Contents

1  Ester Appelgren
Data Journalists Using Facebook. A Study of a Resource Group Created by Journalists, for Journalists

15  Janne Seppänen & Juha Herkman
Aporetic Apparatus. Epistemological Transformations of the Camera

29  Helle Strandgaard Jensen
Parent-Pressure. A History of Parents as Co-consumers of Children’s Media

43  Kenneth Reinecke Hansen, Peter Bro & Ralf Andersson
Return of the Talking Heads. Entering the Third Wave of Television News Dramaturgy

57  Brita Ytre-Arne
The Social Media Experiences of Long-term Patients: Illness, Identity, and Participation

71  Orla Vigsø & Tomas Odén
The Dynamics of Sensemaking and Information Seeking in a Crisis Situation

85  Benedicte Carlsen & Hanne Riese
High Stakes. An Interview Study of Researchers’ Motivations for and Experiences of being Interviewed by Journalists

101  Thomas Bjørner, Andreas Magnusson & Robin Pascal Nielsen
How to Describe and Measure Obstacles of Narrative Immersion in a Film? The Wheel of Immersion as a Framework

119  Holger Pötzsch
Materialist Perspectives on Digital Technologies. Informing Debates on Digital Literacy and Competence

133  Book Reviews
Data Journalists Using Facebook

A Study of a Resource Group
Created by Journalists, for Journalists

Ester Appelgren

Abstract
On Facebook there are interest groups created by journalists, for journalists, that focus on the journalistic profession and work methods. One example is the Swedish group, “Datajournalistik” (in English, “Data Journalism”), which was created in 2012. This article builds on Granovetter’s theory on the strength of weak ties and is focused on the skill development process taking place in the group. A content analysis has been carried out of all posts that received comments in order to explore the social functions of the group. The results indicate both a significant need for knowledge exchange and a need for self-affirmation. At the time of the study, the group was unique in the Nordic countries and as such has played a major role in data journalism’s development process in the Nordic region.

Keywords: data journalism, Facebook, network theory

Introduction
As part of a current global trend towards harnessing information from large quantities of unstructured data, journalists have recently become interested in developing advanced skills in data analysis (e.g. Lewis 2014, Fink & Anderson 2014). Gray, Chambers and Bounegru (2012) argue in the first “Data Journalism Handbook” that using methods and digital tools to gather, filter and visualize stories based on data introduces a novel approach to producing journalism. In contrast to the claim that data journalism is a novelty, pioneer Phillip Meyer began as early as the end of the 1960s to emphasize the importance of a new generation of journalists that knows how to find, evaluate and analyze information (Meyer 2002).

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on the data journalism practice and specifically the skill development process where knowledge is created and shared between data journalists on the social network site, Facebook. The development of data journalism skills may challenge our understanding of what set of skills a journalist needs and the boundaries for the tasks journalists perform. In this context Carlson (2015, p. 3) claims that research on boundaries for the journalistic practice does not have a strong foothold in journalism studies, and that it therefore is necessary to include other research traditions within the social sciences. For this study, sociologist Granovetter’s theory from 1973 is used to explain the importance of social relationships for acquiring new information.
Appelgren and Nygren (2014) found that using data journalism methods and techniques in Swedish newsrooms was still new to many journalists, even though these journalists also claimed that they had always worked with data. Karlsen and Stavelin (2014) showed that as journalism and computing are merging into a single process, the computational skills that are needed represent a different practice than that of traditional journalism (p. 45). The news gathering process is increasingly aided by technology, and journalists are thus led to new technologically specific forms of work, such as computer-assisted reporting (Carlsson 2015, p. 8). It is thus also important for researchers to study emerging forms of such development from the perspective of how it may strengthen the journalism practice.

Due to the economic downturn in the news industry, data journalism is still a practice that has considerable potential for further evolution (Fink & Anderson 2014). In a recent Belgian study, however, De Meyer et al. (2014, p.13) describes how journalists return to their newsrooms with ambitious data journalism projects after attending training courses but have to put these projects aside as they get caught up in the constraints of routine news production. Deuze (2007) states that the introduction of new technology in journalism has tended to amplify existing ways of doing things rather than radically change what journalists are doing. It should also be noted that the process of introducing new technologies in any setting has proven itself to be slow since, over time, it requires behavioral change (Nygren & Wadbring 2013). According to Gynnild (2013), little is still known about innovation processes in news media and, in particular, the role of human aspects, such as skill development and collaboration forms, when extended technological approaches are applied.

The purpose of this article is to describe a small part of a current data journalism skill development process that was displayed on “the wall” of a Nordic journalistic Facebook group, Datajournalistik. The group is public and devoted to discussion about data journalism methods and techniques. It was created in 2012 by three members of a small, Swedish journalistic non-profit association called Fajk. In the beginning it targeted the small community of journalists interested in data and data journalism in Sweden. Since its start, this group has grown to more than 1,800, most of whom are active journalists working primarily at Swedish media companies, but also at Norwegian, Danish and Finnish media companies. The different types of content posted to this group could partly illustrate the process journalists currently undertake when developing the skills needed to produce data journalism.

Summarizing previous research on social media and journalists, Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013, p.370) emphasize the process of “journalists normalizing, i.e. adapting their use of social media to fit traditional professional norms and at the same time adapting those norms to fit the emergent practices of social media”. Studies focus, for example, on describing how social media can serve as a means for journalists to find trending topics or sources for stories (Schifferes et al. 2014), how journalists express opinions on social media (Lasorsa et al. 2011), or the role of social media when publishing breaking news (Vis 2012). These studies describe the journalism practice as closely connected to communication with the audience. However, as in the case of this study, social media platforms such as Facebook can also be home to interest groups that have been created by journalists, for journalists with a focus on different aspects of the profession and work methods and not primarily intended to reach the eye of the general audience.
One research strand on the use of social media explains interactions made by individuals, personal relationships and the benefits that come with them as the goods and services of social capital (Williams 2006). For example, Ellison et al. (2015) assess network theory in the light of social capital to explain how, why and with what results individuals turn to Facebook. The argument is that mobilization activities, i.e. “posts that request some type of assistance from one’s network, which might take the form of an informational question, a request for advice, or help with a physical need” (p. 3) exemplifies social capital conversion, as individuals intentionally are using their network in their requests.

In Williams’ view, social capital is a measurement of the effects of interactions, and while the effects of the interactions may explain interaction taking place in the group, measuring them are outside of the scope of this study. The aim of this study is to explore social functions appearing in the group in order to contribute to a wider understanding of the ongoing skill development process where journalism and computing are becoming closer to one another. The main research questions are: “What social functions can be derived from the posted content?” and “What role does the network have in the development process of Nordic journalists with regard to their data journalism skills?”

Networks and Tie Strength

Social scientists have a long tradition of investigating the dynamics of social networks and information exchange, beginning long before relationships and information could be managed using digital technology. Granovetter’s theory (1973) explains the importance of social relationships for acquiring information, where the information-seeking behavior and success in spreading information are related to the strength of a relationship. In a network, nodes or network members are tied by one or more types of relations (Wasserman & Faust in Marin & Wellman 2014). Network theory is defined as the proposed processes and mechanism that relate network properties to outcomes of interest (Borgatti & Lopez-Kidwell 2014, p. 40).

Granovetter (1973) describes relationships between network members using the terms strong ties and weak ties. According to him, the stronger the tie between two people, the more likely they are to have several acquaintances in common. Summarizing research on tie strength, Granovetter argues that the stronger the tie between two individuals, the more similar they are. Also, the more frequently people interact with each other, the stronger their mutually perceived friendship will be.

In a network, both strong and weak ties are important and play different roles. Even though the Granovetter theory focuses on explaining the importance of weak ties, the presence of strong ties is described as crucial for local cohesion. Extending Granovetter’s theory, Putnam (2001) describes two types of social capital: bridging social capital associated with weak tie networks and bonding social capital created in strong tie networks. Bridging social capital is created in networks where individuals are outward-looking, in contact with a broad range of people where they view themselves as part of a broader group and where there is a culture of giving to others without expecting something back. Bonding social capital is linked to networks of stronger ties, for example during the act of getting emotional support. Measures for social capital are focused on effects of social actions, but may also comprise the networks themselves (Williams 2006)
Although previous research has suggested that no consensus for measuring tie strength exists, the strength of ties on Facebook can be obtained in two ways (Gruzd & Haythorntwaite 2008): 1) measuring similarity between users’ profiles with a substantial overlap between words and phrases, and 2) measuring the number of times two names appear in close proximity within the text, i.e. a co-occurrence metric. In this study, the second approach is used as a guideline. By analyzing the posts with the most comments and where addressivity has been taking place, I will discuss the ties forming the group and the kinds of topics being exchanged.

Addressivity in this study is defined as the occurrence of cross-references in online conversation, what often is referred to by journalists as giving “cred” to someone else. This has previously been studied, for example, on Twitter as one of several important types of interactions that could influence the formation of power relations and information diffusion patterns (Steensen 2013). Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013) lists a set of terms central to forming a social network where the term “retweet” shares similarities with the concept of addressivity. On Twitter, a tweet can be retweeted by other persons, i.e., the written content and author name is forwarded and hyperlinked in a new tweet, by someone else. Hedman and Djerf-Pierre describes how a person with high social capital who retweets content will enhance the social capital of the person being retweeted. According to Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (p.372), the strength and composition of the journalist’s social media network is a significant part of the journalist’s personal brand and the act of giving others credit in a social network is part of the common practice enhancing social capital.

Even though, the Datajournalistik group’s hosting module is Facebook, this module shares similarities with how interaction is carried out on Twitter. The module is a discussion- and threads-based module, which provides members with the opportunity to interact with others sharing a common interest (Smock et al 2011). Furthermore, it allows members to receive information that may not be available elsewhere (Park, Kee & Valenzuela et al. 2009). In a uses and gratifications study of the use of Facebook, Smock et al. (2011, p. 2327) found that groups were associated with expressive information-sharing and users may view groups as sources of information rather than locations for social interaction. Furthermore, according to Smock et al. (2011), the composition of most analyzed groups consist of people without previous social connections to one another, and as a result found a negative association of social interaction in the group module. Gruzd et al. claims that Facebook differs from Twitter in that it encourages people who know each other to keep in contact and, therefore, it is likely that a portion of the group members have stronger ties to each other than just being members of the group.

The Importance of Belonging to a Community or a Subgroup
Having studied the professional identification of news journalists, Russo (1998) found that attachments to co-workers contributed to the professional identity of a journalist. Similarly, Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) found that contact with other journalists with regard to journalistic practices and performance reinforces the professional role of journalists. In this study, the object is treated as a subgroup of journalists specialized in data journalism methods. Since news is produced by a variety of subgroups (Lowrey 2002, p. 411), each subgroup has a different expertise within journalistic work. Lowrey
further states that members of each occupational subgroup “share a set of norms, practices, and values giving meaning to their areas of work and guiding the members of the subgroup in decisions”.

In a previous study, Swedish data journalists expressed how they were one of few, or the only one, in the newsroom with a specific set of skills (Appelgren & Nygren 2013). Borgatti and Cross (2003) suggests that if a group has problems with access, as in the case of a limited number of data journalists working in different newsrooms, distributed or wireless technologies might make it possible for people to access one another.

Previous research has proven that ties maintained online are as real as offline ties (Gruzd & Haythornthwaite 2014). When using digital media channels, strong ties are maintained by, for example, email, texting, blogs and microblogs while weak ties are widespread and maintained through discussion lists, web forums and social networking sites (ibid.). Furthermore, ties created online may be latent, i.e. they are available technically, but not yet activated by social interaction. In this study, it is argued that Facebook may aid journalists trying to develop knowledge in data journalism. As Facebook is well-known as a social tool for the general public and for private rather than professional use, it is important to point out that the social network may serve social functions for journalists other than private social functions. In a national survey of Swedish journalists, Appelberg et al (2014) found that 67 per cent of the journalists use social media in their profession. Facebook was used on an everyday basis by 61 per cent of the journalists. Johansson (2015) found that Swedish journalists who use social media are mainly using Facebook to keep in contact with colleagues (73%), and other purposes for using Facebook included To get ideas (54%), For self promotion (43%) and For professional discussions (32%).

Since the beginning of the Internet, groups of journalists involved in data journalism methods have created forums for knowledge exchange. In a content analysis of blog posts from two such forums, the Guardian’s Data Blog and the National Institute for Computer Assisted Reporting’s listserv NICAR-L, Gynnild (2014, p. 15) found that the impact of what she denotes as computational exploration in journalism is less dependent on technological creation than on news professionals’ values, goals, and interaction skills development. However, she does not examine social networking aspects connected to the two forums, but rather explores the content in them to detect how computational exploration is manifested.

**Methods**

The method of this article is inspired by Gruzd and Haythornthwaite (2014) and is based on a content analysis of all of the posts with comments from the inception of the group, i.e. April 24, 2012 to April 24, 2014.

Nodes in the collected Facebook data were people that were members of the group. Ties consisted of actions that entailed the interaction of group members, such as posts with comments and comments. A limitation of this study is that I will not analyze the “likes” category. Furthermore, posts without comments were excluded.

The network in the study is delimited by the Datajournalistik Facebook group. Therefore, a restriction to the analysis is that the data cannot say anything about the offline relationships of the nodes in the network, whether the members are Facebook
friends outside of the group or whether they have sent each other chat messages as a result of reading a post or comment made to the group. It is likely that many of the group members know each other on Facebook, have exchanged private chat messages and met offline. Furthermore, some of the members may be close friends or work together on a daily basis.

Four steps were used for the data collection and analysis and these steps were inspired by Gruzd and Haythornwaite (2014):

1. Data was extracted using a Python script called Facebook Crawler. This script was provided as an add-on to the SAS Institute Text Mining Tool. A Facebook Developers access token offered the possibility to extract the data compiled as a CSV file. Furthermore, the data was automatically pre-coded with metadata provided by Facebook.

2. Nodes were identified as members of the group. Latent nodes were members who had not yet posted, commented, liked or shared in the group.

Datajournalistik consisted of 1,084 members at the time of data extraction. Of these, 879 members were identified as latent and 205 were active (See Table 1). The members of the group who had made the most posts and comments, here referred to as authors, include well-known Nordic data journalists. Furthermore, the top three authors of posts in the group were the three group founders. Among the top ten authors were the most experienced data journalists from Sweden, Finland and Denmark. These data journalists were furthermore well-known workshop leaders in the area and use their experience as consultants for the Nordic media companies.

Table 1. Number of Datajournalistik Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of nodes</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of members in the group</td>
<td>1,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latent members</td>
<td>879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active members having posted or written comments</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active members having written comments</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active members having written posts that got comments</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Table 1 illustrates descriptive network data (downloaded 2014-04-28) of the number of members in the Facebook group Datajournalistik where the number of active members were 205.

Active members were those who had posted or commented at least once in the group. Table 1 shows the number of comments made. Of the 77 authors, the three founders of the Facebook group accounted for 27 per cent of all comments made. The top 10 comment authors accounted for almost half of all comments made. However, 40 per cent of the 171 comment authors only made one comment to a post in the Facebook group. Of the 549 posts made to the group (See Table 2), 291 posts have no comments. In posts without comments, addressivity, as it is defined in this article, was not present. Therefore, these posts were excluded for further analysis. The remaining 258 posts have at least one comment, and the most commented post has 25 comments. Eighteen more posts were removed from the sample because they were not written in an understandable language or only consisted of an image.
Table 2. Number of Posts in the Group Datajournalistik

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of posts</td>
<td>549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posts with comments</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconclusive posts with comments</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of posts included in the analysis</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table 2 reports the number of posts included in the analysis. The material included a total of 549 posts from 2012-04-28 to 2014-04-28 where 240 were included in the analysis.

3. Ties were discovered using comments and addressivity (Table 3), i.e. referencing to a person in a Facebook comment.

Table 3. Example of Addressivity in Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalist 1: Our newspaper has mapped all bicycle thefts in City 1 and City 2.</td>
<td>[...]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphics were made using Tableau and CartoDB [Link]</td>
<td>journalist 2: I cannot see it using my smartphone, but maybe internet is slow or it is the torque function?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[...].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalist 1: No, Journalist 2, it doesn’t work on smartphones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We are “working on a solution”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[. . .]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalist 2: Ok, but it looks nice on the computer, Journalist 1!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[. . .]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalist 1: Journalist 2, thank you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[. . .]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalist 1: Now the graphics work on a smartphone, too!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The example in Table 3 illustrates how group members address each other in comments. The example is from June 1, 2014 and is here anonymized, shortened and translated from Swedish to English.

Addressivity was coded as a dichotomous variable. It was noted if the post mentioned a name.

4. Posts were categorized using content analysis to code common topics and categories in the posted content, which resulted in a number of topics. Furthermore, the tone of the posts was coded. Two variables were obtained from meta data: date and content type (post or comment). Three variables describing the text content in each post were coded manually: Addressivity, Post topic and Post tone.

The coding instrument Post topic consisted of 12 dichotomous topic categories. All categories that were present in a post were noted. The 12 categories were: promotion of journalistic project (one’s own or the home organization’s), self-promotion (non-journalistic), question programming, question data, question authorities, question tools, question general, tribute to other journalist, tribute to the Facebook group, resource tip (data, tipsheet, tool), invitation (event or job) and other (general reflection or information).

The nominal variable Post tone consisted of 7 categories: positive (contained at least one positive word), neutral, negative (contained at least one negatively charged word), doubtful (contained words expressing insecurity or doubts), boastful, instructive (informative and instructive posts often with a demand that other members should try something out, react or give feedback) and humorous (contained obvious irony or jokes).
Results
In the post cited below, a Swedish reporter at a small local newspaper requests Excel advice. In the quote, the comments have been included to illustrate how, in just a few minutes, three Swedish journalists (two reporters from a larger local newspaper and one data journalist from the Swedish public service broadcaster) responded with links and encouragement on how to solve a specific problem.

Hello, can anyone assist me with some Excel help? I have an Excel file with data showing every instance a specific road has been closed down. [...] I would like to see how many times per year the road has been turned off, average duration of such a stop and which months that are primarily affected by the stop [...]. Would be great if some Excel pro can help me further.

- Sounds like you should use a pivottable. Here is one (of many) [...] [Link]
- A pivottable is probably easiest. A little difficult to explain exactly, but you can learn pivot by googling it (That is how I learned it). [...] Otherwise, Tableau is excellent for this type of analysis.
- Thank you. I will look into it.

[The Datajournalistik group on Facebook, April 15, 2014. Here, shortened and translated from Swedish to English.]

The interests of the group members can be reflected in the posted content. Table 7 summarizes the topics found in the posts that had at least one comment. A post could contain one or more of the topics; thus, 296 cases of topics were found in the 240 posts. Percentages are based on the number of topics found.

Table 4. Topics Found in Posts with Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote a data journalistic project</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question about data journalism tools and standard tool formats</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question about data</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource such as data, a tipsheet, provide a link to a resource</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation to event or a job vacancy</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give credit to or praise someone</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other questions: general opinions, search for data journalism projects or general method questions</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question about programming</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote oneself, however not a journalistic project</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, including general reflections about data journalism on a national or international level</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give credit to or praise the Facebook group</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question about authorities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of topics found in 240 posts</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The topics in Table 5 was in particular aimed at promoting projects or asking for help from the group community.
The five most common topics here will be illustrated using examples of the most commented post in each topic. The first quote illustrates how a journalist promotes his or her own published work in the form of a link to a data journalistic project. The selected post received 21 comments.

Tomorrow, [media company X] will launch an election compass based on EU data with an attached guide to the candidates’ opinions. However, you can check it out now at [link]. It would be so much fun if you could share your opinions about this project.

The tone used in the posts is interesting in relation to the topic of the post. Twenty-two per cent of the posts that promote a data journalistic project contain words that suggest that the journalists are proud of their work. Such posts, which in contrast to the more neutral posts on the topic can be seen as boastful since they are written by the journalist about his or her own work, include phrases such as “we won first prize”, “this is a shameless marketing of my own work”, “I am quite satisfied with this visualization” or simply “I think this is really good journalism”. Twenty-one per cent of the posts on this topic were written in an instructive style inviting the reader to follow a set of instructions to enjoy a data journalistic project.

Questions about tools for data journalistic purposes deal with a range of tools or questions about the right tool to use. Three specific tools dominated the discussion: Google Fusion Tables, Tableau and Excel. This selected post illustrating the topic received 14 comments and is more of a general tool question than a specific question related to one of the three most commonly mentioned tools.

How much time will it take for a beginner with Excel skills to do a first plot of tweets based on location on a map of Sweden. What kind of tool do you recommend?

The tone in 42 per cent of the posts on this topic was neutral. A slightly more negative tone was found in 19 per cent of the posts. In those posts, the journalist described his or her situation using phrases such as “I feel skeptical”, “I wonder if anyone working with this tool is experiencing problems to the same extent as I am” or “For six months now, I have been struggling with this tool”. Furthermore, posts on this topic contain more cautious descriptions (12 %), such as “This should be really easy, but I cannot do it” or “This is possibly a stupid question”.

Questions about data were related to searches for data sets and were mostly neutral (53 %) or positive (13 %). The selected post received 18 comments.

Hello data journalists! I hope it is OK for me to be a member of this exciting group, even though I am not a journalist. I wonder if any of you know about the existence of free GIS-files with post codes? I am interested in polygons rather than points.

The positive data questions were asking in an encouraging manner if certain type of data exists, as in the case above.

Resources posted as links to data sources or large-scale international and inspirational data journalistic projects from other companies than the author’s own were the fourth most common topic in terms of posts with comments in the group. This topic often contained other topics, such as in the example below, where the author also poses a question about data. The selected post received 21 comments.
Does anyone know if there are Scandinavian media organizations working with Linked Open Data in a more structural manner? I looked at this excellent speech [link] and then checked the journalistic projects that were mentioned in the speech, [link], [link], [link]. It feels as if this will open up for new possibilities in terms of how to produce data journalism, see, for example, the BBC Olympics site where links and relationships are built around linked data [link].

The tone found in posts addressing this topic was positive, neutral and sometimes instructive, where the journalist would encourage people to use a resource and in 10 % of the posts give instructions for how to use it.

The fifth topic most commonly found in the posts with comments was related to invitations to events or job postings. Over the course of the group’s existence, invitations for several hackathons and conferences were repeated in the group. Almost half of the posts were written in a neutral manner or a more encouraging manner, as in the post below. The selected post received 8 comments.

On Saturday and Sunday, it is time for Hack for Sweden at the Environmental Protection Agency in Stockholm. Never before have so many Swedish authorities cooperated creating a joint hackathon with open data. They are specifically asking for data journalists. There are a few late cancellations and therefore there is room for one or two teams. Don’t miss this opportunity! Sign up here: [link]

Addressivity, was found in 19 per cent of the posts that received comments. Naturally, addressing someone will spur a comment from the person being addressed and may spark a conversation. However, only 16 of the 77 post authors in the data set used addressivity in their posts, and among these 16 authors were the top authors of the group.

