



Article

Moral Judgment and Social Critique in Journalistic News Satire

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Abstract: Journalistic news satire is a satire subgenre that is gaining legitimacy in academic research as well as in the journalistic field as an opinion news format and arena for public debate. News satirists claim journalistic roles and operate under the mandate of exposing moral wrongs and auditing power. The development of a more substantial news satire coincides with an observed repoliticization of humor and comedy and intensified moral negotiation around comedic content, particularly on social media. Based on the Moral Foundation Theory, this study identifies moral judgments in journalistic news satire, using a content analysis of TV news satire material from Sweden and the U.S. The results show an overwhelming majority of moral judgments related to the individualizing foundations of Harm and Fairness, while the binding foundations of Ingroup, Authority, and Purity were less frequent. In addition, the results show strong similarities between the two countries in the material, indicating moral common ground and displaying how moral judgment is connected to the inherent nature of satire in general and the genre conventions of journalistic news satire in particular.

Keywords: moral judgment; news satire; Moral Foundation Theory; social critique; satirical journalism; MFT; Last Week Tonight; Sweden



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1. Introduction

News satire is a hybrid genre that adopts conventions from comedy, news, and political opinion (Baym 2005) with an aim to criticize targets—individuals as well as institutions—of social and political importance, while providing the audience with entertaining and well-founded reasons for the critique (Peifer and Lee 2019). Western TV news satirists have been found to adhere to an ethos similar to that of culture journalists or investigative journalists (Koivukoski and Ödmark 2020), where exposing political hypocrisy and auditing power are important goals. These news satirists see themselves as societal eye-openers and questioners of the status quo (Ödmark and Harvard 2021), and through hybrid content described by scholars as satirical journalism or investigative comedy, they have been legitimized as quasi-insiders to the journalistic field (Fox 2018; Nicolăi et al. 2022). Some news satirists have claimed to enact the role of “humoralist” (Nicolăi et al. 2022), operating under the mandate of exposing moral wrongdoings.

In line with this moral inquiry and owing to the often boundary-pushing and culturally contextual nature of humor (Critchley 2002), comedic content such as news satire can help demarcate social rifts and delineate moral boundaries in societies (Lewis 2006; Ödmark 2021b). The way satirists hold hybrid positions as both insiders and outsiders of societal debate, balancing on the border between the serious and the non-serious, gives them unique potential to affect the discourse of social and moral change (Dahl 2021; Meier and Schmitt 2016). Furthermore, the development of a more substantial news satire coexists with a trend of increasing moral negotiation in media and on social platforms. The “moral pop-out effect” is a psychological effect that states that the human mind prioritizes focusing on moral content (Brady et al. 2020; Gantman and Van Bavel 2014), meaning that moral messages are successful in the attention economy, for instance, when it comes to content sharing (Valenzuela et al. 2017) or other types of engagement. Social media often acts as an accelerant for existing moral dynamics in society and can amplify both conflict-inducing

expressions such as outrage and status-seeking, as well as more positive forces such as social support and collective action (Van Bavel et al. 2023). Despite morality developing into a major interdisciplinary research focus (Haidt 2007), investigations into expressions of moral judgments in the genre of news satire have been scarce (as an exception, see Brugman et al. 2023). The aim of this study is to uncover what types of moral judgments appear in journalistic news satire and determine possible differences between satire from two different countries. Reviews of the literature on satire and morality show few cross-country comparisons (Leicht 2023) and a narrow focus on the U.S. context (Neumann and Rhodes 2023). This study expands the literature by including Swedish news satire alongside U.S. news satire.

What follows is an overview of the theoretical foundation on which this study rests. There, the genre of news satire is placed in the context of social critique and moral judgments. The theoretical framework of the Moral Foundation Theory, which is the backbone of the empirical analysis of the study, is introduced, together with a presentation of the countries included in the study. Thereafter, I give a more in-depth account of the methods and material used in the study, after which the results are presented, based first on an overview of the material and then a comparison between the two satirical programs in the material. The article concludes with a discussion of the results and their implications.

