The Construction of Corporate Irresponsibility

A constitutive perspective on communication in media narratives

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Abstract
Stories in which corporations are revealed as irresponsible are frequently published and broadcast in journalistic media. These media stories, as well as stories from other stakeholders, contribute to the formation of counter-narratives that consequently stand against corporate narratives with a focus on responsibility. Since corporate irresponsibility is a value judgment attributed by others, narratives about corporations in the media can have particular importance for meaning construction. The aim of this study is accordingly to explain how corporate irresponsibility is constituted in these narratives, by focusing on how corporate irresponsibility is constructed in media stories. The study takes its theoretical departure in the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) perspective and consequently sees communication as the primary constituent of corporate irresponsibility. A narrative approach is also added by highlighting narratives as a particularly powerful form of communication. The empirical starting point for the study is two long-running media stories that are analyzed qualitatively based on material gathered both from print and broadcast media and from interviews. The findings show that the construction of corporate irresponsibility in media stories can take different forms, in this study represented by chronic irresponsibility narratives and acute irresponsibility narratives. By understanding how these two types of narratives differ from each other, it is recognized that meaning construction is not a given and can take various forms depending on the underlying negligence or irresponsibility issues. The study shows that it is in the meetings of the narratives in particular that opportunities for discussion and dialogue arises. It is consequently suggested that it is when narratives collide that communicative events, in which the meaning of corporate irresponsibility is negotiated and re-negotiated, most likely appear. This study therefore concludes that when arguing that communication is the primary mode through which the organization is constituted, narratives told about the corporations, by media and other stakeholders, should also be included in the analysis. The study thus contributes to the CCO perspective by applying the ideas of constitutive communication to narratives told neither inside nor outside the organization. Based on the results of the study, it is argued that the formation of narratives has consequences for understandings about corporate irresponsibility, both for the corporation in the media limelight and for society in general.

Keywords: corporate irresponsibility, media stories, narratives, counter-narratives, communicative constitution of organization (CCO), organizational communication.

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Finalizing this PhD project has been a struggle with both ups and downs. One particular obstacle was the outbreak of the coronavirus which interfered with the last weeks of finishing this text. When I more than ever needed everything around me to stay normal, it definitely did not. Somehow I ultimately learned to work from home and managed to reach the finish line on time. I would therefore like to give thanks to the people who played important roles along my doctoral journey.

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Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCO</td>
<td>Communicative Constitution of Organizations</td>
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<td>CSR</td>
<td>Corporate Social Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>DI</td>
<td>Dagens Industri</td>
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<td>DN</td>
<td>Dagens Nyheter</td>
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<td>H&amp;M</td>
<td>Hennes &amp; Mauritz</td>
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<tr>
<td>SvD</td>
<td>Svenska Dagbladet</td>
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<td>UG</td>
<td>Uppdrag Granskning</td>
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1. Introduction

On September 19, 2012, the most prominent investigative journalism TV show in Sweden, Uppdrag Granskning (‘Mission Investigation’), reported that partially state-owned Swedish-Finnish telecom company Telia\(^1\) may have contributed to corruption when starting business operations in Uzbekistan five years earlier. The Uppdrag Granskning (UG) TV team shows how Telia paid approximately 2.2 billion SEK to an offshore company in Gibraltar for a 3G license. The said offshore company appeared to have close ties to then-Uzbek president’s daughter, Gulnara Karimova, indicating a case of possible bribery. The UG broadcast – called The Uzbekistan Affair – aired on SVT1, a Swedish public service channel, and the next day all major Swedish newspapers wrote about the story. The story continued almost daily for months, including in several follow-up TV broadcasts about Telia’s business operations in Uzbekistan and neighboring countries in the former Soviet Republics in Central Asia.

One month later, on October 24, 2012, another investigative TV show, Kalla Fakta (‘Cold Facts’) on TV4 (i.e. channel 4, a Swedish television network) accuses the multinational clothing retailer H&M of paying ‘slave wages’ when buying from Cambodian garment factories. In this show, representatives from NGO Fair Action question the low wages of the textile workers in the garment factories, demanding that H&M pay a ‘living wage’. A living wage means not only that the factory workers in Cambodia be entitled to that country’s statutory minimum wages, but that their wages also be sufficient for the factory workers and their family’s basic needs, which the NGO representatives claim was not currently possible for factory workers. A discussion of what responsibility H&M has for demanding living wages in its supply chain factories and what a living wage actually entails was the focus of the reporting. The topic of working conditions in the garment factories that produce for H&M is also the focus of several other media reports, for example in the newspaper Expressen, the same fall.

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\(^1\) From 2002-2016, having merged with Finnish Sonera, the organization was called Telia Sonera. From 2016 onwards, its name is Telia Company. For the sake of consistency, the name Telia is used throughout, with some exceptions in quoted passages where no changes to the original text have been made. This is in line with most of the interviewees and media texts, who also used the names Telia, Telia Sonera and Telia Company rather synonymously.
This was not the first occasion when H&M is in the center of media attention on topics related to its responsibility for providing decent working conditions in the garment factories of its supply chain, however. Media attention on the topic started already in the middle of the 1990s at the same time as journalists began to pay attention to the garment production of large brands such as Nike (Greenberg & Knight, 2004). This journalistic interest arose along with the rise of the anti-sweatshop movement launched in response to the economic globalization of the 1980s, when the structure of manufacturing fundamentally changed through the rapid outsourcing of production from consumer countries to developing countries (Barman, 2016). The anti-sweatshop movement criticized, in particular, fashion and sportswear retailers for acting irresponsibly as buyers of garments from developing countries, primarily in Southeast Asia (Balsiger, 2014).

The present study explores these two long-lasting media stories – the story of Telia and the alleged bribery case, and the story of H&M and the issue of poor working conditions in garment factories – from a longitudinal perspective. In the Swedish context, these two stories have been two of the most prevailing media narratives of corporate irresponsibility over the last decades. The stories have consequently also been at the center of the societal debate in Sweden and are a part of widespread narratives about what should be considered the responsibilities of corporations in a more general sense. Some well-known international examples of similar stories about corporate irresponsibility include the Exxon-Valdez oil spill of 1989, the 2001 Enron scandal, with fake holdings and off-the-books accounting, and Volkswagen’s manipulation of emissions testing of ‘clean diesel’ cars exposed in 2015.

1.1 Corporate irresponsibility in the media

Despite the widely publicized stories of corporate irresponsibility mentioned above, the past decades have been characterized by increased attention on sustainability and social responsibility in the business world (e.g. Barman, 2016). This trend is particularly noticeable in corporate communications such as sustainability reports (Ihlen et al., 2011) and on corporate websites (Du & Viera, 2012). Thus, acting socially and environmentally responsible and communicating about such initiatives is now seen as established practice in most industries, although precisely what can be considered responsible behavior for corporations is a matter of frequent debate among various societal actors who participate in framing the issue from their own perspectives (Schultz et al., 2013; Hoffman 2001).
Over the years, extensive research has thus been devoted to examining communication on topics of corporate responsibility (e.g. Fifka, 2013; Golob et al., 2013). The concept of corporate irresponsibility, which is often in the center of media attention and is the focus of this study, has, however, been less well-examined or explicitly discussed in previous literature, even though studies devoted to this concept are increasing (see overview by Riera & Iborra, 2017). One example is a study by Lange and Washburn (2012), who argue that corporate social irresponsibility is a subjective assessment influenced by different framings of corporations as morally responsible or not. Their main point is that corporate irresponsibility is attributed in the minds of the observers. Thus, both corporate responsibility and corporate irresponsibility are understood in the corporation’s relationship with its surroundings, where different societal views on these responsibilities often conflict.

As narrators of corporate irresponsibility, journalistic media often take on the role of ‘watch-dog’ when scrutinizing corporations, with the aim of revealing negligence or misconduct. In today’s society, many corporations are powerful global actors and, as media interest in business matters has grown, journalists have become increasingly important in scrutinizing the business of corporations (Grafström, 2006; Engwall, 2017). Thus, the discussion about what the responsibilities of corporations should be has repeatedly been put to test in influential media stories of irresponsibility, such as the story about Telia and the story about H&M studied here.

Stories of corporations told in the media tend to focus more on corporate actions of irresponsibility rather than initiatives where corporations take responsibility. This is in line with established journalistic storytelling, where stories about, for instance, negativity, conflict and the unexpected are considered newsworthy (Allan, 2004; Harcup & O’Neill, 2017). Stories of corporate irresponsibility are also considered newsworthy to the general public because the public rarely has firsthand knowledge about how corporations handle responsibility issues (Einwiller et al., 2010), especially when an organization’s production or business operations take place in countries far away from the consumers (Greenberg & Knight, 2004).

In organization studies, it has furthermore been argued that symbolic media representations play a fundamental role in the construction of corporate issues (e.g. Rindova et al., 2006; Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2009; Kjaergaard et al., 2011), with some having particularly highlighted the importance of the media in presenting and framing what corporate responsibility means (e.g. Grafström & Windell, 2011; Islam & Deegan, 2010). By telling stories in a certain way, the media take part in constructing certain images of corporations (e.g. Rindova et al., 2006; Zavyalova et al., 2017). For example, previous research has looked at the media’s construction of ‘celebrity firms’ (e.g. Rindova et al.,
1.2 Narratives and communication in focus

This study sees corporate irresponsibility primarily as a communicative matter (cf. Schultz et al., 2013; Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013; Cooren, 2018). Here, communication is broadly understood as something that takes place everywhere in society and constitutes a fundamental part of meaning construction. As issues related to corporate irresponsibility commonly involve stakeholders outside of the organization, views on these issues other than those of the corporation are also communicated, for example, in the media (cf. Joutsenvirta & Vaara, 2009). Thus, by focusing on communication the complexity of understanding how corporate irresponsibility is constructed, and how different views on the issue are often irreconcilable, becomes the focus.

Another important concept here is the narrative, which is a form of communication in which events are linked together in a narrative structure that connects the past, the present, and the future (e.g. Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Brown et al., 2009). The narratives studied here are narratives of corporate irresponsibility that circulate in society. Narratives and stories are closely related concepts and this study follows Czarniawska’s (2004a) definition of stories as a specific type of narrative that includes a plot. In this context, stories are therefore understood as the presentation of corporations and their responsibility and irresponsibility found in texts, and other forms of communication, in journalistic media as well as in corporate communications. As corporate irresponsibility is a multifaceted and complex concept without fixed meaning, the stories told about it thus contribute to the construction of what the meaning of the concept turns out to be.

By spreading certain images of corporations and not others, journalistic media are co-constructors of narratives about corporations (e.g. Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2009; Kjaergaard et al., 2011). Breit and Vaara (2014) have argued, for example, that the narrative structure of media reporting tends to contribute to a certain dramaturgic understanding of corporate irresponsibility issues, exemplified in their study of corruption. They suggest that even though the distinction between responsible and irresponsible behavior is often ambiguous, the media tend to simplify this complexity, particularly in scandals that play out in the media (ibid.). Thus, the journalistic media takes part in the construction of corporate irresponsibility by being one of the most
influential channels, or storytellers, in the societal narrative about corporate irresponsibility.

In a complex communication environment where, regardless of their actual core business, corporations are “in the communications business” (Christensen & Cheney, 2000, p. 246), corporate legitimacy is challenged by a multiplicity of societal voices telling their own stories about the corporation. This can be particularly apparent noticeable for corporations that end up in the middle of the media attention, as the media can have a powerful effect on corporations and corporate activities (e.g. Hayward et al., 2004; Kjaergaard et al., 2011; Pallas et al., 2014). Corporations consequently have a hard time managing their narrative or ‘corporate story’ (Christensen & Cheney, 2000) as this narrative is challenged by other stories ‘out there’. Thus, the construction of narratives about corporations takes place neither inside nor outside of the corporations, but rather at the boundaries of the corporation (cf. Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013).

Engwall (2006) discusses the construction of these corporate boundaries using the concept of boundary-spanning units in which uncertain relations with the external environment are managed. These units serve as ‘gatekeepers’ of sorts, in the form of communications and media relations departments, for example, that control and filter information going in and out of the corporation (ibid). Seen from this perspective, the boundaries of the corporations are consequently under constant negotiation and re-negotiation, with the boundary-spanning units in the middle, both protecting the corporate boundary as outsiders contest it and striving to reach out with their own story. It is thus at the boundaries of corporations that the corporate stories of corporate responsibility meet, and are challenged by, the stories told in journalistic media, where the emphasis is on corporate irresponsibility.

This study examines this interplay between various stories from a communication perspective, meaning that organizations and organizational phenomena are seen as primarily constituted through communicative processes (e.g. Ashcraft et al., 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Cooren et al., 2011; Blaschke & Schoeneborn, 2016; Schoeneborn et al., 2019b). This approach is thus inspired by the ‘communicative constitution of organizations’ perspective in organizational communication studies, henceforth referred to as the CCO perspective. The CCO perspective sees communication not only as a reflection of inner thoughts, or collective intentions, but also as potentially formative of reality (Cornelissen et al., 2015).

Many CCO studies focus on the constitutive aspects of communication that take place within the organization (e.g. Cooren, 2004; Blaschke et al., 2012). In this study, the focus is instead on the communication that takes place in
narratives outside the organization. It has also previously been argued, by Kuhn (2008), for example, that interactions with external stakeholders can be understood as one dimension of the communication processes that constitute the organization. This view is also in line with Cooren (2018) who argues, more specifically, that taking a CCO perspective on communication about corporate responsibility means setting the dialogue, discussion and debate between various stakeholders in focus. Schultz, Castelló and Morsing (2013) present similar arguments, saying that, when communication is in focus, uncertainty and conflict become important parts of the construction of corporate responsibility.

Previous researchers that have used the CCO perspective to understand the responsibilities of corporations all argue that communication may play a role in constituting what corporate responsibility means (e.g. Castelló et al., 2013; Christensen et al., 2013; Schoenborn & Trittin, 2013; Schultz et al., 2013; Cooren, 2018), and consequently also in constituting irresponsibility since this is the other side of the coin. Some also suggest that journalistic media can be of considerable importance in the communicative processes of corporate responsibility (Schultz et al., 2013; Cooren, 2018). However, all earlier CCO studies have a conceptual focus and there is a paucity of studies that make an empirical contribution in this area. The present study thus helps to fill this gap by contributing to the CCO literature empirically by focusing on the constitutive role of communication in media narratives of corporate irresponsibility.

To summarize, narratives on corporate irresponsibility are created neither within nor outside of the organization. Instead, these narratives are constituted in the communication that appears at the boundaries of the organization. By setting communication at the center of the analysis, the contradictions and nuances of a narrative struggle, between narratives of corporate responsibility and narratives of corporate irresponsibility, are emphasized. Thus, the complexity of the interplay between different stories, such as media stories and stories from corporations and other societal storytellers, comes into focus. Such aspects can be difficult to uncover, for example, in content analyses, which is the most commonly used approach in previous studies of the media’s role in corporate responsibility (e.g. Islam & Deegan, 2010; Grafström & Windell, 2011; Lee & Carroll, 2011). The narrative approach applied in this study will therefore bring further knowledge to this field of research.

In brief, this means understanding narratives of corporate irresponsibility as constructed by various stories about responsibility and irresponsibility, provided by several storytellers. Media stories, which often focus on irresponsibility, as well as stories by other stakeholders such as activists, where both responsibility and irresponsibility may be the focus, and corporate stories,
which often focus on responsibility, all play different roles in corporate irresponsibility narratives. This is illustrated in Figure 1 (below). In this study, it is the stories at the upper right of the figure that are the primary focus. The model also recognizes, however, that stories from corporations and other stakeholders can form a part of the media stories since media stories often are co-constructed.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1: The construction of corporate irresponsibility narratives.

1.3 Aim of the study

As argued in this introductory chapter, understandings about corporate irresponsibility are, in this study, seen as primarily constructed through communication. This means that one starting point for the study is that communication about corporations and what issues corporations should be responsible for takes place in stories spread by various storytellers in society, and not least by the journalistic media, the focus of this study. The journalistic media has a vital role in scrutinizing corporations and uncovering misconduct and, in doing so, also participates in the formation of narratives about what corporate irresponsibility entails. Thus, the stories of corporate irresponsibility told in the media make up the empirical focus of the study.

The aim of the study is to explain how corporate irresponsibility is constituted in narratives, from a CCO perspective.
The research question to be answered is correspondingly:

- How is corporate irresponsibility constructed in media stories?

Using the CCO perspective as the theoretical starting point, communication is, in this study, understood as a fundamental and constitutive part of organizations and organizational issues such as corporate irresponsibility. On one hand, previous research in organization studies has been particularly focused on examining the powerful influence of media on corporations and organizational activities (e.g. Hayward et al., 2004; Kjaergaard et al., 2011; Pallas et al., 2014). On the other hand, research conducted within the CCO framework has primarily looked at the constitutive role of communication that takes place within organizations (e.g. Cooren, 2004; Blaschke et al., 2012). This study takes its point of departure from these two approaches in an aim to expand upon previous knowledge by focusing on the media narratives about corporate irresponsibility that are told at the boundaries of the organization.

As will be developed in the next chapter, the study contributes to research on corporate irresponsibility by focusing on media stories and narratives on the topic. As corporate irresponsibility is a value-laden concept without fixed meaning, the stories told about it become a vital part of meaning-construction, particularly influential media stories with a wide reach. Previous research on relations between the media and corporations does not specifically address this construction of corporate irresponsibility. Application of the CCO perspective will provide new opportunities to develop such knowledge by focusing on the constitutive role of communication in the construction of corporate irresponsibility.

In order to answer the research question, the two high-profile media stories introduced in the very beginning of the chapter, will be examined longitudinally. The first, the media story of H&M’s responsibility for the working conditions in the garment factories in its supply chain, is followed from 1995 until 2017. The second, the media story about Telia and the alleged corruption and bribery when Telia initiated business operations in Uzbekistan in 2007, is followed from its starting point in 2008 until 2018. When it comes to the general societal discussion about what the responsibility of corporations should be, in a Swedish context, these two media stories have been particularly influential. And, as both of the stories have been in the media limelight for a long period of time, it is reasonable to assume that they have had a great impact on the corporations in question.
1.4 Outline of the thesis

This introductory chapter has briefly presented the two media stories under study, the story about H&M and the story about Telia, which constitute the empirical focus of the study. A brief background to the theoretical departure point (CCO and narratives) from which the study explores the construction of corporate irresponsibility in media narratives has also been presented. It has been argued that corporate irresponsibility is primarily constructed in communication and that journalistic media plays an important role in this communicative process. The aim of the study, to explain how narratives of corporate irresponsibility are constituted, has also been introduced.

Previous research in this area as well as the theoretical underpinnings of this study are then further elaborated in Chapter 2. Whereas earlier research tends to focus on the impact of the media on corporations and corporate activities, this study instead draws attention to constitutive aspects of communication in narratives told in the media, in the construction of corporate irresponsibility. Chapter 3 presents the motivation for the qualitative methodological approach applied in the study. The choice of the stories about H&M and Telia is also discussed, as well as how the empirical material, in the form of newspaper articles, TV broadcasts, and other forms of media texts and interviews, has been collected.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings from the story about H&M and the working conditions in garment factories, followed from 1995 until 2017, and Chapter 5 from the media story about Telia and the corruption in Uzbekistan, followed from 2008 until 2018. In Chapter 6, an analysis of the empirical material is presented and discussed, with a focus on narrative understandings and constitutive communication. In this chapter, the results from the empirical studies are theorized into two types of narratives of corporate irresponsibility. First, the chronic irresponsibility narrative is discussed, which in this study is exemplified by the media story about H&M and, secondly, the acute irresponsibility narrative is discussed, exemplified by the media story about Telia.

In Chapter 7, the two corporate irresponsibility narratives are discussed further in relation to the CCO perspective and previous research. This chapter explores the role of corporate irresponsibility media narratives as counter-narratives that meet and rival the corporate narrative of responsibility in narrative contests. How and when the media stories can be seen as communicative events which are constitutive for both the corporation in focus as well as for a general, societal narrative of corporate irresponsibility is also discussed. In the closing chapter, Chapter 8, the conclusions of the study are summarized.
2. Previous research and theory

In this chapter, the previous research upon which this study builds and the proposed theoretical framework through which this study contributes to the research field are presented and discussed. As the study focuses on corporate irresponsibility in media stories, the first part of this chapter provides an overview of closely related research areas in organization studies and organizational communication. The second part of the chapter discusses the theoretical concepts from which the study takes its departure: the constitutive communications perspective combined with a focus on narratives. Here, a theoretical framework that will guide the study is presented.

2.1 Previous research

This study is situated in the field of organization studies and organizational communication, and it is also primarily this literature that the study aspires to contribute to. More specifically, the literature review focuses on previous studies about corporate irresponsibility and the interplay between corporations and the media. It will be argued that these studies have contributed useful knowledge from several perspectives. However, when viewing communication and the construction of narratives as central meaning-making devices for corporate irresponsibility, the previous research does not go far enough. This overview of the research closes with reflections on what this study can contribute in relation to the reviewed literature.

2.1.1 Corporate irresponsibility

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, how and why corporations take responsibility for social issues has been extensively examined and discussed both in research and in the business world. A dissatisfaction with initiatives that corporations engage in in order to portray themselves as socially responsible has also raised debate about what corporate irresponsibility is (Alcadipani & de Oliveira Medeiros, 2019). Some examples of what could be included in the concept of irresponsible corporate actions are environmental
disasters, corruption scandals, and other types of activities that in some way or another cause harm to consumers and employees (ibid.). Corporate irresponsibility can consequently be defined as “temporally defined organizational actions that cause harm to stakeholders” (Mena et al., 2016). As this study will show, however, it does not necessarily have to involve events that are limited in time.

Since irresponsibility is a value judgment, not something tangible, defining what corporate irresponsibility often means that it is the subjective assessment of observers that is in focus (e.g. Lange & Washburn, 2012). In a review of the conceptual development of corporate irresponsibility Riera and Iborra (2017) also differentiate between two types of definitions of corporate irresponsibility found in previous research: corporate irresponsibility as defined by impartial observers, and corporate irresponsibility as defined by the specific interests of stakeholder groups. Judgments about corporate irresponsibility are influenced by narratives from many sources, for example, in communication activities both from the corporations in focus and from the various framings of irresponsible corporations, which often meet in the media (Lange & Washburn, 2012).

Whereas some corporate irresponsibility events are rather quickly forgotten, others may be remembered for many years. Mena, Rintamäki, Fleming and Spicer (2016) argue that remembering an event of corporate irresponsibility may be essential for organizations’ ability to learn and to avoid repetition of irresponsible activities in the organizations or in the industry. These authors use the concept of ‘forgetting work’ to describe the way corporations, and other actors, work to reconfigure the collective memory of an irresponsibility event. This need not necessarily be coordinated or intentional, but often includes the silencing or undermining of stakeholders. Some strategies used, for example, are shifting the blame, influencing the media, changing the narrative by providing other stories, or taking responsibility by making either substantive or symbolic changes.

A legitimacy perspective
Matters of corporate responsibility and irresponsibility are often discussed in relation to organizational legitimacy. The increasing demands on corporations to take responsibility for social issues are then discussed as norms that must be taken into account in order for corporations to be seen as legitimate (Windell, 2006). Because the demands on corporations change over time and vary depending on the societal context, however, what is considered legitimate behavior for corporations is not invariable (Matten & Moon, 2008). It has, for example, been shown that the expectations of the kind of responsibilities corporations are supposed to take differ depending on the size of a firm.
One established definition of legitimacy is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). It has furthermore been argued that organizations need legitimacy and societal justification to survive, and the concept is vital in various theoretical views on organizations, such as new institutional organization theory (e.g. Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and resource dependency theory (e.g. Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Different lines of research do, however, apply different views of legitimacy, and it can be viewed as a property, a process or a perception (Suddaby et al., 2017).

The media is considered to be particularly important in the construction of dominant ideas about what is considered legitimate behavior for corporations. By providing, highlighting, and framing information, the media affects the image and legitimation of corporations (Pollock & Rindova, 2003). The media is, from this perspective, seen as particularly important due to its dual function as both an indicator of legitimacy in society and a source of legitimacy of its own (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). As an indicator of legitimacy, media coverage reflects the public evaluation of corporations and provides a measure of corporate legitimacy and, as a source of legitimacy, the media has an influence on public opinion and corporations. Corporations therefore strategically manage their media image in order to maintain legitimacy (e.g. Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001; Deephouse, 2000).

To summarize, extensive research in organization studies explains the adjustments made by organizations to meet the expectations of their surroundings by pointing to the importance for organizations of having legitimacy (e.g. Suddaby et al., 2017). However, the influence of that various stakeholders in the corporate surroundings have on corporations and the role these stakeholders play in revoking corporate legitimacy has also been challenged. For example, Banerjee (2008) questions the assumption that the concerns of societal stakeholders have a great influence on business activities by pointing to the continued growth of transnational corporations with proven negative social impacts, such as Nike or Shell, despite these companies’ well-known acts of corporate irresponsibility.

Consequently, we can conclude that the appearance of being responsible and conforming to the expectations of the media and other stakeholders can be important in order for corporations to be successful. As ideas about what is considered responsible differs between contexts and changes over time, this
can pose a challenge for corporations striving to appear responsible. However, corporate responsibility and media approval are certainly not the only sources of legitimacy, and revelations of irresponsibility in the media do not necessarily mean that corporations go out of business.

**Communicating corporate responsibility**

A significant amount of research on how corporations communicate on responsibility topics\(^2\) has been conducted in the field of organizational communication (e.g. Golob et al., 2013; Ihlen et al., 2011). Traditionally, research on corporate responsibility communication has taken a simplified view of communication as the transmission of information and messages from a sender to a receiver. This simplified view of the communication process has been criticized, for example, by Morsing and Schultz (2006) as well as Schoeneborn and Trittin (2013). One of the main criticisms is that such a simplified view of communication tends to neglect the role of stakeholders, such as the media and NGOs, as co-creators of meaning in communication processes (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). This makes a transmission model of communication less useful for studies of corporate responsibility, and irresponsibility, topics which often affect and include stakeholders.

One research topic discussed in relation to communication about corporate responsibility is the paradox that corporations that invest efforts to increase their legitimacy through communication run the risk of being accused of ‘greenwashing’. Greenwashing refers to a misleading of consumers and the general public by corporations, by claiming to take more responsibility for the environment than they do (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). The concept of greenwashing was initially used to describe corporations that exaggerated their environmental responsibility but has since been extended to include also other types of responsibility.\(^3\) Thus, communicating about the initiatives in the area of corporate responsibility in order to increase one’s corporate reputation can instead lead to the opposite (e.g. Morsing et al., 2008).

Similar phenomena have also been discussed as ‘the self-promoter’s paradox’ (Jones & Pittman, 1982) and ‘the double edge of organizational legitimacy’, where “the more problematic the legitimacy, the more skeptical are constituents of legitimation attempts” (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990, p. 191). Morsing,

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\(^2\) This research field commonly uses the term ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR) rather than ‘corporate responsibility’.

\(^3\) Related concepts used with respect to corporate responsibility for various social issues include concepts such as ‘whitewashing’, ‘bluewashing’ and ‘pinkwashing’. Greenwashing, however, is the most established.
Schultz and Nielsen (2008) call this the ‘catch 22’ of communicating corporate responsibilities when the public expects corporations to take social responsibility but does not appreciate when they talk about these responsibility activities. In other words, people tend to be skeptical of the strategic attempts of corporations to enhance legitimacy by communicating about their responsibility initiatives. This, in following, becomes illustrative of how legitimacy and responsibility are relational and can always be contested.

**Scandals and moral struggles**

In a study of a corruption scandal, Breit (2010) applies a critical discourse perspective to show how different discourses are mobilized in media representations during the course of a scandal. The study also shows how shifting, or even contradictory, information that is available to journalists at certain times in the media story has impact on the way the corruption case is given meaning in the news media. Breit also argues that while the media tend to focus on the dramatic and newsworthy features, other aspects are neglected, thus reducing the complexity of the corruption issue (ibid.). Breit & Vaara (2014) furthermore call for more research that focuses on how corruption and similar sensitive topics are made sense of in the media, as well as in other forms of text and talk.

Research on corporate irresponsibility has also focused on the media as an arena where struggles over meaning take place. Such studies commonly take a discursive perspective to explore how various discourses are used to make sense of corporate issues in the media. Vaara, Tienari and Laurila (2006), for example, focus on global industrial restructuring and show how five legitimation strategies are used in the media arena: normalization, authorization, rationalization, moralization, and narrativization. When it comes to the last strategy, narrativization, the authors specifically highlight a ‘dramatic narrativization’ in the media stories, in which people and organizations are portrayed as winners, losers, heroes, rivals, or wrongdoers. Thus, a dramatized story of an inevitable merger was presented in the media even though the reality may have been more nuanced.

There are also a number of studies that see corporate responsibility as a construction that evolves in struggles over meaning in the media (e.g. Siltaoja, 2009; Joutsenvirta & Vaara, 2009; Joutsenvirta, 2011). In a critical discursive analysis of Finnish media texts, for example, Joutsenvirta and Vaara (2009) highlight three types of struggles over defining the responsibility of corporations. By studying the media coverage of a conflict over Finnish forest industry Metsä-Botnia’s pulp mill in Uruguay, these researchers identify the three struggles as legal struggles, truth struggles, and political struggles. In these
conflicts, protagonists and antagonists strive to influence the framing of a forest project as either legitimate or illegitimate.

Joutsenvirta (2011) has also studied discursive struggles between StoraEnso, also in the forest industry, and environmental NGO Greenpeace related to defining corporate social responsibility by setting the boundaries for socially acceptable corporate behavior. That study illustrates how rational and moral struggles between business and activists take place in dynamic processes in the media, often with ambiguous and inconsistent results. Siltaoja (2009) furthermore shows that a fourth type of struggle also takes place within the media organization itself, where ‘moral struggles’ occur between professional, social, and economical claims.

To summarize, all of the abovementioned studies highlight the use of language and show how struggles over discourse play an important part in meaning construction. The role of NGOs in media discussions on responsibility topics is also emphasized, which makes sense since NGOs often rely on both traditional, journalistic media and social media to get their message out (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 2015). Thus, this line of research shows that the media can be seen as an arena for various struggles, and that these struggles can occur between various actors as well as between various claims about an issue. What is told in the media is then the result of various interests competing for attention, a competition in which the corporations themselves also participate.

2.1.2 Media and corporations

Studies on the relationship between media and corporations show, similarly to the present study, that the media, commonly defined as the journalistic media, can have a great impact on corporations in various ways. Some of the lines of research, such as stakeholder theory, agenda-setting theory, and the mediatization of corporations, are discussed below. Previous studies on how corporations are portrayed in the media have also concluded that the media reporting often highlights unilaterally positive or negative aspects of corporations (e.g. Rindova et al., 2006; Kjaergaard et al., 2011), with a particular focus on the corporate leader as an exceptional person (e.g. Hayward et al., 2004; Sinha et al., 2012; Chen & Meindl, 1991).

Rindova, Pollock and Hayward (2006) show how a ‘dramatized reality’ is created when demands on newsworthiness create a dramatic image of corporations. In order to explain how certain firms gain extraordinary attention from the media, they coined the term ‘celebrity firms’, extending the concept of celebrity from the individual level to apply also to firms. By presenting stories of fact and fiction, some aspects of the corporate organization are presented
in the media while others are not, argue these authors (ibid.). Sinha, Inkson and Barker (2012) have furthermore defined it as a ‘co-created drama’, when the CEO, the media, and stakeholders participate in preserving an established story in order to maintain the credibility of the celebrity CEO, even though this means committing to a failing strategy.

Zavyalova, Pfarrer and Reger (2017) add the aspect of ‘infamy’ to the discussion on celebrity firms, suggesting that the availability of information about socially significant aspects of a corporation makes increases the likelihood a firm will feature as the main character in stories in the media. Their study highlights the literary techniques of simplification and dramatization that journalists use in these narratives in order to personify the organization and attribute it with specific characteristics. The media will also continue to write about the corporations already cast as main characters, since ongoing stories usually attract more attention than single events. One of the conclusions drawn is that, due to its appeal to negative emotions among the public, infamy is the harder of the two to shake off (ibid.).

**Media as stakeholder**

In discussions about what responsibilities corporations should have, the concept of stakeholders is commonly used to explain how the, often contested, responsibilities of a corporation are defined in relation to actors inside and outside of the organization who have an interest in the corporation. A common, and broad, definition of stakeholders is presented by Freeman (1984), who defines stakeholders as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (p. 46). Journalistic media can therefore be seen as one of many societal actors and institutions that has an impact on organizations and thus also as one of many stakeholders that corporations need to take into account.

Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) complement stakeholder theory by adding the attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency for stakeholder identification and salience. According to these authors, stakeholders can be classified according to which of these relationship attributes they possess, and stakeholders who have all three attributes are seen as the most important. The media can fit into all three aspects, of being powerful, legitimate, and needing urgent attention, particularly when an issue of corporate irresponsibility leads to a media scandal. Journalistic media furthermore has a particular role due to its ability to influence the perception of the corporation for many stakeholders at once (e.g. Deephouse & Heugens, 2009; Zavyalova et al., 2012).
It has, however, been argued that for fully grasping the various interests in society, such as the opinions of people not considered stakeholders today but who may become important in the future, the stakeholder concept has its limitations (Ihlen, 2008). The stakeholder concept also has limitations when it comes to discussing the role of media for corporations. For example, because the media can be seen both as an actor of its own and as an arena for other actors and interests (Grafström et al., 2015a), viewing it as simply one of many stakeholders means taking too simplistic a view of the media. It can thus be concluded that the media is a stakeholder for corporations, but that when discussing the particularities of the media’s role for corporations it is likely that other research approaches, which incorporate concepts from media studies and/or organizational theory, are more suitable than stakeholder theory.

**Agenda-setting and issue attention**

Research on corporations has taken much inspiration from media studies and applied concepts from this line of research to the understanding of corporations, and organizations in general (e.g. Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Deephouse, 2000; Ihlen & Pallas, 2014). One such concept that has been used, in discussing both the role of media in society and its role for corporations, is the concept of agenda-setting. Agenda-setting highlights the role media plays in shaping reality by choosing and displaying news that affects the importance that audience attribute to these issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Two levels of agenda-setting can be distinguished, the first of which concerns the salience of an object or an actor. The second level agenda-setting then concerns the attributes connected with that object or actor (McCombs et al., 1997).

Agenda-setting effects are commonly studied within political communication, but Carroll and McCombs (2003) show that both levels of agenda-setting are relevant for corporations as well. Studies on how the responsibilities of corporations are presented in the media (e.g. Lee & Carroll, 2011; Grafström & Windell, 2011), for example, can be related to the discussion about the media as agenda-setters. When it comes to corporate responsibility, it has been shown that business newspapers present these issues in line with recognized business norms, rather than as societal issues, to make the corporate responsibility issues more relevant for the business community (Grafström & Windell, 2011). Thus, certain attributes are assigned to corporate responsibility when the topic is discussed in the media.

Another way of studying agenda-setting has also been to examine the impact, of the media’s reporting about topics that concern responsibility, on corporate activities and communication. For example, a connection has been shown between responsibility topics discussed in the media and responsibility topics
that corporations communicate about in their annual- and sustainability re-
ports (e.g. Brown & Deegan, 1998; Islam & Deegan, 2010). One such study
uses H&M, also a central figure in one of the media stories in the current study,
as an example, and concludes that H&M responded to the media attention by
providing positive social and environmental disclosures about the issue at-
tracting the greatest amount of negative attention in the media, i.e. working
conditions in developing countries (Islam & Deegan, 2010).

In relation to the concept of agenda-setting, many media studies have also
noted that not all topics are discussed in the media at the same time. These
studies often cite Downs (1972), who developed ‘the issue attention cycle’, to
explain why certain issues are on the societal agenda. In an issue attention
cycle, each social “problem suddenly leaps into prominence, remains there for
a short time, and then – though still largely unresolved – gradually fades from
the center of public attention” (Downs, 1972, p. 38). As a result, a societal
problem does not have to be solved for media attention to decrease, it is simply
replaced by something else.

From an organizational perspective, Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) argue
that this focus of attention towards certain societal issues sets limitations for
the kind of ideas that can be presented as organizational solutions. Thus, ideas
of a dramatic and exciting nature that draw public attention are likely to be
addressed. In other words, the ideas that can be related to the problems in focus
in the public attention, i.e. ‘up’ in the issue attention cycle, have a greater
chance of being realized than those that do not appeal to the general public
(ibid.). Thus, when affected stakeholders can mobilize interest in society and
direct media attention towards an issue, the issue is more likely to be adopted
by corporations (Deephouse & Heugens, 2008).

**Mediatized organizations**

Previous studies that explicitly focused on the constitutive aspects of commu-
nication in the relationship between media and corporations are rare (excep-
tions include, e.g. Schultz et al., 2013; Jensen et al., 2017). A number of stud-
ies have focused instead on the sensemaking process, i.e. a process that occurs
when organizations encounter or anticipate changes in the organizational en-
vironment and attempt to bring order to these events (Weick, 1995). Research
on organizational sensemaking in relation to organizational identity shows
that dramatized media reporting on organizations may have a particular influ-
ence in such sensemaking processes (Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2009;
Kjaergaard et al., 2011). The media can thus be understood as sense-givers,
who give meaning to organizational matters by presenting dramatized images
that become self-fulfilling prophecies within the organization (Risberg et al.,
2003).
Kjaergaard, Morsing and Ravasi (2011) furthermore show how intense positive media coverage can lead to a self-enhancement effect for an organization when its organizational members identify with the image portrayed in the media rather than their own experience. These authors also refer to the organization as a celebrity, as previously mentioned. By dramatizing the reality, the media construct positive or negative images of an organization, which may differ from the organization’s self-image and from the experience of the general public. Thus, the images of the organization presented in the media become a part of the organization’s identity work (ibid.). Related to this are discussions on ‘mediatized organizational identity’ (e.g. Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2009), which take a similar approach.

Some researchers go further when discussing the impact that media have on organizations and argue that there is an ongoing process of mediatization in organizations (Lundby, 2009; Ihlen & Pallas, 2014), often referring to a ‘media logic’, a concept derived from Altheide and Snow (1979). In the mediatization literature, media logic encompasses “the media’s rules, aims, production logics and constraints” (Schillemans, 2012, p. 54). This includes criteria of newsworthiness, the aim of news media to be both important and interesting the organizational routines and practices of journalistic work, and limitations, for example, in time and resources (Schillemans, 2012). Discussions about mediatization have been developed with the political sphere in mind and are in this line of research discussed as a process in whereby society, and the political system in particular, depend more and more on the media (Hjarvard, 2013; Strömbäck, 2008).

Studies that have applied the ideas of mediatization to organizations have argued that, along with the increased mediatization of society, organizations, such as corporations, also become mediatized (e.g. Pallas et al., 2014). Grafström, Windell and Petrelius Karlberg (2015c), for example, connect mediatization to legitimacy and suggest that, in their case, the media constructed a legitimacy crisis for a civil society organization, which adopted the media story rather than its own idea of what was appropriate. Thorbjørnsrud, Ihlen and Ustad Figenschou (2014) show, in addition, how a public bureaucracy adjusts to the media by altering its timing to match the rhythm of the news media, prioritizing media requests over other duties, and changing the way it write texts in order to fit the narrative of the media. These authors argue that this way of internalizing norms from the media in the organization can be framed as a process of mediatization (ibid.).

The concept of mediatization used by some of the studies mentioned above is, however, not unproblematic and has been criticized within the field of media studies, foremost for being a vague concept that could be applied to almost anything (e.g. Deacon & Stanyer, 2014). As mentioned, theorizations around
mediatization also suggest that there is a specific ‘media logic’ related to the mediatization process. Critics question this idea, however, arguing that different media platforms have different logics, and that this makes it difficult to establish a single specific logic that applies to the media in general (Nygren & Niemikari, 2019). A recent study of the relationship between politics and the media, with a focus on Finland, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden, suggests that political logic and various media logics can instead be seen as co-existing with and overlapping one another (ibid.).

The view of journalistic media as very powerful in relation to corporations, which is sometimes implied in the idea of mediatization of corporations, can also be nuanced since many corporations are powerful global actors with large communication departments. The communications experts in these departments thus also have the ability to influence the media as well as handle investigative journalists wanting to explore transgressions and misconduct. Moreover, it is also difficult for journalistic media to survive in a media landscape with increased competition from digital platforms, such as Facebook, which has challenged the traditional role of journalism in society and made it difficult for media corporations to develop profitable business models (Westlund, 2016). That journalists can play an important role as co-creators of dominant narratives in society is evident, as the studies in this literature review have shown. However, referring to this as an increasing process of mediatization of society, as well as of corporations, can be questioned.

2.1.3 Summary and reflections
To summarize, previous research on corporate irresponsibility is scarce, but suggests one particularly important aspect – that its definition comes from others, outside the corporation, who make judgments about the corporation. The media can therefore play a vital role in defining what an ‘irresponsible corporation’ means. The research also suggests that it can be important for corporations to have social approval, i.e. to be legitimate, and, consequently, that this can be a motivation for corporations to take responsibility for social issues as well as to adjust to demands from journalistic media. Nevertheless, some corporations manage to stay in business despite repeated revelations in the media of corporate irresponsibility, so there are likely other sources of legitimacy as well. Thus, the research shows that corporate responsibility as well as corporate irresponsibility are constructed in relations to stakeholders.

See e.g. Ihlen & Pallas (2014), however, argue the increased resources that corporations invest in communications is an effect of the mediatization process.
Previous studies of the role of the media for corporations show that it can have a great impact on how corporations and their leader are described. This can occur in several forms, for example, the media can have an impact on the issues that are brought to the corporate agenda, and even on an organization’s identity, i.e. how the organization views itself, through sensemaking processes. Some researchers view this as a process of mediatization in which corporations are becoming more and more dependent on the media. However, because many corporations are powerful actors on their own and the role of the media in society is changing, this study views the relationship between corporations and the media more as a power struggle, where both media and corporation have the ability to influence what goes on.

This study recognizes the important work that has been done in exploring the role of the media for corporations as well as examining how issues such as corporate responsibility are discussed in the media. One way it has been done has been to focus on what underlying logics make certain corporations and leaders appear to be celebrities in the media. Another has been to study the role of the media as agenda-setter. This study proposes an alternative approach – placing constitutive communication and narratives in the center of the analysis. This alternative view sees communication in media stories as one part of narratives that in turn are constitutive for both the corporation in focus as well as for a general understanding of corporate irresponsibility. Thus, instead of discussing issues of legitimacy or processes of mediatization, this study draws attention to the role of constitutive communication in the media that leads to powerful narratives.

2.2 Theoretical framework

The increased focus on communication in organizational research can be traced back to the linguistic turn in social sciences around the 1970s. This linguistic turn also brought a focus on narratives and stories into the research field, which has expanded rapidly (Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Brown et al., 2009). In this study, communication in all forms is seen as a central part of corporations and as constitutive for corporate issues such as corporate irresponsibility. This standpoint will now be discussed in more detail as the communicative constitution of organizations perspective, which is the theoretical foundation for this study, is elaborated. Here, narratives are also highlighted as a particularly powerful form of communication as the study focuses on stories told in media, which take on a specific narrative form.
2.2.1 Constitutive communication

Research on organizational communication has traditionally taken a transmission perspective, which focuses on communication as something that takes place between a sender and a receiver (Shannon & Weaver, 1949; Axley, 1984). It has been argued that this is also the dominant view of communication when it comes to studies of communication about the responsibilities of corporations, a view that has been criticized by several authors as being too simplistic (e.g. Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013). One way of providing a more complex view on communication is to apply a CCO perspective, where communication is seen as a fundamental part of organizations (e.g. Ashcraft et al., 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Cooren et al., 2011; Blaschke & Schoeneborn, 2016; Schoeneborn et al., 2019b) as will be elaborated in the upcoming sections.