None of the authors of posts containing addressivity used a negative tone. Instead, 46 per cent were positive and 15 per cent contained an almost boastful tone that praised the person addressed. The majority of the posts containing addressivity were written by an author who had a connection to the person addressed. The example below is written by one of Sweden’s most recognized data journalists working at the company mentioned in the comment.

The talented [Name] at [Company] has put together a visualization of changes in the government budget. [Link]

Typically, in the analyzed posts, as in the example above, the person mentioned worked in the same group or the same organization as the author. And in 31 per cent of the posts, the topic was a project they carried out together. Such posts suggest a stronger tie between the author and the person addressed as compared to the other members of the Facebook group.

In the occurrences where addressivity was found, the author may have a stronger tie to the person addressed. However, since no network analysis of relationships outside of the group has been carried out, the results serve here only as indications of a stronger relationship. The results support the assumption that most of the group members are connected by weak ties, since it is rare for members to address one another, and in such instances they mainly address people to whom it is evident they have a connection to outside the group.
Table 5 presents the top five topics found in posts that contain addressivity. When someone is addressed, it seems that the information being shared is more along the lines of recognition, i.e. giving someone credit rather than sharing knowledge.

Table 5. Top Five Topics with Addressivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote a data journalistic project</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give credit to or praise someone</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource such as data, a tipsheet, provide a link to a resource</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other question: general opinions, search for data journalism projects or general method questions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation to event or a job vacancy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table 5 shows a top list of topic genres found in posts with addressivity. These posts were aimed at promoting projects or giving credit to someone in the group. Since topics may overlap, a total of 58 topics were found but only 46 included addressivity.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this study, network theory was used to explore the social functions of the Datajournalistik Facebook group with a focus was on the process of skill development. As suggested by Carlsson (2015), technological advancements in an editorial setting have given rise to debate about journalistic boundaries and journalism as a profession. The Datajournalistik Facebook group represents a forum for such skill development processes, where traditional boundaries are challenged in terms of what skills a journalist should have. The interactions taking place can be seen as social functions that potentially could create social capital. However, the contribution of this study is a discussion on the dynamics of the group, rather than the effects of the actions taken. In a future study, the functions found could be linked to the effects they may create for the individual and measured in terms of social capital.

The Facebook group is an internal group created by journalists, where the audience is other journalists. Even though the group was constructed with data journalists in mind, all members may not work actively with data journalism. The results indicate, however, that the active group members use the group to pose questions about data journalism methods and tools and to promote themselves as data journalists. While the questions that were posed qualify as mobilization attempts, as previously shown by Ellison et al. (2015), contributing to social capital, the act of promoting oneself or one’s work may serve not only as a selfish act, but an act of “givingness” (Williams 2006, p. 600), where an individual is giving to others without expecting something in return. Such actions have been linked to bridging social capital, in Granovetter’s view typical for weak tie networks. The posts in the group are often made in the spirit of “givingness”, however, at the same time with expectations of getting feedback from the group. At the beginning of the Result section, a post was cited that is typical of the topics that were found in the Datajournalistik group. The quote illustrates the rather open process of knowledge sharing that is taking place in the group, regardless of the level of difficulty of the question and the rank of the person posing it. It furthermore illustrates how the author expects to
get new information in comments made by peers in the group. If the author knew exactly whom to ask and had a tie to that person other than through the group, the question could have been posed in an e-mail or a phone call. When a seemingly trivial question is asked, such as in this example, the most esteemed Nordic data journalists frequently respond. By doing so, the more experienced data journalists also confirm themselves as experts. Repeatedly answering questions, like the most active group members do, could therefore be seen as an act of self-promotion resulting in the strengthening of social capital, both in terms of bridging social capital where they confirm themselves as part of a broader group of experts, but oddly also bonding social capital, as both the person giving and the person receiving will both benefit from the interaction taking place (Williams 2006).

Questions that are answered imply that knowledge sharing and learning is taking place. On an aggregate level, such activities dominated the post topics, thus suggesting that bridging social capital is created within the network. A major function of the group was thus to find new information in the anticipated comments. This would support the assumption that the group is indeed used as a resource group, sharing both similarities and differences, in comparison to the NICAR-L resource group previously described by Gynnild (2014).

The most common single topic found in posts with comments was journalists promoting their own work. One speculation of the intended effect of such interactions, is that journalists were striving to boost their self-confidence. Posts occasionally indicated a sense of suppression, i.e. not getting enough recognition from peers in the newsrooms, thus seeking acceptance from a group of people with similar skills. Such posts also reflected professional as well as personal values and goals. When promoting one’s own work, it was common to find posts where the tone was almost boastful. When posing questions, however, the tone was mostly neutral, or even slightly negative and frustrated. In several posts an instructive tone was used as the author encouraged group members to try something out or sign up for an event. These instructions were often written in a manner that indicated that the author expected the group members to be new to the topic. The author was writing in a style that was intended to educate. Since such posts receive both likes and comments, this would indicate the possible formation of a sub-community of journalists and others interested in developing their data journalism skills.

The results of this study thus indicate a significant need for knowledge exchange and a need for strengthening their journalistic identity. At the time of the study the group was the only digital forum for exchanging ideas and knowledge about data journalism in the Nordic region. Therefore, since its start, it has played a major role for the development of data journalism skills among Nordic journalists outside of their newsrooms.

In this study, addressivity was present in the Datajournalistik group, although to a very small extent, and only performed by a small number of group members. The low level of addressivity in the results could indicate that the group consists mainly of weak ties. Nevertheless, there are stronger ties present in the group. In the majority of the few posts with addressivity it was evident that the authors only addressed someone if they had a stronger tie to the person addressed. Most commonly, the tie here was considered strong because the author and the person addressed worked in the same newsroom or even on the same project. Furthermore, when addressivity occurred it was used in the context of praising a person for having worked on a data journalistic project. The act of addressing someone in the Facebook group is related to retweeting on Twitter. Hedman
and Djerf-Pierre (2013) suggest that the act of retweeting will affect a person’s social capital, and such posts can thus be seen as a more sophisticated way of giving credit to oneself using the name of someone else involved. In this study, posts with addressivity usually linked to material that had already been published by the journalist’s media organization and did not present new ideas to the members of the group, but rather placed an emphasis on information that was already available. Granovetter (1973) described how success in spreading new information is instead more likely to be achieved using weak ties. It is therefore argued that addressivity between two group members with stronger ties was not used for knowledge-sharing, but rather for the social function of increasing bonding social capital and promotion.

The results of this study indicate that members of the group post content to develop knowledge or receive self-affirmation. The findings of this study illustrate the making of a subgroup of Nordic journalists interested in data journalism as they form specific values and ideals, and in this process the posts that are appreciated and commented on by the group members could shed some light on the direction of these ideals as they are being formed. The intention of addressing peers, apart from taking some of the credit themselves, might also be a means to create cohesion in the group, i.e. to reinforce the group members in their mission to become more skilled as data journalists.

References


Steensen, Steen (2014) Conversing the audience: A methodological exploration of how conversation analysis can contribute to the analysis of interactive journalism. *New Media & Society*, 16(8).


---

ESTER APPELGREN, Techn.Dr., Senior Lecturer, Division of Journalism, Södertörn University, Huddinge, ester.appelgren@sh.se
Aporetic Apparatus

Epistemological Transformations of the Camera

Janne Seppänen & Juha Herkman

Abstract
In this article, we examine the epistemology of the camera today. In order to answer this question, we concentrate on three social and technological forms: the camera obscura, the photographic camera, and the digital camera.

On the one hand, the camera extends our human sensibilities and helps us to obtain knowledge of the world. On the other hand, it works as a device for delusion, bodily vision and spectacle. Historically, these two functions are meshed together in complicated ways and this establishes the paradoxical epistemology of the camera.

We argue that, even if contemporary debates about the truthfulness of the photographic image have persistently been tied to the digitisation of the photographic process, the very origin of these debates actually lies in the camera itself and its contradictory epistemology. The camera has worked, and still works, as an apparatus that relentlessly produces irresolvable ambiguity, aporia, between true knowledge and illusory vision.

Keywords: camera, camera obscura, epistemology, photography, digital photography, visual culture

Introduction
With the proliferation of digital cameras, and particularly camera phones, almost every situation and event can now be photographed and quickly placed on public display. Camera images are thus an essential part of communication and surveillance, in both public and private spheres, as well as, in fact, the whole visual constitution of society. The camera also seems to be an idea or a representation, which has gained a significant presence in the narratives of popular cinema and television. The central medium of spectacle, the camera, has itself turned into a spectacle, especially in the genres of action, crime and horror. For example, camera-based surveillance scenes, often via mobile technology, inhabit numerous films and television series. We have entered into the ‘Cam Era’ (Koskela 2003; Lehmuskallio 2012), where the presence of the camera is larger than ever.

In spite of the camera’s strong technological and symbolic proliferation, it seems to be almost invisible and ‘black-boxed’ in two ways. First, people mostly use cameras without concerning themselves with the technical details of the functioning of the device itself. It is enough that it works. Second, and more importantly, the social function and meaning of the camera as part of the visual constitution of the society is even more obscure. The camera appears simply as a mechanical tool for taking pictures, moving
or still. In addition, contemporary visual culture scholars have been more interested in the different kinds of camera images (photographs, videos, film, and so forth) than in the apparatus itself as social and technological device (see, e.g., Cobley & Haefner 2009; Gye 2007; Son 2009).

In this article, we focus on the epistemology of the camera, which refers to the ways in which questions of knowledge have been connected to the uses and articulations of the camera. In particular, over the last 20 years, the digitisation of the photographic process has raised notable discussions about the truthfulness of the photographic image in different branches of visual culture (see, e.g., Lister 1996), but especially in the field of news journalism. The debate has most often revolved around the question of the proper limits of the editing of the digital image file, which has given impetus to the establishment of different kinds of codes of conduct (Mäenpää & Seppänen, 2010). We argue that the debates on digital editing of the photographic image have their origins in the different uses and contexts of the photographic representation, and also in the controversial epistemologies of the camera itself.

The camera has been, and still is, an extension of human sensibility and a device for obtaining knowledge of the world. In the course of its history, the camera has also been used as a device for magical spectacle, amusement and perceptual delusions. In order to understand the current epistemology of digital photography, we need to turn the focus away from the photographic image and towards the camera and its history, which has been full of indeterminacies and paradoxes. The camera itself seems to be a kind of aperetic apparatus, which has fuelled and still fuels the epistemological debates concerning, for example, the truthfulness of the photographic image. The term ‘aporia’ is loaded with historical and philosophical connotations (Anker 2009; Derrida 1993; Kofman 1988), but here we simply use it to refer to a state of uncertainty and ambiguity, in which different, even contradictory, epistemological stances exist. Our main question is as follows:

• What is the epistemology of the camera today?

In order to get to an answer, we need to journey through a different history of the camera, asking the following:

• How the camera has been conceptualised in different historical contexts?

Below, we focus on three main historical iterations of the camera: camera obscura, the photographic camera, and the digital camera. In this short introduction, we are forced to be very selective, but we are fully aware of the historical richness, as well as the complexity, of each iteration.

Camera Obscura

Several scholars from different disciplines have been interested in the history of the camera obscura (e.g., Gernsheim 1986; Kittler 2012; Kofman 1999; Steadman 2005). A seminal work is Crary’s *Techniques of the Observer* (1992), which offers a far-reaching exposition of the change in the concepts of vision, the camera obscura, and the observer during the nineteenth century. It is not possible to offer a detailed overview of Crary’s work here, but we can summarise the main narrative.
Since the Renaissance, the camera obscura served as a dominant metaphor for human vision, as well as the relationship between the observing subject and the world; its epistemology manifested the new scientific worldview as a device for searching for truthful knowledge. “For two centuries it stood as a model, in both rationalistic and empiricist thought, of how observation leads to truthful inferences about the world” (Crary 1992, p. 29). This connotation appeared in various forms in the writings of René Descartes, David Hume and John Locke, for example. However, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the position began to change. A Cartesian dualism between the observing subject and the observed world gave way to a much more corporeal concept of the subject, in which inner sensations and the physiology of perception played a crucial role. The shift was particularly visible in Goethe’s *Zur Farbenlehre* (1810, *Theory of Colours*), where the camera obscura served as a model for subjective vision, bodily experience and visible sensations arising from the optic nerve system. In addition, during the nineteenth century, the role of the camera obscura started to signify an instrument that conceals, inverts or confuses the truth. Karl Marx, Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud turned their gaze on the hidden dimensions of the psyche and society and employed the camera obscura as a metaphor for literally obscuring the truth, reminding us that “things are not usually just as they appear” (Crary 1992, pp. 27-29).

In a famous passage from *The German Ideology* (1845), Marx and Engels (1969) write that, “If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process” (p. 14). For Marx, the camera obscura worked as a metaphor for ideology precisely because it turns the world upside down: ideology sees things upside down and in a distorted manner. As Kofman (1999) summarises, “The camera obscura functions, not as a specific technical object whose effect is to present, in inverted form, real relationships, but, rather as an apparatus for occultation, which plunges consciousness into darkness, evil and error, which makes it become dizzy and lose its balance” (p. 14).

Crary’s analysis of the camera obscura helps his attempt to construct a general theory of the observing subject, from the Renaissance to the beginning of the modern period. His argument draws heavily on the writings of prominent philosophers, such as Locke, Descartes and Hume. However, Crary’s scholarly orientation leads to certain limits to his interpretations. One may well ask, for example, how much the visual experience of the so-called common people followed the shift that Crary delineates (see Prasch 1992).

Bodily and magical sensations inhabited the use of the camera obscura in the seventeenth century and earlier. For instance, the Italian scholar, Giambattista della Porta, described the camera obscura in the extended edition of his *Magia Naturalis* (1558) and praised how the viewers could see human beings, animals and plants in such lifelike detail that they were not able to distinguish whether the sights were real or an illusion, as early as the sixteenth century (Huhtamo 1997, pp. 25-26). In this way, the camera obscura created the spectacle *inside* the camera itself. Hence, while the camera obscura served the epistemological passion for truth, it represented magic and entertainment for the common people.

The device was also used to make a profit. In the seventeenth century, French mathematician, Jean-François Niceron, described its exploitation:
And charlatans have deluded some naive and ignorant people by persuading them
that what they saw was a manifestation of the occult science of astrology or of
magic, and they had no difficulty in astonishing them and this afforded the op-
portunity to abuse the simpletons and draw whatever profit they could from this

Undoubtedly, most of those who watched the performances were aware that the pictures
produced by the camera obscura were illusions. They admired the adroitness of the sci-
ence of the time to piece together these magnificent performances. However, for part
of the audience, the whole thing was a frightening machine from the underworld that
turned the familiar world upside down, literally as well as metaphorically.

Crary also describes in detail the multiple uses of the camera obscura. However, he
does not let them challenge his general line of argument about the epistemological shift
at the beginning of the nineteenth century. If we consider the camera as a hybrid object,
comprising technology, cultural practices, visuals, and discourses connected to these
practices, Crary’s reading begins to lose its strength because, already before the seven-
teenth century, the camera was at the same time inhabited by the illusionistic sensations
and scientific efforts to produce truthful knowledge about nature. This epistemological
paradox was a central attribute of the camera from the very beginning, and it was to
become an important attribute of the camera after the discovery of the photographic
process. Moreover, the invention of photography causes problems in Crary’s model,
because it continued and even confirmed, at least partly, the Cartesian epistemology by
maintaining a gap between the photographer and the photographed object/scene (see
Batchen 1991, p. 6). Photography worked, and still works, as an extension of perception
in order to know and obtain accurate information.

The Photographic Camera

The invention of photography was not a straightforward process of historical evolution
from the camera obscura to the photographic camera. On the contrary, the invention,
so often credited to Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, Louis Daguerre or William Henry Fox
Talbot, was an outcome of a long historical process of different kinds of experiments
and the desire to fix the image of the camera obscura. In the study Burning with Desire,
Batchen (1999) traces the development of this desire to before 1839, the year the inven-
tion was officially launched to the public. This desire played an important role in the
cultural shift of the camera at the turn of nineteenth century. Here, however, we do not
have the space to go into the historical details of this transition. We focus, instead, on
the relationship between the camera and the newborn photographic image.

It is commonly asserted that the photographic image is an indexical trace that, to
quote Peirce’s (1998) famous definition, is “physically forced to correspond point by
point to nature” (p. 6). This was, and still is, a central part of the epistemology of the
camera: it is a device that produces indexical pictures that have a causal and material
relationship to the photographed objects, bringing history to the present, as Barthes
(1983) famously noted (also Flusser 2000, p. 8). However, their relationship is much
more complex. At the moment of the exposure, the film and the body of the camera form
a single unit, in which the trace (a latent image) is born, according to the laws of the optic
and photochemical properties of the film. After the exposure, the camera and the film
become separate, and the developed trace begins its cultural circulation in the form of a film or a reproduced photograph. This image also has, of course, an indexical relation to the photographed objects. However, the indexicality is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a picture to be a photograph. We do have many other genres of ‘light-made’ indexical pictures: photograms, x-ray images, or tanning traces, for example. What is essential and what, first of all, makes a picture a photograph, is its metonymic relation to the very apparatus itself, the camera. The exposed film not only (indexically) represents the photographed objects or the scene but also represents (indexically and metonymically) a camera because it has been a part of the apparatus. The important thing is that the photograph’s metonymical bond with the camera has not changed in the course of the recent digitisation of the photographic process. Digital photographs are still camera pictures with their indexical logic (Gunning 2004).

Hence, the invention of photography was also a splitting process, through which the camera split into two artefacts, namely, the photographic image and the camera (obscura), which are technologically and discursively tied together but can also inhabit different social practices and spaces. As a consequence of their metonymical relationship, every photographic image carries the social meanings of the camera. The doubling also had some consequences for the camera itself. The fast-growing popular spectacle of photographic images turned the gaze away from the device and towards the photographs, which first began their small-scale circulation in culture and, finally, were reprinted in mass media. The photograph as a separate object eclipsed the camera and fostered its ‘black-boxing’ by emphasising the representation at the expense of the camera. This means that it is difficult to see the complex agency of the camera behind the photographic image. In addition, the metaphor of the camera obscura was fated to give way to a new construct, that of negative/positive. This construct is the paradoxical logic of the photographic camera: its cultural weight notably increased in the form of photographic images, but the device itself descended into the obscurity of the ‘black-box’ (Flusser 2000, p. 27).

Simultaneously, the binary division between the true representation of reality and the ephemeral, misleading bodily sensation, so familiar to the camera obscura, transformed into the binary division between the subject’s unpredictable agency and objective reality. Photographer Lewis Hine’s famous slogan captures the main point: “Photographs don’t lie, but liars may photograph”. Hence, in the epistemology of the camera, the new ‘subjective vision’ also meant the possibility of producing false visual representations by relying on the camera’s (alleged) objective vision. The epistemological tension that has existed since the Renaissance between different uses of the camera obscura was now found in the relationship between the camera and the agency of the subject. This position is still current in discussions concerning the ethics of photojournalism where, in the age of easy digital photo editing, the burden of the responsibility of an individual photojournalist to produce truthful images has increased (see Mäenpää & Seppänen 2010).

These changes in the epistemology of the camera were closely tied to the plethora of new practices, in which the camera underpinned many different disciplines. The proliferation of photographs, and their well-documented uses in anthropology, criminology, psychiatry, and other disciplines, opened up a whole new epistemological space, where the camera was supposed to produce knowledge about the subject (see, e.g., Tagg 1988; Sekula 1986). These uses of the camera were accompanied by its being used to create
public spectacles of historical events. The camera witnessed, for example, the Civil and Indian Wars in the United States in the nineteenth century, the First and Second World Wars in the twentieth century, as well as representations of the blossoming, and then collapse, of socialist regimes.

It can be argued that, without the camera, such a degree of ‘spectacularisation’ of culture, which was fundamental in the formation of ideologies at those historical conjunctures, would not have been possible. Spectacles, of course, appeared long before the camera existed. We only have to think of the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece, or the triumphal processions of monarchs and the Church to imagine the spectacular experiences of our ancestors. However, the camera turned the spectacle into a mediated era, where a larger number of people could be ‘governed’ by the spectacle (see Debord 1987). It is no coincidence that European totalitarian movements gained such a profound advantage from the camera, screens and printed visuals in their spectacular propaganda of the early twentieth century, and neither does it surprise anyone that their liberal and market-driven counterparts have exploited camera-based spectacles even more efficiently since then (see, e.g., Kellner 2003). The indexical dimension of the camera has inherently linked the spectacle with the authenticity of the image and therefore increased the affectivity of the spectacle: the power of the emotions could otherwise have been lost in the mediated forms of spectacle. In this, the photographic image turned the spectacle out from the camera obscura. The camera was now just a technical device for the production of spectacular representations, this time, outside it.

A key element in the spectacularisation of camera culture was the invention of the moving photographic image in the late nineteenth century. It was cinema that finally linked the former modes of spectacle (mass performances, theatre, music halls and vaudeville, magic lantern shows, as well as phantasmagory) with indexical image construction (Huhtamo 1997). For these reasons, the psychoanalytical film theorists of the 1970s (for example, Peter Wollen, Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey) started to see the film camera as a substitute for the eye and as a key factor in a process they called ‘cinematic apparatus’. It was a camera-based narration which, according to them, identified the film spectator as a subject in a complex process of interpellation: the spectator momentarily becomes a part of the cinematic apparatus by camera-based narration, which appealed to scopophilic and voyeuristic desires and fantasies relying on the unconscious constitution of the subjectivity. The power of cinematic spectacle was seen as so intrinsic that the whole subjectivity of the spectator was thought to be dominated by the film camera (Lapsley & Westlake 1988). This so-called ‘psycho-semiotic’ or ‘screen theory’ has been significantly challenged since the 1980s, for example, by phenomenology, narratology and cognitive analysis of film, but the role of the (film) camera as a starting point of cinematic narration and experience has not, nevertheless, been denied (e.g., Bordwell & Carroll 1995).

**The Digitised Camera**

Just as the shift from the camera obscura to the film-based photographic camera was not a straightforward process of historical evolution, so too did the transition from analogue to digital camera have different phases. Computer-based image-editing technologies were already in use at the beginning of the 1980s and became more common in profes-
sional practice by the end of the decade. However, digital cameras only conquered the market in the early years of the twenty-first century. Therefore, the widespread digitisation of the photographic image took place earlier than the digitisation of the camera.