1.1. News Satire and Social Critique

Since the dawn of human communication, humor has been used to strengthen cohesion in communities and to delineate social and moral boundaries (Apte 1985; Billig 2005). “Men have been laughed out of faults which a sermon could not reform”, stated Francis Hutcheson in 1725, illustrating how mockery and ridicule can function as social and moral correctives (Billig 2005; Hutcheson 1725). Humor and comedy function as a means of assessing shared underlying knowledge, attitudes, and preferences of people (Flamson and Barrett 2008), where joking and joking relationships are indicators of cultural similarity and/or stereotypes (Gundelach 2000). Furthermore, the rise of digital media has created forums that exacerbate the expression of moral emotions (Crockett 2017) and where comedy and satire have proven to be fuel for moral negotiation (Ödmark 2021a, 2021b). On social media, comedic content can be used to make distinctions between social groups (Laineste 2020), to question authority (López-Paredes and Carrillo-Andrade 2022), or to function as catalysts for larger societal debates (Ödmark 2021a).

In this light, while satire has been a popular tool for societal commentary throughout history (Marshall 2013), there are claims that our current era is a “new golden age of satire” (Holm 2023, p. 4). Alongside social media, the genre of TV news satire has had great success and international growth in recent decades, following the “glocalization” of *The Daily Show* (Lipson et al. 2023). The new wave of news satire has emerged as a subgenre that has been coined as journalistic news satire (Koivukoski and Ödmark 2020) due to the use of journalistic methods, the pursuit of journalistic goals, and the common practice of collaborations between journalists and comedians. In this more information-heavy form of news satire, the ridicule is intended as a social critique that holds the possibility of political reform.

Although often overlooked in research, entertainment material is a suitable arena for exploring the zeitgeist (Peifer 2013). An argument can be found in the barometer thesis of humor, which states that you can look at comedy as a strong indicator of what preoccupies society at a given moment (Kuipers 2015, p. 123). This is also reflected in the media coverage of comedy controversies, where so-called humor scandals (Kuipers 2011) often have moral connotations (Ödmark 2021a, 2021b). With these aspects and developments in mind, news satire material emerges as a fruitful site of analysis to unveil the moral norms of the hybrid media environment of today (Marx and Sienkiewicz 2018).

1.2. Moral Foundation Theory and the Sweden/US Contexts

News satire is evaluative (Baym 2005), and by nature, satire contains “inescapable aggressivity” (Bogel 2001, p. 50), where a key aspect is passing judgment (Test 1991). This study employs the Moral Foundation Theory to measure moral judgments in journalistic news satire. The Moral Foundation Theory was introduced by Haidt and Joseph (2004) to explain how morality varies across spectrums, and the framework has proven useful for empirically identifying issues related to moral content (Tatalovich and Wendell 2018). The theory presents five moral foundations that are the basis of many cultural human psychological values, emerging from evolutionary, social, and cultural origins. The foundations all have distinct sets of associated concerns, vices, and virtues. The first foundation is Harm, sometimes referred to as care/harm. The Harm foundation includes virtues of compassion and kindness and focuses on the nurturance and suffering of both humans and animals. Fairness, or fairness/cheating, is the second foundation, addressing reciprocal altruism and unfair treatment. It covers issues of justice, rights, and autonomy. The third foundation is here named Ingroup, although it can also be called loyalty/betrayal because those are the two concepts at its core. It is all about group membership and belonging. The Authority foundation is concerned with social order and obedience. In certain cases referred to as authority/subversion, this foundation underlies the virtues of leadership and followership, including respect for traditions. Finally, we have Purity, also called sanctity or purity/degradation. The Purity foundation was shaped by the psychology of disgust and is sensitive to physical and spiritual contamination.

Harm and Fairness are individualizing foundations that focus on the rights and welfare of the individual, while Ingroup, Authority, and Purity have been named binding foundations, argued to focus on the cohesion of the group and helping people to live harmoniously in society (Graham et al. 2009).

As mentioned previously, the Moral Foundation Theory was introduced to explain moral differences between cultures or other social groups (Haidt and Joseph 2004). The material included in this study is gathered from Sweden and the U.S., two countries with both similarities and differences. While the U.S. traditionally represents a liberal media system with a polarized political climate, Sweden represents a democratic-corporatist model with a still relatively homogenous public debate. Swedish people are described as conflict-avoiding and consensus-seeking, valuing compromise and commonality, with the media acting as a social glue that contributes to their cohesion (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Syvertsen et al. 2014). In contrast to Anglophone contexts, Sweden has a robust engagement in voting and a small media market where public service media enjoys high levels of trust and consumption (Wadbring 2016).

