The Political Significance of Spotify in Sweden – Analysing the #backaspotify Campaign using Twitter Data

By Rasmus Fleischer& Christopher Kullenberg

Abstract

This article discusses the political significance of the streaming music company Spotify in Sweden, taking as a case a coordinated campaign in late spring 2016, known by the hashtag #backaspotify (translated as "support Spotify!"), which was mainly played out on the social media platform Twitter. The campaign is analysed using a set of data retrieved from Twitter, examining both the content and the interactions in 1,791 messages. Results show that the main political issue concerned the lack of access to rented apartments in central Stockholm, and that the main actors in the campaign were predominantly associated with public affairs consultants and the youth wings of political parties belonging to the centre-right. The campaign, however, was very short-lived and had diminished significantly already after two days. We conclude that Spotify transcends its role as a streaming music company, and additionally can be used as a point of reference in political campaigns to promote issues that are of wider scope than the music industry alone.

Introduction: Spotify and Swedish politics

"Unicorns are always the answer", read one of the placards at a small protest outside the Swedish parliament on May 11th 2016. The peculiar rally had framed itself as an action in support of Spotify, an information technology company known as a "unicorn" in the business press because its value has exceeded 1 billion US dollars. Since then, the valuation has risen to over $20 billion, as confirmed by the market after Spotify's introduction at the New York Stock Exchange in April 2018. It is not too common that street protest are explicitly mobilized in support of a particular corporation; indeed, we know of no comparable case in 21st century Sweden. In contrast to the usual clarity of rallies in the capital, the cryptic placard message was in need of context in order to be intelligible. Walking by the parliament building that day, a random stroller might have asked themselves: *if unicorns are the answer, what is the question?* In this article, we will analyse what that question – or rather questions – were, and how they have attached themselves to a "unicorn" company in the intersection between technology and music, a company which has come to enjoy the status of being politically significant enough to render a small street protest.

The street protest, called #sthlmtech, was connected via a series of events that started one month earlier, as the Spotify founders Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon wrote an open letter to Swedish politicians on the blog platform Medium, in which they proposed deregulating the market for rental apartments, lowering taxes on stock options and putting computer programming on the curriculum in schools (Leijonhufvud 2016). However, to understand why, in its native Sweden, the music streaming service Spotify has come to enjoy a special status, it is necessary to go back at least a decade in history. Even before the official launch of its service, the company had a marketing strategy deeply entangled in politics. In the early years, around 2007 and 2008 this meant, specifically, that the company was presented as a *solution* to the bitter conflicts over file-sharing and copyright. Spotify was presented as both the *continuation of* and the *alternative to* file-sharing services like The Pirate Bay. For leading politicians, talking about Spotify became a way to avoid taking sides in what had been known as the 'file-sharing debate', which culminated in 2009 with the trial against The Pirate Bay – as well as the European Parliament election which became a small success for the Swedish Pirate Party, founded in 2006 as a pro-filesharing party, as they secured two seats in Brussels. At that time, when political leaders were asked about controversial copyright treaties or enforcement measures they often averted the question by referring to Spotify, alas attempting to making the whole copyright debate irrelevant rhetorically. In effect, these politicians also took part in the marketing of Spotify as *the* new way to consume music, which was supposedly fair to the artists with regards to monetary compensation for their copyrighted materials (Fleischer 2010;

Andersson Schwarz 2013, 149–154).

The first mention of Spotify in the Swedish parliament, the *Riksdag*, were uttered in debates over copyright legislations. But as is apparent from the parliamentary debates of the 2010s, Spotify gradually became the general epitome of Swedish high-tech innovation (Riksdagen 2016). The Swedish Minister of Culture has, for example, repeatedly stated that Spotify is "a part of our music export", and in 2015 the Swedish government granted Spotify a newly instituted prize "for achievements of particular importance to the internationalisation of Swedish music" (Fleischer 2017). The Former Prime and Foreign Minister of Sweden, Carl Bildt, even introduced a new procedure at state visits: offering his colleagues a virtual gift, namely a Spotify Premium account, pre-loaded with playlists of Swedish music (Sweden Abroad 2014). Moreover, the Royal Court of Sweden maintains a Spotify account for sharing playlists, and Prince Daniel has enlisted Spotify's co-founder Martin Lorentzon in a programme for supporting young entrepreneurs (Swedish Royal Court 2016). All this demonstrates how Spotify, during its ten years of operation, has been a source of Swedish national pride. The 'Swedishness' of Spotify can be discussed, but its top executives are indeed Swedish, and its main headquarter remains located in Stockholm. Thus, if Spotify would threaten to abandon Sweden this would arguably be a hard blow to the national self-image of those who have embraced the company as the solution to file-sharing, the new form of music export and as a model enterprise for the continuously developing IT sector.

Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this article is to understand how general political issues are attached to a specific company – Spotify – and how such issues are circulated in social media as a campaign. We will analyse the Twitter #backaspotify campaign (translated as "support Spotify!"), which the physical street protest outside the parliament one month later, as mentioned in the introduction, was meant to be a culmination of. Thus, we inquire into Spotify as a vehicle for political issues that transcend the manifest company, and instead becomes entangled in larger political debates outside the scope of streaming music. More specifically, we aim to analyse the relation between political issues that can be connected to Spotify, and the actors that mobilise and become mobilised by such topics. By analysing the #backaspotify Twitter campaign, such dynamics can be revealed heuristically to deepen our understanding of the *political significance of Spotify*.

We begin by asking how central actors interact and mobilise using the Twitter platform, in order to advance political issues. In particular we will focus on the attachment of concrete political issues to Spotify as a business model, and what

forms of interaction between actors that occur in order to create such attachments. However, since Twitter is only a small subset of the overall media ecology, we will also follow the discussions in their re-mediated forms, as they appear in other types of media, both conventional mass media and other social media. This way we are able to draw a map of the various actors, their sites of interaction, and how such dynamics forge links between political issues and a flagship company.