The CCO perspective

The CCO perspective in organization studies has a relatively short history. It was only just recently that scholars in the field of organizational communication became interested in highlighting the constitutive role of communication for organizations. This line of research applies the idea of a communicatively constituted reality (Craig, 1999) to organizations, to explain the emergence of, continuation of, and changes in organizations (Blaschke & Schoeneborn, 2016). Thus, understanding organizations and organizational issues as constructed through communication means viewing organizations as entities that come into existence through the use of language.

Stemming from the research field of organizational communication, rather than focusing on the transmission of messages, the CCO perspective focuses on communication as the fundamental perspective for understanding the world (Blaschke & Schoeneborn, 2016). The CCO perspective thus differs from transmission models of communication where messages have one fixed meaning and other possible interpretations are disregarded. Within this field, there is ongoing discussion about what it is that is constituted by communication and, in this debate, Schoeneborn, Kuhn and Kärreman (2019b) differentiate between organization (an entity), organizing (a process), and organizationality (an attribute). The most common way of conducting CCO research, so far, has been to focus on the organizations as an entity.

Three main schools of CCO thought can also be distinguished: the Montréal School of Organizational Communication, the Four Flows Model based on Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory and inspired by Luhmann’s (1995) Theory of Social Systems. The three schools share common grounds but also differ from each other, for example, when it comes to epistemological and
ontological issues (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). The Montréal School focuses on textual agency, which means that non-human entities as well as humans participate in the constitutive communications process from a bottom-up perspective (e.g. Cooren, 2004; 2012; Cooren & Fairhurst, 2008). In the Four Flows Model, as its name suggests, the organization is communicatively constituted by four separate, but interacting flows: membership negotiation, reflexive self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning (e.g. McPhee & Zaug, 2008). The third school, CCO research inspired by Luhmann’s (1995) theory of social systems, focuses on communicative events and highlights paradoxes as a fundamental part of organizations (Schoeneborn, 2011).

This study does not place itself neatly into any one of these specific lines of CCO research but rather takes its point of departure from six general premises of CCO listed by Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen and Clark (2011, p. 1151-1154):

First, the study of ‘communicative events’ is an important part of the CCO perspective. This means that not only language and discourse are in focus, but also interactional events. CCO scholars thus “examine what happens in and through communication to constitute, (re-)produce, or alter organizational forms and practices” (Cooren et al., 2011, p. 1151; emphasis in the original).

Second, when it comes to defining what communication and organizational communication mean, for example, the CCO perspective is inclusive in that it does not limit the study to communication in texts.

Third, by focusing on the performative aspect of communication, the CCO perspective also draws attention to the co-constructed nature of communication, in general, as well as organizational communication.

Fourth, what acting is – is, from a CCO perspective, an open question, and can therefore include both human and non-human action.

Fifth, CCO studies always focus on communicative events, and never leave this realm. As the contemporary view of communication is broad, this premise is not as limiting as it might first seem.

Sixth, CCO studies can be about both organizing and organization. The authors also add that the COO perspective does not favor any specific methodology (Cooren et al., 2011).

Some critique has been raised regarding the CCO perspective, which Schoeneborn and Vásquez (2017) have summarized under four main points. The first criticism is that CCO does not present anything new as research used similar arguments long before the use of the CCO concept began. The CCO perspective counters that its novelty lies in its focus on the ontological question: what is an organization? (ibid.). The second point of criticism is that CCO defines communication too broadly and, in addition, does not recognize other essential elements of what an organization is (e.g. Sillince, 2010). Thirdly, some criticism has been directed toward the explanatory power and
importance of communication. This critique is often based on a definition of communication from a transmissions point of view, however, which cannot be considered the foundation of CCO research (e.g. Ashcraft et al., 2009). And lastly, CCO scholars have been criticized for being too descriptive and thereby not paying enough attention to political and ethical dimensions (e.g. Reed, 2010).

In this study, the broad definition of communication of the CCO perspective is applied. This makes sense as it is through communication, for example, between the corporations, the media and various stakeholders, that the meaning of corporate irresponsibility, i.e. the issue at the center of this study, is constantly renegotiated. Thus, this study applies the CCO perspective by focusing on communicative events in which media stories as well as narratives of corporate irresponsibility are constructed.

**Organization as communication**

Previous CCO studies have focused primarily on theory development, meaning that empirical studies are underrepresented. One prominent advocate of the CCO perspective is Cooren (2012), who focuses on ‘ventriloquism’, which he defines as the activity that speaks in the name of an organization. This is connected to textual agency, where various organizational statements, reports and logos communicatively constitute the organization. A ventriloqual approach to communication has also been applied empirically to the case of investigating how organizational tensions shape organizational members’ realities in an ethnographic study of Médecins sans Frontières by Cooren, Matte, Benoit-Barné and Brummans (2013).

Kuhn (2008) uses instead the term ‘authoritative texts’, in order to describe how an organization is communicated into being. An authoritative text is a site where struggles over meaning can come together and is consequently not merely a formal organizational statement but rather a broad concept that includes an overall sense of what the organization is (ibid.). The authoritative text can also be viewed as a narrative that comes up against counter-narratives in an organization, thus revealing its position as a master narrative. It is thus shown how organizational narratives are ongoing processes influenced from various directions (Kuhn, 2017).

In a recent study, Trittin and Schoeneborn (2017) apply a CCO approach to diversity management. By viewing organizations as polyphonic and using a communication-centered approach, these authors argue that diversity management can be seen as a plurality of voices rather than a diversity of individual organizational members among set criteria. In another study, Blaschke, Schoeneborn and Seidl (2012) combine CCO with a network
approach, suggesting the possibility of studying organizations’ networks of communication episodes. The CCO perspective has also been used to explain the organizationality of the social collective Anonymous (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) and the role of social media in constituting the Occupy Movement (Kavada, 2015).

**CCO and corporate responsibility**

In order to emphasize that corporate responsibility is constructed in complex and dynamic communication processes of continuous negotiations over meaning, Schultz, Castelló and Morsing (2013), among others, take a CCO perspective to communication on corporate responsibility. These authors introduced the ‘communicative view’ in which corporate responsibility is constructed in a plurality of narratives that co-exist in society and both traditional media and new media can play important roles. By viewing communication as constitutive of corporate responsibility, aspects of uncertainty, and potentially conflicts, come in focus (ibid.). Similarly, Cooren (2018) also argues that taking a CCO perspective on corporate responsibility serves to emphasize dialogue, discussion and debate.

Christensen, Morsing and Thyssen (2013) have furthermore apply the CCO perspective to aspects of hypocrisy and self-promotion, as previously discussed in the first part of this chapter, when they draw attention to the performative acts of communication with respect to corporate responsibility. These authors used the concept of ‘aspirational talk’ to draw the focus away from the issue of hypocrisy and accusations of not ‘walking the talk’ when it comes to corporate responsibility communication. Instead, talk about corporate responsibility is viewed as aspirations to change (ibid.). Taking a formative point of view, it has also been suggested that, to some degree, practices are communicated into being (Schoeneborn et al., 2019a). Consequently, the inconsistency between talk and action need not be seen as a problem.

It can also be argued that as corporate responsibility often concerns ethical issues of doing right or wrong and a communicative understanding of such issues becomes especially important in the constitution of the organization as a collective entity (Cooren, 2018). Communication about corporate responsibility can, in line with these arguments, be seen as a way in which the corporation is co-constituted. As Cooren (2018) argues:

> Communication cannot be seen anymore as a mere instrument used by corporations to disseminate information about their good deeds. They have, on the contrary, to face what could be called the challenge of co-constitution, that is, they have to realize that what they are and what they do cannot only depend on their way of communicating themselves into being. What they are and what
they do especially depend on how this way of being and doing is communicated into being through negotiations and discussions with stakeholders, whoever and whatever they end up being (Cooren, 2018, p. 17. Emphasis in original).

From this perspective, communication on corporate responsibility can also extend the boundaries of the organization since these boundaries are under constant renegotiation in communication (Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013).

The present study thus relates to the CCO literature that focuses on corporate responsibility in the sense that communication, in various forms, is seen as fundamental also to understanding the related concept of corporate irresponsibility. This means that the communicative processes in which meaning is under constant negotiation, and renegotiation, by and between various stakeholders are emphasized in understanding what corporate irresponsibility is. In this process, journalistic media, due to its prominent role in putting issues on the societal agenda as well as its purpose to scrutinize wrongdoings, becomes a critical storyteller that participates in the construction of a general narrative of what corporate irresponsibility entails.

2.2.2 Narratives of corporations
There has, in recent decades, been increased interest outside the field of literature theory to study narratives, and a multidisciplinary field of narrative studies has developed in both the humanities and social science. This field highlights the important role of language in constructing social reality, pointing out that it is through stories that we create our understanding of the world (Johansson, 2005). This section continues to develop the theoretical lens of the study by bringing into focus narratives, which in this study are seen as a particularly powerful form of communication. Further descriptions of organizational and journalistic perspectives on narratives as well as the CCO-inspired perspective on counter-narratives are presented below.

Narratives in organization studies
In organization studies, narratives can be seen both as a mode of knowing and as a mode of communication (Czarniawska, 2004a). As a mode of knowing, narratives have to do with making sense of what has happened and organizing this experience into something meaningful. Narratives constitute a negotiation of meaning and can be both fictional and factual, as they do not depend on a connection with the outside world. As a mode of communication, narratives are common in everyday life and can be seen as a fundamental sense-making device (ibid.). The ideas behind narrative studies suggest that it is through the stories we listen to and the stories we tell that we make society
understandable. As people tend to structure their experiences through narratives, the study of narratives provides knowledge about society that cannot be captured otherwise (Czarniawska, 2004a; Robertson, 2018).

Semiologist Roland Barthes wrote that “the narratives of the world are numberless” (1977, p. 79), drawing attention to the significant role that narratives play in social life. As Barthes continues in his famous quote:

… under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. […] Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (Barthes, 1977, p. 79)

In this study, narratives are seen as one, particularly powerful, way of communicating that can be found everywhere in society. All narratives are not to be considered equal, however, as some are more dominant than others in a given time period or societal context.

Barthes (1977) goes on to present the news item as one example of a container of narratives. It is such narratives, and other forms of stories told in the media, that are the focal point of the present study. Narratives and stories are concepts that are sometimes used almost synonymously, but this study follows Czarniawska (2004a), who defines stories as a specific type of narrative that includes a plot. These plots are often described as a connection between the past, the present, and the future, in a sequence of accounts (e.g. Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Brown et al., 2009). In keeping with the aim of this study, the media reports about specific corporations are defined as media stories that, over time, constitute narratives of corporate irresponsibility.

The view of a narrative as a story that requires a plot has also been challenged by some narrative researchers within organization studies. Boje (2001), for example, argues for the ‘antenarrative’, which includes parts of stories that do not become part of a plot according to the formal structure of a story. Thus, in contrast to traditional storytelling, in this view antenarratives are unstructured and fragmented. Vaara and Tienari (2011) have used this definition of narratives to make sense of the organizational changes in a cross-border merger, where they combined media text with organizational communications material and interviews to identify antenarratives. These authors see antenarratives as “fragments of organizational discourse that construct identities and interests in time and space” (ibid., 2011, p. 370). This study, however, focus on the more traditional view on stories and narratives.
The narrative approaches used in organization studies are diverse. The study of narratives has consequently been important in a number of subfields of organization studies, including sensemaking, communication, politics and power, learning and change, and identity and identification (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Narrative research can furthermore be seen as a methodological approach, a theoretical lens, a form of data, or as a combination of all of these aspects, as it is being used in this study. Studies of organizations that focus on narratives and storytelling often have an internal focus (e.g. Boje, 1991; Brown, 1998; Gabriel, 2000). In the present study, the focus is instead on stories told at the boundaries that separate the inside from the outside of the organization, where the media, and other stakeholders, also become important storytellers.

**Storytelling in the media**

As mentioned in the introduction, the media participates in constructing images of corporations, where certain aspects receive focus and others are neglected (e.g. Rindova et al., 2006; Kjaergaard et al., 2011; Zavyalova et al., 2017). Thus, media stories generally follow certain storytelling techniques. They are often told in simplified, personalized and dramatized forms with the aim of capturing the attention of the public (e.g. Strömbäck, 2008; Schultz et al., 2014). The media is a multifaceted concept and can refer to many different types of media, which have different ways of telling stories. This study focuses on the journalistic media, with a focus on daily newspapers and investigative TV.

Journalistic media is also often described as having an important democratic function in society. This democratic function suggests that the media play a vital role in scrutinizing those in power, informing the public, and also in enabling different views to be heard (Strömbäck, 2008). Previously, this scrutinizing role focused mainly on politicians in power. Along with the growth of the business media, however, the interest in scrutinizing corporations has come to play a more central role (Engwall, 2017).

An ideal image of journalistic media includes striving to be truthful, relevant, balanced, and neutral as key features (Hadenius & Weibull, 2003). In attempting to live up to this ideal of objectiveness, media reports are told in a certain way, for example, by selecting sources with opposing opinions in order to illustrate balance (ibid.). It has, however, been suggested, from a perspective that sees reality as communicatively constituted, that rather than being present or absent, objectivity is a matter of degree (Martine & De Maeyer, 2019).

For a topic to be reported on in the media, it generally has to meet certain established criteria of newsworthiness (Allan, 2004; Harcup & O’Neill, 2017).
Some examples of what is considered newsworthy include, as mentioned: *conflict*, which often means presenting two sides of a story as a disagreement; *timeliness*, where recent events are more newsworthy than old ones; *unexpectedness*, which suggests that events out of the ordinary are more newsworthy; *negativity*, where ‘bad news’ is favored over ‘good news’; and continuity, where events that fit into the journalist’s common perception of what a news story is appear more frequently in the news. *Personalization* might also be added as having news value, in the sense that “an emphasis on human actors ‘coping with life on the ground’ is preferred over abstract descriptions of ‘faceless’ structures, forces or institutions” (Allan, 2004, p. 57). *Simplification* is another way of upping newsworthiness, by reducing complexity and focusing on events that are unambiguous. *Reference to elite persons*, as well as elite nations, also increases the newsworthiness of a topic.

These aspects of news values are commonly related to written forms of journalism. This study also brings in the aspect of TV journalism, which can differ from print journalism in newspapers. It has, for example, been argued that certain dramaturgical conventions are present in the storytelling of TV journalism, such as in dramatized reconstructions of events (Ekström, 2000). Storytelling techniques are used in TV journalism as a way of creating “mood, excitement, suspense, conflicts and contrasts” (ibid., p. 477). Also, in a dissertation on Swedish investigative TV journalism, Danielson (2016) shows that the narratives in investigative TV shows are developed around accusations of wrongdoing, which are investigated and proved, often with the reporters present in the storytelling. Thus, investigative journalism in particular demonstrates strong communicative features due to its simultaneous combination of information and dramatizations (Ekström, 2000).

Organizational researchers Schultz, Suddaby and Cornelissen (2014) also draw attention to the routinized work in journalism where they identify three ways in which the processes of constructing a media story take place. First, through the selection of newsworthy topics, i.e. stories that fit into the news values and are considered relevant for their audience, as discussed above. The second way is through the production of news, where the implicit routines of journalists’ work and media organizations guide how a media story is told. The third is the way in which the media story is constructed through presentation and framing of the story, i.e. how journalists construct the meaning in the text by including certain aspects and excluding others (ibid.).

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5 The study looked at the investigative TV show Uppdrag Granskning, one of the main storytellers in the media story about Telia and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan in the current study.
As shown above, the ways issues are presented in the media depends not only on the view of journalist but can also be viewed as struggles between various framings. The media does not generally portray only one framing of a topic, but can rather be seen as a place where such struggles between different framings of issues take place. Various societal actors, such as activists and corporate representatives, participate as sources in the media texts and have the ability to frame the media content according to their own beliefs (Reese 2001; Cornelissen et al., 2010). It has also been argued that the effects of different framings of an issue are especially noticeable in the media debate after an event of corporate irresponsibility, when the focus is on assigning responsibility and blame to different actors (Hoffman & Jennings, 2011).

**Dominant narratives and counter-narratives**

Stories in which organizations present themselves are often simplified stories about villains and heroes rather than stories that present the complexities of everyday life (Czarniawska, 1997). Narratives can therefore be seen as central meaning-making devices in organizational communication that serve the function of assembling experiences and making them communicable. Storytelling can also have both collective and individual features, and there is often room for competing and parallel narratives in the co-creation of meaning through stories (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). In this co-creation of meaning, some narratives become established as dominant narratives, often based on ‘strong plots’ with established patterns of emplotment (Czarniawska & Rhodes, 2004).

Narratives that resist and contradict dominant narratives can be defined as counter-narratives, which are, by definition, narratives told to counter another narrative (Andrews, 2004). As it is being used in this study, the counter-narrative concept comes from the book Organization and Counter-Narratives (Frandsen et al., 2017), where the concept is applied to an organizational context. The authors of this book focus on storytelling in and around organizations and, inspired by a constitutive perspective, argue that “the organization emerges from the focus on counter-narratives” (ibid., p. 3). Their argumentation thus resembles CCO researchers’ discussion of communication as constitutive of organizations, since the counter-narrative perspective views narratives and counter-narratives as one form of communication that has performative aspects.

By focusing on counter-narratives, the organization becomes a setting where struggles over meaning take place and both insiders and outsiders, such as the media, NGOs, consumers, etc., participate in this storytelling (Frandsen et al., 2017). In the dichotomy of dominant narratives and counter-narratives, the view in focus is that meaning can always be contested, and that struggles over
meaning occur when narratives collide (ibid.). Even more relevant for this study, Jensen, Maagaard and Rasmussen (2017) discuss how the dominant narrative or, as they call it, the ‘master narrative’ of corporate responsibility established by the organizational management is challenged by counter-narratives of other actors such as employees, NGOs and the media. These authors take their starting point in the corporate story, which they argue is constituted in dialogic processes of power struggles and the negotiation of meaning. In their study, the master narrative, in the form of a CSR policy, is questioned by the news media and thus becomes vulnerable under this scrutiny.

One way of understanding narratives and counter-narratives in relation to the present study is to see the organizational communication on corporate responsibility as the dominant narrative that is challenged by the counter-narrative of corporate irresponsibility. In this counter-narrative, the media questions the assumptions of the dominant narrative and presents an alternative view of the corporation, as irresponsible. The relationship between the dominant narrative and the counter-narratives does not have to be seen as something static, however. This study brings in the possibility that while at certain times, and from certain perspectives, the corporate narrative may be the dominant narrative, at other times, from other perspectives, the dominant narrative may be that of the media, which the corporation will contest.

2.2.3 Summary of the framework

The theoretical point of departure for this study is the CCO perspective. This means that communication is seen as a fundamental and constitutive part of organizations and of the narrative of corporate irresponsibility. The combination of CCO perspective and narrative approach used in this study is not common in previous research. One exception, however, is the counter-narrative approach used by Frandsen, Kuhn and Lundholt (2017) described above. The main reason for the lack of research that combines the two approaches is that narrative research more explicitly recognizes the narrative as the primary mode of understanding whereas CCO researchers see communication as something broader and do not want to limit themselves to narratives (Schoeneborn et al., 2019b). The current study shows that the two lines of research do not necessarily have to conflict.

The theoretical foundation of this study builds on two of the six premises of the CCO perspective (Cooren et al., 2011). To begin with, the study focuses on communicative events in which communication “constitute[s], (re-)produce[s], or alter[s] organizational practices” (Cooren et al., 2011, p. 1151). Thus, the focus is on communicative events where meaning is under constant renegotiation. When it comes to topics of corporate irresponsibility, which by
definition includes the organizational surroundings and affects stakeholders, these constitutive communication processes include various actors and interests. By focusing on uncertainty and potential conflicts in communication as well as dialogue and discussion become the focus. The other premise applied here, Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen and Clark’s (2011) third premise, which addresses co-constructed nature of communication, is thus also important since corporate irresponsibility is understood as constituted by various stories about corporations that act irresponsibly, where irresponsibility is a value judgment, not something that can be measured or in other ways defined objectively.

Recognizing that previous research has shown the important role of the media has for corporations, by taking a different point of departure the present study contributes to furthering our knowledge about the interplay between corporations and the media. By comibng the ideas of constitutive communication with a narrative approach, the interplay between corporations and the media, in this case on the topic corporate irresponsibility, is thus illustrated as a contest between dominant narratives and counter-narratives. In these narratives, the issue is then framed as either responsibility or irresponsibility, or sometimes a bit of both. Bringing the CCO and narrative perspectives together shows how communication in media narratives can take on a particularly powerful role in studying corporate irresponsibility from a constitutive perspective. Combining the ideas from CCO and narrative studies with research from media studies, in this text defined as storytelling in the media, sets the theoretical lens that will guide this study.

To summarize, a central point of this chapter has been to argue that communication by others, in this case the media, can become a constitutive part of the corporation, particularly on the issue of corporate irresponsibility as it includes various stakeholders. By focusing on the communicative aspects of corporate irresponsibility, the often irreconcilable views of various actors, such as corporations and the journalistic media, both of whom have an interest in framing the topic in a certain way, are put forward and the complexities shown. As communication in journalistic media takes its own particular narrative form, the CCO perspective and a narrative perspective are combined here in this study towards understanding corporate irresponsibility.
3. Methodological approach

This chapter presents the methodological choices made for this study and what has motivated them. In line with the arguments made in the previous chapter, the study uses a qualitative and interpretive approach. The focus is consequently on analyzing narratives and communication, with a small selection of media stories viewed as archetypical cases of narratives of corporate irresponsibility. The empirical material consists of stories from various sources such as news media articles and TV shows, as well as stories from interviews conducted with people involved in the media stories. How the stories have been collected and analyzed and some reflections on the consequences that the selection of stories has had on the results of the study are further elaborated below.

3.1 Views on knowledge

The study of narratives in organization studies, as well as in some lines of CCO research, is founded on the interpretive paradigm of organization theory. Interpretative organization theory developed in response to the positivist focus on causality and generalizations, and focuses instead on understanding meaning (Hatch & Yanow, 2003). Thus, this study emphasizes the central role of language and other forms of communication, such as images and symbols, in meaning-making processes. The purpose is to illustrate how the relationship between corporations and the media can be manifested in topics of corporate irresponsibility. The study therefore focuses on the specific context of the media stories of corporate irresponsibility centered on in the analysis.

As described in the previous chapter, this study views communication as a fundamental part of the construction of corporations and corporate phenomena, in line with the CCO perspective. This in turn means that communication is seen as “the primary mode of explaining social reality” (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 302), an ontological statement that CCO research agrees on. Different lines of research within the CCO perspective do, however, hold slightly different views on epistemology. Proponents of the Montréal School, for example, define its epistemological standpoint as relational or pragmatist, which
implies “refusing to determine a starting point in the act of knowing, inquiring, or investigation” (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 288) and attribute agency to both humans and objects. The CCO research that takes its departure in Luhmann’s (1995) theory of social systems uses the observer as a clear starting point for knowing, inquiring, and investigating, and adheres to a form of radical constructivism (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). Finally, some CCO researchers adhere to the ‘four flows’ model, which builds on structuration theory. The four flows model is mainly a meta-theory and can thus include various types of explanations, narrative inquiry being one of them (ibid.).

Taking inspiration from, but not completely embracing, the Montréal School, the present study sees various forms of texts, such as news articles, TV broadcasts, and documents, as possibly having agency. The attributing of this agency to texts is not necessarily in line with the intentions of the human producers of these texts (Cooren, 2004; 2012). This reasoning, particularly in connection to narrative analysis, takes its departure in Greimas’ (1984) semiotic and narratological theory of the ‘actantial model’. In this model, Greimas argued that there are certain structural roles, actants, that typically perform in a narrative. These roles are not only performed by humans but can also be non-human elements within the narrative (Greimas, 1984). Taking inspiration from this approach, this study combines interviews with media texts and images in order to capture various dimensions of storytelling. Consequently, the study focuses not only on human action and intentions, but also on different perspectives on narratives.

This study, as well as all narrative research, uses the starting point that narratives are an important form of knowledge. But the field of narrative research is an interdisciplinary one, which means that there are different ways of conducting narrative research (Johansson, 2005). Depending on the context and research field, for example, the concepts of narratives and stories may have different meaning. In this study, a narrative is defined as something broader and less tangible than a story. Stories are subsequently defined as smaller, delimited parts of the narratives. Media stories on explicit irresponsibility topics are thus told about specific corporations, whereas media narratives tell us

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6 This way of viewing agency as attributed to non-human objects as well as to humans is commonly used in actor network theory (ANT) (e.g. Latour, 2005), which has grown into a popular theoretical and methodological approach in organization studies (e.g. Czarniawska, 2004b; Alcadipani & Hassard, 2010) as well as communication theory (e.g. Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Cooren, 2006). The ANT approach to agency was, however, inspired by Greimas’ actantial model and, as this study does not aim to contribute to ANT, the narrative approach to agency discussed here takes its point of departure from literature theory as well as the discussion on textual agency in CCO (e.g. Cooren, 2004; 2012). As ANT is not used as an approach in the current study, it will not be discussed further in this text.
about the overarching view of corporate irresponsibility presented in the media.

Thus, the object of study here is defined as media narratives about corporate irresponsibility, which are exemplified in the two media stories empirically studied. Consequently, in this study, the study object is not the organizations, the journalists, or the media organizations. The emphasis lies instead on the narratives, where the respective organizations and individuals are at times storytellers and at other times play various roles in the stories told about them.

3.2 Selection of media stories

For media stories to become part of a dominating societal narrative on corporate irresponsibility, the media attention on the corporation regarding a particular irresponsibility topic has to be significant. Also, for the media stories to be considered as constitutive parts of the corporations in focus in the stories, the media attention likely has to be large as well. Thus, in order to explore the aim of this study, two of the most visible and lengthy media stories of corporate irresponsibility in Sweden in the last decades were therefore selected. As mentioned in the introduction, the two media stories are: H&M and its responsibility for working conditions in garment factories in its supply chain, studied from 1995 to 2017; and Telia and its alleged corruption in Uzbekistan, a story followed from 2008 until 2018.

As these media stories are exceptionally large in their Swedish context, they represent extraordinary cases but can also be viewed as archetypical and representative of different types of irresponsibility narratives, a point which will become clearer in the analysis and results of the study. The decision to focus on two cases, rather than including several media stories, was made in order to provide a rich study of how media narratives of corporate irresponsibility are created and maintained over a longer time period. Since these two stories have been going on for a long time, it was possible to study them longitudinally to observe how the narratives change, and persist, over time, and to collect media material from various points in time. Choosing to have two cases also made it possible to contrast the media stories with each other to identify differences and similarities.

3.2.1 Two influential stories

The first of the media stories selected for this study is a long-lived story about H&M’s responsibility for working conditions in garment factories. This story
has been going on since the mid-1990s and, from 1995 until 2017, generated at least 189 news articles\(^7\) as well as several notable TV broadcasts with this topic as the main focus. The second is about Telia’s responsibility to act in an ethical and legally correct manner, i.e. not corruptly, when initiating business operations in Uzbekistan, a story that peaked in a media scandal in 2012. During the period 2008-2018, at least 401 news articles\(^8\) had the topic as the main focus. The Telia story was also the focus of five episodes of Sweden’s most well-known investigative journalism program, Uppdrag Granskning (henceforth UG), that airs on public TV broadcaster SVT.

A pre-study (Grafström et al., 2015b) conducted within the research project for this thesis generated a part of the general knowledge of the empirical field used to design the current study. The pre-study was conducted in 2013 with the aim of exploring the media attention on corporate responsibility topics related to five Swedish corporations over a longitudinal time-frame from 1995 to 2012. The five corporations\(^9\) selected were chosen because they were among the largest corporations in Sweden noted on the Swedish stock exchange and were consumer-oriented industries. They also fit the criteria of large, local and well-known businesses that are most affected by media agenda-setting (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). Thus, these criteria – large, visible, consumer-oriented, in a Swedish context – are also characteristics that apply to both H&M and Telia, the corporations selected for further examination in the present study, which has a more qualitative focus than the pre-study.

The journalistic investigations of the irresponsibility of both H&M and Telia have resulted in several awards for the journalists behind the stories. The UG investigation of Telia and the corruption, in particular, was awarded the most prestigious journalistic prize in Sweden, Stora Journalistpriset, in 2013. In addition, media researchers Allern and Pollack (2016) use UG’s revelations about Telia and the suspected bribery in Uzbekistan as a notable example of a critical investigation that had positive value for society in a public inquiry. This is an indication that this particular kind of investigation into corporate irresponsibility is valued, and seen as important, within the journalistic community.

\(^7\) In Sweden’s four largest daily newspapers DN, SvD, Aftonbladet and Expressen, and business newspaper DI. More information about how these news articles were collected is presented in section 3.3.1. Both the H&M story and the Telia story were also reported in news articles that did not have these specific topics (i.e. working conditions in garment factories and alleged corruption in Uzbekistan, respectively) as the main focus. Thus, the total amount of media attention to these stories is even greater than these numbers indicate.

\(^8\) Ibid. (footnote 7, above).

\(^9\) Clas Ohlson, Electrolux, H&M, Nordea and Telia.
Even though H&M and Telia are both well-known corporations, the two stories were also selected for this study due to how they differ in character, making them diverse examples of the same phenomena. For example, the stories differ in form in that while the story about H&M is recurring and exhibits several smaller peaks over the years, the story about Telia takes the form of one large media event.

The two stories also differ in content regarding several aspects of corporate irresponsibility. The media story about H&M focuses on the ethics of buying garments from poor countries, and thereby exploiting textile workers. Thus, this story is not about breaking laws but rather about a gray area that many global corporations operate in, and H&M is not a unique case when it comes to this type of corporate irresponsibility. The story about Telia, on the other hand, concerns allegations of a violation of the law, both Swedish and international law. Telia’s possible crime is of a financial nature, which makes the victims of the story less evident. In the H&M story, it is instead apparent that the textile workers are the ones experiencing the consequences of H&M’s business practices.

Also, since the media stories selected are two of the most widely publicized media stories about corporate irresponsibility in Sweden, it is important to explore these two cases because they represent prevailing images of what corporate irresponsibility entails for society at large. That these corporations get plenty of media attention means that other stories about other types of corporations and other types of responsibility topics do not. There is not enough room for them in the societal debate. Together, the two cases therefore bring varying narrative aspects to the study and can consequently say something more general about the media reporting on the topic of corporate irresponsibility.

To familiarize the reader with the two corporations in focus, a brief introduction to each of the organizations is given below.

**H&M**

H&M (Hennes & Mauritz) is a Swedish multinational clothing retailer with more than 4700 stores in 6 markets all across the world. The H&M corporation’s business concept is to fashionable clothing at a low price and H&M does not own the factories where the garments are made, but instead buys garments from suppliers, primarily in Asia. The corporation was founded in 1947 and is a family business. Its founder, Erling Persson, opened the first store, called ‘Hennes’, in Västerås, inspired by U.S. clothing retailers, and a

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second store in Stockholm in 1952. In 1969, H&M began to expand internationally, starting in Norway, Denmark, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. During this expansion period, H&M was also listed on the Stockholm Stock Exchange, in 1974, and began rebranding from its full name ‘Hennes & Mauritz’, to the abbreviated ‘H&M’. The first change of CEO took place 35 years after the corporation was founded, when Erling’s son, Stefan Persson, took over in 1982.

H&M continued to expand internationally through the 1990s, when it became famous for its highly publicized underwear campaigns, featuring well-known fashion models. In 1998, Stefan Persson resigned from his position as CEO but continued as board chair and remained so until 2020. The new CEO, Fabian Månsson, took over from 1998 to 2000, followed by Rolf Erikson from 2000 until 2009. In 2009, Karl-Johan Persson, grandson of Erling and son of Stefan, became CEO, H&M’s fifth since the company was founded over 60 years earlier. On January 30, 2020, shortly before this thesis was published, Karl-Johan Persson stepped down and former sustainability manager Helena Helmersson took over as CEO. At the same time, it was announced that Karl-Johan would take over the position as board chair from his father Stefan, who also stepped down.

According to the H&M website, the H&M business model is now to offer “fashion and quality at the best price in a sustainable way,” the last part of which, ‘a sustainable way’, was added to the company’s original slogan in 2015. A starting point for H&M’s sustainability initiatives was the introduction of their first code of conduct in 1997. This code of conduct stated the requirements for H&M suppliers with regard to improving working conditions and environmental practices in their operations.

The 1997 code of conduct was replaced in 2016 by a sustainability commitment listing the same requirements, which all suppliers and business partners must sign. This commitment focuses on three major areas: fair living wages, environmental performance and animal welfare. H&M defines ‘a fair living wage’ as “one which satisfies the basic needs of workers and their families as well as providing some discretionary income. A fair living wage should be revised annually, and negotiated regularly.” The H&M website also lists three key aims of the corporation with respect to sustainability: Leading the

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Change, Circular & Climate Positive, and Fair & Equal. The working conditions in garment factories, which is the topic of the media stories in this study, thus fall under H&M’s final key area, i.e. of being fair and equal.

**Telia**

Telia is a telecommunication corporation with the Swedish state as the largest owner. Prior to that, until 1993, the organization was a public monopoly called Televerket. In July 1993, the organization was incorporated, with the Swedish state its sole owner, and renamed Telia. During the 1990s, Telia started to expand to new markets outside of Sweden, focusing first on the Nordic and the Baltic regions. In 2000, the Swedish state sold 30 percent of its Telia shares to private investors and Telia was listed on the Stockholm Stock Exchange. These Telia shares, called the ‘public share’, were launched with a massive advertising campaign and nearly a million private individuals bought shares at that time. Thus, Telia has many private individuals as shareholders.

In 2003, Telia merged with its Finnish counterpart Sonera to form TeliaSonera. The Swedish state’s ownership in the new company totaled 46 percent, and the Finnish state owned 19.4 percent. A few years later, in 2007, Telia Sonera entered Uzbekistan as a part of a bigger expansion to Central Asian countries, including Russia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Georgia, which Telia calls its Eurasia region. In the middle of this expansion, in 2007, Lars Nyberg took over as CEO. The corruption scandal in focus in this study broke out in 2012 and became one of the largest business scandals in Swedish history. CEO Nyberg and almost the entire board of directors were forced to leave their positions in 2013, in the aftermath of this scandal.

In September 2013, Nyberg was replaced by Johan Dennelin and, together with the new board chair, Marie Ehrling, formed Telia Sonera new leadership after the scandal. Three years later, in 2016, the group changed its name from Telia Sonera to Telia Company as a unified brand for all markets. The Finnish state is no longer a large owner in the corporation, with only 3.2 percent of the shares, so the Sonera part of the corporation has decreased significantly. In the years since the media scandal concerning its business dealings in Uzbekistan, Telia has exited many of the Eurasian countries and concentrated its business

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17 The company group, formerly called Telia Sonera (2002-2016) and now Telia Company (from 2016) is the object of this study and, for the sake of simplicity, is referred to throughout the thesis as Telia. The Swedish branch of the organization has been called Telia Sverige all along but is not in focus here.
18 Approximate translation of the Swedish folkaktie.
operations to the Nordic and Baltic countries. As of April 2020, Telia had brands in the markets of Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Moldova.\textsuperscript{20} Johan Dennerlind resigned from his position of CEO in 2019, with the new CEO, Allison Kirkby, set to take office in 2020.\textsuperscript{21} It was also announced that Lars-Johan Jarnheimer would replace Marie Ehrling, who joined Telia after the scandal, to take over the role of board chair in 2020.\textsuperscript{22}

3.3 Collection of stories
This study has an exploratory character, which means that the collection of empirical material has not followed a pre-determined order. Instead, the way forward has been to follow paths in the empirical stories initiated by clues that appeared exciting and puzzling. The empirical material gathered can be divided into two categories: stories collected from the media, and stories from interviews with people involved in the media stories. This material can furthermore be categorized into three views or ‘perspectives’, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Main empirical material</th>
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<td>Print and broadcast media stories</td>
<td>Media articles</td>
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<td>Investigative books</td>
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<td>Stories from journalists and stories from sources/activists</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
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<td>Media industry magazines</td>
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<td>Press conferences</td>
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<td>Quotes in print and broadcast media</td>
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<td>Stories from corporations</td>
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<td>Press conferences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Quotes in print and broadcast media</td>
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</table>

*Table 1: Three perspectives on the media stories.*

\textsuperscript{20} https://www.teliacompany.com/sv/om-foretaget/marknader-och-varumarken/ (2020-04-11)
In line with the Montréal School of the CCO perspective (e.g. Cooren, 2004; Cooren & Fairhurst, 2008), this study recognizes that the texts (not exclusively written articles but also other things that communicate, such as images, moving images, radio talk, etc.) published in the media can have agency independent of the intentions of the authors who produce them. These types of stories are defined here as official media stories and represent one perspective in the analysis. In order to get behind the stories and discuss the intentions behind them, as well as responses to them, these stories are complemented with interviews with selected individuals such as journalists, activists, investors, and corporate representatives. Thus, journalists and their sources make up the second perspective of the study, and corporate representatives the third.

3.3.1 Stories from the media
The media material for the narrative analysis of this study was collected from various sources. First, a longitudinal collection of newspaper articles from five of the largest newspapers in Sweden was gathered. When reading these news media reports, it was noted that the articles, in both the story about H&M and the story about Telia, often referred to a number of particular TV broadcasts. As they seem to have had particular importance for the media stories, these TV episodes were viewed, transcribed, and included in the analysis. To complement these two important types of media texts, articles from media industry magazines were also collected in order to follow the debate on those issues among media professionals themselves. Selected press releases from the two corporations in focus were also added, as well as video coverage from press conferences hosted both by the corporations and others, such as the public prosecutor in the Telia case.

News media reports
In order to comprehensively follow these two media stories in the news media, Mediearkivet, a Swedish database of print news media articles, was used as a basis for the media analysis. As the time period of the study stretches back to before the breakthrough of online news, particularly in the case of H&M, where the media story began already in the mid-1990s, the focus of the study is on the print versions of the news articles. Five newspapers were selected from the Mediearkivet database to follow the general debate in the Swedish news media. The papers selected are five of Sweden’s largest daily papers with nation-wide coverage and include morning newspapers *Dagens Nyheter* (henceforth DN) and *Svenska Dagbladet*, (henceforth SvD), evening newspapers *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*, and the business newspaper *Dagens Industri* (henceforth DI).
In order to capture as complete media attention in these media stories as possible, a series of search words for each story was used. As it is impossible to conduct an exact search using key words, some news articles captured in the inquiry did not belong to the media stories in focus in this study. After a careful reading of all of the material, these news articles were therefore removed from the study. In some cases, the decision to do this was not entirely self-evident, for example, when a minor part of a news article was relevant to the study but where the rest of the article focused on something different. It was therefore decided that if a substantial part of the article was relevant, i.e. focused on the irresponsibility of one of the two corporations in the study, the news article was included and, if not, the news article was removed. Also, very short news items, containing less than one paragraph, that did not add anything new to the overall media story, were also excluded.

For the story about H&M, the search words used were H&M or Hennes & Mauritz and one of the five terms: child labor, code of conduct, minimum wage, living wage, or working conditions. The time period set for H&M was from 1995, the first year that the Mediearkivet database was complete, until 2017, which marks the end of the time period studied here. During this time period, 186 relevant newspaper articles were collected from the print version of the five newspapers. Three additional online articles from the web versions of Aftonbladet and Expressen were also added as they were connected to two noteworthy events, in 2016 and 2017, that were not published in the print version of those newspapers. The total number of articles that constitute the basis for the news media analysis of the H&M story is therefore 189.

The distribution of the news articles over the years 1995 to 2017 is presented below.

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23 The search was conducted in Swedish using the key words: H&M or ‘Hennes & Mauritz’ and barnarbete* or uppförandekod* or minimilön* or levnadslön* or arbetsvillkor* or arbetsförhållande*, respectively; where the last two terms are both equivalent to ‘working conditions’ in English. Therefore, when translated to English for the purposes of this thesis, the search contains five key words, where the original Swedish search contained six.
For the story about Telia, the search words used were Telia* and Uzbekistan and one of the two terms: bribe* or corrupt*. The search results date back to 2008 and the story was followed until 2018 when a decision was made to stop even though the media continued to report on the topic in 2019, which will briefly touched upon later in the thesis. For the time period 2008 to 2011, when the story was not yet defined as corruption or a bribe, the last name of the SvD journalist who was the author of the initial warnings about Telia’s business in Uzbekistan was added to the search in order to follow his reports from the beginning. After all irrelevant search results were removed, this generated 401 print newspaper articles in total. As all of the main events of the Telia story were published in the print versions of the newspapers, no web articles were included in the study.

The distribution of the news articles over the years 2008 to 2018 is presented below.

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24 The search was conducted in Swedish using the key words: Telia* and Uzbekistan and mut* or korrupt*.
25 The search for the time period 2008-2011 used the key words: Telia* and Uzbekistan and mut* or corrupt* or Cervenka.
Graph 2: The distribution of news articles about Telia and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan from 2008 to 2018 in the newspapers DN, SvD, Aftonbladet, Expressen and DI. Source: Own collection of newspaper articles.

TV broadcasts
In addition to the news media reports described above, a number of TV broadcasts played an exceptionally important role in the two media stories, and thus constitute a central part of the analysis. The TV broadcasts included in the study were primarily identified through the news media reports, as the news media tend to follow up on newsworthy TV broadcasts. Some news broadcasts were also added because they were mentioned as important by the interviewees (see section 3.3.2 below, where interviews are discussed). In total, three episodes of investigative TV programs and two TV news broadcasts about H&M, and five episodes of investigative TV programs and one TV news broadcast about Telia, are included in the analysis.

Due to different copyright terms, the TV broadcasts were collected from various sources and locations. TV episodes aired on SVT (i.e. Swedish public service channels 1 and 2) were watched via Svensk Mediedatabas (SMDB), a database that is only available on location at the National Library of Sweden (Kungliga Biblioteket) in Stockholm. These episodes were therefore watched at the library. The full episode of the TV documentary about H&M Latest fashion - at what price? (SVT2, 1997-12-29) was received digitally from the producer, making it possible to access this broadcast anywhere. The Kalla
Fakta episodes originally broadcast on the TV4 network were available online\(^\text{26}\) with a free account and thus also available at all times.

Most of the TV broadcasts were watched and transcribed in full or in part, and full transcriptions of five of the episodes from the TV show UG were received from one of UG’s producers. These transcriptions were then corrected and completed while viewing the TV episodes, before being included in the analysis. In order to fully capture both the content and form of the stories in the TV broadcasts, the transcriptions not only focused on what was said, but also included a description of images that appeared on the screen. These descriptions were added with the purpose of exploring the form of the storytelling on television and did not contain every detail of the images. Instead, they were added to enable me to study how the moving images, and the cuts between them, worked to amplify what was said.

The TV shows used in the analysis are listed in tables 2 and 3 of Appendix 1 (pages 197-198). In the text below, all of the TV episode titles have been translated into English. The Swedish names of the TV shows, however, have been kept since these names are so well-established in the Swedish context that a translation would not make sense here.

**Media industry magazines**

As a complement to the media reporting that appears in news media and on TV, the media industry debate on the media stories was also captured. Therefore, in addition to the two database searches for news items described above, searches were done using the same key words\(^\text{27}\) for the same time periods\(^\text{28}\) as for the news media in the two largest media industry magazines in Sweden, *Dagens Media* and *Resumé*. These searches were made in Mediearkivet, including both print and web versions of the magazines, using the same criteria, i.e. that the articles should add something relevant to the overall story, in order to filter out irrelevant results. This resulted in the addition of 25 articles, the first from 2001, to the analysis of the media story about H&M and the garment factories, and 29 articles to the analysis of the media story on Telia and the corruption in Uzbekistan.

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\(^\text{26}\) https://www.tv4play.se/

\(^\text{27}\) I.e., for the H&M story: H&M or Hennes & Mauritz and one of: child labor, code of conduct, minimum wage, living wage, or working conditions; and for the Telia story: Telia* and Uzbek-istan and one of: bribe* or corrupt*.