Moreover, while political and moral boundaries are commonly drawn in the U.S. between liberals and conservatives (e.g., Day et al. 2014), where liberals have been shown to more often endorse the Harm and Fairness foundations, whereas conservatives endorse the five foundations more equally (Graham et al. 2009), the Swedish political context is different. Sweden has a multi-party parliament and a political spectrum where the party of the Liberals is historically placed to the right and is currently in a coalition with conservative parties (Aylott and Bolin 2023). Comparing these two countries, therefore, offers a multifaceted lens through which to explore moral media content based on the moral foundations.

Previous research has found the Moral Foundation Theory useful in systematically organizing variability in moral material (Wheeler and Laham 2016), and it was used in this study to help categorize moral judgment in journalistic news satire. The following section will outline how the moral foundations were operationalized after a more in-depth description of the material of the study.

2. Materials and Methods

This study investigated news satire using two TV programs as material: the first being Last Week Tonight, U.S. (2014–present). Last Week Tonight, hereafter LWT, is a weekly half-

hour satire program published on the subscription television network HBO. The second program in the material is Svenska Nyheter, translating to “Swedish News”, Sweden (2018–present). Svenska Nyheter, hereafter SN, is a weekly half-hour satire program on SVT, a Swedish public broadcasting channel. The two programs are similar in format and style, consisting of satirical segments presented by a host behind a news desk in front of a live audience. Since the programs include investigative and interpretative segments that also address issues outside the traditional news spotlight, they could be described as opinion news formats (Brugman et al. 2021), and they are both examples of the satire subgenre journalistic news satire (Koivukoski and Ödmark 2020). In this study, episodes of the satirical programs were subjected to a content analysis with both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The satirical episodes in the material all aired during the summer or fall of 2022. Twenty episodes, ten from each country, were coded.

The coding instrument was based on the MFQ30, a 30-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire (2008), which was developed to measure the moral relevance of the five moral foundations and the moral judgments involved with them. Although the questionnaire is intended primarily for survey work, it includes specifications of the five moral foundations in a way that can be modified for content analysis. Previous studies have used data-driven approaches and automated methods such as word lists (Frimer et al. 2019; Sagi and Dehghani 2013) to flag moral content in text corpus (e.g., Brugman et al. 2023; Rezapour et al. 2019). However, news satire regularly uses communicative tools such as irony, sarcasm, and metaphor, which, due to their ambiguous nature, make computer-assisted word counts less reliable. In addition, TV satirists rely on graphics, images, facial expressions, and gestures, as well as language, to convey satirical messages. Taking this into account, it was assessed that a more qualitative decoding of the content would better contribute to existing scholarship as a complement to the automated studies performed. Therefore, manual coding of the material was preferred.

The satirical episodes were coded for instances of moral judgment. An instance of moral judgment was defined as a person, organization, or institution receiving negative remarks or ridicule that could be sorted under one of the 30 moral subthemes from the MFQ30. This means they corresponded in some way to one of the five moral foundations: Harm, Fairness, Ingroup, Authority, and Purity. It was operationalized as follows: For Harm, the coding instrument looked for references to either emotional suffering, not caring for the weak and vulnerable, non-compassion, references to cruelty, harming animals, or hurting human beings. For Fairness, the references measured were those of societal injustice, unfair laws, class gaps, people being treated differently, someone acting unfairly, or someone being denied their rights. The Ingroup foundation was expressed in terms of betrayal, lack of loyalty, not being a team player, and not showing love or pride for family or country. To be sorted under the Authority foundation, the satire needed to reference a lack of respect for authority, not following orders, not conforming to societal traditions and norms, not disciplining children, or causing chaos and disorder. Finally, the Purity foundation consisted of references to things being unnatural, against God, non-chaste, impure, indecent, or disgusting. One target could be exposed to several moral judgments. All coding was conducted by the author. In total, 512 instances of moral judgment were identified and sorted according to the five moral foundations.

