



# YOUTH AND NEWS IN A DIGITAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Nordic-Baltic Perspectives

Yvonne Andersson, Ulf Dalquist & Jonas Ohlsson (eds.)



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**NORDICOM**  
Swedish Media Council

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# Preface

Ongoing digitalization has fundamentally transformed the entire media landscape, not least the domain of news. This anthology aims to elucidate the implications of these transformations for young people in the Nordic and Baltic countries.

*Youth and News in a Digital Media Environment* consists of contributions from Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Estonia, written by scholars as well as media industry professionals. We – the editors – want to thank all the contributing authors for making this book possible. We hope that it will serve as a source of inspiration for the media industry and media authorities alike when it comes to providing relevant and attractive news services to young people in our region.

The book is the result of a collaboration between the Swedish Media Council and Nordicom. It has been funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. We are grateful for this support.

Stockholm and Gothenburg, October 2018

The Editors



# 1. Youth and news in a digital media environment

## Nordic-Baltic perspectives

Yvonne Andersson, Ulf Dalquist & Jonas Ohlsson

Considering that the ongoing digitization of the past couple of decades has fundamentally transformed the entire media landscape, it might be a truism to claim that the domain of news also has undergone significant change. Not least the blurring of previously sharp distinctions between production, distribution and consumption have challenged the established news industry and brought into question long-held assumptions of what journalism is or should be, who is a journalist and what authority this third (or fourth) estate has in the early 21st century – and in the future.

When news dissemination moves online, it has several crucial consequences. It is detached from the needs of large distribution networks for printing, distribution to subscribers and resellers, broadcasting frequencies, etc. Therefore, it is much cheaper than the distribution of traditional mass media. It might be instant: News production has always been a “stop-watch-culture” but online news distribution increases the pace even more.<sup>1</sup> The distribution of news online is, potentially, worldwide. News also becomes subject to further dissemination by news users through sharing, liking, re-tweeting etc. in various social media channels. Traditional distinctions between production and consumption of news are no longer viable when people are, with Axel Bruns’ terminology, *producing* (producing and using) news.<sup>2</sup> With the advent of digital media technology and social media networks, the

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former users (or audiences) might as well produce and distribute their own content, “user-generated content”, and contribute with important journalistic work. This phenomenon has been studied and discussed among media scholars as citizen journalism, participatory journalism, grassroot journalism or connective journalism, indicating that the very notion of journalism is under consideration or scrutinization.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the technological changes have large-scale consequences for the mode of news production. News production has become increasingly decentralised, and a plethora of new, “alternative” news sources have appeared. The vast amount of free news in social media, ad-funded-news aggregator sites, agenda-driven “news” sites etc. have, in addition to dwindling advertising in legacy media, led to a deep crisis for the traditional news media business model. It is still too early to tell if attempts to combat the loss of revenue by introducing pay-walls or cutting costs by downsizing staff may prove successful or contribute to the downward spiral of legacy news media. We can be quite certain, however, that the days of traditional news media as we know it are counted.

Because of this development, the notion of news itself – as well as the notion of journalism – have been problematised. The news media industry of the 20th century used to produce a rather easily identified product – news – with a distinct format, distributed through designated channels, almost a genre in itself. Today, news can appear in any form, in any context, anywhere. The growth of native advertising, where it, although admittedly sometimes (inadequately) labelled as “paid content,” is presented as objective news reporting is one example. The continuous flow of information in social media, where personal messages, advertising and news items are intermingled is another. The push notice function in digital devices is a third; you don’t even have to look for news – the news comes looking for you. The reported rise of “fake news”, made-up or manipulated information camouflaged as news items for commercial or ideological reasons, is a fourth. So, how do we define news? Is it possible that young people define “news” differently than those who are older?

These recent developments have given rise to several contradictory statements about the state of the news consumer, and most concern is expressed over news use among children and youth. On the one hand, they are portrayed as naive and gullible; on the other, as tech-savvy

early adopters. On the one hand, they are fact-resistant dopes; on the other, highly competent source-critics. On the one hand, they are news avoiders; on the other, hyper-informed news junkies.

This anthology is an attempt to gather and update knowledge on young people and news in the late 2010s in the Nordic and Baltic area. It is focused around three areas: youth as producers of news, news produced for youth and youth as news users.

### Outline of the book

The first part of the anthology concerns youth participating in news and information production; it consists of three chapters.

Thomas Nygren and Fredrik Brounéus describe the construction and first trials of a digital tool for investigating how youth evaluate news items they encounter in their newsfeeds: the News Evaluator mass experiment. Almost 6,000 Swedish teenagers in primary and secondary school have been engaged in the experiment so far but the aim is to further develop the tool and launch a final version in 2019. Nygren and Brounéus present some results but also problems and challenges that must be addressed.

Vedat Sevincer, Heidi Biseth and Robert W. Vaagan describe the Faktuell project, a Norwegian project launched in 2013. *Faktuell*, an online publication produced by and for young people, has the ambition of offering youngsters practical media training as journalists, improving their digital competencies, and, ultimately, contributing to civic engagement among youngsters.

In the third chapter, Kadri Ugur and Eleri Lõhmus discuss a non-formal media education project in a peripheral county in Estonia. Because the *Meediasüst* (“Media injection”) project is in the geographical and cultural periphery, it makes a valuable case for thinking about the specific challenges for hyper-local journalism where personal relationships may influence the journalistic duty, or where these relations are overturned, for youngsters taking on new roles. Together these three cases elucidate both possibilities and potential problems when youth participate in news and information production.

The second part of the anthology consists of four chapters dealing with news production, aimed at children and youth, by media organisations in Sweden, Norway and Finland.

First out is Lowe Östberg, project leader at the Swedish public service news program for children; *Lilla Aktuellt*. Research indicates that children leave traditional media platforms earlier than ever before, and *Lilla Aktuellt* is facing extensive problems when trying to reach its target group from the age of 11. Children from that age prefer digital, social platforms, and Östberg delineates a case – the terror attack on Drottninggatan, Stockholm in 2017 – when *Lilla Aktuellt* improvised its news reporting and communication with kids through its Instagram account and the Children’s Channel’s portal, with an overwhelming response. Since then, *Lilla Aktuellt* has created a new app for children age 9 to 12 that might solve its problems trying to reach this audience.

Marita Bjaaland Skjuve and Petter Bae Brandtzæg have a rather different angle, focusing on chatbots as a new user interface for health information directed towards young people. Getting important information across is a difficult task in a digital media landscape with a constantly increasing supply of media entertainment and information. SocialHealthBots is a research project in Norway, initiated in 2017, that investigates the potential and limitations of using chatbots to provide health information. Because of the findings so far, Skjuve and Brandtzæg raise the question of whether chatbots might become a new way to deliver news to young people because they seem to be perceived as more engaging and have the potential to help youths orientate in the vast media landscape.

Maarit Jaakkola provides an example of “media influencing”, a form of youth participation and engagement, through the Finnish Youth Voice News Centre (YVNC). The intention of the project, started in 2006, is to engage young people in news production and thereby make them, and their perspectives on news, visible in mainstream media content. The distinguishing feature of the project’s pedagogy is to offer the young content providers a “third space”, a physical and cultural place that respects their autonomy and integrity, and cross boundaries between different age groups. This is a practice that could be applied to other neglected or vulnerable groups, Jaakkola argues.

The last chapter in part two is written by Catharina Bucht, and it presents three recent Scandinavian examples of news production for children. The distinguishing feature for these news outlets is that they are printed in an era when most printed newspapers struggle

with decreasing readership and financial problems. In the chapter, the editors-in-chief for the news outlets reflect on the possibilities and advantages that printed news for children may have.

Taken together, part two offers four rather different strategies to reach young people with news and information in these media-saturated times.

The third part of the anthology consists of seven chapters, dealing with news use among youth in Estonia, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. A common theme is that they notice, and sometimes discuss, differences between groups of people or individuals, making it difficult to characterise “news use among youth” in the Nordic and Baltic countries because there are differences – as well as similarities – both between and within countries.

Signe Opermann provides an overview of how young people in Estonia use news, how they define news and newsworthiness, and what motivations for news consumption they have. Although she concludes that their news involvement is quite strong, it is also highly selective, interest-driven and far from homogenous.

Maria Jervelycke Belfrage highlights that the selection of news and sources requires knowledge and skills, and that young people today, largely taking part of news in social media, tend to rely on “opinion leaders”, that is, important others, for their news use. Thus, the heterogeneity of news consumption patterns among youth to some extent may depend on differences in personal social connections and, as Jervelycke Belfrage points out, the incidental nature of news consumption.

The importance of social media for youth news use is also highlighted by Dag Sletteameås and Ardis Storm-Mathisen. In their chapter about news consumption among youth in Norway, they demonstrate that the smartphone has become the most important device for accessing news among youth and that news is mixed with other content in social media feeds, blurring the boundaries between genres, between public and private, and between news practices and other daily practices, making it increasingly more difficult to grasp news use among youth.

Stine Liv Johansen discusses this from a somewhat different angle, highlighting the importance of peer culture and play practices for children’s news consumption and definition of news in Denmark. She remarks that adults usually think about and discuss news in relation to

citizenship and the democratic process, neglecting that children may define and use news in relation to what is important for them in their everyday life with peers and play.

Both Johan Lindell and Jacob Ørmen direct our attention to the importance of class and socio-demographic aspects for the news use among youth.

In interviews with Swedish youth, Lindell has found distinct differences between those with a middle-class background and those with a working-class background. The amount of news they consume, which news genres they prefer and whether they find news interesting and relevant for them and their everyday lives differ, suggesting that “journalism and news have become markers of social status and distinction”.

Ørmen’s reasoning is very much along the same line, but his focus is on “incidental” news consumption among Danish youth. Data indicate that they are divided in their news repertoire, as some (with higher education) consume a high degree of news while some (with less education) avoid news or only consume it through social encounters. The problem with relying on incidental news, however, is that the news one gets is dependent on algorithms and social circumstances, what Ørmen labels “incidental disengagement”. With a social network of news-savvy friends and family, the probability for running into high quality news in the social media feed is higher. Thus, the class and socialization structures that Lindell discusses also seem to matter when it comes to incidental news consumption.

Finally, to make things even more complicated, Yvonne Andersson directs the attention to how news use and identity formation among youth are entangled in partly new ways. Youth today do not use media, they *live* in media, and whatever they share, comment, upload etc. simultaneously shares information about the sender; who you are, who you want to be, how you want to be perceived – and that makes news-sharing and commenting a rather risky business. Interviews with Swedish youth display how these precarious aspects of the news practice sometimes hinder them from digital civic engagement.

So, there are differences between youth within the Nordic and Baltic countries, depending on class, socialization, identity formation and, of course, the vast supply of news, information and entertainment to choose from when composing one’s own media diet. There’s no single



definition of “news”, no universal motive for news consumption, no common path to news. What can we learn from this? Contemporary news organizations that want to reach young people must consider the diversity and probably develop multiple channels and interfaces to meet different requirements. Some suggestions in this anthology stress the importance of using the latest technology, such as chatbots and apps, to provide news and information in appealing ways at occasions preferred by the young audience. Other suggest that old formats, such as printed newspapers, still might be valuable for some children. There is no single way to reach the youth, and there’s probably only a couple of things that news organizations can be certain of: children growing up today will never adjust themselves to news organizations’ air time or the like. News and information must be available when youth need them, not the other way around.

The heyday of the omnibus newspaper is definitely in the past. Given the individualization of media habits among youth and the ambient news media landscape there is no reason to believe that a single outlet can offer all the news and information one needs. As noted above, young people use different paths to different information depending on where they think they will find the expertise (and therefore, the best information), who they trust and maybe even follow as an “opinion leader”. A narrow, but trustworthy, scope might be a fruitful approach for a news provider.

A second insight is that we are confronting a major challenge when it comes to digital media literacy or digital civic literacy. Only the first part of the anthology deals explicitly with this theme, and we learn from it that there are difficulties with developing tools in this area. Multiple concepts are used, and there are no standardised definitions of the notions that may be operationalised in the development of tools for education or evidence-based examination of digital media/civic literacy. As news and information are sought after, encountered or delved into in multiple ways – and the information technology used is in a state of flux – the terms, notions and possible definitions are likely to be temporary, or “works in progress”. How do we apply tools for source criticism on, for example, Snapchat where the information disappears after a few seconds? Which are the most important skills when information is encountered in newsfeeds that are replenished

constantly with new items from a manifold of sources, at a pace that makes it impossible to register even half of it? Is it possible to develop evidence-based tools for assessing skills in digital media literacy when the technology and the skills needed are moderated constantly, which circumscribe the possibilities for longitudinal studies? This anthology does not answer any of these questions, but it might provide a basis for reflecting on them.

### A final note

Although there are plenty of studies on youth and news around on an international level, we hope this anthology can be an important contribution to the field. Admittedly, the digitization process has included a fair deal of globalisation and trans-nationalization of the media landscape. Nevertheless, national differences when it comes to culture, the rights of children and youth, and – most importantly – the structure of national media remain obstacles when it comes to generalising studies from one national context to another. The rapidly changing nature of contemporary media and news dissemination also should be considered. We do hope, however, that this anthology can function as a modest update of the knowledge on youth and news in the Nordic and Baltic countries, a snapshot frozen in time, in an ever-changing world.

### Notes

1. See e.g. Reich & Godler (2014).
2. See Bruns (2008).
3. e.g. Allan & Thorsen (2009); Singer, Jane B. et al. (2011); Schofield Clark & Marchi (2017).

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## **PART I.**

# **Youth Participating in News and Information Production**



## 2. The News Evaluator

### Evidence-based innovations to promote digital civic literacy

Thomas Nygren & Fredrik Brounéus

The News Evaluator is a multi-year project aimed at supporting constructive use of digital news among school pupils and the public. The project includes investigating authentic news feeds, exploring abilities to determine credibility, and developing evidence-based methods, materials and tools for teaching and learning digital civic literacy. In this chapter we describe the first phase of the project, where we collected and analysed empirical data from authentic news feeds with the help of almost 6,000 primary and secondary school pupils. At the same time, we developed a digital tool for scaffolding critical news literacy.

In recent years, the public media debate has been preoccupied with questions of manipulated or downright false news content. Access to credible news and skills to navigate biased and fake information has been highlighted as a pivotal democratic and educational challenge.<sup>1</sup> Citizens need to be able to identify and determine the trustworthiness of different information sources. A recent report from the Council of Europe<sup>2</sup> finds that “the call for more news literacy programmes has been deafening recently, and they are one solution on which almost everyone can agree”. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix to this complex problem.

Scholars argue that teaching and learning *digital civic literacy* is essential to an informed and engaged citizenship.<sup>3</sup> We define *digital*

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*civic literacy* as the ability to navigate digital civic information in critical and constructive ways, and we acknowledge that simply having access to information is not enough. What has been labelled, for instance, media literacy, digital literacy, digital competence has been noted to be quite a challenge, but also to hold promises of educational solutions to challenges of misinformation and disinformation.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of which term one uses, the importance of these kinds of literacies, skills or competences are recognized nationally and internationally.<sup>5</sup> However, implementing digital tools and digital literacy in education comes with numerous obstacles and has proven to be difficult,<sup>6</sup> which highlights the need for a better understanding of the challenges posed by manipulated news content to society and education.

This challenge was the starting point for a collaboration between Uppsala University, the civil society organization VA (Public & Science) and the research institute RISE Interactive. Funded by Vinnova and Uppsala University, the project is focused on: 1) the challenge of biased information in authentic newsfeeds; 2) people's problems in determining the credibility of news; and 3) how educational innovations can support digital civic literacy.

In the project's first sub study, we investigated the following research questions:

1. What news are Swedish teenagers exposed to in their digital newsfeeds?
2. How is digital news being shared among the teenagers?

We were also interested in learning about how credible the teenagers perceived the news to be if we provided them with a tool to guide them through a research-based method for digital source criticism. We also wanted to test whether a digital tool for critically scrutinizing newsfeeds could be perceived as useful by pupils when evaluating their feeds.

To answer our research questions, we engaged almost 6,000 Swedish teenagers in primary and secondary schools in a citizen science initiative as part of the 2017 Swedish events on European Researchers' Night (*ForskarFredag*). By participating, the pupils contributed to the accumulation of scientific knowledge while learning a research-based method for digital source criticism.

### The ForskarFredag mass experiments

Every year since 2009, the Swedish events on European Researchers' Night (*ForskarFredag*) have included a mass experiment – a national citizen science initiative where thousands of school pupils have helped researchers with real research. ForskarFredag, as well as the annual mass experiment, is coordinated by VA (Public & Science). In 2017, the News Evaluator was launched as the ForskarFredag mass experiment of the year.<sup>7</sup>

### Building a tool for supporting digital civic literacy

While it may seem like a simple task, systematically evaluating the credibility of a piece of news takes a lot of practice. Research suggests that a high level of education and a general sceptical attitude are not enough to evaluate information in critical and constructive ways.<sup>8</sup> Digital civic literacy is challenging for everyone regardless of academic titles. Even professors and elite pupils at high-end universities may struggle to determine the credibility of online information.<sup>9</sup> Seemingly, the best way to determine the trustworthiness of news is to use an approach used by professional fact-checkers.<sup>10</sup> This approach is centred around three aspects:

1. Who is the *sender* and what may his/her intentions be?
2. What *evidence* is being presented for claims made in the article?
3. What are *other sources* saying on the same topic?

These three aspects were to make up the foundation for the digital tool being used by the pupils in the News Evaluator mass experiment.

The tool had two aims. One: it was to scaffold the pupils in their evaluation of 1) the sender, 2) the evidence, and 3) the corroboration of the information. In this way, the pupils would be taught a research-based approach to source criticism built upon *reading laterally* to determine the credibility of the news – to leave the website to find the information they need to assess its credibility.

Two: We also wanted the tool to transfer the assessment data to a database that both pupils and researchers could explore for scientific and educational purposes. The data would include a link to the news item, the pupils' ratings of the three aspects (sender, evidence, corroboration) as *Credible*, *Not credible* or *Neither credible nor not credible*, how

the news was found, its main topic, and an overall credibility rating. All information had to be collected anonymously. The database, in turn, needed to have a user-friendly interface and enable easy comparison between different pupil ages, types of news, credibility ratings, geographic regions, etc.

An invitation to participate in the project was sent by email to all primary and secondary schools in Sweden in April 2017. The invitation was also disseminated through the participating organizations' networks and digital channels. With so-called "fake news" being a hot topic on the public agenda in Sweden, the project received a lot of media attention and was featured on television and radio, as well as in the morning papers, tabloids and special interest media. In August 2017, over 12,000 pupils had been signed up to participate in the experiment.

In May 2017, we conducted a series of pilot tests. During this pilot phase, we developed the research protocol and the tool through an iterative process where input from teachers and pupils played a crucial part. We carried out classroom observations, recorded how pupils used the tool by capturing their on-screen navigation, and collected feedback from teachers and pupils through online questionnaires. The pilot also helped us develop visualizations and user feedback on the tool and the database.

In the weeks leading up to the experiment, we set up a series of communication channels for interaction between the participants and the research group, so that teachers (and pupils) could get immediate support if they should run into technical issues or protocol ambiguities during the experiment. These channels included email and a dedicated Facebook group, as well as a telephone support where teachers could speak directly to a developer at Research Institutes of Sweden (RISE) Interactive.

Two weeks prior to the start of the experiment we distributed a digital teachers' guide, including background information, previous research, explanations of the research protocol and a step-by-step description of the experiment. Additionally, the guide contained a number of hints and tips on issues encountered during the pilot.

We also provided the teachers with a short Powerpoint presentation to share with their classes before the start of the experiment.



Materials and tools were designed in line with research highlighting the importance of directing and scaffolding pupils to safeguard learning and quality when using digital tools in classrooms.<sup>11</sup>

### September 2017 – The News Evaluator mass experiment

Over a period of two weeks in September 2017, 2,748 secondary school pupils (16–19 years) and about as many primary school pupils (13–15 years) participated in the experiment. The drop-off rate of about 50 per cent from the 12,000 that had signed up to participate was expected: previous experience has shown that it is difficult for teachers to commit to such activities ahead of the school year.

The experiment was performed in six steps:

1. The teacher went through the Powerpoint presentation with the pupils.
2. All pupils filled in a short survey about digital news. The survey took approximately five minutes and covered topics such as how they commonly accessed news, how often news was shared with them in their social media networks and how credible the news was.
3. All pupils retrieved the latest piece of news from their own digital newsfeeds.
4. The pupils worked in groups of three, assessing the news. The group element was chosen to enhance the pupils' learning experience and to improve the quality of their submitted evaluations. The teacher had been instructed to allow 30–40 minutes for this stage.
5. The teacher engaged the class in a discussion where each group presented one piece of credible news, one piece of not so credible news and one piece of news that had been difficult to categorize.
6. The pupils and teachers filled in a short survey about their experiences with the experiment.

Having completed the experiment, the pupils were encouraged to access the database to explore differences and similarities in the credibility of the reported news. A tutorial was enclosed to introduce the students to the database interface.

### Mainly credible hard news from mainstream media

We will now take a brief look at the results of the News Evaluator mass experiment of 2017. For practical/ethical reasons, primary school pupils are excluded from the analysis, as the inclusion of their data would have required teachers to collect carer consent.

In the pre-experimental survey, nine out of ten secondary school pupils reported using their mobile phones to access news. Six out of ten watch news on TV, and half of the pupils use a computer. A quarter of the pupils read print newspapers and about one in ten listens to the radio.

One in ten pupils had news shared with them on social media every hour. Half of them had news shared with them daily, and one out of five a couple of times per week.

Almost a third of pupils claimed to encounter unreliable news *every day* in their newsfeeds. Half of the pupils saw such news a *few times per week*, one out of five *seldom* saw unreliable news, while one in 50 claimed to never see such news in their newsfeeds.

In all, 2,703 evaluated news items were submitted to the database. The links pasted in the tool allowed access to the original source for every news item. After discarding incomplete or duplicate evaluations, 2,617 items remained. The majority originated from news sites, of which the five most common are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** News reviewed from the most common news sources

	News items	Per cent	Average credibility
Aftonbladet (national evening newspaper)	783	29.9	7.9
Expressen (national evening newspaper)	280	10.7	7.7
Nyheter24 (digital news site)	207	7.9	5.7
DN & SvD (national morning newspapers)	166	6.3	8.3
SVT & SR (public service TV and radio)	165	6.3	8.7

*Comment:* The table shows the total number of news items for each news source, the percentage of all news submitted and the pupils' average credibility rating of news items reported by the source, on a scale from 1 (not at all credible) to 10 (completely credible).

We found that pupils' ratings were slightly less critical than those of experts and teachers when we conducted an inter-rater reliability test of 100 items.<sup>12</sup>

Two-thirds of all news were from the categories Politics/Economy/Societal news and Accidents/Crime – so-called *hard news*. The re-

maining third consisted of *soft news* from the categories Sports, Arts/Entertainment and Lifestyle/Nutrition/Health/Medicine.

Hard news was most common among both girls and boys of all ages. With regard to soft news, Culture/Entertainment and Lifestyle/Health were more common in all-girls groups, whereas Sports news was more often reported by all-boys groups. Soft news was more commonly found on social media (Twitter being the exception), whereas hard news was more prevalent on news sites. In all, only four out of ten items had been shared via social media.

Looking at overall credibility scores, the highest average score, on a scale from 1 to 10, was given to Sports news (8.0), followed by Accidents/Crime (7.0), Politics/Economy/Societal news (6.9), Arts/Entertainment (6.4) and Lifestyle/Nutrition/Health/Medicine (5.7).

According to the post-experimental survey, most pupils found the digital tool to be easy and interesting to use.

### Steering clear of echo chambers?

Among the news items reported by pupils in the News Evaluator, we find primarily hard news vetted by journalists at national newspapers, indicating that the pupils' online news environments hold more than rumours and polarized narratives from narrow-minded sources in echo chambers.<sup>13</sup> In other words, by predominately going directly to established news sites, the pupils may avoid being shut inside filter bubbles and echo chambers.<sup>14</sup> And, if the explanation for this result should be that the pupils are *directed* to newspapers by filter bubbles, then their filters can be said to promote domains with plenty of credible news. It should be pointed out, however, that even if most pupils did go directly to news sites when retrieving news items for evaluation, 70 per cent of them claimed to find news via social media in the pre-experimental survey. Possible explanations for this discrepancy could be that news may come in parallel from many different media and the pupils may fail to self-report the degree to which they go directly to news sites or get push notifications.<sup>15</sup> Although they were instructed to pick the latest news item from their usual newsfeeds, we cannot know for sure that they did this in the classroom setting. Their actual newsfeeds could possibly contain a larger portion of less credible news shared via social media.

A contributing reason for pupils finding news in evening papers more often than in morning papers, in spite of giving the latter a higher credibility score, could be that the morning papers often use paywalls to restrict access to their articles. Such paywalls present a democratic challenge when access to credible news is determined by the citizens' financial situation. However, public service TV and radio, both given the highest credibility scores, help bridge this divide by providing free access to all news on their websites.