We will analyse the results in chronological order, beginning with the publication of an open letter on the blog platform Medium, signed by the founders of the company Spotify. A chronological analysis has both advantages and inherent weaknesses. The qualities of political issue formation can not be reduced to a series of events, in which one event follows upon the other, forming a historical narrative in linear time that can be recorded and presented. The value of a political issue depends as much on its distribution in space, involving questions such as *who* supports it? how *many* supporters are there? in what *domains* (institutional, moral, cultural) is the issue thriving or declining? Latour (2013), argues that political issue formation is instead better understood as a "circle" that has to be continuously sustained as it re-iterates on the one hand a quest for "representation", in which the multitude will agree or disagree in being represented by someone else (a political representative) and, on the other hand, a quest for "obedience", where the representative is able to exert political force and commit changes to society. Both the phase of representation and obedience may break down at any time, thus it has to be repeated and sustained without interruption. Another argument against chronology and history is found in Deleuze and Guattari's seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus* (2005[1980]), in which History with a capital H, as a recording in chronological time, is written as a claim to power with the purpose of conserving a specific History. As a contrast they invoke the concept of "nomadology", which instead would have the contingencies of action as the locus of attention, drawing instead on the affective and non-signifying aspects of politics, referred to as "lines of flight" and "war machines". In their interpretation of the rise of fascism during the interwar years in Germany, Deleuze and Guattari stress that the conventional historical understanding is insufficient. Instead they propose that the way fascism could gain such momentum was not the effect of doctrines laid down by the leaders of the National Socialist Party, but resided within the "petty fears" and fascist desire that could be found rather as "microfascisms". Such affects were to be found amongst city dwellers as well as rural populations, in Left and Right political organisations, even in the family model and slowly spreading from under into schools, the military, the Party and so forth.

However, while chronology may seem limiting from these philosophical critiques, there are still advantages to such a mode of analysis. The primary benefit is methodological. Twitter data is, in its raw form, numerous, contradictory and

"messy" compared to data generated by, for example interviews or surveys, which revolve around questions formulated by the researcher. To extract meaning from more than a thousand Twitter messages, there needs to be a reduction in separating noise from significance. Here chronology offers a sorting mechanism for the data collected, in which the re-construction of a series of events, and how they tie into each other, is an efficient way of reducing complexity. Of course there will always be multiple ways of re-constructing narratives with such an approach, and thus we have tried to transparently inform the reader why we choose each point in the story as worthy of our attention.

In more concrete terms we will follow series of re-mediations in social- and conventional media chronologically in order to understand the dynamics of mobilising a wider network of Twitter users that continue to spread the issues throughout online media and offline promotional events. Here we adopt a similar approach as Highfield et al. (2016), who use minute-by-minute chronology to identify events within the #eurovision hashtag on Twitter. By connecting the flow of tweets to the runtime broadcasting events of the Eurovision Song Contest, they show what was of particular interest in the show, and by mapping the central actors, they could also identify clusters of political matters of concern that connected to the #eurovision conversation, such as human rights issues.

Point of entry: an open letter from Spotify

On April 12, 2016, the co-founders of Spotify, Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon, published an open letter on the blog platform Medium, titled "Vi måste agera eller bli omsprungna!" ("We must act or be overtaken!") (Ek & Lorentzon 2016). Opposing the interests of high-tech startups to those of "traditional industry", the letter articulated three political demands to the Swedish government. These were about *housing*, *taxes* and *education*, with special priority given to the issue of housing. This should be understood in the context of the so-called "global housing crisis" (Florida & Schneider 2018) and its specific manifestation in Stockholm, where access to rental housing has diminished drastically since the 1990s. While rents are still regulated and relatively affordable, compared to the skyrocketing cost of buying a flat, or to rents in some comparable European cities, it might take over ten years on the waiting list to get a rental flat in the outskirts of Stockholm (Polanska 2017). This causes problems for companies that need to recruit skilled employees. The letter from Spotify thus demanded that housing regulations should be abolished, allowing higher rents in the city centre, and better access for those individuals or corporations able to pay. Secondly, Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon called for lower taxes on employee stock options. Lastly, the Spotify co-founders proposed that computer programming should be integrated already

in the primary school curriculum to meet the future demands of the IT-sector. If the government would not act fast enough, Ek and Lorentzon argued, "thousands of Spotify jobs" could possibly be relocated "to the United States instead of Sweden" (Ek & Lorentzon 2016, our translations).

The last formulation was widely interpreted as a threat of moving Spotify's headquarter from Sweden (McIntyre 2016). A more feasible reading would be that Ek and Lorentzon were talking about the future location of potential new jobs. There were in fact no signs of Spotify seriously considering leaving its native country. Quite the contrary: Spotify was already in the process of building a new headquarter, doubling the size of the current one. With 20,000 square meters, Spotify now inhabits the largest of all corporate headquarters in Stockholm's Central Business District (Fastighetsvärlden 2015). At the time of this controversy, Spotify had about 1,600 employees globally, half of these working at the Stockholm headquarters (Gelin 2015). So when Ek and Lorentzon (2016) warned about the loss of "thousands of Spotify jobs" to the US, it seems as they did not talk about the existing jobs at Spotify's headquarter. Nevertheless, the open letter was immediately reinterpreted as a threat of exodus. Maria Rankka, CEO of Stockholm Chamber of Commerce (SCC) declared in an interview that "Spotify seems ready to go from words to action" and that a possible move of its headquarters would be severely "negative for the image of Sweden" (Nilsson 2016, our translations). Rankka is also reported to be a personal friend of Lorentzon (Ekström 2016), and the SCC has on several occasions promoted Spotify as a vital business model for Swedish economy, writing together with Lorentzon to debate programming in schools (Rankka, Lorentzon & Wanngård 2014). Furthermore, she has also argued in favour of a deregulated housing market using Spotify as an example (Handelskammaren 2015). However, the Medium blog entry by Ek and Lorentzon only marked the first utterance in a discussion that would to take place on social media during the following days. This way, we follow how political speech is *enacted* by several actors, with the purpose of broadening not only the understanding of what the political issues are about, but also by whom they are regarded as important and worth struggling for.