To complement this deductive approach, a more inductive thematic analysis was performed. The methodology could be said to be modestly inspired by ethnographic content analysis (ECA), developed by Altheide (1987). ECA proposes the collection of narrative data alongside numeric data and has proven particularly useful when analyzing TV material (Altheide and Schneider 2012). Although on a small scale, the purpose of this method was to both enrich the understanding of the quantitative measuring, as well as expand the analysis beyond the MFQ30, and discover other emphases and themes in the material. The narrative data collected consisted of keyword descriptions of prominent instances of social critique or judgments and was used to help provide the results sections with illustrative examples. In addition, narrative data were used to capture judgments that

could not be sorted under the five moral foundations. The gathered data were reviewed and discussed holistically in relation to topics and themes (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). When quotes from the satirical programs were included in the results, translations from Swedish to English were made by the author.

As with all studies, the methodology has limitations. For the quantitative analysis, it is important to note that emphasis on critique was not considered. The judgments in the material range in severity from a frivolous comment in passing to strong condemnation. In addition, there are several aspects of interpretation in the collection of the data that might influence the reliability of the study, such as defining moral judgment, decoding ambiguity, and interpreting the subthemes of the moral foundations. The results should be reviewed with these aspects in mind. However, since all coding was performed by a single coder over a short period of time, consistency can be expected with regard to the comparison between the countries.

3. Results

3.1. Overview

To obtain an initial overview of the moral judgments in journalistic news satire, the results of the two separate satirical programs were combined and are displayed in Figure 1. The results show that the Harm and Fairness foundations were the most frequent moral judgments, with 45 percent and 27 percent, respectively, followed by Ingroup (14 percent), Purity (eight percent), and Authority (six percent). The foundations were not overlapping and mutually exclusive, meaning that the five bars of Figure 1 sum to 100 percent (not considering possible rounding-off to avoid decimal numbers). We can conclude that in the material of this study, the moral judgments mostly concerned the individualizing foundations, while the binding foundations were significantly less prominent. These results correspond with interview studies with news satirists that have shown them to gravitate toward anti-cohesion, where the aim for some is to break group mentality and political docility (Ödmark and Harvard 2021). Comedic genres commonly use the production of difference and the act of judgment to establish borders, where laughter can be used as a corrective, both with regard to in-group solidarity and out-group hostility (Abrams and Harpham 2008; Friedman and Kuipers 2013). In this case, the demarcations were seemingly focused on the rights and welfare of the individual.

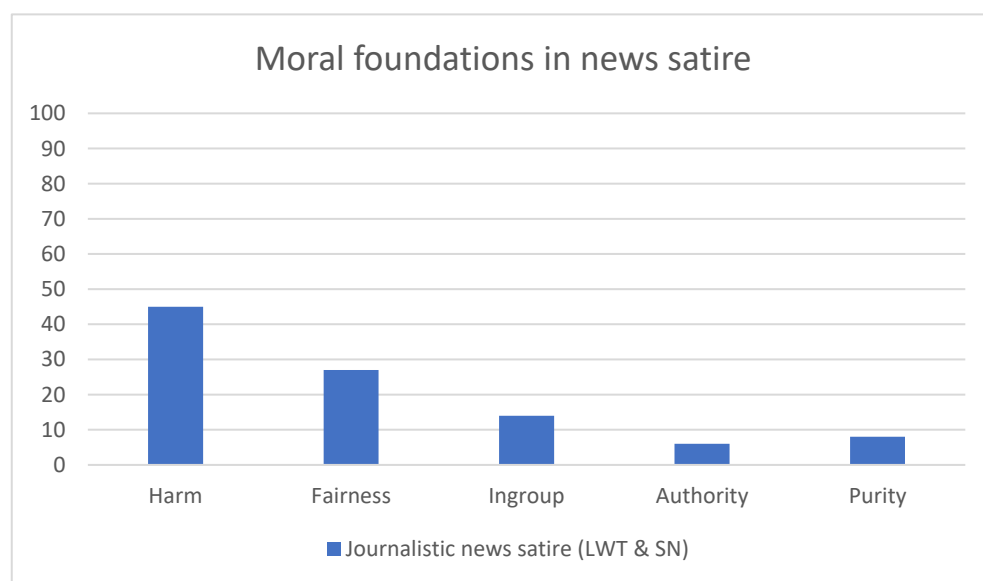


Figure 1. The bars show the presence of the moral foundations Harm, Fairness, Ingroup, Authority, and Purity in journalistic news satire (percentage). N = 512.