### The 2018 Election Special and further developing the tool

In September 2018 we will be running the News Evaluator Election Special with Swedish primary and secondary school pupils. To date (27 August 2018), 10,000 pupils have signed up to help explore the trustworthiness of political news during the week leading up to the general elections on 9 September. The pupils will be working with an updated version of the digital tool, and this time we will also measure the learning effects of using the News Evaluator. We have also, in parallel, tested the digital civic literacy skills among almost 2,000 adolescents and adults, finding that they all struggle with determining the credibility of digital news.<sup>16</sup> A cross-disciplinary team of researchers in psychology, education, history, and media and communication, along with designers, will work together to use the results to further develop the tool with the aim of launching a final live version in 2019. By then we will know what challenges teenagers' newsfeeds may provide during an ordinary week in September and a week before a national election. Based upon the identified limitations among young and old, also studied in the psychology lab, we will provide not only tools for scrutinizing newsfeeds but also user tests with personal feedback on each user's digital civic literacy skills. For teachers, this evidence-based test and feedback system can be implemented in classrooms to help pupils use information in more critical and constructive ways.

### Notes

1. Carlsson (2018); Lazer et al. (2018); Wardle & Derakhshan (2017).
2. Wardle & Derakhshan (2017, p. 68).
3. Kahne & Bowyer (2017); Kahne et al. (2016); McGrew et al. (2017); McGrew et al. (2018).

4. Hatlevik & Christophersen (2013); Kahne & Bowyer (2017); Kirschner & van Merriënboer (2013); van Laar et al. (2017).
5. EU (2006); Skolverket (2017); UNESCO (2011).
6. Balanskat et al. (2013).
7. For more information, please see: <https://forskarfredag.se/researchers-night/mass-experiments/>
8. Kahan (2017); Kahan et al. (2017).
9. Wineburg & McGrew (2017).
10. *ibid.*
11. Kirschner & De Bruyckere (2017); Kirschner et al. (2006); Saye & Brush (2004).
12. Nygren et al. (2018).
13. Del Vicario et al. (2016); Flaxman et al. (2016).
14. Pariser (2011).
15. Jervelycke Belfrage (2016).
16. Nygren & Guath (2018).

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### 3. Faktuell

## Youths as journalists in online newspapers and magazines in Norway

Vedat Sevincer, Heidi Biseth & Robert Wallace Vaagan

In 2013, the youth-led non-profit media organization Norsensus Mediaforum (Norway) launched the Faktuell project. From the outset, it was conceived both as a media competence-building project and as an online publication for the 13 to 20 age group. The declared ambition was to enhance the target group's civic engagement and offer participants practical media training as journalists, photographers and video producers. This in turn would encourage active participation and a mainstream youth perspective. At the same time, it would allow participants to improve their digital competencies through involvement in a high-quality online publication.<sup>1</sup> This chapter first briefly outlines the Norwegian media landscape, then highlights the main features of Faktuell before we conclude with reflections on how the project contributes to civic engagement and digital competence.

As in many other countries, the Norwegian media landscape is undergoing technology-driven changes, especially increased digitization and the use of social media and mobile platforms. New stakeholders and markets have emerged, new professions and roles are in evidence, and media usage has changed.<sup>2</sup> The media policy by several governments has been to support a diverse, free and independent press through various press subsidies.<sup>3</sup> How Norwegians access news and information has also changed significantly. In 1991, 84 per cent of the population between 9 and 70 years of age read print newspapers, 81 per cent watched TV and

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71 per cent listened to the radio. In 2017, only 32 per cent read print newspapers, 62 per cent watched TV and 54 per cent listened to the radio. Ninety per cent of the population now use the internet daily to read online newspapers, access IPTV and listen to internet radio. The Norwegian DAB radio is seen by many as a temporary solution before internet radio takes over. Among internet users, most use the internet to access Facebook (73%) or handle email (71%), while 57 per cent search for facts or background material, and 53 per cent watch films, TV or videos. Gender differences in media usage have diminished, and today 92 per cent of internet users are male while 87 per cent are female. In the 9 to 15 age group, 93 per cent use the internet daily, and the percentage increases to 98 per cent among 16 to 24-year-olds.<sup>4</sup> If we look at social media use, the 18 to 29 age group (the closest to Faktuell's target group that we have updated statistics for) finds Facebook most popular (99 per cent among females and 91 per cent among males) followed by Snapchat (95 per cent among females and 89 per cent among males), Instagram (92 per cent among females and 74 per cent among males) and Youtube (78 per cent among females and 82 per cent among males).<sup>5</sup> Among the most popular websites in Norway, a high proportion comprised newspapers or news sources, which reflects a continuing Norwegian interest in news. The most popular website was the newspaper *VG Nett* with 895,718 unique readers.<sup>6</sup> Weeklies and magazines both have online versions but available statistics still only register print circulation.<sup>7</sup>

### How children and youths produce news at Faktuell

As can be seen from these media trends, Norwegian youths interact with news and media content. From mobile phones to social media, they are immersed in a technologically rich media environment, in a participatory culture where they are not only consuming media content mainly online, but also producing it and sharing it with others on a daily basis. Yet youth activity in this new media world does not ensure either a fully competent media literary generation or their presence in mainstream media. This is where Faktuell can make a difference.

Faktuell is financed by Oslo Municipality, the Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU), the Open Society Foundation and





**Photo 1.**  
In one of the Faktuell workshops, youths learn about photojournalism.

Erasmus+. Aiming for unbiased reporting and respect for a diversity of views, Faktuell attempts not only to develop journalistic skills among youths but also to provide a fresh and quality-conscious youth perspective on public debate. To bring about these ambitious goals, Norsensus Mediaforum has set up a project management team that is legally and financially responsible for all activities.<sup>8</sup> In addition, an independent and unpaid advisory steering committee composed of academics,<sup>9</sup> media professionals and youth representatives provides input on planning and policy. Faktuell consists of two main components: a comprehensive training programme in news content creation and a youth-led online magazine. The training programme comprises five modules: media ethics, basic journalistic skills (investigation and data collection in text, audio, video and photo), storytelling, editing and dissemination training.

To ensure that youths have the chance to interact with professionals and to connect different media generations, all modules are led by media professionals from mainstream media and academia in Norway. Participating youths also meet volunteer mentor journalists, academics and university-level media/journalism students in training sessions and follow-up meetings. Mentors serve as supervisors for the young journalists on language, structure and technical issues. So far, we have interacted with more than 100 schools, student clubs and organizations



**Photo 2.**  
Faktuell participants learn and practice visual storytelling in journalism.

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all over the country, and with thousands of young people through targeted social media ads. Once the applications from interested youths are processed, we carry out a participatory assessment of their knowledge of journalism and use of media. For this purpose, we use media literacy evaluation tools to map individual and collective assets and to shape the training programme. With this method, more than 100 youths have completed the Faktuell training programme since 2013.

The second component of the project is an online magazine, *faktuell.no*. Its aim is to motivate participants and other youths to create news content by showcasing their journalistic work and by creating a comprehensive youth-led magazine for the general public. Showcased content is syndicated with mainstream media and project partners in Norway to increase the impact and recognition of the journalistic work. The magazine has also been an experimental laboratory for observing youth content production. From editorial work to marketing, all activities are run by the editorial group of young people aged 13 to 20 from diverse backgrounds, and these are renewed every year. In addition to the core editorial team, we invite individual contributors, schools and youth clubs to contribute to the magazine. The project management team only provides logistic and technical support to the editorial team in addition to mentorship when needed. This relaxed editorial attitude to control has encouraged the



**Photo 3.**

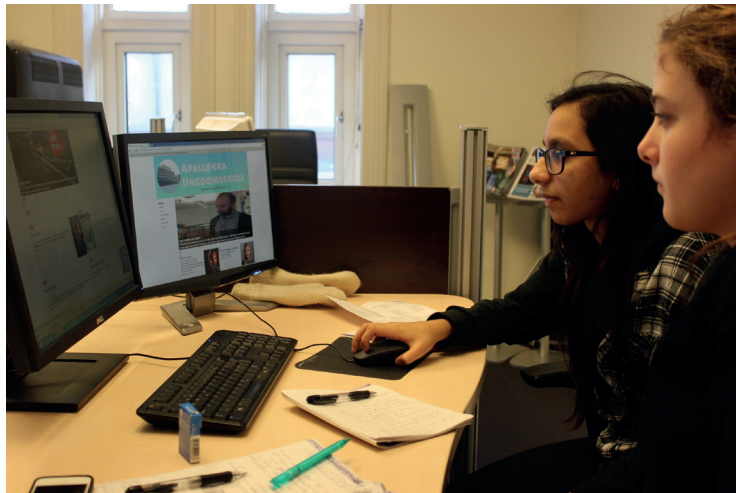
Faktuell journalists are filming for a 5 episode documentary series about the fifth anniversary of 22 July terror attacks in Norway.

youths to produce content ranging from game reviews to politically themed commentaries.

Looking at the type of the content in the magazine, we can see some common tendencies regarding content creation. Despite our efforts to encourage new ways to approach storytelling, in order to use youthful social media habits while offering considerable editorial freedom, most youths imitate the style and format of well-established magazines and newspapers. Unlike their commonly assumed non-textual and short content consumption habits, they have a tendency to maintain a serious and traditional tone, writing long texts. In text-based news reporting, they usually adopt lengthy blog-style texts. Comparing the text-visual content ratio, videos make up about 65 per cent of all content. The content of most videos also carries a similar traditional tone and averages 5–10 minutes in length. Despite the tendency to film for longer and include more content, the completion rate of video news projects without mentor intervention is as low as 20 per cent. The average pitching and completion of the entry rate is, on the other hand, around 35 per cent.

One common trait in video news reporting is how young reporters prioritize equipment and tools before the story and technique, and

insist on using professional equipment. Similarly, a common pattern for many young video/photo journalists is to rely on visual effects rather than content, often citing mainstream media channels such as VG and popular youtubers. This discrepancy from their social media habits made us revise the training content and focus more on storytelling and strategic communication skills. The training became less tool-centred. In addition, to explore transnational interaction among young journalists, we have recently initiated a dedicated collaborative content creation call under Faktuell. Here Faktuell journalists work together with young journalists from Ireland, Germany, Romania and Bulgaria to find common themes and develop content together.



**Photo 4.**  
Two young journalists designing the front page of Faktuell webpage.

### Youth and e-learning from a civics perspective

Faktuell shows how it is possible to engage with youth and e-learning in an innovative way. The rapid increase in the use of the internet and social media among young people is considered relevant for education to such an extent that the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016 also investigated the school context for students' use of social media for civic engagement.<sup>10</sup> Although detailed research results are not yet available, there is a clear increase in all

countries in young people's use of social media for political purposes. Additionally, the average scores on the social media engagement scale were consistently higher for those students who generally expressed interest in civic issues.<sup>11</sup>

Increasing access to, and use of, new technologies permits a re-organization of space, social relations and, hence, of conversation or deliberation. The internet and social media could be defined as a contemporary public sphere.<sup>12</sup> These technologies allow individuals to propose new spaces for politics. The more young people learn about and are accustomed to the use of social and digital media, the more we can expect emerging digitally enabled citizens, possibly with new civic habits, occupying new political spaces. Loader and Mercea (2011) argue that collective and democratic action “is growing new roots”. Social media has lowered the threshold of becoming a sort of journalist to the extent that we can now use the concept of citizen-journalist. One result of this development is the acceleration of many kinds of communication and flows of information – to and from sources and audiences different from before.<sup>13</sup> New kinds of, and places for, civic engagement are available in our societies, and e-learning should be an important part of school in order to promote this. Yet, it is noticeable that the relevant practices are not permeating all elements of our education system. The Faktuell project, however, illustrates clearly the significance of the NGO sector in empowering young people with civic competencies for a digital future.

With regard to the future, there are two main actions we are planning to take to sustain the relevance of the Faktuell project: 1) to introduce more interactive and immersive forms of reporting with the use of new content creation technologies (including virtual reality and artificial intelligence); and 2) to increase cross-border collaborative reporting projects with an emphasis on intercultural competence building and a better understanding of media ethics and literacy. In addition, the Faktuell project could be promoted as a showcase in the education sector to demonstrate how social media can be used to enhance civic engagement among young people.

### Faktuell facts

- Officially started on 1 September, 2013 by Norsensus Mediaforum (Norway), a non-profit media organization in Oslo, working to promote media and information literacy and financed by public grants and media services to public institutions and NGOs.
- The Faktuell project is financed by Oslo Municipality, the Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU), the Open Society Foundation and Erasmus+.
- 242 young people from Norway have participated in Faktuell media training workshops.
- 64 per cent of all participants are female and 52 per cent have immigrant or minority backgrounds.
- 20 journalist/media professionals have participated in the project as tutors and/or mentors.
- The project has inspired similar youth media projects such as Youth & Media by Stuttgart Media University in Germany and the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre.
- The *Faktuell* magazine editorial team is composed of six to eight young people and renewed annually.
- The editorial team is responsible for the coordination of content creation, the social media strategy and marketing.
- 355 entries have been pitched of which 107 have been published in *Faktuell*.

### Notes

1. Faktuell (2018).
2. Vaagan & Barland (2015).
3. Kulturdepartementet (2018); Medietilsynet (2018).
4. Vaage (2018).
5. Ipsos (2018).
6. Kantar TNS Gallup (2018).
7. Medienorge (2018).
8. The first co-author is Project Manager of the Faktuell project.
9. The two other co-authors – Heidi Biseth and Robert W. Vaagan – are both members of the Faktuell advisory steering group.
10. Schultz et al. (2016).
11. IEA (2017).
12. Papacharissi (2010); Gripsrud (2017).
13. Jorba & Bimber (2012).

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## 4. Non-formal media education

### A rich border area of learning

Kadri Ugur & Eleri Lõhmus

Media education in Estonia is mostly seen as a part of the formal education. However, non-formal, production-oriented media education not only has a strong impact on youngsters' media literacy and self-esteem, it also contributes significantly to the hyperlocal media environment. The media club Meediasüst (*Media Injection*) is an example of the very complex combination of youth work, media education and (hyper) local journalism that sheds light on the problems and advantages of non-formal media education. Our qualitative case study is based on the theory of semiosphere by Juri Lotman,<sup>1</sup> which helps us to put non-formal media education in the broader cultural and social context.

Each year we see in admittance interviews at the University of Tartu in Estonia about 150 young applicants who want to become journalists or communication specialists. Only a few of them remember that a year and a half ago they had a mandatory course called “Media and its influences”, and almost nobody has heard about the cross-curricular theme “Media environment” that has been in the Estonian national curriculum since 2002. Amongst student candidates we also meet some very motivated young people with practical production experience that in many cases comes from extra-curricular activities at school or non-formal media clubs.

In this chapter, we do not look at the problems of media literacy education in schools. Instead, we will concentrate on the lively tradition

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of production-based non-formal media education projects in Estonia, and try to outline some benefits and problems, based on the case study of the Meediasüst (*Media Injection*) project in the peripheral county<sup>2</sup> of Põlva. Our case study focuses on the possibilities of non-formal and informal educational settings in the geographical and cultural periphery – terms we will explain further in the next section.

### Media literacy education as periphery

The Tartu-Moscow semiotic school uses the term *semiosphere* created by the semiotician Juri Lotman (2005), which refers to a more or less homogeneous cultural space where meaning-making processes (or *semiosis*) take place. The main features of any semiosphere are the *metropolis* or centre, the *periphery* and the *boundaries* between semiospheres. As Lotman suggested, cultural processes in the centre are often well structured, stable and regular, express and maintain the identity of a particular semiosphere and, in a way, try to establish rules and values. In the peripheral area, which is (spatially, socially or culturally) close to the boundary, cultural phenomena are more playful and varied, often flirting with “foreign” elements of “other” cultures, adapting them and translating between different cultural fields more freely than the cultural process in the centre. This Lotmanian model serves the media literacy education remarkably well, especially if we look at the non-formal settings.

Firstly, in the field of education, media literacy education has never been a priority in school practice in Estonia – despite national curricula. It is a cross-curricular theme and is either an elective subject or a voluntary after-school activity. Pre-service teachers’ *digital literacy* has been supported for only a few years, and never in the frame of *critical media literacy* – so, even though teachers’ digital literacy (as an ability to use a variety of educational technology and software) is finally moving from the educational periphery towards the centre, critical and analytical media literacy remains in the border area. Non-formal media education is not a “school thing”, but it is definitely learning.

Secondly, speaking of media as a semiosphere, we can distinguish mainstream journalism as a metropolis, whereas vlogging or youtubing, GIFs and memes may be considered a periphery. If formal education

uses mainstream media texts often as supportive material in many subjects, the new media formats are usually neglected. Young people's media production, as we describe it in the context of the Meediasüst example, is peripheral and "in between" in many ways: between formal and informal education, between mainstream journalism and spontaneous funny video clips, between financial/political boundaries and journalistic autonomy, etc.

And finally, geographically speaking, Põlva county is as far from the Estonian capital as possible, making it a spatial periphery with distinct cultural differences (dialect, types of villages, transportation, livelihood etc). However, for young people living there, this geographical area is their real physical lifeworld,<sup>3</sup> while their semiosphere may otherwise be worldwide. Translating local into global (or at least nationwide) can be seen as an enrichment of "metropolitan" media – even if it only means covering youth-related themes that are not so common in mainstream media.

Based on the Lotmanian view on cultural processes, we can assume that learning in the peripheral area is more intense than in the metropolis, where rules, conformism and control are usually stronger.

### Youth-created media: Juvenile joke or real local journalism?

In many cases, videos, photos or GIFs are produced just for fun and not meant for wider distribution. Meediasüst has a different approach: being together and learning new things is just a first step towards media production, which is published to large and demanding audiences. This demands higher-quality standards of the production and adult supervisors – the quality of topics and presentation of stories must be high enough to avoid becoming the target of malevolent feedback. Basically, Meediasüst aims to be a proper part of the hyperlocal media field. In local and hyperlocal journalism, young people are a little more represented than in nationwide media, but often they are "talked about" like great athletes or students. Clubs like Meediasüst give a voice to young people, but clubs aiming towards journalistic values and genres (not just making fun footages) are rather rare in Estonia. Is it more about imitating well-known media personalities, dry learning and drills, or real personal learning and real local journalism?

## Practicalities

Põlva is a town, municipality and county in south-eastern Estonia. Local journalism is represented in the so-called county paper, *Koit*, and two regional papers (*Lõunaleht* and *Lõuna-Eesti Postimees*) that aim to cover three counties (Võru and Valga as well as Põlva). There is also a local radio station, *Marta*, and two regular newspapers that are published in local dialects (*Setomaa* and *Uma Leht*). One news site can also be mentioned ([www.lounaestlane.ee](http://www.lounaestlane.ee)) in terms of journalistic outlets, whereas other local sites, managed by local government, are politically engaged or concentrate on gathering and distributing practical information to citizens.

Kristina Masen, a 24-year-old journalist in local media, started *Meediasüst* in 2013. Her former schoolmate, Kadri Pelisaar, was at this time working as a local youth worker. As Kristina said, the main purpose of creating the club was to offer youngsters the same feeling of trust and support as Kristina felt during her years as editor of the school newspaper, and Kadri as a member of the pupils' council. They wanted to support youngsters from this small and peripheral community by giving them the self-esteem and courage not to stay within the small lifeworld of their childhood, but to chase their dreams. The first participants were recruited through fliers in schools and open youth clubs. Later it snowballed, with participants inviting their friends etc. The number of participants differs from year to year, as does the activity and motivation. At the beginning, *Meediasüst* aimed to support the county's youth portal, but now the target is creating audio-visual content about the county's youth work for Youtube and other social media. With funding from EU foundations and local municipalities, *Meediasüst* has purchased a proper set of semi-professional equipment for audio-visual production and uses the premises of the local open youth club. However, the financing model of this kind of media club is a very complicated issue and needs proper analysis elsewhere. Participants get a full-day training each month and have access to the equipment any time they need to, depending on the production process.

We interviewed Kristina Masen several times and carried out semi-structured interviews with two participants of *Meediasüst*, Kairi (17) and Hanna (16), in order to understand the role of *Meediasüst* in the local media field and in the lives of young journalists.<sup>4</sup>

## Production and audiences in 2018

The more or less stable financial situation of the past few years has carried Meediasüst so far that they are now able to produce an eight-to ten-minute-long TV magazine each month. Usually, a magazine consists of three stories that young reporters have found interesting. The most usual reason for picking a theme seems to be an orientation towards youngsters, or a significant event happening in local settings (for example, the Estonian ballroom dancing championship or big folk music events). The reporters, as well as the editors, camerapersons and other involved members approach the stories quite personally: the reporter of the story learns a new skill (like weaving a carpet), or visits some place for the first time (for instance, a kicksled trip on a frozen river) or asks the sources unusual questions (like asking dancers what makes them happy). At the same time, they try out some production skills for the very first time. In many stories, interviews are used as a main element, and if possible, original soundtracks are used as background music. Almost every story is built around the reporter's personal stand and introduced by anchors in the studio. Stories are planned long ahead since authors need time for both getting to know the subject and practising new skills, whether it is shooting the picture, interviewing, using new technology, editing the video or some other skills.

Kairi, who has literally grown into the role of editor-in-chief, follows the production process from the very beginning, and is (just as are adult supervisors) available when advice is needed. She claims that Meediasüst is aware of the responsibility of having a real audience:

*Kairi:* I think this is real journalism for young people. We share our stories online, so our classmates and friends like and share them too.

*Hanna:* So do my parents – they often ask what I am doing in Meediasüst, and why I sometimes ask them to drive me somewhere. When my stories are published on Youtube, they actually see how I look on the screen and what I have learned.

Each magazine reaches 200 to 500 viewers, which is a considerable number in such a small community.

## Learning every day

There are no formal requirements or tests for the youngsters that join Meediasüst. It is often big cameras and fancy technology that appeal to youngsters. Lots of video analysing in weekly meetings, planning of events to cover and having long monthly training days have a deep effect on the participants' critical thinking and self-reflection skills. The priorities for the participants are clear:

*Kairi:* I was in seventh grade when I came here, and I was really a child. I am very thankful that from the very beginning I was thrown into unknown waters and had to interview people that seemed very important to me. The self-confidence I have gained in Meediasüst is of real value. I am not afraid of anything anymore. And I've gotten an endless list of technical skills too.

*Hanna:* After three years in Meediasüst I have to say that this is more like a lifestyle now. Even when I watch TV, I analyse what I see: What I would do similarly, and what I would never do. Behind the camera I do not feel quite as safe as in front of it, but I know enough to discuss technical details with the cameraperson.

As Kristina claimed, the learning process of every participant is different, and the basis is a good personal relationship:

*Kristina:* Youth work is always personal – you click with somebody or you don't. That's why it's good to have several supervisors or teachers who share the same values but are different personalities.

## From learning to producing to teaching

The chain from beginner to expert is not very long in Meediasüst. Kairi, who joined the project in the very first year, has grown into the position of an editor-in-chief who is able to manage all elements of production. She also teaches and supervises younger participants if adult supervisors are busy.

*Kairi:* We encourage new members to try everything from planning to editing, until they actually find out what their cup of tea is.

*Hanna:* The supervisors don't tell us what to do. They are always there but we have the freedom to come to the studio whenever we like, and work here. We feel like we are trusted.

As a joke, Kristina calls herself a “post censor” – young journalists have a freedom to handle every story as they like, but they have to determine where and when they need some help, and be prepared for criticism too.

*Kristina:* Well, courage and production skills are one thing, facing very critical local audience is something different. I try to make sure that our members are aware of the possible consequences of being a journalist.

Taking into consideration the local context is really crucial since members of Meediasüst (unlike most adult journalists) meet their sources and audiences on a daily basis in the real world.

*Hanna:* Kristina sometimes reminds us about the ethical aspects of our stories. For example, there was a visit from 12th-year pupils from the school for children with special needs. They had to act as teachers for one day, but were actually very shocked. So, we felt that we had to choose shots very carefully and not put everything we shot in the news, since we did not want these 12th-graders to feel bad while watching the video.

### Freedom, responsibility and autonomy in hyperlocal youth journalism

There is a thin line to walk for hyperlocal journalists, young or adult. If experienced journalists can rely on the social capital gained over the years, young ones are just in the process of building up their identity. At the same time, the surrounding environment, which is “hyperlocal” from a media market point of view, is the whole life-world for young people. Although video stories published on Youtube can be watched everywhere, the worldwide reach is usually still an illusion: in most cases young journalists know the people who watch and possibly comment on their production personally. This makes the social control and self-censorship even greater than, for example, in public television. Both supervisors and young journalists claim that giving consideration

to the ethical and communicational aspects of each story is far more important than solving technical problems.