\(^\text{28}\) For H&M: from 1995 to 2017; and for Telia: from 2008 to 2018.
Press releases and press conferences
In order to capture the role of the corporations in the media stories in focus in the study, press releases from H&M and Telia were collected from their respective websites when they contained information about the media stories. In both cases, the press releases are from 2012 and onwards. In the case of H&M, 2012 is when it started to publish press releases online, and 56 press releases from the years 2012-2017 about H&M’s responsibilities concerning the working conditions in garment factories were collected.29

In the case of Telia, its press communication concerning the possible corruption in Uzbekistan also started in 2012, and 37 press releases dating from 2012 to 2018 related to this media story have been gathered from Telia. Material was also collected from two press conferences that took place on September 22, 2017, the first held by CEO Johan Dennelind and Board Chair Marie Ehrling, about a settlement that Telia had reached the day before, and the other held by public prosecutor Gunnar Stetler, about the Swedish criminal investigation of former Telia employees. Both of these press conferences were broadcast on the web by several Swedish news media organizations. They could therefore be watched live, and have both been transcribed selectively.

Additional material
In addition to the abovementioned empirical material collected, the media stories were also followed, in a more unstructured manner, after their endpoints – for H&M the end of 2017, and for Telia the end of 2018 – until the final version of this thesis. This means that whenever something came up in the media about H&M or Telia that could contribute to the study, these items were collected as supplementary material for the study. Because the reporting could possibly go on indefinitely and the study had to have an endpoint for the more structured analysis of the media material, these supplementary media items are not described further here. Some are, however, referred to in the epilogues of the empirical chapters, chapters 4 and 5. Any additional media items referenced in the text also appear in the section for media sources in the reference list.

As this study has been going on for many years, a considerable amount of additional material related to the media stories has been observed. This includes, for example, journalistic investigative books, radio broadcasts and podcasts, web series, and Instagram and Facebook updates connected to the

29 It was not possible to collect earlier press releases from H&M’s website and H&M was unable to provide any additional press releases on request. For press releases from the earlier time period, the study therefore relies on quotes from these press releases published in the journalistic media.
two media stories in focus in the study. The additional material has been useful in developing a further understanding of the stories, but as it is not a part of the structured analysis, it is not further elaborated on here. A more vital part of the study are the interviews conducted with people who participated in the media stories, journalists who have investigated the stories, and representatives of the corporations who experienced the media stories.

3.3.2 Stories from interviews

The second part of the empirical material used in this study can be described as ‘stories about the media stories’ and interviews conducted with people in, behind, and around the media stories. The purpose of conducting these interviews was to collect stories about the creation and telling of the media stories as well as the reactions and responses to them. The interviews for the study were conducted from late 2016 to fall 2017. The stories told by the interviewees consequently reflect this specific point in time. Since stories constructed about the past are under constant renegotiation, they might not be the same at a different point in time. Also, since people have difficulties remembering details of the past, the purpose of the interviews illustrate the interviewees’ experience of the world (Czarniawska, 2014), not to attain factual accounts of the past. That would be impossible to obtain.

The interviews for the study can be divided into three groups: interviews with participants of the media stories, interviews with organizational members, and additional interviews with informants who were not a part of the research field. First, a number of interviews were conducted in order to put the media texts into context by talking to the people that appeared in the media content and the journalists behind the stories. For example, influential journalists were asked about the work behind their investigations in an aim to gain knowledge about how topics of corporate irresponsibility end up at the center of media attention. How participants of the media stories, i.e. corporate representatives and stakeholders such as NGOs and investors, worked to express their opinions and their reactions to the media attention were also common topics of the interviews. Thus, in the empirical chapters, the interviews become a way of reaching behind the media stories and exploring how the various actors participated in constructing these stories.

Selecting interviewees

Notable journalists, relevant NGOs and other persons visible in the media were identified mainly through their publicity in the media. Interviews were thus conducted with those who repeatedly participated in news media articles and/or in TV broadcasts. While conducting these interviews, all interviewees
were asked, at the end of the interview, if they had any suggestions of others that they thought could be relevant for the research topic and/or interested in participating, i.e. a form of snowball selection. This led to a number of additional interviews and also helped to confirm that the right people had already been interviewed as those people came up as suggestions.

In order to explore how H&M and Telia experienced the media attention and how they participated in the media stories, contact was made with organizational members who worked, or had previously worked, with sustainability and/or communication in the two corporations. This resulted in interviews with both former and present employees at H&M and Telia, as well as one sustainability consultant who had previously had an assignment at Telia. The response from the two corporations to requests for interviews differed a lot. Telia was very accommodating, and the two first interviewees assisted in contacting colleagues that could be relevant for the research project for further interviews within the organization. The situation was different at H&M, an organization that gets many requests for contact from students, researchers and journalists, which made it difficult to get access. After much effort, interviews with one present employee and four former employees were conducted.

The interviewees representing H&M and Telia, as well as those representing the opinions of an NGO, have been anonymized at the request of some of the interviewees. The topics of the interviews with organizational members were also at times of a more sensitive nature, compared to those with journalists and other known social commentators. This led to ethical considerations about the exposure of individuals, which contributed to the decision to not use their names in the text. As knowing the names of the organizational members would not add anything meaningful to their presentation in the study, it was an easy decision to make. Journalists and other well-known persons are, however, named in the text, since they can easily be identified through the media texts, making it impossible for them not to be recognized. In other words, individuals who represent an organization remain anonymous here, whereas easily identified individuals who represent themselves, rather than an organization, are named.

The interviewees for the study are described in further detail in tables 4 and 5 of Appendix 2 (pages 199-201).

**Conducting interviews**
A total of 23 semi-structured interviews with 25 persons have been conducted. Thus, most of the interviews were with one person at the time but on two occasions the interview was conducted with two people at the same time, upon
the request of the interviewees or because it was the most convenient for practical reasons. The interviews were conducted with past and present organizational members at Telia and H&M, journalists, NGOs and other actors that participate in the media arena. The duration of interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 2 hours, but generally lasted about one hour per occasion, and all of the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. With the exception of one interview in English, all of the interviews were conducted in Swedish. A majority of the quotes in the text have therefore been translated from Swedish into English by the author.

Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in order to develop an understanding of the world from the interviewee’s point of view (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews for this study can be defined as semi-structured as they were conducted using a prepared interview guide, though the order of the questions was often rearranged, and supplementary questions added during the interview conversation. A number of general questions were similar for all of the interviewees, but the interview guides were otherwise carefully constructed to include specific questions for each of the persons interviewed. The starting point was the media stories. As interviews are dialogues between the researcher and the interviewee, in this case in their professional role, the conversations also varied depending on the situation as well as the stage of the research process.

In addition to these 23 interviews, five complementary conversations, similar to interviews but of a more unstructured character, also took place as a part of the study. These conversations took the form of lunch or breakfast meetings, some of which were recorded and partially transcribed but on most occasions only documented by taking notes. These meetings took place with people interested in the project, and the research topic was discussed from various angles, but these persons were not seen as actually representing the research field. Three of the five persons work as consultants with sustainability and/or media relations, one is an editor at a sustainability magazine, and one used to be sustainability manager at a competitor of H&M in the fashion industry. These additional conversations are not quoted in the study as the topics discussed at these interviews were used primarily as background information. The information gained from the meetings was, however, valuable as it contributed to a better understanding of the research field during the research process.
3.4 Analysis and presentation

After collecting an extensive number of media stories, as well as conducting interviews, the main task was to reduce the material into a manageable size. As the study started out as explorative, how to analyze the material was not entirely self-evident, though the narrative features stood out as the most significant patterns in the material. For example, one interviewee at Telia pointed out that he felt that Telia was cast in a particular role, as the villain of the media story, a casting that remained after the most intense media scandal was over. This was a key turning point that led towards a focus on stories and storytelling as a fruitful way of exploring the topic of the study. When reducing the material into a comprehensible dimension, the narrative forms there became the focus.

3.4.1 Organizing stories

According to Czarniawska (2004a), the first step of a narrative analysis is for the researcher to collect stories from the research field, i.e. the empirical material described above. In the current study, this was at first an extensive amount of media texts of various forms and, consequently, a first step in the analysis was to read through the material in order to get an overview and to reduce it to a more manageable size. Thus, the first path of the analysis included watching and transcribing TV shows, reading newspaper articles, exploring corporate webpages and press releases, as well as searching for online stories in social media and on other websites. This phase included re-reading the material several times to get an overall picture of how the media stories began and evolved over time in order to begin organizing the material.

As noted, the study started with an exploratory phase, which means that the stories and ways of telling stories discovered within the longitudinal media stories were followed. The analysis then continued based on what was found. From a practical standpoint, the material, including newspaper articles, transcriptions of TV broadcasts, and interview transcriptions, were gathered and analyzed both manually and with the aid of NVivo software for qualitative analysis. NVivo was particularly helpful for organizing the extensive media material. Only a few quantitative elements were added to the analysis since the study primarily has a qualitative approach. The quantitative calculations and graphs were created in Excel and include, for example, the distribution of articles between irresponsible representations vs responsible representations of the corporations in the news media.

After the initial phase of reading and re-reading of the material, a number of individuals and events were identified as particularly key to the development
of the media stories and these consequently became the focus of attention. As described in the previous section, the individuals identified as significant storytellers, or otherwise knowledgeable about the topic under study, were also interviewed and full transcriptions of these interviews included in the analysis. Conducting interviews was thus a way of evoking storytelling, compared to the collection of media material that was already constructed into stories (cf. Czarniawska, 2004a).

The analysis continued with the interpretation of the stories by asking: what do they say? and how do they say it? (Czarniawska, 2004a). Thus, themes in the empirical material were generated and structured by focusing on events, such as reports in newspapers and TV shows, that generated public attention and/or were described as important by interviewees. As the material had a longitudinal starting point, the time perspective has guided the study and the plot of the stories was structured chronologically. Presentation of the material consequently starts at the beginning, i.e. the first media reports on the topic, and ends at a given time since, for practical reasons, the study had to be limited. Media reports on both H&M and Telia that relate to the topics of this study have also continued after the time periods studied ended. These reports are addressed briefly in the epilogues.

3.4.2 Constructing stories

In narrative research, the research field is understood as constructed through stories collected from various sources, and the researcher herself is also viewed as a storyteller. Thus, the final steps in a narrative analysis include the researcher putting together her own story and setting this story against, or together with, other stories (Czarniawska, 2004a). Thus, narratives can have at least two distinguishable levels: first, the narratives constructed in the empirics, such as the media texts or the stories told by interviewees; and second, the narratives constructed by the researcher (Robertson, 2018). Robertson (2018) therefore notes the importance of including the stories from the field in the stories constructed by the researchers. This means that the text presented in the coming chapters includes extended quotes from interviews and quite a few excerpts from the media reports.

The focus of the storytelling in the presentation of the empirical material is on four perspectives: the print and broadcast media stories, the stories from journalists, and stories from stakeholders, all of which can be considered media sources, and the stories of the corporations in the media limelight. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below.
The first perspective, primarily expressed in newspapers and on TV, sets the media texts in focus. This perspective is based on media analysis and does not include the voices of the people involved. The second and third perspectives consist of stories told by journalists and stakeholders, such as NGOs and investor representatives, who are also journalistic sources. Both of these views go behind the published media stories and show how the stories have been created and told. The final perspective is that of the corporations, H&M and Telia, and how they experienced the media publicity on the corporate irresponsibility topic in focus, i.e. the working conditions in garment factories and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan, respectively.

The collected material from news media, TV broadcasts, and similar items are all in Swedish and, in writing up the empirical stories, the quotes in the text have therefore been translated into English. The same applies to the interviews, where all but one were conducted and transcribed in Swedish. The one interview conducted in English was consequently also transcribed in English. Quotes from the Swedish interviews cited here in the text have been translated into English. When it comes to press releases, and additional corporate communications material, the English version was used when available, otherwise, as with the other material used in this study, if quoted here in the text these have been translated by the author. As this study focuses on the meaning in texts, the aspect of translation from one language to another can have consequences for the study, but is in this case unavoidable.

As the stories from journalists and stakeholders can both be defined as the stories behind the media stories, these two perspectives are dealt with as one in the empirical chapters (chapters 4 and 5). Thus, these two chapters have three perspectives.
3.4.3 Analyzing the results

In organization studies, studies that focus on language and communication in the media often use discourse analysis to examine how issues are constructed in the media (e.g. Joutsenvirta & Vaara, 2009; Breit, 2010; Joutsenvirta, 2011). Discourse analysis, on the one hand, usually has the agenda of focusing on ideological aspects in a strive for social change, especially in the form of critical discourse analysis (Cooren, 2015). Narrative analysis, on the other hand, focuses on the structure and functions of narratives. The two perspectives are not irreconcilable, however, and can be seen as different ways of achieving the same thing (ibid.). Some narrative researchers also use the concept of discourse when focusing on how the content of a narrative is communicated, in line with Chatman (1978).

One particular advantage of narrative analysis is its ability to analyze concrete narratives, such as the media stories, in order to capture less tangible assumptions and reveal underlying assumptions of broader narratives unconsciously controlling our understanding (Robertson, 2018), which is in line with the aim of this study. When it comes to media texts, for example, the conventional journalistic dramaturgy can be uncovered by focusing on narratives in the analysis (ibid.). In narrative analysis, some researchers distinguish clearly between the form and content of narratives (e.g. Lieblich et al., 1998). The present study, however, combines both aspects in order to understand how corporate irresponsibility is constituted in narratives. In other words, both what was written and what was said on the topic (i.e. the content of the stories) and the way it was written and said by various storytellers (i.e. the form of the stories) matter.

In studying the content of the media stories, the collected newspaper articles were counted and organized according to three framings of the corporation: as responsible, i.e. a positive angle; as irresponsible, i.e. a negative angle; or as neutral, i.e. either a balance of responsible and irresponsible content, or an entirely neutral article. The concept of framing is commonly used in a media context and describes how some aspects of an issue are selected and made more salient in a communicating text (Entman, 1993). In this study, how the issue is framed has implications for how the studied stories are viewed as dominant narratives and counter-narratives (e.g. Frandsen et al., 2017). Thus, media attention towards either corporate responsibility or corporate irresponsibility becomes an indication of which narratives can be seen as either dominant narratives or counter-narratives in society at certain points in time.

Both in the analysis of the print and broadcast media stories, and in the interviews with the people telling the stories, primarily journalists as the editors of the media content, the form of the storytelling is in focus. The analysis centers,
in particular, around the way that complex issues are condensed into a comprehensible story since simplification is a vital part in journalistic storytelling (e.g. Allan, 2004; Harcup & O’Neill, 2017). The form of the longitudinal stories is also analyzed by examining how the dominant narratives and counter-narratives of responsibility and irresponsibility shift over time.

The final step of the analysis of the two longitudinal media stories was thus to compare the stories to one another in order to examine what type of narrative they represent. As a result, two ideal types of corporate irresponsibility narratives were distinguished, where the media story about H&M is an example of chronic irresponsibility, and the media story about Telia is an example of acute irresponsibility. These ideal types are in focus in the presentation and discussion of the analysis in chapter 6 and 7.

3.5 Reflections

In order to come closer to answering the initial question posed by the study – How is corporate irresponsibility constructed in media stories? – an exploratory approach is necessary because this study crosses boundaries between organization studies, within the broader field of business administration, and media and communication studies, and in doing so can add something to the previous research in these separate fields of research. As argued by Alvesson and Kärreman (2012), the researcher should be prepared to follow up on unexpected results and let them guide the empirical work. Thus, the process underlying the study means that the empirical stories are followed with an open mindset, starting with the reading of newspaper articles and following up on the puzzling leads that emerge along the way.

The choice of focusing the analysis on narratives was not self-evident but evolved in an explorative mode as the study progressed and the narrative aspects of the media reporting turned out to be a central aspect of the empirical material. As with other methodological approaches, qualitative methods and narrative analysis have both advantages and disadvantages. Using a narrative research approach can, for example, be criticized for its common use of small sample sizes and unrepresentative cases, which does not necessarily have to be a problem as science is built on making assumptions based on cases (Riessman, 1993). Moreover, the findings from narrative analysis are not as easily be replicated by other researchers, and the narrative approach, along with plenty of other qualitative approaches, have been criticized for this limitation (cf. Robertson, 2018). It can be argued, however, as shown in this chapter, that there are advantages to narrative research that can make up for these limitations.
4. H&M and the working conditions in garment factories

This chapter will present the results from the analysis of the media story about H&M and its responsibility for working conditions in the garment factories in its supply chain from several perspectives. The chapter begins with a prologue where the topic in focus, i.e. working conditions in garment factories, is discussed, the plot is summarized, and the three perspectives that the empirical study takes its departure from are introduced. The second part of the chapter deals with the first of these three perspectives, i.e. of the published and broadcasted media stories. In the third part discusses the procedures behind the media stories by focusing on the results from the interviews with journalists as well as NGO representatives, and the fourth presents the perspective of H&M. The chapter then closes with an epilogue in which the repetitive form of the media story is discussed as well as some of the goings on that occurred after the end of the studied time period.

4.1 Prologue

The introductory chapter of the thesis brought up an episode of Kalla Fakta that aired on TV4 on October 24, 2012, in which the show’s investigative team looks into the working conditions of H&M’s supply chain by travelling to Cambodia to visit the garment factories. This was not the first or last time that the issue was brought up in the media, however. From the mid-1990s to the present, the topic has been repeatedly discussed in everyday media reports, with attention peaking for larger media events. It is possible to distinguish two such media events in the main peaks of the media story. The first occurs at the end of 1997 and runs to the beginning of 1998 in connection with the TV documentary *Latest fashion - at what price?* The second occurs in the fall of 2012 when several events, such as the already noted TV show and another investigative trip reported on in Expressen, took place simultaneously. On

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31 These two peaks in media reports are evident when looking at Graph 1 in the previous chapter (page 45), which presents the number of newspaper articles and their distribution over the years.
several occasions before, after, and between these peaks of attention, there also appears more everyday reporting on the topic of working conditions in garment factories.

### 4.1.1 Working conditions in garment factories

What type of responsibility corporations have for what issues, such as working conditions, in their supply chains has been debated over the years and, since the middle of the 1990s when the media story of H&M began, the demand for responsibility has been pushed further and further along the supply chain (e.g. Barman, 2016). In the early days, the topic was linked to the substantial societal debate concerning the topic of globalization. Due to the economic globalization that took off in 1980s, the structure of manufacturing fundamentally changed, with a rapid outsourcing of the production from consumer countries to developing countries (Barman, 2016).

In response to this development, where multinational corporations became increasingly powerful actors at the global level, critical voices began to be heard in society and in the media in the mid-1990s. Particularly vocal in its criticism was the anti-sweatshop movement, which targeted high-profile brands, such as Nike, by directing negative attention to the treatment of workers in their supply chains (Greenberg & Knight, 2004). Thus, in comparison to other industries, the apparel industry, to which H&M belongs, was criticized on topics of social responsibility very early on and has, over the years, been one of the most highly criticized industries when it comes to working conditions their supply chain (Soule, 2009; Balsiger, 2014).

Due to the seriousness of the issue, the use of child labor in the supply chain, the focus of the early media attention, became regulated early on in the codes of conducts of large retailers (Barman, 2016). In general, the demands on large corporations to ensure that their suppliers act ethically have, since these early days, also increased substantially, which can be seen in, among other things, the development of international frameworks and guidelines for supply chain responsibility such as Global Compact from 2000\(^ {32} \) and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights from 2011.\(^ {33} \) Thus, what is to be considered ethical behavior in a global supply chain has continuously been up for debate. Consequently, it is in this changing societal context that the media story about H&M has unfolded, from 1995 to 2017.

\(^ {32} \) [https://www.unglobalcompact.org/](https://www.unglobalcompact.org/) (2020-04-11)
4.1.2 Summary of the plot

The first media reports captured in the media analysis are from September 1995, when reporters from the evening newspaper Expressen traveled to China to explore the working conditions in the garment factories of H&M’s supply chain. In May 1997, the first Swedish NGO report scrutinizing the supply chain of garment-makers was published by Fair Trade Center (later called Fair Action). Following these two separate events, in December 1997, the first large, cohesive media event about H&M and the garment factories aired in the form of a documentary – *Latest fashion - at what price?*

The production of this TV documentary took place in connection with H&M’s 50th anniversary, and the focus was on the story of a reporter from Swedish public service TV broadcaster SVT, who had traveled to the manufacturing countries in Asia and found children working for H&M’s suppliers in the Philippines. From the beginning of December 1997 until the end of 1998, 36 newspaper articles were also published in relation to the findings broadcast in the TV documentary, focused mainly on the issue of child labor. As so many newspapers followed up on the story, it became the starting point of a larger media event and the impact of the TV documentary was massive. The documentary has since been referred to in ensuing media reports and is commonly defined as the starting point of the discussions about H&M’s social responsibility.

In the years between this first peak in 1997 and the next large media event, which took place in 2012, the media attention directed to H&M and the working conditions in the garment factories in its supply chain continues with a similar focus. Several larger reports by journalists who traveled to Asia to investigate the working conditions in the garment factories were published. Other themes that also appeared in the media content during this time were reports published by NGOs, accidents and protests in factories, and also child labor further down the supply chain, i.e. in the cotton production and before the raw materials reach the factories. Other more positive and neutral topics are also brought up, such as reports on improvements that H&M has made regarding garment factory working conditions, where H&M’s view on the topic is declared.

In the fall of 2012, the second peak in media attention occurred, with 23 newspaper articles published from the beginning of September until the end of December. Once again, a TV broadcast plays an important role in the media reporting on the topic. This time the TV4’s Kalla Fakta decides to follow up on the TV documentary from 1997, scrutinizing once again the working conditions in H&M’s supply chain factories. This time they visited Cambodia, as Cambodia was, at least in 2012, was the country with the lowest wages in the
garment factories. Unlike 1997, the issue of child labor is no longer topical in the reporting, and discussions center instead around the difference between minimum wages and living wages for adult labor in Cambodia.

During the later years of this media study, the negative angle towards H&M on the topic of working conditions in garment factories is less dominant in the media. Instead, after the second peak of negative attention in 2012, the media story of working conditions in garment factories has evolved towards a discussion in which H&M is portrayed as a responsible actor. In other words, the media reports undergo a slight shift, from focusing on H&M’s irresponsibility regarding garment factory working conditions towards more mixed reporting, focusing also on the initiatives taken to improve H&M responsibilities with respect to the topic. However, with a general decrease in media reports on the topic in 2016 and 2017, the negative angle did continue to prevail and articles were still being published in the two last years covered in this study.

In the media reporting in print news media from 1995 until 2017, where the topic of working conditions in garment factories was in focus, H&M is portrayed as irresponsible in 79 out of 189 articles, which constitutes 42 percent. In 34 percent, i.e. 64 of 189, of the articles, the angle towards H&M is neutral. Included here are also articles that illustrate balance in cases where both irresponsibility, commonly framed by journalists and activists or other critical sources, and responsibility, commonly represented by the view of H&M, are part of the article. Another type of articles, are those that do not take a stance on H&M’s irresponsibility or responsibility, but have some other angle in focus. This yields 46 (of the 189) articles that have a positive angle towards H&M’s responsibility regarding the working conditions in the garment factories, i.e. 24 percent.

The graph below illustrates how the framing of H&M as irresponsible or responsible when it comes to working conditions in garment factories has changed in the news media over the years of the study, from 1995 to 2017. Articles with a neutral or balanced framing have also been separated.
4.1.3 Three perspectives

As will be further elaborated later in chapter, the findings from the study about H&M take three different views on the media story. Briefly, the first is that of the published media text, which includes both written articles and moving images on TV, i.e. the media perspective. Here, investigative TV broadcasts, in particular TV documentaries, and TV4’s investigative show Kalla Fakta, as well as newspapers, are important in telling the story. For the story about H&M, all of the newspapers studied (i.e. Aftonbladet, DI, DN, Expressen, and SvD) have reported on the topic over the years and the evening newspapers, Aftonbladet and Expressen, in particular are significant in the sense that they have produced several more extensive reports on the topic on several occasions. The results from the analysis of the media stories are presented in section 4.2.

The second perspective is that of the journalists and the sources behind the media reporting. Here, the TV producers have played a significant role as storytellers as have a number of evening newspaper journalists whose work has involved a particular responsibility for reporting on business issues. The first TV documentary on the topic, from 1997, was *Latest fashion - at what price?*, and thus the TV producer behind the documentary had an important function as one of the first storytellers in the Swedish media that participated in setting
the agenda for the form and content of future reports on the topic. Several journalists have since travelled to the garment factories to investigate the working conditions; their view of the story will also be explored further below, in section 4.3.

Most journalistic media do not have the resources to conduct their own investigations into complex issues, which makes reports from various NGOs an important part of the research that journalists do. One such source of information are the various NGOs that have played an important role in keeping the irresponsibility narrative on the media agenda over the years. One of these is the consumer movement in Sweden, which has had an impact in the form of the NGO Fair Trade Center (FTC), formed in 1996 (and re-named Fair Action in 2015) as “a non-profit organization that puts pressure on companies to improve working conditions and pay living wages”. The FTC organization took inspiration from the international Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), initiating a Swedish version of the CCC called Rena Kläder in 1997, which had a particular focus on the garment industry.

FTC/Fair Action is also one of the organizations behind Swedwatch, a non-profit research organization founded in 2003, that “investigate the extent to which companies, investors and authorities are taking responsibility for human rights and the environment.” Thus, as both of these organizations scrutinize H&M, they provide information for the journalistic stories on the topic of working conditions in garment factories. In later years, the union organization IndustryALL, represented in Sweden by IF Metall, has also been an important NGO in relation to H&M’s responsibilities for working conditions in garment factories. Thus, in the second perspective, the experience of NGOs that participate in the media stories about H&M and the working conditions in garment factories is examined.

The third perspective is that of H&M, and is discussed in more detail in section 4.4. As the media story has been going on since the middle of the 1990s, many employees from the early years are no longer connected to the organization. Consequently, the focus of the role of H&M starts, firstly, with the initial media events of the 1990s and the perspective of former H&M employees. Some who represented this perspective in the study were already previous employees of H&M at the time when they participated in the TV documentary Latest fashion - at what price?, in 1997. Secondly, the focus of the discussion moves to H&M’s approaches towards the media concerning topics related to working

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34 [https://fairaction.se/](https://fairaction.se/) (2020-04-11)
35 The Rena Kläder network was a collaboration between labor unions, NGOs and youth organizations, and was active from 1997 to 2014.
4.2 Stories in the media

This section focuses on events in the media story of H&M and its responsibility for working conditions in garment factories in chronological order. The longitudinal media story is divided into four sub-sections starting with the first revelations of child labor and poor working conditions in H&M’s supply chain that were broadcast and published from 1995 until 1998. This period includes the first TV documentary from 1997, which represents the largest media event for H&M on the topic and can thus be seen as the strongpoint of the upcoming media attention. At this point in time globalization was the main topic on the social agenda and, in this early media attention, H&M is held accountable for contributing to global inequalities by outsourcing the production of garments from the consumer market in Sweden, as well as other countries in the Global North, to low-cost production countries in the Global South.

In the second sub-section of the media story, from 1999 to 2011, a middle period without any larger peak in media attention, similar stories are repeated. In 2012, however, media attention rises considerably, to almost the same level as in 1997-1998 when several parallel media stories focus on the topic, and thus the new peak of media attention in 2012 constitutes its own (the third) sub-section. The fourth and last sub-section, the final years of the study, from 2013 to 2017, is characterized by mixed reporting that includes both positive reports of corporate responsibility as well as reports of irresponsibility. These time periods and some of the larger events of the media story are outlined in Figure 3 (below).
4.2.1 First revelations: 1995-1998

This story began in September 1995\(^{37}\) when the newspaper Expressen ran a two-day series of four articles about textile workers in the garment factories in China. The reporters from Expressen had at that time travelled to Miyun outside Beijing to visit the homes of factory workers that produce garments for H&M. In one of the articles, the manager of the factory is quoted as saying: “H&M does not care what’s happening here. All that matters to them are price and quality” (Expressen, 1995-09-09a). The article also mentions that Associate Professor Per Ronnås\(^{38}\) had conducted a study on the topic around the same time, the conclusion of which was that “foreign companies have one moral standard at home and another in China.” The reporter does, however, note that, although it is crowded, the factory is still relatively clean and fresh (ibid.).

On this first day of this coverage Stefan Persson, the CEO of H&M at that time, was also interviewed in another article published in the same newspaper. In this article, Persson explains his perspective, which was that “the situation of the Chinese workers will only get worse if Western companies do not invest in the country” (Expressen, 1995-09-10b). Persson also adds that H&M “has

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\(^{37}\) It was only possible to search the digital Mediearkivet database from 1995 so it is possible that some news articles on the topic may have been published before that. This is unlikely, however, as interviewees involved during the initial time period were unable to recall any substantial reports from earlier.

\(^{38}\) Ronnås’ field of research and university affiliation are not mentioned in the news article.
so many factories in Asia that it is impossible for us to answer for everyone. But, in general, our demands are very high” (ibid.).

Two days after this initial news article was published, the story continues with an unsigned editorial, i.e. an opinion piece written by the newspaper’s editorial board, also published in Expressen. In the editorial, the earlier reports are given a context with the headline “Boycott bites”. Its writer argues that consumers should wield their power and “demand to know the conditions of the workers that make our clothes” (Expressen, 1995-09-12a), and closes off with the rhetorical: “Who wants a shirt made by a locked-up, worn-out, and underpaid girl?” (ibid.).

The same day, a follow-up article about the situation in Miyun is also published (Expressen, 1995-09-12b). The argument is this article is that H&M is not the only retailer that produces clothes in China. The CEOs of three other Swedish companies – Kapp-Ahl, Åhléns, and Lindex – are therefore also questioned about the working conditions in their supply chain factories. Using similar arguments as previously provided by CEO Persson of H&M, then-CEO Tommy Nilsson of Kapp-Ahl claims that one can never have full control, but that Kapp-Ahl has a clear policy against child labor. All of the CEOs cited in the article provide a similar response (ibid.).

Following a two-year lull in the story, the topic is brought up in the media again in May 1997 when the consumer organization Fair Trade Center (FTC) publishes a report. In this report, FTC argues that the garments sold by H&M, Kapp-Ahl and Lindex were produced by “slave workers” in Bangladesh (Expressen, 1997-05-15). The FTC organization does not call for boycott, as suggested in the previous editorial on the topic, as that would likely lead to a worse situation, with unemployed textile workers. However, Kristina Areskog Bjurling from FTC does want the retailers to take a greater responsibility, noting that: “One problem is that the retailers are pressing the prices” (ibid.).

Additionally, the report also mentions an activist from a syndicalist union organization who claims that, when he visited Bangladesh, he encountered a 13-year-old working in a factory. In the same article, a union activist and refugee from Bangladesh also argues that the Swedish retailers should put pressure on their suppliers. Jörgen Andersson, purchasing manager at H&M, replies that H&M trusts the supplier company in Bangladesh as they have worked together for a long time. He also argues that H&M conducts weekly audits, but that it would nevertheless take a closer look at the remarks in the NGO report (ibid.).

The consumer movement was not the only one scrutinizing H&M. Journalistic interest in the topic grew at the same time and resulted in the largest peak of media content, in this study, at the end of 1997 through to the beginning of
1998. The peak starts in connection with H&M’s 50th anniversary celebration in 1997 when public TV broadcaster SVT airs a one-hour documentary about the, at that time, fast-growing Swedish retailer. The TV documentary, called *Latest fashion - at what price?*, was broadcast on December 29, 1997, on channel 2, as the second episode in a two-program series called *Two World Companies*[^39]. The first episode of the series had been broadcast the week before and contained a similar investigation about another well-known Swedish corporation, IKEA.

The story of the *Latest fashion - at what price?* documentary revolved around one garment; a children’s sweater bought in an H&M store in Geneva. The sweater is then followed along the supply chain to the factory where it was produced in the Philippines. The producer of the documentary thus travels to the countries in H&M’s supply chain in order to scrutinize garment production, using this sweater as an example. The first stop along this journey is Hong Kong, which was also H&M’s first stop in Asia in the 1970s because, according to the voice of the reporter in the documentary, at that time in Hong Kong, “a low-cost market that changed the foundations of the Swedish textile industry was waiting.” She continues, noting that “today [1997], however, it is too expensive to produce in Hong Kong so all garment production has moved to China” (*Latest fashion – at what price?, SVT2, 1997-12-29*). Hong Kong is instead now used as a shipping port for garments produced elsewhere.

The TV documentary consequently moves on to China, the reporters have to travel undercover, as garment buyers, in order to get permission to visit the factories. Images from the garment production as well as the living conditions of the textile workers in one factory that produces jeans for H&M, and some other Swedish brands, are shown. The owner of the factory insists that China is the best country to produce in due to the lack of union organizing. The textile workers also tell their stories about how they moved from rural areas of China to the factory a few years ago to work and send money home to their families, some having left their children with their parents to come to work there. The documentary’s images then cut directly from the reporting on textile workers in China to an interview with one of H&M’s production managers who says:

> I think we have an extremely professional purchasing team. We all live with the philosophy, whether you’re a buyer, work in a store or anywhere, we care about the costs. We know that even though there’s an increase of 5 cents, or 10 öre in Sweden, so in the end, with surcharges and everything, it’s the consumer who has to pay. The biggest cost of the product is after all the purchases, so it’s

[^39]: In Swedish: Två världsföretag

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natural that it’s in our blood to press the prices as much as possible. I would like to think that we’re good at what we’re doing. (Latest fashion – at what price?, SVT2, 1997-12-29)

Thus, the storytelling of the TV documentary builds on showing contrast and exposing the hypocrisy of H&M, which does not live up what it was saying. This is especially illustrated in the fast cuts between the catwalk at H&M’s 50th anniversary party and the textile workers in the garment factories, where the difference between what H&M represents in Europe in contrast to in the Philippines was the focus. Also, by discussing H&M as one of the key buyers in the region, shown as particularly tough in negotiations, the particular responsibility of H&M is emphasized. This is furthermore connected to the low prices that H&M is famous for. The employees of H&M, who are proud of their efficiency as garment buyers, are consequently portrayed as the counterpart to the textile workers struggling to survive on low wages and in poor working (and living) conditions.

9-year-old Jo-Ann who turned sweaters produced for H&M in a small village in the Philippines then became the center of the news media attention that followed in the days after the TV documentary aired. She was shown only briefly in the documentary, but had a leading role in the images in the print news media that followed. A headline of an article in Aftonbladet (1997-12-29b), for example, read: “JoAnn, 9, sews for H&M.” The TV documentary producer Cecilia Zadig is also interviewed in the article, commenting that: “It is cruel to see the little children who already have lost their playfulness. Their faces were so serious” (ibid.). In a complementary article the same day, Zadig also makes the claim that the CEO of H&M, Stefan Persson, tried to prevent the TV team from making the documentary (Aftonbladet, 1997-12-29a). The day after, CEO Persson responds, denying that he purposely avoided the media, adding that he, in line with everyone else, thinks that child labor is repulsive and not allowed in H&M’s supply factories (Aftonbladet, 1997-12-30a).

In the aftermath of the TV broadcast, various other opinions of various societal actors are also expressed in newspapers, for months. For example, the Swedish Minister of Labor at the time, Margareta Winberg, reacts emotionally to the 1997 TV documentary and calls for a boycott of H&M. Winberg states that she is shocked by the revelations of child labor and will no longer buy clothes at H&M. She is also convinced that other consumers will follow suit (Aftonbladet, 1997-12-30b). Several other voices in the media also criticize H&M during this media event. A representative from the NGO Save the Children remarks that she places higher expectations on Swedish corporations than foreign corporations since the Swedish tradition is to handle things better (ibid.). Another critical voice heard is that of Sweden’s confederation of trade
Although the main focus in this first phase of revelations of poor working conditions in garment factories portrays H&M as irresponsible, there are also media items published in defense of H&M during this time. In this early period, the framing of H&M as responsible rather than irresponsible tended to appear in debate articles, columns and other types of opinion pieces. For example, a debate article co-authored by then-CEO Stefan Persson and then-Board Chair Sten Wikander was published in DN, arguing that the TV documentary was not representative of H&M’s suppliers and that child labor is a complex issue that H&M does everything it can to combat (DN, 1998-01-23). Also, then-Labor Minister Margareta Winberg, who initially called for a boycott, changes her mind a few days later, after meeting with H&M’s CEO, and is not as critical anymore (Aftonbladet, 1998-01-01).

After the initial, revealing reports of H&M’s irresponsibility relating to the working condition in garment factories and the use of child labor in the supply chain faded, the topic of child labor in a more general sense remained on the agenda a little longer. The debate then takes a different tone when letters to the editor, from both the general public and well-known debaters, take a less critical standpoint towards the use of child labor. In early 1998, for example, widely known social debater and future politician Marit Paulsen argues that child labor is not that bad and that she herself also started working when she was nine years old (Aftonbladet, 1998-01-10).

4.2.2 Repetition: 1999-2011

After the revealing reports of child labor at the end of the 1990s, similar stories of journalists scrutinizing the working conditions onsite in the garment factories are recurring. For example, an April 2001 headline, “They work like slaves for H&M” (Aftonbladet, 2001-04-08), introduces an article written by a freelance journalist who traveled to Cambodia to visit factories that produce garments for Swedish retailers. The working conditions in these garment factories were described here as degrading and very poor as the workers were not allowed to wear shoes or take toilet breaks. The article states that, according to the workers interviewed, any factory workers who strived for improvements got fired (ibid.). That same spring, H&M and competitor Lindex were also scrutinized by ethical fund managers Banco Fonder and Etix Fondförvaltning, who were considering removing H&M from their investments (SvD, 2001-04-10).
The issue of child labor, which was brought up extensively around the first revelations in the late 1990s, is a topic that H&M has been particularly linked to throughout the time period of the media study. During this middle period, 1999-2011, it is almost taken for granted that H&M uses child labor, without providing a basis for the claim, particularly in opinion pieces. This is apparent, for example, in the headline of a column, where well-known commentator Linda Skugge asks newly appointed H&M board member Lottie Knutson: “Do you support child labor, Lottie?” (Expressen, 2006-03-04). A few months later, columnist Jennie Dielemans asks, in a similar manner, “Are you also affected by the smell of farts?” (Aftonbladet, 2006-06-29), and makes the connection “H&M = cheap clothes = child labor = not a funny story” (ibid.).

During these years, there are also examples where the switch between H&M as irresponsible and H&M as responsible can be quick in the media reports. In other words, H&M is sometimes seen as both a good and a bad example around the same time. One example is the discussion of this matter in an article in the media magazine Resumé in 2006. This article draws attention to the fact that SvD was named H&M ‘Improver of the Year’ for its social and environmental actions on the same day as another newspaper, Expressen, revealed that 14-year-olds in Cambodia work under slave-like conditions and earn 0.14 SEK per t-shirt produced (Resumé, 2006-06-07). When asked by Resumé why H&M received the award, Björn Hygstedt, information manager at SvD and in charge of the award, responds that:

With the award we want to show good examples of companies that are positive role models in this area. H&M has been a pioneer in this field and makes large-scale investments in work environment issues, which sends positive signals to the entire industry. (Ibid.)

In 2007, SVT’s investigative TV show Agenda reported about child labor in the cotton production in Uzbekistan further down the line in the garment factories in H&M’s supply chain. A press contact from H&M states that this is unacceptable but also argues that it is not H&M’s supplier that uses the child labor (SvD, 2007-11-26). The newspaper article quotes the press contact as saying:

We are at the end of a long and complex processing chain. We do not accept child labor at our suppliers and we, of course, do not want to have it in any other part of the supply chain either. But it’s hard to put pressure on someone you do not have a relation with. When our suppliers buy the fabric it often contains cotton from all over the world. (Ibid.)

From 2010 to 2012, the media reports involve a mixture of violent protests among factory workers, accidents, and reports on how H&M takes corporate social responsibility seriously and contributes to better working conditions in
factories. In March 2010, for example, 21 people died in a fire in a factory that produce garments for H&M in Gazipur, Bangladesh, and it is suggested that the exits may have been locked (DN, 2010-03-11). In 2011, the media reports that 300 factory workers lost consciousness in a Cambodian factory that produces garments for H&M (Expressen, 2011-08-27). There are also violent protests in garment factories in Bangladesh in both 2010 and 2012 (SvD, 2010-07-31; DI, 2012-06-18).

Thus, during this middle period of the media analysis there was a mixture of reports published supplier focused primarily on telling stories centered on irresponsibility. Starting around 2011, however, the view of H&M as a responsible actor, i.e. as a corporation with a great interest in sustainability issues, was growing. For example, H&M’s sustainability manager, Helena Helmersson was interviewed in SvD (2011-03-20), where she says that corporate social responsibility permeates the entire H&M corporation and that H&M has decided to be a forerunner in this area. Also, in 2012, a report from Swedwatch concerning the working conditions in Bangladesh is discussed in a DN editorial. The newspaper’s editorial board argues that while corporate social responsibility is important, it also has limitations, empathizing that it is good that multinational corporations contribute to the economic development of Bangladesh by placing orders in the country (DN, 2012-06-24).

4.2.3 A new peak: 2012

In the fall of 2012, a new peak in the media attention can be noted. One event in particular that added to this increased interest in the topic was an episode of Kalla Fakta that aired on October 24, 2012. In this episode, called The dream of living wages, the TV show’s investigative reporters visit the garment factories in Cambodia. The aim of the episode was to investigate what had happened there since the broadcast of the TV documentary Latest fashion – at what price? in 1997. Thus, the expressed purpose of the show is to reinvestigate the same story to see if there has been any change to working conditions in the garment factories.

In the broadcast, the NGO Fair Trade Center plays an important role by framing the topic towards the concept of a ‘living wage’, rather than minimum wages, for the textile workers in the garment factories. In the program, H&M’s then-sustainability manager Helena Helmersson remarks:

We can’t follow up on any living wage where there is no industry standard on what a living wage is. (Kalla Fakta, 2012-10-24)

40 See Graph 1 on page 45.
When the reporter suggests that H&M could use the calculations made by Fair Trade Center, she responds:

After all, we have to work on the basis of an industry standard so that it will benefit all workers. (Ibid.)

Thus, H&M suggests that the issue of living wages is more complicated than what the reporters, as well the NGO representatives, state in the same episode. The journalists behind Kalla Fakta also struggle to get answers from H&M’s CEO, Karl-Johan Persson. From the stage at a press conference, Persson gives his reason for why H&M does not want to participate in Kalla Fakta, where he is reported having said:

From experience, I know that it is not a nuanced program. It is very biased, and I think it can be presupposed this time as well, says Persson. (Expressen, 2012-09-28)

In news media reports that appeared in Aftonbladet in connection with the TV show, the wages in H&M’s supplier factories are also defined as “slave wages” (Aftonbladet, 2012-10-24). The same article also compares the salary of H&M’s CEO to the wages of factory workers in manufacturing countries in order to illustrate the imbalance. H&M responds to the accusations of not paying the factory workers enough by emphasizing that it does take these issues seriously and it does want the wages to increase. It also emphasizes that H&M is an industry leader when it comes to sustainability, and the conditions would have been worse if H&M had not bought its garments from these countries at all (ibid.).

Parallel to the investigation conducted by Kalla Fakta, a reporter from Expressen, Fredrik Sjöshult, also traveled to the garment factories in H&M’s supply chain and publishes his experiences from his trip in the fall of 2012. Sjöshult’s destination was Bangladesh and he wrote a series of reports in the newspaper about his experience from his visits to the factories. H&M CEO Karl-Johan Persson is interviewed in two of the articles in the series as he also participated in the journey. This can be considered a rare occasion since he does not generally talk to the media much or comment in the media on the topic in focus in this study.