Re-mediation on Twitter

By virtue of the proliferation of digital data and metadata, new ways of studying the interactions and mobilisations that bind together political discourse has been made available to researchers. What is sometimes referred to as the 'data deluge' makes it possible to record and analyze the minute details of what actors say and do in online environments. To date, the Medium account @SpotifySE (https://medium.com/@SpotifySE) has published no other texts but the opinion

piece mentioned above. However, to attract readers, an unknown text needs to be disseminated widely by further Twitter users. One of the primary functions of Twitter is to re-mediate content produced in *other* hyperlinked media (Andersson Schwartz 2015). When Twitter messages are exchanged, passed along and re-mediated, it is possible to understand this process as a way of *mobilising* users of the platform, since other people have to be engaged in the stream of messages that are continuously passed along. If the mobilised users get attached to the messages and decide to continue passing them along, they can mobilise even further actors, which in turn forms a temporary crowd speaking about the same issue for a brief moment in time (Callon 1986). Such mobilisations of political discourse may, if successful, displace an issue from one point to another, and connect it with other elements that were not there in the first place. This provides a key element in our analysis, as it makes possible a more open-ended discussion of what a corporate entity *is*. Rather than pre-supposing that it should be defined according to legal definitions, as a purely economic phenomenon or as culturally constructed signifier, the actor-network approach of Callon and Latour takes as a point of departure the dual logic that stipulates that the network is defined by its actors, and that the actors are defined by its network (Latour 2012). What appears at first glance to be a circular argument, we argue, is in fact methodologically powerful; Spotify is more than a corporate entity: it is *simultaneously* a business model, a cultural signifier, a specific amalgamation of political ideas, a given set of owners and shareholders, and – of course – a music streaming service that has changed the way millions consume and listen to music.

As we have already shown in our brief historical overview of Spotify, this corporate entity has continuously been mobilised and re-shaped from only being a music company, and instead been connected with other matters of concern such as the "solution" to file-sharing. Mobilisation is, however, always a collective act, where the actors need to be followed through political discourse as they mediate each other in a network. With the data available via Twitter, the interactions of such collectives can be studied with a high degree of precision, at least in terms of the technical information made available through the platform programming interfaces. However, as Tufekci has pointed out, even though the data deluge of social media appears at first glance to be an abundant stream of information, it is still governed by the various internet platforms on several levels. Platform policies, algorithms and various affordances of the medium not only act as gatekeepers, but also sorts, values and renders visible particular content, while hiding or downplaying other content (Tufekci 2017:134ff).

Twitter is a vital medium for political campaigns since it is closely monitored by journalists working in conventional media. Previous research has suggested that journalists' use of Twitter has undergone a process of normalization, where

journalists have adapted their professional norms and practices to a new medium (Lasorsa et al. 2012). This has led to a routine use of Twitter (and Facebook) as a source for media content, where journalists can monitor streams of information and re-mediate such information into conventional newspaper articles (Paulussen & Harder 2014). Thus, using Twitter as a channel provides a fertile ground for political campaigns that aims at a wide reach, at least throughout social media, and as a secondary effect, through re-mediation into conventional media. As Broersma and Graham have argued, social media, in particular Twitter, functions as a "beat" in the everyday work of journalists, as it is both the source of information and a channel for distributing and re-mediating content. This "beat" makes Twitter attractive for the dissemination of political messages. The authors write:

> Politicians and political marketers have discovered that social networks have a twofold benefit. On the one hand, they are relatively cheap, engaging, and easy-to-control tools to reach out to voters without the mediation of traditional news media and journalism, while on the other hand they offer possibilities to set the news agenda and get their message included in the mass media virtually untouched by journalists. (Broersma & Graham 2012: 405)

Consequently, Twitter offers an alternative route for political speech, both as a cost-efficient entry-point into the circulation of political discourse, and as a prolific multiplier of messages. Hedman and Djerf-Pierre argue that the primary function of Twitter, from the point of view of journalists, is "finding and researching stories", but also, to a lesser extent, for organizational branding, distributing their own work and getting feedback from media audiences (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre 2017: 422).

From a methodological point of view, Twitter offers an advantage for analysing political mobilisation, since both the content of the conversation and the meta-data is easily retrieved and stored for later analysis. Since the Twitter platform has a rather generous way of sharing data via its Application Programming Interface (in comparison with for example Facebook and Instagram, who impose stricter limits, or in the latter case, completely bans research), it is possible to trace the actors that began spreading the Ek and Lorentzon opinion piece under the Twitter-hashtag #backaspotify. However, as Andersson-Schwarz and Hammarlund have argued, it is important not to fall into two distinct methodological traps when working with Twitter data. On the one hand, only relying on the user interface of the online platforms runs the risk of becoming anecdotal as they are biased by the sorting and filtering algorithms of the platforms themselves. What appears in the flow of information is designed for the consumer and remains opaque with

regards to how it was ranked by the algorithms. On the other hand, quantitative analyses that merely process large amounts of data as "remote readings" of a giant corpus of interactions and contents, run another risk of only seeing patterns that are made to fit the tweaking of graphs and visualization techniques. The authors instead propose a heuristic quantitative analysis that is highly sensitive both to the way the medium itself prioritises information and to the context of each Twitter-message in relation to the larger streams of messages (Andersson-Schwarz & Hammarlund 2016, see also Latour et al. 2012, Highfield et al. 2016).

This way we are able to record fragments of political speech that emerge from online conversations, and more importantly, also map such speech acts with regards to which actors are engaged in the conversations. The notion of political speech is understood here as a repeated process where specific matters of concern (in our case housing, tax regulations, education policy etc.) become the object of political stakes, by way of encircling, enveloping and mobilising more and more actors in political alliances (see Latour 2013). Of particular interest to us with regards to political speech are the attempts to define a common "we" that is to be represented in certain matters. "We" as in the "people", "the industry", "Sweden" or "music lovers" are all brought into being in such conversations, which means that also abstract (or even fictional) actors are mobilised.