People's complex relations make local journalism very challenging, and this is especially true in youth journalism. Meediasüst has been sponsored by the parish and the county, and has won some EU projects that support youth work on the local level. In 2018, when Meediasüst acts as a part of the open youth centre of Põlva county, they are expected to cover in their magazine several youth events financed by the same sources. Neither Kristina, nor Hanna or Kairi consider this a pressure, since the "obligatory" events are usually interesting for youngsters anyway. However, critical evaluation of information is a daily routine.

*Kairi:* If a friend of mine comes and suggests that Meediasüst could make a story about the event he is organizing, then yes, I consider it carefully. Maybe it is really something interesting, not for big dailies or adults, but for young people. Then we perhaps do the story. If I feel that he's only asking me for cash and fame, then forget it.

Facing undebatable expectations every day at school, young journalists do not find the expectations of financing parties to be a stressor.

*Kristina:* I do not keep financing issues secret from members, but I don't think they're aware of them. I always have room for negotiation with financiers, and so do our participants.

When asked about the core principles of Meediasüst, Kristina replies "teamwork, critical thinking, and self-presentation":

*Kristina:* It's how you behave as a person, when you act as a journalist, but it's also how you represent Meediasüst. It's your personal reputation at stake, but also ours.

Journalists' self-presentation is a serious point of consideration for Meediasüst in order to get sustainable financing for the next election period. In five years, Meediasüst has earned a certain reputation of being a trustworthy media partner, but this quality must be maintained so that younger and less experienced members are not pushed aside, in order to produce high-quality videos – learning is not possible without some room for mistakes. Finding a balance between public relations and a safe space for learning is the supervisors' main task.



## Conclusions

Non-formal, production-focused media education is an intense learning process that can be much more personalized than any activity within formal education. Higher motivation, personal and trusting supervision, learning from peers and the possibility of influencing the learning process are strong elements of non-formal media education. High costs, unstable financing and hints of elitism speak against broader implementation of production-based media education. Since youngsters' lifeworld is local, their production must follow the logic of (hyper)local journalism, but still find new themes and new audiences. Youth journalism is an interesting peripheral area of different fields: education, journalism, creativity, youth work, etc. It can involve a role shift from pupil to interviewer of school principal, finding a way to cover a problematic issue in local life, understanding what is newsworthy for people of different backgrounds or ages etc. The skills and thinking models that are learned in the process of news making (critical thinking, ethical consideration, technical quality, etc.) are usable in many different situations, as is the self-confidence that grows in the process of creating video stories. Last but not least – youngsters from Estonian rural areas really need some support in order to find the courage to chase their real dreams.

## Notes

1. Lotman (2005).
2. In this chapter we use “municipality” for the smallest territorial unit in Estonia, usually 5,000 inhabitants or more. The term “county” is used for the second administrative level, which comprises several municipalities and usually has 20,000 to 40,000 inhabitants.
3. Habermas (1989).
4. It must also be mentioned that both the authors of this chapter have been voluntary teachers for the members of Meediasüst, based on our professional expertise.

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## **PART II.**

### **News Production Conducted by Media Organizations**



## 5. Lilla Aktuellt

### Public service producing news for young people

Lowe Östberg

Working with news for children is inspiring. At Lilla Aktuellt, a news programme for children produced by Swedish public service broadcaster Sveriges Television (SVT), we have the luxury of dealing with a very engaged and interested audience. It's also hard, of course. Although we strive towards a constructive approach in our reporting, news can be both scary and complicated. With the rapid technical development of mobile phones, and children's dramatically increased access to them, they are more exposed to all sorts of atrocities than ever – especially older children, whom we have a much harder time trying to reach on traditional platforms than before. Our biggest challenge now, and our most crucial task, is to work out how we can reach them where they are, outside of traditional broadcast television.

We sometimes get calls or emails from upset parents. In their view, our news reporting is too complicated and/or scary for their kids. If such a call comes from a parent of a five-, six- or seven-year old, it's easy to handle. *Lilla Aktuellt*, a daily news programme on Swedish public service broadcaster SVT's Children's Channel (*SVT Barnkanalen*), targets children aged eight to twelve. If younger children want to watch our programme, we recommend that parents watch it with them so they can deal with any questions or reactions that might come up. Our advice may also be not to watch at all. News is not something you need to take part in at an early age. For some kids, it may certainly raise more

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questions and stir up more fears than you are able to handle as a parent.

Sometimes these calls come from parents of 8 to 10-year-olds, or even older. In that case another approach is required. My answer to them would be based on three important principles:

First, it is a matter of children's rights. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states that children should have access to information. They also have the right to make themselves heard.

Secondly, our experience with children as news consumers indicates that those who have access to newspapers and adults to talk to, or even better, access to news media that operates with children's rights in mind and from a children's perspective, show less anxiety over scary news than those who don't. They are also more capable of defining themselves in the world they live in.

Thirdly (and probably most importantly), trying to protect a 10-year-old from scary or complicated news is an impossible mission. It has always been difficult to regulate children's media use, but now it is harder than ever before. And that is, of course, because of smartphones. In this chapter I will narrow down some of the challenges they have brought to us, but also some of the possibilities.

### A new window to the adult world

When reaching the third or fourth year you are often expected to go to school and return home by yourself. After school you hang out with friends, or perhaps spend whole afternoons alone at home. This is also when you get your first mobile phone.

In 2016, more than 90 per cent of Swedish 10-year-olds had access to a cellphone.<sup>1</sup> Internationally, that is a very high figure. Looking at the trend over the last few years, this figure is most likely even higher today.

This device is not only used for calling or texting worried parents to tell them your whereabouts. It's a smartphone. With this in your hand you can suddenly access things you couldn't before. It's your own private window to the adult world.

This brings fantastic possibilities. You have at hand a wide mix of celebrities, new friend relationships, games, videos and unlimited knowledge about just about anything you want to know. At the same time, you are exposed to a world full of strange rumours, nasty gossip and scary news. You see images and videos about terror attacks around

the world, in Europe, in our neighbouring countries and recently also in Sweden.

Whether we like it or not, this access to all this information makes our 9 to 12-year-olds our “youngest adults” when it comes to news consumption.



#### About Lilla Aktuellt

- SVT’s news programme for children aged 8 to 12.
- Reaches on average 100,000 viewers with the daily programme *Lilla Aktuellt* (SVT) and up to 400,000 viewers with the weekly format *Lilla Aktuellt Skola* (collaboration with UR [Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company]).
- Started in the early 90s. Has evolved from one programme per week during school terms to broadcasts and online content Monday to Friday full year.
- Up to 20 people on editorial staff.
- Links: [barnkanalen.se/lillaaktuellt](http://barnkanalen.se/lillaaktuellt), [barnkanalen.se/lillaaktuelltskola](http://barnkanalen.se/lillaaktuelltskola), [barnkanalen.se/mixat](http://barnkanalen.se/mixat)
- Daily question app: *Lilla Aktuellt Kollen*.
- News and current affairs app for children 10 to 12 years old: *Mixat*.
- Social media target group: Instagram.
- Social media adults (parents, teachers): SVT on Facebook and Twitter.

## A strong relationship through dialogue

SVT and *Lilla Aktuellt* have a long history of bringing news to kids. We still have a large TV audience and a strong brand when it comes to credibility. Our viewers like what we do; they are interested and committed. In recent years we have, in addition to our TV format, also invested in different methods to build a long-term relationship with our target group through dialogue and interaction. We do this on our online platform, in social media and through our app *Lilla Aktuellt Kollen*, a tool strictly built for dialogue.

On this stand-alone platform (in addition to commercial social media platforms where we are also present) up to 20,000 daily users answer questions about what they know, what they think and how they feel about different topics. We use their answers daily in broadcasts and we often act editorially on the results. This app, *Lilla Aktuellt Kollen*, gives us greatly improved knowledge about, and a close connection with, our target group. It also offers our users the opportunity to have a direct impact on our editorial work. It empowers them.

With this said, things should be good. We should be pleased. And we are, at least when it comes to reaching our audience up to ten years of age. Our problem starts after that, since traditional TV watching decreases significantly from this age. When it comes to 12- and 13-year-olds, they have pretty much quit watching public service TV, and the ecosystem, consisting of our broadcast format and other digital platforms, is broken.

## Leaving traditional platforms

A recent study by Insight Kids, a youth and family unit at the global research and strategy firm Insight Strategy Group,<sup>2</sup> confirms what has happened. It concludes that kids leave traditional media platforms earlier than ever before. A 10-year-old simply doesn't watch TV any longer, especially not programmes for kids. With your first smartphone in your hand you go instead for Youtube, social media or similar platforms. We have also learned that many 10-year-olds use various news apps intended for adults.

So, with this new device in your possession you have what you need. At least you think you do. The problem is that for major domestic news providers such as *Aftonbladet*, *Expressen* and *Omni* – or SVT's main



news app for that matter – children are not their first consideration when they report news. They don't consider children's rights, needs or realities as *Lilla Aktuellt* does.

What can we do, then, to maintain the position as the main news source for children in this situation? How can we be relevant for the oldest in our target group and fulfil our public service obligations towards them? Well, like the rest of the media industry we must expand our focus from evening broadcasts to a greater presence on digital platforms at all times. This is not an easy task, since we need to do both at the same time. Our younger target group is still watching our programmes, they can't be left out. But the older children need a different approach.

### Being there, “here and now”

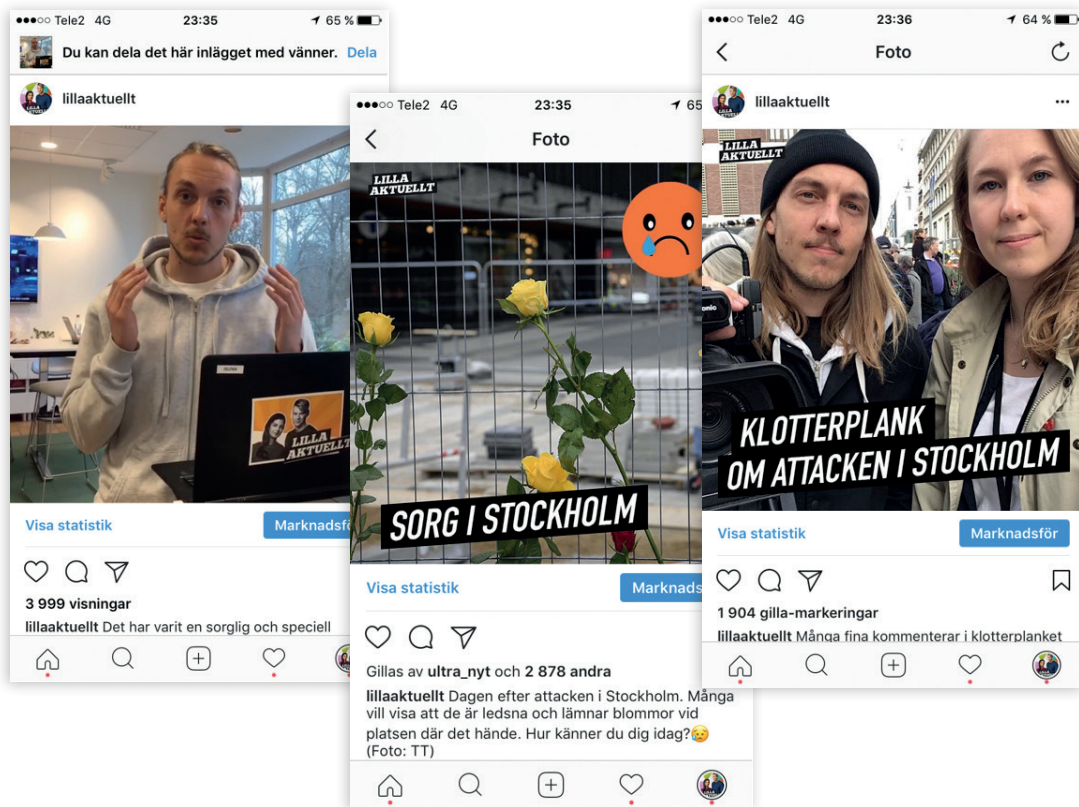
*Lilla Aktuellt's* Instagram account has 35,000 followers who interact actively with comments and likes. Our Snapchat account is smaller, but very useful for interaction. On these platforms we can be certain that we are dealing with the ten- to twelve-year-olds. Most importantly, the activity on these platforms is not limited to broadcasting hours. We meet the children in the morning, at midday, in the afternoon and before they go to bed.

Encouraged by this development, we have experimented with new content online. We have shut down our separate website and joined the SVT Children's Channel's (*SVT Barnkanalen*) portal together with other programmes aimed at the older target group.

The keywords have been “here and now”. The aim is to provide older kids with news and other stories from early morning to evening. We meet them daily with various types of interactions, such as polls, reactions and live chats. We also want this to be the place where they go when something extraordinary happens. The first try-out for that was tough: it was the terror attack at Drottningatan in Stockholm.

### Live reporting on digital platforms

That attack in central Stockholm took place at 14.53 on Friday 7 April, 2017. Almost everyone at the *Lilla Aktuellt* office had left for the weekend. Fridays are special, since we only have a morning edition aimed at schools and no evening programmes. Thus, our normal window for reporting news was not available.



The few of us still at the office had to act instantly. Another programme at the SVT Children’s Channel (Random Mix), targeting the older group, had their afternoon chat going on online. It featured a popular youtuber, but right after the attack they were bombarded with questions about what had happened.

We quickly decided that *Lilla Aktuellt* would take over the chat room. Within 15 minutes after the attack we could present facts as they came in and respond to questions and reactions from users. At the same time, we made several posts on our Instagram account where we moderated comments and gave answers. These windows on our digital platforms were open long into the evening. The questions and comments were like the following:

I'm downtown near the attack and don't know where to go. Is it safe to go home?

Who does such a terrible thing?

I know someone who died. I'm so sad!

I left school to meet my mother downtown, but I can't get in touch with her. I'm so afraid something has happened to her!

I'm afraid and worried. What can I do to not feel so afraid?

### Ease and confirm fears

Dealing with these kinds of questions is not easy, however the editorial staff at *Lilla Aktuellt* are experienced. The focus was mainly on responding to the children's fears. You can often do that by putting what has happened in a wider perspective. For instance, we tried to explain that this was a very rare and extreme event and it's not likely this will happen to you. We also encouraged them to talk to someone they trust, to never carry your fear alone.

Furthermore, confirming fear is helpful. In this case the event was not in another country far away, we couldn't say that. But just being there, confirming their fears, telling them we were scared too, was helpful. One wrote: "Now I have talked to you and to my parents. I feel better. Thank you!"

During this weekend, Instagram and the Children's Channel's portal were the main windows for our reporting. The response from our followers and users online was overwhelming. It wasn't until Monday that we could send a TV report on the attack, but that didn't matter. We had reached them, with balanced information, responding to fears and stopping rumours surrounding this horrific event. And we did it in their window to the adult world, alongside with all the news flashes and terrible pictures spreading in social media. We were there, "here and now", in their smartphones.

### A new news and current affairs app

To our previously established platforms – our TV programme, our question app *Lilla Aktuellt Kollen* and our social media accounts – we

have now added a new app called Mixat. What used to be a subsection of the Children's Channel's portal has now become a news and current affairs app for children aged nine to twelve. The strategy is mobile phone first, be "here and now", and meet the users in the morning, at midday, in the afternoon and in the evening. The focus is on dialogue and interaction.

The aim is for Mixat to be the main online news source for the upper range of our target group. We don't know yet whether they will check in with us as much as we want them to, but the first user statistics indicate that we are on to something. Downloads are climbing steadily. The number of returning visitors is increasing. So the Mixat app may be one answer to reaching the pre-teens with news and other content with a child perspective. With this new platform, we might be able to fulfil our obligations towards them.

### Looking ahead

Our efforts on digital platforms notwithstanding, the TV format is still our main product. It probably will be for several years to come. *Lilla Aktuellt* is closely linked to schools, and each week we reach up to 400,000 intermediate-level school pupils with our programme. If the teachers continue to include us in their tuition, *Lilla Aktuellt* will remain strong.

The Mixat app, however, takes us in new and very interesting directions. It develops our storytelling. It opens up new ways of communicating with older children. We reach into their private lives, outside school. Where there used to be a gap, we are now present. To become relevant to pre-teens, given the technical development surrounding media consumption, this might be an option. And we are at it.

### Notes

1. Davidsson & Findahl (2016).
2. Insight Strategy Group (2016).

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## 6. Chatbots as a new user interface for providing health information to young people

Marita Bjaaland Skjuve & Petter Bae Brandtzæg

Reaching out to young people with important information and services, such as health services, is more difficult than ever.<sup>1</sup> Efficient information providers targeting young people concerning health issues have been among the first priorities of the public health agenda in Europe over the past few decades. Social Health Bots,<sup>2</sup> a research project in Norway that started in 2017 and will continue to 2020, is investigating the potential and challenges of chatbots, understood as automated communication software powered by artificial intelligence, as an innovative tool for involving young people in, and informing them about, health issues. We present the opportunities and limitations associated with the adoption of chatbots as a new conversational interface for providing health information to young people.

International studies show that young people increasingly suffer from mental health issues, such as social isolation, anxiety, eating disorders, sexual problems, depression, self-harm and suicidal thoughts.<sup>3</sup> The enormous volume of health information and information targeting young people available on the internet is hard not only to locate but also to process effectively and may often overwhelm young people seeking information,<sup>4</sup> partly due to an increasing misconception about health issues shared online, which can lead to harm. In addition, the communicative infrastructure among traditional information providers may be ill suited for adaptation to the more intense feedback and

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dialogue forms in which young people's information needs are enacted and performed.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, a large group of young people may be "information underserved" or "information poor", some services or information might either not be available or not fit young people's information needs, or the current services might present such a significant barrier that young people fail to access the services that are available.

Therefore, we need to ask, how can we eliminate the current information barriers for young people? How can we ensure that young people access the crucial and verified information available to them? Currently, information providers and services targeting young people seem to lack the innovation potential to adapt to contemporary youth and youth cultures, where Snapchat, Youtube and Facebook dominate. Information services for youths need to develop good and compelling solutions and user interfaces that can support the individualistic networked culture of young people. This networked culture emphasizes the need for new technology and user interfaces specifically tailored to young people's user needs, which may help information providers adapt to young people's immediate and interactive communication practices.

### Chatbots as a new user interface

Chatbots may be the answer as a new innovative and interactive way to communicate with young users. Chatbots are humanlike representations of information providers that are increasingly applied within popular private messenger services that young people are already familiar with, such as Facebook Messenger, Kik, Telegram, Viber and Whatsapp. Chatbots work as interactive information partners. Users type questions (i.e. queries) in natural language, and meaningful answers are returned. The chatbot parses the content of the user input (questions such as "Why do I have anxiety?") and links it to a message database with possible responses. Based on our previous work, such chatbot conversations can be perceived as meaningful and trustworthy. Thus, chatbots provide a text-based conversational interface for information, which delivers immediate feedback in a humanlike way.

Chatbots are cost-effective methods for dealing with questions from people in social media ecosystems or as customer service agents in big companies,<sup>6</sup> such as Google, Amazon and Apple. The recent developments in artificial intelligence and deep learning, coupled with the broad

popular uptake of online digital devices, and the emergence of huge data sets from digital traces and social media conversations, make chatbots a promising supplement to traditional forms of information services.

Therefore, the cost of developing and deploying chatbots is lower than for native apps and traditional and existing information services, and chatbots have the potential to be adopted and used by private- and public-sector entities.

### Chatbots and mental health support: Breaking down barriers

The potential benefits of chatbots have made this type of interface an attractive and interesting method of delivering information to youths. But what exactly do young people perceive the benefits to be of using chatbots in a mental health-related context? Does this technology have the potential to eliminate information barriers?

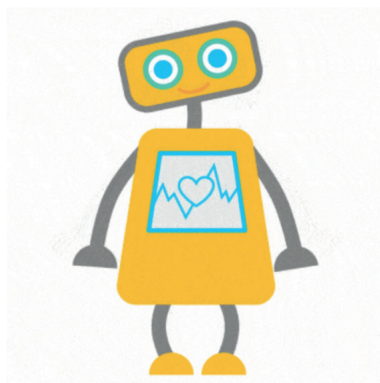
Youths have tended to recognize chatbots as valuable communication partners for several reasons. Young people view chatbots as a more anonymous way of getting health-related information than via Google or telephone services.<sup>7</sup> Since the chatbot is artificial, it is perceived to be good at keeping secrets and will not share the information with others.<sup>8</sup> As chatbots belong to the machine world, it might be easier to trust that questions or self-disclosures will not “leak” into the real world.<sup>9</sup> By securing young people’s anonymity, chatbots can lower the threshold for youths to reach out and get the information they need. Thus, confidentiality and privacy are crucial when deploying chatbots – particularly in a mental health-care setting. Ensuring confidentiality and privacy is necessary to foster trust between young people and chatbots.

Chatbots’ lack of feelings might also make it easier for teens to open up and seek help. Chatbots cannot be offended or exhausted, which can foster an environment where youths feel that they can talk more freely without being judged or making the chatbot tired of listening to them.<sup>10</sup> The use of artificial agents, such as virtual humans, has also been shown to facilitate more information sharing and less self-impression management and fear of self-disclosure,<sup>11</sup> which highlights some of the potential benefits of utilizing chatbots in settings where users seek answers or want to disclose sensitive information.

Although the chatbot fundamentally lacks emotions, this does not mean that it should not display empathy or be motivating and sup-

portive in the way it communicates. An artificially intelligent chatbot designed to help people cope with feelings of depression and anxiety is Woebot, which is grounded in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). The chatbot receives, according to Woebot Labs, more than two million messages a week and is said to be in use in more than 130 countries. It is a free, accessible tool for mental health care.

Figure 1. Woebot<sup>12</sup>



## Hi, I'm Woebot!

I'm ready to listen, 24/7. No couches, no meds, no childhood stuff. Just strategies to improve your mood. And the occasional dorky joke.

SAY HELLO

Alison Darcy, the clinical psychologist at Stanford University who created Woebot, explains: “The Woebot experience doesn’t map onto what we know to be a human-to-computer relationship, and it doesn’t map onto what we know to be a human-to-human relationship either, it seems to be something in the middle.”<sup>13</sup> This chatbot approach is unique. You are communicating feelings and thoughts about your inner self, but not with a human. This new form of socialization and experience with technology was also exemplified by a participant in one of our studies in Social Health Bots that investigated the reasons for using chatbots: “I use them when I feel bored or rather when I feel



down and have no one else to go to, it just relaxes me in a way. Gives me someone to vent to without getting judged. I know they aren't real, but it feels like they are."<sup>14</sup>

With CBT, Woebot supports its users with an array of techniques to help manage users' moods and challenge negative thinking with a positive approach. Woebot's strongest attributes in this regard are the abilities to show empathy and to promote positive self-talk, and the chatbot's fun personality.<sup>15</sup> This chatbot utilizes emojis and phrases such as "I'm sorry you feel lonely",<sup>16</sup> which exemplifies that a chatbot approach to young people can benefit from displaying understanding and emotional expressions. However, it is important that these responses do not display judgment or negative emotions. By utilizing engaging language, the chatbot can become a fun and interactive way to seek help. But most importantly, a chatbot is accessible 24/7, anywhere anytime, through your smartphone.

In addition to offering engaging and confidential conversations, the ability to provide quality-assured information and practical advice has been noted as a benefit by young people. Since the information that forms the knowledge base for the chatbot is not random, the information and advice presented are viewed as trustworthy and of high quality.<sup>17</sup> This point is particularly important due to the existence of false and misleading health advice online. The information environment in social media that young people engage in will probably not improve over the next decade. Being able to discriminate between sources and filter out the information that is of high quality can be time-consuming and difficult. However, a chatbot trained in verified health data can make trusted advice more available to young people.

### Limitations in the current chatbot landscape and new areas to explore

Although the benefits of using chatbots for mental health-care purposes among youths are apparent, several limitations exist. On a general note, questions such as "When should we offer a chatbot instead of a human?", "How can we ensure confidentiality and privacy?" and "In which situations will chatbots be a valuable tool?" arise. In general, there are major ethical questions about the use of artificial intelligence and chatbots in mental health care targeting young people.

By attempting to deploy chatbots in a mental health context for young people, we introduce technology that will manage very sensitive topics. As a human is needed to handle difficult situations such as suicide risks and cases where physical and/or psychological abuse is reported, managing the balance between situations where the chatbot can assist and cases where humans are needed remains a challenge that must be solved.

Specifically, the chatbot technology still has a long way to go before it can understand the user properly. Technical issues, such as difficulties processing queries correctly, providing valuable and/or correct answers, and understanding natural language, are frequently reported chatbot problems, including among youth in a health-related context.<sup>9</sup> We need to combat these issues if chatbots are to take on the role of a communication partner and interact with young adults on sensitive topics.

In addition, in our research project Social Health Bots we are working on how to develop chatbots that facilitate a long-term relationship with the user. How can we design the dialogue so that the user wants to come back and ask more questions?