In the first article, CEO Persson states that “the minimum wages are too low,” but goes on to explain that it is not possible for a single buyer to raise the wages of some workers in the factories so that they make much more than others because it would lead to disorder (Expressen, 2012-09-05). He adds that “buying from low-wage countries is the best way to combat poverty but
that it must naturally be done in a responsible manner,” the final words of the article (ibid.). In another article in the same series of reports, published a few days later, Persson also talks about how H&M wants to increase its social commitment in Bangladesh, for example, by collaborating with children’s rights organization Unicef (Expressen, 2012-09-09). Thus, H&M’s view is expressed clearly in this series of reports, which is an exception compared to what is commonly reported.

Another example of a more positive angle towards H&M’s responsibility in the media reporting occurs when H&M initiates collaborations with other organizations. For example, in the fall of 2012, when H&M also was in the media limelight with an irresponsibility framing, an initiative where H&M was collaborating with a labor union in order to improve the working conditions in factories generates some media publicity focusing on responsibility. It is reported that H&M is working with a Swedish labor union to improve the working conditions in garment factories in Cambodia by increasing the workers’ ability to influence their work environment (SvD, 2012-10-23). In this SvD article, H&M’s sustainability manager, Helena Helmersson, comments:

> We have a huge responsibility to help out so that the workers have a salary they negotiated themselves and working conditions that are healthy. (Ibid.)

The main theme around this time was, however, the problem of low wages in the garment factories, and not H&M’s initiatives for taking greater social responsibility.

As shown in the introduction to Chapter 1, the revelations of Telia’s alleged corruption in Uzbekistan (see next chapter) also took place in the fall of 2012 along with the peak in attention to H&M’s responsibility concerning the low wages in garment factories. The responses of the corporate leaders of H&M and Telia to the media attention were, at the peak of attention to both stories, compared to each other in two opinion pieces (Expressen, 2012-12-12; DI, 2012-12-13). Thus, as a continuation of the media reporting, the topic of how the corporations have handled the media is also brought up. In Expressen, Fredrik Sjöshult argues that the corporate leaders, Lars Nyberg from Telia and Stefan Persson from H&M, helped both UG and Kalla Fakta to make great TV by hiding from the reporters and thus helping to “brand themselves as villains” (Expressen, 2012-12-12). In DI, Tobias Wikström furthermore argued that there was a big difference between Telia and H&M. Here the argument was that Telia deserved the crisis, and the scandal, whereas H&M was taking responsibility issues seriously and, consequently, that Kalla Fakta had no solid grounds for their claims (DI, 2012-12-13).
4.2.4 Mixed reporting: 2013-2017

In 2013, one exceptionally large event concerning the garment industry, though not H&M directly, took place when the Rana Plaza garment factory in Bangladesh collapsed on April 24. Tragically, this accident resulted in 1129 deaths and approximately 2500 people injured, and the working conditions in garment factories rose to the top of the agenda for retailers all over the world. As H&M did not purchase garments from this factory, it was not directly involved in the event and thus, this time, the media reporting did not specifically focus on H&M. However, because H&M is one of the biggest garment buyers in Bangladesh, its name did come up in many of the Swedish news articles. Also, when the editor-in-chief of Aftonbladet writes a column in which he reflects on the accident, the focus is on the responsibility of H&M (Aftonbladet, 2013-05-19).

In the fall of 2013, several newspapers continued to provide positive reports on H&M and how it takes responsibility for working conditions in the garment factories in its supply chains. For example, H&M is brought up as a leading organization when it comes to improving safety after the Rana Plaza accident in a debate article by two leaders of trade unions (Aftonbladet, 2013-10-07). H&M also launches a new program for fair living wages, which receives some media attention (DI, 2013-11-27; DN, 2013-12-10), and H&M is furthermore seen as a driving force in increasing minimum wage levels in Bangladesh (DI, 2013-10-30). Another positive event for H&M occurs on March 6, 2014, when the business paper Veckans Affärer names its choice for the most powerful woman in the Swedish business world. The 2014 recipient of this honorary award was H&M’s sustainability manager at that time, Helena Helmersson (DN, 2014-03-06). This event can thus be seen as a recognition of H&M’s sustainability work.

Focusing on H&M’s irresponsibility, again in a TV broadcast, on November 11, 2014, TV4 airs a Kalla Fakta episode concerning the production of cotton in Ethiopia. This TV episode does not generate any follow-up stories in the news media, however, making it less significant to the overall media story compared to other TV shows, such as the ones broadcast in 1997 and 2012 already mentioned. H&M’s response to the Kalla Fakta TV show broadcast was the following:

We have answered all questions from TV4 in writing and we have ongoing contact with the editorial board, but we have declined to participate in a filmed interview. This is because we previously had bad experiences of how Kalla
Fakta cut their interviews and how they chose not to report on essential information, which makes it an inaccurate reflection of our work.⁴¹

That is, H&M relates this media story to how it experienced the previous Kalla Fakta episodes broadcast in 2012.

An event that generated a bit more media attention was the global framework agreement that H&M signed with IndustriALL in November 2015 in order to improve the working conditions in garment factories by ensuring the right of textile workers to organize in unions (SvD, 2015-11-04; DI, 2015-11-04; DN 2015-11-04). The topic of working conditions in the fashion industry is at this time also raised by two critical books written by journalists and published the following year, in 2016, entitled: *Fashion Slaves: The global hunt for cheaper clothes*,⁴² by Moa Kärnstrand and Tobias Andersson Åkerblom; and The little black one: *The dark side of the fashion industry*,⁴³ by Gunilla Ander. Both books discuss H&M as one example of a Swedish retailer, but do not focus exclusively on H&M.

In the spring of 2016, Aftonbladet broadcast a web series called *Sweatshop*,⁴⁴ a Swedish version of a Norwegian web series released around the same time. The Sweatshop series can be described as a hybrid between social media and traditional media as it was developed by the Aftonbladet newspaper, but only broadcast on the web. In the series, fashion bloggers Anniken Englund Jørgensen and Frida Ottesen from Norway, and Sarah Tjulander and Lisa Tellbe from Sweden, travel to Cambodia to experience the working conditions in the garment industry onsite. The bloggers visit H&M’s supplier factories, and Aftonbladet describes the series as, for the bloggers, an emotional meeting with the low-paid world.⁴⁵

Another social media event on the topic of H&M as irresponsible, which also reached the websites of traditional media, took place in February 2017 when the Swedish singer and songwriter Zara Larsson announces her fashion collaboration with H&M on the social media platform Instagram. Many of Larson’s followers comment on the post, offering positive feedback related to the clothes, but criticism of the collaboration is also noticeable. Several follower comments suggest that H&M is an unethical company and that, by supporting

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⁴² In Swedish: Modeslavar: den globala jakten på billigare kläder
⁴³ In Swedish: Den lilla svarta: modeindustrins mörka baksida
⁴⁴ http://sweatshop.aftonbladet.se/ (2020-04-11)
⁴⁵ Ibid.
H&M, Larsson herself is supporting child labor.\textsuperscript{46} These social media comments also lead to some news media attention to the topic, and it is reported that a crisis meeting between the singer and H&M took place (Expressen, 2017-03-01). A press contact person at H&M is also forced explain to the newspaper, Expressen, that it is actually very important for H&M to have good working conditions in its supply chain and that H&M does not support child labor (ibid.).

In early 2017, the media also reports that several textile workers were fired after wild strikes in Bangladesh. As a result, H&M and several other large retailers decide not to participate in a meeting in March as a protest against factory owners that had fired union active workers (DN, 2017-02-24). Shortly thereafter, in April 2017, H&M was given an award that focused on the social responsibility of its owner, Stefan Persson. Person received the award for “improving the working conditions, ensuring respect for human rights, and reducing the negative environmental impact,” from Freedom House, U.S.-based human rights organization (DI, 2017-04-18).

In the summer of 2017, the head of sustainable finance at the Swedish bank and investment management firm Nordea, Sasja Beslik,\textsuperscript{47} initiated a social media event about H&M by, among other things, tweeting that if customers paid only 5 SEK more for a shirt, the textile workers could make a living wage. This is reported in the newspaper Expressen, which quotes a press contact at H&M who states:

\begin{quote}
It’s not true that increased prices in stores lead to increased salaries at suppliers. The textile worker gets exactly the same salary regardless of whether he or she works for a brand that has higher or lower prices in the store and regardless of whether the shirt costs 199 SEK or 1999 SEK. (Expressen, 2017-06-05)
\end{quote}

Thus, the last few years of the media analysis are characterized by a shift away from investigations conducted by reporters in news media and investigative TV shows towards opinions expressed by celebrities and other well-known persons, and their followers, on social media. The larger investigations of the garment industry are instead published in journalistic books. Also, H&M is used as both a positive or negative example in discussions about how corporations handle issues related to social responsibility and sustainability. Thus, the reporting on responsibility, rather than irresponsibility, increased, which contributed to a more nuanced image of H&M in the media.

\textsuperscript{46} https://www.instagram.com/zaralarsson/?hl=sv (2017-03-02)

\textsuperscript{47} Beslik is also a key person in the media story about Telia, which is explored in Chapter 5.
4.3 Stories of journalists and sources

In this section, the voices of the journalists, as well as NGO representatives, behind the stories are heard. Thus, the purpose here is to go behind the media reports in order to explain how the topic entered the media agenda, and stayed for such a long time, by going behind the scenes. In this section, three notable examples from the studied 23-year period of media stories about H&M and its responsibilities for working conditions in garment factories are presented, of the perspective of journalists and NGOs.

Starting from the beginning, the first sub-section is called ‘building the story’ and addresses the first large media event on the topic, i.e. the TV documentary *Latest fashion - at what price?*, which also was touched upon several times in the previous section. This section builds mainly on the interview with the producer behind the TV documentary, complemented with some aspects from interviews with the sources that participated in the documentary. The focus here is on how the topic of H&M and its responsibility for working conditions in its supply chain ended up in the media limelight to start with.

The second sub-section focuses on ‘repeating the story’, i.e. other ways in which the media has continued the reporting on the topic over the years. For example, travelling to visit the factories has been a common and recurring way for journalists to tell their story about the topic throughout the time period, 1995-2017. Journalists, both those invited by H&M as well as those who travelled to the factories on their own without permission, have been interviewed, and their interest in the topic, and particularly in H&M as the example, are discussed here.

Lastly, the third sub-section discusses the role of the consumer movement, in particular the NGO Fair Action, and its role in the media publicity. Thus, ‘the role of NGOs’ is discussed here, where activists at times participate with the journalists in constructing the stories and at other times struggle to have their voices heard in the media. As journalistic media can be important for NGOs to get their opinions out to the public, the stories about H&M can be vital for raising support, though it can also be problematic that certain stories have news value when others do not, which is discussed further in the last section.
4.3.1 Building the first story

The producer of the *Latest fashion - at what price?* documentary of 1997 described in the previous section, which focuses on media stories about globalization, explains that it was the topic of the global economy and what she, in the interview, calls “outsourcing without responsibility” (2016-12-12) that triggered the attention to the topic of H&M and its responsibility for garment factories in the supply chain. As there was already an ongoing global debate concerning production in multinational corporation Nike’s supply chain, this opened the eyes of the Swedish journalists as well, explains the producer. The business model of buying in one part of the world and selling in a different market was something that Nike and H&M had in common. The producer explains:

One could say that the focus on H&M was because they represented and implemented what we could call the ‘global economy’. That was the economic expression in the 1990s, to outsource and to manufacture elsewhere, in a market where it was cheaper to produce, and to sell it in another market. Produce here and sell there. Outsourcing without responsibility, you don’t own your suppliers and that’s the point, the mobility. Being able to place the orders in several places and have these poor companies in the poor countries compete, make them drop down in price to meet the target price [...] So that’s why H&M ended up in focus. They represented this so well and illustrated the global economy. The global company one could say. That’s why we ended up on them. And then it turned out they were going to celebrate 50 years and it was very appropriate, sometimes you’re lucky. So, we managed to attend their 50th anniversary and then we did the whole trip. (Cecilia Zadig, previous journalist at SVT, 2016-12-12)

By ‘the whole trip’, Zadig means that she and the TV team made several trips to Asia, including Hong Kong, China, and the Philippines, in order to explore the supply chain and visit the factories that supply garments to H&M, and their subcontractors. In line with the procedures of journalistic work, she initially contacted H&M to get access to the organization but get no reply from H&M’s top leaders, Erling and Stefan Persson. This surprised her, as her experience was that people generally participated when the request came from SVT, Swedish public service TV network. “It’s when you don’t get any answer, and no invitation to visit a factory that they select themselves, that’s when the job starts for a journalist. Because then you simply have to get the information from other sources,” explained Zadig (ibid.).

After a lot of work, the producer found what she had heard about in her research. In a small village in rural Philippines, Zadig finds what she calls “sub-sub-sub-sub-contractors” using children for various tasks in the production of garments for H&M. The goal of the documentary was to portray the corpo-
ration from top to bottom, which she thinks that she was able to illustrate successfully in the documentary. By portraying the corporation from top to bottom, she means:

It is from these little ones that sit and embroider on their sweaters for the factory, where they work at night for very little income, to Stefan Persson at the top. It’s a portrait from the top down, at all different levels of the corporation. That was the point. And that’s probably what I was most pleased with, that we were able to show it all the way. (Cecilia Zadig, previous journalist at SVT, 2016-12-12)

This was in line with the ongoing societal debate about the global economy, and it was obvious that it was considered an interesting and newsworthy topic to make a documentary about. She continues:

The reason the global economy ended up in focus is because it was the latest in market economy so to speak. That was what we had as assignment to illustrate. As the dominating editorial office, we had to have focus on current societal issues and how to illustrate them so that it becomes visibly illustrated, tangible, and cannot be disproved. Thus, it must be true and relevant, all of these things (Cecilia Zadig, previous journalist at SVT, 2016-12-12).

This relates to the timing of the TV documentary about H&M that gained a lot of attention at the time it was broadcast and received a prestigious award for investigative journalism. The producer also had many opportunities to revisit the events of 1997 several times during the year, when she was contacted by various people to discuss the impact that her documentary had. She compares the timing of the documentary with other investigations she had done, when she was sometimes too early and the public lacked a perception of the topic, noting that this time the timing was perfect. As she describes it:

It has to be timing. You know, when it just fits right into a framing of an issue that already exists. That’s when you get the impact, otherwise you don’t get it. It can be really good, but if it’s not already known in some way, when you read it or see it you feel... Yes, it has to confirm what you already have in your mind. (Cecilia Zadig, previous journalist at SVT, 2016-12-12)

As investigative journalism strives to make revelations, this documentary can be seen as successful and memorable due to its significant impact. When asked, as the producer behind the documentary, Zadig explains what she was most pleased with in the broadcast:

At the beginning of the film, their production managers say that things like child labor don’t exist and that they have good moral standards, and all that, that’s what we stand for. They say it themselves, and thus in the beginning they deny it. Then we also use an analyst, who is one of their key observers, a financial
Thus, showing the hypocrisy of H&M stating that they do not use child labor and then proving them wrong by showing children working in the supply chain was key to telling this story about corporate irresponsibility. In the documentary, various storytelling techniques are used to illustrate the difference between the top and bottom of H&M’s production that the producer emphasizes as key to her story. She says that it was easy to make the selection of what to include in the broadcast:

It goes from top to bottom, in hierarchical order. From the celebration of their 50th anniversary at the beginning, with the manager, where they’ve invited 700 journalists and showed models wearing their clothes. There, they were shown in an extravagant surrounding, looking very self-confident. And then we show how these products were manufactured, way down in another part of the world. So, it illustrates the rich world and the poor world and the dependence between them. So, we follow the hierarchy very closely, you could say. (Cecilia Zadig, previous journalist at SVT, 2016-12-12)

According to journalistic values, it is important to get comments from those who have been investigated, and accused of wrongdoing, in a media report. The producer thus offered H&M’s CEO, Stefan Persson, a 30-minute unedited interview in connection with the documentary, but he declined. “We’ve never courted anyone this intensively,” she said (ibid.). It did, however, not result in any comments from the leaders of H&M in the TV documentary.

4.3.2 A recurring story
The journalist visits to the garment factories were a significant part of the first media reports regarding the H&M story and also a common way of raising the topic on the media agenda again. Sometimes these visits were initiated by journalists, without the permission of H&M, as has been noted in other parts of the study (e.g. in TV broadcasts: Latest fashion – at what price?, SVT2, 1997-12-29; Kalla Fakta, TV4, 2012-10-24; news media reports in Expressen 2006-06-07; and in the book: Fashion Slaves, 2016). At other times, the visits to garment factories were sanctioned visits, where H&M invited journalists to see the production in the garment factories. An example of one such reporting by invitation was when H&M opened the way for a reporter from Expressen to visit garment factories in Bangladesh in the fall of 2012.
This visit by Expressen in Bangladesh occurred at a time when H&M featured frequently in the media reporting on the topic of responsibility and irresponsibility. Thus, the reporter, Fredrik Sjöshult, adds to this peak in media interest on the topic by publishing four articles about his trip to the garment factories in Bangladesh. Regarding how the idea for the trip came up, Sjöshult says:

I had written about the Persson family for many years and followed H&M in different ways. [...] Then I had a discussion with H&M over a long period concerning my wish to come down and follow the production onsite as well. [...] This was based on the reports that come every now and then about how much they make and the working conditions in the factories. My message was that if we could go down there we could show what it looks like in the factories and follow it onsite. And then this trip came up as an alternative, where H&M invited journalists from different parts of the world to show them what it looks like in Bangladesh. In addition, that Karl-Johan Persson would accompany us on the trip and talk to journalists as a part of his job. That was the origin of the trip. The message to the company was that instead of just being attacked and having other people talk about what they do, it might be better for them to communicate themselves about what it looks like onsite and what they do there. It was the nagging that gave results in the end, that allowed us to come along. (Fredrik Sjöshult, journalist at Expressen, 2016-11-30)

This Expressen reporter, who commonly reports on topics of corporate responsibility, also says that he thinks H&M should be better at communicating the positive things that they do:

They are still surprisingly bad at telling us about the things that they do well; I think companies are bad at that in general. They are very frightened; you have to say. There will be more and more reporting on these topics, I think, because there are interesting issues and the large companies have to get used to being top of mind. (Fredrik Sjöshult, journalist at Expressen, 2016-11-30)

In a different way, freelance journalists Moa Kärnstrand and Tobias Andersson Åkerblom also investigate the garment factories, both in the H&M supply chain and in the factories of other Swedish retailers, in their book _Fashion Slaves_ (2016). In contrast to the journalist from Expressen, these two freelancers were not invited by H&M to visit the garment factories and went to scrutinize the garment production on their own. During the writing of the book, the journalists experienced difficulties communicating with H&M, and although some members of the H&M organization participated in interviews at the beginning of the project, H&M later turned down all of their requests. Despite these difficulties, their scrutiny of H&M was an obvious choice for the journalists. As one of them put it:
Moa Kärnstrand: H&M is a given, because it’s one of the world’s largest retailers. I think they are the sixth largest retailer in the world now, previously even bigger compared to their competitors. It was consequently a natural choice of a Swedish company that is also fairly self-confident on these issues. Then it naturally becomes extra interesting. (Interview with independent journalists, 2017-03-11)

Thus, there is a great deal of difference between the views of the journalist at Expressen who argues that H&M does not communicate enough about the responsible things that it does and the independent, freelance journalists who argue that H&M is ostentatious. One of the independent journalists interviewed adds, however, that the view of H&M is paradoxical because the issues of responsibility relate to the business model rather than minor improvements:

Tobias Andersson Åkerblom: Like, for example, H&M do very good things, but the problem is not the individual efforts that they make. Many of the problems are the result of their business model rather than anything else. Thus, they have a situation where they are trying to patch a big wound. They do things to improve, but the way they run their business means they do like they did in Myanmar. They’ve been working for 20 years in China to improve responsibility with respect to their factories, but now when it’s getting too expensive to manufacture there, production moves from China to, for example, Myanmar. Then it may be the Chinese suppliers that you ask to set up factories in Myanmar too. At the same time, you’ve all of a sudden rewound the tape by 15-20 years when you encounter problems in Myanmar that used to be common in China a long time ago. Since you’re constantly driving this development forward and looking for new, cheap, manufacturing markets, it can’t be avoided, I think. Or it can be avoided, but it’s difficult. (Interview with independent journalists, 2017-03-11)

Thus, in their book *Fashion Slaves* (2016), the authors strive to get a more complete picture of the business model rather than focusing on smaller problems when it comes to responsibility and sustainability issues in garment production. Discussing the topic of production in garment factories and why they chose to write a book on this, they argue that it is a particularly interesting topic due to the emotional sense of proximity:

Moa Kärnstrand: As a journalist you talk about the principle of proximity; it does not have to be geographical proximity, it can also be emotional proximity. And clothes are something that you wear. Instead of talking about the workers in Myanmar who chop down trees and get hurt; that doesn’t affect us as much. But the ones who make the clothes you wear on your body; then it affects you. I mean, it affects you emotionally.

Tobias Andersson Åkerblom: There is also a concrete relationship of responsibility, and the big difference is, to some extent, that you are complicit in it.
Moa Kärnstrand: Exactly, by making choices one can be considered an accomplice. That’s how I think it is. (Interview with independent journalists, 2017-03-11)

In sum, the views of the journalists interviewed for this study differ a lot in their perspectives. On the one hand, the reporter from Expressen had a relationship with H&M, which resulted in an invitation to participate in an organized trip to the garment factories in Bangladesh. This journalist also has a more positive view of H&M as a responsible corporation and argues that H&M should actually communicate more about the positive initiatives that it takes. The two independent journalists, on the other hand, take a role similar to activists and struggle to get access to H&M. They argue that H&M perhaps communicates too much on the topic and should therefore be scrutinized. They single out H&M’s business model as the root of the problems and do not consider the sustainability initiatives taken by H&M as enough to solve this more complex issue.

4.3.3 The consumer movement
The consumer movement and other types of NGOs have played an important role in the media stories about H&M and the responsibility for working conditions in garment factories. The attention from the consumer movement towards H&M and the working conditions in garment factories came early. One of the initiators of the first loosely organized network of activists promoting fairer trade comments that her experience of H&M in the mid-1990s was that its attitude towards the issue changed quickly. She says:

I don’t remember what year our report came out, but everything came out the same year. I remember that I interviewed them [H&M] when we wrote the report. The first interviews went like this: “Yes, but we have no responsibility for our sub-contractors, they are other companies.” We heard that kind of thing. What would that look like? It depends a bit on who you talk to, and there were probably some people in purchasing who had a completely different view. But then things changed super-fast, that they realized it was important to deal with this issue. I think they had almost finished the code [code of conduct], even before our report came out. (Kristina Areskog Bjurling, previous NGO representative, 2017-04-06)

Various organizations have frequently participated in the media reports about the issue over the years, often in the role of experts on the topic in connection to published reports. One particularly notable example of NGO participation in the media is when Fair Action played a vital part in Kalla Fakta’s The

48 At that time called Fair Trade Center.
dream of living wages that aired on TV4 on October 24, 2012. In this Kalla Fakta episode, Fair Action questions the low wages in garment factories and demands that H&M pay a living wage. A living wage means that the factory workers in Cambodia should not only be entitled to the statutory minimum wage, but that their wages should also be sufficient for the factory workers and their family’s basic needs, which they claim is not the case for factory workers today. A discussion about what responsibility H&M has for paying living wages and what a living wage entails are in focus in the reporting.

In relation to wages, different concepts such as living wages (mentioned above), minimum wages (set according to local laws), and slave wages (used in the media) are appearing in the discussions without being properly defined. Wages is a topic that is often at the center of conflicts between the various groups of actors that participate in the media, i.e. journalists, corporate representatives and NGOs. A representative from Fair Action states that the Kalla Fakta show was important for them in establishing the concept of living wages, both when it comes to putting pressure on H&M as well as in a more general sense:

That TV episode meant an acknowledgment, both for us as an organization and, first and foremost, for the concept of living wages. [...] I think that the episode, and the attention, led to the concept of living wages becoming much more recognized. We had been trying to emphasize this issue about living wages for a while before the program was broadcast, and received lots of questions from companies asking: “What do you mean by that? What kind of concept is this? How do you measure it?” That discussion is still ongoing, but now it’s really a recognized concept. In the garment industry there are quite few companies that are now examining the need to raise the wages. The question is, rather, how it should be done and who will take responsibility? Living wages has been much more recognized as a serious concept ever since. (Fair Action representative 1, 2017-03-15)

This representative from Fair Action also says that the role of H&M as the main example when discussing the issues of working conditions in garment factories, has both advantages and disadvantages for them as an NGO:

The benefits, as we see them, are that many other companies tend to look at how H&M acts. So, if we get H&M to change their approach, or take a stand on an issue, or in some way change their attitude, many others will take inspiration from that. I think that the fact that they’re getting so much attention, both positive and negative, and that they’re so heavily scrutinized, could be a great advantage. Also, H&M is so much bigger, compared to the other Swedish fashion brands, and I think it’s also accurate that they’re under more scrutiny. The negative aspects are that there may be others, that are worse, that are overshadowed or even get a free ride at H&M’s expense. (Fair Action representative 1, 2017-03-15)
Fair Action, however, strives to maintain a nuanced opinion about the issue in relation to H&M as, compared to many others, H&M are no worse:

They trigger emotions, I believe, in everyone. We try to have a nuanced opinion about it because they’re no worse than anyone else. Rather, many of their strategies and collaborations are more far-reaching, if you compare to other big fashion companies. However, if you put it in context to how large they are, we think you should be able to demand more. (Fair Action representative 1, 2017-03-15)

Another previous representative at Fair Action also draws attention to other emotional aspects of scrutinizing H&M, as his experience of meeting employees from H&M is that they wanted to do good, but the NGO had to criticize them anyways as it was criticizing the system, not individuals. This had sometimes led to difficult situations in Fair Action’s meetings with H&M. The experience of putting H&M a bit one-sidedly in the center of attention was even more noticeable in relation to the journalistic media. For an NGO striving to draw attention to the particular issues of the NGO, the media can be important as a way of reaching out, though the media reporting also presents challenges:

As an NGO, one is merely grateful that one’s topic is noticed because without the media the message can’t reach out. So, it’s more a channel and then you hope that consumers will visit the website and read more and gain a more nuanced picture, of course. However, it can easily happen in the media, or with the help of the media, that everything is generally portrayed as being very black or white – this is a bad company, this is a good company – and it’s actually so much more complex. So, I think that’s difficult when it comes to the media. (Fair Action representative 2, 2017-05-04)

Thus, from the view of an NGO, the relationship between NGOs and the media can be complex and media publicity can have both advantages and disadvantages. When it comes to the media’s focus on H&M, rather than on other retailers, the representatives from Fair Action argue that, due to its size, H&M deserves to be scrutinized more than smaller competitors. At the same time, they acknowledge that H&M is an industry leader when it comes to sustainability, and their opinions of H&M are nuanced, even if they do use H&M as a frequent example in their own campaigns. H&M’s possible role as role model for the industry is also emphasized as a reason for placing H&M in the center of attention.
4.4 Stories from H&M

This section views the media story from the perspective of those at the center of the media attention, H&M. Thus, the focus is on interviews with former and present employees at H&M. Due to the limited access to H&M, as explained in Chapter 3, the interview material in this text has been complemented with press releases, communication material, responses from H&M in the media, and quotes from other interviews in order to comprehensively explore the media stories from the corporate perspective.

This section has a chronological structure, where the first part focuses on the TV documentary *Latest fashion - at what price?* from 1997. This sub-section is called ‘taken off guard’ and is, true to its title, about how H&M was taken by surprise during the initial media attention, which differed considerably from how the organization had been portrayed in the media in its early years. The focus is on the finding from an interview with a former employee at H&M who was very much involved in the events that took place surrounding the peak of attention in 1997. The perspective of one previous employee who also worked for an NGO that scrutinizes corporations regarding human right issues is included here.

The second sub-section discusses the strategy taken by H&M towards the media for many years, which can be called ‘avoiding the media’. This strategy can in part be described as a result of what H&M experienced as an unfair angle to the initial media reports in the 1990s. A present employee working with sustainability communications at H&M and a previous employee with extensive experience on issues of corporate responsibility were interviewed about their perspectives on the communication of corporate irresponsibility in the media.

Finally, the last sub-section deals with how H&M tells its own story around that time, i.e. when the interviews were conducted in 2017. Here, the focus is primarily on the interview conducted with the present H&M sustainability communication employee. The strategy of avoiding the media is at this point no longer that dominant as H&M experiences a change towards a more positive focus on their responsibility. The relationship between the media reports on corporate irresponsibility and H&M’s business model is also developed here.
4.4.1 Taken off-guard

When talking about the TV documentary *Latest fashion - at what price?* from 1997, one former H&M employee confirms that the documentary was the first event on the topic of working conditions in garment factories with real impact for H&M:

If described as a war, it was a well-planned attack. It came as a surprise when it was supposed to cover our 50th anniversary, and we were completely unprepared. (Previous employee H&M 4, 2017-05-11)

At first H&M did participate in the production of the documentary with the understanding that the story was going to focus on the 50th anniversary of the successful corporation, but decided to not comment in the final stages of production. Instead, it submitted a written statement which was shown at the end of the credits of the documentary program (*Latest fashion – at what price?, SVT2, 1997-12-29*), wherein H&M points out the following:

H&M does not consider the factories shown in the film as representative for H&M’s suppliers.

H&M does not own its own factories but requires agreements with the suppliers that no child labor may occur and that the working environment and wages must comply with the laws of the country.

H&M does not condone the child labor at Eastar Export. H&M has furthermore not entered into any agreement with Eastar but with another supplier who in turn hired Eastar. H&M’s view is that the supplier has committed a breach of contract.

H&M is now developing a so-called code of conduct that regulates the demands on manufacturers in detail. An evaluation of this will take place during 1998. If a supplier refuses to make improvements, H&M will terminate the collaboration.

Consequently, H&M argues that the images from the documentary are not representative and that it is H&M’s suppliers who are responsible for the subcontractors. In other words, H&M experienced the documentary as an inaccurate representation of its corporation. One former H&M employee says that he felt the dramatization and simplification of such a complex topic in the TV documentary was particularly unfair. He notes in particular the way the documentary was cut, that took what he said and put it in another context:

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49 Eastar Export is the company who hired the children in the village in the Philippines for smaller jobs, such as embroidering and turning sweaters produced for H&M.
We really thought that we were going to talk about H&M’s journey and then it turned out like this. I thought it was a bit unfair the way the documentary, as far as I remember, it was cut to become effective TV drama, I think. Here are the men who own H&M, and there’s a picture of Erling Persson and Stefan Persson from ‘Månadsjournalen’50. I believe it was, and then a girl starts crying and John Lennon’s Imagine starts to play. And then it cuts to me where I say, “we’re pretty good at negotiating,” and I laugh a little because it is taken completely out of context. Then you just feel, damn it, what a punch in the face that was, and so damn unfair. (Previous employee H&M 4, 2017-05-11)

At that time, the employees at H&M had very little experience of handling media contacts and this former employee says that he felt like an underdog compared to the journalists. As he put it:

You get cornered, even more today but at that time as well, you don’t have much time to clarify. In 20 seconds you’re supposed to explain something that is so complex, when you actually need an hour to sit down and talk about it. It’s not that easy to just say: “We’re going to ban child labor.” But it isn’t that simple. We agree in principle, but it has to be done the right way as a future plan, and the path there has to be from the child’s perspective, you have to think bigger by going back, and reflect on it. TV, and media in general, are so black and white; it has to have a punchline. That’s why it says on the front-page of Aftonbladet: “This is how Stefan Persson makes his billions.” That’s what drives the sales of newspapers and increases viewers. So, to answer your question, we got some media training to improve how we talk about it, or at least to reach the same level as the journalists and be able to respond to them. To not feel like an underdog. If you watch my interview on Aktuellt, you can see questions like: “Can you guarantee that this won’t happen again?” And then you have to learn to say: “We can’t make any guarantees, but we can do our best to prevent it from happening again.” (Previous employee H&M 4, 2017-05-11)

The significance that the media event in connection to Latest fashion - at what price? had for H&M is also emphasized in the book The Merchants51, written as a biography of the founder of H&M, Erling Persson, and his son Stefan Persson. In this book, the TV documentary is described as an “awakening and entry into a new and unknown world” (Pettersson, 2001:165) for H&M. It was also apparent already in this first media attention that H&M did not agree with how the story about irresponsibility was told in the media. According to a former H&M employee who worked at the corporation in the 1990s when the first media reports about the working conditions in garment factories were published, these initial reports had an impact on the way H&M communicated afterwards, leading to a less open strategy when it came to communicating on responsibility topics due to the risk of ending up in similar situations again. In his words:

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51 In Swedish: Handelsmännen
It’s like a string of events, but I think this was the starting point both internally and externally. Okay, now the target is identified, and we’ve identified what we were going to focus on; it was the child labor issue and sustainability. After this happened, it continued with smaller or larger weaponry, but this was the first bomb that really took us off guard. From that day on, nothing was the same, after that you were always prepared. So, if someone said something like: “You’re going to talk about how well H&M design collaboration works.” Then you checked to see if they had a sticker on their bag. You were more careful. Naïve me didn’t think that this was how it was done, but now I’ve learned that people can sit and perhaps do an interview for a dissertation, and it can be about something completely different instead. But then I feel that as long as you just tell the truth then you have nothing to hide. If you aren’t able to answer a question, or if you don’t want to answer a question, then you don’t answer no matter who is asking the questions. (Previous employee H&M 4, 2017-05-11)

At the time of the TV documentary, in 1997, H&M had started to formulate its responsibility for its supply chain by developing a code of conduct, following the path of large multinational corporations such as Levi Strauss & Co and Nike.

We started to outline our first code of conduct, because the corporation had previously thought about it like: “What applies in Bangladesh is what we will follow.” They said that we should follow the national legislation and I was one of the few who stirred things up by saying: If Bangladesh allows child labor, do we think that it is okay? I understand that you can have national laws as a minimum but then you also have your own conscience. If you, as the corporate management, say yes to that then I’ll quit because I don’t want to participate in that. I want to raise the bar higher. Then came the question, how do we do that? How do we take it step by step? Because you’re a bit of a bully if you go there and say “we’re so good in Sweden, now you have to be good too,” without a deeper understanding of the problems. Why were there children in the factories? Well, because the single mothers had nowhere else to leave their children because there are no childcare services and they might not be able to afford schools etc. So, it was a big issue then, and it’s complex. (Previous employee H&M 4, 2017-05-11)

Thus, the agenda-setting media story became a driving force for H&M in speeding up its work to develop strategies for improving how it audits supplier factories. As the former H&M employee also says:

The only thing I feel was good about this, if you see it from a longer perspective, for the kids and the planet, is that it was a catalyst. (Previous employee H&M 4, 2017-05-11)

This role of the media as a catalyst to get corporations to move faster in their work on responsibility and sustainability is also discussed among the other
interviewees as a positive aspect of media reporting on corporate responsibility topics. For example, a previous employee at H&M, who also worked for an NGO that scrutinizes corporations on human rights issues for many years, stresses the importance of the media in raising the bar for corporations to take responsibility:

I think it’s great that the media have a lot of power because we live in a very fast society today where all development moves very fast. Norms are shifting all the time, what was the norm 10 years ago is not the norm today, and there is something very positive here from a development perspective. That you always raise the bar a little bit. Child labor is not really the issue now. Now the question is, do women get paid enough so that they can send their children to school? Things have moved forward and now this is the norm. There are no laws that regulate this, but instead it’s the societal norms, which are spread in the media, that control it. I think it’s good in this case because it pushes the companies, and it pushes development forward, and companies need it and they can take it because they’re so powerful today. In many cases companies are more powerful than states, so I think that’s good. On the other hand, I’m also arguing for the development of laws in terms of corporate responsibility. [...] In many other cases, I think that legislation is very important, but legislation moves forward more slowly. You can’t wait for that. (Viveka Risberg, previously at H&M and Swedwatch, 2016-12-05)

This interviewee is, at the same time, critical of the lack of “nuanced investigative journalism that is critical and dares to problematize, because it’s not as easy and simple as many would like to claim” (ibid.). Thus, the role of journalism for corporate responsibility is a contradictory one. On one hand, media reporting can serve as a catalyst that moves corporations forward faster on a path towards a more responsible and sustainable business world. On the other hand, the complexity of such issues is generally simplified in the media’s storytelling, which can be unfair towards the corporations, and the individuals in those corporations, that end up at the center of these stories.

4.4.2 Avoiding the media

As shown in the media stories about H&M, as presented earlier, it is evident that H&M rarely participates actively in the news media publicity about the working conditions in garment factories. For example, as mentioned above, the authors of the book Fashion Slaves (2016) describe their experience of getting hold of H&M as difficult. Tobias Andersson Åkerblom explains:

We did some interviews at an early stage of the project but after that they [H&M] only provided an autoreply saying: we decline participation in your book. Even when it comes to purely factual information. (Interview with independent journalists, 2017-03-11)
Despite H&M having maintained this avoiding and reactive approach towards the media, when asked whether coming out as a responsible corporate actor in the media is important, a present H&M employee answers a resounding ‘Yes’, and adds:

Though also looking at it realistically that, I mean you’ve studied that, there is a certain tendency towards negativity, for example. Bad news is more attractive than positive news, and so on, so in many cases maybe traditional media is not the most neutral, or positive, filter. So, in many cases actually, if that’s a little bit the topic of your study as well, direct conversations with different stakeholder groups in other kinds of media besides traditional media can be a more effective approach. (Sustainability employee, H&M, 2017-10-02)

This H&M employee says that he himself prefers to meet people face-to-face but realizes the obvious limitations of getting the message out with that method. He continues:

The easiest way is a personal conversation, but you can’t do that on a large scale. So, for example, producing own communication products, like an extensive and transparent sustainability report. Making information and data available so that others can get firsthand access to that information, and it can also be other actors, it could be everything from rating agencies to all kinds of institutions or stakeholders that would do some of the translation work that otherwise the media do. Or do it themselves then, reach out to the media, for example, by publishing reports and things like that. (Sustainability employee, H&M, 2017-10-02)

Several interviewees also highlight the paradox of communicating responsibility and sustainability, where the corporations that communicate positive aspects about their initiatives on responsibility and sustainability are also those who are most likely to be scrutinized by the media. Furthermore, as the issue of working conditions in garment factories is linked to how much control H&M has over its suppliers, it is almost impossible to be sure that no mistakes are made anywhere in the global supply chain. Thus, communicating this is difficult as the risk of being seen as a hypocrite is high. One former H&M employee discusses why H&M does not communicate more on such topics:

I think it’s simply because you get burned. When you open up, you may also be scrutinized, and you want to be scrutinized in a way that you feel is fair. […] Also, because you work with things that aren’t perfect and even if you do good things and want to communicate about them, you know it’s not perfect. There may be a journalist who discovers something, it could be anything, and then you risk a much higher price if you’re taken to be a liar or caught greenwashing. I think you’re aware that things may not be able to withstand a review because there are still so many problems in the supply chain. (Viveka Risberg, previously at H&M and Swedwatch, 2016-12-05)
To summarize, the representatives from H&M experience an established angle of negativity from the journalistic media, which contributes to H&M’s less open approach towards journalists as they often feel misrepresented in the media. It is, however, important for H&M to be seen as a responsible corporate actor and the corporation therefore uses other channels to communicate about responsibility topics, rather than using the filter of journalistic media. Opening up on these topics also means taking the risk of even more scrutiny from journalists. As it is impossible for global corporations like H&M, with far-reaching supply chains, to have complete control of their suppliers’ mistakes, the risk of being accused of acting irresponsibly is continuously high.

4.4.3 Telling their own story

Along with the change of topic in the media story, from a negative slant on H&M towards a more mixed and positive tone in later years, there has also been a change in H&M’s approach towards the media. This can be noted in an interview with a present employee at H&M who confirms the view that H&M has taken a reactive approach towards the media but also argues that this has changed over the last 10 years:

I think there has been a change, especially looking back to 95, and also maybe 10 years after that. Our approach to most kinds of stakeholder communication by then was a rather reactive one. And it was pretty much exclusively the media at that point. So, you get a bunch of questions and you just try to answer them, in a way that no one can tweak the quotes too badly. Whereas that has changed over the last, I would say 10 years, quite massively, where sustainability is a topic also proactively brought to the media and discussed a lot with other stakeholders. And it moved from a defensive mode, so to speak, to active management, I would say. (Sustainability employee, H&M, 2017-10-02)

The 10 years that the interviewee is talking about would be from around 2007 until 2017. The H&M interviewee can also see a change in the media during this time period, towards a more nuanced discussion of the topic of sustainability. As he explains:

We noticed that the media can also be a way of interacting with consumers ultimately, particularly when the fashion media also picked up the topic of sustainable fashion. […] I think that started a good ten years ago, that the topic would make it into consumer publications. And that was a turning point for us too, to see that we could work with media, but in a totally different way, and actually show a nice product and show that it looks nice and then start the conversation about sustainability matters. Then gradually corporate media was also talking more about sustainability as a business concept that made business sense, thereby turning the conversation around and allowing for a more diverse
discussion about it, and also for us to be more proactive about it. (Sustainability employee, H&M, 2017-10-02)

Thus, from the perspective of H&M, there has not only been a change in its approach towards the media, but they can see a change in how the media discusses H&M on topics of responsibility and sustainability. One example of an event that was particularly important for H&M in this shift towards more positive media attention for H&M on sustainability topics occurred in 2014 when the sustainability manager of that time, Helena Helmersson, was named ‘most powerful woman in the Swedish business world’ by business newspaper Veckans Affärer. The H&M interviewee describes this as an important event for H&M, saying:

I think it was three or four years ago when our head of sustainability at the time, Helena Helmersson, was named as the-, I think she was on the cover of Veckans Affärer back then, as the most influential woman in Swedish business or something like that, as ‘a sustainability agent’. Just thinking of media coverage, although we didn’t pay that much attention to it other than that it was nice for her personally. I think that left a lot of impact afterwards. (Sustainability employee, H&M, 2017-10-02)

In telling H&M’s own story about its responsibility for working conditions in the supply chain, the sustainability employee at H&M points to the business model as the problem that underlies the media reports on the topic and says that if the solution is to stop consuming it becomes a dead-end discussion. He continues, adding that it is often the corporations with low retail prices that are frontrunners when it comes to sustainability.