It should be noted that the moral judgments in the material were not necessarily delivered by the satirists themselves and cannot automatically be viewed as judgments being advocated or endorsed by the satirical program. It is not uncommon for news satirists to present or reference social critique and judgments delivered by others, followed in some cases by a defense of the target. The moral judgments presented here should, therefore be seen as moral judgments included in satire. The use of comedic devices, such as irony, exaggeration, and sarcasm, stresses this point. Irony, in particular, is common in satire, often with a serious or ameliorative intent (Hutcheon 2003), but ambiguity can obstruct the interpretation of the actual target of the moral judgment. Studies have found that audiences interpret irony in satire differently based on political leanings (LaMarre et al. 2009). This prompts a more detailed look at the findings, starting with the individualizing moral foundations of Harm and Fairness (see Figure 2).

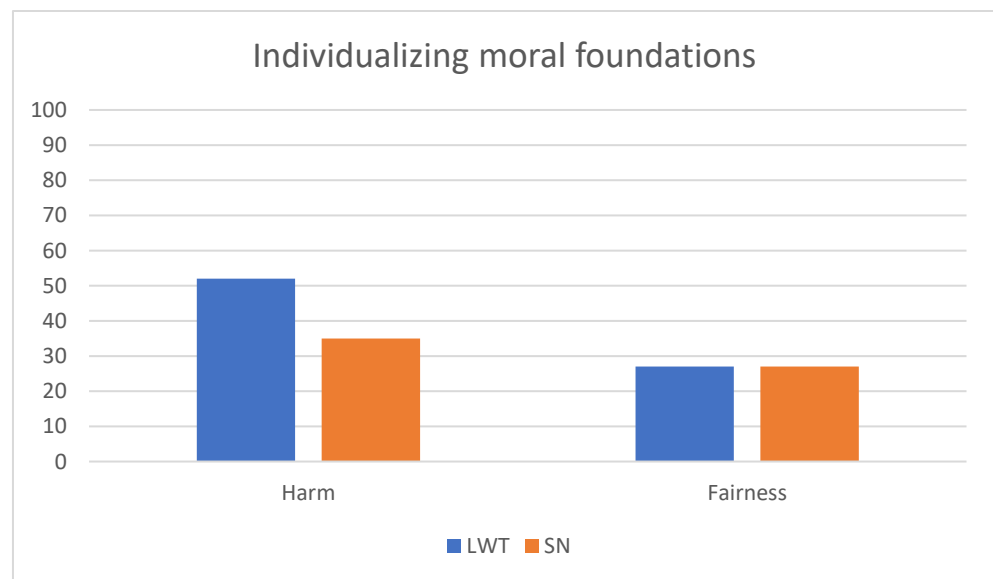


Figure 2. The bars show the presence of the moral foundations Harm and Fairness in two journalistic news satire programs (percentage). N LWT = 282, n SN = 230.

3.2. A Closer Look

In order to further nuance the view of the moral judgments, the two satire programs were separated. The findings for the two countries were strikingly similar regarding the frequency of the Fairness foundation (27 percent in each country), while LWT from the U.S. engaged more often in moral judgment connected to the Harm foundation (52 percent) compared to the Swedish program SN (35 percent). In contrast, SN was more concerned with violations toward the Ingroup foundation than LWT (see Figure 3). However, the Harm foundation was still the most frequent moral judgment in the Swedish material as well.

A typical example of moral judgment connected to the Harm foundation can be gathered from an LWT segment on the developments in Afghanistan since the U.S. departure. The segment included critical scrutiny of the role of U.S. sanctions in the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and concluded with a passionate appeal from the satirical host John Oliver:

I do get the broad worries about how sending money to Afghanistan might inadvertently help the Taliban, but I'd argue the key question here isn't just "What happens if we send Afghanistan money and aid?" It's: What happens if we don't? And we know the answer to that: millions of innocent Afghans will suffer and die under a government they did not choose. The reality is, there is no one simple solution here that is without risks. But 38 million people's lives are at stake. (LWT, 14 August 2022)

Satirists tend to connect with their audiences using a more personal and emotional address than traditional news reporters (Ödmark 2018), and the way the genre combines entertainment with societal engagement has been suggested to reframe citizenship (McClennen and Maisel 2016) and encourage audiences to engage with traditional forms of civic participation (Kilby 2018). The LWT's reporting on Afghanistan also illustrates how the moral foundations could interact. The main targets for moral judgments in the segment were the Taliban and the U.S. government, both of whom were judged harshly and predominantly based on Harm due to direct or indirect causes of harm to ordinary Afghan citizens. In addition to the Harm judgments, there was also a pronounced judgment on the Taliban on the basis of Fairness, since a lengthy part of the segment was dedicated to gender inequality and the recent dismantling of women's rights in Afghanistan. One could also note that including the phrase "under a government they did not choose" delivered judgment undermining the Taliban authority based on ideals of Western democracy. In contrast, the U.S. government was judged for violations against the Ingroup foundation, for lack of loyalty to the allies left behind:

While we managed to get roughly 80,000 Afghans, many of whom had worked with the U.S., to America since the withdrawal, the number who remain in danger because of the association with the U.S. mission can be counted in the hundreds of thousands. So, criticism of what happened is completely justified. (LWT, 14 August 2022)

Thematically, previous studies have found news satirists to address news more on a societal level than on an individual level when compared to traditional journalists (Ödmark 2018), and the moral judgments found in this material had indeed often ambitions of uncovering systemic abuses rather than personal character defects, although the latter was also present. This was found in particular in the longer segments of the satirical programs. Here, the Fairness foundation was pronounced, emphasizing structural inequalities and unfair incentives. In LWT, in particular, a moral critique was commonly recognized as falling in line with what Michaud Wild (2019) described as "conceptualizing the entrenchment of inequality as a normative evil".

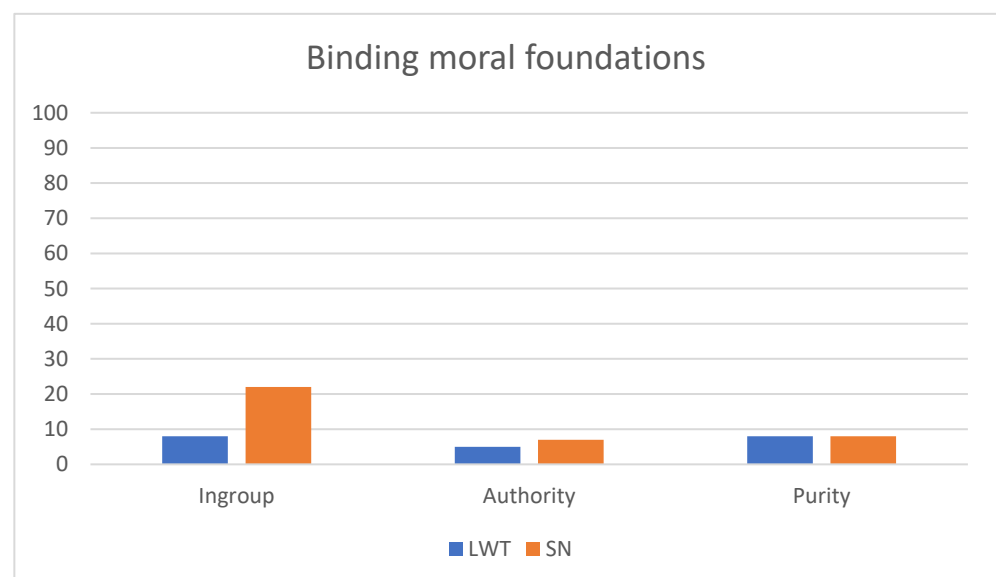


Figure 3. The bars show the presence of the moral foundations Ingroup, Authority, and Purity in two journalistic news satire programs (percentage). N LWT = 282, n SN = 230.

The typical Ingroup judgment in the Swedish material could be found in the coverage following the 2022 general elections, where promises were broken, alliances dissolved, and new ones were formed (Aylott and Bolin 2023). An example came from the municipal

election in Sölvesborg, where SN and its host, Kristoffer Appelquist, reported on power struggles between several parties following the election.

(graphics display photo of Louise Erixon, the Sweden Democrats). She was happy, cause the Sweden Democrats got nearly 39 percent of the vote down there. (In a history documentarian voice): “The woman in the photo has extended her mandate, in a few days’ time, she will be deceived by her allies, but of this she knows nothing.” You see, the Moderates Kith Mårtensson *dumped* the Sweden Democrats and replaced them with the Social Democrats. (SN, 28 October 2022)

Instances of Purity judgments appeared only marginally in the material. When it occurred, it could be in the form of referring to various forms of disgust, as in LWT’s report on inflation. The report included a video clip of President Biden saying he could “taste” the frustration of the American people, leading to this reaction from host John Oliver:

No. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no! Never say that again! That may have been the single grossest thing I have ever heard come out of Joe Biden’s mouth, and that is saying a lot, cause I have heard the stuff he used to say in the 1970:s. (LWT, 24 July 2022)

While displaying disgust was not the *modus operandi*, there were regular instances of moral indignation and high emotionality, often expressed by the satirical host in a personalized manner. A segment from SN on climate activists can be used to illustrate judgments falling under the umbrella of the Authority foundation. In the segment, where it is reported how the activists glued themselves to Swedish roads, the activists are called “spoiled children” causing troublesome traffic disruptions. In addition, it was reported that the activists glued themselves to artworks in museums:

Personally, I get most upset when these—glue sticks, frankly speaking—attack our cultural treasures. ... How low, how incredibly low to include the masterpiece Primavera by Botticelli in this. How much does it even cost to repair the damage after such an attack? Well, it cost some window cleaning because there is apparently protective glass in front. . . protective glass! (Laughing) (SN, 2 September 2022)

There were plenty of examples of harsh moral judgment that could be considered crude and offensive. In news satire and public debate in general, offensive political humor can function as an affective resource (Graefer et al. 2019) that is complexly intertwined with social change (Pedwell 2017). News satire typically aims to evoke emotions such as joy or indignation in audiences (Skurka et al. 2019) and engaging with transgressive news satire has been found in young adult audiences to aid in the development of “transgression skills” (Doona 2020), i.e., increasing abilities to shift perspectives and deepening comprehension of political issues.

The example above also illustrates the ambiguity of news satire. The use of comedic tools such as exaggeration, sarcasm, and irony make moral judgment at times indistinct. The climate activists are indeed ridiculed—but their message is also represented and acknowledged: later in the segment, the satirist reiterates and validates the activists’ claims that the inaction of political authorities could be argued to justify their actions. However, the satirical segment concludes by reporting on how the traffic disruption caused by the activists hindered an ambulance containing a severely ill person. Here, the prominence of the Harm foundation is reinforced since while the protest at the museum is portrayed as fairly harmless, the obstruction of medical aid to a fellow citizen is not as easily dismissed.

The low results of Authority and Purity judgments could be argued to reflect Western culture in general and the subversive and secular nature of Western news satire in particular. According to McQuail (2003), public communication is expected to support the influence of socializing agencies such as education, family, and religion. “Its tendency is conservative more than radical, supporting consensus and tradition” (p. 71). News satire, however, tends not to adhere to such ideals, a notion that is supported by these results. When

Authority or Purity judgments did occur, they were rarely the main theme of their satirical segments but were commonly referred to in passing.

When LWT addressed museums and cultural repatriation of looted artifacts, the main themes revolved around the Harm and Fairness foundations, focusing on the injustices of the acquisition processes and the damage caused to the plundered cultures.

The point is that conversation should be led by the groups that those items originally belong to because while obviously museums should not be violating the law, they shouldn't be violating basic moral decency either. There is so much that we need to do to reckon with the harms—both past and present—of colonialism, but this should really be the easy part. (LWT, 2 October 2022)

The concept of moral decency was here used as a higher principle, a term indicating the existence of sacred values beyond societal laws, rules, and regulations. A Purity-adjacent notion, one could say. However, once again, the concluding statement is still focused on the Harm foundation—in this case, general and longstanding harm caused by colonialism.

Most of the judgments found in the material could be sorted under the five moral foundations, indicating that they are indeed a useful tool for mapping moral content. The judgments that were not as easily categorized under the moral foundations could generally be thematized under an umbrella concept of judgments on incompetence. Individuals as well as organizations were criticized based on incompetence, which could be characterized as (a) physical incompetence, as in someone tripping, making odd hand gestures or peculiar facial expressions; (b) cognitive incompetence, as in people being generally stupid or naive; or (c) professional incompetence, i.e., being old-fashioned or not living up to professional expectations in a way that still did not give the direct moral consequences that would sort them under the five moral foundations.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

Identifying moral judgments in media content establishes a moral temperature check on societal debate and can be used to assess cultural differences in mediated moral negotiations.

The aim of this study was to uncover what types of moral judgments appear in journalistic news satire and determine possible differences between satire from two different countries. To answer the first part of the inquiry, there was a clear majority of judgments connected to the individualizing foundations of Harm and Fairness in both satire programs. The Harm and Fairness foundations combined made up more than 70 percent of the identified moral judgments, whereas the binding foundations, Ingroup, Authority, and Purity, were significantly less present. These findings align with global morality studies showing how Western immoral behaviors are centered on avoiding harm (e.g., [Buchtel et al. 2015](#)) and historical morality studies showing an increase in the salience of Harm-based morality in Anglophone contexts from the 1980s and forward ([Wheeler et al. 2019](#)).

To answer the second part of the inquiry, it can be concluded that the findings did not show any large differences between the two countries. While the binding foundation of Ingroup was slightly more prominent in the Swedish material, possibly relating to the more pronounced emphasis on consensus and cohesion in Swedish culture, the overall results followed similar patterns. The Moral Foundation Theory is grounded in the claim that moral intuitions are expressed differentially between cultures ([Graham et al. 2013](#)), and naturally, it would be possible to conclude that Sweden and the United States are too culturally similar for moral differences to emerge. However, while sharing Western culture similarities, the media landscapes and the political scenes of the two countries are not without contrasts, as presented previously in this article. Against this backdrop, it could be argued that the two satire programs show a remarkably similar distribution of the five moral foundations, indicating that the moral judgments follow the media logic of the news satire genre rather than adhere to cultural or political differences in the societal landscapes the programs occupy. Indeed, the production team behind the Swedish satirical program SN has acknowledged being inspired by American role models such as LWT ([Koivukoski and Ödmark 2020](#)), and the program could be said to be an extended result of the “glocalization”

of *The Daily Show* (Lipson et al. 2023). In addition, it has recently been argued that the Swedish media system has undergone rapid changes and should now be considered a “neoliberal media welfare state” (Jakobsson et al. 2021), characterized by a more polarized media use and increasing similarities with the American and British systems.

Exploring further implications of the results and turning the interest to the potential impact of moral judgments in journalistic news satire, there have been concerns raised that satire is only “preaching to the choir”, i.e., satire programs are attracting an audience of already like-minded people, rendering the social critique embedded redundant (Seymour and Lioi 2024; Ödmark and Harvard 2021). These limitations are supported by research on how the ambiguity of satire makes it possible for those whose views are targeted to dismiss or re-interpret the critique (LaMarre et al. 2009). However, studies have found entertainment media to be able to influence moral sensitivities in audiences by making moral intuitions more salient (Eden et al. 2014), at least if moral consistency is displayed (e.g., Grizzard et al. 2017). In addition, the possible influence on the “choir” in the form of shared experiences and emotional support as stones on the path to action (Seymour and Lioi 2024) should not be overlooked.

The Swedish satire program SN airs on a public service broadcasting channel, and while LWT is known for openly progressive activism (Michaud Wild 2019), SN has consistently emphasized its political independence, for instance, by claiming to follow an “amoral compass” (Ödmark 2021b) where the goal is to be morally unpredictable and constantly shift political allegiances. Still, at least looking at this broad mapping of moral judgments, the two programs produce very similar moral patterns.

In sum: With increasingly blurred professional boundaries in a fragmented media environment, the traditional field of news journalism has expanded. The genre of journalistic news satire has emerged and gained legitimacy in public debate as performing opinion journalism, where political comedy functions as an arena for negotiation concerning society and its moral values (Quirk 2015). Following this development, which has been called a “repoliticization of humor” (Nieuwenhuis and Zipp 2022), scholarship should focus on broadening the cultural comparisons of moral judgments in news satire, as well as further exploring institutional-level factors such as media organizational aspects. Despite several differences in political and media contexts between Sweden and the U.S., these findings confirm similar judgment patterns between the individualized and binding moral foundations in the two countries, highlighting genre conventions of journalistic news satire. Future studies could build on these notions and preferably include cases beyond the Western scope.

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