Privacy is also an important issue that needs to be addressed. The EU has very strict data protection laws, and in 2018, all the Nordic countries implemented the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which aims to safeguard users concerning their privacy. However, privacy is not only about legal requirements; it is also an important part of the user experience. For example, the Woebot service is provided on Facebook Messenger, and several thousand users from around the world chat with Woebot via Messenger. However, many users reported that they were not comfortable sharing intimate and personal data over Facebook's platform, which recently has been under fire for the company's handling of personal data. Woebot is still accessible on Facebook but has also launched a stand-alone Woebot app that requires only a first name to sign up to provide as anonymous a user experience as possible. This approach also avoids any connections between user profiles and the users' interaction with Woebot. In addition, users can ask the Woebot app to delete their user history, as well as remove all conversations. This anonymous approach, which takes privacy into account, may be the most trusted approach when it comes to conversational needs for sensitive and personal issues.

Moreover, chatbots have the potential to be a new way to deliver news. We know that both social media and mobile devices for news con-

tinue to grow. Chatbots are, in this context, part of a new development for news consumption due to the increasing use of messaging services such as Facebook Messenger, Kik, Telegram, Viber and Whatsapp. The BBC and CNN have both recently developed chatbots that deliver news in a conversational style on Facebook Messenger. This way of delivering news may be experienced as more engaging among users, and one study by Yu and colleagues (2018) also demonstrated how chatbots might help combat the effect of disinformation.

Disinformation is perceived a growing problem in society, also in the context of health, and it can be difficult for youth to maneuver in the media landscape and evaluate the trustworthiness of a news story. The study by Yu and Han (2018) is particularly interesting because they revealed how a chatbot for news consumption can help readers to correct their wrong perceptions of a certain topic by utilizing the conversational nature of chatbots.

### Conclusion

Designing and developing chatbots as a new interface to provide health information for young people needs a new understanding of new user needs and motivations, as well as privacy. What is needed to develop a successful conversational interface based on chatbots to provide health information is not straightforward. The use of chatbots as conversational user interfaces means a dramatic shift in how we are used to thinking about young users, communication and information. In this paper, we have outlined some of the new needs and challenges posed by the emergent trend of chatbots in the context of young people and mental health information, as well as the new benefits that chatbots deliver.

### Notes

1. Brandtzaeg et al. (2016); Crutzen et al. (2011).
2. <https://www.sintef.no/en/projects/socialhealthbots/>
3. Dick & Ferguson (2015).
4. Rao et al. (2017).
5. *ibid.*
6. Reddy (2017); Xu et al. (2017).
7. Crutzen et al. (2011).

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### Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Norwegian Research Council and the research project Social Health Bots (Project-No 262848).

8. Kim et al. (2018).
9. ibid.
10. ibid.
11. Lucas et al. (2014).
12. <https://woebot.io/>
13. Brodwin (2018).
14. Brandtzæg & Følstad (2017, p. 387).
15. Fitzpatrick et al. (2017).
16. ibid.
17. Kim et al. (2018).

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## 7. Voicing young people's perspectives

Media influencing as a form of collaboration between youth organisations and the professional media

Maarit Jaakkola

Media influencing became a common media education practice in Finland around the turn of the millennium, with powerful support from citizen engagement policies. Media influencing is a form of youth participation and engagement that combines media literacy and citizen influencing. A distinguished example of municipal youth work is the Finnish Youth Voice News Centre (YVNC). The newsroom, founded in 2006, is an initiative to make the perspectives of young people more visible in mainstream media content. Its activities are run by the city of Helsinki, with the aim of engaging 13 to 20 year olds and based on collaboration with the established professional media. Unlike many other citizen engagement projects involving the professional media, the YVNC newsroom provides its young content producers with autonomy and integrity – separating them both physically and culturally from their commissioner – thus creating a “third space” that enables engagement through self-expression and peer support.

Young people are typically portrayed in the media as representatives of an allegedly homogenous group referred to as “*the young*”. This is often done in a negative manner, identifying young people as the cause of a wide range of problems, from cyberbullying to juvenile delinquency. At the other extreme, their representation is ultra-individualised to depict exceptional superheroes, such as youtubers and other “micro-celebrities”.

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This issue was one of the catalysts for the project that came into being in 2006 at a public discussion event about young people's participation and representation in Helsinki. Based on these discussions about the representation of young people in the mainstream media, a news production collective was founded. The Youth Voice News Centre (*Nuorten ääni-toimitus*, YVNC) has for more than a decade been giving 13 to 20-year olds the opportunity to experience media production in collaboration with the established nationwide media. The YVNC newsroom is part of the youth work carried out by the city of Helsinki. The YVNC community is an "involvement and influence community" within the municipal system for involving young citizens. The ultimate aim is to make young people's voices heard in the mainstream media, and the focus is therefore on influencing through the production of journalism. In this way, young people can exploit the legacy media for purposes of self-expression and influence.

In this chapter, I describe the pedagogical practices and challenges of media influencing within the youth work sector. The distinctive nature of the YVNC newsroom is that it attempts to turn local youth culture into a forum for voicing opinions – scaffolded by adults (youth workers and media professionals) – that are expressed in front of large, established mainstream audiences, side by side with professionally produced media content.

### What is media influencing?

Young people's participation in the media that reach a wide audience is relevant, socially and democratically. According to international conventions, children and young people have a right to express their opinion and to be listened to.<sup>1</sup> The promotion of diversity of expression is not only a general societal aim; it also fits well with the need for news organisations to maintain representativeness of voices. Traditional media practice has, nevertheless, typically departed from giving a voice to the voiceless, marginalised groups who have been excluded from the modern public sphere.

Gaining access to young people's lives is challenging for professional newsrooms, as there are many practical issues in the way. To name but a few, observing and interviewing minors always requires parental consent. Approaching young people requires specific interviewing tech-

niques, as well as assessment of content and pedagogy that is different from the standard journalistic mode. It can be problematic to ensure that the people interviewed – children, young people or their parents – understand the consequences of appearing in the media. Adults, such as schoolteachers, may position themselves as protectors rather than as cooperative partners when faced with journalists.

Against this background, the YVNC newsroom has been a welcome venture in letting a neglected group *produce* their own voice. This is not something completely new, as newspapers and broadcasters have for a long time maintained special sections for content produced by children and young people. What is important in YVNC's case is the autonomy that is created by separating the youth newsroom from the publisher, both physically and mentally. Young people attend the newsroom on a voluntary basis. It is thus a free-time activity, like any hobby, and the work is carried out in the evenings after school. This can be described as using what Ray Oldenburg calls the “third place”<sup>2</sup> Oldenburg argued that third places are crucial for civil society, democracy and civic engagement, because they establish a sense of place and feelings of belonging to a community. Home, where people live, is the first place, and the workplace, where people tend to spend most of their time, is the second place. Third places exist beyond homes and places of economic production. As settings for voluntary socialising, they are the anchors of community life, such as cafes, churches, public libraries, parks, community houses or virtual communities. Third places are typically free to access, they thrive on emotional expressiveness and social roles, and qualifications play less a of role in them.<sup>3</sup>

In youth work, media participation has developed into a more specific notion of *media influencing*, or influencing through the media.<sup>4</sup> From 2006 to 2013, a number of initiatives focused on this approach to media literacy.<sup>5</sup>

According to an EU project on media influencing in youth work, media influencing implies “combining media and citizen education”, “influencing the decisions and value basis of society and choices made by individuals with the help of media”, and providing “a channel for realising active citizenship among youth”.<sup>6,7</sup> Media influencing thus incorporates elements of self-expression, civic engagement, involvement

and participation, as well as lobbying and communication, carried out through media production.

### How to identify the voice of young people?

As the idea of the YVNC newsroom is to identify topics that are relevant for young people and to address them in a way that makes young people's voices audible, ideas for stories have to derive from the community and be developed within and by the community. Therefore, there are democratic structures for decision-making, featuring four chairpersons for each term. Meetings are normally attended by seven to 15 people who are at secondary school, senior high school or vocational school.

Stories take the form of journalistic projects that accommodate the roles of project leaders, reporters, editorial researchers and videographers. Having selected the appropriate media channel or channels, the young people present their ideas to their contact person in the professional media, who makes suggestions and elaborates the plan with them. A story project typically takes several months of production time.

Over the years, the YVNC newsroom has established permanent collaborations with the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle, the metropolitan daily newspaper Helsingin Sanomat and the nationwide magazine Suomen Kuvalehti. On television, inserts are presented in the magazine programme A-Studio and special programmes (for example, before elections). The newsroom has also run a number of blogs.

The media influencing work targets politicians and other decision-makers who exert influence on citizens' issues in everyday life. The editorial work is led by two producers, both youth workers with a journalistic background, one focusing on writing and the other on television production. The producers describe themselves as facilitators who do not make decisions for the young people but help them make decisions by themselves. Ideally, they do not have any influence on what the young people decide to do. In reality, this is, of course, impossible, as informed decisions depend on facts that have to be put forward by the facilitator.

Even if the starting point of many projects is an individual opinion, the story is less about voicing that opinion and more about posing a question that leads to fact-based, often investigative stories carried out using journalistic means. The aim is to reach people (politicians)



who can make a difference and influence outcomes. For example, many television inserts have dealt with aspects of work life, including in 2018 the legal basis for the age limits set for summer jobs for young people and, in 2011, poor summer work contracts. The latter had a concrete impact: A television interview revealing shortcomings in the work conditions of young summer workers at an amusement park based in the capital became a nationwide scoop when the CEO of the amusement park walked out of the studio.<sup>8</sup> As a result, a new Head of Human Resources was recruited.

### What are young people learning and how?

The YVNC model is distinctive in that the young are positioned as producers, similar to freelancers or news agency workers, who collaborate with the professional media; in most projects, media production among young people is aimed at visibility in the local media and organised as peer-to-peer production. In terms of its organisation, the YVNC newsroom accommodates features of participatory and community media, citizen journalism and news agencies. Citizen journalists are often more controlled by the media, and community journalists typically create content for their own communities; YVNC, in contrast, is an autonomous producer, both physically and culturally separate from the media (which in this case function more as commissioners). Therefore, as a newsroom, YVNC is more like a news agency or a freelancers' collective, where individual story projects are sold separately to the professional media. The formal or legal position of a content producer is like a freelancer's, and the newsroom structure allows peers to provide support to each other.

In my interpretation, YVNC activities draw upon three types of pedagogy:

- *Individual-related pedagogy*: How to promote the expression of opinion so as to promote the young person's own voice and agency,
- *Community-related pedagogy*: How to advance youth engagement or involvement, group formation and a meaningful experience of being part of a local community and of society more broadly,
- *Media-related pedagogy*: How to produce media content for a specific channel; as the tool for influencing is a journalistic one, the activities require mastery of the basic skills of producing content.

To adapt pedagogy in these three directions, the community has developed a number of working methods with the aim of observing the environment, collecting information and expressing oneself using the means of the (journalistic) media.<sup>9</sup> The pedagogies are highly intermingled, as self-expression is connected to being part of a community able to influence matters that concern them in society, in understanding and mastering the mechanics of media is key. Examples of typical individual exercises are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Examples of exercises related to the different pedagogies applied in youth work.

Pedagogy	Exercise	Description	Objective
Individual-related	An opinion line-up	A line is marked on the floor by using sticky tape. One end stands for “I fully agree”, the other for “I fully disagree”. The young choose a position that corresponds to their opinion. A discussion is carried out with alternating lead in which people need to motivate their position and are able to ask questions to persons at the opposite end.	Creating, arguing for and discussing an opinion; finding out what interests and moves people
	I don't have a clue!	The young present each other issues (or individual newspaper articles) they don't understand. After the presentation of the issues, one issue is voted for. The young figure out questions they would like to know more about.	Helping the young to ask questions and finding out how to find what is relevant in complex and intangible issues
Community-related	Digital story	The young produce an unedited one-shot short film with their mobiles in small groups on the following topics: freedom, fear, courage, anxiousness	Applying digital storytelling to group formation
	Parents' night	The young plan and carry out an event for parents in which they discuss media- and/or youth-related issues with methods used in their own training.	Mediating the lessons learned to adults by using methods of media education, creating a sense of meaningfulness in front of parents and families and with regard to the youth's community
Media-related	Interview with 3 questions	People make short interviews by using the question pattern 1) one topical question, 2) one deepening question, 3) one personal or future-related question	Adopting the basics of interview techniques, improvising and quick reacting
	Telephone interview	People discuss the objectives and rules of a telephone interview, train making a call to each other, prepare a set of questions in pairs and make a real call to an unknown expert. After the call, the experiences are shared in bigger groups.	Overcoming the fear of making a phone call

Source: Lundvall & Kiesiläinen (2013), Kapanen et al. (2012), Juusola (2007).

A central issue is the positioning of the activity as a certain type of citizen and youth engagement journalism, thus providing the young producers with a certain identity. Previous research addressing YVNC has focused on citizenship abilities and identities.<sup>10</sup> The young journalists are not meant to act as professional practitioners; newsroom descriptions carefully emphasise that the newsroom is not a journalism school and does not subscribe to any professional objectives.<sup>11</sup> This is how a 17-year old community member, active in the newsroom for two years, describes her motivations:

I like to gain new information by discussing with people, that's my cup of tea – to learn new things, to write about them and to tell about it to other people. [...] To me, journalism is a way of discovering the world and presenting these discoveries to others. [...] The thing I'm most worried about is that adults believe that we are trying to mimic adults. When I was interviewing the president, I didn't want to be compared with professional journalists, as I'm presenting an *alternative* type of journalism. I'm not pretending to be anything, I'm just being a young person. I'm not doing the same as professionals as a young person, but I'm doing this in my way, *as* a young person.<sup>12</sup>

Since influencing through media has been identified as the core concept, YVNC's relationship to journalism and news can be said to be instrumental; the specificity of journalism or journalistic ideology or storytelling is not emphasised. This detachment from the professional context may lead to some tensions: sources might speak to young reporters less carefully, revealing issues that they would otherwise not want to speak about with an adult journalist. Again, packaged as full-fledged journalistic products, the published news is likely to be read and to be taken seriously.

### Back to the audience role?

When YVNC was founded around 2005, enhancing citizenship was a prominent goal in Finnish politics. The political programme for citizenship influence,<sup>13</sup> presented in the government period 2003–2007, formed a solid basis for later developments in organising media education nationwide.<sup>14</sup> Later on, it contributed greatly to the formation of a national media literacy strategy.<sup>15</sup> Citizenship influence and identities were also prevalent in youth politics.<sup>16</sup>

Around 2010, the newsroom was at its heyday in terms of the number of people involved in the activities. Since then, the number of individuals involved in the activity has steadily decreased.<sup>17</sup> This may be understood as a consequence of the increase in opportunities for third place youth citizen influence. Municipalities have developed more forms of engagement, a trend that is likely to be supported in future by the renewed Youth Act, implemented in 2017, which strives towards objectives strikingly similar to those of the YVNC activities. For example, the objectives of the Youth Act include the following: “to promote young people’s social inclusion and opportunities for exerting an influence”; to “improve their skills and capabilities to function in society”; to “support their growth, independence and sense of community and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge”; and to enhance the “adoption of skills and pursuit of free-time hobbies and activities in civic society”.<sup>18,19</sup>

Besides the development of the third place, media organisations have themselves started taking on an educational role towards audiences. In 2014, based on the model retrieved from the BBC’s School Report, YLE started a media literacy project, Uutisluokka (Finnish) and Nyhetsskolan (Swedish), for 11 to 16-year olds to produce news for its own sites. This appears to have diminished YVNC’s opportunities for visibility on national television. Along with the saturation of citizen journalism in newsrooms and the establishment of journalistic practices that seek connections and dialogue with audiences, it has become more and more mainstream to let different groups of people produce content. Finally, because of the possibilities of easy content publishing, more and more young people are able to engage in content production online without any institutional intervention.

Whereas the establishment and development of media literacy guidelines were strongly rooted in citizenship and democracy education, the political focus in Finland has recently shifted more towards employment and employability, in which digital skills play a more prominent role. More attention is being given to notions of facts and truth. The producer of the YVNC newsroom describes this development as worrying, as it may easily put young people back in a less interventionalist audience role, something the newsroom specifically set out to avoid.<sup>20,21</sup>

## Conclusion

The YVNC newsroom is still unique in Finland in terms of its impact and visibility. The model has been replicated in bigger cities, such as Oulu, Tampere and Turku, but without close and permanent ties to professional media production.

The YVNC newsroom presents a form of media education and youth work that combines elements of citizen or democracy education and media literacy education with a focus on media influencing through journalistic production. In a way, it exploits the wide audience for print and broadcast culture to arrive at a win-win situation: A group of young people are empowered, and the media reach out to audiences with issues that would not otherwise be covered.

In this respect, the YVNC pedagogy crosses boundaries. Its foundation is the transgression from one world into another: providing young producers with an entry into a world which would otherwise be saturated with an adult perspective. This practice could also be applied to other neglected or vulnerable societal groups, to enable messages to reach audiences who would otherwise not come into contact with them. In this respect, the media still seem to be the arena in society – more than parliament or administrative organisations – where power is more easily and more flexibly reallocated between influential and neglected groups of people. As the YVNC experience demonstrates, young people are able to produce content with equal influence to that of adult professionals in media. In political and administrative decision-making processes, the roles between adults and young people's representatives are more fixed, and such coordinated dialogue seems to be more difficult to achieve.

## Notes

1. OHCHR (1989).
2. Oldenburg (1989).
3. Oldenburg & Brissett (1982).
4. Kapanen et al. (2012), Kotalainen (2007).
5. Examples include Vaikuttamo in Hämeenlinna and the Youth Media Literacy Network Mediaskooppi.
6. Kapanen et al. (2012 p. 6).
7. Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences coordinated in 2010–2012 the project *The best European practices of youth media participation*, including workshop pilots in media influencing.
8. Nuorten ääni-toimitus (2011).

9. For a collection of exercises in Finnish, see Lundvall and Kiesiläinen (2013).
10. Kotilainen & Rantala (2008).
11. Lundvall & Kiesiläinen (2013).
12. A personal interview with the youth participant Nita Koivisto conducted by the author on the 25th April 2018 in Helsinki.
13. Ministry of Justice Finland (2007).
14. Ministry of Justice Finland (2005).
15. Ministry of Education and Culture Finland (2013).
16. Ministry of Education and Culture Finland (2012).
17. A personal interview with the producer and youth worker Ismo Kiesiläinen conducted by the author on the 25th April 2018 in Helsinki.
18. Ministry of Education and Culture Finland (2018).
19. Ministry of Education and Culture (2018).
20. A personal interview with the producer and youth worker Ismo Kiesiläinen conducted by the author on the 25th April 2018 in Helsinki.
21. A personal interview with the producer and youth worker Ismo Kiesiläinen conducted by the author on the 25th April 2018 in Helsinki.

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## 8. Printing children's news

### Three editors' views on newspapers for a young audience

Catharina Bucht

Reading news in a printed newspaper and subscriptions to the same have decreased among the population in recent decades. Analogue media have in many segments been replaced by their digital versions and young people have established habits of finding information through the appropriation of digital devices and digital media content. Despite this development, the past few years have seen the launch of a number of new titles of printed newspapers for children in the Scandinavian countries. For this chapter, three editors-in-chief have been interviewed to share their thoughts and reflections on why these titles have been launched now, what needs the printed newspapers can meet and why they believe there is a place for an “old-school” product in the digital media environment.

Once upon a time a newspaper subscription was almost as natural as a landline phone in households in the Nordic countries. Then the internet came and in due course social media, which had a profound impact on the number of media platforms available, and on the consumption and use of media in general. The fact that news consumption in the way adults were used to since their upbringing was not the same anymore soon became obvious to media houses in their interaction with the younger generation.

The decline in newspaper reading and newspaper subscriptions among the population in the Nordic countries has become clearly visible in the statistics. Between 2000 and 2017 in Sweden, the reading

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of a morning paper on an average day dropped from 74 to 44 per cent, while household subscriptions decreased from 72 to 49 percent.<sup>1</sup> Since 2000, analogue media has been ousted by digital versions in many segments of society.

In the current decade, the 2010s, well-established media houses such as *Aftenposten* in Norway (Schibsted), *Berlingske* in Denmark and *Svenska Dagbladet* in Sweden (Schibsted) have nonetheless chosen to launch new titles of printed newspapers for children. A much smaller actor, the Swedish *MiniBladet*, was launched onto the scene in 2014.

Following the negative development of printed news media, and reading about and observing the younger generation's appropriation of, and devotion to, digital media devices with on-demand service at any time of the day, this recent predilection for printed news magazines has come as a surprise to many. How come these titles were launched in these times? What needs can be met for the young readers of a printed newspaper in a time when news and other current affairs information are available anywhere and at every minute, for free, through the internet and social media platforms? These are some of the issues that will be explored in this chapter.

Three editors-in-chief of Scandinavian children's newspapers have been interviewed to share their thoughts and to reflect on these issues. The interviewees represent *Aftenposten Junior* (AJ) in Norway, *Børne-*

### Aftenposten Junior, Norway

*Aftenposten Junior* is published once a week (Tuesdays) and distributed to its subscribing readers. Only a small share of the circulation is sold as single copies. The newspaper was launched in 2012 by Schibsted Media Group in Oslo. Ever since *Aftenposten Junior* was launched circulation has grown steadily and it is now (2018) the seventh largest newspaper in Norway with 30,000 copies/issue and it is financially profitable. *Aftenposten Junior* does not contain any advertising and is not dependent on sponsors. The Norwegian subscribers market were willing to pay for quality journalism for young people, something that surprised many sceptics according to Mari Midstigen, editor-in-chief since February 2018. Readers are mainly in the eight-to-thirteen age range but some are as young as six years old.

In 2015, the Swedish daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*, also within Schibsted Media Group, launched *SvD Junior*, a newspaper very similar to *Aftenposten Junior*. The two newspapers exchange material from time to time.



### Børneavisen, Denmark

In May 2018, the Danish publishing house JP/Politiken announced the launch of a weekly newspaper for children. The mission is to provide curated news content to their readers as an alternative to the overwhelming abundance of information, and sometimes disinformation, from social media, but also to contribute to young Danes' democratic and social education. Editor-in-chief Louise Abildgaard Grøn previously worked with JP/Politikens' school activities for several years. The editorial office consists of three journalists and with a planned launch in September 2018 *Børneavisen* will be spread mainly through subscriptions but also through single-copy sales.

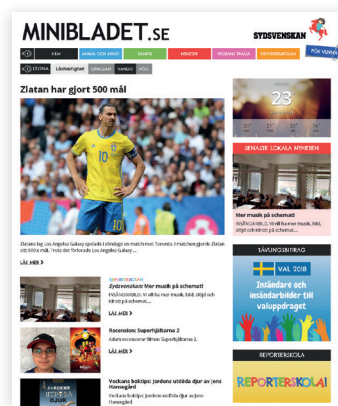
The first announcement of JP/Politikens' plans for a printed newspaper for children came at the same time as its main competitor Berlingske Media decided to close down their newspaper *Kids News* (February 2018). *Kids News* was launched in 2014 but closed down only four years later following a strategic shift within the media company.



*avisen* (B) in Denmark and *MiniBladet* (MB) in Sweden.<sup>2</sup> They form a rather heterogeneous group comprising a now established successful title (AJ), a yet-to-be-launched title (B) and a title launched by a former teacher and enthusiast without the infrastructure of an established media company (MB). The main target group for all three newspapers is children from about six years of age up to the early teens. For a more detailed presentation of each title, see the fact boxes.

### MiniBladet, Sweden

Behind *MiniBladet* is Maria McShane, teacher and author of educational books. After many years working with young immigrants in language and reading development she felt that free easy-to-read news material for children was missing. Together with an illustrator, a web designer, a language consultant and journalists, *MiniBladet* was developed. The newspaper is available on paper, published once a week and is also an interactive website, which is updated on a daily basis. The editorial office of nine persons cooperates with ten local newspapers all over Sweden, which publish *MiniBladet's* content once a week. The aim is to offer a version in every region with local as well as national/other news for young readers. Readers are between three and twelve years old and the online texts are offered at different levels of legibility. *MiniBladet* also runs Reporterskolan (*the Reporter School*), where school classes can contribute with material to the newspaper in cooperation with journalists.



## Youth and the news

Whether there are children's newspapers or not, young people hear, see or read about big news events either through media or just by hearing adults talking about them. With a smartphone in their pocket, participation in social media and access to more news channels than ever before it is almost impossible for children not to pick up news of all sorts. And the inherent curiosity, the wish to learn about and try to understand the surrounding world, is an important part of growing up and of forming one's own knowledge and opinions. The abundance of information, sensations, images, messages and events can, however, complicate the process of understanding, sorting out right from wrong, being informed and getting a manageable overview. And of course, this goes for young people as well as adults.

In Norway, the reporting around the terrorist attacks on 22 July 2011 (in Oslo and Utøya) highlighted the need to explain news events in alternative ways. The events had a huge impact on everyone in the society and young people in particular were affected, as victims and as recipients of reporting in the media. The need for a reliable source that explains an event in a sensitive way adapted to a young reader became clear to parents and other adults. Although not being a single cause, it did matter in the launch of *Aftenposten Junior*.

## The old-school newspaper in the digital environment

Both *Aftenposten Junior* and *Børneavisen* initially met voices of doubt around the idea of a printed newspaper for children in these times. But referring to their own experiences from partaking in school activities, the editors' impression was that children themselves do not seem to have anything against the paper version. When given the choice to publish online or in print, the latter was surprisingly often preferred by children. Print was considered by the majority to be more serious, more "for real" – it seemed as if children placed more trust in something that is printed: "You will be perceived as a more serious person if you read a newspaper. And children want to be taken seriously."<sup>3</sup> Something that is published online could easily be changed or altered, according to the children, and was therefore seen as less important, less trustworthy. Similar experiences from classroom activities are shared

by the editor of *MiniBladet* in retelling the pride with which children show the printed versions of articles they have produced.

The possibility of using the full spread of a printed newspaper is also described as an advantage when explaining complex news items. There is enough space to include fact boxes, maps, big images and graphic elements, which immediately give the reader a better overview than a web page or a smaller screen on a tablet or phone where information is given more on demand, by clicking on a link.

When extraordinary or violent events occur the limits in space of the printed newspaper provide clear frames, a selected and curated experience. The reader can find information about a news event without becoming overwhelmed by too many details. Gory or graphic details that may frighten or be “too much” will not pop up unexpectedly. A news event explained by a professional journalist can also be a help to parents who sometimes find it difficult to explain or talk to their children about complex issues in the news.

*MiniBladet* had another point of departure. In the years before the founder began to design it, Sweden scored lower than ever on reading skills in the international Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report (2012),<sup>4</sup> something that created worries, not least among teachers and politicians. Since there was no newspaper for children at the time (*SvD Junior* was launched in 2015), the idea of launching one was born. With a focus on reading and a special concern with less affluent families and children developing their basic skills, *MiniBladet* began as an educational project to enhance reading skills. According to the founder, many efforts have been made in society aimed at encouraging the reading of books. However, the shorter items in a newspaper and the curiosity for news can be an alternative way to improve reading skills. An equally important aim was to offer an opportunity to learn to read and produce news, to offer a space where children could learn to express their views and learn to become critical media users – a media literacy project.

In the interviews the editors all mention the fact that the newspaper is not trying to compete with, or be an alternative to, other digital news sources, but rather to be seen as a complement. Although both young people and adults live in an environment with an abundance of news and access to all kinds of information, it is easy to feel over-

whelmed and confused. The newspaper provides the most important facts and information and you can finish the reading with a feeling of being up to date with current events. Someone has brought some order to the chaos. A wish for time and a place to dig deeper into a topic or event at your own pace, to be able to delve in peace and quiet, is something that all three interviewees mention: “You need some tranquility in your brain!”<sup>5</sup>

## Content

Topics addressed in the newspapers can be of any kind, the editors say. What is important is how topics are presented – not in a frightening way with too many or scary details. Occasional crime events, personal tragedies, etc. are avoided. The events are explained thoroughly so that previous knowledge about an event is not needed. Another aim is to describe actions taken to help solve or improve the problem that has occurred, that something is being done not to leave the reader in despair. The fact that the newspapers are published once a week is, in this case, often an advantage since it gives time for an event to develop and more information can be included. But as one of the interviewees mentioned, they will not sugar-coat a news story to give something a happy ending but rather strive to give an accurate but constructive image of the situation.

To find out which topics to address, a close relationship with their readers is something all three interviewees pointed out as being important; listening to the children is vital – what are *they* talking about, what do *they* want to know and how do we take their interests and feelings seriously? Input from parents and teachers is also important to find the right way to address an issue.

## Differences from an adult newspaper

Although no topics are avoided, there are differences in how they are treated. The focus is on explaining a situation or event, presenting a story from scratch and giving context. Young readers of different ages who are still in school do not have the same level of general knowledge as can be expected from an adult population. However, as one of the interviewees mentioned, this is something that could be done to a greater extent in newspapers for adults as well. Another difference that was mentioned is the tone or angle in a story. While a common crite-

tion in journalism for adults is to focus on the conflict, the sensation, the three editors of children's news all mentioned that this is not at all necessary in their writing.

Initially the editorial team of *Aftenposten Junior* thought they would be able to benefit from material intended for the main newspaper (*Aftenposten*) and just rewrite the text. This proved not to work out well since rewriting took longer than writing the article for children from scratch. In fact, it has been the other way around when *Aftenposten Junior* has presented texts from a children's perspective.

Images, graphic elements, maps and illustrations are used to a greater extent than in an ordinary newspaper and provide different entries to the news story. This also makes it easier to get information about something even if the reading skills are under development, and eventually the readers can access longer texts. The newspaper is also printed on a heavier paper, which displays photos better and makes it easier for smaller hands to turn the pages.

### On the importance of news for children and some advice

When asked to reflect on if, or why, news for children is important, all three editors stressed the value for young people in building knowledge about the society and the surrounding world through news reporting. News that is available and adapted to your level of knowledge is essential when learning how to be a citizen and the role of news media in a democratic society. To become *media literate*, it is important that you have the opportunities to practise these skills somewhere, that there is a platform to turn to. And the three interviewees all found that there was a gap here to be filled:

Parents worry about their children's societal and democratic knowledge, believing that it is under pressure from all the chaos with all kinds of input from all kinds of channels. And they don't know what to do about it. [...] I believe parents are willing to invest in children's building of knowledge, their curiosity, where they can explore topics in a quieter environment. (Abildgaard Grøn, *Børneavisen*)

If children learn about what a newspaper is, its role in a democratic society, they become media literate. But it is important that there is a platform to turn to for this. (McShane, *MiniBladet*)

I believe the world will be a better place if children learn to love news. Learn to appreciate the value of keeping abreast with what is happening in the world. [...] I think this need can be found everywhere, the need for a trustworthy, serious news outlet that children love to read. (Midststigen, *Aftenposten Junior*)

And of course, for the commercial media houses represented in the Norwegian and Danish examples, there is an interest in establishing the habit of reading news, to create brand awareness and learning about and attracting future customers. However, in the case of *Aftenposten Junior* in Norway, the newspaper has already proved to be a financially successful idea. They found what they perceived as an underused market for quality journalism for children, and a will to pay for it.

Based on the experiences the three interviewees have had so far, what advice would they then like to pass on? The main advice given is this: listen to children and take them seriously! Working close to the target group is important, initially and along the way. Listen to them and explore what interests them, their needs and concerns, and learn about their everyday life.

To establish a new product there is obviously a need for initial funding. Together with a degree of patience on behalf of the editorial team, it is important to get the financial backing from an owner or sponsor who is willing to last until awareness and new habits have been established. Raising interest in, and an ability to read, news, and learning about the world, should be of interest to society. Reading news can lead to insights into, and an understanding of, other cultures and issues of equal rights. Thus, to be able to reach out to as many children as possible, not only to those who have parents/carers who give active support or can afford a subscription, is also mentioned as something that ought to be of great public interest.

### So why now?

Although the conditions for the three cases at the time of the interviews were very different, the editors-in-chief seem to agree about many aspects concerning the *raison d'être* of printed newspapers for children. Children are curious and interested in the surrounding world and reading news adapted for them will contribute to their societal knowledge.



To practise reading skills they also need different kinds of platforms complementing each other. Although the opportunities in terms of access are unprecedented, the constant flow of information and images around us can create an overwhelming feeling. Thus, returning to the initial question of *how come these printed newspapers for children were launched now*, with all the opportunities to find news and information at any time and any place on any device, an answer could be that it is actually *because of precisely this*.

### Notes

1. Nordicom (2018).
2. The chapter is based on interviews with the editors-in-chief of three newspapers for children: Mari Midtstigen, *Aftenposten Junior* (4 July, 2018), Louise Abildgaard Grøn, *Børneavisen* (13 July, 2018) and Maria McShane, *MiniBladet* (20 August, 2018). The interviews were filmed and recorded via Adobe Connect and later transcribed.
3. Abildgaard Grøn (2018).
4. PISA (2014).
5. Abildgaard Grøn (2018).

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## **PART III.**

### **News Use among Youth**



## 9. Youth news media use in Estonia

Signe Opermann

This chapter discusses how young people in Estonia engage with media and how they make sense of news. The chapter introduces research data from recent studies and surveys, focusing on media users in their late teens and 20s. It appears that young people's engagement with news is still quite strong, though highly individualized, selective and interest-driven, both technically and in terms of content. Their patterns of media use are far from homogeneous, but it is evident that the written press and linear television have lost importance as the preferred and quickest sources of information. Instead, the role of social media sites has grown, although the trustworthiness of their content is perceived to be quite low.

In the past ten years, Estonia has witnessed the cultural transformation that has occurred with the change from text-based to digital-based "reading".<sup>1</sup> These developments have brought about a major change in the ways and means of obtaining news and differences in choices and preferences, which are especially visible between age groups. The latest devices, platforms and media consumption trends have been adopted most enthusiastically by young (and resourceful) people.<sup>2</sup> It has also been claimed that their speed of information use is different from that of older generations – for many young people, linear and print media as information providers are just too "slow".<sup>3</sup> This chapter gives an overview of how young people in Estonia use news media and

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what motivations/lack of motivations they have. The chapter also asks how young media users define news and newsworthiness, and to what extent their own interpretations agree or disagree with the traditional Anglo-American concept, which is dominant in news research.<sup>4</sup>

### The Estonian media system and general media use patterns, with a focus on young audiences

The Estonian media system, characterized by a liberal and market-oriented media policy and a moderately developed self-regulatory system of journalism,<sup>5</sup> serves a population of only about 1.3 million inhabitants, with two major subpopulations: Estonian- and Russian-speaking communities (comprising about 68% and 24% of the country's population, respectively).<sup>6</sup> Despite the small size of the market, the diversity in media platforms and channels is significant. One of the recent studies, conducted by Kantar Emor in 2016, includes nearly 30 national and local newspapers (eight of them in Russian) and 40 magazines.<sup>7</sup> The Estonian TV broadcasting market, on the other hand, is shaped by three main channels: Estonian Television (owned by Estonian Public Broadcasting) and the commercial channels Kanal2 (owned by AS Eesti Meedia) and TV3 (owned by Providence Equity Partners). Altogether, there are more than 20 radio stations and about 10 TV channels, along with a number of international services. All of the main newspapers and the Estonian Public Broadcasting produce content for online platforms on a daily basis; some outlets also provide news in Russian and English.

The general trends in media use demonstrate that even though television is still the preferred source of news and information (in 2017, 46% preferred TV as the primary source and 31% as a complementary source), the proportion of those preferring online websites is on the rise (the respective numbers in 2017 were 30% and 28%; in 2016, they were 26% and 29%). At the same time, radio and the printed press have lost importance as the preferred sources of news (10% preferred radio and 4% newspapers as the main source, nearly 40% and nearly 30% as a complementary source).<sup>8</sup>

In addition, a survey conducted by the research company Kantar Emor revealed that the number of newspapers and magazines read by people has decreased, especially among younger age groups. In

2000, 15 to 29-year-olds read, at least from time to time, four to seven different magazines and regularly read a couple of newspapers. By 2016, their repertoire had shrunk to sporadic and irregular reading of one or two newspapers. The TNS Atlas survey from early 2018 showed that 14 per cent of 15 to 19-year-olds still read newspapers almost every day, which is only half of the rate of 20 to 29-year-olds.<sup>9</sup> Watching television (on TV sets) has also decreased among young people. While in 2000, 15 to 19-year-olds spent approximately three and a half hours and 20 to 29-year-olds more than four hours a day watching linear TV, the data from 2016 reveal a decrease in TV watching to two hours a day in both groups. A similar tendency can be found with radio listening, which has dropped to one to two hours per day from two and a half to three and a half hours in 2000 among young people.<sup>10</sup>

These results are mirrored by those of another representative study, “Me. The World. The Media”, conducted in five waves by the University of Tartu during the period 2002–2014. An analysis of the 2014 survey data revealed that half of those aged between 15 and 29 had abandoned some of the traditional media forms for new forms, including social media.<sup>11</sup> Over a third of them had completely stopped reading newspapers, slightly less than a third had stopped listening to music on the radio, and a quarter had given up watching TV programmes (in real time) and films on TV sets. Almost a fifth of them had abandoned following news programmes on TV, and one-tenth news on a radio. At this point, it should be emphasized that several on-demand services and TV watching on the internet are on the rise and have changed consumption patterns significantly.

Thus, it can be argued that the internet has become an integral part of the information space of media users in Estonia. According to the Kantar Emor study, the share of internet users has tripled since the 2000s, reaching 83 per cent by 2016. Among 15 to 29-year-olds, the use of the internet is ubiquitous. In 2017, 98 per cent of people aged 16 to 24 used the internet every day, regardless of gender, age, prevalent communication language or education, as can be seen in the data from Statistics Estonia. Dependence on the internet has intensified even more due to the spread of smart devices: nearly 614,000 people in Estonia use smartphones for internet activities,<sup>12</sup> and about 75-80 per cent of

smartphone owners are between 15 and 29 years old (according to the “Me. The World. The Media” 2014 data).<sup>13</sup>

*The main types of news media usage profiles among young people*

Although there is a great deal of diversity and fragmentation in media practices and the “news repertoire universe”,<sup>14,15</sup> systematic sociological research reveals larger patterns that distinguish different types of users. As previous studies have demonstrated, the main socio-demographic characteristics in shaping such a typology are age, education and ethnic background, and/or the prevalent communication language, which in Estonia is either Estonian or Russian.<sup>16</sup>

The data from the most recent wave of the “Me. The World. The Media” survey confirm that the engagement with news content in various media forms in general is relatively high: more than 61 per cent of the population reported that they followed news across various media platforms at least once a day or even more frequently.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the number of frequent and regular users of news among younger age groups is much smaller: slightly over 20 per cent of the 15 to 19-year-olds and more than 40 per cent of the 20 to 29-year-olds followed news on a daily basis.

It is interesting to consider *when* in one’s life course news use habits and patterns evolve and crystallize. Triin Vihalemm and Marianne Leppik have discussed news audiences’ formation within the context of Estonia, proposing that such practices emerge somewhere in the 20s,<sup>18</sup> and become more deeply entrenched later. Before that age, people tend to have rather sporadic and inconsistent news use habits.

From a topical point of view, different age groups prefer different content in news. In young people’s repertoires, topics related to “human interest” and entertainment, and those related to stage of life, are more likely read and paid attention to: youth issues, education, pop culture, technology, etc. For middle-aged and older adults, other topics and issues become more compelling: family and children, work life and career-related issues, politics and social issues, culture and history, health and well-being, etc.<sup>19</sup>

What might be the most common features of young news media users have been proposed and elaborated on by Peeter Vihalemm and Ragne Kõuts-Klemm (see Table 1).<sup>20</sup> Based on a cluster analysis of the



**Table 1.** A typology of media users, 2014. Per cent of Estonian respondents

	Type						
	Multi-active users of traditional media	Active users of new media	Moderately active users of traditional media	Moderately active users of traditional and online media	Users of only new media	Passive media users	The average among Estonians
<b>Per cent among respondents</b>	16	13	22	18	14	17	100
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	53	42	39	49	53	50	47
Female	47	58	61	51	47	50	53
<b>Age</b>							
15–19	1	14	<1	9	17	1	6
20–29	6	43	1	26	54	6	20
30–44	16	22	9	32	22	17	19
45–54	26	15	12	17	5	21	16
55–64	27	3	24	14	1	21	16
65–74	20	2	42	3	2	23	18
75–79	5	1	10	0	0	11	5
<b>Education</b>							
Lower than Secondary education	5	13	10	18	35	41	20
Secondary education	43	46	60	53	43	50	50
Higher education	52	41	30	30	22	9	30

Comments: Types with most younger users are shaded (N=1,020).

Source: Survey “Me. The World. The Media”, 2014. Vihailemm & Kõuts (2017, p. 269).

data from the “Me. The World. The Media” study, the authors have distinguished between six types of general media users, of which two (type II and type V in Table 1) consist of proportionally more young people than the other four.

The first of the two salient types or clusters in the typology, which are dominated by the younger generations, has been labelled “active new media users”, consisting of 13 per cent of all respondents, 14 per cent of the 15 to 20-year-old and 43 per cent of the 20 to 29-year-old respondents. The dominance of online media shapes their media repertoire, and the frequent use of smartphones and tablets characterizes

their preferences in terms of media forms. This type spends rather little time watching TV, while they have quite high cultural interests, follow international media (in other languages) and are interested in information from all around the world.

The second type is labelled “users of only new media” and was not as clearly present in the fourth wave of the survey conducted in 2011. The type consists of 14 per cent of all respondents, 17 per cent of the 15- to 20-year-old and 54 per cent of the 20 to 29-year-old respondents.

Fact Box. Media habits and lifestyle of the six types of media users among Estonians, 2014 (see Table 1).

<b>Type 1:</b> Multi-active user of traditional media	Reads newspapers, magazines and books; listens a lot to radio and watches TV. Interested in news, discussions and documentaries. This type is a keen consumer of culture. The frequency of use of the computer is moderate, while the use of social media is rather low. Many contacts in Estonia and abroad, and travels quite often. Active as a citizen.
<b>Type 2:</b> Active user of new media	Uses traditional media via smartphone and tablet. Quite frequently follows foreign media reports; has a need to be thoroughly informed. Has an interest in culture; mobile, with an active social life. Many contacts in Estonia and abroad. Focused on work and self-development. Active as a citizen.
<b>Type 3:</b> Moderately active user of traditional media	Reads newspapers, watches TV and listens to the radio at average levels. Does not follow foreign media very often; rarely uses a computer. About one-third do not use the internet. Likes to read books and has a versatile pattern of culture consumption. Moderately active as a citizen.
<b>Type 4:</b> Moderately active user of traditional and online media	Watches TV frequently, especially entertainment shows, but is not keen on following news programmes. Follows online media, and has an interest in foreign media content. Has quite low interest in culture and literature; is slightly interested in sports. Has a more mobile lifestyle than Type no. 3. Moderately active as a citizen.
<b>Type 5:</b> User of only new media	Almost no interest in media or books. Very little engagement with culture. Active and frequent use of the computer, especially social media use. Minimally follows online media and foreign media channels, with a clear preference for entertainment. Has a vibrant social life and an interest in sports activities. No interest in politics or civic participation.
<b>Type 6:</b> Passive media user	Low media use. Limited following of TV and entertainment shows. Has a poor knowledge of foreign languages, which also limits their media use. More than half of this type do not use the internet. Has very little interest in books. Has a non-mobile lifestyle. No interest in politics or civic participation.

Source: Survey “Me. The World. The Media”, 2014. The fact box is compiled based on the study by Vihalemm & Kõuts (2017).

They have almost no contact with traditional media forms: they do not read newspapers and books, and do not watch TV (on TV sets) or listen to the radio. Their media repertoire consists of very little journalistic news programming; instead, they immerse themselves in the internet and social media, where they get news and information that attract their attention. From the lifestyle point of view, both described types are focused on studying and/or working and have vibrant social lives

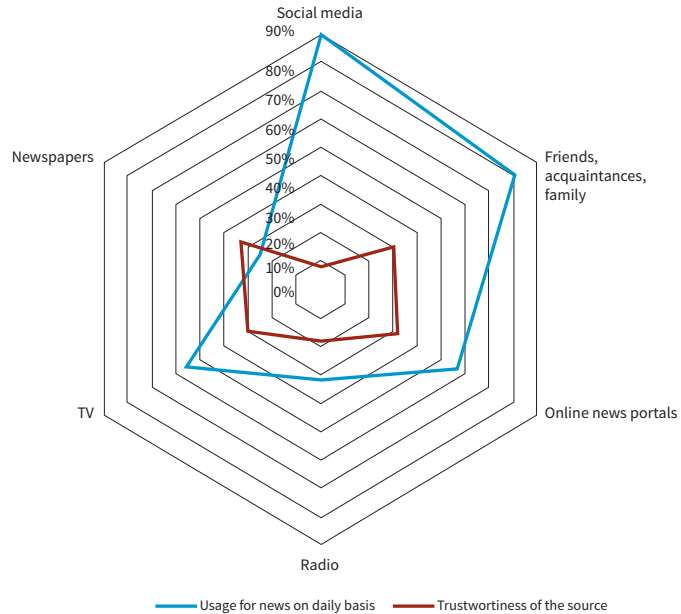
full of entertainment, sports and other activities. The first type is also characterized by greater (domestic) mobility.

As for preferences in social media platforms, Facebook has the highest number of users in Estonia (more than 600,000 users), being most popular among 25 to 30-year-olds and slightly less popular among 19 to 24-year-olds.<sup>21</sup> Youngsters prefer to use Youtube, Snapchat or Instagram due to their convenient photo and video sharing applications. Facebook seems too boring and overflowing with advertisements for them; they also feel uncomfortable having their parents and grandparents keeping an eye on them on Facebook.<sup>22</sup> vKontakte and Odnoklassniki are popular among about 35 to 50 per cent of Russian-speaking communities, respectively.<sup>23</sup>

Young people's overwhelming "migration" to the internet and social media networks was also revealed in Statistics Estonia,<sup>24</sup> emphasizing the vast variety of activities they engage in on social media, among them news consumption and information seeking, and by the report of the "Structured Dialogue" project (initiated by the European Commission and conducted in Estonia in 2017 by the Estonian National Youth Council).<sup>25</sup> The national sample of the latter study consisted of 1,735 young people aged 13 to 30; the data were collected through a survey and individual interviews. Again, the survey results revealed the majority's (89%) commitment to social media becoming the most common and convenient way of getting news and information. Almost the same amount (81%) of information and news came from young people's friends, family members and acquaintances, while about half of the participants followed online media and TV on a daily basis, a third got their news from the radio and a quarter from newspapers. Together with exploring those changing patterns, the study sought to assess young people's perceptions of the credibility of various news and information sources they relied on. Not surprisingly, the results showed a certain discrepancy between the frequent use of sources and their trustworthiness as assessed by the young users. Although the level of trust in sources listed in the survey questionnaire was not very high in general, a clear divide between credibility in established news providers and social media as news sources was evident. About one-third of the respondents saw newspapers and online news portals as trustworthy, but less than

one-tenth trusted information they got from social media networks (see Figure 1 for a comparative overview).

**Figure 1.** Sources used for news purposes every day and their trustworthiness as perceived by 13 to 30-year-old young people in Estonia, 2017. Per cent of usage and trust.



Comment: (N=1,666).

Source: Report of the project “Structured Dialogue” by the Estonian National Youth Council. The figure is compiled by the author of the chapter.

*How do young people define news and what makes news reliable?*

This section explores users’ motivations and lack of motivation regarding news consumption, asking: what makes news consumption meaningful or tedious? With this purpose in mind, Maria José Brites and Ragne Kõuts-Klemm conducted a qualitative study in 2015–2016 in Portugal and Estonia.<sup>26</sup> The data were collected from 17- to 20-year-old and 36 to 49-year-old people, who were asked to fill in a media diary of their daily experiences with media and participate in interviews. The overall results revealed significant differences between Estonian and

Portuguese young people; some of these can be interpreted in the light of the status that media literacy education has in the school curricula in the two countries. However, this section presents only the results of the Estonian data.

Among the younger Estonian participants, news was defined through several criteria. First, they emphasized that news had to contain, explicitly, *new* information, *new* facts, details and aspects about any event or issue. As one of the interviewees, a secondary school student, stated: “News is something I didn’t know [about] before, and is something interesting.”<sup>27</sup>

The second significant marker for distinguishing and classifying content as “real news” with particular form and structure is the media brand and its taken-for-granted values. In this case, obviously, responsibility for assessing and providing quality news content was assigned to the producers. However, as the young participants also acknowledged, some subportals of respectable news organizations had taken rather tabloid and sensationalist approaches.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that young users are aware of the distinctions between various “genres” of news and acknowledge their specific features. These aspects are more closely attended to when using the internet. News in its most appropriate form was seen as based on factual information, scientific evidence, etc.; on the other hand, there is sensational news, based on gossip, curiosity and unnamed sources, which was classified by the participants as entertainment-oriented content rather than news.

Besides those young people who got their news from the mainstream media sources, the findings of the study revealed a group of young people who were mainly oriented to recommendations and opinions from their peers and other personal sources, especially when the shared or suggested content was meaningful and relevant to their own lifeworlds (the relevance of topics and issues, as pointed out above, is to a large extent life course-related and may change over time). In addition, it should also be emphasized that there are young people who actively avoid news consumption, or avoid particular news topics.<sup>29</sup> One such unpopular topic specified by the participants was politics, and the main reason for avoidance was a lack of interest. At the same time, the interview responses indicated personal interest and psychological closeness as important criteria for focusing on

news: “News has to be interesting to me,” stated one interviewee, a vocational school student.<sup>30</sup>

The study also investigated what motivated young people’s news consumption and found that, while among the young Portuguese people a relationship between citizenship and news consumption was articulated (i.e. news consumption was seen as a social responsibility of a good citizen), the young Estonians’ strongest motivation was the need for personally important, educative, “mind-broadening” and knowledge-providing information, which, among other things, helped to prepare them for their future (beyond school). Also, news, according to the Estonian young people, helped to keep them up to date and acquaint them with domestic and international issues and events. The participants, however, also mentioned some demotivating factors concerning news consumption: for example, explicit bias in sources, implicit biases referring to stereotypes or certain attitudes, inaccurate facts, an excess of bad and frightening information (e.g. about catastrophes and tragedies) and one-sidedness in news reporting (vs a more all-encompassing approach), leaving users with the impression that “all news looks the same”.

Therefore, one may claim that at a time when the concepts of “post-truth”, “alternative facts” and “fake news” are becoming a focus of public attention, the critical need for news literacy skills (and sometimes healthy scepticism) has become more urgent. A similar point was also made by the participants in the “Structured Dialogue” study, mentioned above. In particular, when the 13 to 30-year-olds were asked what, in their opinion, guaranteed the credibility of news content, the majority of them (76%) pointed out the verifiability of the information or material. The users defined trustworthy news as information in which all facts presented could be checked from the original or other sources, in one way or another; in addition, all sources had to be clearly identified and referenced. In order to be able to check and critically assess any news story, competences and skill in information search, critical reading and analysis are needed to be developed, for example in schools and educational programmes.

## Conclusion

To conclude the overview of young people’s news media use in Estonia, as the available data and arguments offered in public discussions indi-

cate, young people are dynamic members of media audiences as well as of society, though they have less life experience than older people. They may be either more or less active and have various preferences in terms of how they navigate the news media landscape. However, they are adapting to diverse new stimuli, while older people may be held back by inertia and commitment to already crystallized practices. Their patterns of media use are far from homogeneous. Thus, it can be concluded that young people's engagement with news in Estonia is still quite strong, though highly selective, and interest-driven, both technically and in terms of content. Based on these findings, it can also be concluded that, together with the ever-increasing individualization of media and information practices, the understanding of news is also changing among the public, both young and old.

#### Notes

1. Lauristin (2014).
2. Kalmus, Masso & Lauristin (2017).
3. Niitra (2015).
4. Hamilton & Tworek (2016).
5. Kõuts-Klemm (2017); Stetka & Örnebring (2013).
6. Statistics Estonia (2017).
7. Heinla (2016).
8. Standard Eurobarometer 88. November 2017.
9. Niinas (2018).
10. Heinla (2016).
11. Vihalemm & Kõuts (2017).
12. Järv (2018).
13. Kõuts, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Siibak & Lauristin (2017).
14. As shown in the study by Kõuts-Klemm and Brites (2017), young people's preferences in Estonia reveal various news media repertoires, as is the case with other age groups. Some have quality news orientations with online preferences; some combine quality news, online news and social media; others follow mainly social media through which they also have contacts with traditional channels – some occasionally, some more frequently.
15. Kõuts-Klemm (2017, pp. 375-377); Kõuts-Klemm & Brites (2017).
16. Vihalemm, Lauristin & Kõuts (2012); Kõuts-Klemm (2017); Seppel (2017).
17. Vihalemm & Kõuts (2017, pp. 254-256).
18. Vihalemm & Leppik (2014).

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19. Opermann (2014); Vihalemm & Kõuts (2017); Kalmus, Masso & Lauristin (2017, p. 631).
20. Vihalemm & Kõuts (2017, pp. 266-271).
21. Communication agency Dalton (2015).
22. Idol (2018).
23. Lõugas (2012).
24. Ait (2017).
25. Project “Structured Dialogue” (2017).
26. Brites & Kõuts-Klemm (forthcoming).
27. Brites & Kõuts-Klemm (forthcoming).
28. E.g. subsites <https://elu24.postimees.ee> and <https://sobranna.postimees.ee> within the website of the largest quality daily *Postimees*, available at the link [www.postimees.ee](http://www.postimees.ee).
29. Velsker & Kõuts (2015).
30. Brites & Kõuts-Klemm (forthcoming).

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## 10. Young people do consume news in social media

– with a little help from their friends!

Maria Jervelycke Belfrage

Nine out of ten young Swedes use social media every day, and when it comes to news consumption, eight out of ten come across news on social media platforms.<sup>1</sup> Consuming news online and in social media flows, and having an almost unlimited access to a wide variety of different sources, does, however, require some life experience as well as knowledge and specific skills in source criticism. It could be that certain persons in young people's social media flows have an important role to play in helping them find their way in a changing media landscape. This article, based on an interview study with Swedish high school students, describes how the news use among youths is both planned and incidental, and to some extent informed by important others. Lastly, it is argued that news organizations should consider these findings to reach the young population.

Society is moving from a traditional news cycle dominated by journalism professionals to a more complex information cycle that incorporates news consumers within the process.<sup>2</sup> Social media networks are central in this development, in the way they affect how people communicate and relate to each other. This is a consequence of several changes, with the emergence of the internet of course being the most obvious, but the development of digital technology in general, and smartphones in particular, also plays an important role in this process. These changes have affected the media and news industries in several

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ways, with a variety of convergences over the years, concerning production as well as distribution. Since both the audience and advertisers have shown less and less interest in traditional media platforms, the industry's presence on social media, such as Facebook, has become necessary in order to reach out to the audience.

Research has shown that young people generally do not take part in news as much as the adult population, and some not at all, or very little.<sup>3</sup> But there are also studies that show that many young people are indeed interested in news, that they believe it is important to keep up with what is happening in the world, but that traditional scheduled/linear newscasts or subscribed morning newspapers aren't perceived as relevant. Perhaps, it is speculated, since the traditional media forms and formats do not fit into one's lifestyle, for practical, temporal, geographical or economic reasons, they are not considered an option – or at least, it seems, they are deemed more difficult to make use of.<sup>4</sup>

This article is based on an interview study with young Swedes, conducted in the spring and autumn of 2016. Knowing that younger people, in general, consume news to a lesser degree than adults, we wanted to find out whether the presence of news in social media networks actually reaches a young audience, and, if so, how the young reflect on this presence.

The method used was semi-structured focus group interviews with a total of 44 informants, all attending high school in the Gothenburg region, aged 17 to 19, with a slight predominance of male participants. The interviews were conducted in smaller groups of four to six participants and lasted for about one hour each. This chapter starts with an overview of previous research on news consumption among young people; it is then followed by some of the study's results, and ends with a summary and conclusion.

### Young people's news consumption in a new media landscape

Although research shows that young people seem to have an interest as well as an ambition to actually keep updated on the news, it seems that many consume news in an *incidental* manner – as a side effect of other reasons to use the internet. Studies have shown that young people do indeed take an active interest in news, that to a great extent this takes place online and through social media and that it is often carried out

in an incidental way.<sup>5</sup> The consumption can therefore be seen as a by-product of other activities, something that comes with the habitual use of a certain medium, channel or content.<sup>6</sup> The phenomenon is not new, but given the increased opportunities to consume news, through mobile devices, in a social media flow, where socially oriented updates are irregularly but continuously being mixed up with news stories, the coincidental exposure to news becomes more significant. Social media networks differ from traditional news distribution in that news distribution also includes media consumers, and in fact gives them a quite prominent role.

### *Changes in consumption behaviour*

As a consequence of the fast development of digital technology and the emergence of social media networks, research has shown how news consumption behaviour has clearly undergone a change: from consumers having followed a *traditional news cycle*, with scheduled/linear broadcasts and subscribed newspapers, dominated and controlled by professional journalists, the consumption is now moving in the direction of a more complex *information cycle*, which runs constantly, online and in a vast variety of social media flows.<sup>7</sup>

The main reasons for people to use social media networks are to keep in touch with friends and to maintain relationships already established offline. The most common ways to use social media are writing about yourself, chatting and commenting on other people's comments and postings, and uploading pictures of yourself or your family.<sup>8</sup> However, a large proportion of users say they also get news in their social media feeds from people they follow or are friends with. They also "like", comment and recommend news to their friends and acquaintances,<sup>9</sup> which means news consumption through social media to a large extent has become a significant social and shared experience.<sup>10</sup>

The development of digital technology, such as mobile devices, has also most likely contributed to the changed consumption behaviour, for instance when and where people consume media and news content. A survey from 2017 shows that nearly everyone in Sweden aged 16 to 25 owns a smartphone.<sup>11</sup> The study confirms international comparative studies, where for example the Reuters Digital News Report 2017 showed that news consumption via smartphones had superseded

consumption via computers. News consumption via social media has so far been continuously and steadily increasing.<sup>12</sup>

### *The importance of others*

Furthermore, research shows that in many users' social media networks, there are certain individuals who are of particular importance for the spread of news, so-called "opinion leaders".<sup>13</sup> They are nodes, centrally located in larger networks, which, among other things, means they usually have a lot of friends on Facebook and many followers on Twitter, Instagram and/or Youtube. It is typical of these opinion leaders that they are often engaged in a variety of social and civic issues, that they thoroughly follow the news and actively pay attention to societal matters.

The theory of *Two-step flow of communication* is based on studies conducted in the 1950s by the two researchers Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld and their teams. The theory is considered to be an important contribution to the development of media and communications research and highlights two aspects. One is that every individual makes their own choices when it comes to media consumption – you can choose to read the text, or not read at all. The second aspect was the introduction of the concept *opinion leaders*, described as influential persons in our direct vicinity (Katz and Lazarsfeld use the term *primary groups*), within the family, in our circle of friends or at our workplace, who "interpret" news for us and also affect what news we take part in. Opinion leaders tend to personify certain values (who one is), to have more familiarity with certain issues (what one knows) and to be positioned at the centre of social networks (whom one knows).<sup>14</sup> When it comes to social media, this is of extra interest since research shows that we prefer shared and/or commented news,<sup>15</sup> and when it comes to opinion leaders' influence, the emergence of social media and the rapid spread of digital devices are believed to provide it with far greater reach.<sup>16</sup>

It does, however, seem that young people combine and make use of a variety of sources in their news consumption, largely depending on the subject and the nature of the news. In an American survey from 2015, "Where Millennials Get the News", the researchers used a questionnaire that allowed respondents to categorize their pathways to news and information. They were given the ability to choose between three different ways, depending on what kind of news they were looking for.

This was because the researchers noted that the young people seemed to have made this kind of division themselves, consciously or not, and that they would use the paths they perceive to be most reasonable.

These three paths were described as follows:

1. *A social path*: social media networks where the news comes in an incidental way, shared by friends/opinion leaders, groups and networks one belongs to.
2. *A curated path*: semi-professional blogs/podcasts/websites powered by more or less professional/skilled actors/players and brings up/is about specific subject areas.
3. *A reportorial path*: professional newsrooms online, accessed via apps and links or traditional media platforms, television, radio, newspaper, where everything is produced by journalists.

When the respondents in the survey chose paths concerning news about the economy, crime, domestic policy, foreign affairs, medicine/health or environment/climate, the professional path was significantly preferred to social and semi-professional paths. On the other hand, in regard to news focusing on abortion, race, religion or HBQT rights, the social path was more popular. Subjects relating to religion showed an especially big difference, with 81 per cent choosing the social path, and 51 per cent choosing the professional path. When it came to local news, both the social and professional paths ended up at the same level, as 77 per cent would have chosen this. The more severe, or otherwise important, a news piece was considered, the greater the impact it had on the society and citizens, and the greater the probability that they would rely both on the social path, i.e. opinion leaders, and on traditional media, i.e. professionals.

### Young people's news consumption in social media – both planned and incidental

Young people in Sweden today have, in general, always had access to computers. They have also had access to the internet all their lives, and gradually also to a variety of mobile devices, the latest in line being smartphones. They are undoubtedly what Marc Prensky labelled in his 2001 article<sup>17</sup> *digital natives*; they are used to organizing their lives with the help of the internet and use their smartphones in such a manner

that they have practically become an extension of their actual beings.

This also applies to the young people interviewed in this study. The majority of the interviewees replied that they do indeed get news via social media, however many also added that they have actively chosen to follow news sites via social media. Others stated that friends share a lot, and some even said that they get all their news on Facebook. Other platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Youtube and Twitter were also mentioned:

Yes, I get news in social media. It can be about different things, environment, celebrities, it can be completely different, depending on what others share, what your friends tag you in, [usually] on Facebook, it's most common in there. (Female, vocational programme)

#### *The news consumption is both incidental and planned*

The majority of the interviewees said they get news in an incidental way in their feeds, partly due to the fact that friends share news, partly due to news organizations having their own presence in social media. However, some interviewees said their news consumption is both incidental and planned and exemplified by recognizing incidental consumption through taking part in whatever shows up in their flows submitted by friends and families. At the same time, they also pointed out that they made clear and deliberate choices, for instance by having apps with push notifications from Swedish dailies or by following news-oriented accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube or Snapchat.

#### *Counting on being informed when important news breaks*

A few interviewees replied that their consumption is planned to a high degree and explained that they use carefully chosen digital news service applications and instant updates. As many as 26 out of 44 stated that they have different types of push notifications and alerts on their mobile phone:

My consumption is planned, so for me it is not so much a coincidence, I've chosen to follow some on Youtube, and they put up pretty much the same things, things that I know that I want. I also occasionally check out the apps, Aftonbladet and GP.<sup>18</sup> (Male, college preparatory programme)



Over all, everyone seemed to expect, even taking it for granted, that when something “big” or important happens in Sweden or elsewhere, it will show up in their social media flows. However, some interviewees made it clear that they don’t always check the notifications, and also that it can sometimes be overwhelming with constant updates.

#### *Some are more digitally skilled than others*

Some make a point of saying that, for example, Facebook’s algorithm and news feed settings allow them to make a form of *indirect* choices, for instance by liking or commenting on someone’s post, and thereby knowingly accepting that more from that particular user will show up. Others emphasize that they have made clear and definite choices, based on their own areas of interest. Several interviewees stated that they supplement consumption in social media feeds with news consumption through traditional media, such as reading the morning newspaper, listening to the radio, or watching television news in the morning or evening.

So it seems that for a quite large proportion of the interviewed youths, the total news consumption is quite well planned, even if some of it is based on what shows up incidentally. Although the respondents in this study stress that social media lends itself especially well to keeping up with sports news, entertainment news and news about lifestyle and celebrities, it is clear that several of the interviewees are also interested in social/civic issues and politics. Some interviewees gave concrete examples of this by mentioning, for instance, climate issues, feminism, immigration and human rights. It is also apparent that they make a clear distinction of the types of news that are considered more lightweight. Most also seem aware that they should pay close attention when they come across news with questionable sources.

#### *The importance of experienced and knowledgeable others*

There is no doubt that there is a presence of opinion leaders in many of the interviewees’ social media flows and feeds. Over half of the young people interviewed stated that there are a couple or more *extra active* people, who frequently update and post news, often with links to the original source and quite often with comments. Most said they were happy with this, as it meant they got news that they otherwise would

have missed. It seems that the opinion leaders acquire respect on the basis of their expertise in specific subject areas and because they offer in-depth knowledge.

Yes, there are those, they are really important for me. Because I have many people who are interested in politics. I tend to read what they think and what they say. What their plans are and what they want, what they are doing, it's important. I learn things. (Male, vocational programme)

## Conclusion

Over all, it seems that the young people in our study habitually first encounter news on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or a Youtube channel. A clear majority said social media was the *most* common way to encounter news, but they also often turn to traditional media to double-check sources. Several use news applications with alerts and push notifications, although some admitted to having abandoned this due to feeling stressed out by the constant updates. This study also shows that the interviewees make a distinction between “major and minor” news, important and unimportant, business and pleasure. But to be able to make these distinctions it seems that they rely, to varying degrees, on having specific people available, who have knowledge and expertise – people who in this article are described as opinion leaders.

Something the media industry in general, and news organizations in particular, probably have to deal with is how to make use of the access to the audience that opinion leaders constitute – partly because these people are perceived as playing an important role when it comes to communicating and interpreting news, partly because research has shown that there are different paths to a news story.

For news organizations, this could mean that they should look for, reach out to and engage opinion leaders on social media; it could then become a way of reaching out to a young audience. And maybe news organizations then could manage to channel part of the audience to their own platforms. The knowledge that young people are, so to speak, screening sources by topic, and use different paths to different news, based on an idea of where the expertise is to be found, could then be used to strategically target and direct news to the appropriate social

media platform, in order to reach more people and increase the circulation. Most likely, this could give rise to entirely new functions among media company employees – perhaps even entirely new professions.

## Notes

1. Nordicom (2016).
2. Chadwick (2011).
3. Sternvik (2010).
4. *ibid.*
5. Yadamsuren & Erdelez (2010).
6. Valeriani & Vaccari (2016).
7. Chadwick (2011).
8. Bergström (2010).
9. Purcell et al. (2010).
10. Costera Meijer & Kormelink (2014).
11. The Internet Foundation in Sweden (2017).
12. Reuters (2017).
13. Yadamsuren & Erdelez (2010), Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage (2018).
14. Katz (1957).
15. Meijer & Kormelink (2014).
16. Lee & Ma (2012).
17. Prensky (2001).
18. Aftonbladet is a national evening newspaper, and Sweden's most popular online news service. GP/Göteborgs-Posten is a local newspaper.

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# 11. News consumption among young people in Norway

## The relevance of smartphones and social media

Dag Slette-meås & Ardis Storm-Mathisen

News consumption among young people is now widely debated. The emergence of the Internet, social media and personal smartphones has been accompanied by a decline in the consumption of news through traditional channels. At the same time, digital media has made news continuously available “everywhere”. It is difficult, but paramount in this new landscape, to build knowledge on how news is accessed, consumed and interpreted and how it affects young people in their daily lives. By portraying news-related practices among today’s youth in Norway, based on a nationwide survey with a particular focus on smartphones and social media, this chapter offers one such contribution.

Digitalization is increasingly permeating the social fabric of our lives. This has not least affected the news media market in terms of production, distribution and consumption.<sup>1</sup> A gradual move from print to digital media, along with a “blurring” of boundaries between news and other more personal or commercial formats, has made it difficult for policymakers, the media industry and others to understand how young people engage with news. Although there has been a decline in the use of traditional media,<sup>2</sup> personal media access tools, such as smartphones, have made news omnipresent, reaching people wherever they are. This pervasiveness of news tends to generally *increase* the amount of news consumed.<sup>3</sup>

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Public discourse about youth media consumption (including news media) tends to be problem-oriented. Attention is given to the fact that young people consume less news, that news consumption is superficial and entertainment-motivated, that young people are not critical enough in terms of sources/origins of news, and that they tend to be less engaged in public discussions on topics relevant to society.<sup>4</sup> The fear is that the younger generations grow up to be news-avoiding, uncritical, uninformed and disengaged citizens, gradually undermining the democratic foundations of the Nordic societies. Another challenge is the potential for a generation gap, as different generations (through different means of news access) tend to “consume different public spheres and representations of reality”.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter we offer a more nuanced look at this development by discussing core findings from a Norwegian study<sup>6</sup> that looks at news interest and ways of consuming news among youths, in particular via social media and smartphones, and the social and contextual conditions that play a role in news-related consumption practices. The study was conducted in late 2015 as a nationwide representative web survey among 805 youths in the 16 to 25 age group.<sup>7</sup>

### News interest and news consumption patterns

As the boundaries between sources, genres, channels and contexts are blurred, measuring news consumption is becoming increasingly difficult. However, the study reveals that more than half of Norwegian youths (16 to 25 years old) say they are interested or very interested in news in general, with more boys than girls claiming to be *very interested* in news.<sup>8</sup> This general interest level concurs with the alleged consumption of news: As many as nine out of ten say they read, watch or check the news at least once a day. More boys than girls claim to follow news *continuously* during the day.<sup>9</sup>

The study shows that news consumption is part of both private and social practices. Close to eight out of ten read, watch or check news when they are alone at home. However, seven out of ten often discuss news face to face with others, indicating that news is a natural part of daily conversations. Peers and family also influence news consumption patterns. Half of the respondents are occupied with news that their friends care about, and four out of ten engage with news that their

families find important. On the other hand, only in ten often discuss news in various online forums.

A defining feature, in Norway as in the other Nordic countries, is the high level of *digital access* to media among young people. In our study, 99 per cent of youths had access to a PC/Mac, 97 per cent to a smartphone and 72 per cent to a tablet. The *preferred platform* for consuming news was the smartphone (75%) and this was more popular in the older group (21 to 25 years old) than in the younger group (16 to 20 years old). PCs were the second most popular platform for news consumption (70%), while traditional platforms were overall less popular, such as TV (21%), radio (19%) and newspapers (14%).

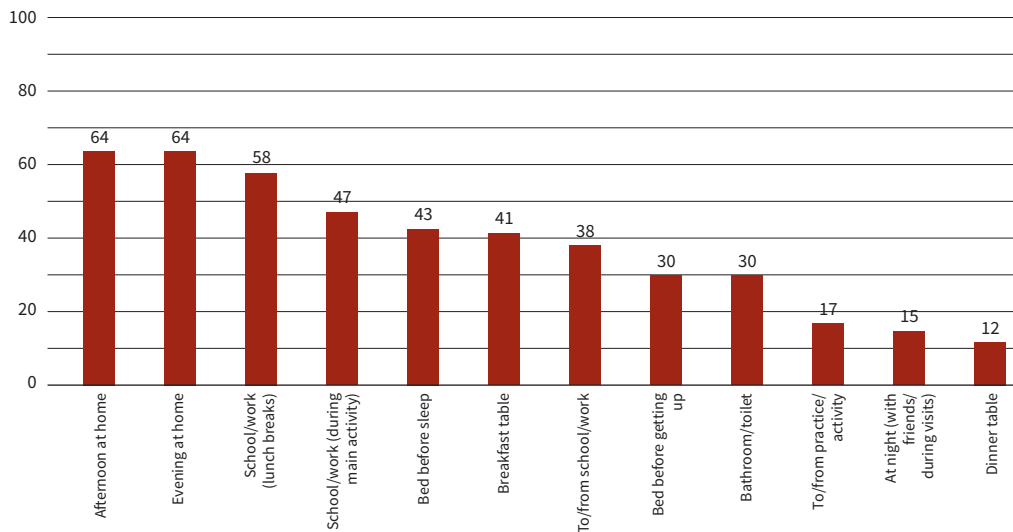
### News consumption on smartphones

The smartphone has thus become the most important device for accessing news among young people. It enables constant engagement with – and “unlimited” opportunities for – new genres, formats and business models related to news presentation, distribution and consumption. It is not merely a multi-purpose “task-oriented artefact”<sup>10</sup> but has become a “lifestyle artefact” for today’s youth.<sup>11</sup> This also implies that time is not allocated to news consumption specifically. Rather, the smartphone enables news to be consumed as part of, or in between, other daily practices.<sup>12</sup> The data show that youths consume news both in typically private and social settings, and in a wide range of daily contexts. There is a clear indication that the older group (21–25 years old) engage more with news than the younger group (16–20 years old) in all the given contexts. The only significant gender difference is that boys are slightly more prone to consume news when they wake up in the morning and when they are in the bathroom. The various contexts for news consumption mediated by smartphones can be seen in the figure on the next page.

### Consuming news via social media on smartphones

As almost all Norwegian youths now possess a smartphone and engage with one or more social media platforms, checking news via social media on smartphones is becoming popular. We see that three out of four prefer to access social media from their smartphones, with a higher proportion among girls than boys. A slight majority of Norwegian

**Figure 1** Situations in which Norwegian youths (16–25 years old) use their smartphone to check news, 2015 (daily usage in per cent)



*Comment:* The figure shows the percentage of Norwegian youths (aged 16–25 years) who own a smartphone that use their smartphone to check news in different situations during a typical day. N=783.

*Source:* Slettemeås & Kjørstad, 2016.

youths still claim that they never use social media to check news first. However, four out of ten often consult social media first when they are looking for news. Boys and older youths tend to check news first through *other media channels* than social media.

If we look at young social media users, more than half claim to follow, like or “friend” news sites in social media. In addition, they follow other news-related providers or individuals, such as bloggers and politicians,<sup>13</sup> and one in ten follow journalists. Still, entertainment providers (“soft” news sites or individuals) are the most popular ones, such as celebrities, sports stars and entertainment sites. Girls tend to favour these entertainment sites/individuals more than boys.

Among the plethora of social media alternatives, Facebook remains the most important one for Norwegian young people, including in terms of news consumption. Among social media users, 93 per cent use Facebook on a daily basis, followed by 78 per cent for Snapchat and 58 per cent for Instagram, while Twitter, for example, has low daily usage (11%). Among Facebook users, as many as 62 per cent claim that they



like, follow or subscribe to news services. Furthermore, 59 per cent say that news features liked or shared by friends appear in their newsfeed. For Snapchat, news engagement is considerably lower.

### Engagement with and attitude towards social media-generated news

How Norwegian youths engage with social media-generated news varies. A slight majority say they *often* find news as they scroll down the newsfeed, while a third find it *occasionally*. Very few *rarely or never* find news in their social media feeds. Many also *click* on news links from the feed. Quite a few actively *promote* news by liking, sharing or retweeting news articles, and one in three claim to do this often or occasionally. However, a majority *never comment on or discuss* news-related stuff in social media. Most young people support the idea that it is OK to share and discuss news on *some* social media platforms but not all, and they prefer more closed conversations.

Algorithms embedded in social media enable news items to be *indirectly promoted to others* just by liking or following news posts. Many of the youths were unaware of this. Advanced algorithms based on profiles, previous searches, likes or friends' activities can reproduce and narrow down what is shown in the newsfeed, creating so-called "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles".<sup>14</sup> When informed about this in the survey, many disclosed a negative attitude to the lack of "control" over what news was presented to them. Quite a few were positive, though, toward algorithms facilitating *relevance* (content) and *convenience* (time-saving). However, since social media may provide other news than what is actively searched for by the user, this can potentially moderate the echo chamber effect.<sup>15</sup>

Recently, so-called *news aggregators* have become popular news mediators. News aggregators typically filter and recycle/repackage content from other news sources, making short stories and promoting these through catchy titles and images/videos (click baits). They depend on viral peer distribution through social media. These new actors contribute to the dissolving of boundaries between edited and non-edited content, between soft and hard news, and between traditional journalism and marketing. The Norwegian survey shows that a third of young people occasionally read, watch or check news from news aggregators (e.g.

Buzzfeed) and girls favour these types of sites/news more than boys. The main reason for consuming aggregated news is that they appear *automatically* in the newsfeed.<sup>16</sup> The mix of entertainment news and serious news in mash-ups also motivates consumption, along with the fact that the *user experience* is better and more fun. Still, Norwegian youths exhibit some sense of source critical attitude as one-third say that they often or very often *check the origin of the content* presented by news aggregators.

Overall, young people perceive news delivered through social media as positive for their societal engagement. Almost half of young social media users, and in particular the girls and the younger age group, say that social media makes them *more interested in news* because it enables them to engage with news on a regular basis. Many also state that they *come closer to the world* as social media-mediated news is more tailored to their own and their friends' preferences. A third feel a *sense of participation* as they can comment on news, although a majority claim they never do this.

### Concluding reflections

In this chapter we have presented data that offers some nuances to critical perspectives on young people's news media consumption. The data indicate that Norwegian youths have a relatively high interest in news and a regular and varied engagement with "digital" news consumed in both social and private settings. In addition, news topics are discussed "analogously" with friends and family in daily conversations,<sup>17</sup> while online public discussions are mostly avoided. This indicates that digital news consumption should not be studied in isolation. It is interwoven in daily practices.

The smartphone and social media have become central platforms for accessing news among young people. While a recent Norwegian study found that 55 per cent of youths (16–25 years old) read one or more newspapers online daily,<sup>18</sup> our study shows that social media accessed from smartphones has become a key "mediator" of news. Smartphones and social media play an important role in making news constantly available to young people, even though short, image-rich and elusive news formats seem to dominate. Still, this may trigger an interest in news topics that would otherwise be absent, or may keep the news

interest warm over time through constant exposure.

How “deep” this news involvement is, and how critical and reflected news consumption practices are among young people, we know less about. The study finds that there is some critical thinking in terms of the origin of news sources and of algorithmic filtering, but there is arguably a large knowledge gap concerning, for instance, how algorithms filter and affect content and user perspectives. Overall, however, these findings moderate the idea of “news-avoiding”, “unengaged” and “un-critical” youths. News is now available everywhere in a blur of formats, genres, channels and consumption contexts, with digital and analogue engagements closely intertwined.

This new reality makes it increasingly more difficult to understand how youths engage with, conceptualize and perceive news, and how this shapes their future democratic contribution. In the era of “fake news”, and global social media and aggregator platforms, local and national media will probably benefit from playing the roles of “trusted” and relevant news contributors. They need to understand how young people engage with news in their everyday life (without resorting to aggressive personal data gathering) and identify what triggers their news interests. The research community can support this endeavour. What seems clear in terms of policy is that a comprehensive and more integrated framework for critical media competence should be introduced at an early age, in order to equip young people with the tools to deal with present and future risks and opportunities in this field.

## Notes

1. NOU (2017).
2. SSB (2018).
3. Pew (2012).
4. Elgesem & Olsen (2013); Strömbäck (2015); Moe & Kleiven (2016).
5. Newman & Levy (2014).
6. Slettebø & Kjørstad (2016).
7. The project was financed by *Rådet for anvendt medieforskning* (RAM). The online survey was conducted by Norstat in November/December 2015. We would like to thank Ingrid Kjørstad for her contribution to the study.
8. There was no specification or definition in the questionnaire of “news” so the answers are based on a subjective definition by the respondents. We also see that many news genres are blurred as soft and hard news are mixed in mash-ups, while social media mixes personal, soft and hard news from a range of sources.
9. This implies going constantly *in and out* of news, without allocating a specific time for news consumption set apart from other practices or contexts.

10. Barkhuus & Polichar (2011).
11. Carroll et al. (2002), (2003); Slette-meås & Kjørstad (2016).
12. These new opportunities complicate the identification and measuring of frequencies, spaces and types of news consumption in surveys.
13. cf. also Enjolras et al. (2013).
14. Pariser (2011).
15. Elvestad (2015).
16. Users stating that they agree with this statement “to a large extent”.
17. Elvestad (2015); Huang et al. (2016).
18. SSB (2017).

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## 12. News kids can use – to play with

Stine Liv Johansen

Young children are an often overlooked group of news consumers, in public debate as well as in academic scholarship. In this chapter I will argue for a broadened concept of news, focusing on the everyday media practices of younger children. The news they are using and consuming may often bear only little resemblance to “real” news, as it is relevant mainly for children’s everyday life, their peer cultures and their play practices. Even young children may feel an urge to keep themselves informed in order to be able to engage themselves in peer and play communities.

Children use social media to keep themselves informed and up to date on topics of importance to them. News consumption – including youth news consumption – is most often discussed in relation to issues of participation in democratic processes. But news may also be important on a more everyday level. The concept of news in relation to children’s lives should therefore include not only traditional news genres but also new play practices, formats, remixes etc.

This chapter will present knowledge about, and discuss, young children’s use of media content as news sources valuable for engaging in peer communities and play. This will be done through a specific case, which filled Danish news media (traditional as well as social media platforms) in the summer of 2018. The chapter will show why media platforms like YouTube are important news sources for children

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if they want to stay informed and up to date in order to engage in peer play culture.

### Social media as a news source for children

The article takes its point of departure from the overall question:

*How do social media platforms function as news sources for young children in relation to their peer cultures and play practices?*

Children's use of seemingly silly and disregarded content is important for their access into peer and play communities. Just as adults discuss news at work or with friends and family, it is important for children to obtain knowledge about things of relevance to them. It could be sports, such as football,<sup>1</sup> or it could be knowledge about crazes, memes and gossip in online communities, which function as a pathway and as glue in their social relations.

### The case of #squishygate

The analysis in this chapter will revolve around a particular case that was prevalent on Danish YouTube in the summer of 2018. For about a year, small latex figures in the shape of food and animals in a characteristic anime style, called *squishies*, had been the talk of the town across tween bedrooms and Youtube channels. As a scholar, I was first acquainted with the phenomenon in early 2018, when I had a phone call from a journalist who was covering the craze and wanted me to comment on the fascination. While I was not familiar with squishies at the time, it was still fairly easy for me to see the resemblance to other crazes such as nice-smelling rubbers, fidget spinners and the – at the same time – highly popular slime.

In June 2018, the Danish Agency for Environmental Protection (under the Ministry for Environment and Food) announced that a test of 12 different squishies had shown an unacceptably high level of toxic gases in all of them. Therefore, they were withdrawn from the market in all countries in the EU and consumers were encouraged to either throw them out or return them to the shops where they were bought.

During the following days and weeks, the news regarding this #squishygate spread not only across regular news outlets (with comments from the Minister for Environment and Food, Jakob



Ellemann-Jensen, as well as interviews with retailers, children and parents) but also across children's own news channels, in particular on Youtube, and especially on the channels of those – mostly girls – who had designated all their uploaded videos to unboxing,<sup>2</sup> squeezing and talking about squishies and their sensuous affordances. Hours after the news had broken, they expressed their immediate, intense feelings of sorrow, while at the same time encouraging their followers to express their emotions as well. Later on, some of those who before had named their channels directly after their obsession with squishies (such as Madickens Squishies and Kiwi Squishies) changed either channel names or the content of their videos.

Within a few weeks, new and smaller crazes appeared such as home-made squishies made from foam sponges and scotch tape and ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) videos.<sup>3</sup> On other channels, youtubers would continue to show and squeeze their squishies while arguing that particular brands were not toxic or that they would keep their squishy collection in closed boxes to prevent emission of the unwanted gases from them. This would lead to intense debates in the commentaries, which would in themselves be a relevant subject matter for analysis but falls outside the scope of this chapter.

### News kids can use – for play

Instead, having now introduced the #squishygate case, I will discuss how this serves as an example of relevant news for young children and what this case might tell us about the relationship between content, media platforms and media (prod)users on the one hand and about young children's contemporary play culture on the other.

As mentioned in the introduction, research on young(er) children as consumers of news is scarce. Most scholarship within the field of news consumption among younger age groups is concerned with adolescents and young adults – those age groups that are entering adulthood, including gaining democratic rights such as the right to vote.<sup>4</sup> Some researchers have focused on the influence of social media in relation to young people's news consumption, and point to the fact that news should be understood in a broader sense than just topics related to fields like society, politics, etc. This means that “softer” topics – lifestyle and gossip, for instance – should also be taken into account

when trying to understand the role of news in young people's lives, not to mention the meaning of news in relation to young people's active participation in society.

Following typical patterns in the rise and fall of toy crazes, as they have been seen in relation to, for instance, yo-yos, fidget spinners, tamagotchis, etc., the story of squishies is a story that is being framed by the influence of social media platforms – Youtube and Instagram in particular. In Denmark, around 70 per cent of children aged 7 to 12 use Youtube on a daily basis,<sup>5</sup> many of them spending significant amounts of time watching youtubers display and discuss different artefacts such as toys, make-up and clothes or demonstrating their skills in, for instance, computer games.<sup>6</sup>

This means that the interconnections between media use and children's play culture and practice must be taken into account in the overall understanding of a phenomenon like this. As such, framing #squishygate as an example of news for children is not based on traditional concepts of news consumers as interested in political and societal issues or as active participants in democracy, i.e. as voters. Being an active participant in children's play culture means knowing about relevant play structures, toys, memes and crazes in order to take part in play with others, offline as well as online.

If, in June 2018, you were a squishy fan, you would over a longer period of time have achieved relevant knowledge of different squishy brands, of their textures and density, and of vocabulary used to describe these, just as you would most likely have made your choice of which squishy Youtuber you preferred. Also, many children produce content for Youtube (or other social media platforms) themselves, and if they are interesting, skilled and/or cute enough, they sometimes gain a significant number of followers.

Youtube can be said to have become a primary news source for the age group, as it is their first choice for entertainment as well as for information on topics relevant to them.<sup>7</sup> Schröder (2015) introduced the term “worthwhileness” to grasp the reflections by the users of different news platforms, enabling each individual to choose the platform or format that best suits their needs and aspirations. A recent pilot study by Johansen (2017b), in which 11 children aged 7 to 14 were interviewed about their use of Youtube, suggests that Youtube functions as

the primary content provider and search engine for these children. This means that Youtube as a platform, and not least the specific youtubers themselves, are reference points for them, including in cases such as the one described above in which they need to gain knowledge and guidance in relation to their own practice.

Schröder's "worthwhileness" term encompasses seven aspects<sup>8</sup> of which three in particular seem relevant in this context. Youtube as a news medium for orientation in relation to #squishygate is particularly significant in relation to: 1) public connection – meaning "any news content that helps maintain relations to one's networks and the wider society";<sup>9</sup> 2) normative pressure, that is Youtube being the preferred media platform among the age group as such; and 3) participatory potential. In this case the *participatory potential* refers to the general view among the children I have interviewed<sup>10</sup> that they have a "say" in relation to the content on their favourite youtubers' channels.

### News kids can use

The case of #squishygate has been discussed above in relation to theories of play on the one hand and media use – in this case use of news in the broadest sense – in children's everyday life on the other. What distinguishes this particular case from other media events circulating in children's own media-related networks is the fact that the story of the withdrawal of toxic rubber toys actually made it to the headlines of traditional news media, involving governmental institutions and thereby also hitting the news menu of many parents and other adults. Still, most of them did not understand the massive fuss it caused, the tears shed on camera and the immense frustration that was expressed in commentaries below the videos.

From an analytical viewpoint, though, this particular case is a highly relevant example of the type of news content that is important to children, as it highlights similar aspects of news consumption (referring to Schröder's notion of worthwhileness) as is seen in relation to adults. For children, relevant content providers and platforms are chosen in order to stay updated and able to make relevant choices in their lives, in this case related to whether or not they should throw away or keep their squishy collection. And in doing so, they involve themselves in communities that to them are important – online as well as offline.

The case of the withdrawal and banning of seemingly silly toy figures could function as a relevant example to broaden traditional notions and understandings of children's participation in culture and society. As described above, it shows how younger children actually take on the role of active participants in their own lives, and how much they are willing to involve themselves if only the subject matter of news, as well as the communities in which news is used, is relevant to them. This should be acknowledged and included in policies regarding media literacy, even for very young children, in order to help children and young people form supportive, democratic and creative communities, including in online settings.

### Notes

1. As described in Johansen (2017a).
2. Marsh (2016).
3. For an introduction to this particular genre, see Breth Klausen and Have (forthcoming).
4. Examples of this can be found, for instance, in Kobbernagel et al. (2015), Svenningson (2015) and Schofield Clark & Marchi (2017).
5. DR Media Development (2016).
6. Johansen (2017b).
7. *ibid.*
8. Schrøder (2015 p. 63).
9. *ibid.*
10. In Johansen (2017b).

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### News articles etc. about #squishygate

UltraNyt: <https://www.dr.dk/ultra/ultranyt/butikker-fjerner-squishies-fra-hylderne>.

DR nyheder: <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/ekspert-squishies-skal-ud-af-boer-neaerelset>.

Several videos are available on Youtube (search for “squishies er ulovlige”). This includes illegal copies and remixes of the video by *Madickens Squishies* in which she shows her immediate response to the news. She later took the video down and deleted her channel. She now continues creating content as *Madickens anden verden*.



## 13. The taste for news

### Class shaping young people's news use in Sweden

Johan Lindell

Class matters in terms of the extent to which young people find news relevant and interesting, which news genres they prefer and how much news they consume. When the ability, inclination and motivation to take part in news and journalism are set by people's class positions we are faced with a pressing democratic problem. Rather than a collective good, journalism and news have become markers of social status and distinction. In this chapter I summarize key findings from two recent publications dealing with the relationship between class and news consumption: *Smaken för nyheter – Klasskillnader i det digitala medielandskapet* (*The taste for news – Class differences in digital media landscape*) and *Distinction* recapped: Digital news repertoires in the class structure.<sup>1</sup>

Class can be defined as a position in a social hierarchy that is set by an individual's access to resources that in different ways improve chances and opportunities in life.<sup>2</sup> Access to economic means is one such resource. Between the 1980s and the present day, Sweden was the OECD country wherein the gap between the rich and the poor increased fastest.<sup>3</sup> In a recent book, sociologist Göran Therborn describes the distribution of economic capital between the richest and the urban middle classes as being equivalent to the gap that existed between the aristocracy and the urban craftsmen and merchants in 17<sup>th</sup> century England.<sup>4</sup>

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Educational, or cultural, capital is another important resource for one's opportunities in life. While it is true that the Swedish university system expanded greatly during the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century – creating the “mass university” – one's social background still matters in terms of the extent to which people pursue an education at a Swedish university.<sup>5</sup> Class, in the form of one's family background and an internalized and pre-reflexive sense of what one can and should do, plays a crucial role when prospective students decide on which topic and at which school or university they should study.<sup>6</sup>

Resources – both cultural and economic – are thus unevenly distributed in Swedish society. The effects of a family's and an individual's access to both economic and cultural capital tend to be manifested in their lifestyles, tastes, consumption patterns and values.<sup>7</sup> In other words, class can be observed in how different people manoeuvre in the social world, in their tastes, practices and, not least, in their news habits.

Another major transformation took place during roughly the same period. Since the 1980s the supply of mediated information and entertainment has exploded.<sup>8</sup> We have moved from a low-choice media environment wherein a significant proportion of the Swedish population shared the same media diet. The main components of this diet were broadcast public service news complemented with a subscription to a local daily newspaper. Globalization, digitalization and deregulation of the media, and the democratization of the internet in the 1990s, have come to mean that today's citizens are forced to tailor their media diets from a vast supply of providers of, for instance, news.

Given that people's choices, tastes and lifestyles tend to reflect their class, we have reasons to believe that news consumption in contemporary Sweden is connected to social hierarchy and status. Next, I present the main findings from interviews with over 50 young men and women from different class positions who have grown up in a high-choice media environment in an increasingly unequal Swedish society. The purpose of the interviews was to get young people that share the same class position to discuss news habits and preferences so as to gain insights into how class forms news diets and attitudes towards journalism. We begin by looking at how the news cultures within different types of homes and schools give rise to different orientations in the news landscape. This is followed by a study of class differences in terms of



how the different classes manoeuvre among news. The closing section summarizes the findings and suggests general principles for policy.

### Socialization into different news diets

Children develop their media habits in their formative years, at home and in school. For different social classes, these milieus tend to be vastly different when it comes to their capacity to constitute cultures that promote orientations in the news landscape. The interviews with the upper secondary pupils that I conducted for the studies that this chapter builds upon suggest that the middle classes (who are defined by their relatively high volumes of cultural and economic resources) are likely to be exposed to news on a regular basis. They learn the value of news from their peers, parents and teachers. In the news-savvy middle-class homes, and in the university preparatory schools wherein middle classes are over-represented, young people cultivate the sense that the news is “for them” and that they are expected to “have an opinion” on current affairs. In both subtle and explicit ways they learn that they “have a voice” and that their views matter.

Homes lacking access to cultural capital and where the parents hold working-class jobs, in contrast, constitute “free zones”<sup>9</sup> that are largely detached from the norms and the demands put forth by the schools and their representatives. Here, spare time is spent on the things that “one enjoys”, which tends to not include reading, listening or watching the news.<sup>10</sup> The vocational programmes, where children from the working classes are over-represented, are far from thriving news cultures wherein students become “one” with current affairs. For these young people discussions about the news and politics are largely absent, both in school and at home. One interviewee recalls that he “can only talk about the sports news” with his dad. The middle-class respondents, on the other hand, describe how their parents provide them with news stories that they may find interesting, and that their teachers encourage them to engage with the news on a weekly, if not daily, basis. These patterns align with quantitative research showing that well-educated parents are more likely to consume and talk about news at home and, in effect, that the middle classes become more news-savvy than the working classes.<sup>11</sup> We may conclude that young people are exposed to vastly different news cultures on an everyday

basis – and that these cultures are class-specific. We now turn to the outcomes of this differentiation.

### Class-based choices and values in the news landscape

Although the middle classes tend to consume more news than the working classes, news consumption levels are still comparatively high in Sweden.<sup>12</sup> However, class does not only matter in terms of the extent to which people in different social positions consume news overall. The notions that news is worth spending time on, that it is interesting and relevant, is, for instance, more widespread in the middle classes than in the working class. Young men and women in the middle classes approach news as an integral part of their daily activities – they feel they need the news to know “where they stand” and to experience a sense of attachment to the wider society. People in less well-off segments of the population, especially those who lack cultural capital, are more likely to feel that the news is “not for us” and that it is up to “other people” to partake in politics and public matters. The sense of being up to date on current affairs and being endowed with a “general knowledge” (cf. “allmänbildning”) follows similar patterns, where the middle classes feel knowledgeable and where the working classes degrade themselves with sentiments such as “I don’t know anything” or “the teachers sometimes ask us to list weekly current affairs – that list is usually not very long [laughter]”.

Furthermore, the reported interest in news on economics, politics, culture and the wider world – what is sometimes referred to as “hard” or “real” news – is more common in the middle classes, especially the fraction of the middle class that is particularly rich in cultural capital. Young people in this fraction tend to distance themselves from “boring” and “non-relevant” local news, which, in their view, describes how “somebody opened a bakery” or “that some lady finally made it out of bed”. Instead they value more cosmopolitan, world news. In diametrical opposition to such a news diet, the young people in the working class prefer local news since it relates to them on a personal level and since they “don’t gain anything by reading about China”. Overall, the “softer” news genres, such as celebrity news, sports and news about crime and accidents taking place in the vicinity, are more commonly preferred in segments that are less well off. These genres are, in turn, looked down

upon by the cultural fractions of the middle classes who reject them as “silly” or “pointless”.

News preferences follow social hierarchies and enable groups in different positions in society to mobilize the taste for news in order to draw symbolic boundaries toward other classes. This was further evident when the young participants in the study were asked to describe the news diets of *other classes*.

It is not uncommon for the middle classes to describe the working class as uninterested, unmotivated and unable to relate to news in productive ways. Discussions about news consumption become platforms upon which the classes describe themselves as morally superior/inferior to other classes. In the eyes of middle-class respondents the working class is lazy, interested in cars and beer rather than news, and for the most part concerned only with their immediate, local, surrounding. In turn, the working-class respondents describe their middle-class peers as “snobbish know-it-alls” who consume “too much” news, and that they have “never missed a class in school”. News consumption is thus embedded in the wider, “legitimate” and institutionalized, culture, which includes the “correct” behaviour in terms of lifestyle choices and attitudes towards the educational system. These kinds of boundary drawings also take place between different fractions of the middle class, where those whose capital composition is mainly constituted by economic capital tend to view themselves as “too busy” to consume as much news as the “cultural elites”.

### A democratic problem and some general guidelines for policy

This chapter has only glanced at some of the results presented, at length, elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> We have, however, seen that:

- News consumption and news preferences are connected to class. Access to cultural capital is especially important when it comes to embracing the socially recognized and valued news culture.
- The ability to manoeuvre in the media landscape in ways that correspond to society’s expectations (that news is interesting and worthwhile, to value knowledge on current affairs and to be able to “produce an opinion”) is shaped in middle-class domains. The

lack of news presence in the working-class home and in vocational programmes implies that young people in these positions to a small extent incorporate news orientations and diets that correspond to society's expectations.

- The norms surrounding news and journalism (what is “good” and “correct” and “bad” and “incorrect”) enable classes to draw boundaries between each other and to legitimate existing class discrepancies.

These results break with the widespread notion that the news constitutes a “common good” that binds society together, and that Sweden is a society largely ridden with inequality and class differences in terms of media use.<sup>14</sup> Fundamental structural transformations of Swedish society, most notably the increasing inequality and the explosion in the supply of mediated information, suggest that we rethink the role of news and journalism in our society. In fact, similar patterns regarding class-based news consumption among young people have also been unearthed in Denmark and Norway.<sup>15</sup> While there is no doubt that news *can* and *should* be a collective good, we have seen here that it works as a marker of social status and distinction. Should we continue down this line we risk facing the formation of distinct “social islands” – a clustering and subsequent isolation of people who share conditions of existence, media diets and world views, political orientations and lifestyles.<sup>16</sup> Such a development could exacerbate the rate at which inequality is growing in Sweden. Political endeavours setting out to avert this development should focus upon three interrelated points of departure: 1) decreasing the social inequality that has grown at an unprecedented rate over the last few decades; 2) increasing media literacy across the Swedish educational system; and 3) to whatever extent possible, decreasing middle-class bias in news media, and in the supply of mediated information and entertainment at large.

#### Notes

1. Lindell (2018a, 2018b).
2. Bourdieu (1986).
3. OECD (2015).
4. Therborn (2018, p. 101).
5. Öhlin (2010).
6. Börjesson (2016).

7. Bourdieu (1984).
8. Van Aelst et al. (2017).
9. Danielsson (2014).
10. Willis (1977).
11. York and Scholl (2015).
12. Andersson (2018).
13. Lindell (2018a, 2018b).
14. Syvertsen et al. (2014).
15. Hovden and Moe (2017); Møller Hartley (2018).
16. Lindell and Hovden (2018).