Using the Python module Tweepy (http://tweepy.org) we downloaded 1,791 tweets on 2016-04-30, more than two weeks after the original Medium post, by requesting all messages containing the word "backaspotify" (which included the hashtag #backaspotify)[1]. This way we were able to capture all tweets (unless deleted by the user) back to creation of the #backaspotify hashtag that was brought into being in connection with the open letter by Spotify. A limitation of the data collection is that we were unable to gather tweets that did not include the "backaspotify" phrase. Here we had to choose between the trade-off of widening our search query to include also phrases such as "Spotify". However, these queries deviated too much from the issue and campaign that we were following (and created a lot of noise since people often post their Spotify playlists on Twitter), so we decided to use only the "backaspotify" phrase to construct our dataset.

Mobilising Actors

The original Medium post by Ek and Lorentzon was published early in the morning of April 12th[2], and the #backaspotify hashtag emerged by noon the same day.

One approach to summarizing the discussion on Twitter is to look at the most frequent terms used. As Figure 1. shows, the most common words are "business", "Sweden", "Spotify", "relocate", "Stockholm" and "needs". The original Medium post elaborated three different political problems (housing shortage, program-
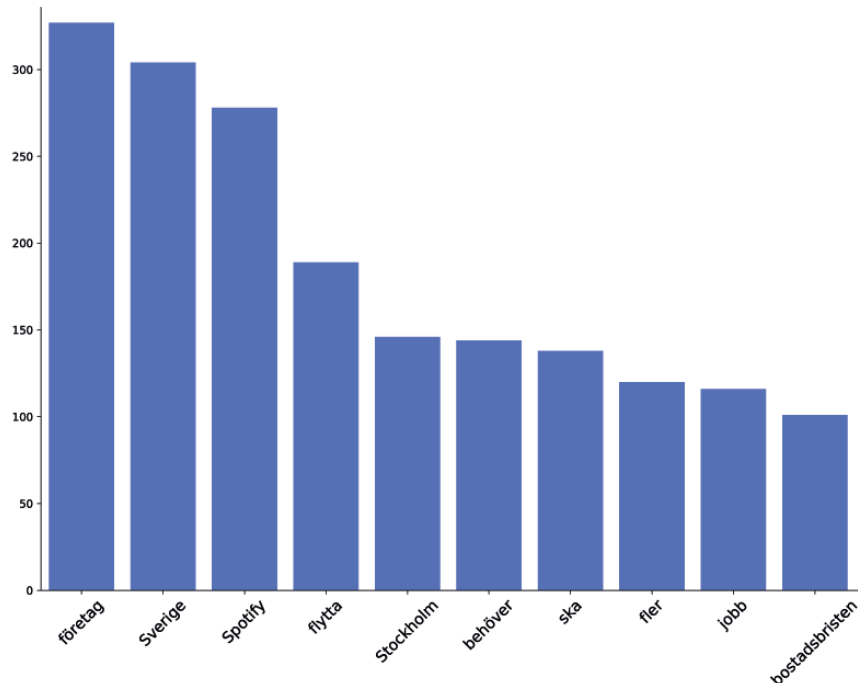
Figure 1. Word frequency, 10 most common words in 1791 Twitter messages.

ming in school and stock options), and judging from word frequency, the issue of "housing shortage" appears to be the most widely discussed of them.

Housing shortage is a recurrent issue in Swedish political debate, especially in Stockholm. From that perspective, it comes as no surprise that it was the most discussed issue in the campaign. However, the connection to Spotify modifies the housing issue towards a specific social group − professionals in the IT sector that regard their job market to be any large city in the world with high-tech employers.

But which actors were tweeting about #backaspotify? Another approach to describing the #backaspotify campaign is to study the central actors that shaped the Twitter discussion. Here it is worthwhile to study the *most frequent speakers* in the discussion and their *profiles,* in order to situate the actors in their networks (Latour et al. 2012: 593ff). While the #backaspotify discussion barely lasted for more than a week (see Figure 5 below), its emergence and disappearance renders visible a list of actors (detectable as Twitter users) in a network. Even if this *unstable* actor-network has perished by now, a recorded database copy of the interactions on Twitter can be used to reconstruct it as a *point of view* of other networks that are more stable, and can aid in understanding Spotify as a political idea by mapping the contributors to the discussion.

If we interrogate the profiles of the most frequent Twitter users in Figure 2., we can detect other relevant networks. For example, Fredrik Andersson (Feffe2010),
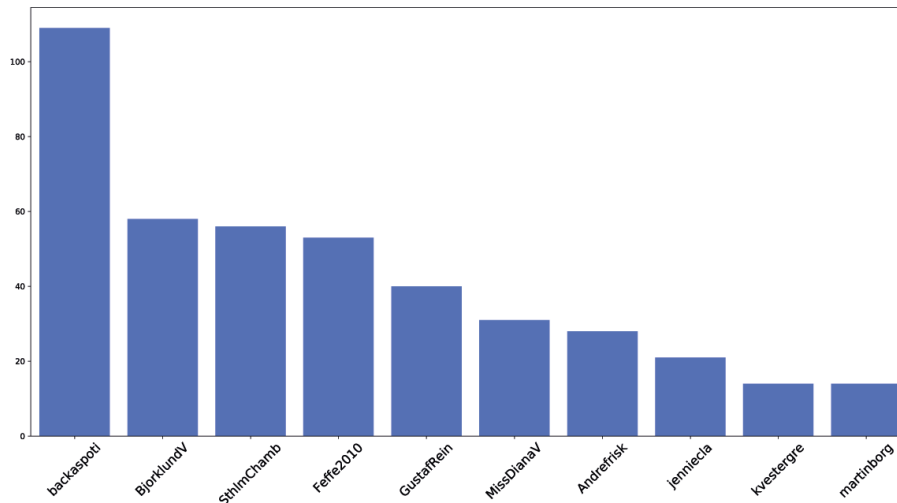
Figure 2. Most frequent Twitter users in the #backaspotify hashtag (N=1791).

Diana Van (MissDianaVan), Klas Vestergren (kvestergren) and Andre Frisk (Andrefrisk) all worked at the Public Affairs agency Milttonlabs at the time of the campaign, with Gustaf Reinfeldt (GustafReinfeldt) being hired soon thereafter (Färlin 2016). Milttonlabs described itself in November 20163 with the following words:

> Happiness is not measured by the number of employees, but by the number of users. Our organization is not a whale but one of the shoal. We're inspired by Uber, not dinosaurs. We don't sell hours. We sell products and services. No, this is not another agency. To start one of those in 2015 would be like starting a record label. We're inspired by how Spotify turned the music industry on its head. (Milttonlabs 2016).