It doesn’t matter what you do because the business model is just wrong and there’s nothing you can do to fix it. For me, it comes down to the question of globalization and a division of labor, and that simply exists; just listening to that, we could make it extremely easy for ourselves and say: OK then – no. But that’s not how it works. Like I said before, it’s not our retail price that makes a difference in the supply chain. Actually, when you look at our suppliers, we share them with a lot of different companies no matter the price point. If you look at one particular factory, and talk to them, it’s definitely more the ones with a lower price point that drive the sustainability agenda. Not only in the factory but also the system around them, by bringing in unions, for example. Because, at least you can guess that it’s a business incentive, that if we share the factory anyway, with the ones that have more efficient routines, better supply chain management in place. For example, we utilize the capacity better, we have closer relations with the suppliers and so on, we actually benefit, or maybe not benefit but have fewer disadvantages from increasing labor costs than others do. So, it often feels like a dead-end discussion, so to speak. If we can’t do anything just because there’s such a thing as globalization, and there’s such a thing as global inequality, then there is no solution whatsoever, except for going back to that all of us stop consuming and maybe live like in medieval times,
which we’re not going to do. It’s the only way forward. (Sustainability employee, H&M, 2017-10-02)

This H&M employee is also critical of how the problem is framed in the media. From H&M’s perspective, the textile industry can be seen instead as a positive force for development in supplier countries. He also argues that H&M’s business model can actually be a way of leading positive change. His explanation continues:

What I react to a little bit is what you read in the media headlines too, that someone else pays the price for a low-cost product, which, according to this logic, of course, no one pays the price, there’s still someone earning money and, actually, from all the data and all the historical examples we see, leads to positive development. The textile industry has always been a starting point that follows, actually, if you think about it, in the 1980s we ordered almost everything from Hong Kong, which is now one of the wealthiest places in the world. I’m not saying that that is the reason for it, but it’s simply one step in the development, so to speak. What definitely is a fact, is that they should earn more and even faster, and not only in terms of wages but actually making sure that the sourcing from these markets leads to positive development for the entire community and the country around it. That is precisely what we can do; we can go beyond just sourcing from somewhere, and thinking that this is good enough, to actually building systems around it and thereby lead change in the industry when it comes to things like how purchasing practices are organized. Knowing the supply chain and all those kinds of things that we can maybe do even better, because of our business model, than others might be able to do. (Sustainability employee, H&M, 2017-10-02)

In sum, the representative from H&M describes a change in H&M’s sustainability communication – from a reactive, defensive approach with a focus on the journalistic media, towards managing its own communications. As H&M experiences a change in the media, with a more nuanced discussion that focuses on the business side of sustainability, the possibility for H&M to be proactive grows. When it comes to the actual problem related to corporate irresponsibility, the sustainability employee at H&M points to the role of H&M’s business model. Thus, if globalization and global inequalities related to H&M’s business model is the problem, then there is no solution, but rather a “dead-end discussion”. Instead, H&M directs attention to the positive role the textile industry can play in development and the possibility for H&M to lead change in the industry.
4.5 Epilogue

In the epilogue of a literary work, the author can use the space to speak directly to the reader and reveal the fates of the characters after the story ended. While this study ended in 2017, the media reporting on H&M and its responsibility for working conditions in garment factories continues after this ending. In 2018, H&M encountered financial issues due to decreased sales, and the media reporting shifted to focus on these issues (e.g. DI, 2018-01-12; SvD, 2018-01-31) rather than topics of responsibility and sustainability. In the fall of 2019, sales had increased, the financial difficulties had past, and there were positive reports on sustainability. For example, a news flash from DN arrived on October 3, 2019, around the time that this text was written, announcing that:

“H&M has succeeded better than its competitors when it comes to sustainability issues” – DN’s financial reporter Ida Yttergren regarding the apparel giant’s report.

In the article referred to in the news flash, financial reporter Ida Yttergren argues that H&M “has in recent times greatly accelerated its communication on sustainability issues,” and that sustainability has taken up a greater part of the financial report, for example, with a new focus on circular services52. A week later, DI ran a two-page piece in which both then-CEO Karl-Johan Persson and sustainability manager Anna Gedda are interviewed, under the headline “H&M believes that sustainability is the key to the future” (DI, 2019-10-30).

On a less positive note, from H&M’s perspective, journalists Erik Palm and Jonas Alsgren, who were also the reporters behind the 2012 Kalla Fakta episode about H&M, published a book about H&M in late 2019. The book is called The Big Boss and has Stefan Persson in focus. In the promotion of the book, the authors write that “Stefan Persson is a man of great power that we know very little about,”53 giving that as their reason for having written the book. The book touches upon the working conditions in garment factories, but focuses mainly on the Swedish context, i.e. the working conditions of employees at H&M headquarters and in the clothing stores are scrutinized (Palm & Alsgren, 2019). Thus, the media stories about H&M’s responsibility when it comes to working conditions continue, with new angles to the established story.

4.5.1 A story on repeat

As has been shown in this chapter, the form of this media story can be defined as a repetitive issue rather than a single media scandal. Compared to the other media story in the study, the story about Telia and the corruption in Uzbekistan, which can unquestionably be defined as a scandal, the story about H&M resurfaces at many times over a long time-frame. Its form includes ups and down in attention over the years, but the topic seems to almost always carry some kind of newsworthiness. Although H&M pursues several initiatives in the area of sustainability, the focus of the media reports is most commonly on the issue of working conditions in the garment factories.54

Some of the interviewees of this study reflected on why this particular media story has been so frequently repeated. One former H&M employee sees the dramaturgic clarity and the obvious injustice of the story as key to why this particular topic is brought up so frequently in the media. In her view, the reason for this is:

Because it’s probably an issue that is very easy to see, and understand, that there is an injustice here. That there’s an unfair imbalance, that poor women living in slums work very long days, for very low wages, in order for us to buy cheap fashion. There’s dramaturgic clarity, a clear media logic, and it’s easy to see that something is wrong. (Previous employee H&M 1, 2016-12-05)

A journalist at Expressen who has reported extensively on H&M also discusses the newsworthiness in H&M’s responsibility for its supply chain and compares H&M with another famous Swedish corporation, IKEA. He also notes that having a famous corporate leader increases the media’s interest in the topic.

We have some really big players, global companies, like H&M and IKEA, if we can call IKEA Swedish nowadays... It’s Kamprad and Persson, who are both colorful families. How they behave in other countries is clearly of interest. H&M is, of course, I don’t remember exactly, but it’s one of the biggest buyers in Bangladesh by far. […] When it comes to these big, global companies, there are a number of interesting issues that one has a duty, as a journalist, to follow up on and question. (Fredrik Sjöshult, journalist at Expressen, 2016-11-30)

In addition, a representative from the NGO Fair Action also explains the strong focus on the fashion industry in Sweden as being due to its success. She also highlights the personal interest that many people have in fashion and how clothes are strongly connected to personal identity.

54 As shown, for example, in the pre-study to this study (Grafström et al., 2015b) and confirmed by the interviewees.
I think the topic is appealing because we have so many strong, profiled, Swedish fashion brands and H&M is a good example of that. It’s not so surprising that it draws attention, as fashion is such a strong Swedish sector, so it becomes extra interesting to examine. I also think the interest has a lot to do with the many private individuals that have such a strong connection to clothing and style. You associate it so much with your personal brand or identity, so to speak. I think that can also pique people’s interest and make them eager to learn more. (Fair Action representative 1, 2017-03-15)

A former H&M employee also adds the fact that the garments sold at H&M are cheap, establishing a connection to lower quality and, as a result, also worse conditions and a higher impact on the environment:

Here we have a company that is incredibly successful and is owned by a family that is incredibly wealthy. It’s clear that there is built-in drama, already there. It has everything. If you sell a product that is cheap, same as with Ikea, how the hell can it really be fair? This has followed me throughout my professional career, when you talk about how one should stop buying cheap products and buy something expensive instead so that it has higher quality and consider the environment. Then I say that it has nothing to do with that; the expensive garments can be produced in the same factory but go through lots of intermediaries. It is the business model that makes these products more expensive, you pay for the brand. (Previous employee H&M 4, 2017-05-11)

Thus, many aspects of the media story about H&M and its responsibility for working conditions in the garment factories have contributed to making the stories persistently newsworthy and repeated over the years. Some of these features include the apparent global inequalities, H&M’s financial success, the famous, wealthy owners and leaders of H&M, consumers’ personal connection to clothing and fashion, as well as the low prices.
5. Telia and the corruption in Uzbekistan

This chapter will present the results from the analysis of the media narrative concerning the allegations of corruption when Telia entered Uzbekistan. In this narrative, Telia is held responsible for not acting appropriately ethical when initiating its business operations abroad. Similarly to the previous chapter about H&M, this chapter about Telia begins with a prologue in which a discussion of corruption is the topic in focus, a summary of the plot is presented, and the three perspectives that the empirical study takes departure from are introduced. The second part of the chapter focuses on the first of these three perspectives, i.e. that of the published and broadcast media stories, and the third part discusses the procedures behind the media stories by focusing on the results from the interviews with journalists and a critical investor. The fourth part of the chapter presents the perspective of Telia. The chapter then closes with an epilogue in which the form of the narrative as a media scandal is discussed and some notes about what happened after the end of the studied period is presented.

5.1 Prologue

The first paragraph of the introduction to this thesis makes mention of revelations of *The Uzbekistan Affair* broadcast on an episode of the TV show UG on September 19, 2012. Thus, that Telia experienced a corruption scandal in which the media played a significant role is already evident to the reader of this text. The topic of the media story about Telia is corruption and, more specifically, the possibility that Telia may have bribed the daughter of the Uzbek president when starting up its business operations in Uzbekistan in 2007. The media reporting on Telia’s entry into Uzbekistan started some years before the scandal and continued for several years after, and we may not have seen the end of it yet. But the peak of the scandal in the fall of 2012, after the UG TV broadcast. In hindsight, this corruption story has been influential not only for Telia as an organization, but also for the issue of corruption in the Swedish business world in general (e.g. Brown, 2014).
5.1.1 The corruption issue

In 2007, at the time of the possible transgression, Telia was a Swedish-Finnish corporation, that went under the name Teli a Sonera. In general, both Sweden and Finland are thought of as countries that have very few problems with corruption, which is reflected, for example, in their high ratings by the anti-corruption organization Transparency International.\(^{55,56}\) Corruption has advanced on the societal agenda in Sweden in recent years, however, due to a number of corruption scandals, of which the media story about Telia is a prominent example. The media story about Telia is often talked about as ‘The Uzbekistan Affair’, as the corrupt business practices took place when Telia initiated business operations in Uzbekistan. In contrast to Sweden and Finland, Uzbekistan is a country with one of the highest levels of corruption in the world according to anti-corruption organization Transparency International.\(^{57}\)

Despite the decision to expand to a country with such a high risk of corruption, Telia received positive reactions to its social responsibilities, and its anti-corruption program in particular. For example, in 2013, the year after the corruption scandal was revealed, Transparency International ranked Telia as one of the most transparent corporations in Sweden.

What we have studied is the anti-corruption work on corporate websites and in annual reports, not how the work is done in practice. Telia is a clear example of a company that has good rules — but that seems to ignore them in practice. And the historical conduct of the management did not show any greater understanding of the importance of anti-corruption, says Birgitta Nygren, member of the board of Transparency International Sweden, and the person who conducted the review, to Svenska Dagbladet. (SvD, 2013-02-04).

This is thus illustrative of how complex the issue of corruption is and how difficult it can be for an organization to build effective anti-corruption programs (Brown, 2014). Researchers Breit and Vaara (2014) argue, in addition, that corruption is a phenomenon that is “constructed differently across different contexts by different actors” (p. 48) and that the distinction between corrupt and non-corrupt behavior is not self-evident. Corruption can be difficult to detect and combat as it is often hidden beneath the surface of the organization, especially as many corrupt activities take place in gray areas (Brown, 2014). Thus, it is likely that the alleged corruption when Telia entered Uzbek-istan might not have surfaced had it not been for the media revelations discussed in this study. The role of the media has consequently been crucial for this corruption case.

\[^{55}\text{https://www.transparency.org/country/SWE (2020-04-11)}\]
\[^{56}\text{https://www.transparency.org/country/FIN (2020-04-11)}\]
\[^{57}\text{https://www.transparency.org/country/UZB (2020-04-11)}\]
5.1.2 Summary of the plot

The reporting on the story that came to be called ‘The Uzbekistan Affair’ was launched on the leading investigative journalism TV show in Sweden, UG on SVT, on September 19, 2012, when the first revelations of the possibility of corruption when Telia entered Uzbekistan five years earlier, in 2007, were broadcast on TV. This was not the first time that similar accusations had been brought forward in the media, however. The daily morning newspaper SvD had started to write about the topic already on February 11, 2008, and continued yearly up until the 2012 revelations on UG. In this initial stage, however, it is mainly one journalist who drives the media story, along with one of Telia’s main critics on the topic of corruption, Sasja Beslik, who at the initial stage held the position of head of responsible investments at ethical fund management firm Banco Funds.

When the UG episode aired on September 19, 2012, drawing the attention of most Swedish media towards the topic of Telia and the possible corruption in Uzbekistan, the actual media scandal began. In this revealing episode, UG was able to show that Telia’s partner in Uzbekistan, Takilant, had close ties to the Uzbek president’s daughter, Gulnara Karimova, suggesting that it was in fact a case of bribery. The team of reporters from SVT1, a national public service channel, had at that time been investigating Telia’s business operations abroad for a longer period of time and had previously broadcast several episodes related to wiretapping and human rights in the spring of 2012. The September episode of the TV show was called The Uzbekistan Affair and the story continues to be called that in a long-running media scandal that included four follow-up episodes of UG and many newspaper articles over the years that followed.

The corruption affair takes a serious slant due to the particularities of Telia’s ownership, which also makes the story into a huge scandal as it has high public interest. The storytelling takes the form of an investigate story in which the journalists strive to gather information from Telia about what happened and Telia frequently refuses to provide answers. In the beginning, a conflict can be seen, with Telia claiming that it has done nothing wrong. That later changes towards agreement among everyone involved in the media stories that Telia has acted irresponsibly, whether or not it was legal.

The reporting immediately following the revelations on UG, for example, focuses on whether Telia’s CEO Lars Nyberg is going to resign and how investors, as well as private individuals, are selling their Telia shares as a result of the revelations. In February 2013, the investigation of a law firm commissioned by Telia is finished and is inconclusive as to whether it was a case of bribery or not. The reporting on Telia decreases during the spring of 2013 but
the topic does not disappear from the media agenda; it continues to appear regularly, especially in DI and SvD, which have the largest business coverage of the newspapers studied. Also, the CEO and almost the entire board of directors are replaced during 2013. The new board chair, Marie Ehrling, starts in April 2013 and the new CEO, Johan Dennerlind, in September 2013. These changes are reported rather positively in the news media.

Some events that take place in the aftermath of the scandal include, in 2014, the presentation of new evidence that strengthens the bribery case, showing that most of the 2.2 billion SEK paid by Telia to Takilant went to Gulnara Karimova. In 2015, Telia announces that it will withdraw its operations in the Central Asia region, and that it is working to find buyers for its businesses. Also in 2015, authorities in the United States and the Netherlands announce that Telia must pay a penalty of 1.4 billion USD for alleged bribery in Uzbekistan. Telia furthermore decides to sell all of its business operations in Eurasia. On September 22, 2017, Telia acknowledges that it has reached a settlement with the U.S. authorities. On the same day, three former top executives from Telia are charged with bribery according to Swedish law, which is also announced the same day as the settlement. Finally, in December 2018, Telia sells its business in Uzbekistan and several other businesses in the Eurasia region.

The reporting in the media story about Telia differs from that in the story about H&M as already in the search for material for the study there was an implied bias towards negativity. The search was limited to newspaper articles with a focus on the bribery or corruption in Uzbekistan, which is a topic that is very difficult to frame in a favorable, responsibility angle towards Telia. Consequently, only a single article out of 401 is considered here to have a responsibility angle, which is less than 0.25 percent. This article is an editorial published in the business newspaper DI (2015-09-18), an opinion piece written by Lotta Engzell-Larsson, a member of DI’s editorial board. The article’s headline reads “Telia is choosing the right path,” and the argument is that by leaving Uzbekistan Telia is taking responsibility for what happened and that this is a sign of strength. The article furthermore argues that Telia will lead the way for other corporations to avoid making similar business deals.

In the rest of the 401 articles, published between 2008 and 2018, Telia is framed as either irresponsible or neutral/balanced. As it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between those framings, the calculations are approximate. However, Telia is seen as irresponsible in about 318 of the 401 articles, corresponding to about 79 percent. In approximately 20 percent, 82 of the 401 articles, the angle towards Telia is neutral or balanced. Included here are articles that illustrate balance where framings of both irresponsibility and responsibility are part of the article, as well as articles that do not take a stance on the irresponsibility or responsibility of Telia but focus on some other angle of the
story. The proportion of neutral or balanced publicity increases starting in February 2013, when Telia appoints the new leadership.

The graph below illustrates how the framing of Telia as irresponsible or responsible in the news media, with respect to handling the possible corruption in Uzbekistan, changed over the years of the study, from 2008 to 2018. Articles with a neutral or balanced framing have also been separated.

Graph 4: The distribution of news articles about Telia and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan from 2008 to 2018, in the newspapers DN, SvD, Aftonbladet, Expressen and DI, divided into three framings of Telia as: irresponsible, neutral, or responsible. Source: Own collection of newspaper articles.

5.1.3 Three perspectives

The findings from the study of the Telia story, similarly to those from the H&M story presented in Chapter 4, contain three different views on the story. Published media texts, which includes both written articles and moving images on TV, constitute the first perspective, i.e. the media perspective. In the case of Telia, the TV show UG played a key role of storyteller as it was on this SVT broadcast that aired the revelations that led to the media scandal. The daily newspaper SvD also carried reports about Telia in the early period. As the Telia story focuses on allegations of a financial crime, the newspapers that focus more on business matters, such as DN, SvD and DI, were the ones who paid most attention to this corruption story.
The second perspective in the Telia story is that of the journalists and the sources behind the media reporting. Here, two media channels played a central role, first, SvD in the early phase of the media story and, second, the UG TV team, who were the ones that revealed the actual scandal. At SvD, journalist Andreas Cervenka was almost alone in reporting about the risk of corruption for Telia in Uzbekistan, so he takes on a particularly important role in this perspective. Often referred to in the media reports were the investors, with a focus on ethical fund investments, and one such person, Sasja Beslik, featured especially frequently in the media reports expressing his critique of Telia.

The corporation in focus, Telia, represents the third perspective. In order to capture how Telia experienced the early days, i.e. from around 2007 when the alleged corruption took place, as well as the more present years, i.e. in the aftermath of the media scandal, this perspective includes the views of both former and present organizational members. The interviewees that represent this perspective include two former employees who quit before the media scandal, one who worked at Telia throughout the time period studied, one who started around the time of the scandal, and two who started afterwards. A consultant who worked at Telia for a limited time period was also included. Thus, this person represents both an outside and an inside perspective towards Telia, which added to the study.

5.2 Stories in the media

This section focuses on events in the chronological media story of Telia and the allegations of corruption in Uzbekistan 2007. This longitudinal media story is divided into three sub-sections, or ‘stages’, starting with the reports about the risk of corruption, followed by the scandal, and then the aftermath. The starting point is consequently the early reports that occurred before the actual media scandal, i.e. from 2008 through the beginning of 2012. During this time, there were no grand revelations, but rather recurring reports on the likelihood that something corrupt may have taken place when Telia expanded to Uzbekistan, and neighboring countries in Eurasia. Most of the risk reports were published in the morning newspaper SvD, and written by the same journalist, Andreas Cervenka.

The second stage of the story begins with UG’s first episode on the topic, broadcast on September 9, 2012, on Swedish public service channel SVT1. Thus, the focus of this sub-section is on the investigative reporting of UG as well as the news media reporting that followed the revelations of the investigative TV program. The third sub-section focuses on the third stage of the
story – what happened after the possible transgressions were revealed and Telia was viewed as responsible for not ensuring that its business operations in Uzbekistan were handled according to corporate policy and official regulations. This stage of the aftermath went on from 2013 until the end of the media analysis in 2018. Some of the larger events presented in more detail below are outlined in Figure 4.

5.2.1 Early reports: 2008-2012

The media story before the scandal broke in 2012 was a story about risks and warnings of possible corruption. At that time, there was still no evidence that a corrupt transgression had actually taken place when Telia entered Uzbekistan around 2007. The stories told in the early days focused on the more general risk for corruption and human rights violations in Uzbekistan and neighboring countries. At this time, there are not that many actors participating in the media discussion, and journalist Andreas Cervenka and Sasja Beslik, who works with ethical fund management, drive the story very much on their own. Telia’s attitude externally towards the first media attention on the possible problem with corruption in Uzbekistan was that it was actually not that important to know the actual beneficiary of the large amount of money Telia had paid for its 3G license.

From the first article in 2008 until 2011, SvD published 13 articles on the topic, 10 of which were written by Cervenka. The focus in these reports was on the dangers of starting business operations in a country like Uzbekistan,
with such a high risk of corruption and lack of respect for human rights issues. Various experts were interviewed in this early coverage, and they argued that it was likely that President Islam Karimov and his family were the real recipients when Telia bought its 3G license (SvD, 2008-02-11). Both in 2008 and in 2009, Telia responds by saying that it could be better at handling issues of corruption and transparency, but nevertheless defends its investments in Uzbekistan (SvD, 2008-03-13; SvD, 2009-05-11).

In the first article in the media reporting on the topic of corruption in relation to Uzbekistan, published on February 11, 2008, journalist Cervenka first brings up the possibility of corruption in Telia’s expansion. Cervenka had spoken to several experts in the Central Asia region, who said that it was very likely that Telia had made a deal with the president and his family when entering Uzbekistan. This argument was founded on the notion that it was not possible to conduct successful business without involving the president. In answer to the question of whether it is important to know who Telia’s business partners in Uzbekistan really are, then-Telia CEO Lars Nyberg is quoted in SvD in 2008, as saying:

I don’t know, maybe. I hadn’t thought about it. The important thing is that Telia Sonera acts in a proper manner in relation to the ethical rules we have. I can’t be sure about what our partners are doing. If I can’t live with that, I shouldn’t be in these countries, but then I wouldn’t be in half of the countries on earth. (SvD, 2008-02-11)

In the same article, Nyberg goes on to say that: “Even though I know who the formal owner is, I don’t know who the beneficiary in the next stage is” (ibid.). The story is also repeated the next day (SvD, 2008-02-12) with more focus on the financial aspects of the transaction that Telia made to the company Takilant to enter the telecom market in Uzbekistan.

One month later, in March 2008, Sasja Beslik, head of responsible investments at Banco Fonder, is interviewed by SvD. In the interview, Beslik criticizes Telia and other Swedish telecom operators for not conducting proper investigations before entering countries with a high risk of corruption, since such risks are particularly high in the types of business that involve governments.

Banco has requested to see what analysis of the ethical business-related risks Telia Sonera did before the company decided to invest in Uzbekistan. “Until now, we have not seen a single document, even though we have been promised this. The question is whether the analysis even exists,” says Sasja Beslik. […] “If we don’t get any good answers, we’ll be forced to sell all our shares.” (SvD, 2008-03-11)
Two days later, a Telia press officer agrees in part with this criticism, saying that the telecom industry has not come so far in terms of transparency in policy and policy compliance. He does, however, continue to defend Telia’s investments in Uzbekistan (SvD, 2008-03-13).

In April, Banco Fonder decides to sell all of its shares in Telia as a protest against Telia’s business in Uzbekistan. Sasja Beslik says that he did not get good answers at the Annual General Meeting and therefore Banco has decided to sell, arguing that Telia “has failed to account for how it dealt with obvious ethical risks in its business operations” (SvD, 2008-04-04). Telia’s largest owner, the Swedish state, does not have an opinion on the matter, states Minister for Financial Markets Mats Odell in the same news article. Also, in October 2008, Telia is excluded from the Dow Jones SI and Financial Times 4 Good for the same reasons (SvD, 2008-10-18).

In May 2009, three additional articles are published in SvD, two longer reports by Andreas Cervenka, this time co-written by Johanna Petersson, and one analysis by another journalist, Jan Almgren. The longer pieces repeat suspicions similar to those reported the previous year, and Cecilia Edström, then-Communications Director at Telia, responds that: “No payment was made to the authorities” (SvD, 2009-05-12a). Once again, several experts argue that it is not possible to conduct business of that magnitude in Uzbekistan without being involved with the president and his family. “Without paying some kind of bribe, you can’t do business,” states Uzbek journalist Alisher Sidikov. The story about Telia is in this news article connected to attacks on human rights activists in Uzbekistan (ibid.). An opinion piece that ran the same day criticizes Telia for putting profitability ahead of the risk of a scandal, saying that “Telia has a moral obligation to the shareholders and taxpayers to provide an accurate account of what the risks in these countries are and what it does to minimize them” (SvD, 2009-05-12b).

Once again, in February 2010, Andreas Cervenka reports on Telia and the risk of corruption in Uzbekistan and neighboring countries. Relying on information from the NGOs Human Rights Watch and Transparency International, the situation with respect to human rights issues in Uzbekistan is described as “awful”. It is also revealed that the payment that Telia made went to a company called Takilant in Gibraltar, and that the sole board member and shareholder of that company is one woman called Gayane Avakyan, not ‘a few local businessmen’ as Telia had previously stated. Telia confirms that this is true, but that it has not found any other underlying owner. Andrea Berg of Human Rights Watch warns that foreign companies should be careful in Uzbekistan. “Uzbekistan is one of the world’s worst countries. If a company feels comfortable doing business in such a country, it says something about that company,” the article quotes her as saying (SvD, 2010-02-10).
The day after, Minister for Financial Markets Mats Odell is interviewed by the same journalists who question the Swedish state’s role as a large owner in Telia. Minister Odell argues that “functional telecommunications infrastructure contributes to the development of democracy” (SvD, 2010-02-11), and goes on to say that “investments in the countries we’re talking about are risky, in a way, but these investments are also valuable in the sense that they both contribute development and provide a very good return on investment for Telia Sonera’s owners” (ibid.). In 2011, the risks for Telia in the Eurasia region are the focus of an additional article in SvD. This time Sasja Beslik, now at Nordea Asset Management, also brings up the financial risks in these countries and says that Telia has become a bit better at providing information (SvD, 2011-04-06).

5.2.2 The scandal: 2012-2013

Despite the warnings from SvD discussed in the previous section, little happened in other media channels until the revelations of UG aired on September 19, 2012, on public service channel SVT1. The reporters from UG had earlier investigated Telia and its business operations abroad in a series of episodes in the spring of 2012, and at that time the focus had been on wiretapping and human rights issues in the countries of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Belarus, countries in which Telia had established business operations. These UG programs had generated some discussions in the media about the consequences of helping the government of authoritarian states with wiretapping. When the revealing report of September 2012 was broadcast, coining the phrase ‘The Uzbekistan Affair’, UG had already established, through these earlier investigations, the idea that Telia was acting irresponsibly in its business expansions abroad.

The part about Telia was 30 minutes long and constituted the first half of that week’s full UG episode. In the show, Telia was again accused of paying a bribe to get the 3G license needed to start up its business operations in Uzbekistan in 2007. The UG TV team was now able to show that Takilant was an offshore company based in Gibraltar and represented by a woman named Gayane Avakyan, who was a close associate of the Uzbek president’s daughter, Gulnara Karimova. Telia had consequently paid 2.2 billion SEK to a company with close connections to the Uzbek regime. This proof of a connection to the Uzbek regime consequently shifted the focus of the reporting, from the early reports about risks and the possibility of corruption, to allegations of an actual crime.

The September 2012 episode starts at Telia’s headquarter where the reporters are interviewing Telia’s communications director at the time, Cecilia Edström.
The reporters ask to speak with the CEO but are denied that request and it is instead Communications Director Edström who gives the same answer to all of the questions asked. In the TV broadcast, Edström’s response is:

When we made our investment in Uzbekistan in 2007, we investigated that the counterpart we had then was the rightful owner of the licenses and frequencies we were later granted, and that the person who represented the company had the mandate to do so. (UG, SVT1, 2012-09-19)

An image repeated in this episode, as well as in its follow-up episodes, is that of the Telia group’s headquarters at Stureplan, in Stockholm, from the exterior (e.g. UG, SVT1, 2012-09-19; UG, SVT1, 2012-12-12). The team from UG went there plenty of times during the series of episodes about Telia, but rarely received any substantial answers from the corporate leaders. Images of the street outside of the office building thus serves to illustrate the lack of access to the responsible persons inside the building.

The first UG episode, The Uzbekistan Affair, also features experts on Uzbekistan who offer their views on the corrupt practices of the country. For example, an expert on the Central Asian region representing the organization Civil Rights Defenders, Joanna Kurosz, is interviewed. Kurosz claims that it is a moral problem for Sweden that a state-owned corporation is conducting business with “an illegitimate dictatorial regime that tortures people and boils people to death” (UG, SVT1, 2012-09-19), adding that, though perhaps not impossible, it is certainly difficult to do business in a country like Uzbekistan without paying bribes.

In contrast to images of massacres and political prisoners, the president’s daughter Gulnara Karimova is depicted as an exceptional person in the episode. She is a pop star, glamour queen and fashion icon, as well as businesswoman, professor and diplomat. Thus, she is portrayed as a multifaceted person living a life in exceptional luxury, with images of music videos and fashion shows. Even though Karimova has no formal power over the telecom market, she is described, on the basis of experts and documents presented in the episode, as the one who approves the establishment of new businesses.

The story in this first episode also takes the form of a detective story in the sense that one of the reporters travelled to Gibraltar and the viewers get to follow his journey as he struggles to uncover information about who actually benefited from Telia’s large payment. The UG reporters themselves appear in the TV shows, and the viewer is able to follow their investigations. In this detective story, clues are detected along the way and lead the reporting towards ‘the truth’ about what happened when Telia possibly bribed the Uzbek regime for 3G licenses.
A retired police inspector who offers his view on the case is also part of the story, as he goes through the information collected by the TV team and gives his opinion about whether or not the business deal can be considered legal. Another person that plays a vital part in the story at this point is Telia’s former communications director, Karin Moberg, who worked at Telia at the time of the establishment in Uzbekistan. Moberg says that when she and her colleagues responsible for sustainability issues made inquiries about what happened in Uzbekistan they were told not to ask questions.

The day after The Uzbekistan Affair episode aired, all of the major Swedish newspapers wrote about the topic, and the story continued almost daily for months. In these media reports, columns and other types of opinion pieces written by journalists about this event were common. These articles had negative headlines such as “Dubious ethics in Telia Sonera” (DI, 2012-09-20), “Unacceptable of Telia Sonera’s CEO” (DI, 2012-09-25), and “A stench of corruption hover around Telia” (DN, 2012-12-08). A few days later, the news media also report that a criminal investigation into the potential bribery had begun (e.g. DI, 2012-10-02; SvD, 2012-10-02).

Telia is also criticized for not being open with information and not handling its media relations properly. The CEO has, at this point, avoided participating in interviews, and the communications director has been unable to answer the questions that the journalists are asking. The way that Telia had tried to sidestep the questions in the TV show also received strong criticism in the news media, with one columnist even calling it a “classic breakdown in crisis management” (Expressen, 2012-09-20). Telia’s response, at this stage, was to initiate an independent investigation. This investigation was already being questioned by journalists, however, who argued that there was a risk that the investigation would not be independent enough and the results inconclusive (DI, 2012-09-22).

As early as two days after the first TV episode on the topic was broadcast, one article in SvD suggests that then-CEO Lars Nyberg can be expected to resign if Telia is found guilty of bribery (SvD, 2012-09-21a). CEO Nyberg’s response is, however, that: “There are serious accusations against Telia Sonera. But I feel confident that we have not bribed anyone and have not participated in money laundering either” (ibid.). Articles about possible successors are nevertheless published long before any decision is made about a possible resignation (e.g. DN, 2012-10-10). It is also suggested early on that the board of directors needs to be replaced due to Telia’s poor judgment and neglect of issues related to corruption, human rights, and the lack of democracy in certain countries (DN, 2012-10-01).
The newspaper reporting in the days following the revelations on UG were also marked by columns and analysis in which journalists expressed their opinions on the issue. A column in SvD by Andreas Cervenka, for example, argues that the ultimate responsibility lies with Telia’s biggest owner, the Swedish state, which should have done something about the issue earlier (SvD, 2012-09-21b). Opinions from experts who address the issue of the corruption at a more general level are also conveyed in the early reports. In DN, for example, where Folksam’s head of responsible investments, Carina Lundberg Markow, argues that this is not an issue related only to Telia, but that most large corporatitons in Sweden do business with dictatorships and that the potential for profit commonly outweighs the risk of corruption (DN, 2012-09-21). An editorial in DI also suggests that Telia should stop apologizing for its possible transgressions and provide better answers (DI, 2012-09-22).

After the initial reactions to the revelations made by UG, the news media continues to report on Telia and the corruption case almost daily for a month. There are reports of both private individuals and large investors such as Nordea selling their shares in Telia (DN, 2012-09-27; SvD, 2012-09-28), for example, and in several news items the situation is described as a crisis for Telia (e.g. SvD, 2012-09-25; Expressen, 2012-10-18). During this time, headlines such as “Ethics spreads panic in boards” (DI, 2012-10-17) also suggest that the Telia case has put issues of ethics, moral, and social responsibility on the agenda when it comes time to nominate candidates to the boards of other Swedish corporations. Thus, the suggestion is that the media stories do not only have an impact on Telia, but have spread to others as well.

The first follow-up episode of UG is then broadcast on December 12, 2012. This episode, called The dictator’s daughter, is a one-hour long program that takes a more in-depth look at the issues presented in The Uzbekistan Affair. In this second episode, Telia’s ‘year of crises’ is summarized, focusing on both human rights issues in Telia’s expansion east as well as the corruption issue in Uzbekistan. The political situation in Uzbekistan is described through interviews, with people who fled Uzbekistan and now live in Sweden, for example. Another focal point is a series of anonymous sources with insight into the events, and their testimonies, which are performed by actor stand-ins. These sources indicate that the leaders of Telia were aware that they likely participated in bribery when they bought the 3G license in Uzbekistan in 2007.

The TV team from UG also tries to get an interview with Telia’s CEO, for example, in connection with the release of a financial report in which the press officer states that the CEO will only talk to the news media about financial issues. It is also stated in the episode that the reporters “have called, e-mailed, and called again and again, but the answer has always been the same” (UG, SVT1, 2012-12-12). Two attempts to confront and interview Telia leaders are
also made during the episode. First, the reporters visit Telia’s headquarters but only manage to reach the new press officer by telephone; the CEO is not available. The press officer suggests that the UG reporters leave a message at reception instead. The second attempt, at the very end of the episode, the reporters are once again in the reception at Telia headquarters and once again only get hold of the press officer via telephone. The reporters say that they want to give Telia the opportunity to comment before the allegations are published, but Telia declines to participate. As a last attempt, using an unofficial number and calling outside from their car, the reporters ring CEO Nyberg, who answers but hangs up when he realizes it is UG calling.

A short follow-up, in the form of 20-minute section (entitled White wash) of a UG program, is then broadcast on December 29, 2012. One key question raised in this episode is: “Is Telia really doing everything they can for the truth (about the corruption in the corporation) to come out?” A classified report compiled by a large accounting firm a year earlier is the focus here, and not actually the corruption case in Uzbekistan. According to the episode, the said report may be a cover-up, a whitewash, of a system of bribery that is sanctioned within Telia.

In February 2013, the independent investigation that Telia commissioned from a law firm is also complete. This investigation receives criticism already before it is published. For example, the public prosecutor not happy with the fact that the law firm interviewed the concerned persons before the criminal investigations, which may affect the prosecutor’s inquiries (DI, 2012-11-15). The investigation is also criticized for being difficult to draw conclusions from (DI, 2013-01-11). Fund manager Folksam also demands that the majority of the board resign regardless of the results of the report (DN, 2013-02-01; Expressen, 2013-02-01). When the report was published, it showed that Telia had not had much knowledge about its business partner in Uzbekistan, but it was not possible to show, according to Swedish law, that Telia had paid any bribes (SvD, 2013-02-02). It is in connection to this report that CEO Lars Nyberg’s resignation is announced (DN, 2013-02-02).

5.2.3 The aftermath: 2013-2018

As requested by many critical voices in the media, Telia’s CEO and almost the entire board of directors were replaced after the peak of the media attention. The appointment of a new CEO and new board chair generated articles with a more positive, or at least neutral, view of Telia in the first half of 2013 (e.g. DI, 2013-02-07; DN, 2013-06-07). For example, the new board chair, Marie Ehrling, is described as a part of a new start for Telia in which Ehrling will oversee its business operations. In an interview in DI, she says that her
ambition for the near future is to restore confidence in Telia after the crisis (DI, 2013-04-04).

About eight months after the initial revelations, UG revisits the topic in two new episodes about Telia. The first of these, an episode called The courier from Moscow, aired on May 22, 2013, and the second, The unbribable, on May 29. From September 2012 until May 2013, a total of five UG episodes were dedicated to the topic of Telia and the Uzbekistan Affair. Thus, the detective story continued, following more clues to get the full picture of what happened in 2007 when Telia entered Uzbekistan. The appropriate consequences that the possible transgression should have for Telia, and the leaders responsible, are also discussed further.

In The courier from Moscow episode (UG, SVT1, 2013-05-22), UG announces that they have new information about what they call a “widespread and ongoing culture of bribery” in Telia. The episode focuses on a letter that the UG reporters have gained access to. The letter was presumably written by Gulnara Karimova and contains instructions concerning a mafia-like arrangement of how Karimova controls her businesses around the world, as well as descriptions of, at that point, unknown business operations with Telia. The episode revolves around an investigation of why the letter means as well as its authenticity. It also raises the issue of responsibility of the corporate leaders who are still a part of Telia’s leadership despite suspicions of their having participated in bribery. The ‘fresh start’ that Telia has announced is thereby also questioned (UG, SVT1, 2013-05-22).

A week later, The unbribable (UG, SVT1, 2013-05-29) is broadcast, focusing on the criminal investigations. In this episode, it is suggested that prosecuting the leaders of Telia according to Swedish law will be difficult. The episode also contains a poll, where people in the streets of Stockholm express their opinions about Telia’s alleged corruption in Uzbekistan. By placing a ball in one of three baskets, the individuals polled are asked to choose which crime should carry the harshest punishment – cycling against a red light, peeing in public, or giving 2 billion SEK to a dictator’s daughter. Most put their ball in the final basket (paying off a dictator’s daughter), while their thoughts on the matter are recorded (UG, SVT1, 2013-05-29).

In June 2013, the new CEO of Telia, Johan Dennerlind, is announced, which like the announcement of the new board of directors, leads to more neutral reporting about Telia. A headline in Expressen in the middle of June, for example, reads: “He will bring order to Telia Sonera” (Expressen, 2013-06-17) and DI reports on how the stock market also approved of the new CEO (DI, 2013-06-18). Nevertheless, criticism of Telia’s participating as a sponsor for a festival in Uzbekistan arises (DN, 2013-10-25), and it is also suggested that
the changes in Telia are too slow, with a call for Telia to go from talk to action (DI, 2013-11-29). It is furthermore reported that Telia may have been involved in other dubious business deals in the Eurasia region, and four top managers are fired (DN, 2013-11-30).

In 2014, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, SEC, takes an interest in the Telia case and suggests that there may be large fines coming Telia’s way (SvD, 2014-03-18; DI, 2014-03-18). The public prosecutor’s office in the Netherlands also takes an interest in the case around the same time (ibid.). At Telia’s AGM in April 2014, former CEO Lars Nyberg is not discharged from liability for 2013 which is very unusual and opens him up to a possible lawsuit (SvD, 2014-04-03). In 2014 Telia also invites its investors on a trip to Uzbekistan to visit its business operations in that country. The investors who take part in the trip, among others Sajsa Beslik from Nordea, are not impressed as some of the activities revealed, such as special benefits for politically influential people, run counter to Telia’s own code of conduct (SvD, 2014-09-11).

After revelations of unethical business operations in other countries, such as Azerbaijan, as well (e.g. SvD, 2015-04-09), Telia makes the decision to withdraw the operations in its Eurasia region, i.e. Central Asia, and announces that it is working to find buyers for its businesses (SvD, 2015-09-18). The reason for these sales is not only the issue of business ethics but also the problem of not getting profit out of the foreign companies. It is also noted that finding buyers for the companies might be difficult (DI, 2015-09-18). In connection with this media event, the only news article that can be considered to frame Telia in a positive light is, as mentioned earlier, published under the headline of “Telia is choosing the right path” (DI, 2015-09-18). At the end of 2015, it is announced that the first business to be sold in Telia’s exit from Eurasia is Ncell, in Nepal (DI, 2015-12-22).

The following year, 2016, continues with reports about the risk of a large settlement with the U.S. authorities (e.g. SvD, 2016-02-24; DN, 2016-09-21) and the problems related to the sale of more businesses in Eurasia (e.g. DI, 2016-04-13; SvD, 2016-04-13). That the prosecution has been postponed is also reported (DN, 2016-12-10; SvD, 2017-02-07). The big event in 2017 comes on September 22, when Telia acknowledges that it has reached a settlement with the authorities in the United States and the Netherlands (DN, 2017-09-22; SvD, 2017-09-22). Also, three of Telia’s former top executives, including former CEO Lars Nyberg, are charged with bribery according to Swedish law, which is announced the day of the settlement (SvD, 2017-09-23). In 2018, the trial of the three top leaders becomes the focus of the media reporting (e.g. SvD, 2018-08-22; DN, 2018-09-03). Telia also finally manages to sell its Uzbekistan business Ucell, and CEO Johan Dennerlind is happy about closing the deal (SvD, 2018-12-06).
5.3 Stories of journalists and sources

Similarly to the corresponding section in the previous chapter about H&M, this section focuses on the stories behind the media reporting. For H&M, NGOs sometimes played an important role, but this was not the case for Telia, even though material and opinions from NGOs were sometimes used as background information for the journalistic stories. Instead, other types of stakeholders were more noticeable in the media reporting, particularly investors with an ethical profile as and politicians representing the state’s ownership in Telia. The following three sub-sections focus on the findings from interviews with the two key journalists as well as one particularly frequently appearing investor representative.

The first sub-section examines the view of ‘the initial storyteller’ who wrote the reports on the risks of doing business in Uzbekistan published in SvD, from 2008 until 2011. The focus here is on why the topic was noteworthy in the early days, before the grand revelations that made the topic a corruption scandal, when the story was being told in only one newspaper and mainly by one reporter. Working at a newspaper, this reporter works under the conditions of a news reporter, i.e. with more limited resources and shorter timelines than an investigative journalist, which impacts how he approaches the topic of Telia’s businesses in Uzbekistan.

The second sub-section focuses on an interview with investor representative Sasja Beslik, whose criticism of Telia dates back to the early days. At several times, working at different investor organizations, Beslik has sold investors’ ownership in Telia shares due to ethical considerations. His participation in the media publicity surrounding Telia has been frequent and he has become an influential person when it comes to scrutinizing, and criticizing, corporations from a responsibility perspective.

The sections in this part of the chapter follow a chronological order and the final sub-section focuses on the revelations made by UG when “producing a scandal”. This section is based on an interview with one of the producers behind the UG episodes about Telia. The producer thus takes the perspective of an investigative journalist working at Sweden’s most prominent investigative TV show broadcast on a public service channel with plenty of resources to do in-depth reporting, which differs from the news journalist in the first section.
5.3.1 The initial storyteller

The first newspaper article about Telia and the risks in Uzbekistan was published in February 2008. Andreas Cervenka, at the daily newspaper SvD, is the journalist leading the story in this initial phase and brings up the possibility of corrupt dealings in Telia’s expansion to Uzbekistan. Cervenka writes about the story a couple of times a year from 2008 to 2012. As he explains, it all started with a tip regarding a possible case of corruption when Telia made its business deal in Uzbekistan and that the business deal was worth looking into. In the beginning, Cervenka was not able to pursue this information any further, but in connection with an annual report from Telia he remembered the tip and had the opportunity to dig further. He explains the full story on how it all started like this:

It was actually pretty straightforward this whole thing, in a way. Before I started working at SvD, I received a tip in connection with Telia’s entry into Uzbekistan; it was a credible tip, that it was worth looking into this business deal. But I was a little in-between jobs then, so I didn’t do anything about it at that time. But then, in 2008, I recalled that I had seen something in the annual report or something when they made that deal, where they sold something back to a partner, that they gave a valuation of it in the annual report or something like that. And then I also had that tip in the back of my mind and so I did a quick check on Uzbekistan myself, and I could quickly see, I just googled Transparency International, where you see that it’s one of the world’s most corrupt countries. Then I thought, a state-owned company doing business in a country like that, it’s reasonable to assume there may be a risk of corruption. It was just an easy thesis. Okay, as in all journalism, you have to find out more facts and learn more about the country, so I spent a lot of time researching. When I was reading online, I came across the names of different people that I called, who might be able to tell me more about this area. And this led to the first article, where I quoted some of these people; I talked to others as well. Some who aren’t named in the article too. They provided a fairly clear image of what kind of country it was and the risks associated with doing business there. And when you have a local partner, there’s historically a very high risk that that money goes to the regime, so that was the basic finding. And I had no evidence of that. (Andreas Cervenka, journalist at SvD, 2017-03-21)

When asked if it was obvious that this was an interesting topic to report on, Cervenka’s answer is ‘yes’, and he mentions several points related to Telia as a partially state-owned corporation and the particular risks of Uzbekistan, as two of the aspects that made the story appealing to him:

Well, what absolutely makes it interesting is the fact that Telia is part-owned by the state, and that the state is the largest owner. It puts it in a completely different perspective than for an ordinary limited company, although a lot has happened in this area since then, with stricter guidelines and so on, but at that time it wasn’t quite the same. In an ordinary limited company, the expectations
aren’t as high, but when the state is involved you’re actually doing business in the entire Swedish people’s name in some sense. […] And also, the fact that this was not just any country, it really stood out as the kind of country that is totally controlled by the regime. As I thought when I looked at it, it was clear that all the alarm bells were ringing. Any sensible person, and it only took me a few days to get this information, you couldn’t help but wonder what kind of analysis they did beforehand. So that was what made it interesting, I thought, from the beginning. (Andreas Cervenka, journalist at SvD, 2017-03-21)

In order to construct his story, Cervenka did what he calls “ordinary journalistic research, which is a combination of what you read online and calling people who know the area” (ibid.). Selecting what to include in the final news articles from all the gathered information is the next step. He explains:

That’s always the question, what to include and not to include. What is my assignment? Well, it’s to let the reader form their own understanding – could this be problematic or not? So, then I highlight various experts. Why do you write about this? Well, there are some question marks here; then I have to bring it forward; what do I base this on? Well, on these experts, on these institutions, on these organizations who say this is what it’s like. So that’s what it was. Very basic journalism. (Andreas Cervenka, journalist at SvD, 2017-03-21)

The communication with Telia began with an interview with CEO Lars Nyberg, in connection to an interim report, for the first article. After that, the communications director at Telia took over the contact. That’s when things changed:

And when she took over the communication it became more formalized, so to speak. My experience was that Telia was not particularly open; they had trouble answering questions and, above all, they had chosen a strategy that was roughly: no, we don’t know who the money went to but that’s not a problem, there’s not much to do about it. (Andreas Cervenka, journalist at SvD, 2017-03-21)

As a reporter who specializes in business matters, Cervenka’s experience is that this avoidance strategy is becoming more and more common on the part of businesses. He elaborates on why his initial reporting on Telia did not lead to much attention:

From a journalistic perspective, these were clearly very sensitive matters and they did not provide particularly exhaustive answers so many questions remained. And then these questions were just left hanging there. One might think that I should have brought the matter forward on my own, but then UG did, and it was very clear that there were questions. Which also turned out to be big problems, right? And then the whole scandal broke. (Andreas Cervenka, journalist at SvD, 2017-03-21)
In answer to the question of why he and his newspaper, SvD, did not pursue the story further, Cervenka goes on to compare the time and resources that a newspaper has in relation to an investigative TV show like UG, which broadcasts on the SVT, a public TV channel:

One can absolutely say that we should have gone ahead with this matter. But there are several reasons why we didn't. It was partly a question of resources, to make the confirmation, that linkage, takes a lot of time and energy. […] It takes time and resources, which they have in a different way. But of course, we could have pursued it. (Andreas Cervenka, journalist at SvD, 2017-03-21)

Another factor that led to a lack of attention to the issue, was possibly also the timing of his early reporting. He continues, pointing specifically to the time of the financial crisis, when that was at the top of the agenda, as a topic that overshadowed other types of business news:

It was also the fact that not much happened really; there was no public opinion, or storm on the matter, and no one followed up on it. It’s difficult of course to pursue it on your own. But it has a lot to do with timing of the issue, I think, because when we write about it in 2008, 2009 and also in 2010, there was a lot of focus on the financial crisis and that had died down in 2012. So, it was a matter of timing and impact. There’s a completely different impact when it’s broadcast on TV. So, there were several aspects. Then there was also a new minister who acted in a completely different way. So, there were a number of different factors that came into play. I think it was good that they took hold of the matter. (Andreas Cervenka, journalist at SvD, 2017-03-21)

Thus, this initial story can be defined as ‘a non-event’, or the pre-story to the actual media story, as this media reporting primarily took place in SvD only, with stories mainly written by one lone journalist. Andreas Cervenka together with an investor, Sasja Beslik, who in this initial phase worked at an ethical fund management firm and can also be defined as an activist, were almost the only ones criticizing Telia publicly for not providing enough information about what happened in Uzbekistan in 2007.

5.3.2 A critical investor

As noted, another important actor in the early days of the media story was Sasja Beslik, who was head of responsible investments at Banco Fonder, an ethical fund management firm, at the time. For many years, Beslik was vocal in his criticism of Telia, both in the media and in direct contact with Telia. In 2008, for example, Banco Fonder sells its shares in Telia. Beslik, who was at Banco Fonder from 2005 until 2009, explains how it started when he first reached out to Telia in an attempt to get information about its expansion into
Uzbekistan and neighboring countries. As described by Andreas Cervenka, the reporter at SvD:

And then there are actors like Sasja, who were active very early, and he got it right. He went out and sold the Telia shares early as a protest and it turned out to be the right decision. After that, many others realized that they couldn’t be left behind in these matters. They also had to answer questions from stakeholders. (Andreas Cervenka, journalist at SvD, 2017-03-21).

The reasons for this early interest in this particular issue was that Beslik had worked in Georgia and Azerbaijan and knew the region. He says: “I have lived in these countries and have seen how corrupt it is, and myself encountered corruption to a very large, systematic extent when I was there” (Sasja Beslik, investor representative, 2017-02-28). He describes his long-term relationship with Telia with respect to the risks in Uzbekistan and neighboring countries as a journey in which he struggled to get information from the company:

When I started working at Banco, I started mapping out the companies that we invested in. I noticed Telia, which had a pretty extensive expansion strategy to grow in these countries, which I thought was very exciting financially, but I asked myself a lot how they had handled this. At the time my journey started with Telia, with constant meetings, questions, battles, general meetings, all this where I struggled to get hold of really, really basic things. That is, extremely basic things. I tried to find information about how they had assessed the risks when they established their businesses. The only thing I asked for is actually an A4 page where it says: we assessed these risks. Actually, initially I was not even interested in the decisions they had made, because the decision to be there had already been taken; I just wanted to know the systematics behind it, how they had figured it out. It indicated to me that they had not done their homework even though they were trying to convince me that they had. If they had told me from the beginning that – no, we didn’t, we didn’t see it, we ignored it. But they continued to claim that they had looked at it and that everything was in order. (Sasja Beslik, investor representative, 2017-02-28)

Beslik continued to ask questions throughout the years and, having changed jobs, at the new employer he once again sells the Telia shares, in 2011:

First, I sold them at Banco. Then I switched employers and started working at Nordea and, since 2011, when I was CEO of Nordea Asset Management, we made the decision to sell 77 million shares, we were the third largest owner in Telia, for the same reason. So, between 2005 and 2011, I still got, that’s 6 years in-between, I still asked the same questions and got the same answers, to varying degrees. (Sasja Beslik, investor representative, 2017-02-28)

In 2014, Telia invited some of its largest investors to visit its business in Uzbekistan to show its new guidelines on sustainability (SvD, 2014-08-28). Sasja
Beslik, the interviewed investor from Nordea, was among those who participated in this trip, but notes that he had tried to get access to Telia’s business in Uzbekistan earlier and failed:

When they changed management and parts of the board, then we had to give them another chance. So, we invested again, and put our money in Telia to show our confidence, and then, we’ll see what happens. And then, after that, I went to Uzbekistan after requesting... There’s also one thing that you should know, that I’ve asked to visit these countries for years: Never, no. But after this whole Uppdrag Granskning matter, then we got access to go to Uzbekistan. But before that, there was no fucking way. (Sasja Beslik, investor representative, 2017-02-28).

When Beslik went on the trip, he was able to confirm the complexity of the topic and how entering Uzbekistan had been a bad deal for Telia:

I got it confirmed, how complex it is. I mean, how politicized it is, and how difficult it will be for Telia to leave. Partly because this was an incredibly bad deal for us shareholders, and for the Swedish people, because in Uzbekistan they could not even get their profits. In Uzbekistan, the money is inaccessible; they can’t even get it out. What idiots. They take all the risk, they expose themselves to huge risks of corruption and they can’t even take the profits. What’s the point? I know the point: the point is that, in the books it’ll look very good. So. In the books, it looks very good because the expansion level is good, and the growth looks good. It looks better than it should be. I understand why they did it. (Sasja Beslik, investor representative, 2017-02-28)

He adds that even though Telia has realized that it is sick, they have not yet found the cure. He continues, explaining that he does not require that they create policies and documents, he just wants them to take responsibility, which he argues they have not. On a more positive note, he says that Telia is at least better at providing information today [2017] (Sasja Beslik, investor representative, 2017-02-28).

5.3.3 Producing a scandal

The producer of UG says that their investigation into Telia and the business in Uzbekistan was different from other similar investigations he has done “in the sense that when this story broke, there was a resonance in the Swedish public debate that was able to capture this issue” (Joachim Dyfvermark, journalist at UG, 2016-11-14). The producer goes on to note that the fact that the UG investigation was perfectly timed because the societal debate about corporate responsibility had shifted towards a tougher view of corruption. He compares this to an earlier investigation he had done in 2007 about how Swedish aerospace company Saab’s use of questionable kickbacks when seeking
to business deals on fighter jets in the Czech Republic, Hungary and South Africa:

My theory is that in the general debate you can only have a couple of topics running at the same time. [...] With Telia, we arrived at the right time. It used to be okay, even in 2007 to say: that’s how it works in these countries; if we’re going to sell some damn planes you have to do what it takes. The ‘when in Rome’ rhetoric, that is ‘of course you can do a little bribing in Uzbekistan,’ didn’t exist anymore in 2012. It wasn’t like that anymore. That’s why it had a greater impact. That’s what I think. (Joachim Dyfvermark, journalist at UG, 2016-11-14)

For the production team at UG, the story about Telia started in 2011 with a project on how Swedish technology was used in dictatorships. The findings from these initial investigations led to further interest in Telia’s expansion into Uzbekistan due to the high risk of corruption in this country. The UG team thus decided to continue the reporting started in SvD a few years earlier and finish the job. One of the producers explains:

In that research, when looking at the kind of country Uzbekistan is, we saw quite clearly that it was one of the worst regimes in the world, that it was one of the world’s most corrupt countries. The human rights people we spoke to said: there is no chance that they could have entered here by legal means because the Karimov family controls everything. And then we looked in the archives, as you always do in a project, to see what had been done, like studying previous research. Then we saw that SvD had written about this business deal when it took place in 2007. I think they had written about 2008 and 2010, where they singled out, they painted with a broad brush, saying that it was Islam Karimov, and so on, with question marks. So, then we decided, after we finished the first job, that we wanted to look at how the establishment in Uzbekistan took place. (Joachim Dyfvermark, journalist at UG, 2016-11-14)

When it comes to storytelling, the reporter from UG explains that simplification of the story has to occur in order for it to be suitable for TV. He says that the team of reporters, in this case three reporters working closely together, had dialogues on how the story should be told, according to: “What is the most important? How do we prove it? How do we tell the story?” (Joachim Dyfvermark, journalist at UG, 2016-11-14). He adds that the storytelling part is important since it is through the story that they reach their audience. Thus, the key to the story is to make selections from the research material. For example, because the story becomes too complex if there are too many names, they choose to focus on a few main characters.

The journalistic sources that appear in the TV show also have great importance for the storytelling. For example, one important role in the media story is assigned to a former Telia employee. This employee serves as a whistleblower
when she reveals that she was silenced by Telia leadership when she, at the
time Telia established its business operations in Uzbekistan, asked questions
about how the organization had handled the possibility of corruption. She says
that she did not actually add any factual information to the TV show in 2012,
but instead played an important dramaturgical role in moving the story for-
ward as well as encouraging others who knew the facts to step forward (Pre-
vious employee Telia 1, 2017-03-28).

In the first TV episode, the reporters from UG visit Telia’s headquarters in
Stockholm asking to see the CEO, Lars Nyberg. But it is the communications
director who does the TV interview and the reporters show their disappoint-
ment as they wanted answers from the top leaders. In the next TV episode on
the topic, the reporters furthermore show their unsuccessful attempts to get an
interview with the CEO. When asked why it was important to illustrate the
lack of answers, one of the producers replies:

If you’re trying to tell a story about something and you are about to do a con-
frontation interview and the interview subject says: I don’t want to participate.
That’s the way it is; then you let the viewer down. Here, we have a huge issue,
and they say that they don’t want to participate. And we’re supposed to be sat-
isfied with that, but I want answers. This was a pronounced strategy on their
part, from the first press conference where they run and hide in the stairwell
until he [CEO Lars Nyberg] resigns; he stayed away. Then we took a dramatur-
-gical decision, something we rarely do, but this time we took a dramaturgical
decision. Here we have this affair and, we really want to ask these questions,
this is the way that Telia acts and, somewhere, it illustrates their guilt. If they
had nothing to hide, they could have sat down with us for 15 minutes, and talked
to us. But here we have one of Sweden’s most powerful CEOs who literally
hides from a simple question. So it was a conscious decision that we made, in
one of the programs. (Joachim Dyfvermark, journalist at UG, 2016-11-14)

Hence, the UG producer emphasizes the dramaturgical aspects of showing the
guilt and the importance of talking to the CEO since he is the person respon-
sible, the one who signed the papers. He also says that UG rarely makes these
types of dramaturgical choices, but that in this case it was necessary.

In 2015, Telia decided to exit the entire region they call Eurasia due to the
corruption issues and difficulty getting its financial returns from the region
(e.g. DI, 2015-09-18). The UG reporter says that their reports do not usually
lead to any real changes, but in the case of Telia he is satisfied with the job
they did:

I’m not in this business because I want headlines or prizes; I want to achieve
something, and I want to make a change. When Telia chose to withdraw from
the entire Eurasia area, it shows the explosive power of journalism. (Joachim
Dyfvermark, journalist at UG, 2016-11-14)
Thus, regarding the creation of the award-winning journalism that led to a corruption scandal for Telia, the producer of UG says that this particular investigation came at the right time, it fit with the societal agenda. Looking at the previous reporting on the topic, the TV team recognized that there may be something more there and they had the resources to conduct a thorough investigation, which led to the revelations of the alleged corruption. The dramaturgical aspects of the storytelling, for example, the illustrating of Telia’s guilt by showing how its leadership was reluctant to answer questions, are also cited as important in explaining how the media story ended up the way it did.

5.4 Stories from Telia

In focus in this section are the findings from the interviews with former and present (i.e. at the time of the interviews) organizational members at Telia. The corporation was, in comparison to H&M, more open to participating in the research project and it was therefore possible to conduct interviews with four employees working in the Telia organization. In addition, two former employees from before the corruption scandal and one sustainability consultant, hired by Telia after the scandal, also participated in the interviews. Thus, this section of the chapter focuses mainly on the results from these interviews complemented with communication material such as press releases, and responses given by Telia in the media reports when these added something of relevance to the interview stories.

Following the same structure as the previous sections, the three sub-sections here also have a chronological character. Thus, the first focuses on ‘internal complaints’ at Telia in the early days when SvD reported on the topic, i.e. from 2008 until the first part of 2012, as well as on the criticism expressed by former Telia employees that emerged in connection to the revelations made by UG in 2012. The focus here is on the interviews with former employees who were organizational members at Telia when the alleged corruption took place.

The second sub-section deals with the experience of the corruption scandal and the most intense media attention from Telia’s point of view. This section focuses on the interviewees that were a part of Telia’s organization in 2012, who were also still employees at Telia in 2017 when the interviews were conducted. The organization’s perspective on the media’s attention to the topic of the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan as well as individual organizational members’ experience of working for an organization in the media limelight on topics of irresponsibility are both brought up here.
The final sub-section, ‘the change story’, focuses on the changes that took place in Telia after the media scandal. This section is based primarily on interviews with four present organizational members, and one consultant who worked with Telia after the media scandal. This is complemented with information from two press conferences held around September 2017: Telia’s press conference when the organization reached an international settlement, and a press conference held by the public prosecutor when he presented the Swedish prosecution of three former organizational leaders from Telia.

5.4.1 Internal complaints

When interviewed in the early media reports (e.g. SvD, 2008-02-11), the CEO of Telia seems to take the corruption topic lightly, but one former Telia employee says that every one of the SvD articles by Andreas Cervenka published in the years 2008 to 2011 caused a crisis meeting at Telia. At the time, however, few people at Telia knew how to answer to the questions raised in the media. One previous employee explains how the information in the media reports came as a surprise to Telia’s communications department:

Each time he [Andreas Cervenka] wrote something there was a morning meeting where we discussed how we would communicate and how we would respond to his articles. There were also many times then that the communications department had no idea about the things that he was writing about. I especially remember the time he wrote about the offshore company; it came as a big surprise to the entire communications department. There was no one who knew about it. So, they got everyone started to handle the issue and find out: What is this? Is it true? What should we say? And so on. (Previous employee Telia 2, 2017-06-20)

The former communications director from Telia remembers also that the organization was questioned by its owners at that time. One particularly critical investor was the ethical fund management firm Banco Fonder, but other large investors also raised questions. The employees trying to find answers to these questions were unsuccessful, however. As the former communications director describes it:

We then tried to find answers in the business group about these issues. And, basically, we were told not to answer any questions, and not to root around, which was very strange. And I was going to quit anyway, so I went to the media and did one interview. I believe that Telia, the ‘public share’\(^{58}\), 37-percent owned by the state, was obliged to answer questions when one of the big TV

\(^{58}\) Approximate translation of the Swedish *folkaktie*. 
networks, or any of the large media organizations, wanted to ask questions. But I went against the CEO’s wishes. (Previous employee Telia 1, 2017-03-28)

On the TV news program Rapport, she comments on Banco Fonder selling its shares in Telia:

It’s regrettable that they’re selling the shares, at the same time, we’ve provided information to them about how we work in these countries, and we consider ourselves to have adequate control. (Rapport, 2008-07-02)

This previous employee explains that she was following the official narrative from Telia leadership, that they had done the necessary investigations before entering the country. Her regret over having made this statement in 2008 was one of the reasons that she later chose to participate in the 2012 investigative TV show. “I got a chance then to do the right thing,” she explains (Previous employee Telia 1, 2017-03-28). In the UG first episode on the topic, this former employee becomes a vital part of the story when she talks openly about her experience of working at Telia in 2007 when the alleged corruption took place.

The former and present employees from Telia interviewed provide several explanations as to why the transgression in Uzbekistan took place. For example, in one interview, an employee who worked with CSR at Telia at the time of the expansion to Uzbekistan explains how the organization functioned at that time. She says that there was a strict line between the Central Asian part of the organization and the rest, i.e. the Nordic and Baltic States, where one manager served as a gatekeeper. The rest of the organization had no insight into what was going on there, not even the internal audit function had complete insight (Previous employee Telia 2, 2017-06-20). Hence, a division of the organization occurred and the Central Asia markets, which included Uzbekistan and neighboring countries, operated separately from the rest of the organization. One Telia employee even defines the operations of the Central Asian part of the organization as business done in a “cowboy-like manner” (Communications employee Telia 2, 2017-03-07).

At the time of the alleged corruption, Telia had implemented an operating strategy to prevent corruption in its Central Asian markets, by rotating managing positions, for example, but one interviewee points out that Telia missed the strategic level by focusing only on the operational level (Previous employee Telia 1, 2017-03-28). Also, the individual leaders of the organization who did not carry out the proper investigations, or perhaps accepted the corruption, are discussed as a possible reason behind the transgression, according
to the previous Telia employees. Another explanation is the lack of engagement from the owners, particularly the Swedish state whose profit demands on Telia at that time were high.

5.4.2 Experiencing a scandal

In the middle of the corruption scandal Telia still tried to avoid answering questions from the media. Instead of providing information, Telia hired a law firm to investigate whether anything illegal had occurred and Telia wanted to wait for the results of that inquiry before commenting in the media. The plan was that the investigation would take six weeks, and the former press officer notes that a press conference was scheduled for December 2012. The decision to wait for the investigation before commenting is one reason for Telia’s silent approach towards the media, and towards the reporters from UG in particular, during the period that followed the revelations in the fall of 2012. However, the investigation took much longer than anticipated and the media got tired of waiting. Finally, when the investigation was complete, it did not reach a conclusive result regarding whether or not the transgression was illegal, though there was no question that it was unethical (Communications employee Telia 2, 2017-03-07).

It was therefore difficult for UG’s journalist to get answers from Telia during the most intense period of the scandal, and Telia adopted a defensive strategy, explaining that the allegations of corruption were incorrect. A press release from December 12, 2012, for example, states the following:

> Uppdrag Granskning’s report, which was broadcast on Swedish Television on December 12, contains a number of erroneous and misleading information about Telia Sonera’s business in Uzbekistan. [...] Telia Sonera’s management is firmly convinced that the continued legal process will show that Telia Sonera and its representatives are innocent of the allegations made. Nothing in the information that Uppdrag Granskning has published now changes this. (Press release from Telia, 2012-12-12)

The press officer at the time of the media scandal points out that he had difficulty doing his job as even he did not have enough information. For example, he says that there were matters revealed by the media that he had no knowledge of until he was questioned by the journalists. He recalls one particular experience, when he was on a ski lift in the French Alps and learned of an email that he didn’t know existed until it was published: “Then you sit there like a fool, that made the job hard” (Communications employee Telia 2, 2017-03-07).
At the time of the media scandal, in 2012-2013, this press officer, who was responsible for handling media requests, experienced a period of mental stress during which he constantly had to be prepared for questions from journalists. As he puts it:

I was on standby 24 hours a day; they could call at any time and expect answers, almost before they called even. That was what was hard; it’s not like you’re sitting talking with someone on the phone all the time, but you have to be prepared and expect that at any time someone might call. When someone calls, you’d rather not be surprised by their questions. There were many different, smaller angles, and some journalists picked their own path through this story. Thus, there was quite a variety of enquiries. (Communications employee Telia 2, 2017-03-07)

Another interviewee who worked at Telia for a long time before the scandal, and who still works there today, describes the period of the media scandals as a tough period for him personally as well. This employee felt that he had a responsibility to answer questions about the affair in his spare time as well. He says that he felt obligated due to his position as a member of Telia’s communications group, and that he “knew how the company was struggling with these issues and how complex they are, that it’s not as black or white as the media sometimes tells it” (Sustainability employee Telia 2, 2017-03-07).

As shown, experiencing a media scandal is demanding for the employees of the organization in the media limelight. The media reporting also seemed unfair since some journalists continued to take a particular interest in Telia for a long time after the initial reports, sometimes with no basis for their stories. One Telia communications employee exemplifies this unfairness citing his experience of an issue where it was of greater interest to scrutinize Telia than its competitor Tele2. He relates this to the already established narrative about Telia as being irresponsible:

I mean, Tele2 also has operations in Kazakhstan and so on, but it is... I know that when DN did some investigations there, because they were looking into what could become more problems for Telia in these countries. Then they looked at a few businesses in Kazakhstan. We had done business there with someone named Aigul Nurieva, but then I point out, just as background, that: Yes, you think it’s problematic that we bought an asset from Aigul Nurieva. I mean this is Tele2’s partner. So, they’re partners with this person, but it’s not an issue; instead, the story was about us, because we are Telia. (Communications employee Telia 2, 2017-03-07)

To put this in perspective, however, according to the same Telia employee, being the most well-known corporation in the industry also has its advantages:
In some ways, it can be positive too, because we get a lot of questions when things are good too; we get to represent the industry in a way. So there’s both ups and downs, we’re more interesting than all the other telecom companies. (Communications employee Telia 2, 2017-03-07)

To summarize, for Telia as an organization it was difficult to coordinate the external communication and media requests during the first period of the scandal. The organization started by claiming that it had acted ethically in Uzbekistan and relied heavily on the external investigation it had commissioned, but waiting for this investigation made the journalistic media feel unsatisfied. It was also a difficult time for individual employees, especially for the press officer who was often unprepared for the questions raised by the media. It is also concluded that being the main industry example, as Telia is in a Swedish context, can have both advantages and disadvantages. Thus, being the center of attention means more scrutiny when something negative happens, but also more positive attention in connection with positive events.

5.4.3 The change story

After the corruption scandal, Telia made and underwent several organizational changes, such as the resignation of corporate leaders and promising to leave the Eurasia region, as well as developing an ethics and compliance program. The scandal consequently served as an awakening, whereby it became apparent that having solid anti-corruption work on paper was not enough for an organization to act ethically. It was also important to get a positive message out into the media, as the consultant who worked with Telia after the scandal explains:

Yes, absolutely, Telia wanted to come out with a positive message in the media. At the same time, if we talk about sustainability strategy, you can say that on the one hand you have to do your homework and act responsibly and credibly in all parts of the business, which is one side of things. The other side is positive value creation and: how can we do more and become an actor that drives positive change? These two complementary perspectives, they must coexist, you can’t do just one. Above all, you can’t start talking about positive change before you’ve done your homework. And in the Telia case, the dilemma was just that, the impact of the corruption scandal was so great that the media interest that followed was also very much linked to those issues. So naturally even though we began to reposition the media image, it was also important, from a Telia perspective, that we can’t just talk about the new things because then we have no credibility; we really have included both aspects. Especially because it was situation where the ownership [in Uzbekistan] remained (Sustainability consultant, 2017-03-30).
The consultant describes Telia, after the media scandal, as a dream assignment since the management was so open to working on sustainability, compared to other corporations where it could be a struggle to get the management to prioritize these topics.

Normally what one experiences when working as a consultant, or as a sustainability manager, is that, very often, you have to push the company, can’t we do more? But here it was the other way around. We made suggestions and the board said: This looks great, but can’t we do even more, even faster? (Sustainability consultant, 2017-03-30)

Telia also changed the name of the company group from Telia Sonera to Telia Company. Within the organization, the name change was an indication of a change in Telia’s organizational culture. The name was meant to symbolize that the organization had now changed its operations into a more united organization. As one interviewed employee explains it:

We now call ourselves Telia Company; not ‘Company’ as in a business firm but rather as in a bunch of people who have something in common. (Communications employee 1, Telia, 2017-02-07)

It should also be mentioned, however, that decreased Finnish ownership in the company was also a reason for removing Sonera from the name, a point emphasized by the interviewees at Telia, who do not want to assign too much significance to the media reporting as the reason behind the change.

Among the interviewees that still work at Telia today, there seems to be a consensus that, even though they were difficult to handle at the time of the scandal, the journalistic investigations have led to many positive changes in the organization. When asked whether he thinks that Telia is able to reach out, in the years of negative reports, to the media with positive attention as well, one former long-time Telia employee answers: “I don’t think that’s really the role of media; the media should put pressure on and criticize” (Sustainability employee Telia 2, 2017-03-07).

The feeling of Telia’s organizational members was, however, that Telia had been cast as the villain in the media stories, and that this was a role that stuck even though the journalist investigations that followed the initial revelations lacked substance. Despite having taken many measures to rid the organization of the problems that led to the transgression, the organizational members feel they are still being punished in the media. This is reflected, for example, in the number of journalistic investigations of Telia in the years after the corrup-
tion scandal. One present employee explains that the long-term goal is to re-
build Telia’s corporate reputation and to not be seen as a scandal firm, but it
is difficult:

There is, however, a media logic and dramaturgy around the company, where
we play a particular role, and there is an interest in keeping the problem around
the company alive. (Communications employee Telia 1, 2017-02-07)

A sustainability consultant who worked with Telia after the scandal also notes
that it was difficult for Telia to focus on making positive changes due to the
continued media attention on the same issues:

Most of these things [in the media] were, of course, things that very clearly
continued to shifted the focus back to these issues that Telia wanted, not to
abandon, but that they wanted to say: Okay, we know this is important and
we’re implementing the most ambitious corruption program in Swedish indus-
try. Can you, please, let us do our job, and at the same time we can talk about
how we’re trying to build an even better company. But when these things came,
one after another, it always came back to the defensive position, even though it
didn’t include much new information. […] There was an established drama-
turgy and, if one is to be critical, one can say that the journalists aren’t always
that inventive. It’s easy to roll along in the old ruts. (Sustainability consultant,
2017-03-30)

As the TV show UG continued to report on Telia and various issues in its
businesses abroad, how Telia treated the reporters changed. Its initial respons-
se to the UG reporting on corruption in 2012 was to say nothing at all, but that
has changed over the years. One employee working with communications at
Telia Company today explains the company’s current approach to the media:

We have had two recent investigations by UG […] In both cases, we have had
an open telephone line to the reporters and we have spent hours on the phone,
delivered all the information requested, as far as we have been able to do. (Com-
munications employee Telia 1, 2017-02-07).

Thus, an increased openness towards the media as well as other stakeholders
was also part of the organizational changes that Telia made after the scandal.
Also, as a part of taking this retroactive responsibility for what happened,
Board Chair Marie Ehrling puts forward the organizational learning process
that has taken place since the media scandal at a press conference in Septem-
ber 2017:

We who represent Telia Company’s board and management today, we have
decided to take responsibility for these historical errors. /…/ It is important for
me to say that in these years that this process has been going on, we have grad-
ually learned more and more about what actually happened, and we can unfortu-
ately conclude that it was not just a matter of unethical dealings but we, the
company, also violated laws and regulations in connection with the establish-
ment in Uzbekistan. /.../ In the dialogue that has been conducted during this
period, it is also important to understand that we have received a great deal of
recognition for the work that has been done in the company from 2013 onwards.
(Board Chair of Telia Company, Marie Ehrling, Press conference, 2017-09-22)

This press conference was held on September 22 in 2017, the same day Telia
announced that a global settlement has been reached with the U.S. Department
of Justice (DOJ), Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and the Dutch
Public Prosecution Service (Openbaar Ministerie, OM) regarding its transac-
tions in Uzbekistan. A financial penalty of USD 965 million was agreed upon,
and this manifests the end of the global investigations into the corruption af-
fair.59

Hence, due to the criminal investigations, one important part in this final stage
of the change story is the public prosecutor in Sweden. At another press con-
ference held on September 22, 2017, Swedish public prosecutor Gunnar
Stetler announces that three former employees at Telia will be prosecuted for
bribery in connection with Telia’s establishment of business operations in Uz-
bekistan, one of the accused being the former CEO, Lars Nyberg. The public
prosecutor’s understanding is that, even though Nyberg started at Telia after
the business arrangement was completed, he had received enough information
via media reports to know that something was wrong. Talking about the year
2008, the public prosecutor states:

During January, February, March; your colleagues, including Svenska
Dagbladet, begin to act and question how this could happen. They ask Tero
Kivisaari and [Lars] Nyberg about these things, and question how they entered
without bribing, and who is actually behind this company Takilant? And there
are no proper answers. A fund called Banco Fonder, which was an ethical fund,
asks concrete questions and failure to receive proper answers results in them
selling their holdings of Telia shares. (Press conference, live broadcast,
Aftonbladet, 2017-09-22)

Hence, the public prosecutor emphasizes two actors that Telia’s CEO should
have taken into account already in 2008 to prevent further corrupt dealings in
Uzbekistan – daily newspaper SvD and ethical fund manager Banco Fonder.
The prosecutor’s statement is illustrative of how important the investigative
role of journalists has been in revealing misconduct in this media story of cor-
porate irresponsibility. At the same press conference, however, the public

global-settlement-with-the-authorities-regarding-uzbekistan-investigation/ (2020-04-11)
prosecutor also praises the transparency that Telia has shown during his investigations. As he puts it: “Our opinion is that in terms of culture and other matters, Telia is now a completely different company. Telia has been there when it comes to obtaining relevant information and cooperation, by providing information to the public prosecutor in a manner that is commendable” (Press conference, live broadcast, Aftonbladet, 2017-09-22).

5.5 Epilogue

This chapter has presented the media story about Telia and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan from 2008 until 2018. Shortly after the end of the time period studied, the Swedish verdict fell against the prosecuted leaders of Telia. This took place on February 15, 2019, six and a half years after the criminal investigation started. This event once again put focus on the irresponsibility of Telia in the news media and on February 15 and 16, 2019, the newspapers DI, DN, Expressen and SvD published at least 12 articles on the topic. In these articles, the plot of the Uzbekistan affair is summarized and various experts make predictions about on the outcome (e.g. SvD, 2019-02-15).

On February 16, it is reported that all three of Telia’s former leaders being charged have been found not guilty. It is also commented, however, that they would likely have been found guilty if they had been prosecuted according to a new law that came into effect in 2012 (DI, 2019-02-16). But this event may not be the end of the story, as the prosecutor may appeal (SvD, 2019-03-22). In the fall of 2019, it is furthermore announced that Telia is getting new leaders, both the CEO and the board chair who joined Telia after the scandal, are to be replaced. Thus, a new era has begun for Telia, in which issues other than the Uzbekistan affair are the focus of attention. The possible bribery is, however, still mentioned in passing (SvD, 2019-10-26).

According to Kantar Sifo’s reputation index for organizations in Sweden based on surveys of the general public, Telia’s reputation fell a little between 2012 and 2013, but was up again in 2014 and has since remained almost the same. Telia does not rank among the corporations with the best reputation, but its competitors in the same industry, i.e. Tele2, Telenor and 3, all have

lower rankings. In another survey of the most sustainable brands in Sweden, Sustainable Brand Index, Telia was also named most sustainable brand in the telecommunications industry every year from 2011 to 2019. Thus, Telia’s image among the public seems to be fine despite the corruption scandal.

5.5.1 A scandal

The Uzbekistan affair is one of the largest corruption scandals ever in Sweden, and thus this media narrative takes the form of one big scandal with the main focus on one issue with a few side stories. One reason for this may be that Telia is a unique corporation that attracts high public interest. Besides being a well-known brand for consumers in Sweden, many private individuals also have shares in the company from when it was first listed on the stock exchange. Also, the Swedish state is a key owner of Telia, giving all Swedish citizens an interest in the corporation and journalists the possibility to involve politicians in the story, which can make it even more newsworthy.

These aspects were often brought up in the interviews in discussions about why the media story became so big, rather than the seriousness of the supposed corruption case. As one former employee at Telia points out:

There are so many ingredients. A state-owned company. Listed but still largely state-owned, the ‘public share’ as we talked about before, and then there was this CEO, who had lived in the US and come back, and you also have these strange countries. It has a lot to do with the Swedish state, as soon as you can involve the state you can go to a minister, or the ministry, there are so many aspects that are added. It’s clear that TV has magical dramaturgical features, but there were also facts and evidence. They had done incredibly thorough research, and that made it interesting for all of the other media to follow up on it. It became such a big deal; if it’s something smaller some media might let it go, but no one could let this go. (Previous employee Telia 1, 2017-03-28)

An investor who was early to criticize Telia appears to agree with this previous Telia employee, and also points to similar ingredients in the story that, together, made interest in the story exceptionally great:

It has all the components. Everyone knows it. If it had been some weird unfamiliar brand it would have been different, but everyone has a relationship with the ‘public share’, the state as part-owner. Telia has lots of customers. Telia has lots of corporate customers, Telia is in everyone’s home, at least in Sweden. They own the infrastructure. So, you have all the ingredients. And they have a

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63 https://www.mynewsdesk.com/se/sbinsight (2020-04-11)
very, very cocky CEO. Don’t forget that. An extremely cocky CEO. (Sasja Beslik, investor representative, 2017-02-28)

Other thoughts on why the story of Telia became such a huge scandal also include that the state-ownership is something that makes Telia’s responsibility extra interesting. As one SvD journalist put it:

In most companies, if as a shareholder you don’t like the ethics and morals, then you can sell your shares. But as a Swedish citizen, you can’t sell your holdings in Telia because everyone is a shareholder. So, then you actually have another type of responsibility. The state should be the one who sets the rules of the game for the entire business community and then it’s clear that it matters how you act. So that was absolutely why it was so explosive. Had it been another company, it would still have been interesting, of course, but not at all the same explosiveness. (Andreas Cervenka, journalist at SvD, 2017-03-21).

One employee working with communications at Telia identifies the dynamic of politics, media and business as being the key to why the scandal became so big:

It’s the fact that we’re the old Televerket and that we have state ownership, and that also brings another dimension to the story. It doesn’t stop here; it can be placed on the politicians’ desk. And then you get this dynamic that arises when there’s politics, media and businesses, and it starts to spin and then you get this feeding frenzy. It feels like those are the kind of stories that get really big. That’s when it happens, when it’s got politics in it too. (Communications employee Telia 2, 2017-03-07)

Thus, Telia is seen by interviewees of this study as a unique corporation in the sense that there is more media interest in Telia than in other organizations due to the company’s state ownership and particular history. The connection to political responsibility, especially, was a factor in why the Telia story attracted this exceptional media attention, and was highlighted among the interviewees. Some also point to the CEO as a distinctive person and the country Uzbekistan as unfamiliar from a Swedish perspective. That the misconduct was revealed by UG, which had the resources to conduct a thorough investigation as well as the ability to dramatize the story when it was broadcast on TV, is also brought up as a component that increased the attention to the topic. In the end, it could be said that the elements and timing of the story, the resources behind it, and the main storytellers combined contributed to making the Uzbekistan affair one of the largest scandals ever in Sweden.

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64 Approximate translation of the Swedish mediedrev.
6. Constructing narratives of corporate irresponsibility

In this chapter, the media stories about H&M and Telia and the related media stories of irresponsibility are analyzed in order to theorize by focusing on communication in its narrative form. The media stories about Telia and H&M presented in the previous two empirical chapters are contrasted with each other there. The analysis shows that two ideal types of how corporate irresponsibility is constructed in narratives, formed in the media, can be distinguished. The first is the chronic irresponsibility narrative, exemplified in the media story about H&M, and the second is the acute irresponsibility narrative, exemplified by Telia.

The first sections of the chapter discuss the two types of irresponsibility narratives from four different points of view, using the same three perspectives as in the empirical chapters (chapters 4 and 5), i.e. the print media stories, the journalists and sources behind these stories, and the perspective of the corporation in the media limelight. The roles of journalists and critical stakeholders are now discussed separately. The chapter concludes with a final section that summarizes and contrasts the two types of irresponsibility narratives.

6.1 Chronic irresponsibility

The media story of H&M and the working conditions in garment factories is an example of a chronic irresponsibility narrative. In this type of narrative, the problem is related to the corporation’s business model, with recurring incidents that portray an image of irresponsibility. The chronic, recurring issues are consequently inherent to the story and linked to ‘business as usual’ rather than a one-off transgression that can be resolved or amended without challenging the core of the corporation. Thus, the media narrative of chronic irresponsibility is repeatedly brought up in the media as it remains unsolved. As corporations make improvements in the problematic area, and communicate about their own initiatives, however, the media narrative is confronted by nar-
ratives of corporate responsibility as well. The narratives of chronic irresponsibility are thus characterized by recurrent conflicts and struggles between narratives.

In the case of H&M, the poor working conditions in garment factories are the focus of the media attention. As issues related to the supply chain are often complex, they can be difficult to explain, and various actors may have responsibility for different matters along the chain. It is thus not evident that the solution to the problem simply lies with the corporation at the center of the media attention. In order to tell tangible stories in the news media, the complexities of the issue are therefore reduced, commonly by focusing on specific aspects. In some ways, the focus on garment factory working conditions is also a reduction of a bigger problem related to the apparel industry, where other aspects such as over-consumption, lack of recycling, and environmental consequences of the production, are also consequences of the business model.

As this study addresses complex topics, judgments of right and wrong can be difficult to make. Thus, what the meaning of responsibility is, with respect to the issues in focus, is not always clear. It is not evident who is actually able to take responsibility and improve the working conditions in a supply chain as complex as H&M’s. For H&M, the responsibility for the working conditions in garment factories can be found at several levels, for example, it can lie in the process of globalization based on institutionalized and political decisions at a global level, in which case the responsibility is in hands of the garment industry as a whole, where many actors use the same production practices. As one of the industry’s leaders, however, H&M could be seen as having a particular responsibility to drive development in the industry. Responsibility can also lie with the corporate management, which can be held responsible, in the media often portrayed as an individual corporate leader.

Although the issue of poor working conditions in garment factories is seen as a chronic problem, the solution for which cannot be complete without changing the business model of large retailers such as H&M, several improvements have taken place, in H&M as well as in the industry, over the years. For example, the media reporting in the 1990s started with revelations of child labor, in 1997, where a girl as young as 9 years old was working for a sub-contractor to an H&M supplier. During that time period, H&M followed in the footsteps of other global retailers, such as Levi Strauss & Co and Nike, and developed its first code of conduct, thus formalizing the responsibilities of- and demands on suppliers to improve the working conditions. H&M has, along with other global retailers, also taken other initiatives over the years to improve the working conditions in garment factories, such as setting goals to provide fair living wages, in 2013, and signing a global framework agreement to increase the right of workers to organize in trade unions in 2015.
6.1.1 The form of the media story

What is defined here as ‘chronic irresponsibility’ is caused by a structural problem generated by the business operations of the corporation. Thus, the form of the media storytelling is shaped by this underlying irresponsibility and is likely repetitive, as in the story about H&M, because the problem is not easily solved. Also, as shown in the longitudinal study of media stories about H&M, between 1995 and 2017, the media events need not contain new revelations in which H&M actively participates. In the chronic irresponsibility narrative about H&M, media stories can arise instead from various sources, such as reports of protests and accidents in garment factories or NGO reports on working conditions for retailers in the garment industry. Some of these stories do not even involve H&M’s business operations.

As with all societal issues, stories of corporate irresponsibility need to fit into the societal context in order to be taken up on the media agenda. Narratives of chronic irresponsibility can thus be spurred by a revelation of corporate misconduct or other newsworthy event, in the form of a scandal. The first event in the media story about H&M started in 1997 with the TV documentary *Latest fashion – at what price?*, which contained revelations of the use of child labor in H&M’s garment production. This serious allegation was made in a societal context where the public debate was focused on globalization and the problems related to the outsourcing of production to developing countries. This first event therefore shares many similarities with how an acute irresponsibility narrative can begin, which is discussed in more detail in the next section.

When it comes to journalistic storytelling, it is apparent that personalization is used a key device in telling stories about issues related to the working conditions in garment factories in the media story about H&M. As noted earlier, media researchers define personalization in journalism as a focus on the individual experiences of human actors rather than the structural level in a story (Allan, 2004). In the chapter about H&M, the use of life stories from textile workers as well as the focus on the wealth of the leaders and majority owners of H&M – the Persson family, were shown to be clear examples of personalization and simplification used to tell a media story about chronic irresponsibility. Thus, the media coverage of H&M rarely refers to the business model as the problem, but rather focuses on illustrative examples of global injustice.

One way to make the story less abstract, and give it a personal touch, is to put individual textile workers in the garment factories in focus by including names, ages, and images. This field-reporting style of journalism was particularly observable in connection with the above-mentioned 1997 TV documentary in which 9-year-old JoAnn became the face of child labor in the news
media reports that followed the broadcast. Similar reports also appeared repeatedly in the years that followed as journalists travelled to the producer countries and reported on their visits to garment factories, focusing on one or more individual textile workers as representatives of everyday life at the garment factories. Thus, rather than bringing forward possible structural improvements that involve the entire fashion industry, the media stories center around individual testimonies of the workers.

The journalistic storytelling furthermore builds on a focus on emotional aspects. In the pioneering TV documentary *Latest fashion – at what price?*, for example, the dramatization is built around contrasts, which includes cutting rapidly back and forth between H&M’s lavish 50th anniversary festivities and textile workers toiling away in the garment factories. Thus, the contrasting life stories serve as illustrations of injustice and conflict. Due to its repetitive form, the storytelling also becomes conflict-oriented, with two sides of an issue held up against each other. Even though corporations often take a defensive stance to stories about irresponsibility, at other times they can be proactive, telling their own stories about the responsibility they are taking. In the news media, occasions where corporations are given space in the media to advocate for their role as responsible social actors are particularly frequent in connection with the release of financial reports or in personal profiles of corporate leaders.