With digitisation, the photographic process diversified the use of the camera and enmeshed it with other technologies, paving the way for radical technosocial changes, both in the equipment itself and its functions in society. First, the camera has become a small computer, with built-in image-processing technologies that, for example, enable the user to instantly see an image or video clip. This function has changed the photographer’s relationship to the equipment, as well as to the very act of taking photographs. Second, the camera is often connected to data transfer networks (most often the internet), which makes instant online publishing possible, as well as remote visual surveillance (see Lehmuskallio 2012). Third, digitisation has enabled the seamless joining of the camera to other technologies, most notably, to mobile phones and laptops. Fourth, the camera’s role as a device for producing popular imagery has also been transformed via vernacular publishing on the internet. In this respect, the most dramatic change has perhaps been the ‘invasion’ of the camera phone; practically every smartphone is also a camera.

According to some scholars, digitisation ruins the indexical capacity of the camera: they argue that digitisation represents the artificiality of culture and that the naturalness of traditional analogue photography thus disappears with an ‘algorithmic image’ (e.g., Lister 1996; Mitchell 1992, p. 31; Rubinstein & Sluis 2013). Although there have been some scandals in recent years, for example, where press photographs have been digitally manipulated, there is no evidence that the authenticity value based on the indexical nature of the camera pictures would have been diminished. As a matter of fact, there is some empirical proof that the digitisation of the photographic process is not an essential factor in determining an audience’s trust in news photographs (see Puustinen & Seppänen 2011). The popularity of amateur footage in the press, on television, and on internet photo galleries, as well as the huge popularity of reality and 24/7 television programming, indicate that trust in the documentary value of the camera flourishes at least as much as it did before digitisation (Herkman 2010; Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti 2011). The digitisation of the camera, therefore, has not changed the camera into a more ‘artificial’ or ‘untrue’ visual technique, as some early critics of digital photography argued (see also Seppänen 2006, p. 101).

The huge number of personal cameras is accompanied by the rapidly increasing number of public and private camera surveillance systems (closed-circuit television or CCTV), which can be found in nearly all public places in large cities. Cameras were used for surveillance well before digital imaging, but data networks and digital content storage and management have made surveillance remarkably effective and much faster. The digitisation of camera surveillance systems has also made it possible to integrate them seamlessly into various databases, as well as to take advantage of computerised content analysis and identification technologies. Today, for example, ‘deviant’ behaviour can be recognised automatically from the visual data. CCTV and other surveillance systems gather information about a subject’s life, in order to discipline public behaviour. Hence, there is a strong connection between governance, power, and the visual data gathered by these technologies. This connection ensures the camera’s indexical role as a disciplinary apparatus, which had already started in the late nineteenth century with the emergence of crime photography.
However, simultaneously, the spread of camera phones has helped to question the top-down, panopticon-type surveillance between the surveyors and surveyed. For example, an amateur videographer happened to film the assault of black trucker Rodney King by some Los Angeles policemen and the video then catalysed a chain of events, including riots and demonstrations that finally led to the resignation of the Los Angeles police commissioner. This was thought to be exceptional in the early 1990s; it was unusual that someone had witnessed the assault but the most extraordinary thing was that this person had a video camera so the event could be recorded (i.e., documented) as it happened. Today, the recording of these kinds of events would not surprise anyone: if there are people, there are also cameras. We could even see almost real-time footage from the Asian tsunami in 2004, because those who witnessed the catastrophe wanted to record it with their digital and phone cameras and deliver their videos via mobile networks.

Nevertheless, the extensive spread of camera technology as a part of everyday communication, surveillance and entertainment has obscured the camera’s status as a specific visual technique and assimilated it into common communication practices but, at the same time, has made the camera itself a spectacle in popular representations. It is the ‘camera everywhere’ that has enabled the popularity of so-called ‘reality’ television formats such as Big Brother. The Orwellian dystopia of the surveillance society has been realised, not only through the spread of real life surveillance cameras but also through several popular narratives representing the spectacle of the camera itself. One has to think only of the significance of the camera in some contemporary popular narratives of action and crime genres, such as 24 or the C.S.I. television serials and Mission Impossible films, to become convinced of the spectacular role of the camera in today’s popular imagination.

With digitisation and computerisation, the camera has been turned from a special social and cultural metaphor into the everyday visual technique of documenting and witnessing the ‘real’. Even though the camera’s indexical nature has remained, its aura as a specific visual technique, however, has diminished.

Today, the camera is perceived merely as a pure instrument for visual documentary and memory rather than as the master visual technology of the era. This kind of instrumental vision is connected also to the range of other communication practices and technologies which, in turn, can be situated to the overall context of late-modern capitalism and neo-liberal market economics (cf. Jameson 1992). The so-called convergence culture does not triumph over single master technologies as the central cultural determinant, but it prizes digital networks, social media, ‘collective intelligence’, and participation as its buzzwords (see Jenkins 2008). Today, the camera exemplifies the liminality typical to late modern societies and cultures (Latour 1991). The camera is and produces the borderline between history and the present, between on and offline, between everyday life and the spectacle, as well as between reality and simulation.

**Aporetic Apparatus**

In his Towards a Philosophy of Photography, Flusser (2000, pp. 21-32) considers the camera as an apparatus, referring to systems that enable something to function and simulate thought. Even if Flusser gives the camera some agency, he sees it rather as a tool or an extension of human organs, resembling McLuhan’s (1964) medium theory.
Photographs still play the main role accompanied by photographers with their cameras. We claim, instead, that the camera itself inhabits incommensurable cultural practices, which obtain different meanings. For example, on the one hand, the camera can serve as a means of achieving visuals from the Martian landscape to be used to build our astronomical knowledge. On the other hand, we can play with cameras and use their elaborate technologies to create pictorial effects and illusions. In addition, we can enjoy the spectacle of the camera by consuming it in a television series or film, for example. All these different cultural practices also seem to provide different epistemological contexts of the camera. Problems may emerge if there is a transgression between different practices: if the news image, for example, is edited too much, the principle of the camera as a device for creating indexical representations is undermined. Even worse is if the reputation of the camera as an objective device is used to deceive spectators, by claiming that the image is the camera image, although its indexicality has been destroyed. In some other practices, for example, art photography, the rules of editing are not so strict, and the indexicality may have been heavily edited. The explanation sounds logical, because cultural practices attach to material objects as well as technologies to certain meanings. However, the picture is slightly more complicated.

Niépce and Daguerre were already at pains to define photography: they could not decide whether the true author of the photographic image was the photographer or nature itself. This ambiguous concept of the photograph was also common among other inventors of photography. Batchen (1999) describes the discourse in which the photograph was:

…a mode of representation that is simultaneously active and passive, that draws nature while allowing her to draw herself, that both reflects and constitutes its object, that undoes the distinction between copy and the original, that partakes equally of the realms of nature and culture (p. 69).

The quotation reflects not only the epistemology of the newborn photographic image, but also the whole history of the camera, in which it is an amalgam of nature and culture. The camera is an apparatus that produces representations, whether fixed or not, whose epistemological status is unclear and has vacillated from the very beginning. As a metonymic part of the camera, the photographic image also carries this obscurity.

From this point of view, the camera itself can be seen as an aporetic apparatus that produces images with the strong potential to become the objects of different kinds of controversies, because the photographic act “both reflects and constitutes its object”, as Batchen brilliantly observes. This double logic of the camera makes its epistemology hard to understand, because the distinction between what is represented and the representation itself disappears. The photographic image, thanks to the camera, is and is not what it represents. As a matter of fact, in the camera picture, the whole logic of representation is paradoxically undermined. The documentary, recording and reflective attributes of the camera image serve as a disguise to hide its non-representational epistemology. Hence, every effort to discuss the truthfulness of the photographic image ends in aporia as far as the basic postulation of the discussion is the idea that the photographic image is a representation of something.

The double logic of the camera as a reflective and constitutive device establishes a good example of the split that Latour calls the ‘Modern Constitution’, which also dates back to natural science and political philosophy from the seventeenth century.
According to Latour (1991), our world is saturated with hybrids (or quasi-objects), which are both ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, and hard to grasp for just that reason: they are “invisible, unthinkable, unrepresentable” (p. 34). It seems to us that the camera and photographic images are hybrid objects \textit{par excellence}. In the Latourian framework, we can say that, under the Modern Constitution, we have never managed to handle photographs as hybrids, seamless combinations of nature and culture. Theories of photography have managed to designate their object either in terms of nature (as a material base of the image and technology) or in terms of cultural signification (a constructivist approach). This antagonism is something that becomes visible in Lewis Hine’s famous catchphrase, but it is also present in different kinds of current codes of conduct established by media houses in order to prevent the ‘unethical’ digital editing of news photographs (Mäenpää & Seppänen 2010). In both cases, the sheer materiality of the camera image is something that is on the side of nature and constantly in danger of being manipulated by human agency.

The Latourian solution to the split is to provide material objects with a sort of agency that gives them the power to influence human cultures. Through this operation, material objects become part of complicated networks within other material objects and also human agents. This point of departure allows us to comprehend photography and technological systems as products of human agency, but it also presupposes that human agency and cultural production are scrutinised from the object’s point of view. Thus, to connect technology or nature with such agency does not mean that technical devices act and think like humans, or that they have free will or the capability of ethical considerations (see Wolf 2012); instead, it means that the objects re-affect humans. We can interpret the meanings of a photograph, but the fact that it is a camera image has some effect on our thoughts and actions. We are not actors who use the camera and outline it with different kinds of cultural ‘meanings’. Quite the opposite, the camera itself is an agent that relentlessly forces us to oscillate between unarticulated physical nature and cultural meanings. Through this aporetic apparatus, nature penetrates, with its sheer transcendence, into the realm of the social.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The epistemology of the camera dates back to the Renaissance era and the different meanings and uses of the camera obscura. The development of the photographic camera, however, started to radically reshape this epistemology between the 1830s and 1840s. The emergence of the photographic image, its different uses and its circulation in both private and public spheres expanded the meanings of the camera. However, simultaneously, the vast proliferation of photographs rendered the camera to a state of pure technology. Thus, the visibility and attractiveness of the photographic image left the camera in a state of invisibility. Even so, the photographic image started to carry the meanings of the camera as an amalgam of objective, true knowledge and subjective vision.

Later transformations were anchored to the technological developments of the photographic camera, which turned into a common device in many professional organisations and ordinary households. These developments contain such changes as the decrease in the size of cameras, which made them easier to move from one place to another, the birth of the press photograph after the invention of photographic printing techniques,
and the development of fast film materials, which enabled reaching beyond the early limitations of time in photographing.

In addition to these developments, two radical changes appeared during the late nineteenth century: the invention of the moving photographic image and the spread of Kodak cameras (West 2000) as everyday appliances, the so-called ‘Kodakisation’ of culture. The former fundamentally transformed visual representations, which could now document and spectacularise the world more prominently than ever before. The latter made the photographic image a key technology of memory on a large scale. However, perhaps an even more profound change was the historical transformation of the camera seen in the late twentieth century, when digitisation changed the material and physical processes of photography. Digitisation also expanded the camera to global visual networks.

All these historical changes have also re-articulated the conceptualisation of the camera as a technical device of spectacle. At first, the camera obscura constructed the spectacle inside the camera itself. During the nineteenth century, the photographic camera transferred the spectacle to its end products: photographic representations. Since the twentieth century, the most influential form of creating these spectacles has been the moving image of cinema and television. More recently, especially in the early twenty-first century, digitisation has, on the one hand, integrated cameras as parts of other utility techniques, especially mobile phones and, in doing so, has eroded the aura of the camera as a spectacular technology as such. On the other hand, these ‘domesticated cameras’ have invaded the popular imageries of films and television serials, turning the representation of the camera into a spectacle.

However, if the camera constituted an important metaphor for the recognised social and cultural scholars of the seventeenth and early nineteenth century, in the twenty-first century, its metaphors are represented by popular narrators. The camera has maintained its value as a device for documentary, but its aura as the technology has diminished at the same time as cameras have been merged with other communication devices and information networks. Instead, scholars use the vocabulary which developed along with the new digital communication technology. Such terms as ‘information’ and ‘network’ are used to describe, not only the contemporary condition of global communities (e.g., Castells 1996), but also the whole history of human societies and life-forms (e.g., McNeill & McNeill 2003). Computer-based networks have also taken the camera’s place as the main hybrid object of visual culture.

The overestimated effects of the digitisation of the camera led to not very well-grounded assumptions about the end of photography. The protagonists of the digital revolution forgot that the basic optical device, the camera, is still behind both the analogue and digital photograph. The camera itself is a carrier of a historical continuity of a plethora of meanings connected to the photographic image and the camera obscura. The combination of the camera’s documentary value and routinisation has actually increased the popularity of photographic practices to an extent never before seen in the history of the camera.

The epistemology of the camera has been inhabited by the paradox of true knowledge and unreliable illusion. The camera obscura was simultaneously a place for scientific observation and illusions and spectacles. The photographic camera is a tool for creating objective visuals of the world, but it is also a device that can be used to deceive spectators in many ways, as brilliantly described by Lewis Hine’s famous slogan. The
controversies surrounding the digitisation of the photographic process continue this binary split between true representation and misleading illusion.

The pictorial dimension of the camera has weakened due to the digitisation of film. The latent image was, after all, an image. The saved file contains binary code. However, this fact is only one part of the assemblage of the camera, but it paves the way for the vast expansion of the camera and also its convergence with other technologies. Our claim is that, eventually, this unstable binary division, not the shift from analogue to digital image, still fuels the discussion about photographic veracity. Moreover, this paradox will be with us as long as we take pictures with a camera.

References
Janne Seppänen & Juha Herkman Aporetic Apparatus


Puustinen, Liina, & Seppänen, Janne (2011) In amateurs we trust! Audiences’ views on non-professional news photographs. In Kari Anden-Papadopoulos, & Mervi Pantti (Eds.), *Amateur images and global news* (pp. 175-192). London: Intellect.


Janne Seppänen, Professor, School of Communication, Media and Theatre (CMT), University of Tampere, janne.seppanen@uta.fi

Juha Herkman, Academy Research Fellow, Department of Social Research, Media and Communication Studies, University of Helsinki, juha.herkman@helsinki.fi
Parent-Pressure

A History of Parents as Co-consumers of Children’s Media

Helle Strandgaard Jensen

Abstract
In this article, I examine change and continuity in conceptions of parental agency in public debates about children’s media consumption in Scandinavia, 1945-1975. During this period, public debates about the various kinds of media products children consumed were dominated by different groups of professionals: first, by teachers and librarians in the mid-fifties and, then, by intellectuals and performing artists in the late sixties. With a radically changed professional hegemony and a shifting media landscape, the role of media in children’s lives was described very differently during the period. However, a strong continuity in the debates was the negative influence parents were seen as having on children’s media consumption due to their lack of insight and interest in the topic. Drawing upon recent works on children’s media, consumption and enculturation, I analyse why the negative description of parents as co-consumers prevailed despite radical changes in views on children’s media consumption. In particular, I examine the shared inter-Scandinavian socio-cultural contexts that structured the changing professional and political groups’ pressure on parents to perform according to their norms and values.

Keywords: children’s media, enculturation, parenthood, Scandinavia, media history, public debates

Introduction
The question of parental co-consumption of children’s media appears to be ever present in today’s public debates. Should parents allow their toddlers to use iPads? What kinds of content are they letting their children encounter online? Are television programmes and games developed by public service broadcasters better than videos from YouTube and advergames? Questions like these surface weekly, if not daily, in print, on television and online; they are addressed in all kinds of parental literature; and being raised by NGOs, politicians, private companies and parents themselves (Clark 2012; Johansen 2014; Sjöberg 2013). The answers are many and often depend on the type of professional who gives them (e.g., media researchers, psychologists or educators); the type of media in question (books, tablets or television); the message (entertaining or educative); and the media in which the story itself appears (tabloids, news broadcasts or parental magazines).

The present article takes a step back from today’s debates, offering a historical perspective on concerns about parental co-consumption of children’s media. It introduces
new questions about children’s enculturation via media and its entanglement with parental agency using a multi-layered comparison of two different periods’ key debates: one about high versus low culture reading material in the nineteen fifties and its successor about politicization of children’s media in the late sixties and early seventies. In doing so, the article answers a call for historicizing questions about public debates about children and media (Buckingham & Jensen 2012) and creates a context in which the dynamics and high levels of anxiety in present-day discussions can be understood (Clark 2012).

The context for understanding today’s questions about parental agency in children’s media consumption is created by unravelling the main levels and themes that have defined different interests in this area. Though the current digital media environment is in many ways different from what children encountered in the nineteen fifties, sixties and seventies, the intriguing dynamic that can be found in these periods’ public debates can inform new research on the positioning of parental co-consumption in present-day discussions. Particularly striking in this regard is a seemingly similar view of childhood as a place where the wrongdoings of society can be set strait through professionally guided enculturation without raising any political or socio-cultural issues. In the present article, I show how this was the case in the fifties, sixties and early seventies and hope the article provokes researchers to ask whether current-day debates on children’s media consumption are also dominated by “naturalized” professionalized ideals, which, potentially, exercise a highly normative pressure on parents to “doing the right thing” when they act as co-consumers.

My investigation starts from an analysis of debates about the role of media in children’s lives within a specific setting, namely the Scandinavian welfare societies.1 What has been of particular interest to me is the continuity of a negative conceptualization of parental co-consumption during the period 1945-1975, which prevailed despite radical changes in the ways in which media’s role in children’s lives was viewed and discussed. How could aesthetic and professional hierarchies change by 180 degrees while the view on parental co-consumption as problematic remained exactly the same? By holding up a vast body of sources from the printed public sphere against knowledge of the shared socio-cultural environment in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, in particular the rise and consolidation of the welfare state, I aim to understand the discrepancy of great change and strong continuity inherent in this question.

The article’s theoretical framework combines theories from childhood, media and consumption studies. It emphasizes dimensions of enculturation and dependence upon parents in children’s media consumption and how these have been understood and discussed in the Scandinavian public. The methodological framework is built around a diachronic comparison of views on parents as co-consumers in public debates about children’s media consumption in two periods: the mid-fifties and the late sixties/early seventies. At the same time, the analysis moves across national borders by focusing on inter-Scandinavian commonalities in the conceptualization of parent’s role in the child-media relationship. This broad scope enables me to focus on wide sociocultural trends in Scandinavian views on childhood and media consumption as the cause of change and continuity rather than particular national issues.
Media Consumption and Enculturation: Looking for the Significance of Parental Agency

Recent literature on children’s consumption often considers the multiple social and cultural significances related to this activity (Buckingham 2011; Clark 2014; Cook 2008; Cross 2004). Drawing on the work of David Buckingham, consumption is understood here as something that has a symbolic, communicative function and “define[s] and construct[s] our identity. As such it depends upon people learning to interpret cultural symbols, acquiring particular cultural values and following (or at least understanding) cultural norms” (Buckingham 2011: 37). This definition of consumption covers all kinds of relationships that children (and adults) have with commodities, including media products. In these relationships, both children and adults are understood to play an active role in shaping the meaning of the relation. The roles of adults are the focus of the present paper for two reasons: first, because it is conceptualizations of parental agency in relation to children’s media consumption that are investigated and, second, because adult professionals and political groups have dominated these conceptualizations in public debates.

The definition of consumption above emphasizes the role commodities play in the construction of cultural values and norms. When children and adults interact with commodities, they are understood to express and negotiate their identity in relation to the society they are part of. In a recent criticism of the term “consumer socialization”, Daniel Thomas Cook proposes that we call this active process “commercial enculturation” (Cook 2010). This is a concept that confronts a narrow view of what constitutes consumption. The concept “assumes that consumption and meaning, and thus culture, cannot be separated from each other. [...] Children [...] are...] entering into social relationships with and through goods and their associations” (Cook 2010: 70). Taking inspiration from Stanley Fish (1980), we can understand consumer culture as something that takes place within specific “interpretive communities” bound by space and time. This again leads to the question of how meaning-making, understood as enculturation, is related to children’s media consumption at a specific point in time. Furthermore, by appropriating this perspective, the conceptual constructions created in the debates about children and media come into focus as spaces where parents’ agency as co-consumers is defined and contested in light of its contribution to (their children’s) enculturation.

The above characterization of (media) consumption emphasizes that, when we consume, we participate in the maintenance or undermining of a system of cultural and social values. This means that when parents are involved in children’s consumption directly or indirectly as co-consumers, they participate in what we might call the cultural politics of consumption, if we take politics to signify a shared set of assumptions or lived identities. When parents take part in children’s consumption, they are, thus, wittingly or unwittingly engaged in consumption politics, creating identities for themselves and their children through their involvement with goods, as also described by Roger Silverstone and his colleagues with the concept “the moral economy of the household” (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1992). It is the ways in which these identities have shaped or been shaped in public debates that are of central interest in the present article. As we shall see, the process of how specific conceptualizations of the child consumer are constructed is particularly pertinent in this process, as it indirectly and often unwittingly produces a
certain image of idealized adult behaviour against which the actions of adults, including parents, can be viewed (Cook 2011).

**Across Media, Across Nations:**
*A Scandinavian Comparison of Parent Pressure*

In order to investigate change and continuity in the conceptualization of the parental role in children’s media consumption, I compare how this issue has been shaped in the public debate by focusing at two points in time between 1945 and 1975: the mid-fifties and the late sixties. These two periods were established as units for comparison using two different entry points: first, through an examination of previous literature on histories of children’s media in Scandinavia in the latter part of the nineteenth century (e.g., Bakøy 1999; Birkeland et al. 2005; Christensen 2003; Christensen 2006; Felitzen 1999; Helander 1998; Kåreland 2009; Rydin 2000). Second, digital and printed indexes from Denmark, Sweden and Norway, which list the titles of all major native language newspaper and periodical articles from 1945-1975, were systematically reviewed using a set of keywords related to children and media to determine which periods to look at in detail. On the basis of this review, two periods were established as centres for the analysis, as articles were particularly numerous during these periods and, judging from the titles, where charged with normative content: 1953-1957 and 1968-1972. For these two periods, all indexed articles related to children’s media consumption in a leisure-time setting were collected, using the registers and indexes’ lists of themes by date and titles, or electronic meta-data. These added up to 1942 articles (see Fig. 1). Later, because intertextual references to other works by a specific author, conference or government reports or radio broadcasts appeared in the articles, this material too was included into the data pool. In this way, many sources from both before and after the selected key periods, often of a different nature (books, reports, broadcasts) than what had first been in focus (articles), came to inform the analysis. This has enriched the explanations of continuity and break by allowing a ‘thickening’ of the analytical description both chronologically and with extra layers of biographical data on key debaters (professional background; key arguments in scholarly/political work), hubs of professional dissemination (union meetings; professional journals and conferences) and political influence (government reports and white books).

**Table 1.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through their interconnectedness, the sources present a discursive map that covers the cultural space in which struggles over children’s leisure-time media consumption have taken place. These turned out to be arenas in which no institution *per se* has held power but, rather, a free-for-all, no man’s land between different groups of welfare-state
professionals, media producers, parents, politicians and cultural critics. Analysing this map with the help of key arguments in secondary literature (including, but not limited to, ibid.), we see how hegemony has shifted in this arena in an intricate interplay with broader sociocultural and political changes in the welfare states.

The theoretical point of departure has formed analytical fix-points for the analysis in the form of questions related to the communicative process that has taken place in the public during the two periods. In order to analyse the construction of parental identity in co-consumption of children’s media, I have therefore used the following questions to categorize the vast body of sources:

1) What were the roles that the media should (and should not) play in children’s lives;
2) Who were the professionals/political groupings that defined the answer to these questions (and what does this tell us about the motivation for their positions in the debates);
3) How were parents addressed directly or positioned indirectly as either co-consumers or adults in general (and thus assumed to have different behaviour patterns than children, as outlined in Cook 2011).

All of these questions were related to a general analysis of themes that derived from a triangulation of the sources, the existing historiography and theoretical fix-points related to “media enculturation”, “parental co-consumption” and “children-as-consumers”.

The vastness of the sources and their various origins meant that I could trace particular arguments or even a specific debater through various kinds of mediated public arenas, from academic journals and specialized professional magazines to newspapers and popular magazines. Given the overall scope of the analysis, it has been the similarities across these different spheres that, primarily, have held my interest, as I take these to reflect the broader socio-cultural foundation of the professional or political groups that were involved in the debates. This is also why I have chosen to refer to a number of specific sources, which express an idea or a viewpoint particularly well, and to combine these with related observations/analytical entry points from secondary literature. I have hereby allowed specific debaters and texts to become representatives of professional or political groupings. The sources referenced below must thus be understood as representatives of groupings made from the categories that were established from my initial analysis of the material based on different positions in the public debates.

1950s: Irresponsible and Incompetent Parents

In the late forties and early fifties, Norway, Sweden and Denmark all had governmental or other semi-official bodies that conducted large surveys on the reading practices of children and young people (Bejerod 1954; Fransson 1954; Slettvold 1953; Unge paedagoger 1952). They all found great gaps in what educators would like children to read and what children preferred. The data included information about all kinds of reading material from books to magazines, newspapers and comics. The concern appears to be as great when it was Enid Blyton types of books as when it was comics in newspapers or magazines that children read: all materials, books or comics, that were not carefully adapted to the minds of children were considered to be dangerous to children’s well-
being – no matter their format. Certain formats were seen as more closely connected to quality literature than others: the unique book that was not part of a series, written by a well-known author and published by an equally well-known publisher (ibid.; Jensen 2012). But there was nothing that was safe for the untrained eye, as the Norwegian authors’ union warned: Norway’s best publishing house had been infested by the Nazis during the war, resulting in the poor and dubious quality of their children’s books (Hagemann 1954). Therefore, to understand which books were best for children, one could not just buy a book judging from the publisher, price or general format. No, teachers and librarians continually warned; to know whether something was appropriate, one had to have knowledge of both developmental psychology and aesthetics (see, e.g., Buttenschøn 1953; Larson 1954; Nørvig 1952; Tenfjord 1953).

The importance of children’s media consumption meant that children and their parents would need careful guidance in their choice of media products. Unsupervised consumption of inappropriate material was assumed to have damaging consequences for children’s mental health, as we see in the debates on comics during the period (Larson 1954; Winter 1995). The connection between the focus of dominant professions on prevention of mental harm and a strong emphasis on the need for knowledge about children’s psychological development in order to select the right reading material framed the role of parents in children’s media consumption: their lack of professional insight made them useless, even harmful, to the social engineers’ panoptical procedures.

Towards the mid-fifties, work by UNESCO on children as a new mass media audience was central in turning general Scandinavian concerns about children’s reading material into more specific concerns about superhero comics. With the Norwegian UNESCO committee functioning as a hub for the dissemination of concerns about comics to a Scandinavian public, the attention of librarians and teachers in Denmark, Sweden and Norway turned towards the potential threat the superheroes presented (Arbejdsutvalget i Statens folkeopplysningsråd 1954; Statens folkeopplysningsråd 1956; Winther 1955; Bejerot 1954). For the Europeans in UNESCO, the threat of superhero comics had primarily been framed as a question of the Americanization and homogenization of Western culture (Bauchard 1952/53). In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, this was picked up within the framework of scepticism against free market capitalism – a key issue in the new welfare states, where the aim was that living standards should not depend on pure market forces (Christiansen et al. 2006:12). In the discussions on comics this became a focus, because children were seen as particularly vulnerable to the capitalist recklessness embedded in comics production and distribution, as they were believed not to be able to withstand the low quality products and the power of advertisements (see, e.g., Brøndegaard 1955; Fransson 1953; Ipsen 1954; Johansen 1954; Nørvig 1953).

The mid-fifties discussions about comics also took on other dimensions besides the question of commercial dumping down of quality in children’s reading material. In Scandinavia, the role of children as future citizens of the welfare state became a determining issue for the course of the debate and its framing of parents as co-consumers. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the interests of the state in all three countries widened to include social issues that had previously belonged to the private sphere; and, accordingly, their citizens were increasingly counted as active participants in the progress and workings of the state alongside various professional groups (de Coninck-Smith & Sandin 2004). Ning de Coninck-Smith and Bengt Sandin have described the
parallel expansion of the welfare states’ areas of interest and growing democratization of society at large as closely linked to an increased focus on education and sociocultural equality (ibid.: 768). The focus on education and social equality through the establishment of comprehensive schooling meant that all children, no matter their cultural, social or economic background, were now part of the central resource on which the new society should be built. Superheroes, however, were seen as endangering this plan.

Alarmed by children’s comics consumption, librarians and teachers took up arms against Batman, Superman and the Phantom. For the most part, their head-on plunge into the public sphere with fierce warnings against comics book can be understood in light of the responsibility these professionals had in their role as social entrepreneurs. The formal education as well as informal bildung that children were seen to be in need of to fulfil their role as good welfare state citizens had been put in the hands of teachers and librarians by the Scandinavia governments. These professionals had to ensure that children grew up supporting democracy, equality and shared views that would facilitate the continued growth of public welfare. To them the superheroes’ violent and non-democratic ways of solving society’s problems were seen as incompatible with these aims (Arbejdssutvalget i Statens Flokeopplysningsråd 1954; Bejerot 1954; Haxthausen 1955; Norland 1954; Slettvold 1953; Gustafsson 1954). An additional support – albeit on a more practical level – for the view that comics were inappropriate reading material was the suspicion that their visual representations of text in a short and snappy form would harm children’s ability to read “proper” books, a skill that was believed to be pertinent to becoming a good citizen.

The importance of children’s leisure time media consumption for enculturation purposes put great pressure on parents. When they allowed their children to consume the “wrong” kinds of media products, such as the superhero comics, it was these future citizens’ mental health, and thus the very foundation of the welfare societies, that was at risk. That parents were exposing children to this risk and thereby failing in their role as co-consumers is quite clear from discussions about children’s media consumption: they were described as lacking skills, for instance, in choosing books. In articles about children’s literature, we are told how little parents actually knew about finding appropriate books for their children – they were incompetent in this matter and needed careful guidance by professionals (Bentzon 1953; Buttenschøn 1953; Nørvig 1953; Kragh-Müller 1953). But this incompetence was also described as paired with a certain degree of irresponsibility; parents were also portrayed as absent and uninterested. In articles about film-going, parents were described as sending their children off to the cinema, not caring what they watched or how it affected them (Siersted 1953; Granat 1953; Germeten 1953). In the period’s most cited and elaborated book on children’s comics consumption, we hear how terrible it was that parents themselves read comics and did not care about their children’s comics consumption (Larson 1954).

In the debates about children’s leisure-time media consumption, “parents” were generally used as a neutral term, not divided into gender or class; only a few times were working-class parents mentioned as being particularly neglectful, but this was the exception (Bentzon 1953). This un-nuanced negative description of parents’ general incompetence and neglect underscores the point that it was the general climate of professionalization that had a great stake in creating the period’s strong and negative discourse around parental lack of competence regarding their children’s media consumption.
Solutions to the problem of children’s poor choices in reading material and films often took the form of creating a space in which consumption could be regulated by professionals who understood children’s needs for media products that were mentally safe and good for their enculturation. Film clubs and children’s libraries were suggested as spatial solutions for creating a “safe” environment in which children could come and read, watch and listen to media productions selected to fit their age and stage. Once again, we see how developmental psychology in its basic and popular form created a foundation for the period’s common understanding of children as mentally vulnerable and subject to great danger if exposed to something unfit for their particular mental stage. Media consumption generated by the combination of market and peer pressure; children’s own preferences; and parental ignorance were all threats that children had to learn how to avoid, and their parents were side-tracked in this process. In conclusion, parents failed to provide the support their children needed, because they had neither the pedagogical insight nor the interest in providing their children with what teachers and librarians thought was appropriate media for children as future citizens of the Scandinavian welfare states.

1960s and 1970s: Conservative and Corrupted Parents

In the late sixties, the Scandinavian countries experienced a challenge to established norms, which played a prominent role in the debates about children and media. The significance of the 1968 youth rebellion and its counter-culture has often been linked to the change in pedagogical and educational values at this point in time (Andersen 2007; Nørgaard 2008; Korsvold 2008; Rydin 2000; Kåreland 2009). Criticism of existing cultural and social values, in particular the way in which they were transmitted to younger generations inside and outside the educational system, was a common starting point in the many different forms that “1968” took – from the hard-core political variants of neo-Marxism to the counter-culture lifestyle of the hippies (Jensen 2013). However, Norwegian historian Tora Korsvold has shown how the criticism of the welfare state from the New Left to some degree converged with changes in welfare state institutions and ensured a shift from a primarily psychological definition of children’s needs to an increased emphasis on sociology (Korsvold 2008). The shift in dominance of professional knowledge inside the welfare state and the criticism of the educational system from outside are of particular interest here: together, they seem to pose a two-front attack on the fifties’ dominant discourse on education and developmental psychology, which had defined the negative role of parents as co-consumers in debates on children’s media consumption.

Fuelled by a desire to revolutionize the Scandinavian societies, a new generation of intellectuals and producers of children’s media entered the debate about children’s media consumption by the late sixties. Their interest in changing the existing society radically caused them to focus on the role of children’s media as a conveyer of established values and norms. In 1968, Gunilla Ambjörnsson, a young, Swedish children’s book author, critic and television producer, wrote a book called *Trash Culture for Children*, which collected, connected and amplified the critical viewpoints of her fellow left-wing intellectuals and media producers on the production, distribution and content of children’s media (Schultz 1972; Sundström & Allroth 1970; Ørjasæter 1972). In Ambjörnsson’s view, there was no such thing as neutral or apolitical content; all children’s media had political
significance. To her, that which was said to be “neutral” was, indeed, political because it did not reveal the ways in which it supported already existing political, economic and sociocultural structures. Thus, she took one of the most widespread opinions of the 1968 youth revolt (Olsen & Andersen 2004) and brought it into the field of children’s media. Building on this foundation, Ambjörnsson and her like-minded contemporaries argued that children would benefit from an explicit politicization of their media products. They proposed to bring to an end what, in their view, was a long-standing tradition of giving children media products that were either “commercial trash” or so-called “high-quality” – the latter of which was perceived to be moralistic and escapist (Ambjörnsson 1968).

A central point in the argument for revisiting the standards of children’s media was that children deserved to be treated as competent and knowing individuals. The new generation of debaters argued that the well-meant, protective and moralistic tendencies they believed were apparent in many of the books, films and television programmes that were generally considered to be of high quality and appropriate for children made these media products boring. They proposed that children were suspicious of happy-endings, because they were well aware that the real world was not like this (Ambjörnsson 1968; Hemme 1968; Sjöstrand 1970). Thus, the argument ran, these seemingly appropriate media, for instance books that were promoted in the fifties as children’s classics, were dull, unattractive alternatives to the media products of “commercial trash culture” (Ambjörnsson 1968: preface). Commercial trash (pocket books, comics, magazines, slapstick movies and westerns), therefore, was what many Swedish children preferred, because they found these products “more realistic despite the fantasy they represent[ed]” (ibid.: 24). Accordingly, this lack of respect for children’s interests and needs, apparent in the so-called high-culture products, was what drew children into the arms of the “trash”. The emphasis on and criticism of children’s low status in traditional hierarchies of power, became particularly important to the discussion of children’s media consumption in the sixties and subsequently to the role of parents as co-consumers, because the focus on children as individuals marginalized parents as an entry point to children’s leisure-time media consumption even further than in the fifties.

The new standpoints, which were brought up in discussions on children’s media, won a great deal of ground in the growing area of children’s culture, which attracted academic, public and political interest. An official advisory assembly in the Nordic Countries [Nordisk Kulturkommissjon] discussed the questions Ambjörnsson’s book had raised (Nordisk Kulturkommissjon 1969). The success of its ideas can partly be explained by the ways in which the new generation of debaters – despite their original, radical political agenda – managed to include and reach out to a fair share of the debaters who had dominated the fifties on several fronts. The points on which these otherwise very different groups came together are important, because their unity partly explains why parents were continually framed as inadequate co-consumers even though the standards for appropriate children’s media had changed by 180 degrees.

One of the points on which the old and new generation agreed was the distributive solutions they proposed to improve children’s access to appropriate media products. To debaters of both generations, the state, not the home, played the central role as the distributor of appropriate children’s media to all children. In 1969, the Nordic Commission for Culture held a symposium where debaters from both generations met (Skard 1970). They disagreed on many issues, but a speech held by one of the fifties’ central debaters,
Norwegian Åsa Gruda Skard, shows how they agreed on parents’ inability to be good co-consumers of children’s media. In her speech, Skard emphasized that, even though she saw the family as the ideal caretaker, the state had to actively balance out what she called “the unfortunate” conditions that industrialization and urbanization had created for families in modern society (Skard in Nordisk Kulturkommission 1969). She claimed that appropriate children’s media did not reach children because parents were ignorant about the importance of the issue. Her solution was that the state had to be more actively involved in the distribution of appropriate media products using instruments such as legislation and education, making the state a strong, governing support to the family (ibid.:40). These solutions were considered an extension of the power of the state, which would help parents and, in the end, children to make appropriate choices. Likewise, Ambjörnsson also called for state solutions to the distribution of appropriate children’s media to all children and raised the possibility of having a non-commercial, national publishing house. The state, thus, became a central solution in the various conceptualizations of appropriate children’s media that both women represented. Nevertheless, Ambjörnsson saw the values of the current state as conservative and wished to replace it with another, more socialist state (Ambjörnsson 1968).

Ambjörnsson represented the view that children’s media should help children see the problems of society and address potential problems within their own family (ibid.). In the view Ambjörnsson represented, children’s media were supposed to give children the ability to face their own and society’s problems – independent of what political views or social values their parents might hold. Within the left-wing discourse to which Ambjörnsson adhered, parents were depicted as the conservative forces in children’s lives: they were an obstacle to children’s empowerment and emancipation (and, ultimately, to the achievement of a socialist society). This – freedom from the restricted enculturation promoted by the home and the school – was what the new kind of socialist children’s media was supposed to help to overcome (FBT 1968:3). According to Ambjörnsson, owing to parents’ potentially conservative influence, they should play only a marginal role in children’s media consumption. Thus children represented a progressive resource in the present society, but also, as in the fifties, a bright future population that should take society in the right direction – and children’s media consumption should support this. However, it was no longer as educated welfare state citizens, but as emancipated people in a new and different society, free from old traditions and values, that children should develop. In this process, children’s media became a means for separating children from their potentially conservative parents.

Discussion: Parent Pressure, Parent Failure

In the landscape of public opinion on children’s media consumption, the dubious role of parents as co-consumers was often tucked inside another point, mentioned in passing as just another thing to worry about. Only in rare cases were parents directly addressed; their lack of interest and knowledge was described and lamented, but they were not confronted as active recipients of this message in public writings that discussed the issue. Direct address to parents only appeared in texts that were meant to guide their co-consumption in a restrictive manner, such as book reviews. During the entire period 1945-75, parents were, on the whole, not trusted to have the skill, insight or right at-
titude to be able to participate in children’s media consumption unless they received direct instructions, and they were not invited to take part in discussions about their role and failures. Thus, even if the role of media in children’s lives was a highly political, opinion-based matter, in the sense that it was determined by whatever ends the dominant debaters wanted children’s enculturation to be aimed at – shifting from the fifties’ good welfare state citizens in the making to the seventies’ critical and politically active children – parents were nevertheless side-tracked as incompetent. In the fifties, it was their lack of professional skills that framed this picture, in the seventies it was their lack of (the right) political insight.

The fierce importance with which the arguments for one or another kind of media product were stated further restricted the scope for parental agency. Throughout the period, children’s media consumption was treated as something that had a great impact on their enculturation. Should children consume “inappropriate” material, they would not be able to carry on society in the ways that the dominant debaters wanted, neither in the fifties nor the sixties or seventies. The high risk involved was therefore another reason why parents should either be firmly guided or kept out of children’s involvement with media altogether.

This positioning of parents, and their subsequent failures in carrying out the right consumption politics, can partly been explained in relation to the development of the (Scandinavian) welfare state. The increasing professionalization of all public realms related to children, and the ever-increasing interest in social issues that previously resided in the private sphere, were important to the view of parental co-consumption. In the fifties, the perfect parent was someone who acted like a professional librarian or teacher when it came to choices of leisure-time media – which regular parents failed to do. And though the debates in the late sixties were dominated by other types of professional and political interest, which rebelled against traditional educational/rearing discourses and practices, the intellectuals and producers of children’s media did not argue against making the child a subject of society, quite the contrary: as parents were seen to be too embedded in traditional practices to reach, children should be “saved” by someone else, namely, the producers of (the right kind of) children’s media. The entire periods’ recurrent solution of spatial separation of children from the household and its dodgy moral economy and placement of them into libraries, theatres and film-clubs underpins this conclusion; it reflects a material demarcation of the role that parents could (not) play when it came to children’s media consumption.

Throughout the period, the description of children as innocent in any consumer relationship also had consequences for the implied notion of adults, including parents. Whatever role the media were preferably believed to play in children’s lives (educational, liberating or creatively stimulating) and however children were seen as not consuming what was for their own good, they were believed to be innocent in this respect. Children were persistently, from the forties to the seventies, describe as lacking knowledge about the “appropriate” alternatives, as being seduced by enticing commercials or tricked by flashy, but hollow, stories. The indirect implication here was that, had they known better, they would have chosen what a given period’s dominating debaters thought was appropriate. This belief in children’s desire to live up to the standards of whoever was in power in the debates reflected badly on parents; they were the adults who should know better, but did not.
In this last line of interpretation, we see what Daniel Thomas Cook has called “a ghostly presence” of adulthood (Cook 2011). Cook made this comment based on implicit notions of adulthood inherent in the scholarly field of Childhood Studies and their negative consequences for our view of adult capacity for constantly enlightened, rational agency. However, we could also argue that the public debates on children’s media consumption have been “haunted” by a notion of adults and, ultimately, parents as those who were supposed to know better. The consequence of describing children such that their choices were seen as unwitting of the identities their media consumption created for them – rather than as choices based on a different moral economy – therefore made parents weak in their role as (responsible) co-consumers unable to perform as their children would, given the chance.

The dynamics of parent pressure in public debates described above raises several interesting questions for today’s research on children’s media consumption. First, it would be interesting to ask which professional norms dominate the field today and how they pressure parents. Second, a quick “googling” shows that today, at least in Denmark, parents themselves are “talking back” in letters to the editor, on social network sites and blogs. But which socio-cultural segments do these parents represent and are their voices being heard? And, third, has the increased acknowledgment of children’s agency meant a lowering of pressure on parents as co-consumers? If we look at today’s public debates, we see how “childhood” is still singled out as the place where social illnesses such as poverty, obesity and literacy should be battled. The, fourth question is, then, how does children’s enculturation via media consumption factor in here, and what pressure does it place on parents?

Notes
1. Here, Scandinavia is taken to cover Denmark, Sweden and Norway as opposed to the Nordic Countries, which also include Iceland and Finland.
2. The methodology described in this chapter was not only used for the present article, but for collection of all sources for my PhD dissertation (Defining the (In)appropriate: Scandinavian Debates about the Role of Media in Children’s Lives, 1950-1985. Department of History and Civilisation, European University Institute, Florence, Italy).

References
Brøndegaard, V. J. (1955) ’Kontrol med kuløren’ in Demokraten, 4 June.


Schultz, Per (1972) *Barn & Kultur*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
Unge pædagoger (1952) ‘Specialnummer: børns læsning’.

HELLE STRANDGAARD JENSEN, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Media, Cognition and Communication, University of Copenhagen, rgx626@hum.ku.dk
Return of the Talking Heads

Entering the Third Wave of Television News Dramaturgy

Kenneth Reinecke Hansen, Peter Bro & Ralf Andersson

Abstract
The present article suggests that the brief history of Western television news dramaturgy can be expounded as three major waves: from the early days of the talking heads in the studio, over the narrativization of the field report to a (re-)current studio- and field-based talking heads format. In order to analyze the latest development entering the third wave, we propose a theoretically based dramaturgical model for the television news item. The analysis concludes that, with the current ‘return’ of the talking heads format, the pre-produced and pre-packaged bulletin program about past events is dissolving and transforming into an evaluative present- and future-oriented update format that resembles the 24-hour news-only channels. Production time merges with broadcast time so that the uncertainty of live spreads to the dramaturgy.

Keywords: dramaturgy, live interview, narrative, television journalism, television news item, television news report

Introduction
In most of the Western world since the late 1980s, television journalism has been dominated by a strong norm of telling the news in narrative formats with distinct storylines and visuals, cf. the principles of visual storytelling (Everton 1999, Baym 2004) and the adaptation of various structuralist-narratological and dramaturgical models in the training of television journalists (Everton 1999, Larsen 2003, Hansen 2013, Larsen and Frederiksen 2014). Even though the notion of ‘narrative’ might be debatable in that connection, it is true that these news stories have typically been researched and told by one narrator, the journalist. In this regard, the talking heads format (Morse 1985) that dominated early television has often been considered to be of low quality or, at best, a workaround solution to delivering the news (Comstock 1980: 43).

However, current television journalism is challenged by a number of changes in news technology and news markets (Anderson et al. 2012) with digitalization/convergence, increasing competition (Montgomery 2007: 18, 184 f.) and on-demand viewership changing viewer behavior. For instance, in Denmark, the two public service television stations, DR and TV 2, have lost 500,000 news viewers over the 2003-2013 period (Pedersen 2013), a considerable loss in a country with approximately 5.5 million inhabitants. Hence, radical changes are being made in news production routines (Bro et al. 2015).
We propose that the form of television journalism should be understood as evolving through three waves and that the latest development marks in many regards a return of the talking heads tradition. Our main focus is (entering) the third wave, addressing the research question: What are the dramaturgical consequences of returning to a talking heads format for the news item?

The scholarly literature is limited in its descriptions of the dramaturgy, i.e. internal structure and course, of the television news item: how the news is told, in what order and by whom. Thus, in order to address the research question, we develop a dramaturgical model for the television news item based on discourse and genre analysis (e.g., Montgomery 2007, Martin and Rose 2008), narratology (e.g., Labov and Waletzky 1967, Genette 1980), and prescriptive journalism textbooks (e.g., Everton 1999).

Our focal point is an illustrative case from Denmark that has parallels in countries throughout the Western world: The larger of the two Danish public service television stations, DR, has faced the changes in the news environment by introducing a new workflow, framed *The News Engine* (corresponding roughly to the BBC’s somewhat more adequate metaphor *Newsgathering*). With the news engine, a large section of DR’s news division now comprises ‘live teams’ that are responsible for interviewing, shooting, etc., while other journalists edit the stories and prepare them for different platforms, and still other journalists – internally high-profile and publicly familiar correspondents – deliver live interviews (Andersson 2013). This is a very radical change in the working routines, as journalists used to be individually responsible for various steps in the production process, sometimes even all the steps, cf. the so-called video journalists (Everton 1999). With this case, we can study the recent development in television news dramaturgy, because the news engine quite abruptly introduced and accelerated the trend toward a return of the talking heads. Specifically, we analyze the recent development in the most essential part of the news engine: DR’s television news bulletin program *TV-Avisen* (*TVA*), aired nightly at 6.30 p.m. As it turns out, the news engine is not solely to ‘blame’ for the changes in the form of TVA. Rather, the news engine is apparently accelerating a process that was already underway.

**Data and Methods**

The present findings stem from of a larger study on DR’s news engine – and its consequences for the production process, journalists’ roles and self-understanding, and the content of TVA (cf. Andersson 2013, Bro et al. 2015). The argument of the current study relies on a broad literature review and, more specifically, on quantitative and qualitative analyses of TVA in 2008, 2011 and 2013.

The news engine was introduced on 1 September 2012. For the content analysis (cf. section 3), we compared the overall composition of TVA at 6.30 p.m. from the same week (week 17) in 2008, 2011, and 2013. Two coders measured time spent on news reporting versus live elements, and enumerated sources being interviewed live.

Applying the dramaturgical model (presented in section 5), all of the news items from week 17 in all three years were analyzed with regard to their stage structure and how the stages were realized linguistically (cf. Montgomery 2007: 36). Due to the limited space in the present article, however, we mainly present qualitative analyses of major changes in dramaturgy of TVA between 2008 and 2013 (section 6).
Three Waves of Television News Dramaturgy

Generally, the form of television journalism is and has been dependent on technological enablements and constraints. From the onset of television, cumbersome technology contributed to a strong talking heads tradition, where television news was presented from the studio, i.e. read out by the presenter or ‘debated’ in long monologues on a bland background (Barnhurst and Steele 1997: 48, Hjarvard 1999). Doing field reports was simply troublesome and expensive. Even when technology became more flexible, public service stations like DR insisted on the talking heads format for some time, at any rate up to the end of the Danish television monopoly in 1988. This format raised a scholarly critique that television news did not harness the media’s potential for visual language (Graber 1990), which might also result from a certain institutional inertia. ‘TV-Avisen’ literally means ‘The TV Newspaper’.

Nevertheless, when lighter technology was combined with deregulation and increased competition in the news market (Hjarvard 1999, Ytreberg 2001, Dunn 2005: 147), more edited field reports appeared, and the talking heads format was largely abandoned (Barnhurst and Steele 1997: 49, Baym 2004: 284), or rather, the two ways of delivering the news became competing ‘schools’ (Ytreberg 2001: 362 f.). In Denmark, a television journalist became a reporter, and as a whole, the evolution in the 1980-1990s can be characterized as increasing narrativization: The reports adapted narrative and dramatical models in order to sustain the viewer’s attention, which until recently has been bound in real time, applying a range of narrative devices and ascending editing. These characteristics are seemingly contrasting: Reality is being segmented – literally cut – to a greater extent, and this is a fragmentation. But at the same time, these fragments are packaged (Griffin 1992: 139) and framed into a tight angle linked together by the journalist’s voice-over. The narrativization has thus been problematized, as it cuts up the sources’ discourses into sound and image bites (Griffin 1992: 124-125, Hallin 1992; Barnhurst and Steele 1997, Sand and Helland 1998: 231, Baym 2004: 295, Eriksson 2006). Concurrently, however, it has been acknowledged because edited news reports are apparently easier to comprehend, retain and recall compared to live talk formats (Edwardson et al. 1981, Graber 1990, Brosius 1991, Snoeijer et al. 2002, Machill et al. 2007).

In recent years, the edited news report is declining and, concurrent with a rise in the much cheaper live interview, facilitated by the technically easier exchanges to various news fields. This is also documented in our preliminary content analysis of the overall composition of TVA at 6.30 p.m., showing that over the course of the 2008-2013 period, the amount of time spent on prerecorded news reports has decreased significantly, concurrent with a doubling of the total length of live elements, i.e. news presented live by the presenter from the studio, and live interviews (cf. Figure 1).

The graph suggests that the evolution toward ‘more live’ was already underway before the introduction of the news engine. However, the changes accelerated in 2011-2013, and in 2013, more time was in fact spent on live elements than on news reports. Compared to 2008, where reports outnumbered live elements at a 3:1 ratio, this change seems quite significant.

Furthermore, a large – and increasing – number of these live interviews were with DR’s own staff members, i.e. “live, two-way affiliated interviews” (Montgomery 2007: 117 ff.).¹ The content analysis reveals that 68 percent of the live interviews were with
Figure 1. Prerecorded News Reports versus Live Elements in TVA (per cent)

DR’s own journalists in 2008 and 2011, whereas in 2013, the corresponding figure was 75 percent. In other words, DR’s own journalists and correspondents have in fact become the main source in TVA. This finding is in concordance with, e.g., Bucy and Grabe (2007: 665), who show that journalists were speaking on-air about twice as often as political candidates during the US presidential election campaigns in 1992-2004, and Kroon Lundell and Eriksson (2010), who find that journalists-as-interviewees are now more common than politicians-as-interviewees in British and Swedish television news (cf. also Baym 2004: 292, Tolson 2006: 68, Kroon Lundell 2010: 434). In content, these interviews most likely align with a general trend in which journalism is becoming increasingly interpretive (Schudson 1982: 100; Barnhurst & Mutz 1997; Baym 2004: 292; Tolson 2006; Djerf-Pierre & Weibull 2008: 209; Salgado & Strömback 2012; Barnhurst 2013; Kroon Lundell & Ekström 2013) and future-oriented (Ellis 2000; Jaworski et al. 2003; Neiger 2007). According to Salgado and Strömback, this interpretive journalism “is opposed to or going beyond descriptive, fact-focused and source-driven journalism […] by journalistic explanations, evaluations, contextualizations, or speculations going beyond verifiable facts or statements by sources” (2012: 154).

Is Television News Narrative?
The recent decline in edited news reports has caused scholars to lament a loss of intelligibility. Ben-Porath, for instance, states that “[t]elevision news stands out as the most
coherently organized form of news narrative” (2007: 418), and when turning to talking heads formats the result is “internal fragmentation of the news message” (p. 415, emphasis original; cf. also Griffin 1992: 139; Lewis 1994: 33; Barnhurst & Mutz 1997: 19, Ellis 2000: 75). However, the – often presupposed – view that television news is in fact narrative has been challenged, even contradicted (e.g., Lewis 1994). Ytreberg finds that television news admittedly contains “several ingredients that are common to narratives (persons, places, events, causes) but seems to order them quite differently […]” (2001: 359). And Montgomery argues that “the core principle of intelligibility in television news reports might be summed up as the convincing deployment of pictures – and, in this respect, narrative is only an occasional discursive resource […]” (2007: 91). When television news reports are often considered narratives, cf. also common-sense concepts like news story, it is probably mainly due to the voice-over format (Montgomery 2007: 89), but also the temporal organization of content (Martin & Rose 2008: 244). Television journalists narrate about (communicative) events that occur or have occurred in time, in a format that expands in time and with time as a composition principle. Admittedly, chronology is ruptured and reorganized, which is why (here written) “news stories are opposed to other types, in that they privilege textual organisation over temporal sequence” (ibid., 81), but this does not necessarily make the news item less narrative. From a narratological perspective, the news item thus resembles other narratives in that it constructs a narrative on the basis of an underlying chronological story (Genette 1980). It is, however, obvious that this mainly applies to the report; as the report is replaced by live elements, recency (event time) merges with currency (reader time) and immediacy (writer time) in “a precarious performance” (Barnhurst 2011: 109). Thus, narratively, the “frequent selection of the present tense helps to collapse the distance between the news field and its report in such a way that undermines chronology.” (Montgomery 2007: 93).

From our perspective, the most severe objection to considering television news items narrative is that they most often comprise “running news stories where the resolution of plotlines is simply not available because events have only partially unfolded” (Ytreberg 2001: 365; see also Bell 1991: 154-155, Lewis 1994: 28 f., Scannell 1996: 84, Ellis 2000: 78, Dunn 2005: 145, Montgomery 2007: 91). The news is literally ‘going on’ as it is told. Thus, the items are mostly open-ended and respond to the news’ latest developments and possible futures (Ellis 2000). In addition, television news is in fact not – or rarely – composed around suspense and an “at least minimally complicated detour, the intentional deviance, in tension, which is the plot of narrative” (Brooks 1984: 104). Rather, television news delivers an adequate summary already in the news kernel (Montgomery 2007: 39), resembling the inverted pyramid (Lewis 1994: 29 f., Ytreberg 2001) with a more uncertain and frayed ending. On the other hand, the narrativization of television journalism has carried metaphors like package (Baym 2004: 281-2) and wrap (Everton 1999: 38), indicating that journalists have sought to, at least dramaturgically, close the items in a narrative-like manner (Lewis 1994: 29).

The more fundamental challenge to the view of television news as narrative is connected to a perception that “television as a form tends towards […] uncertainty and openness” (Ellis: 2000: 82), deriving from the fact that “the domestic setting in which it is viewed, makes television eminently interruptible” (Dunn 2005: 130). Accordingly, television narrative is, generally speaking, “more diffuse, more fragmentary, more episodic and iterative than cinema” (Montgomery 2007: 90), given that cinema consti-
tutes a “fictional totality” (ibid. 225). Because television news is composed of coherent segments at best (Dunn 2005: 146), these should rather be compared with the mostly brief and incomplete narratives of everyday life (Labov and Waletzky 1967, Labov 1972, 1997, Martin & Rose 2008). These can be grasped as open or discursive genres, not (only) to be defined in “properties of talk or text “itself” […] but rather in terms of aspects of the context” (van Dijk 2008: 149). Thus, it is possible for a news report to be coherent, even if it lacks text-internal cohesive ties: The verbal track refers both homophorically/intertextually to presupposed knowledge of the world and former news (‘the so-called X-affair’) and endophorically/intermodally to the more or less parallel pictures, due to “a presumption of shared reference between the verbal track and the visual track” (Montgomery 2007: 95).

A Dramaturgical Model for the Television News Item

In this section, we present a fundamental dramaturgical model for the television news item, mainly based on Montgomery’s distinction between axis of presentation and axis of reporting (2007: 77), as well as on a distinction between modes and stages.

Within the narrative presentation form, which has time as the organizing principle in indirect address, we find it useful to operate with the two modes of dramatic and epic. The former can be characterized as a (causal-) temporal account without narrator, presented scenically and linearly in an ‘ongoing now’ (mimesis), and the latter as a causal-temporal account with narrator, narrated in the past tense, thus allowing curved leaps in time (diegesis).

Accordingly, we can localize a didactic presentation form, which is predominant in television journalism and is causally-logically structured in direct address (Larsen 1995: 90 f.). Within the didactic presentation form, we uphold a distinction between a descriptive mode, which instructively lays out information by declining significance according to the news angle (cf. Ytreberg 2001: 358; Machill et al. 2007: 193; Montgomery 2007: 78; roughly corresponding to the information mode in Ekström 2000), and a commentary mode, which analyzes and interprets the news and its (possible) consequences (Bell 1991: 170; Montgomery 2007: 109).

The descriptive mode particularly manifests itself in the kernel, in which the presenter addresses the viewer in a monological and formal, i.e. non-evaluative, discourse, a mode that also applies to much of the report’s voice-over (Ytreberg 2001: 360-1; Montgomery 2007: 84 f.), while the commentary mode is most apparent in the live two-way affiliate interview in a dialogical, informal-conversational and evaluative discourse marked for modality (Montgomery 2007; cf. also Scannell 1996, Labov 1997, Haarman 2004, Tolson 2006: 63, Ekström & Kroon Lundell 2011). The two narrative modes mainly appear in the reports (and particularly in the case of a motor2): epic when voice-over and sound bites are recounting, and dramatic when clean sound and short sound bites ‘unmediatedly’ display scenes in an ongoing present.

However, more specific knowledge about the course of the news item is rather limited, mainly because journalism research has been remarkably sparse when it comes to television news dramaturgy (Langer 1998: 39-40). At least in Denmark, the training of television journalists has largely built on experience-based and prescriptive models, the most common until recently being the Hollywood model as characteristically called
berettermodellen in Danish) – and its compressed edition of the Canadian The Grid’s four stages: Hook, Context, Development, Wrap’ (Everton 1999: 35 f., Larsen 2003: 169 f.). The Grid prescribes that Context, i.e. essential background information, should be located in the first part of the news item, and Development in the second part. Context roughly corresponds to Orientation in Labov and Waletzky’s terminology, and Development to Complication and Resolution (Labov & Waletzky 1967: 32, 39), even though proper Resolution rarely applies to (hard) news (Bell 1991, 154-5). Between Context and Development, a disruption (Martin & Rose 2008: 50 ff.) usually occurs, typically marked in the speech with a “but”, “however”, or similar.

Hook and Wrap – the latter roughly equivalent to Coda (Labov 1972: 365) – are not obligatory stages in television news. It is, however, Kernel – corresponding approximately to Abstract (Bell 1991: 149; Labov 1997: 5) – that, strictly speaking, is the only obligatory stage (Bell 1991: 149, Montgomery 2007: 83). Kernel can be read solely from the studio or augmented with prerecorded footage and/or sound bites, i.e. “live voice-over” (Dunn 2005: 149). Finally, we must embody an independent Evaluation stage located after the report in a live interview or as dispersed “waves of evaluation that penetrate the narrative” (Labov 1972: 369). With these remarks, we can assemble the four modes and the four stages in a prototypical dramaturgical model for the television news item, cf. Figure 2.4

**Figure 2. A Dramaturgical Model for the Television News Item**

STUDIO/LIVE
Didactic: logic

PRESENTATION
REPORT
FIELD

Narrative: temporal
description
epic ↔ dramatic
commentary

KERNEL CONTEXT DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION
time
disruption

If we regard the three waves in the perspective of the model, the first wave was largely characterized by description, weighting Kernel and Context. The second wave expanded the narrative – this was the heyday of The Grid, so to speak. In the third wave, cf. section 6 below, Kernel is expanded (adding several devices: footage, graphs, etc.) concurrently with an expanding Evaluation stage. Narrative is thus diminished, due to the contracting report, and because Evaluation “suspends the forward movement of the action” (Labov 1997: 6).
TV A Dramaturgy Entering the Third Wave

The qualitative analysis below takes its point of departure in a typical 2008 news item, followed up by typical developments in the 2013 material. Thus, although there are more dramaturgical similarities than differences in the analyzed items over the three years, we focus on the most significant differences between 2008 and 2013 in an attempt to identify the dramaturgical consequences of the returning talking heads.

The 2008 news item with the subject heading ‘Torture’ (TV A, 21.4.2008) is a political top story, comprising a packaged report followed by a live interview with the Danish Minister of Justice at the time. The Kernel is read from the studio:

Excerpt 1
Presenter: Minister of Justice Lene Espersen is now considering expelling terrorist suspects to countries that practice torture. Denmark merely needs an agreement with those countries in which they promise not to carry out torture, after a so-called diplomatic guarantee, although not legally binding. But the proposal faces some opposition.

Characteristically, the Kernel is short and summarizing, and miming the dramaturgy of the news report and live interview: The news itself (“now”) and its Context is presented, then disrupted (“although”, “But”), and finally Development is announced: The proposal faces opposition. The mode is descriptive and instructive (“a so-called diplomatic guarantee”). Likewise, in the report, the proposal and its background are presented in the first half, after which a journalistic stand-up overlaps to the second half, where spokespersons from opposing political parties contradict the proposal, to be discussed finally with the Minister herself.

The report has an independent Hook (footage of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack in New York), followed by Context:

Excerpt 2
Reporter: Since the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, we have struggled to make rules and regulations to restrain the terror threat. Recently, two Tunisians were expelled for plotting the assassination of the illustrator Kurt Westergaard. But now they perhaps cannot be expelled because they risk torture in Tunisia. But Lene Espersen has a plan.
Lene Espersen: I will examine whether […]

The transition to the Context stage is clearly marked, visually (terror attack) and verbally (marked theme). Here, Context is about past events, realized in the present perfect and past tenses (and the proposal itself in the present and future tenses). The reporter narrates epically from a distant past (2001), to “Recently” up to “now.”

After Context, the report goes into Development via a visually marked disruption: a stand-up with the reporter in the picture:

Excerpt 3
Reporter: But the idea faces severe resistance, both from organizations such as Amnesty International, who believe it is completely impossible to make reliable agreements with states that allow torture, and from the opposition here in Folke-tinget [the Danish Parliament].
The disruption is also discursively marked with a conjunction (“But”), and compared with the Kernel, characterized by a more evaluative discourse (“severe resistance”; “completely impossible”).

Development itself consists of sound bites with two opposition politicians. Unlike Context, this stage is characterized by resistance (e.g. “We are against …”) and dilemmas. Because the question is fundamental, the tense is mainly the timeless present.

Finally, the report is followed by a live (on tape) interview with the Minister. This is the Evaluation stage testing the proposal against some of the objections. The question design is prepared to challenge counterarguments, logically built up of legal practices from different (comparable) countries: “When you say […] yet you will expel people […]”; “But also a country like Sweden […]”; “But, for instance, in Canada […].”

Thus, ‘Torture’ consists of a summarizing Kernel, a packaged report with clearly marked stages, and a live interview commenting on the statements of the report. These characteristics position the dramaturgy of ‘Torture’ in the second wave, even though live seems to have an independent value (the final interview could have been edited into the report).

When entering the third wave – in this study represented by the 2013 week – several dramaturgical changes can be observed. First, a significantly expanded Kernel (live voice-over) becomes more common, most obviously in items with direct transition to a live interview and (thus) without a prerecorded report. This is the case in ‘Homo-wedding’ (TVA, 23.4.2013), where the following is read in Kernel while pictures from and demonstrations outside the French Parliament are displayed:

**Excerpt 4**

Presenter: We are going to France where the politicians a short while ago decided that homosexuals will be allowed to marry and to adopt children. 331 politicians voted in favor. 225 voted against [pause].

Here the law is, eh, cheered on by the supporters, eh, passed. There has otherwise been great opposition in the National Assembly during, eh, the reading of the law, and, eh, large parts of the population [pause] have been against it. There have been major demonstrations.

Sorry, that was a slightly confusing text. I hope you got most of it [laugh]. In any case, the law is passed. Good evening, Bjørn Willum. The debate has been fierce [reporter: Good evening] among politicians, and here in the past week, there have been lots of demonstrations against this law. Who has been so much against it in France?

The overall structure is largely the same as in ‘Torture’: starting with the news (the passing) and Context (stating where, who, when, and what, cf. Bell 1991: 151), followed by a disruption (“otherwise”) and Development (the resistance). But Kernel is longer – not just a summarizing Abstract – with current and dramatic footage displayed. Moreover, the uncertainty of the newly arrived images (“a short while ago”) spreads to the presenter’s discourse in the form of hesitation, self-interruptions, etc.

Second, the direct transition from Kernel to live interviews often results in an omission of the Context stage, which is presupposed or delivered live from the studio and/or the news field. The latter is the case in ‘Homo-wedding’, cf. the reporter’s answer following the question in Excerpt 4:
Excerpt 5
That can be put quite briefly: It is members of France’s large Catholic majority, then it is members of the right-wing opposition, and then it is people from the extreme right.

This Context stage is summative, descriptive (except for the evaluative “extreme”), and ordered logically, not epically. But what the reporter delivers is still a report – although not prerecorded – about (recent) past events.

Third, Development is also often executed live. But since the reporter sometimes lacks information, she/he has to ‘thread water’, cf. the live interview from Boston in Excerpt 6 (‘Terror in Boston’ TVA, 22.4.2013):

Excerpt 6
Reporter: […] Because the Americans have many questions they would like to ask the 19-year-old here in the hospital.
Presenter: And some of the questions could perhaps be about whether he had more plans for more attacks, as we hear that this is what the US police is saying now, that in fact he had. What do we know about these plans?
Reporter: American police is quite convinced that the two brothers had intended to carry out more terrorist attacks […]. But […] that is probably the kind of question they are asking Dzhokhar Tsarnaev right now.

The reporter mainly reiterates what “we” already knew, cf. presenter’s “we hear that this is what the US police are saying now”, after which he – uncertainly – points to the ongoing “right now.” Because the result of the examination is, ipso facto, unknown, TVA must rely on conjecture, cf. irrealis past tense “could” and the modality markers “perhaps”, “quite”, and “probably.”

Fourth, this uncertainty also characterizes the expanding Evaluation stage, which often incites predictions and speculations about the future, the latter usually containing a hypothetical scenario in the form of a conditional clause (Hansen & Blom 2014). In the exchange in Excerpt 7 (‘IT Crime’, TVA, 22.4.2013), the speculative question design induces, not facts, but what is imaginable as a worst-case scenario (cf. Neiger 2007: 314):

Excerpt 7
Presenter: And just very briefly, Claus, how bad can this end up, this, if what FE [intelligence agency] dreads ends in disaster?
Reporter: Try to imagine if somebody breaks into the Danish banking system […]. That would, in reality, destabilize our society.

In a sense, such future-orientation is a logical consequence of the uncertainty of the ongoing present, because, as phrased by Neiger, “when new information on the event itself is no longer available, only its future outcomes can be deemed new” (Neiger 2007: 319). It contributes to the open-endedness in somewhat the same way that narrative builds tension through expectancy and suspense (Scannell 1996).

Fifth, the live format has the ability to prolong deadlines, making the entire news program open-ended. This is demonstrable in a characteristic new segment before the last item where the presenter summarizes, e.g. (TVA, 26.4.2013):
Excerpt 8
Presenter: We are in progress with TV-Avisen, and for new viewers, here are today’s headlines […]

In this roundup, TVA displays footage and sound bites from the program so far. Thus, TVA does not count on being viewed from the beginning.

Sixth, due to the uncertainty of live, the presenter must repair verbally in a strategy including, among other things, coherence through question design (cf. the presenter’s anaphoric precision, “some of the questions”, from the reporters “many questions” in Excerpt 6), technology as an ‘excuse’ for lack of coherence (cf. Excerpt 4), and summaries along the way or, as in Excerpt 9 (TVA 25.4.2013), at the end of a news item:

Excerpt 9
Presenter: And then, let’s just recap what today’s intervention means for all the pupils who are now waiting to get back to school.

Previously, summaries were mainly located in Kernel (Bell 1991: 148 f.). By spreading them, the journalists are better able to survey the news flow while broadcasting, and the viewers are better able to switch on and off.

Seventh, and finally, with the more exposed production process and the increase in live talking heads, TVA has, to some extent, ‘solved’ a fundamental television journalistic problem, which is “that the events journalists are to depict have already happened and cannot be visualized” (Ekström 2000: 475). By commenting on events and their possible futures, the screen is occupied by talking heads. In return, however, these pictures most likely lack important realism, and emotionality (Graber 1990: 152), correspondence with the text/speech (Brosius et al. 1996: 184), and documenting visual proof (Larsen 2003: 157, Hansen 2013: 46). Moreover, the location of the talking heads is not always journalistically or dramaturgically motivated. The presence in Boston might, admittedly, substantiate the eyewitness status, but often the reporter is seen in front of a closed door somewhere in Copenhagen a few kilometers from the studio – or in another studio – and such “pictures rarely contribute any additional information to the soundtrack […]” (Griffin 1992: 135).

Conclusion
In the present article, we have suggested that the dramaturgy of television journalism can be understood in three waves: from the early days of the talking heads in the studio, over the narrativization of the field report to a recurrent studio- and field-based talking heads format, the latter, in the TVA context, accelerated by the news engine.

Our analyses indicate that when entering the third wave, the dramaturgy extends Kernel, diminishes or presupposes Context or delivers it live, emphasizes Development in the ongoing present, and increases Evaluation of present events and their possible futures. Production time merges with broadcast time and event time so that the uncertainty of live spreads to the dramaturgy. Thus, the presenter becomes more involved in delivering the news and verbally repairing coherence. As also mentioned by other scholars (e.g., Ellis 2000, Tolson 2006, Montgomery 2007), it seems that the television news item is moving from a somewhat closed, ‘packaged’ dramaturgy to a more fragmented and permanently open flow structure, so that the pre-produced and pre-packaged bulletin
program about past events is dissolving and transforming into an evaluative present- and future-oriented update format that resembles the 24-hour news-only channels.

In a Danish context, this evolution is also reflected in – and/or caused by – the fact that The Grid in recent years has been challenged by The PCP model (PKP-modellen in Danish) with the stages Premise, Consequence, Perspective (Larsen & Frederiksen 2014, our translation). The two models have the same compositional logic, but also a very distinctive difference: While The Grid has a closed dramaturgical structure in the Aristotelian sense, cf. Wrap, the PCP model prescribes an open-ended structure where Perspective must provide “a prospective estimate on what will happen to the premise set out in the first phase” (ibid., 2014: 36, our translation). The prescriptive dramaturgy has thus adapted to a highly competitive news environment with expanded airtime and (thus) prevailing talking heads.

On the whole, one might ask whether this trend is beneficial to television news. Generally, we do not believe that the solution to the crisis in television journalism is more live interviews with in-house journalists, especially not if employment of talking heads is not motivated by the content and/or dramaturgy. In fact, experimental reception studies have suggested that viewers not only appreciate edited news reports compared to live formats (Snoeijer et al. 2002), but moreover that they recall (ibid.), comprehend and retain the report better (Edwardson et al. 1981, Graber 1990, Brosius 1991, Snoeijer et al. 2002, Machill et al. 2007). On the other hand, television journalism must adapt to on-demand viewership. The solution may be a division of labor known from other kinds of journalism: brief updates combined with longer and well-narrated background formats.

Theoretically and methodically, we address the need for research-based news dramaturgy. The prevalent dominating prescriptive formulas “are often limited to apodictic statements” (Machill et al. 2007: 191), which might also be the main reason why news items are so strikingly uniform. The developers of the PCP model, for instance, states that the three stages “together and quite naturally [sic] will create the proper dramaturgy that can convert all journalistic stories to well-functioning television narratives” (Larsen & Frederiksen 2014: 36, our translation and italics). Such statements might constitute a straitjacket, hardly conducive to the creative development of television news dramaturgy in a time of rapidly changing viewer behavior.

Notes

1. In concordance with Montgomery (2007), we term these exchanges interviews, although they are more symmetrical than other interview types and differ in degree of interaction (if any), cf. that Kroon Lundell suggests “intraprofessional dialogues” as the superordinate term (2010: 435).
2. An epic or dramatic motor can be defined as a systematized plot carried by an exemplar or the journalist her/himself. Hence, a motor is an intervention (reconstruction or reenactment of event, interference with event, construction of new event) into the reality narrated, aiming at establishing a parallel or embedded narrative with the exemplar or the journalist as leading character (Ekström, 2000: 475; Larsen, 2003: 164-165; Hansen, 2004: 230; 2013: 228).
3. From this point, we indicate stages with initial capital.
4. The model in Figure 2 is linear, given that the order of Context and Development is obligatory. Additionally, another significant, circular stage model can be identified, structured by a more or less chronological motor under which Context is installed as ‘pockets’ (Hansen, 2013: 236 ff.). We do not elaborate on this model here because the trends we stress below are virtually identical for the two models.
5. All excerpts have been translated, and orthography has been normalized. In Excerpt 4, significant pauses have been indicated.
References


Bro, Peter, Hansen, Kenneth Reinecke & Andersson, Ralf (2015) Improving Productivity in the Newsroom?: Deskilling, reskilling and multiskilling in the news media, Journalism Practice, DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2015.1090883


Hjarvard, Stig (1999) *TV-nyheder i konkurrence* [Television news under competition], Frederiksborg: Samfunds litteratur.


Larsen, Rasmus Sylvst & Frederiksen, Kristian (2014) *Skarpt skåret – sådan fortæller du en tv-historie* [Sharply cut – this is how you tell a television story], Århus: Ayjur.


Morse, Margaret (1985) Talk, talk, talk. *Screen* 26: 2-17.


Pedersen, Christian Grunert (2013) *Tv-nyheder taber 500.000 seere* [Television news loses 500,000 viewers]. MEDIAWATCH 19.12.13, Available at: http://mediawatch.dk/Medienyt/TV/article6348109.ece


The Social Media Experiences of Long-term Patients: Illness, Identity, and Participation

Brita Ytre-Arne

Abstract
The present article investigates the meanings of social media use for long-term patients, focusing on a group of Norwegian bloggers diagnosed with myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME). This severe illness can confine patients to their homes for long periods of time, drastically reducing possibilities to participate on most social arenas and leaving Internet use as a rare opportunity for connection with the outside world. A qualitative analysis of interviews with ME bloggers investigates the meanings of social media use in this particular situation. Drawing on perspectives from research on patients’ Internet use, this phenomenon is analysed as management of identity narratives in the face of illness. However, the article further argues that the concept of participation provides a relevant supplementary perspective that highlights the societal and political relevance of these practices.

Keywords: social media, participation, identity, narrative, illness, welfare state

Introduction
As the Internet has become an integral aspect of everyday life and contemporary society, an important orientation for media research is to explore the impact of the Internet on people’s lives and in diverse societal contexts. These issues have been investigated using a myriad of theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches and empirical cases. Two important focal points are the issues of identity and participation. Studies have analysed how people express, construct and manage identities through Internet communication (Turkle 1995, Enli & Thumin 2012, Rettberg 2014) and how they use the Internet to situate themselves within and participate in various communities, ranging from small social circles to political and public spheres (Baym 2010, Miller 2011, Moe 2011, Loader & Mercea 2012). In particular, social media such as blogs and social network sites have been investigated as arenas for identity management and participation (Boyd 2014, Lövheim 2011, Enjolras et al. 2013, Fuchs 2014).

The present article contributes to these strands of research by analysing the social media experiences of a group of Internet users in a very particular situation, a situation that affects both conceptions of identity and possibilities for participation. This group consists of Norwegian bloggers who are also patients suffering from long-term myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME). This severe illness reduces patients’ possibilities to engage in work, family activities and on social arenas outside the home. While ME is sometimes
collapsed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (Grue 2013), severe fatigue is merely one of many symptoms that can leave ME patients housebound, bedridden and isolated for periods of time. Internet use thus emerges as a rare opportunity for connection between the patient and the outside world, and this particular context has implications for the meanings of ME patients’ social media use.

Previous research has revealed high levels of social media engagement amongst Norwegian ME patients. A comparative study found higher levels of online forum activity for ME than other patient groups (Knudsen et al. 2012), and blogs by ME patients have appeared as central nodes in mappings of the Norwegian political blogosphere (Moe 2011). Popular histories of the Norwegian blogosphere have also noted the importance of ME blogging (Jackson 2010: 77, Westerby 2013). Furthermore, initiatives originating from ME patients through blogs and Internet forums have aimed to affect medical treatment, research funding and political attention concerning this disease (Westerby 2013: 186-190). Such use of social media by ME patients has been criticized (Bjerkestrand 2012) in debates that are part of broader discursive contestations concerning this illness. Ongoing struggles over the nature of ME, treatment procedures and directions for research imply that patients find themselves at conflicting junctions in polarized debates (Jelstad 2012, Lian & Bondevik 2013).

The present article analyses the meanings of social media use for ME patients, focusing on connections between the meanings of social media use in the lives of individuals and in society. The central method is qualitative interviews with Norwegian ME bloggers, but blogging is analysed in combination with other social media such as Facebook and Twitter. The theoretical perspective draws on previous research on patients’ Internet communication, where theories about identity management in the face of illness have been important. However, while drawing relevant insights from this approach, the analysis will also highlight participation as a potential supplementary perspective. Through this analytical concept, identity negotiations in patients’ social media use can be made relevant in the larger societal systems that surround them, thereby connecting the meanings of social media use in the lives of individuals to societal contexts. The analysis will start from the perspective of long-term patients and gradually broaden in focus to explore the participatory potentials of social media use.

Research Perspectives on Patients’ Internet Communication

Patient’s use of the Internet has been explored rather comprehensively, but reviews of the field emphasise that large bodies of research draw on relatively similar perspectives (Murero & Rice 2006, Orgad 2005, Seale 2005). The Internet has transformed patients’ opportunities to seek health information, potentially challenging the authority of the medical system and contributing to new forms of communication in patient groups and between patients and health care services (Tjora & Sandaunet 2010). Shifting relations of power and knowledge have been important areas of research, focusing on e-health services, online support groups and most particularly information-seeking on the Internet (Nettleton et al. 2005, Kivits 2009, Mager 2009).

Sociologist Shani Orgad (2005) also highlights information-seeking and support communities in her review of research on patients’ Internet communication, describing them as framed within a paradigm of conversational communication models (Orgad 2005: 30).
She introduces the concept *storytelling* as an alternative for processes in which patients attempt “to produce a framework to organize disconnected elements into a whole and direct them towards closure” (Orgad 2005: 37). Storytelling stands in a dialectical relationship with *agency*, one prerequisite being the “ability to make sense of and construct a plausible story that can be incorporated into one’s life” (2005: 41). Orgad draws on Anthony Giddens’ (1991) sociological theory of agency and the role of narrative in the construction of the modern self. Giddens emphasizes reflexive dimensions of identity, understanding identity not as an essential inner truth, but as a narrative the individual strives to maintain through reflexive interaction with the world (1991: 14). Identity construction is complex and multi-layered, involving potentially conflicting conceptions.

While Orgad studied breast cancer patients, her concepts connect well with health sociology research on long-term or chronic illness. This has been understood as *biographical disruption* (Bury 1982), and the role of *narrative* as a structuring device for relating experiences of illness has been emphasized through categories such as *restitution* narratives, *quest* narratives and *chaos* narratives (Nettleton 2013: 74, Frank 1995). Looking at ME more specifically, studies have documented the complex social navigations patients experience as they try to make sense of their situation (Åsbring & Närvänämen 2002, Edwards et al. 2007). The theoretical concepts of Orgad and Giddens would thereby appear to be relevant to an analysis of ME bloggers’ experiences, and the present article will start with identity and narrative as key concepts. Throughout the analysis, a supplementary perspective will be developed in order to also highlight how identity management connects to participatory dimensions of social media use.

**Methods: A Qualitative Study of Norwegian ME Bloggers**

The present analysis is based on qualitative interviews with a group of Norwegian bloggers suffering from ME. The purpose was to analyse the meanings of social media use in light of this particular situation, and a qualitative approach was chosen to allow for in-depth analysis of this phenomenon as situated in its context (Gentikow 2005, Gray 2003). Given the focus on social media use, the methodological approach needed to move beyond blog analysis and rather focus on bloggers’ experiences. Qualitative interviews were chosen as a relevant method for such exploration.

The starting point for selecting informants was two blogs that had made notable contributions to the Norwegian blogosphere with regard to ME and other topics. These were *Marias Metode* by Maria Gjerpe, a doctor and ME patient who had participated extensively in public debate on health and welfare, and *~SerendipityCat~* by Catherine Eide Westerby, author of a long-running blog and a chapter on ME blogging in a history of the Norwegian blogosphere (Westerby 2013). Links and comments on these blogs were used to trace other ME blogs, and potential informants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) the blogger disclosed an ME diagnosis, 2) the blog was written by an adult, 3) the blog provided contact information, and 4) the blog addressed topics concerning the blogger’s situation as a patient, such as reflections on life with illness, debates on ME or discussions of attitudes towards illness. Ten bloggers were invited to participate and eight interviews were eventually completed.⁴

Interviewing ME patients implies several ethical considerations, and by necessity, concerns owing to illness influenced certain methodological decisions.⁴ One problem
was how to arrange comfortable interview situations for informants who might experience a face-to-face conversation as straining on their health. After being presented with many options, most informants agreed to be interviewed in written form through e-mail, one preferred Skype and one a mix of these methods. Importantly, all interviews were planned and carried out as qualitative interviews – the written interviews were not designed as questionnaires or surveys. Instead, an interview guide with questions in several parts was sent to informants with instructions that they could give as short or as long answers as they pleased and combine questions as they wished. Informants were given as much time as needed to reply, and all eventually answered the questions thoroughly. In some cases, follow-up rounds of questions and answers were conducted, and some also contributed additional information in later e-mails. In addition to meeting requirements mandated by informants’ illness, use of written communication appeared to be well suited to their experiences as bloggers. The Skype interviews followed the same interview guide and were transcribed in full for analysis.5

The interviews focused on blogging as part of a broader spectrum of social media activity, including for instance Facebook and Twitter. All interviews covered topics such as blog history, use of different social media, Internet use in everyday life, and social media in relation to ME. The interviews were analysed thematically, starting from a hypothesis building on the analytical perspective outlined above: that ME bloggers’ social media use is made meaningful as a way of reconstructing identity narratives when faced with long-term illness. The analysis therefore begins by exploring social media use in relation to the particular situation of ME patients before moving on to their participation in different communities.

Analysis of ME Patients’ Social Media Use

Managing Narratives of Illness and Identity

Why would an ME patient start a blog? The answer most informants gave was that they had heard of someone who was blogging and thought that this was something they could try – for various reasons. Some told stories of “coming back” from periods of severe illness and wanting to catch up with technological developments, while others thought that blogging would be a practical way of updating friends and family. On a deeper level, blogging appeared to respond to a need caused by the situation of being ill:

When I started blogging I was bedridden without possibilities for social contact or arenas to be on. I ate alone. Had twelve hours each day with minimal contact with other people. A lot of my time was spent just lying down, without being online, without reading, just letting my thoughts wander. Then those thoughts become something that wants to find an expression, and often I wrote blog posts in my head while lying there waiting to be able to sit back up. Now I live a social life with my family, with friends and I even leave the house. There is no longer time to write long texts or think long thoughts in the same way as before. After 18 months of almost complete isolation and silence I had a great need to not contemplate, to keep the silence away. Now perhaps the need is starting to make itself known again, and who knows what I might want to share of my thoughts? – Beate6
I started blogging to express what was pressing on me from within; I needed an outlet for what was moving inside me. At the same time, I needed to not feel empty and to escape the sense of waiting. I don’t think life can be put on hold and continued later. Life is all the time. I had an idea that my life would not have a big void there, but that the time with ME would be filled with something that can be used on a résumé at a later date. I would use my time on something that made sense to me, have an alternative outlook on life – since it could not be lived as I had expected. While restrictions on life were considerable, a room for self-realization opened up. – Anne-Helene

Both quotes point to a need for meaning-making through creative expression. Blogging is described as a pressure-relieving outlet, made necessary by an illness that confines patients to their homes and to their own minds. Blogging is portrayed as a way of making time with illness more meaningful, and making meaning of a difficult situation.

The theoretical perspective Orgad outlines, referring to Giddens, offers relevant insights for understanding these experiences. Giddens’ concept reflexive identities (1991) illuminates the ways in which ME bloggers were forced to rethink their sense of self when faced with fundamental disruptions in their lives. In the second quote, the informant describes her need to develop alternative conceptions of what constitutes a meaningful life. ME can be understood as a life crisis, affecting multiple aspects of everyday life and calling into question life plans and conceptions of identity. An ME diagnosis can imply brutal confrontations with questions such as “what is my place in society when I am unable to work?” or “how can I best be a parent when I cannot be with my children outside the home?” Patients might find themselves forced to rethink their sense of self without drawing on established social roles. This poses a difficult challenge to the task of keeping a coherent identity narrative together, as multiple dimensions of the self are challenged simultaneously and dramatically, while outcomes are left uncertain.

Orgad’s concept of storytelling as “the attempt to produce a framework to organize disconnected elements into a whole and direct them towards closure” (2005: 37) also appears relevant, but the notion of closure is problematic to transfer to ME patients, as there is no definite treatment or timeframe of recovery. Similarly, a study of patients with unexplained neurological symptoms found that their experiences came closer to so-called chaos narratives than the more culturally legitimate restitution narratives in which the patient moves towards recovery (Nettleton 2013: 76). The first informant quoted above had experienced significant improvement and was able to construct a restitution narrative, while the second informant focuses on the process of rethinking narratives. Importantly, difficulties in formulating clear-cut narratives only strengthen the relevance of understanding ME blogging as a way of managing such identity narratives.

In both quotes, positioning of the self in social contexts is crucial, as the informants speak about identity management. The first informant describes the loss of ordinary social contact as the direct reason for making meaning through blogging, using the phrase “without arenas to be on” to depict her previous situation. The second describes blogging as a way of building personal competence in order to participate in the workforce again in the future. Both accounts emphasize social media use as ways of coping with reduced possibilities for participation. As well as exploring participatory dimensions further, it is necessary to ask why social media would be preferable outlets for these processes.
Participation in Social Circles: Controlled Communication

When informants described their social media use, they emphasized that certain capacities of Internet communication were adjustable to their needs as ME patients. Social media use could not fully replace — but could partly supplement — a little of what they were missing in terms of participation on other social arenas, such as circles of acquaintances and friends:

The Internet is nice in that way, as I can control how available I am. It doesn’t require as much of me as meeting someone in person would. On bad days, the Internet is all I can take. I guess this is why ME patients are accused of being overrepresented online. In a way I feel that I’ve become weird and withdrawn since I became ill, but I do find that every time I have a good period I’m more out and about and less online. – Lothiane

Communication with people I know in physical life can sometimes be demanding because it builds on information we already have about each other. It’s difficult for a ‘ME head’ to keep track of a lot of information at the same time, which is needed to keep up a fluent and meaningful conversation. Communication with Net acquaintances is low-threshold, expectations are loose and how I’m seen is how I represent myself. That can be liberating, especially when my cognitive levels are low due to exhaustion. – Anne-Helene

Here, Internet communication is perceived as limited compared to the richness of face-to-face interaction, but these limitations enable manageability and thereby control. Related discursive themes explain how the idea of controlled communication is constructed: a notion of written language as precise, peeling away interesting but disturbing layers of social meaning, and social acceptance of delay — the ability to wait and shield oneself. With this view of the possibilities of Internet communication, many informants moved from blogging to also testing other social media. In this process, they evaluated how their own abilities as ME patients worked with the capacities of different social media:

I’ve been on Twitter, but it’s too fast. It’s so fast, and you need to be alert. I have an account, and a couple of years ago I ended up in a discussion with some doctors, and there was a lot of resistance and a sharp tone, and I felt that this was something I couldn’t control. I was not ready and alert enough to stick to the case and keep track, so I chose to drop it. And there is too much going on there. I’ve decided not to use my energy there. […] [Facebook] is slower. [Laughter] […] Facebook might be a little slow, but it’s safe and you can say things very briefly. Two lines about something are enough. That’s good. – Fremad i alle retninger

I feel insufficient… in the sense that I cannot use [Twitter] as I would like. When I’m cognitively impaired I’m unable to think as quickly as I used to. Participating in debates is practically impossible because I can’t keep track of my own arguments, let alone others’. It’s quite simply not possible to discuss things on a reasonable level. I’m left short due to my illness. – Lokki

An important aspect here is the communicative spheres that informants envision themselves entering through different social media. Twitter is described as a public sphere for rational deliberation, while Facebook is understood as mirroring communities in one’s
personal life. While some wanted to participate in the public sphere through social media use, others emphasized personal support in smaller social circles. These informants described Twitter as having a pace and form that established requirements they could not meet, while Facebook was safer, slower and friendlier. They referred to social and cultural conventions for use, as mere technological features would render Twitter’s character limit better suited than Facebook to their desire for brevity. Facebook was, however, the most important social medium for most informants. The diverse uses of this popular service could easily be appropriated to their different needs, keeping in touch with friends outside the sphere of illness but also taking part in closed or open ME groups. Some described ME blogging as a phenomenon of the past, while Facebook had emerged as the crucial arena for continuing communication that had previously been established through blogging.

Participation in Patient Communities: Ambivalences and Dilemmas

There was considerable variation in how informants connected social media use to illness, and this too varied over time. The possibility to communicate with fellow patients through social media was appreciated, but found different expressions:

It’s nice to get support. It’s often the same people reading my posts and commenting, and I comment on their blogs. That becomes a small community. You update each other and … care about each other, actually. If someone hasn’t been blogging for a while, you might e-mail and ask how it’s going. Is it quiet because things are good, or because things are bad? There’s a lot of caring in that – Fremad i alle retninger

Social media have been, and are, an invaluable tool for ME patients worldwide, so that they can come together and work together, share information and experiences. Before the Internet, people would lie at home suffering in silence, and that could probably explain why there was a high suicide rate amongst patients. Now you are actually not alone anymore, you get to know that there is research going on in Australia or in the US that you might recognize yourself in… that gives hope. It seems like something is happening now, and hopefully we are approaching better diagnosis and treatment options – Lothiane

Here, the first informant speaks of support and care being exchanged when social media communication overlaps with interpersonal communication, while the second refers to an international community with a common cause. She gives a forceful account of how Internet use gives housebound patients access to knowledge, community and voice, enabling participation in a patient community where empowerment and agency are central elements. However, ideas about being a “ME blogger” or taking part in a patient community were also troubling to some. An example is this response to a question about the environment10 of ME blogging:

I don’t feel the need to be part of an environment, but I’m interested in individuals. I don’t know what the so-called ME environment is, or who’s included in it. When I communicate with people, whether they have ME or not, it’s dialogue and interaction that matters the most. When I write about life with ME, I’m most likely to encounter people who have the disease or have close relations who do.
These people are still primarily individuals to me. I don’t know who belongs to this or that environment, nor do I know how many environments there are. As I said before I don’t engage in other people’s conflicts and consequently I don’t have insight into them and so I don’t know what a possible ME environment consists of. The most important thing is to relate to and communicate with people one feels on the same level as and where dialogue is characterized by mutual respect. – Anne-Helene

Here, respectful dialogue is contrasted with the idea of an environment of ME bloggers. One probable explanation is the highly polarized debate on ME in Norway, a debate most informants wanted to avoid. They felt estranged from common discursive constructs of what “ME patients” were like, and while debate participation could nuance such constructs, they also risked being taken as representatives of the labels they sought to escape. A strategy for handling this dilemma was to emphasize that they blogged about personal experiences and “their own story”.

As Orgad argues, experienced patients might teach the newly diagnosed not just about the illness, but also about discursive conventions of communicating about illness online (2005: 123). Some ME bloggers who had been ill for years had also been early adopters of social media, resulting in considerable expertise in Internet communication on health and illness. They balanced feelings of obligation to help the newly diagnosed they encountered online with feelings of tiredness over the endless circles of debate on ME. When necessary they would give newcomers advice on how to find information and community through social media, but also on how to avoid further conflict and stigmatization of the patient group.

Participation in the Public Debate: Contributing through Experience

The dilemmas described above indicate that participation in patient communities is closely integrated with societal discourses on health and illness. The position of the patient in the health system is a lived reality for those concerned, but also a topic of debate in the public sphere. Both users and non-users of health and welfare services can participate in such debates with reference to their shared roles as members of publics, citizens of the state, media audiences or users of social media. Some ME bloggers sought to communicate their particular experiences as direct contributions to public debates on the politics of health and welfare. In contrast to discussion forums or Facebook groups that could be closed to outsiders, the open blog medium could imply orientations towards a broader public:

I started blogging as an attempt to render illness harmless, maybe primarily for myself, but also with a hope of giving insight and understanding of what it’s like to stand on the outside of life, not being able to participate. There is a form of therapy in writing, and I don’t share everything I write, but it’s a way to breathe. By blogging from my perspective, I hope to get those who are healthy out there in life to stop for a moment and appreciate what they’ve got. That’s important. – N.N.11

It’s surprised me how many people I’ve gotten to know through social media. How easy it is to participate even though I can’t participate in real life. It’s my social arena. That’s also why it’s important to me. I would not have been this active in
social media if I hadn’t been ill. […] It’s my way of showing that I exist, that I still have something to contribute – N.N.

Both quotes are from the same informant, who starts by describing blogging as personal meaning-making, but goes on to envision a message to the public. She uses metaphors of location when she situates herself as trapped in a sphere of illness, and by blogging she reaches into “life”, trying to capture people’s attention. Emphasizing social media as a rare connection between the housebound patient and the outside world, she uses this connection to carve out a place for herself on a broader social arena. Social media are the arena where she can participate and be recognized as a contributing member of society, sharing experiences of what it is like to live with long-term illness in the Norwegian welfare society.

Such use of social media ties to discussions on whether patients’ Internet communication makes visible previously neglected experiences, integrating them into the public realm (Harrison 2014, Orgad 2007). In her research on breast cancer patients’ online communication, Orgad has argued that this is generally not the case, due to “a combination of disembodied, anonymous, patients-only and highly personalized space and discourse” (Orgad 2007:156). While the same could be said of some aspects of ME patients’ social media use, parts of their Internet communication were not patients-only, not personalized in discourse, and not anonymous. Some blogged about problematic encounters with the health services, bureaucratic struggles to get assistance or entitlements, or reactions to political debates on the organization of welfare services. Initiatives originating from ME blogs have received political attention and resulted in meetings with health ministers and other authorities, thereby contributing to visibility in the public realm (Westerby 2013). Blog posts written by ME bloggers have also been republished as debate pieces in widely read news media. Last but not least, a particular event in 2013 provided a striking example of social media use as patient activism.

**Participation as Patient Activism: From Debate to Action**

In the spring of 2013, a Norwegian foundation called MEandYou collected nearly three million Norwegian kroner in a crowdfunding campaign. Crowdfunding is often associated with the creative arts, but this campaign aimed to fund a medical research project testing a new drug treatment for ME. Doctors Olav Mella and Øystein Fluge at Haukeland University Hospital in Norway had discovered improvement in ME patients treated with the cancer drug Rituximab, and after conducting pilot studies they applied for funding for a larger clinical trial. In December 2012, the Research Council of Norway announced its annual endowments for independent projects, but the Rituximab study was unsuccessful despite receiving a good evaluation.

Several ME patients expressed their disappointment in blogs and on Twitter and Facebook, but blogger Maria Gjerpe declared that despair should be turned to constructive action. She established MEandYou as a crowdfunding initiative, the aim being for patients to fund the research themselves. Gjerpe was an ME patient, a doctor and an experienced blogger who had participated in media debates on health, communication and welfare. Her blog had also won a grant from the Norwegian Freedom of Expression Foundation for its contributions to public debate. As opposed to most informants in this study, she had from early on thought of her blogging as an address to a public sphere:
I started blogging to systematize my search for treatment. After two blog posts I understood that Maria’s Metode dealt with topics concerning communication and doctor-patient relationships, and that it could not be a diary blog. [...] Eventually I became an active participant in the public debate, both with blog posts, interviews and writing in newspapers – Maria

Gjerpe was a pilot patient for Rituximab treatment, and after the Research Council’s decision she devoted her renewed energy to fund further research on the medicine that had helped her. As her improvement was expected to be temporary, she set up MEandYou as a campaign that would last 90 days and within this timeframe collect 7 million NOK. This ambitious goal was not achieved, but the foundation made a significant contribution and attracted considerable attention from politicians, contributors and news media. The proclaimed close of the MEandYou campaign in June 2013 concurred with the news that the Research Council would fund the Rituximab study after all, and the Minister of Health approvingly tweeted that further ME research should be a priority.

MEandYou inspires questions about the role of patients in the health care system and about public opinion and how it can be influenced. Intersecting with these questions, the campaign highlights the potential of social media as an arena for mobilization. Social media were crucial for a number of reasons. The first was Gjerpe’s blog and the position she had built through it, establishing herself as credible and resourceful in patient communities and in the public debate. The blog was also an effective outlet for sharing her story of improved health and her quest to help others. A second reason was the active use of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media to share campaign information, and a variety of bloggers with and without experiences of ME promoted MEandYou. The third reason was a campaign rhetoric that drew on narrative devices with mobilizing force, such as Gjerpe’s quest and the hopes for a medical breakthrough, visuals and videos for sharing across social media, and slogans such as “Sharing is caring” and “Let’s walk together”, emphasizing community, empowerment and participatory culture.

The MEandYou campaign constitutes a special case, but it nevertheless gives an example of the participatory potential of social media use in a patient group. The initiative could be seen as patient activism – here understood as organized public action in the pursuit of defined goals that affect the prospects of a patient group – carried out with social media as the central arena. The notion of patient activism carries with it some tension due to the critique of ME bloggers, but has at times been used by bloggers themselves (Westerby 2013). The role of the patient activist refers to and challenges ideas of what it means to be a patient in the health care system, actively seeking to address power balances and influence decisions. This case, where social media were crucial in transforming patients into activists, illustrates the relevance of further research into how social media are used for mobilization and public engagement by a wide array of social groups in different societal systems.

**Social Media and Participation in the Welfare State**

Meanings of social media use for long-term patients could span from management of personal identity narratives through participation in different communities to political patient activism. A contextualized conceptualization of participation could further illuminate how these dimensions are connected.
Participation is an important concept in democratic theory and widely used in different strands of research (e.g., Pateman 1970, Held 1996). In media research, recent works have highlighted participation as an analytical concept used in analysis of audience transformations (Carpentier & Dahlgren 2014). Participation can be defined as referring to “questions of citizen’s inclusion in the dynamics of decision-making” (Carpentier et al. 2013: 123). Foundations for participation can encompass structural opportunities concerning institutional mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, cultural resources that might be unevenly distributed amongst groups, and subjective dispositions formed in cultural and structural contexts, but on an individual level (Carpentier et al. 2013: 125). This conceptualization privileges an underlying view of participation in terms of connections between individuals and societal systems, referring to the existence of multiple actors with power positions, situated in a context (Carpentier 2013: 125). In order to address specific modes of participation, it is thus necessary to consider which context one envisions participation taking place in.

Research on participation often investigates citizens’ possibilities to take part in political processes, exemplified by Carole Pateman’s classic work on participatory democracy (1970). Participation, however, can be conceptualized without reference to the formal political system, as the notion of actors aiming to affect power balances can be transferred to other societal systems. For the purpose of analysing patients’ participation, the health care sector is an obvious example, but in countries such as Norway health care is part of broader welfare systems. In the Nordic countries, the welfare state is a societal system of great significance in people’s lives, in the constitution of social groups, and in the political debate and state organization (Hatland et al. 2011). Patients encounter this system when they seek treatment, but also entitlements or assistance when they are unable to work, or when facing different everyday challenges resulting from illness. Patients and welfare users are also citizens of a state where welfare is a central policy domain and an important topic in the public debate (Hatland 2011). The welfare state can thus be viewed as a complex and multifaceted social system where political and personal discourses blur the public-private divide, and where different modes of participation might be envisioned.

One mode of participation in the politics of the welfare state refers to the ways in which users of welfare services – e.g. patients in the health care system – voice concerns and attempt to influence their own situation, drawing on subjective dispositions and shared cultural resources. A different mode of participation refers to the ways in which citizens – both users and non-users of welfare services – take part in political processes and public debates on legitimation, organization and challenges in the welfare state. As indicated by the experiences of ME bloggers, social media use could be relevant to both modes of participation. Through social media use, long-term patients can participate in the welfare state through patient communities or patient activism, but also as citizens making contributions to public debates on different dimensions of the welfare state.

Conclusion: Connecting Identity and Participation in Social Media Use
The present analysis has explored the social media experiences of long-term patients, focusing on meanings of social media use in the lives of individuals and in society. Participatory dimensions of media use have been highlighted by gradually expanding the
analytical focus from the situation of the isolated long-term patient to the communities and publics he or she can enter through social media use. In so doing, the focus has also shifted from questions of identity management to questions of participation. As mentioned in the introduction, identity and participation are focal points in media research exploring the significance of the Internet in life in contemporary society. A relevant question is, therefore, what this particular case signals regarding how these dimensions can be connected – empirically, theoretically and methodologically.

The empirical findings of the present analysis indicate that participatory dimensions of long-term patients’ social media use are closely intertwined with personal aspects of managing identity in the face of severe illness. A patient’s process of rethinking the self is not merely relevant to the individual, it also refers to and potentially challenges dominant discourses of what it means to participate in society: Which social arenas matter, how and why? Which forms of participation are relevant? What are the implications of health and illness for inclusion and exclusion in a welfare society? Social media offer communicative tools for addressing these matters, and for sharing reflections on them. In other words, identity management through social media can be understood as a personal and cultural resource for participation in important public conversations.

Theoretically, connections between identity and participation can be highlighted by employing perspectives with a broad view on how media use is made relevant in society. As indicated by the present analysis, some established concepts in research on patients’ Internet use build on theories that facilitate such connections. An example is Orgad’s (2005) conceptualization of storytelling, which draws on Giddens’ theory of the reflexive self – a theory that situates narrative identity work in societal contexts. This can further be connected to conceptualizations of participation where cultural resources and subjective dispositions are counted as important foundations (Carpentier et al. 2013), and where modes of participation beyond the formal political system are included.

Another insight, highlighted by employing interview methods, is the importance of investigating the shifting meanings of social media use over time. Such shifts are not necessarily expressed in the texts of social media, but could be experienced and accounted for by users. As exemplified by this case, long-term patients’ social media use can initially find importance as identity management and small-circle sharing of support. However, by ensuring continued inclusion in communities, latent potentials for changing modes of participation are continued and can eventually take on different meanings. This may lead to surprising outcomes, such as patient activists mobilizing for the MEandYou campaign – an initiative that moved beyond the personal to directly address power relations in the systems of medical research, health care and the welfare state. For media research on the diverse meanings of social media use, this illustrates that not merely participation, but also potentials for participation constitute a relevant research orientation.

Notes
1. http://mariasmetode.no/
2. www.serendipitycat.no/
3. Of the two blogs that served as starting points, Gjerpe was interviewed while Westerby referred to her book chapter. While thematically relevant, this is not counted as an interview.
4. The collection and management of data were approved by the Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research and carried out in compliance with regulations.
5. Informants were asked whether they preferred being quoted anonymously, or identified as they are on their blogs (by ‘nickname’, given name, full name, and/or blog name). Identification will vary according to their choices.
6. Beate, author of http://Beatesrasteplass.wordpress.com E-mail interview, also interviewed on Skype.
7. Anne-Helene Ose-Johansen, author of http://Melivetpaaslep.wordpress.com E-mail interview.
8. Lokki (nickname). E-mail interview.
9. The Norwegian word ‘miljø’ translates to environment, and can be used to refer to loose social and cultural groupings (e.g., ‘the student environment’).
10. E-mail interview with anonymous informant.
11. Maria Gjerpe, author of http://mariasmetode.no/

References


Jelstad, Jørgen (2011) De bortgjente – og hvordan ME ble vår tids mest omstridte sykdom [The hidden – and how ME became the most controversial disease of our time]. Oslo: Cappelen Damm.


The Dynamics of Sensemaking and Information Seeking in a Crisis Situation

Orla Vigsø & Tomas Odén

Abstract
The present article investigates two questions: What determines citizens’ use of different media to seek information in a crisis situation, and what influences their evaluation of the information found. The case analysed is a major fire at a chemical storage facility in the harbour of Halmstad in Sweden, where there was a risk of toxic fumes reaching the city and its approximately 60,000 inhabitants. The study is part of a larger project, financed by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, and in this part, focus group interviews are analysed. The results point to an interaction between citizens’ perception of the world, the perceived information, and the development of how the situation is regarded, where sensemaking is the pivotal concept.

Keywords: crisis communication, media use, sensemaking, focus groups, Halmstad, fire

Introduction
What determines citizens’ use of different media to seek information in a crisis situation, and what influences their evaluation of the information found? These two questions are crucial in a situation where the lives and health of citizens may be at stake. The present paper deals with a major fire at a chemical storage facility in the harbour of Halmstad in Sweden, where there was a risk of toxic fumes reaching the city and its approximately 60,000 inhabitants. The study is part of a larger project, Crisis Communication 2.0, financed by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, and in this part, focus group interviews conducted after the fire are analysed. The results point to an interaction between the citizens’ perception of the world, the perceived information, and the development of how the situation is regarded, where sensemaking is the pivotal concept.

The Objectives of Communication during a Crisis
When crisis strikes, the authorities have a number of objectives for their communication with the public. When, as in the case of the Halmstad fire, the lives and health of citizens are at risk, the main goal is to avoid any loss of life or negative health effects.

The Swedish Parliament has decided that the goals of Sweden’s emergency management are to minimize the risk and consequences of serious disturbances, crises, and accidents, to secure the health and personal safety of children, women, and men, and to prevent or limit damage to property and the environment. Given that public crisis
communication is part of the authorities’ crisis or emergency management, the goals of communication in relation to the Halmstad fire could be specified as:

- Minimizing the consequences of the fire.
- Making sure that as few people as possible are exposed to as little danger as possible, either through fire or smoke.
- Making sure the fire does not spread to other areas, and that the toxic materials do not contaminate the water or soil.

There is one last point that transcends the specific crisis situation, and that is the minimization of risks. This is more of a pre-crisis task and includes physical measures, such as the construction of safer production and storage facilities, as well as informational efforts, such as informing citizens about procedures to be followed in case of a future crisis or emergency situation.

**Sensemaking: The Individual Perspective**

What happens in an individual when a crisis situation – a breach of normality, a rupture – develops? He/she receives some piece of information that threatens existing frames of interpretation and calls for a reevaluation of either the new information or the old situation. In other words, a process of sensemaking takes place, and the outcome of this process will determine the individual’s initial reaction to the crisis situation (Klein, Moon & Hoffman 2006a: 71).

From a sensemaking perspective, a person’s reaction to a crisis situation is a continuous oscillation between known and accepted knowledge and the input of new information, through perception or communication, leading to changes in what is accepted as knowledge – and thus how the person should act or react. Naturally, some of this knowledge is personal and depends on the person’s prior experiences, etc., but a substantial part of it belongs to what Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1994) calls doxa, i.e. what a person or a group thinks or values at a certain time. This could also be characterized as a kind of unconscious “common sense” that affects all of us.

This means that whenever we try to make sense of events, we always start out “with some perspective, viewpoint, or framework – however minimal” (Klein, Moon & Hoffman 2006b: 88). Our initial perspective can be seen as a frame, and it has serious repercussions for how the individual regards the status of data:

We can express frames in various meaningful forms, including stories, maps, organizational diagrams, or scripts, and can use them in subsequent and parallel processes. Even though frames define what count as data, they themselves actually shape the data (for example, a house fire will be perceived differently by the homeowner, the firefighters, and the arson investigators). Furthermore, frames change as we acquire data. In other words, this is a two way street: Frames shape and define the relevant data, and data mandate that frames change in nontrivial ways. (Klein, Moon & Hoffman 2006b: 88).

Basic sensemaking is thus a “data-frame symbiosis”, and it can evolve along several paths:
The frame can be elaborated through details.

The frame and its explanation can be questioned.

Troublesome data can be explained away to preserve the frame.

In Figure 1, this is seen in the left side of the figure, but there is also another possible sensemaking cycle: the reframing:

Here, questioning the frame leads us to reconsider – to reject the initial frame and seek to replace it with a better one. We might compare alternative frames to determine which seems most accurate. Or we might simply be mystified by the events. The sensemaking activity here, akin to Piaget’s notion of accommodation, is to find some sort of frame that plausibly links the events that are being explained. (Klein, Moon & Hoffman 2006b: 88)

**Figure 1. The Data/Frame Theory of Sensemaking**

Collaborative Sensemaking

An individual’s sensemaking cannot however be seen exclusively as isolated within him/her, but as a combination of internal and external or social processes. Actually, the very notion of sensemaking, as made popular by Karl Weick (Weick 1995), is itself collaborative. From his organizational point of view, sensemaking is what happens when members of an organization negotiate beliefs and interpretations in order to construct shared meanings and common goals, and it constitutes the framework for explaining observed
reality. In organizations, this collaborative sensemaking most often takes place through face-to-face communication, but with the new information technology and growth of social media, these media can be seen as a kind of forum that facilitates this process. The instantaneity and the spreading through networks combined with the possibility of “liking” and discussing provides the perfect background for a shared accepted meaning.

**Information Seeking and the Choice of Media**

When the individual experiences a gap between the existing frame and current events, the natural first step is to seek more information on what is going on, and determine whether there is any danger for oneself or one’s family and friends involved. Asking friends or neighbours is one way of doing this, but using media to obtain information is also an integrated part of most people’s behaviour. This includes everything from the telephone to radio and television, not to mention the Internet and all its different uses.

How a person seeks information in a crisis situation depends of a number of factors. One factor is his/her ordinary choice of media for information seeking and entertainment. Another is his/her ranking of the different media’s credibility in a serious situation (Ghersetti & Westlund 2013). The accessibility of the media also comes into play, including their technological requirements, functionality and cost.

**The Collection of Data**

To discover how information was sought in a specific crisis situation, focus groups were organized in Halmstad within a week after the fire in the harbour. The fire started late at night on a Friday, 21 September 2012, and lasted until the following Monday. The fire generated large amounts of toxic smoke, which at first blew out to sea, but at one point on Saturday noon it spread into the central part of Halmstad, which resulted in a VMA (Important Message to the Public), for which the official warning siren was used for the first time since World War II.

The official VMA can consist of both an alarm signal and information on radio and TV. The alarm signifies that there is some kind of public hazard, and when the signal sounds, every citizen should go inside, shut all doors, windows and ventilation, and turn on the local public service radio channel (SR P4) for more information.

Collection of interview data about how residents handled the situation with the fire and the VMA, was accomplished through semi-structured focus group interviews. The method and the composition of the focus groups were based on recommendations from Morgan (1997), Wibeck (2010) and Ekström and Larsson (2010).

In total, the focus groups included 25 people, 14 men and 11 women, all of them living in Halmstad. The interviews were conducted in three groups, the first with nine people aged 16-34 years, the second with six people 39-59 years, and the third with ten people 57-82 years. The grouping was based on the assumption that there would be differences in behaviour and media use among people of different ages (Westlund & Ghersetti 2014).

In the following text, the focus will be on the persons in Group 2 (39-59 years), who are individually presented with a summary of each person’s description of when and how she/he received information about the situation and from what sources. Also each
The Results of the Analysis

The information sources referred to in the present study were friends, family, neighbours, or strangers, that is, what is usually referred to as personal communication. But the main sources of information were official websites and mass media in a broad sense, often accessed via smartphones. As shown below, most of the interviewees used a combination of media throughout the fire, but with one or two preferred source(s). The presentation starts with the story told by Anna, 40, followed by the other participants in Group 2: The “grown ups”:

Anna, 40:
The respondent was told about the fire on Saturday morning by her boyfriend. He had received an SMS from his sister in Gothenburg early in the morning. After that, they went online and read the web edition of the local newspaper, Hallandsposten. From their apartment they could see the smoke, its colour and direction, so they felt fairly safe. When the alarm sounded at noontime, they became very active, the radio was on and so were two computers. They tried to get information about the alarm, but Hallandsposten’s website crashed, as did Halmstad Municipality’s website. On the radio channel citizens are supposed to listen to in a crisis situation (SR P4), there was nothing about the fire. She zapped through all TV channels that might have had information, but there was nothing. Both she and her boyfriend were very irritated and anxious for their baby daughter. Finally, after 8-9 minutes, there was information about the alarm having sounded because of a change in the wind direction. This she found out through Halmstad Municipality’s Facebook page, which was constantly updated and where the links to their websites worked, even when the main page was down. She did not spread the information to others, except for a relative in Norway who wondered.

The fire itself was a bit creepy, with the risk of explosion and such, but because we could see the smoke and which way it was moving and that it wasn’t heading towards us, we felt calmer. But when the alarm sounded, I know I became somewhat edgy. Because then I expected it to be something really huge, so we both became very nervous and worried.

She was somewhat irritated that neither TV nor Internet websites were sufficiently fast in getting out information. Once they decided to use the alarm, they should have had an announcement ready to immediately put out on TV and radio, she said. When it comes to action, she did nothing particular, but saw people with breathing masks or a towel over their nose and mouth.
Bertil, 39
The respondent woke up on Saturday morning and was told about the fire by his wife (Fanny), who had woken up in the night when she smelled the smoke. He then went online and got the information.

When he heard the alarm, he was at his son’s basketball match, and at first nobody there understood what it was. After a while they realized it was the alarm, but nobody reacted. He went online on his phone and checked Hallandsposten, he spread the information to other parents and talked about it, but nobody did anything, and there was no public information in the sports hall.

Carl, 52
The respondent became aware of the fire on Friday night, because there was a VMA (Important Message to the Public) in the form of a moving band of text across the TV screen. He reported having some experience with fires, as he works in the metal works in the harbour, and his first thought was that his own workplace was on fire. He could not smell any smoke, but the next evening he went by car to Örkeljunga, a small town 50 km from Halmstad, and drove through the smoke. Earlier, around noon Saturday, he went to his job to do some work, and saw that the whole harbour was shut off by the police, so he could not get to his job. Many of his colleagues were curious and went up onto a roof to look. When the alarm sounded, he did not make a connection to the fire, until later. He did not seek any information himself, nor did he share any information with others. His evaluation of the situation was based on his experiences from work: let it burn out and only then start using water so as not to create gasses and a higher risk of explosion. When it comes to information, he reported believing that the “old” public service channels on TV have the highest reliability; he did not read Hallandsposten, but from what he saw during this situation, everything was alright.

David, 54
The respondent drove his neighbours to the train station on Saturday morning and saw a lot of blinking blue lights, and thought he had better turn on the radio, so he got the information at 6:30 a.m. When he got home, he turned on the radio and it remained on while he read the papers. He even checked text-TV. He did not see or smell the smoke until Saturday afternoon, when he and his wife drove out of town. When he heard the alarm, the radio was on, “but there was no announcement. It was a bit like ‘okay, shouldn’t there be one now?’ Then you were a little…”

After the alarm, his wife tried to go to the municipality’s website, but it was down, so she looked up different newspapers’ web editions instead. Around 2 p.m. they drove to a football match and exchanged information with others there, but that was all. When asked to give his assessment of the situation, the most important question was why they did not put out the fire to stop exposing people to smoke, but he understood that it might have to do with the chemicals.

But then you know that you shouldn’t stay in smoky conditions, that’s quite logical. Smoke is never good, no matter what kind of smoke. It’s not good to inhale. But since I felt nothing in the air back home, you can’t say that I was upset or
anything. But of course one listened to the radio and wanted information in case it turned or something.

David can be seen as a sort of “information hub”, actively seeking information and distributing it to others, in his case especially at the football match, but also to the neighbours he drove to the station, and to his wife and her parents.

**Erik, 59**
The respondent was away in Lund, 110 km to the south, and did not get back until Monday morning.

When I was out on Saturday morning, they interrupted the national broadcast on P1 and announced that there was a fire in Halmstad. Then I didn’t get back until Monday morning, but I could follow the whole incident on the radio as they mention it several times. Even in the weather forecasts where they said that ‘now the wind is favourable’ or ‘now we have to be careful’ or exactly how the wind would blow here in Halmstad. So that way I got pretty good information even if I wasn’t at home, but so to speak at a distance.

He did not seek information, but got quite a lot from public service radio and TV, and even talked to others in Lund about the situation in Halmstad.

**Fanny, 40**
The respondent, who is married to Bertil, woke up at 1:25 a.m. on Saturday morning because of a strong smell of smoke. She checked the apartment to see if the fire was there, but as she found no fire and there were no blue lights outside, she went back to bed and looked up Hallandsposten’s website on her phone. There she read that there was a fire in the harbour. “It says there’s a fire in the harbour, but it says nothing about shutting your windows or anything, so I went back to sleep.” She did not wake up her husband. When the alarm sounded on Saturday noon, she was in a café downtown and did not hear it:

Nothing could be heard downtown. I was in a café and couldn’t hear the alarm.

I read it on Facebook while sitting there, that is in the café surfing. Then you could see it on Facebook. Then I went to the library, here, and there was a notice on the doors that the alarm had sounded and that it was because the smoke was moving across the city.

Sitting in the café and learning that the alarm had sounded, she (and others) looked out and saw people continuing to go shopping as usual, and then she thought that “it probably wasn’t that serious”. She did not go to any website to learn more. She only checked friends’ Facebook pages, not the municipality’s, and the reason was that nobody in the café gave any information about what to do. On Saturday evening they went to have a look at the fire, and there were a lot of people who did that. Once she had found out that the fire was not in her own home, she did not become scared, and the information on Hallandsposten’s website also calmed her down – there was nothing about toxic fumes. She got all her information later on from Hallandsposten’s website, not from TV or radio, but some of the links were to the live TV coverage of the municipality’s press conferences.
Sensory Perception, Collaborative Sensemaking, and Media (old and new)

What becomes obvious from the interviews is that the persons in question may receive the initial information that something unusual is taking place in different ways. In some cases it is through perception of smoke or police cars with flashing lights, some are given personal information, and some find out through the media, but the next step for almost all of them is to search for further information or confirmation through the media. This was what Greenberg concluded already in 1964: People turn to the media even if they initially learned about the crisis from an interpersonal source (Greenberg 1964).

The web edition of the local newspaper is the first or second choice for most, in combination with the municipality’s website, and public service broadcasting. Some do not actively look for information, while one person only looks at the Facebook pages of friends, i.e. no traditional news provider.

But what is also evident is that at one time or another, all of them include their own sensory perception in the process of sensemaking. One must conclude that personal experience of a sight, sound, or smell plays an important role in assessment of the situation: If you cannot hear it, see it or smell it, you may question its existence. What is normally labelled as “curiosity” might just as well be seen as an element of their attempt to make sense of the situation. Even the sight of other citizens plays an important role in assessment of the situation: If people are seen to continue with their everyday business, the favoured (default) conclusion is that the situation is not different or dangerous, not that people have simply not noticed the danger.

The initial information gives rise to a desire for more information, as does the addition of a new serious element of information: the sounding of the alarm. Some people ignore the public warning system, but those who do not, immediately try to find information about why the alarm has sounded – and become frustrated when several minutes pass without any information on any channel. This is experienced as a very long period of time, and may even lead to an erroneous conclusion: that since no further information is given, it cannot be important.

Although none of the interviewees give a description of their initial frames, it is clear that all have different frames for what might be happening when normality is disrupted. Fanny immediately thinks of a fire in her own home, and when she, after inspection and information, is sure that her home is fine, she returns to her previous state of normality and goes back to sleep. Anna’s frame was one of possible danger to her baby, and she was the one who reacted most strongly to the combination of perception and lack of information. But she was calmed by her own observations and her interpretations of them. David saw the blue lights, found information, and was then calmed and could return to normality because he himself could not smell the smoke or see the fire. He seems to have a fairly open frame for interpreting the presence of blue lights and relies on a combination of his own perception and information from different sources. Finally, Carl’s frame for interpreting the events builds on his rather extensive experience of fires in industrial plants. This results in a calm, almost fatalistic interpretation that there is nothing much you can do while the fire is raging. This interpretation is strengthened by his own observations.

It seems that there is an initial “normality frame”, and that when the individual experiences a gap between this frame and the present situation, a need for information arises.
The outcome of this information seeking can take two paths: either the acknowledgement that the abnormality presents a danger, or that the abnormality exists but poses no danger.

The interviewees almost all discuss the situation at one point or other during this period. It might be with a partner, other parents at a sporting event, or people in a café, and it is obvious that these conversations deal with the question of how to interpret the situation. There is a collaborative sensemaking process taking place, in which different data are compiled and discussed in order to create a logic that is both descriptive (“what has happened”) and prescriptive (“what should we do”).

A crucial situation is when the official VMA sounds on Saturday noon. From discussions in the interviews, it is evident that people do not react in the way the authorities want them to. Most people continue their everyday business, believing the signal is a test or simply ignoring it because they a) do not perceive any signs of danger themselves or b) do not receive any supplementary information. This sequence can be seen as an instance of collaborative sensemaking, as the interviewees try to explain why nobody reacted as they were supposed to. One of the important parts of this process is establishment of the inefficiency of the present public alarm system. In some cases the alarm cannot be heard, and in other cases the lack of immediate information about the reason for the alarm leads to the conclusion that it was probably not serious. In this case, collaborative sensemaking takes the form of a shared apologia (Hearit 2006) for not following instructions: nobody did it, and thus nobody can be blamed for not doing it. Instead the diminishing number of sirens is brought up, the soundproofing of modern apartments, and the lack of information through loudspeakers in public places. With this lack of information, people either observed others and did as they did or went online to find information from news providers, official sources or friends.

At this point there is a discussion about the quality of information in the media used. Most of the participants have standpoints on Hallandsposten, a local daily newspaper, and on Aftonbladet, which is the largest national tabloid. Also its major competitor, Expressen, is mentioned.

*Interviewer:* And what about the press? I’m talking about this specific episode?
*Erik:* Well, the press on the Internet works alright, but apart from that you have to wait too long for that.
*Anna:* I think Hallandsposten was quite good. They updated regularly.
*Interviewer:* You’re thinking about the web edition?
*Anna:* Yes, the web edition. It was updated continuously so you could follow it there. Then I also went and had a look at Aftonbladet and Expressen, but it’s so hyped. “Halmstad is burning”, that kind of giant headlines.
*Erik:* That’s what I mean, when I say it’s not as reliable.
*Anna:* No. I normally read those pages on the web, but now I felt that, no, I’ll stick to Hallandsposten. It felt more secure when it was more local, then they knew what they were talking about. Aftonbladet and Expressen were a bit “Great fire in Halmstad”, it sounded like the whole city was burning down.
*Bertil:* Yes, it was probably a bit like that.
*Fanny:* And they didn’t update that information, that was what came first. But Hallandsposten updated all the time, right.
In this sequence, the subject is the reliability of the web edition of a local paper and the two Stockholm-based tabloids. The interviewees support each other and supply each other with arguments for why the local paper is reliable and the tabloids not reliable in this particular situation, and this is related to a normal situation where the tabloids have higher reliability. It is also obvious that this discussion works as an argument for Bertil, who appears to have moved from either a neutral or positive position regarding the tabloids and is approaching the position of the others. A clear hierarchy of important features in a paper is constructed, with continuous updating as the prime feature to be looking for in a crisis situation.

Generally, this group uses a combination of old and new media, but with the traditional providers of news as key actors: radio, TV, local newspapers, and to some extent the official website of the municipality. What is important is that the information be swift, reliable, and not overly dramatic or sensationalist. But as can be seen from the comments, swiftness is the most important aspect, and the authorities receive much criticism for the time span between the alarm and the information on radio and TV. Swiftness when it comes to updating is also the main reason for people to choose web-based news providers, as they are usually ahead of the others and the information is always available.

The role of social media differs between the interviewees, but it is generally ranked quite high due to the functionality and swift updating, though most people use it to access the municipality’s or the local newspaper’s websites. In other words, the source is the same, but the media have changed.

The Age Factor

In the other groups, there were similar reactions and actions, which are not repeated here, but there were also some patterns specific to the younger and older interviewees. Obvious differences are a greater use of social media among the young and of the traditional broadcast media among the elderly.

In Group 1 (“The youngsters”, 9 people, aged 18 to 30 years) Facebook is used by practically everyone, and Twitter and Instagram are also quite frequently used. But even Hallandsposten’s web edition and radio, TV, and Youtube are used to some extent during the weekend. Which media they turn to in the first place depends on their ordinary media habits, but combined with a search for “something I can use”. If the person does not find anything useful, the media is abandoned quite quickly. Text messages on the phone from friends was how two of the interviewees received the initial information, but even parents worked as information sources for some of the youngest interviewees.

One feature that attracts attention is the assessment of different media with regard to credibility. Aftonbladet’s web edition is generally considered less trustworthy and more exaggerated, but even Halmstadsposten’s web edition is considered a bit dramatic by some. Even among those in the group who read them, this characterization of the two papers is found, i.e. they prefer them despite the questioning of their credibility. The reasons are either habit or entertainment. Nobody discusses the credibility of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Youtube, but there seems to be a general consensus that because these media are used by private individuals, you are always aware of the inherent bias and potential inaccuracy. But once again, this does not affect their preferences for these channels.
A second feature which is remarkable is that several bring up previous experiences with crisis situations in Halmstad. One of the girls received a mass distributed text message in the night to shut windows and doors because the storage might explode.

*Gabriella:* …but then I didn’t think so much about it because so much has happened here in Halmstad, that they have exaggerated it to the extreme, with acid in the water and such, but nothing has ever happened anyway, so I just thought “oh yeah”, shrugged and went back to sleep.

The experience of a major disturbance over what turned out to be nothing has given the interviewees a feeling that danger is always exaggerated. It is a bit like “the boy who cried wolf.” So apparently, the younger persons have different frames for interpreting a public alarm and a different scheme for evaluating the different media and channels. Apart from that, they feature the same mix of information sources, with personal perception playing a role as well.

In Group 3 (the “Senior Citizens”, 10 people, aged 55 to 82 years) the interview becomes more of a group conversation with several instances of collaborative sensemaking, e.g. concerning use of the sirens and the apparent lack of information within the fire brigade about the presence of chemicals in the burning building. Most of the interviewees received their information from radio (both national, P1, and regional, P4), but they even looked up newspapers’ web editions and other websites. One of the women heard it on national radio, and thought that “this has got to be something important. Local radio can pick up the tiniest things, but this was on national radio”. Nobody contradicts this, meaning that apparently although the local radio is considered better with regard to the coverage of local events, it is ranked lower on the “credibility of seriousness” scale. But no matter how the interviewees received the initial information, they actively searched for more information from other sources. In general one can say that they initially became somewhat worried, but that they soon calmed down and considered this to be a non-dangerous event. Nevertheless, this group shows a remarkably higher degree of compliance with the standard orders on what to do when the alarm sounds – they closed their windows and doors and stayed indoors, many of them with the radio on.

There is a recurring theme of other citizens not reacting to the alarm and warnings, and how strange (or bad) this is. There are even references to the fact that Halmstad is in the vicinity of a nuclear power plant: Will it be the same if there is a meltdown at the plant?

*Hanna:* Well, I mean IF. I’m scared of nuclear power. I hope everything will just toot, flash, that all media will be… ‘Cause otherwise, what’s the point in warning people?

*Ingvar:* I had another thought. I had this ohvwell, if you don’t feel anything, you don’t see anything, it doesn’t smell– then you don’t care.

*Hanna:* No, that’s why you have to be warned.

*Ingvar:* There was something implied here, that “it doesn’t affect me, it’s somebody else who’s affected.”

And as another interviewee later asks: “How do you find out at first?” This is combined with a desire for the authorities to be more precise when communicating: is this danger-
ous or is it not? Many of the interviewees express initial concern, but they were clearly all calmed by what information they subsequently found themselves.

In addition to this, the study points to a number of other factors to be considered and discussed in order to improve the efficiency of official crisis communication. One such factor is the routines when the siren is used. It is obvious that just using a siren is not enough to make the public aware of a danger. It must be immediately followed by other forms of information, both to underline that it is not just a test, but also to make clear what the warning is about. Use of many platforms when spreading the information is also of great importance. One reason for this, as shown in this study, is the ever-present risk that one platform will not work properly. Another reason is the great differences between generations in media use and habits.

Conclusions and Perspectives
One phenomenon that becomes clear through the interviews is the existence of a “default” frame, or a “normality frame” for interpreting and making sense of the surrounding world. If the individual does not receive any input that questions this frame (through own sensation or communication), the frame will remain in force. In other words: Those who do not see, smell, or hear anything out of the ordinary, and who do not get any such information through mass media or personal communication, will continue life as if nothing has happened. This is a rather banal observation, but it is significant because it also highlights the fact that questioning the standard frame and replacing it with an “abnormal” frame, e.g. a crisis frame, is dependent on the input being of a certain strength. If the signal is not particularly strong, the individual will make a mental note of this deviation and wait for further and more conclusive signs that the standard frame is no longer valid. Or she/he will actively seek information to confirm one of the two frames.

Figure 2. The Role of Information Seeking in the Data/frame Model

In the case of a crisis, what happens when the normality frame is questioned is that the individual evaluates the situation using the following dichotomy: is this or is this not dangerous? Uncertainty about possible danger leads to information seeking, and a re-evaluation of the danger. Looking at the stories people tell in the interviews, the first threshold to be transcended if people are to start looking for information is not particularly high. Especially older people become anxious and active, as does the mother of an infant, and they immediately check for confirmation or rejection of the danger frame. But once this status has been established and the danger more or less dismissed, the
threshold seems to become much higher. In other words, it takes a very strong signal or combination of signals for the person to re-adjust her/his judgment about the situation. Once the citizen has been calmed (“the smoke and fire does not pose a threat to me”), even the sounding of the alarm and the knowledge that this ought to be followed by preventive action does not lead to any change in assessment of the situation or to any changes in behaviour.

There seems to be a strong need to provide diversified and immediate information for citizens if they are to make the kind of sense out of the situation that is intended by the authorities. As soon as people perceive a breach of normality – smoke, fire, etc. – there should be instant and evaluative information about the reason for and seriousness of the new situation. As Seeger et al. write:

Specific kinds of information are needed in a high uncertainty, post crisis environment. These include information about cause of the post crisis and identification of responsible parties, consequences such as scope of harm and instructions for mitigation of harm, and information about corrective actions necessary to reduce risk and re-establish security. [...] Information about consequences and scope of harm gives cue as to personal impact, how serious the crisis is, and about what might constitute reasonable levels of concern and attention. (Seeger et al. 2002:56)

Not only does this satisfy the need for information and present citizens with a realistic picture of the situation, it also increases their attention to future information – and it can restore their faith in the authorities: “Post crisis audiences, therefore, may need to hear that there is a system of authority and control and it is taking appropriate action” (Seeger et al. 2002: 56).

Naturally, this also has repercussions for the level of compliance. As the interview showed, the older people were generally more compliant with the standing recommendations for what to do when the alarm sounds, but doubt about the danger and the necessity of the precautions even grew in them, as they observed life going on as normal outside and there was no further information about the level of risk. Here, it is also worth noting that there was apparently never any “all clear” signal, signifying the end of the precautions. This lack of expected information is of course damaging to the authorities’ reliability in the eyes of the citizen who did what was expected.

The present study builds on a limited number of interviewees in one particular crisis situation, so the reader should be cautious about generalizing. The study does, however, bring a number of questions into focus, several of which have been addressed in other studies and textbooks. One is the threshold to be transgressed in order to get people to accept something as a crisis situation and to take appropriate action, but also the interplay between different sources of information and their prior status as reliable or not. But mostly it becomes clear that sensemaking is a collaborative and social process in which people collect and compare information and interpretations in order to achieve some kind of consensus about how to classify the situation and determine which action to take (or not take). Seen from the authorities’ point of view, this may pose a problem, especially if the people you cooperate with in order to create sense are your peers, as is often the case within social media communication. The actions of a homogenous group will most likely result in reluctance to question frames, as the inflow of communication becomes too univocal.
References


ORLA VIGSO, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Gothenburg, orla.vigso@jmg.gu.se

TOMAS ODÉN, Ph.D., Senior lecturer, Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Gothenburg, bengt.johansson@jmg.gu.se
High Stakes

An Interview Study of Researchers’ Motivations for and Experiences of being Interviewed by Journalists

Benedicte Carlsen & Hanne Riese

Abstract
Researchers are key sources of an increasing amount of research news in the media. Hitherto, the meagre empirical literature on researchers’ media performances has been divided in two strands: one indicating that researchers are generally motivated to report their research in the media, and the other paradoxically reporting negative experiences of and conflict with journalists. The aim of the present study was to explore Norwegian researchers’ motivations for participating in and experiences of journalistic interviews. We find that researchers’ main reason for seeking media coverage is that they want their findings to be of use to society. This makes it essential to avoid errors or misleading framing of the news report. Despite strong motivations to do so, the researchers experience that communicating through the media is stressful and that their motivations for seeking media attention are in conflict with the motives of some research journalists. The study reveals a link between researchers’ motivation for seeking media coverage and their experiences of conflict with journalists.

Keywords: research communication, science communication, news sources, researchers in the media, sociology of science

Introduction
The majority of us acquire most of our research-based knowledge through the media, and primarily through journalistic news or feature stories (Bell 1994; Castell et al. 2014; Wilson 1995). Researchers’ experiences of journalistic interviews concerning their own research are of interest because researchers are the sources of research news. Nevertheless, empirical studies of what motivates researchers’ media performances, and how researchers experience their meetings with journalists and the resulting news reports, are in short supply when compared to the large number of studies on the research stories themselves (Schäfer 2012). A meta-study conducted in 2009 found that most studies on research communication are based on surveys among journalists or researchers, a minority being qualitative interview studies (Schäfer 2012). Among the qualitative studies within research communications, few have explored researchers’ views on the media specifically or in any depth (Besley & Nisbet 2011). In general, the selection of researchers in the studies on researchers’ views is remarkably skewed. While the great majority of studies describe the experiences and attitudes of natural scientists, very few include the views of social scientists or researchers from the humanities.
From existing surveys we know that researchers are in contact with the media several times during their careers (Schäfer 2012), and that participating in journalistic interviews is the most common channel for reaching out to the public (Eide & Ottosen 1994; Peters 1995; Peters et al. 2008). Furthermore, these surveys indicate that researchers are typically highly motivated for research communication through the media; the great majority see research communication through the media as something important. However, a review of two surveys among scientists in the UK and US indicates that while scientists often believe that being in the media and communicating through journalists is the most effective means of communicating with the public, they generally hold a negative view of science coverage and believe that science news reports are often confusing and often scare the public (Besley & Nisbet 2011).

In 2013, we conducted a survey among Norwegian researchers from all major academic disciplines (Carlsen, Müftüoglu, & Riese 2014). