

# Spin in the Media

## - the Media in a (self-)Spin?

Spin was a central issue amongst journalists during the Danish parliamentary election campaign in 2005. But what is this extensive and critical media debate regarding spin actually an expression of: a self-reflective awareness of trends in the relationship between media and society? Or a self-righteous journalistic meta-discourse?

The professionalization of the interplay of sources with journalists has appeared on the agenda in both Danish journalism studies (e.g. Lund 2004; Nielsen 2004; Kristensen 2003) and the media themselves in recent years. Most recently, 'spin' was a buzz-word and fixed point for the journalistic attention during the Danish parliamentary election campaign in January and February 2005. At regular intervals, readers were presented with often lengthy articles with 'spin' as an eye-catcher – e.g. *Spin decided the election* (Information, 19 January 2005) or *The spin doctor prescribed an election* (Jyllands-Posten, 30 January 2005). A Danish television program, *Jersild on Spin* on DR2, a Danish public service channel, has even been devoted to the concept. In other words, the editorial teams have joined academics in demonstrating a great awareness of the politicians' – the sources' – more or less professional (attempts at) managing the media.

The question is what the extensive media debate about spin – in general and during an election campaign such as the one in 2005 – is actually an expression of: is it a reflection of a professional responsiveness and self-reflective attention to various trends in both the media and the relationship between media and society? Or is it rather an expression of a self-righteous meta-discourse? Drawing on secondary empirical studies and an explorative reading of all of the newspaper articles about (and during) the 2005 Danish election campaign in which the word 'spin' appeared, this article argues that it is more an expression of the latter than the former. The main point is to illustrate that the media discussion about spin generally appears to overlook the tendencies

that spin is actually part of, i.e. a more structurally deployed mediatization of politics that presents new perspectives for both politics and journalism. These perspectives, however, often disintegrate in the comprehensive but typically 'self-centered' attempts of media and communication experts to proclaim every political and communicative initiative as spin.

### **Demonization and self-criticism**

Although the research literature offers many definitions of 'spin', it can, in a somewhat simplistic manner, be said to relate to a number of practical techniques of turning a message in a particular direction, primarily with journalists as target group and influencing the media agenda as purpose (Lund 2002; Esser; Reinemann & Fan 2001; Pedersen et al. 2000). The concept is especially associated with the political scene and politicians' implicit or explicit adaptation to the logic of journalism (deadlines, angles, concreteness, simplicity, etc.). In both the theoretical and public discussion of spin, great weight is thus accorded to 'the actors' practicing spin (particularly spin doctors) rather than the 'act' of spinning (Sarup 2004). However, both are based on one of the fundamental sociological perspectives: the 'agent/action-perspective'. The actions of journalists and politicians and their reciprocal effects are considered determinant for the media-politics relationship. This is first and foremost opposed to the structural view, according to which overarching social structures are believed to shape these relations. Furthermore, it differs from the integrated perspective whereby agents and structures (journalists, politicians and the public as well as media, politics and

society) are considered to be mutually affecting and affected as argued for by e.g. Anthony Giddens, the British sociologist, in his theory of structuration (Giddens 1984).

In addition to – but also because of – the prevailing political, form- and agent-centered focus on spin, researchers have long associated the phenomenon with a discourse of decline (Bennet & Manheim 2001; Esser, Reinemann & Fan 2001; McNair 2000). This negative framing is echoed in the Danish media representation of an academic view of spin as well as in the rhetoric of some journalists themselves – e.g. during the 2005 election campaign. Under the heading *Chess player at the center of power*, journalist Marianne With Bindslev portrayed Michael Kristiansen, the Prime Minister's spin doctor at the time, with this comment:

"(...) with Michael Kristiansen and the other government press officers, Danish politics is increasingly becoming a process which is largely about spin and scene-setting through the media" (Kristeligt Dagblad, 19 January 2005).

The same rhetoric appears in the description provided by reporters Lea Wind-Friis, Bo Søndergaard and Pernille Tranberg of the politicians' campaign tour around the country: "It is beautiful. Or is it the Prince of Darkness and his acolytes who, with cold calculation, manipulate the voters and the media to win and exercise power" (Politiken, 23 January 2005). Journalist Torben Jakobsen continues the discourse in the article *Spin: Election upon the spin doctor's prescription*, writing that "(...) the Danish election has become a strategic game in which the performance of the politicians is more important than their political opinions. But the strategic game can pose a danger to democracy" (*Jyllands-Posten*, 30 January 2005).

These examples more or less explicitly reflect the agency-centered and demonized rhetoric that has long been associated with spin, spin doctors and politicians themselves as communicators in both some academic circles and parts of the public debate; i.e. as arcane manipulators of power operating in the shadows and distorting political reality.<sup>2</sup> However, the critical perspective in the media debate was also turned against the editorial actors themselves, because journalists throughout the industry and the duration of the election campaign accentuated the media's own swing in relation to spin. Under the headline *Spin or disappear*, journalist

Jesper Larsen wrote: "Perhaps it is all spin, and then it is either spin or disappear. But perhaps it is no more than ordinary politics or everyday and banal populism" (*Berlingske Tidende*, 24 January 2005).

He hereby questions whether political spin was actually used in the election campaign or whether misrepresentation – spinning – was the construction of the media themselves. Journalist Helle Broberg Nielsen used similar phrases under the headline *Spin and self-spin* (*Jyllands-Posten*, 28 January 2005) in a discussion of how the media coverage of the election campaign represented a power struggle between spin doctors and political journalists about who were leading whom. Part of the media coverage thus focused its critical gaze inwards on the journalism profession instead of narrowly on the politicians and their communication advisors.

"The comprehensive thematization of spin first and foremost contributes to keeping the phenomenon on the agendas of the media, the politicians and the public."

Irrespective of the framing of the media discourse – positive or negative, demonized or self-critical – the comprehensive thematization of spin first and foremost contributes to keeping the phenomenon on the agendas of the media, the politicians and the public. The media discourse subsequently contributes to maintaining the angle in the discussion of media and politics on the question of agents, actions, motives and (media) form – whether expressed as an identification of spin activities and thus control over the media logic by politicians, the absence of the same, or as an apparently self-reflexive debate regarding the media's own treatment of political news management.

### Metacommunication in journalism

The extensive and at times self-critical media debate of the recent developments in political communication, e.g. during the 2005 election campaign, point to an editorial awareness concerning the communicative situation currently playing out between journalism and politics. This situation presents journalists with a number of challenges in the interaction with politicians as sources, requiring a corresponding reaction and change in

journalism. It can be argued that Danish journalism has already responded to these challenges by optimizing the theoretical and analytical foundation of the profession when journalism became an academic discipline in the late 1990s (Lund 1999; Kristensen 2003). Furthermore, several media have re-armed as to ethical guidelines, accentuating their autonomy (Bredal 2001; Kristensen 2003).

 "It can be argued that modern politics are as much about communication as about politics."

These self-critical initiatives are part of a more general trend in the media to ever-more publicly, e.g. in news broadcasts, newspaper articles etc., direct an – on the face of it welcome – analytical focus on their own professionalism. The German and American researchers Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann and David Fan (2001) have labeled this 'metacommunication', what they define as: "the news media's self-referential reflections on the nature of the interplay between political public relations and political journalism" (ibid. 39). They perceive metacommunication as a reaction to the communicative professionalization of the political sphere, but accentuate that the (self-)critical media discussions, not least as regards the spin doctor, are often biased and – unjustifiably – discredit the politicians' professional media management.

In continuation of this, it can be argued that the self-reflexive meta-discourse of the media and their attentiveness to the professionalization of political communication is not necessarily synonymous with the implementation of counter-offensives in the journalistic practice. Rather, it may represent an expression of a professional self-justification. The American communication researcher Ronald Bishop (2001: 23), for example, introduces the concepts of 'ritual sacrifice' and 'synthetic self-policing' concerning the media's self-criticism in print and primetime. He makes the point that the editorial aim is more about persuading readers and viewers to reinvest their trust in journalism in order to maintain an audience with purchasing power<sup>3</sup> than about any genuine self-examination with actual intentions or initiatives to take action on the basis of the criticism. This point is confirmed by an empirical study of the rela-

onship between Danish journalists and their sources as seen from the journalists' perspective (Kristensen 2003). The study reflects an unquestionable awareness amongst journalists that working with sources, such as politicians, has become more difficult. Their professional routines, however, have remained relatively unaffected by these circumstances. Thus, studies in Denmark and elsewhere indicate an explicit distance between the journalistic self-awareness and reflection being signaled and the actual professional behavior.

### Process journalism

It can be argued that the same 'ritual sacrifice' applied to the media debate about spin during the 2005 election campaign. For example, it was largely the media themselves that placed the concept of spin on the agenda with resounding headlines, election duels between the 'presidential candidates', and spin-based discussion programs. In this manner, the media implied a certain awareness of the communicative professionalization of the competing politicians by means of spin, though also a critical approach to their own coverage of this phenomenon. However, they also maintained focus on the political agents and (media)form instead of on the political content, perhaps because this – from an editorial point of view – made for good, 'sellable' stories.<sup>4</sup>

This can be linked to the focus of political journalism on the political game – or what has been referred to as 'process journalism' in the international and national literature. For example, Esser, Reinemann and Fan define this as news focusing

"(...) less on the performance and perceptions of the reporters themselves (...) and more on the strategies, stage-craftings, and spin doctors employed by candidates to control information" (2001: 39).

Accordingly, Rasmus Jønsson and Ole Larsen, Danish political communication researchers, explain 'process journalism' as dealing "(...) with the power struggle in the wings, forging alliances and exposing the motives behind the statements and actions of the various players" (2002: 23, my translation).

This results in journalism principally focusing on individuals, their mutual power struggles and commu-

nicative competences (e.g. image, impact or signaled trustworthiness), perhaps at the expense of the political content. A quantitative study of the media coverage of the 2005 election campaign by a team of media researchers and journalists (Bro et al. 2005: 12) at least shows that the political processes were the primary focus in almost half of the news items/articles (45 percent).

The extent to which there has been any real change in this matter is debatable – change that is one of the points made by Jønsson and Larsen (2002) and in principle also by Bro et al. (2005); or whether political journalism has dealt with political battles and personal conflicts for a long time (if not always). In any case, it is possible to identify a shift in the temporal and factual basis upon which this political journalism rests. Forecasts, opinion polls, interpretations and speculation regarding political motives and prophecies about the future are increasingly the point of departure in journalism instead of news-oriented and factual reporting. For example, in a comprehensive study of Swedish television and radio news journalism in the 20th century, the Swedish media researchers Lennart Weibull and Monika Djerf-Pierre (2001), show the extent to which journalism has shifted from being informative to being reflective and investigative to interpreting society. Journalists have become active participants, experts and interpreters despite the fact that, historically speaking, their fundamental project has been to ‘objectively’ report documented facts (e.g. Andrén et al. 1979).

The media coverage of the 2005 election campaign reflected some of the same tendencies – first and foremost in terms of the numerous stories focusing on processes, individuals and speculation about the communicative motives of the politicians, irrespective of whether the framing of this spin discussion was critical of the politicians or the media themselves; and subsequently through the fact that in over half of the stories, the media themselves set the premises through news analysis, background articles, opinion surveys, predictions, etc. (Pedersen/Monday Morning Weekly 3/2005: 19).

That the media’s election coverage supports a development in journalism from being retrospective to speculating about the future is further supported by the players who appeared in this media coverage to explain and analyze various political and communicative trends, including the use of spin.

### The media’s own experts

One of the conclusions of the aforementioned content analysis of the media coverage of the 2005 election campaign (Bro et al. 2005: 13) is that ‘Media Representatives’ and ‘Experts’ were equally frequent as sources. Among the ‘Experts’, only one-in-four could be regarded as ‘impartial’ (e.g. from universities), corresponding to 1.4 percent of all of the sources used in the media coverage of the three-week election battle. Instead, both television and the press used their own political commentators, journalists, editors and analysts or communications people, former spin doctors etc. as commentators and opinion-makers. This confirms a more general tendency that journalists are increasingly acting as sources for their own or other media’s stories instead of simply reporting them.

“Journalism has shifted from being informative to being reflective and investigative to interpreting society.”

For example, The Danish sociologist Jakob Arnoldi’s analysis of the public expert (2005) shows that media representatives are gaining a foothold as experts in the media, not least on television. With reference to Pierre Bourdieu, the French cultural sociologist, Arnoldi argues that the academic field – including the ‘impartial’ experts from research institutions – is thereby losing ground to the journalistic field in terms of describing and/or constructing reality. One concrete example is an analysis of the media coverage of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by three Danish journalism researchers (Hjarvard, Kristensen & Ørsten 2004), which shows that ‘journalists’ and ‘other media’ accounted for 19.5 percent of all sources. Not least on television, the media’s own correspondents acted as military analysts rather than mere observers or eyewitnesses of the war (Kristensen 2006). By contrast, more traditional experts, such as those from research institutes, accounted for only 5 percent of all sources.<sup>5</sup> As pointed out, the same trends appeared in the media coverage of the 2005 election battle.

Some explain this growth in (political) media experts with their ability to adapt to the media logic with acutely angled points and messages (e.g. Bro et al. 2005). They possess, in Bourdieu’s terminology, a ‘symbolic ca-

pital' of communicative competences which the media require and therefore prioritize (Kristensen 2003, Arnoldi 2005). The American sociologist Herbert Gans (1979) originally defined good news sources as productive, reliable, trustworthy, authoritative and eloquent – characteristics that the media representatives in many ways possess: they can provide information whenever the media need it – at deadline. They are often considered trustworthy and authoritative because of their affiliation to a media institution, but also because of their repeated media exposure, which consolidates their position as established sources in the editorial – and political – hierarchy. Further along these lines, it can be argued that modern politics are as much about communication as about politics, which in its own way legitimizes the prominent position of media and communication experts as sources. However, this again primarily explains this development from a formal – media logic – perspective.

“Even though the media debate reflects various attitudes towards spin and the media coverage of it, the discussion remains one-dimensional.”

Another explanation of why articulated analysts and commentators from the media and communication sector undertake and offer analysis and speculation to such a great extent might be that the representatives of the research institutions decline to do so, as their trustworthiness is in part based on presenting empirical facts rather than assumptions. In any case, as regards the coverage of the 2005 election campaign, several media representatives and analysts pointed out a lack of contributions from traditional experts such as economists and political scientists (Bro et al. 2005: 19, Albret/Monday Morning Weekly 3/2005: 7) – but then their colleagues came to the rescue.

It can be argued that, in a broader perspective, one consequence of this is that the speculative element of the media attributes a number of covert and/or cynical ulterior motives to the actions of the politicians, which may not fairly represent reality (Blumler 1997). Thus, the media construct a political discourse on two levels – on the one hand, a notion of ‘a politics of façade’, cynically controlled with spin and manipulation, and, on the other hand, an impression of a more ‘real’ or ‘truer’ rea-

lity behind the façade; in other words, an opposition between a false and a genuine political reality.<sup>6</sup> However, political journalism rarely produces any evidence as to whether there really *are* such different political levels or more or less genuine political realities. In any case, analyses of the media coverage of the election campaign indicate that especially in the first phase of the campaign, the media were more or less uncritical of the political parties' numerous election promises (Pedersen/Monday Morning Weekly 3/2005: 19); i.e. uncritical of precisely the promises which the media were at the same time quick to call spin.<sup>7</sup> This again indicates that the media prefer to *interpret* actions and motives rather than factually unravel, investigate and document them.

This can in itself be seen as a form of (cynical) media spin which not only casts journalists as critical organs of control in regard to those in power, but also unnecessarily discredit political life, since the media call many political initiatives into question by connecting them to deception, manipulation or cover-up of ‘another’ or ‘truer’ political reality.<sup>8</sup> Along these lines, it can be argued that the media discussion of spin is the political journalists' version of the ‘interpretation paradigm’ in the historical development of news journalism, as analyzed by Weibull and Djerf-Pierre (2001) and, consequently, an expression of a more structurally anchored shift in the relationship between journalists and politicians, news media and politics and the role of journalism itself.

Finally, the media's considerable use of their own representatives as sources can be perceived in the light of the earlier mentioned self-critical metacommunication of journalism. For example, in his study of stories with a journalistic, self-reflexive angle, Bishop (2001) found that journalists themselves were often the sources of the self-criticism instead of experts from research institutions or, for that matter, representatives from political, public or commercial institutions. Similarly, Esser, Reinemann & Fan's (2001) study of spin doctors in different countries showed that this group of communicators frequently acts as news sources, commenting on political campaigns, actors, issues, etc. – despite the fact that they themselves very often are the pivotal point of the metacommunication as well. The media once again hereby confirm their own agenda and priorities as well as their framing of the subject ‘media and politics’, i.e. their tendency to focus on communicative form ra-

ther than political content, thus confirming the prominent status of the logic of adaptation in the journalistic comprehension and perception of the interplay between media and politics.

These circumstances point towards a schism between 1) the critical tone of journalism in regard to both the communication of the politicians and the media's own treatment of this political communication; and 2) the extensive media discussion of spin and the journalists' own significant position in and contribution to this debate. It can therefore be argued that even though the media debate reflects various attitudes towards spin and the media coverage of it, the discussion remains one-dimensional. Many of the changes within the media and political communication are overlooked in the self-perception of the journalists and their coverage of the relationship between media and politics, symbolized and demarcated by spin.

### Mediatization

'Mediatization' incorporates the aspects that parts of both the theoretical and the public discussion of spin can be criticized for overlooking. It concerns not just semiotic aspects, such as coding messages according to a media form or logic, but also technological and economic aspects. This hereby unites the three media functions which, according to the German social scientist Winfried Schultz (2004), influence the shifts in the relations between media and society. On the face of it, mediatization is linked to some of the same aspects as spin, although at a more overarching level. According to Kent Asp (1990), a Swedish professor in journalism and mass communication, mediatization concerns the explicit and implicit power of the mass media in society: the media have an evident control function in relation to the (political) holders of power. Simultaneously, the media logic is largely integrated in the social actions of precisely these (political) holders of power. From a research point of view, mediatization – just like spin – is therefore especially widespread regarding political communication (e.g. Amnå 1999).