The "unicorns" of the IT sector, from Uber to Spotify, seems to be the model organisms of Milttonlabs.

However, the most frequent users are also associated with other interesting entities. As shown in Figure 3., several participants also work for political parties, in particular for the youth branches of the Moderaterna (liberal-conservative party) and Centerpartiet (centre-right liberal), but also Liberalerna (centre-right liberal).

The dynamics of online discussions are, however, more than its actors. Taking turns in online discussions can reveal some interesting patterns of interaction between the actors that encircle the #backaspotify discussion on Twitter. Figure 4. (below) shows a so-called in-degree-network (Krapivsky et al. 2001), which mea-
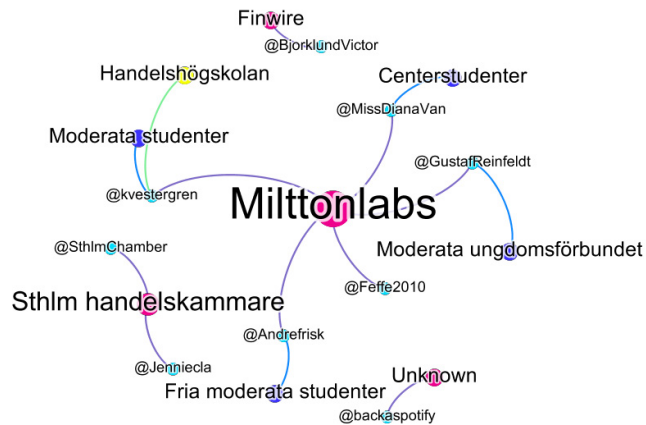
Figure 3. Extended network: Employers (purple), Political parties and Organizations (blue), and Schools (yellow). Networks like these can be extended further by incorporating more information from publically available profiles such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. However, such investigations soon run into ethical dilemmas regarding privacy. In this figure we limited our scope to include only basic information from public professionals.
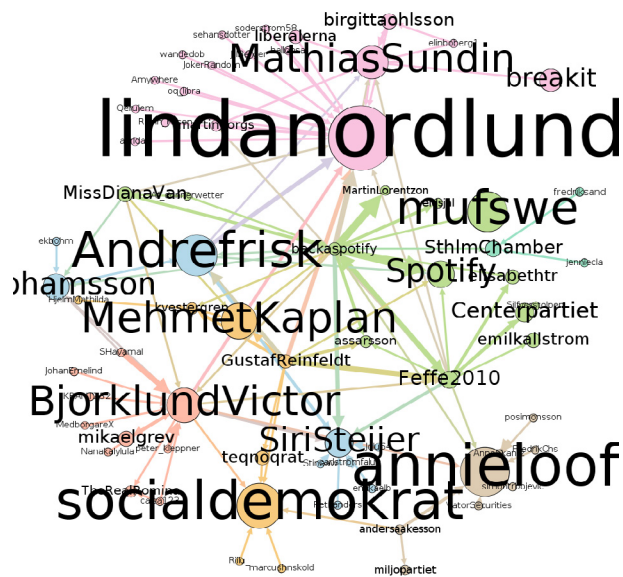

Figure 4. In-degree network. Size of nodes is determined by frequency of incoming @-tweets, including retweets. The larger the node, the more tweets are directed towards it. The more connections between two nodes, the thicker the edges. Arrow represents direction of edges. Colors are provided by the modularity algorithm (Blondel et. al. 2008), which is a heuristic tool to detect communities based on how often they interact with each other.

sures the number of incoming links (@-tweets) and represents the degree by making the nodes larger the more tweets are directed towards it. When retweets are included as in-degree factors, it can be used to determine popularity or influence in a similar manner as citations are used in scientific literature or web pages are ranked in search engines (Brin & Page 1998). The method identifies those actors that are implicated in the #backaspotify campaign as voluntary or involuntary interlocutors. For example, @annieloof, the centre-party leader, received 137 tweets (including retweets), but only tweeted 5 times herself.

Illustration 1. The centre-party leader, Annie Lööf, backing Spotify. As shown in Figure 4. below, the tweet that circulated the picture in this illustration was passed along several times, making one of several points of reference in the campaign.

The user @lindanordlund, an editorial writer at the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*, achieved a very high indegree status (Figure 4) as the following tweet was retweeted 65 times:

> Kötid för hyresrätt: Berlin - 0 v, NYC - 0 v, Bryssel - 0 v, Stockholm (länet) - 208 veckor. Gissa varför företag flyttar? #backaspotify

> Wait time for rental apartment: Berlin - 0 w[eeks], NYC - 0 w[eeks], Stockholm (county) - 208 weeks. Guess why businesses are moving? #backaspotify

However, not all in-degrees are the result of a successful speech act. For example, the official account of the Swedish Social Democrats, @socialdemokrat, did not tweet about #backaspotify at all, but still received many critical @-tweets from the Moderaterna (conservative party) youth section @mufswe, who argued that social democratic politics was undermining business in Sweden, and this is why Spotify must be supported. This stresses the methodological principle of combining visualisations and quantifications with qualitative analyses. While @annieloof and @lindanordlund were active participants in the Twitter conversation, the @socialdemokrat account did not send out a single message, yet it was implicated by other users who directed their tweets at it.

The in-degree network reveals a number of highly connected nodes. In the green community, the @backaspotify account makes numerous connections (thicker edges) to other accounts associated with Spotify, such as @MartinLorentzon and @Spotify. The same day that the open letter was published, the youth wings of the three abovementioned centre-right parties also began circulating 'meme' style images in support of the #backaspotify campaign. One slogan read "Backa bakåt or #backaspotify" ("Go backwards or support Spotify"), with backwardness illustrated by a cassette tape (Hägg 2016). Another picture showed the Swedish prime minister asking "what's the problem?" while holding a cassette tape in his hand (Rödgrön röra 2016). Of all "old" audio technologies, it was the cassette tape - rather than vinyl, FM radio or MP3 - that was chosen to illustrate a certain past, in which social democracy supposedly was stuck.

Creating an event

Little more than a week after the open letter, The Stockholm Chamber of Commerce (SCC) circulated a music playlist named #backaspotify, mostly consisting of mainstream pop songs with titles that in various ways alluded to the idea of Spotify abandoning Sweden – first in the list was "Should I stay or should I go" by The Clash (Spotify 2016). More importantly, the SCC arranged an after-work seminar held on April 22 with about 300 guests attending, including high-ranking politicians (for example Carl Bildt, see Illustration 2) – although Spotify itself declined to send an official representative (Ekström 2016).

With this event, however, the coordinated efforts behind the #backaspotify campaign was apparently over, and the Twitter account @backaspotify has to date never been used again. As this account stopped tweeting, along with the central actors as analysed above, the #backaspotify hashtag was turned into vapour. As the public sphere on Twitter was struck with a harsh competition on what issues should remain on the agenda, the case was more or less closed at this time. However, as we have shown, this was not the first time that Spotify became at-

Illustration 2. Former Prime and Foreign Minister of Sweden at the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce event, Carl Bildt, backing Spotify.

tached with political issues, and probably it will not be the last time.

It remains important to stress, that as a company Spotify did not involve itself in the #backaspotify campaign in any visible way. Of its two founders who signed the open letter, only Martin Lorentzon took some part in the subsequent discussion. For example, he approvingly posted a link to a comment published by the ultra-libertarian Mises Institute, arguing against the very existence of a tax-funded education system, and in favour of tax avoidance (Lorentzon 2016; Book 2016). Indeed, Lorentzon himself is known to avoid paying taxes in Sweden by owning his stocks through a post-box company registered on Cyprus. Some commentators hence remarked that Spotify's founders had in fact already chosen to leave Sweden, at least financially (Hedelius 2016).

Another blowback against Spotify came with the revelation that it had recently turned down an offer by Järfälla Municipality to rent 24 newly built apartments for its employees. Järfälla is a well-connected suburb[4] to Stockholm and the commuting time to Spotify's headquarters would be only 25 minutes, which is considerably less than the average commuting time for residents in the Stockholm area (Larsson 2016, Senneby 2016). This lead to a brief but interesting discussion about the role of urbanity in attracting skilled employees on a global labour market. Supporters of the #backaspotify campaign defended Spotify's decision. It would be "embarrassing" for Spotify to offer employees to live in a suburb, tweeted a repre-
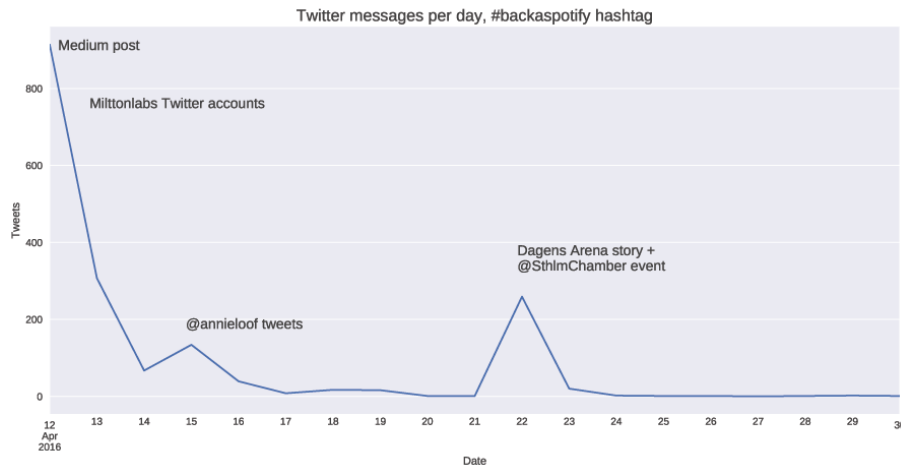
Figure 5. Day-by-day frequency of tweets (including retweets and @-tweets) for the #backaspotify hashtag. Three "waves" of topical intensity can be distinguished; firstly as dissemination and reactions to the original Medium post, secondly as an upsurge in tweets as reactions to Annie Lööf's tweet (see Illustration 2) and thirdly as a combined effect of a critical article in Dagens Arena (Senneby 2016) and tweets covering the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce event for supporting Spotify.

sentative of the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (Holdstock 2016). Moreover, the most influential of Sweden's editorial pages wrote: "An international company with employees who choose between living New York, San Francisco and Stockholm cannot direct people to a suburban bed. Especially for the young, the city is an attraction and an employee benefit in itself" (Dagens Nyheter 2016).

Discussion

This article has analysed the political significance of Spotify in Sweden from the perspective of Twitter interactions. As a general observation, Spotify can be connected with political issues that are much larger than the music industry, or even the IT-sector. Spotify is portrayed as a novel form of entrepreneurship and a pioneering industry, important for the future of the Swedish economy. The political dimension of Spotify is manifested by the active participation of politicians from centre-right opposition parties (Moderaterna, Liberalerna, Centerpartiet) - especially from the youth wings - who engaged swiftly in the #backaspotify campaign. However, it is interesting to note that music, the "content" of Spotify, was barely ever discussed. What mobilised political discourse was rather the *conditions of entrepreneurship*, such as housing, education, and legal matters concerning ownership. In short, it is possible from this perspective to say that "Spotify" has al-

most nothing to do with music from a political point of view, but indeed has the capacity to be associated with other issues. Spotify is portrayed as the future of content distribution, against a backwardness illustrated with pictures of cassette tapes. In this debate, the housing question - which is really a pressing issue in Swedish politics - was re-framed into a question about which housing policy that would be best for Spotify as a company, a company claiming to be all about music. But as we have shown, the political discussions never became a topic of discussion.

So what does this mean in terms of how politics is mediated through social media? Bennett and Segerberg (2012) make a useful distinction between "collective" and "connective" action. Collective action is mediated in organised networks that coordinate action and act as the representatives of a larger collective. Connective action, especially the kind that appears as "self-organising networks", lacks formal organisation, utilises communication as ways of mediating personal expression, and appears without a clear sender or representative organisation. In the case of #backaspotify, connective action is the primary mode of expression. The actors that support Spotify act as their own persons (or personas), formal organisations such as the Swedish Chamber of Commerce, Spotify itself, or political parties remain in the background, and the campaign appears as if it were spontaneous, self-organised and backed by seemingly random people. This shows some similarity with the detection of human rights issues in the study on the #eurovision hashtag by Highfield et al (2016), where loose networks are shaped around an issue, as a sort of subsection compared to the main topic of conversation.

Furthermore, in Bennett and Segerbergs' conception, #backaspotify shares similar logics as the *Occupy* protests to the extent that there lacks a clear organisation acting as a spokesperson. But, since we are still able to identify organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce in the background of the series of events, it also has the character of what Bennett and Segerberg call "hybrid model networks", in which NGOs and other organisations are loosely connected to the campaign.

It is difficult to give an absolute analysis on whether the #backaspotify campaign was short or long, involved many people or few, consisted of much or little data et cetera. These are all relational concepts when assessing the impact of social media campaigns, even though they are sometimes treated as hard numbers from a marketing perspective. However, there can still be comparisons made. For example, in relation to the widely known #metoo campaign, there are of course massive quantitative differences as the #metoo campaign had a global reach and its traces in social media can be counted in millions (see Burke 2018). However, there are also qualitative differences. While #metoo took gained a strong foothold in a number of grassroot movements while simultaneously being embraced by both high officials and politicians, celebrities and representatives of labour organisations, it was repeatedly re-mediated and put high on the news agenda. The

#backaspotify campaign was not able to stay on the news agenda for much more than a week, and reporting on Spotify as a company has recently concerned its stock market debut. It is, however, likely that the political issues that were connected to Spotify will re-emerge soon again, either connected once again to the unicorn company, or expressed in another form.

Rasmus Fleischer is an economic historian at Stockholm University. His research has largely concerned media history, cultural economy and critical theory. Between 2014 and 2018, he has worked with "Streaming Heritage", a transdisciplinary research project centered on Spotify. He contributed to the thematic section on Spotify in Culture Unbound volume 9, issue 2, and is the co-author of Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music (MIT Press, 2018). Currently he is also beginning a study on the history of price statistics and inflation measurement. E-mail: rasmus.fleischer@ekohist.su.se

Christopher Kullenberg is Associate professor in Theory of Science at the University of Gothenburg. His main research concerns citizen science, digital methods, social media and epistemology. As an overall research problem he wants to understand under what conditions different forms of knowledge are possible. E-mail: christopher.kullenberg@gu.se

Notes

[1] The source code and an anonymised dataset is available on https://github.com/christopherkullenberg/backaspotify

[2] According to the Medium blog platform source code, the exact time of publication was 2016-04-12 at 06:00 GMT in the morning. The post was later modified on 2017-04-19, see view-source: https://medium.com/@SpotifySE/vi-m%C3%A5ste-agera-eller-bli-omsprungna-383bb0b808eb (retrieved 2017-04-20).

[3] Milttonlabs changed their website in 2017. The version we refer to here (Milttonlabs 2016) is archived as a snapshot at Archive.org on https://web.archive.org/web/20161110002105/www.milttonlabs.com

[4] In the context of the greater Stockholm area, as well as in most larger cities in Sweden, the concept of "suburb" (förort) primarily denotes a high-rise and planned satellite city built during the Miljonprogrammet years (1965–1975). Many of these suburbs have been socially marginalised and are not considered attractive dwelling sites, especially for those with high incomes.

References

Andersson Schwarz, Jonas (2013): *Online File Sharing: Innovations in Media Consumption,* London: Routledge.

Andersson Schwarz, Jonas (2015): "Hur flöden moduleras", in Carlsson, Eric, Bo Nilsson & Simon Lindgren (eds.) *Digital politik: Sociala medier, deltagande och engagemang,* Göteborg: Daidalos.

Andersson Schwarz, Jonas & Johan Hammarlund (2016): "Kontextförlust och kontextkollaps. Metodproblem vid innehållsanalys av sociala medier",

Nordicom-Information (38)3: 41-55, http://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/node/37932

Bennett, Lance W. & Alexandra Segerberg (2012) "The Logic of Connective Action", *Information, Communication & Society,* 15:5, 739-768, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661

Burke, Louise (2018) "The #MeToo shockwave: how the movement has reverberated around the world", *The Telegraph, 20180309,* https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world/metoo-shockwave/

Blondel, Vincent D., Jean-Loup Guillaume, Renaud Lambiotte & Etienne Lefebvre

(2008): "Fast Unfolding of Communities in Large Networks". *Journal of Statistical Mechanics: Theory and Experiment*, 2008(10): P10008, http://stacks.iop.org/1742-5468/2008/i=10/a=P10008

Book, Joakim (2016): "Veckans Politik-konflikt: Spotify vs Politiker", *Ludwig von Mises-institutet i Sverige*, April 14 http://www.mises.se/2016/04/14/veckans-politik-konflikt-spotify-vs-politiker/

Brin, Sergey & Lawrence Page (1998): "The anatomy of a large-scale hypertextual Web search engine". *Computer Networks and ISDN Systems, Proceedings of the Seventh International World Wide Web Conference,* 30 (1–7): 107–17, http://ilpubs.stanford.edu:8090/361/

Broersma, Marcel & Todd Graham (2012): "Social Media as Beat." *Journalism Practice* 6 (3): 403–19., http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2012.663626

Callon, Michel (1986): "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay." in John Law (eds.) *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge*, pp. 196–233. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Dagens Nyheter (2016): "Snurr på Stockholm", May 18.

Ek, Daniel & Martin Lorentzon (2016): 'Vi måste agera eller bli omsprungna!', https://medium.com/@SpotifySE/vi-m%C3%A5ste-agera-eller-bli-omsprungna-383bb-0b808eb, retrieved 2016-10-02.

Ekström, Johanna (2016): "Hon har tagit över stafettpinnen efter Spotifys öppna brev", *Breakit*, April 22 http://www.breakit.se/artikel/3467/hon-har-tagit-over-stafettpinnen-efter-spotifys-oppna-brev

Färlin, Mårten (2016): "Gustaf Reinfeldt till Miltton Labs", *Resumé*, June 7 http://www.resume.se/nyheter/artiklar/2016/06/07/gustaf-reinfeldt-till-miltton-labs/

Fastighetsvärlden (2015): "AMF Fastigheter hyr ut hela 20000 kvm till Spotify", *Fastighetsvärlden*, October 27 http://www.fastighetsvarlden.se/notiser/amf-hyr-ut-hela-20000-kvm-till-spotify/

Fleischer, Rasmus (2010): "Femton gastar på död mans kista – om framtidens nätpolitik", Jonas Andersson & Pelle Snickars (eds.), *Efter The Pirate Bay* (Stockholm: Mediehistoriskt arkiv), pp. 259–280.

Fleischer, Rasmus (2017): "Swedish Music Export: The Making of a Miracle", Alf Björnberg & Thomas Bossius (eds.), *Made in Sweden. Studies in Popular Music,* London: Routledge.

Florida, Richard & Benjamin Schneider (2018): "The Global Housing Crisis", *City Lab*, April 11, https://www.citylab.com/equity/2018/04/the-global-housing-crisis/557639/, retrieved 2018-04-25.

Gelin, Martin (2015): "Vart är Spotify på väg?", *Dagens Nyheter*, June 5

Handelskammaren (2015): "Stockholms bostadsbrist hotar jobben", https://www.chamber.se/debattartiklar/stockholms-bostadsbrist-hotar-jobben.htm, retrieved 2017-04-20, originally published 2014-01-29.

Hägg, Alexander (2016): tweet, April 12 https://twitter.com/alexander_hagg/status/719958750791143424

Hedelius, Patricia (2016): "Spotifys grundare valde bort Sverige för länge sedan", *Svenska Dagbladet*, April 15.

Hedman, Ulrika & Monika Djerf-Pierre (2017): "Journalists' use of Twitter", in Franklin, Bob, and Eldridge II, Scott, A. *The Routledge Companion to Digital Journalism Studies,* New York: Routledge, p. 417-426.

Highfield, Tim, Stephen Harrington, and Axel Bruns. "Twitter as a Technology for Audiencing and Fandom." *Information, Communication & Society* 16, no. 3 (April 1, 2013): 315–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.756053.

Holdstock, Tobias (2016): tweet, May 18 https://twitter.com/TobiasHoldstock/status/732806510343032836

McIntyre, Hugh (2016): "Spotify May Soon Leave Sweden, According To Its CEO", *Forbes*, April 19, http://www.forbes.com/sites/hughmcintyre/2016/04/19/spotify-may-soon-leave-sweden-according-to-its-ceo/#40f3c30a2b92

Milttonlabs (2016): "Miltton Labs", https://web.archive.org/web/20161110002105/www.milttonlabs.com, retrieved 2016-11-10.

Krapivsky, Pavel L., Geoff J. Rodgers & Sidney Redner (2001): "Degree Distributions of Growing Networks". *Physical Review Letters*, 86(23): 5401–5404, dx.doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevLett.86.5401

Larsson, Linus (2016): "Spotify nobbade nya lägenheter", *Dagens Nyheter*, April 21.

Lasorsa, Dominic L., Seth C. Lewis & Avery E. Holton. (2012): "Normalizing Twitter" *Journalism Studies* 13 (1): 19–36, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2011.571825

Latour, Bruno, Pablo Jensen, Tommaso Venturini, Sébastian Grauwin & Dominique Boullier (2012): ''The Whole Is Always Smaller than Its Parts' - a Digital Test of Gabriel Tardes' Monads", *British Journal of Sociology*, 63 (4): 590–615.

Latour, Bruno (2013): *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence – An Anthropology of the Moderns*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Leijonhufvud, Jonas (2016): "Så utlöste Spotify riksdagsdebatt och gatuprotester", *DI Digital*, April 15 http://digital.di.se/artikel/sa-utloste-spotify-riksdagsdebatt-och-gatuprotester, retrieved 2017-05-21.

Lorentzon, Martin (2016): tweet, April 15 https://twitter.com/MartinLorentzon/status/720822566714257408

Nilson, Erik (2016): "Spotify hotar lämna Sverige", *Svenska Dagbladet*, April 13.

Paulussen, Steve & Raymond A. Harder (2014): "Social Media References in Newspapers." *Journalism Practice* 8 (5): 542–51, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.894327

Polanska, Dominika (2017): "Inside Sweden's housing crisis: when renovation means eviction", *The Conversation*, February 1, https://theconversation.com/inside-swedens-housing-crisis-when-renovation-means-eviction-71836, retrieved 2018-04-25.

Rankka, Maria, Martin Lorentzon & Karin Wanngård (2015): "Stockholm stad inför dataslöjd på skolschemat", *Dagens Nyheter* 2015-02-10, http://www.dn.se/debatt/stockholms-stad-infor-dataslojd-pa-skolschemat/, retrieved 2017-04-20.

Riksdagen (2016): search results for "Spotify" in the Swedish Parliament (Riksdag) document database, http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/global/sok/?q=spotify

Rödgrön röra (2016): tweet, April 12 https://twitter.com/Rodgronrora/status/719953388100796416/

Senneby, Johanna (2016), "Spotify ratade nyproducerade lägenheter", *Dagens Arena*, 22 April, 2016.

Spotify (2016): "#backaspotify", playlist added by the user "chambersthlm" https://play.spotify.com/user/chambersthlm/playlist/0be4nZ2eq3wNcnNELTRFKD

Sweden Abroad (2014): "Bildt gav Spotifykonto till Japans utrikesminister", February 28 https://www.swedenabroad.com/sv-SE/Ambassader/Tokyo/Aktuellt/Nyheter/Bildt-gav-Spotifykonto-till-Japans-utrikesminister-sys/

Swedish Royal Court (2016): search results for "Spotify" at Kungahuset.se

Tufekci, Zeynep (2017) *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. New Haven: London: Yale University Press.