Being a leader in the industry in Sweden, as well as one of the largest apparel retailers in the world, H&M is often used to represent an example of the industry. H&M is therefore a high-profile corporation that journalists go to with stories that concern the industry, also when it comes to the topic of working conditions in garment factories. In other words, H&M often symbolizes the apparel industry in the media stories. For H&M, being the stand-in for an industry with built-in problems that lead to recurring accusations of irresponsibility has meant that it has had to answer critical questions even when the topic concerns other organizations. This is illustrated over the years in the media narrative about H&M in connection to fires, protests, and, most notably, in connection with the collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 2013, where H&M was asked to respond to media questions about the accident even though H&M had no production in the Rana Plaza factory.

Figure 5 (below) illustrates how an issue that concerns an entire corporation, and presumably the majority of corporations in the same industry, is narrowed down into a delimited and tangible story in the journalistic media. The issue consequently surrounds the whole operation, in a structural manner, and part of it becomes the story. Thus, the media deconstruct the issue into smaller stories, which in general do not deal with the structural elements. Rather, the
stories told by journalists often follow an already established framing of corporate irresponsibility with one corporation repeatedly in the center of the story. The figure consequently shows that the underlying issue concerns the whole corporation, as well as some of its surroundings, but the stories in the media do not reflect the whole picture as the story only tells us bits and pieces of the problem.

![Figure 5: The form of the chronic media story, exemplified by H&M.](image)

When summarizing the form of the media storytelling in stories about chronic irresponsibility, it becomes apparent how difficult it can be to fit a structural problem into a compelling story. The focus on personalization, simplification, conflicts, and emotional aspects, is thus a consequence of making the stories comprehensible. When emphasizing that corporate irresponsibility is constituted in communication (cf. Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013; Cooren, 2018), the way stories are told has consequences for what becomes the issue. Thus, the irresponsibility issue is not defined as being of a structural nature, but rather as individual experiences and separate incidents.

### 6.1.2 The role of journalists’ investigations

When taking the second perspective, that of journalists, in explaining why corporate irresponsibility ended up in the media in the first place, the study suggests that timing and relevance are of particular importance. For example, when the first reports about H&M began in the TV documentary *Latest fashion – at what price?* from 1997, the topic of globalization was high on the societal agenda in Sweden as well as internationally. At this point in time, other global retailers, such as Nike, were being scrutinized by the media, and by the Sweatshop movement, on the topics of working conditions and child labor in their production factories. Scrutinizing H&M thus became a way of illustrating the global inequality resulting from the increased outsourcing of
garment production to low-cost manufacturing countries far from the consumer markets.

As explained in the previous section, the stories about a broader problem of corporate irresponsibility are personified by focusing on the experiences of individuals affected by the corporate activities and on the contrast between poor workers and rich owners. Another type of personalization of the media stories is when the journalists focus on their own opinions, emotions, and/or experiences when telling the stories. This is common in the media story about H&M and also becomes a way of reducing complexity. Journalists who travel to the manufacturing countries in Asia, such as Bangladesh and Cambodia, to visit the garment factories and investigate the working conditions of the textile workers for themselves, for example, are a common feature in the stories about H&M. In these stories, the eyewitness experiences of the journalists become an important storytelling device, complemented also by columns in which journalists discuss their own emotions and opinions on the topic.

Aspects of inconsistency and hypocrisy, i.e. exposing the corporation for not walking the talk, are also frequent in the stories told by journalists. Revelations of corporations with double standards in the media stories, for example, are illustrated by comparing the communicated responsibility initiatives of H&M with the working conditions actually observed by the journalists who visit the garment factories. As explained in interviews with journalists, a corporation like H&M, which has a high profile in matters of sustainability, makes an interesting subject to scrutinize and expose. The ‘self-promoters paradox’ (Jones & Pittman, 1982) or ‘Catch 22 of CSR communication’ (Morsing et al., 2008) discussed in previous studies thus have relevance in the construction of a chronic irresponsibility narrative.

Also, the propinquity of an issue plays a part in the journalistic attention paid to the issue and a specific corporation. This means that a Swedish corporation like H&M draws increased media attention in Sweden. Issues related to fashion also add another aspect of propinquity in that most consumers have a relation to clothing — not only as something that we need for its functional value, but because we also use clothes to express our identity, which makes such issues more personal. Hence, issues related to the clothes that we wear on our body have emotional aspects.

Another aspect that catches our attention is the depiction of suffering textile workers often illustrated in the media, an issue that has increased emotional value compared to other types of responsibility topics, like environmental issues, that do not directly concern living creatures such as humans or animals. Seeing other people can therefore reinforce the message.
The role of journalists’ investigations in the chronic irresponsibility narrative is related to the choice of which stories to tell. Aspects such as timing and the ability to construct a compelling story that bring out emotions and/or reveal hypocrisy are consequently keys to the story reaching the media agenda. When they first appeared, revelations of negligence mattered. For global retailers like H&M, this meant exposure of child labor and the use of ‘sweatshops’ with poor working conditions. As the story continues, the new revelations from journalistic investigations become less significant and the story is driven forward as a continuation of a story already framed towards irresponsibility.

6.1.3 The role of critical stakeholders

The role of NGOs can be important for the chronic irresponsibility narrative as journalists lack the resources to conduct their own investigations on a regular basis. NGOs can therefore also function as whistleblowers. As the issue is on the media agenda and playing on repeat, NGO reports and campaigns are ways of raising interest in the issue. However, not all societal voices are heard in the media, and the names of individuals and organizations that criticize the corporations for being irresponsible are often familiar and recurring. For example, ethical fund investment expert Sasja Beslik appears in both of the media stories in the present study and is a well-known person who is actively engaged in sustainability-related issues and attracts media attention, playing the role of the ‘truth-teller’.

Having an industry example like H&M to refer to has both advantages and disadvantages for NGOs as they struggle add their message to the chronic irresponsibility media narrative. The NGOs are eager to have an impact on the underlying issues and the focus on one corporation as the industry example can be useful in simplifying their message, as well as making their stories more compelling for the journalistic media. In the media story about H&M the organization Fair Action, for example, plays a role in constructing the story by, among other things, raising awareness for the concept of living wages in 2012. Consequently, the role of NGOs in a chronic irresponsibility narrative can be to define what responsibility corporations should have for social issues, by promoting concepts and definitions in line with their agenda, for example.

For Fair Action, having H&M as an example and taking a leading role in an already established media narrative is advantageous since many other corporations take inspiration from H&M. Due to H&M’s prominent role as the industry leader in Sweden, the impact extends beyond the boundaries of a single corporation. Focusing on H&M can also have disadvantages, however, as the
underlying problem is an industry-wide structural problem, and when the discussion circles only around H&M, other corporations, which are also responsible, pass under the radar.

The participation of NGOs in the media stories also adds another perspective to the topic of the irresponsibility narrative and thus creates more room for discussion and debate among those concerned about the issue. However, as journalists are the finals editors of the media stories, having detoured through journalistic media, the likelihood of the message that NGOs want to spread coming out exactly as they would like it to is limited. That is, in creating room for actual dialogue, discussion, and debate (Cooren, 2018), there are probably more suitable places for NGOs and corporations to meet and discuss these issues, e.g. conferences with participants from different groups.

6.1.4 The role of corporations
As the chronic irresponsibility media narrative is an ongoing struggle between stories about irresponsibility and stories about responsibility, the role of the corporation can be described as both active and reactive. Because the irresponsibility narratives are related to the business model, this makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the corporation to fundamentally fix the problem, though steps of progress can be seen. The possibility that remains for corporations in the middle of such a media narrative is to change the narrative by providing their own stories and thereby sidestepping the focus on the problematic issue. Thus, as explained by the interviewees working at H&M, the corporation prefers to communicate on other topics related to corporate responsibility and sustainability rather than the working conditions in garment factories.

For H&M, the dominant media narrative of irresponsibility was established almost from the beginning of the media reporting in 1997, when the first media event of irresponsibility took H&M by surprise. As shown earlier, a previous employee of H&M likens the media attention to a well-planned “attack” in a war (Previous employee H&M 4, 2017-05-11). From the perspective of the corporations, the media reporting in the first revelations of irresponsibility is described as ‘unfair’, although in retrospect the media attention also brought positive results due to its power to speed things up. For example, H&M accelerated development of a code of conduct for its suppliers in 1997, which then became a norm for most corporations in the industry.

During the time period studied, H&M has been reluctant to talk to the media and has also received criticism from journalists for its lack of availability. One interviewee who worked for H&M when the media story began also stresses
how he felt that the journalists had the upper hand in framing the story (Previous employee H&M 4, 2017-05-11). This interviewee also points out the difficulty of explaining the complexity of the issue of working conditions in garment factories in the meeting with journalists as the issue is often misrepresented in the media reporting. When H&M chooses not to participate in the construction of the media stories, by not participating in interviews, for example, it is the stories told by others that define the issue in the media, with no contribution of stories from H&M.

The media material studied, however, suggests that H&M was able to reverse the story from the narrative that H&M was one of the worst examples of irresponsibility, towards a presentation of the corporation as a role model and good example, given the conditions in the industry. Thus, H&M, over the years, has learned how to engage with the issue of corporate responsibility. This engagement is manifested, among other ways, in H&M’s own communication about its positive initiatives, which often take place in the form of collaboration with NGOs. Thus, H&M is able to avoid the ‘negative filter’ of the journalistic media and tells its own story. The media attention towards the issue has also decreased in the later years of the time period studied, which indicates that this strategy has been rather successful.

This shows that a corporation in the middle of repeated media attention towards a chronic industry problem can learn to engage with the media on its own terms and in doing so change the narrative. Figure 6 (below) relates to Figure 5 (page 137), and shows how a corporation in the middle of a chronic irresponsibility narrative can handle the media story by telling its own stories, illustrated by the circles with dotted lines. As the issue surrounds the corporation, it can generate a number of stories and counter-stories. Thus, by telling its own stories, preferably about responsibility initiatives taken, the media story becomes one story of many. The media story about H&M shows that the responsibility stories told by the corporations can have the potential to reach the journalistic media and thus contribute to a less one-sided media narrative.
One way for corporations to tell their own stories in the chronic irresponsibility narrative is to communicate in the form of ‘aspirational talk’ (Christensen et al., 2013), where aspirations about taking responsibility in the future are the focus of the message. It has been argued that, since talk about responsibility has the potential to change action towards responsibility, aspirational talk can (and should) be viewed as performative (ibid.). The lack of consistency between the walk and the talk, however, is often described in journalistic media as hypocrisy.

As the problem underlying chronic irresponsibility narratives cannot be completely resolved, the communication provided by corporations in this narrative will likely be of an aspirational nature. This makes it especially challenging for corporations to participate in the communication about corporate irresponsibility that takes place in the media. Nevertheless, large corporations, like H&M, which often are the ones being scrutinized by the media also have plenty of resources to present their side of story too.

6.1.5 Summary
The chronic irresponsibility narrative is defined as a contest between stories provided by journalists and corporations, as well as other storytellers, including NGOs. Due to the duration of the underlying problem that forms the basis of the irresponsibility narrative, after its initial stage, the narrative of chronic irresponsibility lacks the element of surprise. Instead, the negative message is reinforced with recurrent disclosures in the media. In this type of narrative, the underlying problem is likely an industry problem, where corporations that belong to an industry that concerns large number of consumers, or society in general, consequently figure more frequently in the narrative.
One key storytelling device in the media stories of chronic irresponsibility is personalization, which means that a larger issue is simplified to fit the format of media stories. Thus, through compelling storytelling with a focus on emotional aspects, simplified illustrations and personalized stories, a chronic problem that is less newsworthy can become relevant in the media. Media stories about such problems consequently have a greater chance of reaching the media agenda when highly visible organizations that attract media interest in themselves or well-known people, i.e. celebrities, are involved or take an interest in the topic. For a corporation in focus in a chronic irresponsibility narrative, one way to avoid negative attention is to engage with the media by providing other stories, about its responsibility initiatives, for example, and thus circumvent the topic at the center of the chronic irresponsibility narrative.

6.2 Acute irresponsibility

The media story about Telia and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan is defined here as an example of acute irresponsibility. In the acute irresponsibility narrative, the acts of irresponsibility are revealed in the form of a scandal concerning irresponsibility connected to a delimited part of the corporation’s business operations. Thus, the wrongdoing is not related to the core business operations of the corporation. The acute irresponsibility thus follows the definition of corporate irresponsibility given by Mena, Rintamäki, Fleming and Spicer (2016), which stresses the temporality of the organizational action that causes harm to stakeholders.

Acute irresponsibility narratives, in the form of scandals, are not that uncommon, but appear every now and then in the media. For the corporation in focus, however, the situation comes as a surprise and is something out of the ordinary that calls for immediate attention. Although the problem that draws the media’s attention to corporate irresponsibility can concern various topics, a media scandal is likely to follow the format of a beginning, where risks and revelations are made, a middle, where the media attention peaks, and an ending, where the topic falls out of attention.

In the acute irresponsibility narrative, all parties, including the corporation in the media limelight, are likely to reach an agreement whereby the wrongdoing is defined as irresponsibility, though, initially, there is probably disagreement regarding exactly how the irresponsibility should be defined, who should take the blame, what the appropriate punishment should be, and similar matters. Once the irresponsibility has been revealed and some kind of action has been taken on the issue, the story generally fades out of attention after someone has faced the criticism and been penalized. The acute irresponsibility narrative can
then be revived, for example, in connection with a criminal investigation, or as an illustrative example when other organizations experience similar situations. In these cases, it takes the form of historical misconduct from which the organization in focus may be able to detach itself to some degree.

As with issues that concern chronic irresponsibility, it can be difficult to blame a particular actor for the acute irresponsibility, even though the misconduct may be easier to define. In the media story about Telia, however, blame was assigned to various organizational leaders who should have taken responsibility, to the board of directors for neglecting the risks, and to politicians representing the Swedish state for not paying close enough attention. Acute irresponsibility narratives often single out individual persons to blame. Regardless of how the reasons behind the alleged corruption are framed, the media as well as Telia seem to agree that what happened in Uzbekistan was an out-of-the-ordinary, flare-up event that needed to be dealt with, which is also what happened.

6.2.1 The form of the media story

The acute irresponsibility media narrative can take the form of a scandal, with a beginning, a peak in the middle, and an ending. One particularly notable aspect in the media story about Telia and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan is the difference in impact between the reports about a vaguely defined problem concerning the risk of corruption that appeared in SvD from 2008 until early 2012, and the revelations aired on the investigative TV show UG in September 2012. Thus, for an issue to become a media narrative of acute irresponsibility, the wrongdoing has to be substantiated and fit into a dramatized narrative.

The specific storytelling features of investigative TV journalism, which combines information and entertainment with a focus on dramatization (Ekström, 2000), increased the visibility of the acute irresponsibility narrative. The importance of TV broadcasts was especially evident in the media story about Telia and the Uzbekistan Affair, which became a huge scandal when the revelations of the alleged corruption were presented, with evidence, in an investigative TV show. This can be compared to the scarce newspaper reports previously published, without a thorough investigation into the topic, which led to very little attention.

Personalization of the topic is also evident in the acute irresponsibility narratives. In the story about Telia, the storytelling device of personalization is seen when a number of high-profile players become the center of media attention. For example, Lars Nyberg, the CEO at the time, is commonly featured in the
images that illustrate the news media articles and is the person that the reporters strive to get answers from. The Uzbek president’s daughter, GulnaraKarimova, is another person of importance in the media stories, where she is described as an exceptional person with many different professional roles, living a glamorous life in luxury.

That the corporate leaders are held personally responsible is particularly apparent in the demands for the CEO’s resignation, brought up only two days after the revealing TV show was broadcast. It took a few months until the CEO and other leaders of Telia did resign, but when leaders resign as a result of media reports about these types of issues, the responsibility ultimately is put on the individual. Also, demanding that the leader take responsibility also reinforces the idea of the organization as a hierarchal system in which the CEO, as the official representative of the corporation, is assigned responsibility and is thus the one who should take the fall when the media singles out someone to blame.

The UG reporters are themselves also very much present in the TV shows, where the viewer is able to follow along as they make their way through the investigations. Similarities can be drawn to detective stories in which clues are uncovered along the way that leads the reporters towards ‘the truth’ about what happened when Telia possibly bribed the Uzbek regime for 3G licenses. These aspects of personification were particularly noticeable when the reporters did not manage to get comments from the leaders at Telia. The story was then built instead around the experiences of the reporters who struggled, unsuccessfully, to get answers. The journalists, particularly those in the investigative TV shows, describe catching the CEO for interviews as of particular importance, since answers from the media and communication departments are often not enough (e.g. Joachim Dyfvermark, journalist at UG, 2016-11-14).

While many media stories of acute irresponsibility can phase out of media attention rather quickly once the novelty of the story wears off, the story about Telia has lasted for an exceptionally long time. One reason for this is that the legal actions that followed the revelations continued for many years. The aspect of Telia as an extraordinary corporation with more news value than other corporations also played an important part. The news value of continuity, or follow-up (Allan, 2004, Harcup & O’Neill, 2017), is thus expressed. This means that events that fit with the journalist’s general perception of what can be considered a news story are more likely to appear in the media. In addition, stories about subjects that already figure in the news recur more frequently (ibid.).
The foundation for the acute corporate irresponsibility narrative about Telia was the allegation of corruption in a business deal made abroad. Thus, this issue did not affect the entire organization, or its core business, since the affiliated companies in Eurasia and in Uzbekistan were, in many ways, separated from Telia’s main markets in the Nordic and Baltic countries. When it was revealed, however, the issue did become a big story – for several other reasons. One was the seriousness of the issue, which could possibly be a criminal offence. Another reason was the expectation that Telia, a partly state-owned corporation, should act according to ethical standards both at home in Sweden as well as in other countries.

Figure 7 illustrates the form of the media story, showing how the enormous interest in the media story is disproportionately distributed in relation to the issue. This is to be expected in scandals. Seen from the eyes of the organization that is the focus of attention, in this study Telia, the amount of media reporting and the time devoted to the issue exceed its relevance. The whole organization is thus affected by the media reporting rather than the consequences of the transgression that caused the acute irresponsibility narrative in the first place. Figure 7 shows a simplification of the relationship. The figure does not suggest that the revelations about the misconduct are insignificant; rather, it suggests that media stories that turn into scandals, in acute irresponsibility narratives, a relatively small issue in the business operations, are inflated into a large event.

![Figure 7: The form of the acute media story, exemplified by Telia.](image-url)

To summarize, the form of the acute irresponsibility narrative has a beginning, a middle with a large peak in attention, and an ending where the media reporting fades out of attention. The acute revelations can also lead to criminal investigations, which in turn lead to an extension of the media story, meaning that the ending of the story can drag on for years. In the acute irresponsibility narrative, the possibility of telling a compelling story with dramatization seems to be one key to the topic becoming a powerful media story. Even
though the underlying problem often concerns a delimited part of the organization’s activities, the media story can become outsized and thus have an impact on the entire organization for an extended period of time.

6.2.2 The role of journalists’ investigations

In the acute irresponsibility narrative, journalistic investigations can have an immediate and strong impact on the corporation in focus because the media attention requires an immediate response from the corporation. In the case of Telia, it is also possible that the alleged corruption in its business operations in Uzbekistan would not have been uncovered at all if it were not for the investigations of a team of reporters from UG. The media thus took a significant part in defining, for Telia as an organization, what it means to be corrupt, as Telia had not previously considered its business to be unethical, at least not publicly.

In 2012, UG broadcast their revelations about Telia at a time when the topic at issue fit the societal debate. The SvD reporter who published the initial reports before the revelations aired on UG, Andreas Cervenka, suggests that, in the beginning, the financial crisis of 2008 may have overshadowed the interest in the possibility that Telia had acted corruptly in Uzbekistan (Andreas Cervenka, journalist at SvD, 2017-03-21). Another factor that could have been important was a change in society’s view of what is considered responsible versus irresponsible behavior, from 2007 when Telia entered Uzbekistan and to 2012 when the media scandal broke. During this time, discussions about corporate responsibility had grown substantially in the business world, for example, in the form of development of UN’s Guiding Principles of Human Rights in 2011.

The media story about Telia consequently illustrates the difference between a story about the risk of irresponsibility, which remains a discussion about probability, as in the reports in SvD from 2008 until 2011, and a story about an acute situation where revelations of irresponsibility become a scandal, as in the UG episode in 2012. A number of features are relevant in explaining this difference. First, the timing of the issue – which coincided with the current societal debate and was not surpassed by other, more newsworthy events. Second, the ability to produce dramatizations of the issue using a medium with wide reach, i.e. a national TV channel, no doubt made a difference. And third, the foundation that UG had for its claims regarding irresponsibility, that is, the

fact that the reporters had the resources to do a thorough investigation and shape their findings into an acute scandal that Telia had to handle.

To sum up, in the early days, i.e. from 2007 until 2012, the corporate irresponsibility narrative concerning Telia maintained a neutral framing. In this framing, the corporate leaders argue that they had carried out all the necessary investigations and that it is unlikely that any wrongdoing had occurred. Furthermore, if a transgression was made, Telia is not to blame as it is impossible to know who the real beneficiary of the business deal was. This story is contested by SvD, along with a few critical investor representatives, who suggest that Telia could not possibly have acted responsibly when entering Uzbekistan, as the country has too high a risk of corruption. During the initial phase, this criticism was not enough to really threaten the story presented by Telia. However, when UG created a more persuasive story, by adding TV dramatization and evidence, the acute irresponsibility narrative took over. If that had not happened, it is possible that the problems related to the business deal in Uzbekistan would never have surfaced.

6.2.3 The role of critical stakeholders

The role of critical stakeholders can be important for revelations of corporate transgressions, which can be a starting point for an acute irresponsibility narrative. For example, proof of misconduct can be presented by NGOs, who can also function as scrutinizers of corporate activities. Another type of revelation can come from whistleblowers inside the organization. In the media story about Telia and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan, even though most of the job of building the story was done by journalists, critical stakeholders performed various other roles.

One leading stakeholder in the media story about Telia was Sasja Beslik, an investor representative with a focus on ethical fund management who also appears in the media story concerning the working conditions in H&M’s supply chain. It makes sense that investors, especially those with an ethical profile, show an interest in Telia on these matters, since they also take a risk when investing in corporations where there is a potential for revelations of acute irresponsibility. That one particular person became the most significant criticizer of Telia in the media reports has several reasons, including this person’s knowledge and own experience of corruption in the region as well as his status as an outspoken expert on issues that concern sustainability and corporate responsibility. Beslik has therefore become a media favorite for commenting on issues related to corporate irresponsibility.
NGOs that work with human rights issues also played a role in the story about Telia and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan. These NGOs provide background information for journalists and take the role of expert in the media reports, for example, by confirming the findings made by journalists. Former organizational members at Telia, particularly the former communications director who participated in a UG episode, also had the function of confirming that Telia’s leaders had acted irresponsibly as she, at the time for the transgression, was told not to ask questions about the issue. Some former organizational members, and others with insight into the organization, also participated in UG as anonymous sources to confirm the story presented by the TV team.

Retired representatives of law enforcement also participated in the UG episodes, providing expert opinion on whether Telia’s business deals could be considered legal or not. When the criminal investigations actually started, the public prosecutor took on a prominent role in criticizing Telia, although at a later stage also praises Telia’s transparency in providing information for the criminal investigations. Because Telia is a partially state-owned corporation, politicians of the Swedish state also had a particular role in the story in that they both took part of the blame for the misconduct and, somewhat contradictorily, criticized Telia.

Depending on the type of issue in focus in an acute irresponsibility narrative, the role of stakeholders can vary. As shown in the study about Telia, various types of experts are used as providers of background information and to confirm the journalistic findings. Former organizational members with insight into the corporation accused of irresponsibility can function as whistleblowers and thereby strengthen the story of the journalists. If the acute irresponsibility turns into a criminal case, representatives of legal authorities can also take part in the media stories. Famous persons, particularly outspoken individuals with strong opinions, can also take a more independent role and participate in setting the agenda from their own perspectives. Hence, some critical stakeholders are able to use journalistic media to get their message out or to put pressure on corporations to take responsibility.

6.2.4 The role of corporations

In the acute irresponsibility narrative, the role of the corporation in the media is mainly reactive as the journalists had the upper hand when it comes to setting the agenda. Thus the corporation that is the focus of attention must adjust to the media story for damage control. When journalists have a convincing story about corporate irresponsibility, it is difficult for a corporation to choose other alternatives. In the case of Telia, however, this was not done without a
struggle. The corporation first focused on trying to clear itself by conducting its own investigation to counter the investigations in the UG broadcast of fall 2012. This attempt was unsuccessful, however, and after a while, in the early months of 2013, the media story of Telia’s business venture in Uzbekistan is framed as irresponsible by all of the actors involved.

The internal complaints voiced around the time when Telia entered Uzbekistan did not manage to cause any organizational changes. Neither did the early media reports with a more general focus on the risk of corruption in Uzbekistan. However, when brought to the media’s attention on UG, the situation became vastly different. Thus, by replacing the organizational leaders in 2013, deciding to exit the Eurasia region in 2015, and changing the group name in 2016, the acute narrative of irresponsibility provided by the media was also reinforced by Telia.

Telia’s initial response to the story was to not to talk about it at all, but this strategy changed towards increased openness and participation in the media when the organization appointed new leaders. When the most intensive media reporting had died down, the corporate representatives describe themselves as stuck in the role of the villain of the story. Their experience was that it did not matter what they did, the media story of irresponsibility persisted. However, as one interviewee from Telia points out, the media attention to the corporation has its ups and downs, and Telia also serves as a representative of the industry in many positive stories, on other topics, as well (Communications employee Telia 2, 2017-03-07). The media attention about corruption also subsided eventually, and Telia as an organization managed has gained attention in the media on other issues.

Figure 8 (below) illustrates, in a simplified way, how a narrative of acute irresponsibility can be perceived from a corporate perspective. In the figure, the smaller issue in the business operations is rectified with hopes that the larger story will also implode. In other words, the figure suggests that removing the problem that caused the allegations of irresponsibility can eventually also remove the story, though this may take time and is likely not possible for all problems that cause the acute irresponsibility narrative. For Telia, it was a step-by-step process starting with commissioning an investigation into the topic, dismissing the leaders responsible, implementing new policies and, after that, selling its business operations in Uzbekistan. In the end, Telia was able to almost completely remove the story from the media. Thus, if the scandal is big, this process can take time, like it did in the case of Telia, where the criminal investigation dragged on for many years afterwards, but eventually the story will be something that happened in the past.
Figure 8: Stories from corporations in an acute irresponsibility narrative, exemplified by Telia.

As the acute irresponsibility narrative decreases, the corporation in the center of attention can shift the narrative with stories of its own about responsibility and change. For Telia these stories came in connection with new corporate leaders, who symbolized a new, more responsible organization and also generated more neutral media reporting, with less of a focus on irresponsibility. Another possibility is, of course, to change the conversation entirely and provide stories on other topics not at all related to the problem that caused the acute irresponsibility. However, due to the limitations of the current study, this type of media content was not captured in this media analysis.

6.2.5 Summary

The acute form of irresponsibility narrative concerns issues that call for immediate attention from the corporation in focus. The underlying problem can take various forms, but the revelations most likely come as a surprise and more or less cause a crisis situation for the corporations that end up in the media limelight. The acute irresponsibility narrative is characterized by a beginning, a middle, and an ending with a long tail, and can take the form of a scandal due to its evident peak in attention. The word ‘scandal’ might sound like it refers to something out of the ordinary, but scandals of varying sizes and degrees take place every now and then in the media and some of them concern acute corporate irresponsibility, which is the focus here.

The problem that constitutes the starting point for an acute irresponsibility narrative can be revealed by journalists and, in such cases, the journalists have
the upper hand in defining the problem and who is to blame for acting irresponsibly. Whistleblowers and investigations by NGOs can also play a part in the revelations. In order to confirm the media story, various storytellers are used in the media, as experts or in other ways, to illustrate and prove the wrongdoing. Without the journalistic investigations, it is likely that the transgression that caused the irresponsibility might never have been revealed. The role of media investigations can thus be essential in establishing the corporate irresponsibility narrative.

6.3 Concluding remarks

The main point of this chapter has been to show that when brought up in the media for a long period of time, by way of either frequently repeated stories or intense media scandals, media stories turn into powerful narratives. Two types of corporate irresponsibility narratives have furthermore been distinguished from the findings of the current study: the chronic irresponsibility narrative and the acute irresponsibility narrative. The two narratives differ in the type of irresponsibility that constitutes their foundation. In the chronic irresponsibility narrative, the issue is related to built-in problems in the business model, which is commonly shared by others in the industry. And in the acute irresponsibility narrative, the problem is related to out-of-the-ordinary events that often lead to a scandal when the misconduct is revealed. However, both of the narratives relate to established news values, where personalization and simplification are key storytelling devices, and both have increased impact when they fit into the current societal context.

The chronic irresponsibility narrative is constructed by focusing on a single corporation that serves as an example of the industry, as responsible. As problems that relate to the business model are generally complex, the media stories are also simplified by narrowing the focus and telling stories that bring out emotions rather than focusing on the structures that cause the problem. The acute irresponsibility narrative concerns scandals, which can be big or small depending on how they fit into the social debate, what corporations they concern, and the gravity of the misconduct. While acute irresponsibility narratives may concern various types of negligence or irresponsibility, what they have in common is that the media stories have an ending, when the topic stops being newsworthy. Thus, the storytelling in the acute irresponsibility narrative is the other way around – a problem that concerns a delimited part of the corporation gets blown up into a huge story.

In defining what corporate irresponsibility means, the acute irresponsibility narrative presents the problem more clearly and assigns blame with less room
for discussion and dialogue. If the transgression is revealed by journalists, the media is likely to have control over the story and other perspectives become less prominent. The chronic irresponsibility narrative, on the other hand, leaves more room for contests between stories, as the one who is to blame is less clearly identified. The media stories thus tend to simplify this complexity, for example, by making a smaller part of the problem the center of attention as well as placing the blame for an industry problem on one corporation.

The analysis in this chapter has focused on the form and content of the communication that takes place in the construction of media stories and formation of narratives. As corporate irresponsibility is a value judgment made by others, and consequently has to be communicated into being, it is especially suitable to seek to understand the meaning of corporate irresponsibility from a CCO perspective. The two corporate irresponsibility narratives put forward in this chapter thus bring us a few steps closer to understanding how corporate irresponsibility is constituted in narratives, which is the aim of this study. This will be elaborated on more specifically in the next chapter.
7. Constituting corporate irresponsibility

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of this study in relation to previous literature in order to show what the focus on constitutive communication and narratives can add to previous knowledge. The results from the construction of corporate irresponsibility in the two media stories studied are thus addressed at a more general level and the chronic and the acute irresponsibility narratives, as presented in the previous chapter, are understood as two ways in which corporate irresponsibility can be constituted in narratives.

In the first section, the media narratives of corporate irresponsibility are viewed as counter-narratives (Frandsen et al., 2017) that often stand against a corporate narrative of being responsible. As the CCO perspective suggests that constitutive communication takes place through communicative events (Cooren et al., 2011), the second section discusses the ways in which both chronic and acute irresponsible narratives become important in such communicative events. The role that these events as well as the meeting of dominant- and counter-narratives play for organizations in constitutive communication about corporate irresponsibility are summarized in the third section.

7.1 Corporate irresponsibility in counter-narratives

Both of the media narratives of corporate irresponsibility distinguished in the previous chapter can be viewed as counter-narratives (Frandsen et al., 2017) for the corporations in focus in the media attention. These narratives compete with the dominant narratives in which the corporation presents itself as responsible, or at least not negligent or irresponsible. When the counter-narratives told in journalistic media meet the corporate narrative, there can be a collision of worldviews. Thus, as shown in the previous chapter, when journalism’s ideal of investigating misconduct and the corporation’s view of itself as doing its best to be a socially responsible corporate citizen meet, these perspectives can be difficult to reconcile.
When the narratives of corporations as irresponsible, predominantly told in the media by journalists with the aid of activists, meet the narrative about corporations as responsible, predominantly told by the corporations themselves, a tension or a contest arises. These narratives meet in the media, as well as other arenas, where one is established as the dominant narrative and the other as a counter-narrative. Thus, the counter-narrative stands in opposition to the dominant narrative, which sets the agenda. In most cases, the corporate narrative is the dominant one, since corporations regularly publish information about their achievements, whereupon journalists take on the role of questioning some of these achievements. Normally, these questions from journalists do not reverse the narrative completely.

However, when questions from journalists turn into irresponsibility narratives with revelations of acute wrongdoings, in the form of a scandal, or narratives of chronic negligence, which is reported on repeatedly over time, the power between narratives may be a shift. The two narratives contain the values and practices of journalists and corporations, which often differ from one another. When they meet, the narratives collide and struggles over the meaning of corporate responsibility or irresponsibility can take place. In other words, it is primarily here, in these collisions between narratives, that communicative events (cf. Cooren et al., 2011) where a renegotiation of meaning constitutive for organizations appear. Thus, when it comes to corporate irresponsibility, the relationship between dominant narratives and counter-narratives should not be seen as static.

7.1.1 The chronic counter-narrative

In media narratives of chronic irresponsibility, the relationship between the dominant narrative, of the corporation, and the counter-narrative, of the journalistic media, takes the form of an ongoing struggle. It is consequently no surprise that one interviewee uses war metaphors, citing ‘attacks’ from the media, to describe the relationship between the corporation and the journalistic media on the topic of corporate irresponsibility. Thus, the journalists ‘attack’ with revelations of misconduct and findings of injustice that create empathy. The corporation, in turn, responds with communication about improved auditing and initiatives to create positive change. Consequently, a contest of narratives arises.

When the initial media revelations first appear, a time when the agenda for how the irresponsibility of the corporation is to be defined is set, the corporation experiences surprise. Over time, however, the corporation learns how to deal with the stories told in the journalistic media, both by taking and communicating about its responsibility initiatives, and by learning how to handle
the journalistic media. Over the past decades large organizations have, for example, increased the budgets for their information and media departments in order to handle the attention from journalistic media (e.g. Ihlen & Pallas, 2014). The situation today is consequently different from when the first revelations of child labor and poor working conditions in garment factories were made, implicating many large retailers, in the middle of the 1990s. At that time, corporations, such as H&M, were somewhat surprised by the media attention towards corporate irresponsibility issues and did not really know how to respond.

Graph 5 (below) offers an illustration of the media reporting about H&M, broken down according to the focus of the reporting as irresponsibility of responsibility, to show how the two framings interrelate in an example of a chronic irresponsibility narrative. Depending on the perspective taken, chronic irresponsibility narratives can also generate positive stories of corporations that engage in the issue and take responsibility. It is noticeable already from the beginning of the media story about H&M that aspects of both irresponsibility and responsibility have newsworthiness in this chronic irresponsibility narrative. As shown in the empirical chapter on H&M, it is the media that sets the stage also in the articles with a responsible framing at the beginning of the time period studied. However, the number of H&M’s own stories about its responsibility initiatives increases over the years.

Graph 5: The distribution of news articles about H&M and the garment factories from 1995 to 2017, in the newspapers DN, SvD, Aftonbladet, Expressen and DI, divided into the framings of H&M as: irresponsible or responsible.
In line with media research on issue attention cycles (Downs, 1972), the media attention on a chronic irresponsibility topic rises and falls depending on how the topic fits the media agenda and the general societal debate. The peaks and drops in media attention in Graph 5 can thus likely be explained by various factors in the surrounding environment. For example, other newsworthy events, such as the 9/11 terror attack in 2001 and the financial crisis in 2008, may have overshadowed the topic and caused a decrease in attention to this particular media story. The peaks in attention can possibly be explained by the criticism from the consumer movements at the end of the 1990s as well as increased general interest in the topic of corporate responsibility around 2012, the same year as the media story about Telia also broke. Corporate wrongdoing can naturally also generate headlines in the media regardless of external events, but when the timing is right the media stories are likely more influential.

The issue of working conditions in garment factories has moreover evolved a lot over the time period studied – from revelations of child labor in 1997, to discussions about proper wages for textile workers in 2012 and efforts to improve the right of workers to unionize in 2015. Thus, the definition of what is considered responsibility or irresponsibility is not the same in 2020 as in the mid-1990s, the starting point for the study about H&M. Even if the issue attention cycle (Downs, 1972) suggests that some issues fade out of attention without being resolved, the issue of working conditions in garment factories progressively improves despite the industry’s continuing problems. The critics who participate in the media also continue to express their dissatisfaction, however, claiming that the progress is too slow.

This section has shown that dominant narratives and counter-narratives are not deterministic, but rather a back-and-forth struggle. The shift between dominant narratives and counter-narratives thus takes the form of a power struggle. Instead of talking about a process of increased mediatization where the media has increased influence on corporations (cf. Pallas et al., 2014), the chronic irresponsibility narrative suggests instead that the relationship between the journalistic media and corporations is signified by an ongoing power struggle. In this struggle, various stories are told by corporations and the journalistic media, as well as NGOs and other societal actors who provide their stories about the issue. In these stories, the issues are framed as either corporate responsibility or corporate irresponsibility depending on how they fit with the established narratives from the media or from corporations.
7.1.2 The acute counter-narrative

In media narratives of acute irresponsibility, the relationship between the dominant narrative, of the corporation, and the counter-narrative, of the journalistic media, changes once revelations of misconduct are made. Thus, the irresponsibility narrative presented in the media becomes the dominant narrative embraced by the corporation in focus as well, and it adjusts to this narrative. Adjusting to the irresponsibility narrative means admitting that a transgression was made, accepting the punishment for the transgression, for example, by removing the corporate leaders responsible, and making improvements in corporate guidelines. The corporate narrative is then formed around stories of change, with the premise of the irresponsibility narrative as a starting point.

In the narrative of acute irresponsibility, both the misconduct and the responsibility are more apparent than in the chronic irresponsibility narrative. As the problem likely lies outside the everyday business operations of the corporation in focus, this counter-narratives presents less conflict in the long run. As is the case with all media stories, the stories of acute irresponsibility eventually become ‘yesterday’s news’ and, as attention is directed elsewhere, a new normal arises. With the right combination of gravity and dramatization, however, the story becomes more compelling and can thus remain on the agenda for a longer period of time.

The distribution of news coverage about Telia and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan illustrates (see Graph 6, below) how the media story about acute corporate irresponsibility peaks during the scandal and then drops off substantially. Due to the magnitude of the scandal and the lengthy criminal investigations that ensue, the story does not disappear completely, however, as may likely be the case with smaller incidents of corporate irresponsibility that concern less well-known corporations. In the later stages, the topic centers around legal issues and drags on, which likely means that it loses its attraction value as a media story. The focus of attention thus turns to other issues instead.
Graph 6: The distribution of news articles about Telia and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan from 2008 to 2018, in the newspapers DN, SvD, Aftonbladet, Expressen and DI, divided into the framings of Telia as: irresponsible or responsible. (This graph is identical to Graph 4, but with the ‘neutral’ category removed.) Source: Own collection of newspaper articles.

Graph 6 also reveals that media stories that frame Telia as responsible are almost non-existent, with the exception of one article published in 2015 in DI. This could be an effect of the key words chosen when collecting the news media material, but is at a minimum an indication that the irresponsibility framing holds a fairly undisputed position as the dominant narrative. Thus, the acute irresponsibility narrative differs from the chronic irresponsibility narrative in that there is less of a struggle between the dominant narrative and counter-narratives.

To summarize, the counter-narrative of irresponsibility introduced in the media a few years before this scandal has a rather insignificant impact in the first years. During this initial period, the responsibility narrative, which the corporation strives to sustain, remains relatively unquestioned. When the most substantial revelations come, however, the counter-narrative takes over, taking the position as the dominant narrative. The corporation manages to put up a struggle at first by providing its own stories to dispute the new narrative of irresponsibility, but they then abandon these attempts and the dominant narrative of corporate irresponsibility constitutes a new point of departure. As the corporation begins to tell new stories about how it has changed its actions, the irresponsibility narrative decreases in impact and, as time passes, the acts of irresponsibility fade from memory (cf. Mena et al., 2016).
7.1.3 Comparison of counter-narratives

Corporate stories on responsibility topics can be vulnerable to criticism and scrutiny, which is clearly shown in the acute irresponsibility narrative when the journalistic media force the corporation to change its approach. A previous study by Jensen, Maagaard and Rasmussen (2017) used a counter-narrative approach in aim to understand how a CSR policy came to be questioned by various stakeholders. These authors argue that the counter-narratives presented by others, such as the media, lead to power struggles and negotiations of meaning through which the corporate stories are constituted. Thus, struggles over meaning are viewed, also in previous research on counter-narratives, as an important part of the constitutive process.

When comparing the chronic irresponsibility and the acute irresponsibility in this study, the potential for struggles about meaning is more apparent in the chronic irresponsibility narrative. As this irresponsibility narrative is under constant renegotiation fueled by new revelations of misconduct by journalists as well as communication about initiatives to increase responsibility from the corporation itself and as reported in the media; that is, if these stories are considered newsworthy. In the acute irresponsibility narrative, however, the room for discussion is smaller as the media’s counter-narrative can quickly become the dominant narrative when the revelations of misconduct are built on proof of the transgression and told in a compelling story.

Consequently, by focusing on communication, it becomes clear that corporations do not fully control the narrative about themselves since stories from outside the organization are such a large part of what corporate irresponsibility becomes. The corporation can thus communicate very positively about the responsibility initiatives it takes, but these stories will always be understood in relation to the narratives formed on the outside, frequently in the journalistic media, about what being an irresponsible, or responsible, corporation means.

7.2 Corporate irresponsibility in communicative events

The CCO literature argues that the communication of stakeholders, for example, expressed in the media, can be constitutive for organizations as well as for corporate responsibility as an organizational issue (e.g. Shultz et al., 2013; Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013; Cooren, 2018). This study takes its departure in this literature by focusing on irresponsibility, rather than responsibility, and shows how the construction of influential media stories leads to the formation of narratives of corporate irresponsibility. The two types of narratives pre-
sented in the previous chapter thus demonstrate two ways in which this formation can occur. In the next step, these stories become one constitutive part of what corporate irresponsibility means for the corporation in the media limelight.

Using the six premises of CCO research as a starting point, a CCO approach should focus on communicative events. These communicative events not only concern communicative representations in text, but also include interactions in which organizational forms are constituted, reproduced, or altered (Cooren et al., 2011). These co-constitutive forms of communication are particularly relevant with issues related to responsibility, since corporations alone cannot communicate themselves into being responsible (Cooren, 2018). When it comes to corporate responsibility, as well as irresponsibility, various stakeholders have an interest in the matter and participate in the communication. As shown in the previous section, it is primarily in peaks of attention where the viewpoints of the different stakeholders collide that meaning can be renegotiated into narratives.

Following the Montréal school of CCO, all forms of media texts about an organization can be viewed as communicative events in which the organization is constituted as an entity from a bottom-up perspective (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2008). The more day-to-day reporting of the media can, however, handle topics of corporate irresponsibility like any other topic focusing on factual information, such as reports about a new corporate initiative or the announcement of a postponed trial. In these media reports, the foundation of corporate irresponsibility is commonly not up for debate and renegotiation since no interaction between narratives takes place. However, long-running media stories in which the meaning of corporate irresponsibility is negotiated and renegotiated likely have particular importance since they form powerful narratives.

As will be shown in the two upcoming sub-sections, the constitution of the meaning of corporate irresponsibility takes place when this value judgment is filled with meaning through stories that take different forms in the chronic and the acute irresponsibility narratives. These two forms of constitution of meaning in narratives are further explained in the upcoming sections. The constitution of the meaning of corporate irresponsibility in these narratives, formed in the media, also challenges the boundaries of the organization, as the narratives present themselves neither outside nor inside the organization. The different types of irresponsibility narratives confront the corporation in the center of attention in various ways, which is elaborated in the third sub-section below. The fourth sub-section then addresses how influential media stories about corporate irresponsibility also contribute to the formation of the general narrative of what corporate irresponsibility means for corporations as a whole.
7.2.1 Constitution of meaning in chronic irresponsibility narratives

As has been shown, the chronic irresponsibility narrative relates to a structural problem of negligence that becomes the foundation for stories about corporate irresponsibility, with a focus on delimited parts of the problem through stereotypical characterization. The chronic irresponsibility narrative develops over time and is characterized by contests in which various framings of corporate irresponsibility and corporate responsibility vie for dominance. The relationship between narratives can be reversed depending on the societal context as well as the actors who participate in the storytelling. In the chronic irresponsibility narrative, media stories about irresponsibility are repeatedly brought into attention over a longer period of time, and the narrative is continuously renegotiated.

A chronic irresponsibility narrative focuses on negligence related to the corporation’s business model. The problem is hence chronic and not easily solved, even though improvements can be made. As the problem is structural, it is not easy to define where the responsibility for the problem lies. Consequently, communication about the issue that takes place in the media has a higher chance of being constitutive in the formation of the dominant narrative of corporate irresponsibility. In the media narratives, such constitution takes place in three steps of simplified and personalized stories. First, one corporation comes to exemplify the structural problem, and thereby becomes representative of an entire industry. The second step is to simplify the problem related to the business model by focusing on a particular aspect that can be told in a comprehensible story. In the third step, this aspect is then personified by telling life stories of people affected by the issue and consequently also related to emotions.

As shown in the previous chapter, this type of narrative has room for stories about responsibility initiatives as well. As journalists and corporations often present different perspectives, or even worldviews, when it comes to understanding corporate irresponsibility, these perceptions repeatedly collide in the chronic irresponsibility narrative and it is here, in the collisions where they meet, that other opportunities for meaning construction arise. The chronic irresponsibility narrative is thus also characterized by contests between the framing of the corporation in the center of attention as responsible and the framing of it as irresponsible. There is therefore room for both types of stories in the chronic irresponsibility narrative as it continues over time.

Both the responsibility narratives of corporations as well as the irresponsibility narratives in the media can, however, be perceived as simplified and dram-
atized worldviews. This study shows how contradictory views on the responsibility of the corporations make sense depending on the situation and the context. Hence, it is not as simple as that journalists are independent scrutinizers of corporations who ‘tell the truth’; instead, issues become constructed as a certain type of narrative. In these narratives, journalists and others, such as corporations and NGOs, use storytelling devices to highlight certain features of the irresponsibility issue. It is when these different views meet that the potential for communicative events, which include discussion and dialogue (cf. Cooren, 2018), can arise. These events are constitutive for the general narrative of corporate irresponsibility as well as for the view of a particular corporation as irresponsible, with the consequence that what these organizations are and do is also constituted (cf. Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren et al., 2011; Blaschke & Schoeneborn, 2016).

7.2.2 Constitution of meaning in acute irresponsibility narratives

A key feature in the acute irresponsibility narrative is the immediate peak in attention that follows revelations of a wrongdoing, often in the form of a scandal. The wrongdoing, which is seen as negligence or irresponsibility, is likely to concern something outside the everyday business operations of the corporation at the center of attention. This peak in attention is likely larger if the topic fits into the current societal debate and/or if it can be dramatized into a compelling story according to established news values (cf. Allan, 2004). Another characteristic of the acute irresponsibility narrative is that all of the parties involved eventually agree on the fact that a wrong has been committed. From a short-term perspective, the media stories have a great impact on the corporation, but in the long term the narrative is likely to fade from memory if the underlying problem is resolved or removed.

In the acute irresponsibility narrative, the communicative events that provide the opportunity for meaning construction is most likely to be found in the rise of the media scandal. This can be a time for discussion and dialogue (cf. Cooren, 2018), a time when the communication on the matter defines what the irresponsibility is. Later on, when the irresponsibility narrative takes over and becomes the dominant narrative, as shown in the previous section, the interpretation of what is to be considered irresponsibility has already been made. Paradoxically, it is not uncommon that corporations attempt to avoid the media attention at this stage. Likely because the immediate media attention can be overwhelming. Consequently, this means that others, primarily the journalists, but also those interviewed in the media such as experts, activists, investor representatives, and politicians, become the main storytellers, instead of the corporations themselves.
When the meaning of a corporate irresponsibility topic is constituted in an acute irresponsibility narrative, with journalists as the main storytellers, corporate irresponsibility is likely to be defined according to a compelling media story. This often includes dramatizations of the irresponsibility, which often build on showing contrast. For a story to be told, it also has to fit into the current societal debate. This means that certain topics reach the media and others do not. Although the acute irresponsibility may concern a minor part of the corporate activities, the inflated stories in the media form the irresponsibility into a narrative that can define the entire corporation as irresponsible. The corporation must consequently redefine itself as responsible afterwards, as it recovers from the peak of attention in the scandal. As time passes, the acute irresponsibility narrative likely fades out of attention and is no longer a defining part of what the corporation is.

7.2.3 Narratives challenging the boundaries

It has now been established that chronic and the acute irresponsibility narratives have different characteristics, which also means that how they contribute to the constitution of the meaning of corporate irresponsibility, in both general and local narratives about corporate irresponsibility that appear in communicative events, can also be different. The CCO literature proposes that the communication of stakeholders, for example, in the media, can be constitutive for organizations (e.g. Kuhn, 2008), particularly in matters concerning topics of responsibility (Schulz et al., 2013; Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013; Cooren, 2018). The two forms of narratives identified in this study are likely to contribute substantially in such constitutive processes as they fill the value judgment of corporate irresponsibility with meaning.

The examples of the corporations in this study are H&M, a retailer that produces and sells garment, and Telia, a telecom services provider. However, not all communication about these corporations relates to their respective business operations. There are also narratives about these organizations that form them into what they are. While these narratives can be considered attached to the corporation, they are, at the same time, outside the corporation’s control, making it impossible for the corporation to control them. From this point of view, it does not matter if the corporation actually adjusts its activities according to the media stories or not. Rather, the mere presence of such a narrative is sufficient for it become a constitutive dimension of the corporation as it is communicated into being (cf. Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren, 2018).

The results of this study suggest that chronic and acute irresponsibility narratives pose different challenges to the boundaries of a corporation. In the chronic irresponsibility narrative, interactions take place over time and what
is to be considered responsibility or irresponsibility is continuously contested. The chronic irresponsibility narrative thus repeatedly challenges what the corporation is, possibly also over long periods of time, in constant interaction with the corporation’s own stories. Due to the emotional and personalized stories told in this narrative, the corporation is also forced to deal with the problem as it is defined by the media, even though the problem is most likely a structural problem shared by the industry as a whole. In the acute irresponsibility narrative, on the other hand, the story told by journalists quite rapidly becomes internalized in the corporation. Thus, in this narrative, the dramatized stories presented by the media redefine corporate irresponsibility in an initial, urgent phase, after which the corporation is able to return to normal again.

When viewing organizations as an effect of communication, what organizations are, and consist of, is thus constantly being negotiated and renegotiated between different actors (cf. Blaschke & Schoeneborn, 2016). It has furthermore been argued that attributing responsibility to an organization plays a part in defining the organization as an entity through communication (Cooren, 2018). Narratives of corporate irresponsibility can therefore be particularly vital in the communicative process in which corporations are constituted, when they challenge the corporations inside with communication from the outside. As shown above, this study posits that opportunities to renegotiate corporate irresponsibility primarily arise in the communicative events that take place when the dominant narrative of a corporation meets counter-narratives of the media.

### 7.2.4 Corporate irresponsibility as a narrative

The earlier sections of this chapter have focused on what the constitution of corporate irresponsibility narratives means for corporations that appear in the media limelight. The purpose of this study is furthermore to discuss the formation of narratives of what irresponsibility means for corporations at a general level. Since corporate irresponsibility is a contested issue, various actors have an interest in defining what it means from their perspective. As has been shown, corporations strive to present one narrative of themselves by telling stories in which they act responsibly. However, this self-told narrative always stands in relation to media narratives, as well as other narratives provided by other stakeholders, in which corporations are often portrayed as irresponsible.

The general narrative of corporate irresponsibility consists of various stories provided by the media, by corporations, and by other stakeholders. This was established in the introduction to this text and shown in Figure 1 (repeated below). The empirical focus of this study is the stories in the media. Since the
media can be viewed as an arena, stories from corporations and other stakeholders are also part of the co-construction of corporate irresponsibility narratives that takes place in the media. Nevertheless, what is published and broadcast has been approved, and often also edited, by journalists.

Figure 1: The construction of the corporate irresponsibility narrative

It is likely that stories told by consumers also have the possibility to participate in this co-construction, for example, via social media. Even though this study has not focused on social media events, some stories in the media reporting of the chronic irresponsibility narrative studied started with allegations of irresponsibility made on social media sites, one example being the comments that followed singer Zara Larsson’s Instagram post in which she announces a fashion collaboration with H&M. Some of the comments addressed the working conditions in the garment factories of H&M’s supply chain, suggesting that H&M had not handled this issue properly. Hence, due to their view of H&M as negligent or irresponsible, these commenters argued that Larsson should not support H&M (e.g. Expressen, 2017-03-01).

However, because journalistic media has a dominant role in spreading information in society, it is safe to assume that the media stories play a particularly significant role in forming these general irresponsibility narratives. The two different forms of corporate irresponsibility narratives distinguished in this study are therefore also important for the formation of the general narrative of what corporate irresponsibility is. The chronic irresponsibility narrative, for example, builds on personalized stories that are emotionally charged, which create a certain image of what can be considered corporate irresponsibility. This image focuses on a small part of a larger, structural problem, which is
absent from the media stories. In the acute irresponsibility narrative, the problem gets inflated and dramatized when a media scandal arises. These types of stereotypical characterizations become the images of corporate irresponsibility that prevail, although reality might be more nuanced.

That the specific stories about H&M and Telia receive so much attention and are re-told over the years is also important for the general corporate irresponsibility narrative, at least in a Swedish context. When the working conditions of a large retailer’s supply chain are repeatedly discussed in the media, other retailers as well as consumers will also focus on the issue. It does not matter if this is the most urgent problem or not, the attention brought to the issue makes it a strong image of what corporate irresponsibility is. The same happened with the revelations of Telia’s alleged corruption in Uzbekistan, where the corruption issue quickly rose to the top of other Swedish corporations’ agenda as well.

Once the narrative of corporate irresponsibility is established, the narrative is sustained in day-to-day conversations among consumers in the general public. It also has an impact on the spreading of ideas of what corporate irresponsibility means for the business world. In this way, stories about certain issues and certain corporations become institutionalized as the dominant narrative of what corporate irresponsibility means and how corporate responsibility is assigned (cf. Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

7.3 Concluding remarks

This chapter has shown that, when repeated over time, media stories can constitute narratives, and that, when they become components in communicative events, these narratives are likely to have a significant impact in renegotiations of the meaning of corporate irresponsibility. These communicative events of meaning construction are most likely to take place at times and in places where dominant narratives and counter-narratives collide. As they appear on the boundaries of the corporations, narratives of corporate irresponsibility hold different challenges for the corporation when viewing organizations as an effect of communication (cf. Blaschke & Schoeneborn, 2016). The stories told in the media about particular irresponsible corporations also contribute to the formation of a general narrative of what corporate irresponsibility means for corporations as well as for consumers in the general public.

Previous research has examined the impact of the media on corporate identities (e.g. Kjaergaard et al., 2011; Rindova et al., 2006) and corporate responsibility communication (e.g. Islam & Deegan, 2010), as well as the potential
of the communication of stakeholders in the constitution of corporate responsibility (Schultz et al., 2013; Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013; Cooren, 2018). However, neither the studies that focus on the impact of the media on corporations nor the existing CCO literature specifically address the formation of narratives that arise as elements in communicative events where corporate irresponsibility is constituted. The starting point for this study is that how these narratives are constructed matters for how communicative events are formed. How such events are formed has, in turn, consequences for the constitution, at both a general and local level, of corporate irresponsibility.

The study thus adds to previous knowledge by focusing on how the construction of media stories takes place. Knowing how media stories are constructed has relevance for organization researchers, both with an interest in how the media influences organizational activities and with an interest in how organizations are constituted through communication. In order to understand the constitutive role of media narratives, focusing primarily on exploring the already constructed media stories is therefore not enough, since such studies do not take into account the various perspectives in which narratives are communicated through media stories.

At first glance, it might seem that the acute irresponsibility narrative has the most impact due to its magnitude when the counter-narrative of corporate irresponsibility takes over as the dominant narrative. Corporations that end up in the media limelight in a story about acute irresponsibility likely adjust to the media, for instance, by letting the leaders responsible go, implementing new policies, or even removing problematic business operations. Viewing the interplay between corporations and the media from a linear perspective, by focusing on the media’s agenda-setting regarding organizational activities, for example, shows that the impact on the organization can be significant due to the immediate crisis situation that this entails.

However, by setting communication in the center of the analysis from a CCO perspective and focusing on the narratives rather than making the tangible consequences for the organization the center of attention, the comparison between these ideal types of narratives becomes different. When comparing the chronic irresponsibility narrative and the acute irresponsibility narrative, the opportunities for communicative events that open the way for renegotiation of what corporate irresponsibility means are likely greater in the chronic irresponsibility narrative. Thus, focusing on these communicative events has enabled us to observe how the colliding of framings of responsibility and irresponsibility is continually ongoing in this type of narrative.

The study consequently shows that if our interest lies in understanding how corporations are constituted through communication, it is not enough to focus
on the communication that takes place within organizations. As has been argued previously, this becomes particularly relevant in discussions about corporate responsibility (e.g. Schultz et al., 2013; Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013; Cooren; 2018). This is because corporate responsibility topics encompass also the interests of stakeholders outside the corporation’s communication. This means that communication produced by actors other than the organization in focus is also a component in the construction of what corporate responsibility, and corporate irresponsibility, entail, especially when narratives are formed.
8. Conclusions

This final chapter summarizes the conclusions of this study of how corporate irresponsibility is constructed in media stories and constituted in narratives. The first section sums up the results by revisiting the study’s aim and provides a summary of the study and its findings. Thereafter the contributions of the study is discussed, with a focus on the theoretical contribution to organization theory. A third section discusses the practical implications of the study for corporations, journalists, investor representatives, and other stakeholders. The fourth section contains some final reflections about the narratives of the study set in a broader societal context, and the fifth and closing section offers some suggestions for further research.

8.1 Summary of the findings

The aim of this study was to explain how corporate irresponsibility is constituted in narratives, from a CCO perspective, by answering the research question: How is corporate irresponsibility constructed in media stories? From a CCO perspective, this means a focus on communication as the primary constituent for understanding the value-laden concept of corporate irresponsibility, which does not have meaning unless it is communicated. Earlier studies have, however, taken the existence of media stories for granted. For this reason, a narrative approach was added to the CCO perspective in order to highlight that stories and narratives are a particularly powerful form of communication and that it therefore matters how these stories are constructed. Focusing on narratives also means that it is the narratives about corporate irresponsibility, which are not singlehandedly constructed inside or outside the corporation, that are in focus. In these narratives, the stories told in the media play a significant role due to their extensive range and reach and impact on the spread of narratives.

At the beginning of the thesis introduced two media stories concerning what is defined in the media as corporate irresponsibility was introduced. The two stories, both journalistic investigations, had a peak in attention in the fall of 2012 in connection with TV broadcasts in which different kinds of corporate
irresponsibility were discussed. First, were the revelations of unethical business practices, alleged corruption, when Swedish-Finnish telecom operator Telia expanded into Uzbekistan in 2007. The investigative TV show UG played an important role in telling this media story that became a well-known corruption scandal that remained in the media limelight for many years. In the second story, Swedish clothing retailer H&M, with a global supply chain and stores all over the world, was questioned about the low wages of the garment factory workers of its suppliers.

The starting point for this study was that the two long-lived media stories in Sweden, of H&M and Telia, have a particular dominance in the media due to their length, visibility, and scope. It should be noted that not all corporations attract as much media attention to their responsibility and irresponsibility activities as the two corporations studied here. Thus, one part in the creation of these particular stories is the role these two corporations play as prominent actors in society, where both can be considered industry-leaders and both have well-known owners and organizational leaders. Other corporations often fly under the radar even if they might have similar problems related to corporate irresponsibility.

The empirical material for the study was gathered in the form of media material such as news media articles and TV broadcasts, and interviews with representatives from the two corporations, journalists, and various sources that appear in the media. The findings were presented from three different perspectives including: print and broadcast media stories, stories from journalists and their sources, and stories from the corporations. The results of the analysis show that the construction of corporate irresponsibility in media stories takes different forms, in this study represented by a chronic form and an acute form of corporate irresponsibility narrative.

The first narrative form, the chronic irresponsibility narrative, is illustrated in the case of H&M, where the business model itself is the problem and thus the acts of irresponsibility cannot simply be solved or removed. These media stories consequently repeat the same narrative over and over again without coming to a conclusion about how the corporation can take responsibility. In this case, the corporation attempts to challenge the irresponsibility narrative presented in the media by communicating about the responsibility initiatives it has taken. However, no real conclusion is presented as, even though improvements are made, the underlying problem is still there. Personalized stories of poor working conditions in the garment factories of H&M’s supply chain have thus repeatedly been the focus of media stories for the past decades.

The second form, the acute irresponsibility narrative, is illustrated in the case of Telia and takes the form of a scandal with a beginning, a middle, and an
end. Here, the problem that drew the media attention towards irresponsibility lies outside the core business of the organization. The alleged corruption had taken place when the corporation expanded to Uzbekistan several years earlier and, even though it took a while for Telia to take responsibility, the solution to the problem was to admit the misconduct and remove the problem. For Telia, this entailed firing the leaders responsible, exiting the problematic region, improving its ethics and compliance function, as well as providing a story of change.

The chronic and acute irresponsibility narratives differ in several ways. The chronic irresponsibility narrative leaves room for contests between narratives of corporate irresponsibility versus corporate responsibility. Due to the continuation of the media stories, several aspects of the issue can reach the media agenda. In the acute irresponsibility narrative, on the other hand, the revelations about irresponsibility made in the journalistic media generate immediate attention to the problem. The corporation in the center of attention must handle it somehow, and all parties likely agree on understanding the wrongdoing or negligence as irresponsibility that requires action on the part of the corporation in order to recover.

The problem that caused the chronic irresponsibility narrative is likely structural and shared by the entire industry and thus one leading corporation can be used to illustrate the issue by placing it in the center of the media stories. Journalists are also able to also personify the issue by telling the real-life stories of those affected and harmed by the corporate activities. The problem is also simplified by focusing on certain aspects of the problem that fit into a story, and not on structural elements. The storytelling in chronic irresponsibility narratives thus focuses on stereotypical characterization and personalization at various levels. In the acute irresponsibility narrative, the storytelling is characterized by a large amount of attention to the issue that peaks in the form of a scandal. The media stories often also assign blame to the corporate leaders. Narratives of acute irresponsibility often lead to adjustments in organizations, such as dismissal of the leaders responsible, implementation of new policies and/or solving or removing the problem.

Distinguishing these two forms of narratives in which corporate irresponsibility is constructed provides knowledge on how this value judgment is given meaning in narratives; without such knowledge, media stories are simply loosely coupled stories. By understanding how the chronic and acute irresponsibility narratives differ from each other, we recognize that meaning construction is not a given and can take various forms depending on the underlying negligence or irresponsibility issues. This study thus adds to previous knowledge about the interplay between media and corporations (e.g. Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2009; Kjaergaard et al., 2011; Zavyalova et al., 2017).
as well as to understandings about how corporate irresponsibility is defined (e.g. Lange & Washburn, 2012; Mena et al., 2016; Alcadipani & de Oliviera Medeiros, 2019), by focusing on the communication that takes the form of narratives. The study also contributes to the line of research that focuses on the constitutive aspects of communication by highlighting the role of media narratives as constitutive of what corporate irresponsibility means, both for the corporation in the media limelight and for society as a whole.

8.2 Contributions of the study

More precisely, this study adds to the recent discussion in organization studies about the need to focus more on communicative aspects of organizations (e.g. Cornelissen et al., 2015) as well as discussions about the constitutive role of communication for organizations (e.g. Cooren et al., 2011; Blasche & Schoenborn, 2016; Schoenborn et al., 2019) and for corporate issues such as corporate responsibility (Schoenborn & Trittin, 2013; Schultz et al., 2013; Cooren, 2018). One contribution of the study is therefore that it brings a new perspective towards understanding corporate irresponsibility, in the interplay between corporations and media, by focusing on the role of communication and narratives. Whereas previous research primarily discusses corporate responsibility, the focus of this study is corporate irresponsibility, which likely has more news value.

The study also brings narratives into the CCO literature and argues that it is the formation of narratives about corporate irresponsibility that makes the communication in media stories particularly powerful. As has been shown, these narratives of corporate irresponsibility are formed when a specific topic, related to a specific corporation, is brought up in the media repeatedly over time. The day-to-day communication in the media that takes the form of isolated news stories does not have the same ability to influence meaning construction that the stories connected to established narratives have. Thus, when media stories of corporate irresponsibility form narratives, they challenge the corporation’s own stories by presenting a counter-narrative.

The counter-narratives constructed in media stories can have different characteristics. That is, they can be chronic irresponsibility narratives or acute irresponsibility narratives. The form of the irresponsibility narrative – chronic or acute – matters for the corporation at the center of the media attention. Chronic irresponsibility narratives concern an industry problem, or an issue related to the business model of the corporation. In such situations the underlying problem is difficult to change. However, these types of narratives are likely to be co-constructed by various actors and the corporation can participate by providing
its own stories. Acute irresponsibility narratives, on the other hand, have to do with problems that require immediate attention. Such narratives are likely told by journalists, and the corporation can handle them by removing or solving the underlying problem. Both narratives have in common that the storytelling builds on established news values, often with simplified, dramatized and personified stories as key features.

It has also been shown that particularly when different narratives encounter each other, for example, corporate narratives of responsibility and media narratives of corporate irresponsibility, opportunities for discussion and dialogue (cf. Cooren, 2018) can arise. It is consequently suggested that it is when narratives collide that communicative events occur, in which the meaning of corporate irresponsibility is likely to be re-negotiated. Opportunities for such events are more frequent in the chronic irresponsibility narrative, where the topic is repeatedly brought up in the media where different framings of the topic take part in storytelling. The acute irresponsibility narrative takes the form of a scandal with a beginning, a peak in the middle, and an ending. In this narrative, the story is established early on and there is less room to change the narrative.

By showing that there are several different perspectives to corporate irresponsibility intertwined in the narratives, this study presents a more complex view of how issues and the meaning of them are constructed in the media. Corporate irresponsibility is a value-laden concept that has no particular meaning unless (or until) someone or something communicates about it, i.e. makes a judgment (cf. Lange & Washburn, 2012). This study therefore concludes that when arguing that communication is the primary mode through which the organization is constituted, narratives told about the corporations, by media and other stakeholders, should also be included in the analysis. The study thus contributes to the CCO perspective by applying the ideas of constitutive communication to narratives told neither inside nor outside the organization that challenge the organizational boundaries.

8.3 Practical implications

The implications of this study can have relevance for the practice of several societal actors, including corporations, journalists, and investors. First of all, as both chronic irresponsibility and acute irresponsibility are rather common, there are lessons to be learned for most corporations. Although not all media stories draw as much attention as those at the center of this study, it is reasonable to assume that most media attention towards corporate irresponsibility issues takes the form of either an acute irresponsibility narrative or a chronic
irresponsibility narrative. Thus, understanding how the constitution of narratives works would give corporations increased knowledge on how to address the stories told about them by others.

The study also shows that the journalistic media can be a positive force for encouraging corporations to take more responsible action, particularly at the initial stage when revelations are first made, as the corporations are forced to address the issues presented in the media. The possibility for the journalistic media to be a force for increased responsibility in the business world could hence benefit from less focus on these established stories and more resources on new investigations. By widening the scope to include new issues in other industries, the journalistic media could continue to play an important role as a watchdog and catalyst for corporate responsibility. Thus, the findings of this study imply that repeating these stories over long periods, as is often done in the media, reduces the opportunities to create positive change by taking space from new revelations.

For investors who want to reduce the risk of investing in corporations that are viewed either as irresponsible or as acting irresponsibly, knowing what corporate irresponsibility is and how it is constructed can be vital for several reasons. There are, for example, financial risks connected to issues like corruption, where a corporation can, like Telia, be forced to pay large settlements. Corporations accused of acting irresponsibly can also lose legitimacy and reputation, which can also impact their financial value. This is particularly relevant when managing various forms of ethical funds, as such funds neither want to invest in, nor be associated with, corporations that end up in the media limelight on issues of corporate irresponsibility.

8.4 Final reflections

This study has focused on narratives and argues that the narrative form of communication is particularly powerful for negotiating meaning and ensemble experience into to something meaningful (Czarniawska, 2004a). Narratives are thus an important way in which we structure the world to make it understandable. Some stories have higher attraction value than others. The stories that are most likely to be told in the media, for example, are those that can be related to established news values (cf. Allan, 2004). The same may be said of stories in general, where a story that fits neatly into a recognized plot is more likely to be told than another (cf. Czarniawska & Rhodes, 2004).

As shown, the acute and chronic irresponsibility narratives distinguished in this study are connected to certain news values. These narratives can also be
related to established dramaturgies, which can contribute, at least in part, to their attractiveness. On the one hand, the acute irresponsibility narrative resembles, at least in its first phases, the plot a Greek tragedy. In a tragedy, a protagonist of importance fails due to both personal inadequacy and outside circumstances. Then comes a clarification where, the protagonist is restored. Thus, in an acute irresponsibility narrative, the previously successful leaders of a corporation fall into disrepute after a media scandal. Then later, they take responsibility for what happened and ultimately fix the problem.

Chronic irresponsibility narratives, on the other hand, follow the course of events of a melodrama, and appeals to our emotions. Melodramatic stories are often sensational and focus on morality, with the plot built around stereotypical characters. Thus, in several media stories, the chronic irresponsibility narrative is illustrated by poor, struggling factory workers in contrast to corporate leaders living a life in luxury. Thus, the conflicts inherent in global inequalities are depicted in a melodramatic example. In the current study, emotional stories are especially apparent in the media reports about H&M, where real-life stories about difficult living conditions are told rather than, for example, a story about structural problems related to consumption and the environmental impact of the garment industry.

These plots offer a compelling way of telling stories. Hence, in the battle for attention, when so much media focus is given to these two types of narratives, other stories with less appealing plots end up being neglected. As journalistic revelations of corporate irresponsibility can be a positive force for increasing responsibility, one might question why the focus ends up on a few established stories. Other issues, such as gender inequalities, over-consumption, climate change, and other environmental issues, as well as other, less well-known corporations, fall under the radar when the attention remains fixed on the same types of high-profile corporate irresponsibility narratives provided in the media.

This study has focused on corporate irresponsibility in narratives primarily told by journalistic media. The relationship between corporations and the journalistic media has consequently been the main empirical focus here. The underlying issues in the chronic and acute irresponsibility narratives do, however, apply to other parts of society as well. In this study, it has been shown that various actors such as NGOs, or investors and politicians, with an interest in the same issues, participate in the construction of media stories. Those even more affected by whether or not the corporation at the center of the media attention takes responsibility or acts irresponsibly, however, are not present as storytellers in the media. Stories are instead told about them.
In the media story about H&M, the textile workers are the ones directly experiencing the consequences of poor working conditions and low wages in the garment factories. Their life stories are sometimes told by journalists who travel to the manufacturing countries in Asia to report on bigger stories, but these textile workers cannot be considered actors in their own right. In the media story about Telia and the allegations of corruption in Uzbekistan, those affected by the issue are not as easily identifiable. However, that foreign corporations support a corrupt regime likely has consequences for the wider population in a country like Uzbekistan. Having a proper discussion and dialogue about the responsibilities of corporations for a more sustainable development would undoubtedly require the participation of those harmed by corporations that act irresponsibly.

8.5 Suggestions for further research

While previous research has focused on either the impact that media attention can have on corporations or the content of the media reporting, this study contributes by instead setting the narratives constructed in the communicative interplay between media and corporations at the center of the analysis. A part of the analysis therefore addressed the perspective of the corporations that ended up in the media limelight. The results suggest that media reporting can have an impact on corporations, for example, as a catalyst for speeding up more responsible business conduct. However, it is also noted that corporations in the media limelight often put up a struggle, for example, by telling their own stories about corporate responsibility without including the journalistic media. Hence, the storytelling of corporations can be equally powerful, meaning that corporations do not always adjust to the stories told in the media or adhere to the media requests for corporations to be available for answers.

In line with previous research on the implications of media attention to corporate activities presented in the literature review of Chapter 2 (e.g. Chouliarki & Morsing, 2009; Kjaergaard et al., 2011), the corporations in focus in this study likely experienced pressures that affected their identity, i.e. how they view themselves. This study has touched upon how media attention is experienced within the organization as well as consequences that established narratives have had on organizations. A more comprehensive examination would provide us with a better understanding of these aspects. It is therefore suggested that future research continue to explore how organizations experience the challenge of media narratives by focusing also on what goes on inside a corporation that is or has been the main character of such narrative.
Future studies of the interplay between media and corporations could also use the CCO perspective to examine, in line with this study, the impact of communication in the media on corporations. The present study has taken a broad perspective on communication and discussed the form and content of storytelling in narratives over an extended period of time including also interviews with actors behind the scenes. Future studies could advantageously delve deeper into communication theory and focus in more detail on language, where perspectives such as semiotics, rhetoric or speech acts could be fruitful avenues for continued study of similar topics as in this study. This could consequently add further knowledge on the constitutive communications processes that take place in the boundaries of the organization.

The findings of this study show that the CCO perspective can be particularly useful when it comes to exploring the construction and constitution of the value judgment of corporate irresponsibility. Since a value judgment has no meaning unless the meaning is communicated, the focus on communication that takes the form of stories provided by various actors, such as the journalistic media and corporations, offers an opportunity to understand how this meaning comes into being. This study suggests that similar processes of construction and constitution in narratives take place in other organizational matters. Future studies that take a similar approach as the current study could thus examine this empirically.

Furthermore, neither the impact of corporate irresponsibility narratives on consumers, nor the financial performance of the corporations in the media limelight have been studied here. However, as mentioned in the epilogues at the end of each of the empirical chapters (chapters 4 and 5), surveys of the public do not indicate that the corporate irresponsibility stories have had any great impact on the perceptions of the general public. For example, consumer surveys have shown that both H&M and Telia have been considered among the best in their respective industries when it comes to sustainability.

Lastly, the role of the journalistic media in society has changed in the past decades. The use of print newspapers, for example, an important source of material for this study, has decreased in favor of online news spread through channels other than traditional media organizations. Fewer viewers also follow traditional TV broadcasts, which could change the impact that these journalistic investigations have on the public debate. The way that these changes in journalistic media may be changing the interplay between media and corporations, as well as the societal narratives on corporate issues, would be an interesting topic for future study.
Svensk sammanfattning

Trots att företag numera satsar mycket på att ta ansvar för, och kommunicera om, sociala frågor så förekommer det ofta avslöjanden om företags oansvarighet i medier. Två sådana medieberättelser som fått stor uppmärksamhet är den om arbetskvinnoles i textilfabriken i H&M:s leverantörskedja, som pågått sedan 1990-talet, samt den om korruptionsanklagerina mot Telia i samband med etableringen av en ny verksamhet i Uzbekistan 2007. Dessa medieberättelser bildar sedan mer övergripande narrativ som i sin tur skapar förståelse för vad företags oansvarighet innebär.


konstitutionen av företag, speciellt vad gäller ansvarsfrågor. Då få har undersökt detta empiriskt ger denna studie även ett bidrag till detta forskningsfält.


Urskiljandet av dessa två former av narrativ bidrar till förståelse för hur ett värdefullt begrepp som oansvarighet ges mening genom narrativ som återberättas i medierna. Genom att förstå hur de kroniska och akuta ansvarsnarrativa skiljer sig åt framgår det att meningsskapandet tar sig olika former beroende av dels det underliggande problemet rörande försämring eller oansvarighet, dels dess narrativa framställning. Mer specifikt bidrar den här studien således till utökad kunskap om hur uppfattningar om företagens oansvarighet skapas i kommunikation genom att speciellt fokusera på kommunikationens narrativa form. Studien bidrar också till den forskningslinje som inriktar sig på de konstitutiva aspekterna av kommunikation genom att peka på mediernas
roll som konstituerande för vad företags oansvarighet innebär, både för företaget i mediernas rampljus och för samhället i stort.
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1997-12-30b. ”Winberg: - Jag tänker inte handla mer på H&M”, Y. Johnson.
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2013-05-19. ”Tänk dig att olyckan hade inträffat i Borås i stället”, J. Heli.n
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Resumé

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1997-12-31. "LO hotar sälja H&M-aktier", TT.
2008-10-18. "Cecilia Edström…".
2011-04-06. "Riskfylld jakt på tillväxt i Telia”, A. Cervenka.
2012-09-21b. "Dubbelfel av Telia Sonera”, A. Cervenka.
2013-02-04. "Här topprankas Telias antikorruptionsarbete" (published online), P. Alestig.
2018-12-06. "Slutnotan klar för Telias affärer i Uzbekistan”, B. Ewnfeldt/TT & O. Lindström/TT.
Appendix 1: TV broadcasts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of episode</th>
<th>TV show</th>
<th>TV channel</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Transcription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senaste mode – till vilket pris? (Latest fashion – at what price?)</td>
<td>Två världsföretag (Two global companies)</td>
<td>SVT2</td>
<td>1997-12-29</td>
<td>Fully transcribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport</td>
<td></td>
<td>SVT2</td>
<td>1997-12-29</td>
<td>Fully transcribed (about H&amp;M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aktuellt</td>
<td></td>
<td>SVT1</td>
<td>1997-12-29</td>
<td>Fully transcribed (about H&amp;M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drömmen om levnadslön (The dream of living wages)</td>
<td>Kalla Fakta (Cold Facts)</td>
<td>TV4</td>
<td>2012-10-24</td>
<td>Fully transcribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefan Persson och H&amp;M (Stefan Persson and H&amp;M)</td>
<td>Kalla Fakta (Cold Facts)</td>
<td>TV4</td>
<td>2012-12-12</td>
<td>Partly transcribed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: List of TV episodes about H&M*
## List of TV episodes about Telia and the alleged corruption in Uzbekistan, 2008-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of episode</th>
<th>TV show</th>
<th>TV channel</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Transcription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapport</td>
<td>SVT1</td>
<td>2008-04-02</td>
<td>Fully transcribed (about Telia)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistanaffären (The Uzbekistan affair)</td>
<td>UG (Mission Investigation)</td>
<td>SVT1</td>
<td>2012-09-19</td>
<td>Transcription from producer (+ supplement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diktatorns dotter (The dictator's daughter)</td>
<td>UG (Mission Investigation)</td>
<td>SVT1</td>
<td>2012-12-12</td>
<td>Transcription from producer (+ supplement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White wash</td>
<td>UG (Mission Investigation)</td>
<td>SVT1</td>
<td>2012-12-29</td>
<td>Transcription from producer (+ supplement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuriren från Moskva (The courier from Moscow)</td>
<td>UG (Mission Investigation)</td>
<td>SVT1</td>
<td>2013-05-22</td>
<td>Transcription from producer (+ supplement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De omtybara (The unbribable)</td>
<td>UG (Mission Investigation)</td>
<td>SVT1</td>
<td>2013-05-29</td>
<td>Transcription from producer (+ supplement)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: List of TV episodes about Telia*
## Appendix 2: Interviewees

First part of the list of interviews about H&M and the working conditions in garment factories, 15 interviews, 2016-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Role in story</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Length of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fredrik Sjöshult, journalist at Expressen</td>
<td>Traveled to Bangladesh in a series of articles about H&amp;M in 2012 and has repeatedly reported on corporate irresponsibility.</td>
<td>2016-11-30</td>
<td>46 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viveka Risberg, previously employee at H&amp;M and Swedwatch</td>
<td>Employee at H&amp;M 2006-2009 and at the NGO Swedwatch.</td>
<td>2016-12-05</td>
<td>59 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia Zadig, previously investigate journalist at SVT</td>
<td>Producer of the documentary Latest Fashion – at what price? in 1997.</td>
<td>2016-12-12</td>
<td>106 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous employee at H&amp;M 2</td>
<td>Participant in the SVT documentary in 1997.</td>
<td>2017-02-06</td>
<td>55 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johanna Nilsson, slow fashion activist</td>
<td>Author of the blog Slow fashion and co-author of the book with the same title.</td>
<td>2017-02-09</td>
<td>58 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous employee at H&amp;M 3</td>
<td>Participant in the SVT documentary in 1997.</td>
<td>2017-02-24</td>
<td>44 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moa Kärnstrand, independent journalist</td>
<td>Journalists and authors of the book Mode-slavar: den globala jakten på billigare kläder (Fashion Slaves: the global hunt for cheaper clothes), 2016</td>
<td>2017-03-11</td>
<td>102 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobias Andersson Akerblom, independent journalist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair Action representative 1</td>
<td>Participant in one Kalla Fakta episode in 2012, works at the NGO Fair Action.</td>
<td>2017-03-15</td>
<td>87 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee</td>
<td>Role in story</td>
<td>Date of interview</td>
<td>Length of interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IF Metall representative</td>
<td>Works with H&amp;M at a labor union organization IF Metall (part of IndustriALL).</td>
<td>2017-04-03</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristina Areskog Bjurling, previously NGO rep</td>
<td>An initiator of the Swedish consumer movement in the 1990s, formerly at the NGO Fair Action and Swedwatch.</td>
<td>2017-04-06</td>
<td>53 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair Action representative 2</td>
<td>Participant in one Kalla Fakta episode in 2012, formerly at the NGO Fair Action.</td>
<td>2017-05-04</td>
<td>51 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous employee H&amp;M 4</td>
<td>Employee at H&amp;M for many years and participant in the SVT documentary in 1997.</td>
<td>2017-05-11</td>
<td>56 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability employee H&amp;M</td>
<td>Present employee working with sustainability and communication at H&amp;M.</td>
<td>2017-10-02</td>
<td>53 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedwatch representative</td>
<td>Working at the NGO Swedwatch, previously a news journalist.</td>
<td>2017-11-15</td>
<td>71 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4: List of interviews about H&M*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Role in story</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Length of interview</th>
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<td>Joachim Dyfvermark, investigative journalist at UG</td>
<td>Co-producer of the episodes of UG about Telia.</td>
<td>2016-11-14</td>
<td>78 minutes</td>
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<td>Communications employee Telia 1</td>
<td>Present employees working with sustainability and communication at Telia.</td>
<td>2017-02-07</td>
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<td>Anderas Cervenka, journalist at SvD</td>
<td>Financial reporter at SvD who wrote about Telia and the risks in Uzbekistan already in 2008.</td>
<td>2017-03-21</td>
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<td>Previous employee Telia 1</td>
<td>Former employee in communications at Telia, participated in one episode of UG</td>
<td>2017-03-28</td>
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<td>Sustainability consultant</td>
<td>Consultant in sustainability at Telia 2014-2015</td>
<td>2017-03-29</td>
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<td>Previous employee Telia 2</td>
<td>Former employee in sustainability at Telia</td>
<td>2017-06-20</td>
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*Table 5: List of interviews about Telia*
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<td>Hanna von Schantz</td>
<td>Well, that makes sense! Investigating opportunity</td>
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<td>Development in a technology start-up.</td>
<td>Kerstin Thomson</td>
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<td>Styrning och samhällsvärde. En studie med exempel från museivärlden.</td>
<td>Emma Björner</td>
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<td>“Sweat is weakness leaving the body” A study on the self-presentational practices of sporty top managers in Sweden.</td>
<td>Janet Johansson</td>
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<td>Weaving the symbiotic relationship. A longitudinal study of the maintenance of a firm-sponsored open source community.</td>
<td>Elia Giovacchini</td>
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<td>Consumption of financial services in global mobility. A Cephalopodic consumption mode?</td>
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<td>Matrixing Aid. The Rise and Fall of ‘Results Initiatives’ in Swedish Development Aid.</td>
<td>Janet Vähämäki</td>
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<td>Information Worker Productivity Enabled by IT System Usage. A Complementary-Based Approach.</td>
<td>Natallia Pashkevich</td>
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<td>Mohammad Irani</td>
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<td>Andrea Lucarelli</td>
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<td>Service Provider Flexibility – A Strategic Perspective.</td>
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192 2013  Caihong Xu  *Essays on Derivatives and Liquidity.* Stockholm University School of Business.

191 2013  Mikael Andéhn  *Place-of-Origin Effects on Brand Equity. Explicating the evaluative pertinence of product categories and association strength.* Stockholm University School of Business.

190 2013  Sabina Du Rietz  *Accounting in the field of governance.* Stockholm University School of Business.


188 2013  Svärdsten Nymans, Fredrik  *Constituting performance: Case studies of performance auditing.* Stockholm University School of Business.

187 2012  Kumar, Nishant  *Globalisation and Competitive Sustenance of Born Global. Evidence from Indian knowledge-intensive service industry.* Stockholm University School of Business.


184 2011  Molander, Susanna  *Mat, kärlek och metapraktik. En studie i vardagsmiddagskonsumtion bland ensamstående mödrar.* Stockholm University School of Business.


181 2011  Schultz-Nybacka, Pamela  *Bookonomy. The Consumption Practice and Value of Book*
180 2011 Lund, Ragnar

Leveraging cooperative strategy – cases of sports and arts sponsorship. Stockholm University School of Business.

179 2010 Svendsen, Jens Martin

Gör som jag säger! igen och igen – om lojalitet och lek i marknadsföringen: en beskrivning av legitimeringssystematik. Stockholm University School of Business.

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Köp av tjänster för ledningskompetens – en polyfonisk process. Stockholm University School of Business.

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The Rise of Luxury Brands Online: A study of how a sense of luxury brand is created in an online environment. Stockholm University School of Business.

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Standardized Knowledge Transfer: A study of Project-Based Organizations in the Construction and IT Sectors. Stockholm University School of Business.

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Learning within and between public-private partnerships. Stockholm University School of Business.

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Patient Patients? Achieving Patient Empowerment through active participation, increased knowledge and organisation. Stockholm University School of Business.

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States under scrutiny. International organizations, transformation and the construction of progress. Stockholm University School of Business.

159 2007 Gawell, Malin

Activist Entrepreneurship - Attac’ing Norms and Articulating Disclosive Stories. Stockholm University School of Business.
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133 2003 Willstrand-Holmer, Sofia  
Att konstruera kunskap om kunder - en studie om förändring och berättelser i ICA-sammanslutningen.  
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132 2003 Roy, Sofie  
Navigating in the Knowledge Era. Metaphors and Stories in the Construction of Skandia’s Navigator.  
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Skräddare utan tråd - en illustration av fyra företag i klädbranschen.  
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130 2002 Hansson, Johan  
Omtänkbara organisationer – Sagor och utsagor om Astrid Lindgrens Barnsjukhus.  
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Rättssystemets Lärande.  
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Värdeskapande produktutveckling i tjänsteintensiva företag.  
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124 2001 Gottfridsson, Patrik  
Småföretags tjänsteutveckling - en studie av hur småföretag utvecklar individuellt anpassade tjänster.  
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Essays on Equity Options.  
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Artificial Market Actors: Explorations of Automated Business Interactions.  
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110 2001  Carlell, Camilla  Technology in Everyday Life - A study of Consumers and Technology in a Banking Context. Stockholm University School of Business.

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72 1994 Sveiby, Karl-Erik  
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71 1994 Bergqvist, Erik  
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The Construction of Corporate Irresponsibility

A constitutive perspective on communication in media narratives

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