According to both Schultz (2004) and Hjarvard (2004), mediatization, however, is neither merely a matter of adaptation (to the media logic) nor merely of politics. Adaptation is one of several complementary processes in the interplay between the media and various social

institutions – and their mutual influence and changes. This adaptation takes place within many different social spheres in addition to the political – business, cultural and public life, etc. Another important mediatization process is extension: the media bridge the spatial and temporal distances normally characterizing human communication. For example, they enable direct dialogue between citizens and politicians via chat rooms, homepages, etc., and, on the whole, contribute to placing particular topics and agents on the political and public agendas. Another dimension of mediatization is substitution, because the media substitute and alter social actions not traditionally mediated: election duels on television substitute or give new form to election meetings in community halls because of an intermediary medium; to some extent, press conferences replace the human dialogue of journalists and their sources amongst politicians at Christiansborg; and political speeches on the open screen become important communication tools for political agents, not just in regard to the voters, but also to other politicians and interest groups. The media hereby serve as arenas for political gambits which promptly require answers and action, precisely because of the media's dissemination of them to the greater public.

"Changes in the relationship between media, politics and other social spheres not only relate to form, but also to interactivity or mutual influence, communications channels, etc."

Several scholars (Schultz 2004, Hjarvard 2004, Ekström 2001) thus point out that the theoretical discussion of mediatization, understood as the changes in political institutions in relation to, because of and/or with the aid of communication media, often have a normative and demonized undertone; akin to that of spin. This is not least related to the notion of politics depending on and dictated by the media logic, e.g. when political messages are simplified, unnecessarily made sharper, or taken out of their context (Bennet & Manheim 2001, Franklin 1994). For example, Mats Ekström, a Swedish professor in journalism and political communication, writes that: "The concept [mediatized politics] (...) is frequently used to denote the dependency of politics on, and its adaptation to, mass media per se" (2001: 564).

According to Schultz (2004), this discourse overlooks the media as disseminators of a more comprehensible communication of complex politics to citizens and as creators of new forums for public political debate – irrespective of whether this is considered to be populist and despite the limitations that the media logic can impose on the political messages. In this light, the media can actually facilitate a political discussion, and the mediatization process can have a democratizing rather than a demonizing function. Furthermore, changes in the relationship between media, politics and other social spheres not only relate to form, but also to interactivity or mutual influence, communications channels, etc.<sup>9</sup>

### Self-spin in journalism

The aim of this article has been to focus on the often one-sided thematization of political communication, especially in the media and typically symbolized in the 'reductive', decay-ridden or demonized concept of 'spin'. As an example, the article has pointed out how political spin was sought exposed during the Danish election campaign in 2005.

On the one hand, it can be useful that the media present these aspects of modern politics so clearly. The public is once more made aware that the communication between politicians and the media has changed – and that it does not just concern political content, but also personal style, image and rhetorical capacities. The comprehensive media debate about spin, raising a critical eye both outwardly towards the politicians and inwardly towards the media themselves, thus points to an up-front media awareness of these new conditions and reflects a professionalization of both political communication and journalism in general.

"Parts of the media debate about spin can be said to be distorted on several levels."

On the other hand, the media debate can also be interpreted as, primarily, an attempt to fly the flag of the critical, investigative tradition of journalism. This kind of attitude may have outlived itself, however, because adaptation to the media logic by various social agents must now be considered an inherent premise in the rela-

tionship between journalists and sources. A premise which the media and journalists have in fact themselves helped to create because of the demands they constantly place on the communicative competencies of their sources – as part of their own professionalization; i.e. a premise that the media should already have launched professional initiatives to comply with.

Additionally, concrete acts of spin symbolize just one of many new premises in the relationship between journalism and society. As the concept of 'mediatization' indicates, this relationship now involves more overall, structurally rooted changes in how to perceive and perform mediated communication. Though it can be argued that journalism *per se* focuses on agents and actions (individuals and specific events) rather than on overarching structures, these new dimensions ought to be the subject of not least the modern, politically critical and process-oriented journalism as well, since it precisely attempts to investigate, interpret and predict the political game.

By focusing primarily on the negative consequences, politically and media-wise, of media adaptation and management – instead of e.g. the structural changes in the relationship between the media, politics and public brought about by mediatization – journalism itself contributes significantly to the spin wave. Concurrently, it dilutes the critical and reflexive perspective of putting spin and the media debate concerning spin on the agenda – not least when the media to such a great extent position themselves as some of the primary experts on both specific elections and political communication in general. Consequently, parts of the media debate about spin can be said to be distorted on several levels and in need of stretching beyond its own logic of action and form by including other, more structurally rooted aspects in the analysis of the developments in the media-society relationship.

However, it can be argued that though the media themselves were perhaps unaware of it, their treatment of political communication, e.g. during the 2005 election campaign, is in many ways implicitly linked to the three fundamental functions of the media that Schultz (2004), as mentioned, considers closely related to the changes brought about by mediatization – technology, semiotics and economy:

1) Technology: the considerable coverage of the election and not least spin made the news media a primary – also

from a technological point of view – information channel for the public in regard to how politics and political communication are run in an election campaign.

**2) Semiotics:** the considerable media focus on communicative form – including the politicians' angling, spinning or 'coding' of messages as well as the media's own 'framing' of their discussion of this political communication – contributed to the media themselves being portrayed positively. They signaled critical attempts at exposing the political game as well as an awareness of the professional issues that this revelation resulted in for the journalistic profession itself.

**3) Economy:** the considerable media coverage and discussion of the politicians' spin provided material for good stories with striking, spectacular headlines – or sales potential and commercial value for the media industry.

Although the media prefer to focus on the concrete, manageable and comprehensible concept of 'spin', their coverage of it can in itself thus be seen as an example of many of the aspects linked to the concept 'mediatization'. A more explicit media awareness of this could contribute to a weighty, serious and fundamental public discussion of media, politics and society – on the one hand, emphasizing the central position of journalism in a mediated society, and, on the other hand, recognizing when the media do not or should not place themselves in the center.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A search of all articles, features and letters to the editor from national, regional and local papers, registered in the Infomedia newspaper database, shows that between the announcement of the election on 18 January 2005 and voting day on 8 February 2005, the word 'spin' appeared in 171 articles. The main part was about the election, and 'spin' was included in 59 headlines. Extracts from articles (from different media across the Danish newspaper industry and printed at different stages of the campaign throughout the campaign) will be quoted in the following in order to exemplify the theoretical argument of the article. The extracts are, however, *not* the main focus of the discussions and have therefore not been analysed systematically or discursively. The extracts point to several interesting circumstances, which can be further analysed empirically.

<sup>2</sup> During the 2005 election campaign, some communication researchers appeared to repeat or consolidate the media rhetoric concerning politicians and their spin doctors as deliberately attempting to mislead the media and the public. They created homepages in order to pinpoint when spin was applied – or more specifically "(...) *make spin visible and demystify it. Here bad spin will be exposed and placed on view, and good spin will be appreciated and savored by professionals*" ([www.spinnesiden.dk/omsiden.php](http://www.spinnesiden.dk/omsiden.php), 11-05-05). Others attempted to screen "(...) *the performance of the politicians in the media for manipulative spin and attempts to distort or derail the debate*" ([www.spinkontrol.dk](http://www.spinkontrol.dk), 11-05-05) (my translations).

<sup>3</sup> Studies indicate that the credibility of journalism from a public perspective is very limited, e.g. an Internet-based survey of a representative cross-section of the Danish population (n = 1005), undertaken by the Analysis Institute Zapera on behalf of Section of Film and Media Studies at the University of Copenhagen in April 2005: only 15 percent consider the credibility and ethical standards of journalists to be 'very high' or 'high' – the lowest rating of all the professions included in the survey (politicians, advertising people, lawyers, communications consultants, university researchers and doctors).

<sup>4</sup> For example, a ratings survey by Gallup from week 4 (24 to 30 January 2005) shows that the 'Jersild on Spin' program, shown around 11pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, was almost the most popular program on DR2 that week with a rating of 166. In week 5 (31 January to 6 February 2005), the program was the fifth most popular on DR2 with a rating of 155 (TNS Gallup TV-Meter / [www.gallup.dk/media/tvm/scripts/default.aspx?week\\_year=052005&B1=Hent](http://www.gallup.dk/media/tvm/scripts/default.aspx?week_year=052005&B1=Hent) 01-05-05, [www.gallup.dk/media/tvm/scripts/default.aspx?week\\_year=042005&B1=Hent](http://www.gallup.dk/media/tvm/scripts/default.aspx?week_year=042005&B1=Hent) 01-05-05).

<sup>5</sup> Of course the work conditions of the war correspondent differ considerably from the work conditions of the political journalist. Nevertheless, as argued by Jørndrup (2005), a substantial part of war reporting, e.g. during the war in Iraq in 2003, is made on the home-front, defending and practicing conventional journalistic routines.

<sup>6</sup> This notion for example characterized the television debate program Jersild on spin on DR 2 during the 2005 election campaign. The program homepage described it as follows: "*During the election campaign, DR 2 is airing the program "Jersild on spin", where Jens Olaf Jersild and his guests will go behind the politicians' motives and analyze what is spin and what the truth really is*" (my translation).



(<http://www.dr.dk/nyheder/Folketingsvalg/valgvideo/article.jhtml?articleID=231493> 12.04.05).

<sup>7</sup> The article *The cleverest spin doctors of the campaign: The civil servants at the Ministry of Finance* (Albret/*Monday Morning Weekly* 12/2005) is one exception. The article tries to clarify the method of calculation behind some of the election promises made by the right wing during their 2005 campaign – a method which made the economic prospects appear much rosier than they perhaps really were. This, however, was around two months after the re-election of the self-same right wing.