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# 14. A generation divided

## (Dis)engagement towards news among Danish youth

Jacob Ørmen

Public commentators often worry about the seemingly disengaged youth of today. This is also the case in Denmark, where young people are turning away from traditional sources of news. However, research indicates that the youth of today are keeping up with news – just in new ways and through different media compared to previous generations. There is a substantiated concern, nonetheless, about whether this picture covers the Danish youth as a whole or only the most interested individuals. In fact, research indicates that youngsters are especially polarized in their news habits – indications of a generation divided. In this chapter, I outline the overall trends in news consumption among young Danes with a particular focus on algorithmic media and the particularity – or generality – of the Danish case in relation to the other Nordic countries.

Before we can characterize media use patterns for the young, which is the purpose of this chapter, we have to delineate this group from older generations and establish baseline trends in their news habits. For the present purpose, the Danish youth encompasses anyone from the early teenage years up to 30 years old – the formative years of adolescence and early adulthood. Naturally, there are vast differences in how a 13-year-old and a 30-year-old use media, but in comparison to older generations they do share significant similarities.

When it comes to media use trends, the issue is more complicated. According to one extensive report, made by the media research section

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at the Danish public service broadcaster DR, about 90 per cent of people below 30 years of age consume news on a daily basis (compared to 95% for the full population).<sup>1</sup> About two-thirds of them get news on social media followed by news websites (60%) while TV, radio and print have less than 40 per cent each. Thus, digital media, and in particular social network sites, form the core of their news repertoires. For older generations, TV, radio and print take precedence. This suggests that online has displaced traditional media for youngsters, but also that they do keep up with news on a regular basis.

Since these statistics rely on a survey questionnaire, it is difficult to know how respondents define “news” and to what extent respondents answer accurately and reliably. In comparison, the official Danish internet tracking statistics (*Dansk Online Index*) finds that only 42 per cent of people in the age group in question visit any one of the Danish news websites on a daily basis.<sup>2</sup> We currently have no reliable measure of social media news use, but it is likely to be higher as services such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat play vital roles in the media diet for the Danish youth. Thus, we are left somewhat in the dark in terms of patterns of usage of online services, and social network sites are hard to pin down in surveys or tracking data.

Measurement issues aside, these figures hide a noteworthy development: youngsters are divided in their news repertoire. A recent study shows that Danish 18- to 30-year-olds are split almost perfectly between those that consume a high degree of news (from new as well as legacy media) and those that only get news through social encounters (on social media or in physical conversations) or rarely pay attention to news at all.<sup>3</sup> This split roughly follows educational background (those with lower education being more likely to encounter news solely in social circumstances). In contrast, older generations tend to be highly dependent on one or a few media, TV in particular, which constitute the core of their news repertoire. Thus, the dominant trend in the news use of the young is that there is no unified trend, but instead indications of great fragmentation across socio-demographic lines.

The most evident development is the rise of incidental news exposure.<sup>4</sup> As many youngsters do not seek out news to the same extent as older generations, they are more reliant on their social peers and the infrastructure of social media to encounter news incidentally. A young



Dane in her early 20s epitomizes the situation: “I do not seek out news directly. If it is relevant enough, news will find me.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, to understand the news habits of the young we need to appreciate the impact of online services on media use and social interaction.

### The impact of algorithmic media

In recent years, we have witnessed the rise of algorithmic media on the internet. Media can be said to be algorithmic when computer programs play a decisive role in organizing and displaying information to users (e.g. as a news feed, search result or recommendation list).<sup>6</sup> Thus, in contrast to traditional media, it is not humans but computer algorithms that edit or curate the content to be presented for users. Social network sites, messaging applications, search engines and video streaming services constitute key algorithmic media. These media play decisive roles in how Danes in general, and young people in particular, access information and communicate with others on the internet.

The public discourse has centred on the algorithmic dimension of these new online services. Research has, however, shown that the impact of algorithmic media, particularly on social network sites, is just as much about the social dimension. For instance, a study of the Facebook newsfeed found that a person’s social connections (their “friends”) matter more in terms of what they see than the ranking algorithm; if no one share news, news is not shown on Facebook.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, tests reveal that the algorithms on Google Search tend to give people roughly similar results for the same search terms – in contrast to the claims of the “filter bubble” hypothesis – but that people do not search for the same things.<sup>8</sup> Thus, if people do not search for news-related topics, news is not shown in Google. The same phenomena arguably exist for Youtube, Twitter and other forms of algorithmically guided and socially curated media on the internet.

Thus, it is not necessarily the case that the young are actively avoiding news (purposeful disengagement) but rather that they tend to be left out due to social circumstances (incidental disengagement). It is likely that the more individualistic forms of media use lead to greater information inequality within the group of youngsters currently reaching adulthood. As they are not necessarily socialized into news as part of family life in the same manner as previous generations – sharing

the newspaper at breakfast or watching the evening news broadcast at dinnertime – they are more dependent on their family, friends and teachers to introduce them to news directly. This means that youngsters coming from poorer socio-economic backgrounds with similar peers are less likely to encounter news incidentally. Research has shown that it is crucial to form good habits in terms of following news in younger years if people are going to keep these habits up later in life.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the social stratification of the young plays a critical role in understanding both whether people seek out news on their own and whether they get news through social encounters offline as well as online.

### Initiatives to engage the young

There have been some initiatives in Denmark targeting this youngest generation. Two of the national newspapers, *Weekendavisen* and *Politiken*, publish a separate section for children and teenagers. As newspaper subscription is heavily skewed toward the more educated, it is unlikely that these initiatives will reach the underserved parts of the young population particularly well. The most promising initiative is a news programme (Ultra News, DR) directed at primary school children. It is distributed both as broadcast (on TV, until 2020) and on demand (on DR's website, app and Youtube channel). The programme relies on a reporting style that mimics social media and blogging practices, integrating graphics and language, and producing features that many youngsters are familiar with from their everyday media habits. The reporters also seek to engage their users on Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook, often using the commentary tracks to sample opinions on subjects and crowdsource ideas for stories to cover. On the Youtube channel, the news programme is presented in a flow of content – mimicking elements from the traditional TV flow structure<sup>10</sup> – that can serve to guide users to encounter news when browsing around on Youtube or scrolling through their social media feeds. Although the attempt is impressive and extensive, there are currently little data on how well DR Ultra manages to reach the less engaged.

### From Denmark to the Nordic countries

The tendencies observed for Denmark largely prevail for the other Nordic countries. A large-scale study of generational trends from

Sweden confirms the exceptional heterogeneity of young news users compared with previous generations.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, a Norwegian study notices the split between highly engaged and disengaged news users as a key differentiator among young adults.<sup>12</sup> One area where news use in Denmark diverges from the other Nordic countries is in the willingness to pay for news. While Norwegians, Swedes and Finns are among the most willing to pay for news in the world, Danes are much more reluctant.<sup>13</sup> It is unclear what the picture is like for the youngest parts of the population in all of these countries, but it is likely that the difference remains. Whether this is the result of different payment models, news supply or cultural norms is not clear at the moment. Yet, all in all, the differences between the Nordic countries are dwarfed by the similarities. Compared to most other places, young people in the Nordic countries tend to be well informed and interested in issues in the news.<sup>14</sup> The question is, then, whether this Nordic exceptionalism will remain or be subsumed by global trends in young people's media consumption.

### Concluding discussion

In contrast to the often lamented view, there is little basis to say that the young generation is avoiding news and disengaging with society at large. In contrast, many youngsters keep up through both old and new media. What is concerning, however, is the apparent divide between these “news seekers” and the significant share of young people that rarely seek out news on their own. The key to understanding how young people today engage with, or disengage from, news is to appreciate the fundamental shift in media they use in daily life compared with their parents – and grandparents. While earlier generations got news from human-curated print or broadcast media (“mass media”), the young rely heavily on algorithmically curated media on the internet. This will likely have two major consequences for news use among the young. First of all, algorithmic media exacerbate social differences as only those with social connections that share and comment on news will encounter news in this way. Secondly, the technological infrastructure of these media is dependent on automated steps rather than editorial decision-making. This marks a significant shift in the gatekeeping power traditionally held by the press. Far from being neutral innovations, the

algorithms underpinning search engines and social network services are encoded with preconceived notions about relevance, importance and topicality. These preconceptions lead to some issues, notably of race and ethnicity, being represented poorly,<sup>15</sup> and others achieving a high level of visibility as they are circulated rapidly on the internet.<sup>16</sup> If large parts of the population, young and old, start to get news primarily from algorithmically curated media, then the information landscape will depend heavily on the haphazard decisions of computer programmers located in the US or Asia. Thus, both social and technological issues related to algorithmic media will likely increase the gap between those that keep up and those that are left behind. It is currently uncertain whether the current news options for young people in Denmark (and abroad) will enable the disenfranchised youngsters to catch up.

### Notes

1. DR Medieforskning (2018).
2. Calculations done by the author in Instar Analytics (based on May 2018).
3. Ørmen (2016).
4. Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi (2017).
5. Interview transcript, Ørmen (2016).
6. Napoli (2014).
7. Bakshy, Messing & Adamic (2015).
8. Pariser (2012); Dutton et al. (2017).
9. Shehata (2016).
10. Williams (1974).
11. Westlund & Bjur (2014).
12. Hovden & Moe (2017).
13. Newman et al. (2018).
14. Curran et al. (2009).
15. Umoja Noble (2018).
16. Ørmen (2015).

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## 15. To share or not to share?

### News practices in the media life of Swedish youths

Yvonne Andersson

During the last decade both news consumption and private communication have undergone dramatic change. With the advent of digital social media, news is omnipresent and may be shared and commented on by any media user. At the same time, life online and offline flow into each other, not least for children and youngsters growing up in this media-ubiquitous era. This entails a context collapse where news use and identity formation are entangled in partly new ways. This chapter discusses the context collapse in the media life of Swedish youths, with a specific focus on their notification of news and hesitation to share and comment on news.

Studying children and adolescents today inevitably means studying media use. Media are ubiquitous in the Nordic and Baltic regions (as in many other parts of the world) and those growing up in this mediatized landscape will be influenced by it. Some scholars, such as professor of psychology Jean M. Twenge, even suggest that the generation growing up between 1995 and 2012 could be named after the media devices that characterized their formative years: iGen, characterized by the iPhone.<sup>1</sup> Other scholars resist that kind of homogenization, pointing at both individual and structural differences between people, but still insist on the pervasiveness of media in social life, and in human existence.<sup>2</sup> A frequently cited thesis by Professor Mark Deuze is that our lives nowadays are “lived *in*, rather than *with*, media”. We are living

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a *media life*,<sup>3</sup> suggesting that the world we inhabit – and are deeply immersed in – is characterized by ubiquitous media, which is why our lived reality cannot be experienced or described separate from media. This is probably particularly true for youngsters, who hardly know what it's like to live without the internet, smartphones and other digital devices since they have been there from the day they were born. Some children play *in* media, do their homework, organize their social relations, explore and develop their own identities, and encounter the world in digital media.<sup>4</sup> Among homework, friends, etc. online they will also encounter news.<sup>5</sup>

As media have become omnipresent, so have news and journalism. Along with the development of web 2.0<sup>6</sup> the flows of information have fundamentally changed from an era of broadcast mass media to an era of non-linear, interactive and networked media where the production, dissemination and consumption of news and information are in the hands of the many. News and journalism can be found on multiple platforms, in multiple formats – they are ambient.<sup>7</sup> This development started more than a decade ago but it has been reinforced by the advent of portable digital media devices, e.g. smartphones, to such an extent that a study by Pew Internet claims that people's relationship with news has been transformed into “portable, personalized and participatory”, and that news has become “a shared social experience”.<sup>8</sup> Of course, news has always been portable, personalized and participatory: one could easily carry around a newspaper, choose what newspaper and articles to read, and discuss it with friends and fellow citizens. So this transformation is rather a difference in degree, but by dint of digital devices news has become spreadable and social in partly new ways.<sup>9</sup> News has become part of media life.<sup>10</sup> The question here is: What does it mean that news has become ambient, spreadable and social in the media life of Swedish young people? It might entail a lot, but the focus for the discussion here is on the consequences, firstly, for their notification of news and, secondly, for their sharing and commenting on news.

This chapter is based on a qualitative case study carried out in Sweden in 2017–2018. The investigation shows that some Swedish youths hesitate to share news online, and it will be argued that one reason for this is that digital news-sharing simultaneously shares information



about yourself, your relationship with others and your social position. The question about sharing a news item or not is therefore also a question about what one wants to communicate about oneself, and if it's worth taking the risk to be misunderstood or misinterpreted. It will then be suggested that research, media politics and industry with an interest in news, children and youngsters should consider these precarious aspects of news practices if we want to fully understand what hinders or promotes digital civic engagement among young people in an era where life is lived *in* media.

### Methods and material

The empirical material in this study consists of focus group interviews and news diaries written by Swedish teenagers. In June 2017, the Swedish Media Council (*Statens medieråd*) contacted several primary schools and upper secondary schools across the country with an invitation to take part in a study about the use of news among seventh graders and students in the second or third year in upper secondary school. In total, four classes in the seventh grade and five in upper secondary school volunteered for the study and accomplished it during the winter of 2017–2018. The schools are located in central Stockholm and Malmö, in Visby (isle of Gotland) and in a borough a few kilometres outside Örebro. There are substantial social differences between some of the schools, as well as between students on programmes that prepare them for higher education, and students on vocational programmes. This means that there are also many differences in their news media use – between groups and between individuals – that cannot be accounted for in this article, which should be borne in mind while reading. As it is a qualitative case study, the results are obviously not generalizable. It should also be noted that Sweden, in comparative studies, has been described as a media welfare state because of a generally high media access in the population, and the absence of significant class differences in terms of media habits.<sup>11</sup> Sweden has a strong public service broadcasting sector and a long tradition of local newspapers with a high reach among the population. Thus, news during the pre-digital era was quite evenly distributed. This is changing now as the reach of news provided by public services and the local press is diminishing, especially among adolescents and young adults, and some scholars

suggest that we have now entered an era where news consumption in Sweden is distinguished by class.<sup>12</sup>

### Ambient news use

Media, especially digital media, permeate modern societies and make news and journalism available at any time and any place. Research has shown that young people today mostly follow news on the internet, especially via their smartphones and social media such as Facebook, and on television.<sup>13</sup> The students in our investigation are no different. The mobile phone is the primary device in their lives and therefore key for their news consumption. Several informants describe “checking cycles”<sup>14</sup> where they go through their favourite apps – Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, *Aftonbladet* (Swedish daily newspaper), etc. – to stay updated on what’s going on in the world and in their personal life. For some of our informants these digital checking cycles are supplemented with news programmes on the television, or newspapers. The key factor for these extended checking cycles seems to be the parents’ news habits and influence. In particular, family habits, such as watching television news while having breakfast or dinner, or listening to the radio in the car, are mentioned by some students as being important for their news consumption. Thus, socialization matters.<sup>15</sup>

As digital devices today, e.g. the smartphone, promote individual use and personalized modes of application, news consumption on the internet is probably less informed by parents’ news habits and influenced more by algorithms and friends’ sharing of news on social media.<sup>16</sup> Research has described this new encounter with news on social media as incidental, in contrast to a deliberate, established news practice.<sup>17</sup> Traditionally, news consumption has been somewhat habitual, but with the advent of digital social media one might bump into news while checking a friend’s update on Facebook, searching for a celebrity on Instagram, etc. News consumption today may therefore be understood as both deliberate and incidental.<sup>18</sup> But this omnipresence and unpredictability of news might also imply that news passes by unnoticed, or unheeded; news is there but one does not necessarily notice it or reflect on it. In our interviews some students told us that they found it difficult to diarize their news use (as we had asked them to do) as much passes by unrecognized in the constant flow of information:

It was quite difficult to describe ... you know, to remember, because you get a lot of information unconsciously, stuff you don't recognize like "okay, here is a new news item". (Girl, 17)

It was difficult to rattle off "here is my news sources" because one hardly thinks about it, but if someone mentions a news item I remember that I've heard about it, but I don't remember where I have heard it. (Boy, 13)

There is probably a lot of news consumption that goes under the radar, so to speak. News is unavoidable, as it is ambient, but we don't know how much "unnoticed", or unconscious, news consumption it contributes to, or what impact it has on users' knowledge. From a media literacy perspective, this may be a challenge: to be observant about something that passes by unnoticed is a contradiction in terms.

### To share and comment ...

Social network sites have been theorized as networked public spheres, spaces where the audience may share, discuss and contribute to the news media landscape in qualitatively new ways.<sup>19</sup> An investigation by the Pew Research Center in 2010 showed that 37 per cent of American internet users had contributed to the creation of news, commented about it or disseminated it via social media sites.<sup>20</sup> Other studies have shown that personal recommendations on social media could increase the audience reach of news sources, or suggested that adolescents prefer news recommended and commented on by friends, stressing the importance of the personal, social aspects of news consumption.<sup>21</sup> Against this background we expected that sharing news with friends via social media sites, e.g. Facebook or Instagram, would be a quite common news practice among our informants, but we were proved wrong. They do understand and describe news use as a social activity, but not necessarily as a social activity *online*. Instead, they emphasize the social context and the sociability of news *offline*:

*Interviewer:* So, when, or how, would you say that news appears in your everyday life?

Well, I would say in social settings.

*Interviewer:* How come? Do you mean when you talk to people or ...?

Yes. And in the evening, when you come together with your family and so on. (Girl, 17)

When asked about sharing news many students spontaneously described verbal sharing of news; in other words, talking to someone – parents, teachers or friends – about something that has happened in the world. As mentioned above, many of our informants recount parents' news habits as important for their own news consumption – not least family gatherings for dinner in front of the TV, or breakfast with the radio turned on, and that's where some "sharing" takes place. Another kind of sharing between friends (or relatives) is when they are together, and one shows their telephone to their mates to share a post with them, i.e. a kind of visual sharing or analogue sharing of digital content. "Sharing", according to our informants, thus might be understood as digital or verbal spreading, or as visually displaying. When it comes to the digital spreading of news, most students told us that they never, or seldom, do that. And if they do, the post is mostly sent exclusively to one person, or a group of close friends, either because the item is of highly personal relevance to the recipients or it's something that will give them a good laugh:

Well ... Sometimes I talk to my parents, such as: "Have you heard about this!" You know, and ... sometimes I add a link and post it as a personal message on Instagram, but then it's mostly fail videos or other funny things. Not hard news. (Boy, 13)

You can use news to make a joke. If you are updated on the latest news and know what's appropriate in the context ... Well, then you can make a smart joke. And those who appreciate it may think that you are clever and witty. (Boy, 17)

... or not share and comment?

So, posts that might be important for the recipient and posts that are amusing may be spread, but otherwise our informants hesitate to share news. According to our interviews, there are at least five reasons for this hesitation. Firstly, news is not interesting enough. There's a lot going on in life when you're a teenager and sharing or commenting on the latest news is not necessarily at the top of the priority list. Secondly, some of the students are afraid of being attacked, threatened, flamed or getting into conflict with others:<sup>22</sup>

Sharing and commenting may cause ... disputes, and you get into a fight. (Boy, 17)

Yes, there is a war going on in the comment sections. (Boy, 17)

Well, if you have ... You may feel a bit worried that someone will correct you, that you are wrong about something and people will correct you. Or, if you write about something and somebody has a totally different opinion and starts hating and flaming you. I cannot cope with it ... And then, maybe a friend of yours finds it and starts arguing against you and then you may end up in trouble. (Girl, 13)

No, even if I want to, I'm afraid of saying something wrong or ... If you say something wrong, someone may seek you out and come to your home and say: "We have recognized what you wrote on that page and we want to talk to you about it." Or something like that. (Boy, 13)

Thirdly, some of the students think that commenting online is insignificant, a waste of time, because nobody really takes the commentary sections seriously.<sup>23</sup> Fourthly, some are afraid of not having enough knowledge to comment and that they will appear ignorant. Fifthly, and lastly, there seems to be a common understanding among many of our informants that those who share and comment online are rather silly – and if so, you don't want to be associated with them.

Well, as they [classmates] have already said, I don't comment but when I'm bored I tend to read comments because it's funny. (Girl, 17)

[Everybody laughs.]

You read comments because it's hilarious, because most ... Most of the commentators are, you might say, not the sharpest tool in the shed, you know. (Boy, 17)

Yes, in my opinion there's a lot of stupid people commenting [everybody laughs], a lot of dickheads comment, so then if *you* comment and somebody you know finds out, then you might be regarded as a moron. If you have an opinion about something and write it on Facebook people might just "What the fuck?!" So, I think you better keep that to yourself. (Boy, 17)

It is generally held that those who comment on news sites ... An image of those who comment, and you don't want to have that public image, you might say. (Boy, 17)

For children and youngsters growing up today, offline and online flow into each other. Social relations, affiliation, affinity, belonging and identity formation are crucial for adolescents taking part in digital media. And as the quotes above demonstrate, these teens are very aware that what you post online are statements – not just statements about public issues, but about yourself. Sharing and discussing news and public issues face to face with people you trust might be seen as less risky than doing it on social media, where it might be noticed and/or spread to people other than those intended. A digital statement is a double risk in that it may lead to flaming, and conflicts with both people you know and people you don't know, but it might also risk the public persona and identity that are under construction. Commenting on and sharing a news article, or not, is a form of civic engagement but it's also personal impression management.<sup>24</sup> This entanglement of news consumption and identity formation has emerged quite recently with the advent of social media. There are reasons to believe that as long as news was used exclusively in offline contexts the association between news consumption and identity was less pronounced, and therefore a less relevant aspect to consider in research, and in the public debate on youth and news. Thus, when youngsters partly live their lives *in* media, news engagement – or the lack of news engagement – is not merely contingent on knowledge and skills that may be improved by education, e.g. media literacy. Maybe it's time to consider this now, along with other elements, e.g. social demographics, to enrich our understanding of civic online engagement among young people.

#### Noter

1. Twenge (2017).
2. Cf. Westlund & Bjur (2014); Westlund & Weibull (2013).
3. Deuze (2011, p. 138).
4. This is not to say that children have given up on life offline, or that all children use digital media in the same way (cf. Westlund & Bjur, 2014). But most children and youngsters in Sweden use digital media (see, e.g., Swedish Media Council (2017)).
5. Cf. Boczkowski et al. (2017).
6. There is no precise definition of the term “web 2.0” as it describes a combination of technical innovations and new modes of application. One decisive difference

- between web 2.0 and its predecessor is the capabilities in terms of interaction and content creation. Any participant on web 2.0 may be a creator, not just a receiver or audience. Web 2.0 is strongly associated with the development of social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Wikipedia (Cormode & Krishnamurthy 2008).
7. Hermida (2010).
  8. Purcell et al. (2010, p. 2).
  9. Jenkins, Ford & Green (2013).
  10. Deuze (2011).
  11. Syvertsen et al. (2014).
  12. Lindell & Hovden (2017); Ohlsson, Lindell & Arkhede (2016).
  13. Swedish Media Council (2017); Nordicom (2018); Wadbring, Weibull & Facht (2016); Sletteameaås & Kjørstad (2016).
  14. Costera Meijer & Kormelink (2014).
  15. Lozanovski & Wadbring (2013); York & Scholl (2015); Shehata (2016); Lindell & Hovden (2017).
  16. Cf. Chapter 14 by Ørmen in this book.
  17. Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matissi (2017); Hermida et al. (2012); Beam et al. (2017); Williamson et al. (2012).
  18. Swart, Peters & Broersma (2016); Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage (2018); Jervelycke Belfrage, Chapter 12 in this book.
  19. Hermida et al. (2012).
  20. Purcell et al. (2010).
  21. Marchi (2012); Hermida et al. (2012); Costera Meijer (2007); Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage (2018); Madden, Lenhart & Fontaine (2017).
  22. Cf. Sveningsson (2014).
  23. Cf. Van Cauwenberge, d'Haensens & Beentjes (2013); Sveningsson (2015).
  24. Cf. Picone (2011); Costera Meijer & Kormelink (2014).

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Ongoing digitalization has fundamentally transformed the entire media landscape, not least the domain of news. The blurring of previously sharp distinctions between production, distribution and consumption have challenged the established news industry and brought into question long-held assumptions of what journalism is or should be, who is a journalist and how we define, consume and use “news”. This anthology aims to shed light on the implications of these transformations for young people in the Nordic and Baltic countries. It focuses on three themes: youth participating in news and information production; news production by established media organizations and novel information providers aimed at children and youth; news use among youth. Taken together, the chapters illustrate the complexity of news use among youth and offer some rather different examples of strategies that news organizations might consider for reaching young people with news – or involving them in the production of news. Furthermore, the book might serve as a basis for reflecting on the urgent, but cumbersome, area of media and information literacy in these media saturated times.

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*Youth and News in a Digital Media Environment* consists of contributions from Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Estonia, written by scholars and people working in the media industry. The target audience of this book is students, professionals and researchers working in the field of journalism, media and communication studies, children and youth studies, media and information literacy and digital civic literacy. The book is edited by Yvonne Andersson and Ulf Dalquist at the Swedish Media Council and Jonas Ohlsson at Nordicom. It has been funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

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