<sup>8</sup> During the election campaign, the Danish population expressed that they actually experienced this cynical agenda, as 74 percent of a representative sample of the population thought that “*The media takes an interest in some particular topics in the election campaign. If the politicians wish to talk about something else, they find it very hard to get a word in*” (Pedersen/*Monday Morning Weekly* 4/2005). *The Monday Morning Weekly* pointed out that the media could thus contribute to political fatigue and reduction of public interest (Pedersen/*Monday Morning Weekly* 3/2005).

<sup>9</sup> Cultural life is an illustrative example of mediatization in contexts other than the political. Artists are increasingly aware of the commercial, political and symbolic value of the media – as windows for launching cultural products, contributors to the agenda of cultural politics and to an internal, symbolic positioning (‘hyping’) of cultural players in the cultural hierarchy (Kristensen 2003).

## REFERENCES

- Amnå, Erik 1999, *Politikens medialisering*, SOU/Demokratiutredningen, Forskarvolym 3.
- Andrén, G., Hemánus, P., Linné, O., Lundberg, D., Nordahl Svendsen, E., & Veirup, K. 1979, *Loyalitet mod virkeligheden*, Gyldendal, Copenhagen.
- Arnoldi, J. 2005, *Den offentlige ekspert*, Forlaget Samfundslitteratur, Frederiksberg.
- Asp, K. 1990, ‘Medialisering, medielogik, mediekraft’, *Nordicom-Information*, 4, pp. 7-12.
- Bennett, W.L. & Manheim, J.B. 2001, ‘The Big Spin: Strategic Communication and the transformation of Pluralist Democracy’, in Bennett, W. & Entman B. (eds), *Mediated politics: communication in the future of democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Bishop, R. 2001, ‘News Media, Heal Thyself: Sourcing Patterns in News Stories about News Media Performance’, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 22-37.
- Blumler, J.G. 1997, ‘Origins of the Crisis of Communication for the Citizenship’, *Political Communication*, 14, pp. 395-404.
- Bredal, B. 2001, *Læsernes redaktør*, Politikens Forlag, Copenhagen.
- Bro, P., Jønsson, R., Jørgensen, S.S., Pedersen, A.P. 2005, *Mediernes Valgkamp*, Modinet/*Monday Morning Weekly*, Copenhagen.
- Ekström, M. 2001, ‘Politicians interviewed on television news’, *Discourse & Society*, vol. 12, no. 5, pp. 563-584.
- Esser F., Reinemann, C. & Fan, D. 2001, ‘Spin Doctors in the United States, Great Britain, and Germany. Metacommunication about Media Manipulation’, *Press/Politics* vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 16-45.
- Franklin, B. 1994, *Packaging Politics: Political Communications in Britain’s Media Democracy*, Arnold, London.
- Gans, H.J. 1979, *Deciding What’s News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*, Vintage Books, New York.
- Giddens, A. 1984, *The Constitution of Society*, University of California Press, California.
- Hjarvard, S. 2004, ‘From Bricks to Bytes: The Mediatization of a Global Toy Industry’, in Bondebjerg, I., & Golding, P. (eds) *European Culture and the Media*, Intellect Ltd., Bristol.
- Hjarvard, S., Kristensen, N.N. & Ørsten, M. 2004, *Mediernes dækning af invasionen af Irak 2003*, Modinet Forskningsrapport 13, Copenhagen.
- Jønsson, R. & Larsen, O. 2002, *Professionel politisk kommunikation*, Akademisk Forlag, Århus.
- Jørndrup, H. 2005, *Journalistik – midt i en krigstid. En analyse af journalistikkens forhold til det nationale set gennem danske avisers dækning af Irak-krigens udbrud i marts 2003*, PhD dissertation, University of Southern Denmark, Odense.
- Kristensen, N.N. 2006, ‘Den selvgenererende krigsjournalistik’, in Kristensen, N.N. & Ørsten M. (eds.) *Krigen i medierne – medierne i krig*, Forlaget Samfundslitteratur, Frederiksberg.
- Kristensen, N.N. 2003, *Udfordringen af journalistikken i lyset af kildernes professionalisering – slinger i valsen?*, PhD dissertation, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen.
- Lund, A.B. 2004, ‘Niche Nursing Political Networks: Priming and Framing before Spinning’, *MODINET Working Paper*, 9:1-14.
- Lund, A.B. 2002, *Den redigerende magt*, The Danish Democracy and Power Study/Aarhus University Press, Århus.
- Lund, A.B. 1999, ‘Journalistroller i det redigerede samfund’, *Politica*, vol. 31, no. 2.
- McNair, B. 2000, *Journalism and Democracy: An evaluation of the political public sphere*, Routledge, London.
- Negrine, R. & Lilleker, D.G. 2002, ‘The professionalization of Political Communication: Continuities and Change in Media Practices’, *European Journal of Communication*, vol. 17, no. 3.
- Nielsen, M.F. (ed.) 2004, *Spin, selvfremstilling og samfund*, Samfundslitteratur, Frederiksberg.

- Pedersen, O.K., Esmark, A., Horst, M., Kjær P., Carlsen, E.M.** 2000, *Politisk Journalistik*, CFJE/Forlaget Ajour, Århus.
- Sarup, T.S.** 2004, 'Spindoktori – hvad er det, og findes det i Danmark', in Nielsen, M.F. (ed.) *Spin, selvfremstilling og samfund – public relations som reflekterende praksis*, Forlaget Samfundslitteratur, Frederiksberg.
- Schultz, W.** 2004, 'Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytical Concept', *European Journal of Communication*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 87-101.
- Weibull, L. & Djerf-Pierre, M.** 2001, *Spegla, granska, tolka. Aktualitetsjournalistik i svensk radio och TV under 1900-tallet*, Prisma, Stockholm.

#### Newspaper articles

- Albret, P.** 4 April 2005, 'The cleverest spin doctors of the campaign: The civil servants in the Ministry of Finance'/'Valgkampens dygtigste spindoktorer: Finansministeriets embedsmænd', *Monday Morning Weekly*.
- Albret, P.** 24 January 2005, 'Voters: Lower taxes do not increase the wish to work'/'Vælgerne: Lavere skat øger ikke lysten til at arbejde', *Monday Morning Weekly*.
- Bindselev, M.W.** 19 January 2005, 'Chess player at the centre of power'/'Skakspilleren i magtens centrum', *Kristeligt Dagblad*.
- Esbensen, M.C. & Lund, B.B.** 10 February 2005, 'When the media go into a spin themselves'/'Da medierne gik i selv-spin', *Kristeligt Dagblad*.
- Henriksen, M.** 26 May 2002, 'Powerful princes of darkness or faithful servants of democracy?'/'Mørkets magtfulde fyrster eller demokratiets tro tjenere?', *Politiken*.
- Jakobsen, T.** 30 January 2005, 'The spin doctor prescribed an election'/'Spin: Valg efter spindoktorens recept', *Jyllands-Posten*.
- Klingsey, M.** 19 Januar 2005, 'Spin decided the election'/'Det var spin, der udskrev valget', *Information*.
- Larsen, J.** 24 January 2005, 'Spin or disappear'/'Spin eller forsvind', *Berlingske Tidende*.
- Mogensen, L.T.** 9 February 2005, 'Conspiracy theory. The spin doctor is a political phantom'/'Konspirationsteori. Spindoktoren er et politisk fantom', *Politiken*.
- Nielsen, H.B.** 28 January 2005, 'Spin and self-spin'/'Spin og selvspin', *Jyllands-Posten*.
- Pedersen, P.A.** 24 January 2005, 'The press sets the election campaign agenda'/'Pressen sætter valgkampens dagsorden', *Monday Morning Weekly*.
- Pedersen, P.A.**, 24 January 2005, 'The media's election campaign: Quick political fatigue'/'Mediernes Valgkamp: Politik-trætheden satte hurtigt ind', *Monday Morning Weekly*.
- Sass, U.** 5 February 2005, 'PR politics with no guts'/'PR-politik uden mod', *Fyns Stiftidende*.
- Stigsgaard, L.** 22 January 2005, 'Spin doctors: Labybird book politics'/'Spindoktorer: Pixibogspolitik', *Berlingske Tidende*.
- Wind-Friis, L., Søndergaard, B. & Tranberg P.** 23 January 2005, 'Election strategy: It's a good story, when the candidates come to town'/'Valgstrategi: Det er en god historie, når kandidaterne kommer til byen', *Politiken*.

#### Internet sources

- [www.dr.dk/nyheder/Folketingsvalg/valglydvideo/article.jhtml?articleID=231493](http://www.dr.dk/nyheder/Folketingsvalg/valglydvideo/article.jhtml?articleID=231493) (about the television programme 'Jersild on Spin', 12-04-05).
- [www.gallup.dk/media/tvm/scripts/default.aspx?week\\_year=052005&B1=Hent](http://www.gallup.dk/media/tvm/scripts/default.aspx?week_year=052005&B1=Hent) (viewer-ratings from TSN Gallup, 01-05-05).
- [www.gallup.dk/media/tvm/scripts/default.aspx?week\\_year=042005&B1=Hent](http://www.gallup.dk/media/tvm/scripts/default.aspx?week_year=042005&B1=Hent) (viewer-ratings from TSN Gallup, 01-05-05).
- [www.spinkontrol.dk](http://www.spinkontrol.dk) (website about spin during the Danish election campaign 2005, 11-05-05).
- [www.spinnesiden.dk](http://www.spinnesiden.dk) (website about spin during the Danish election campaign 2005, 11-05-05).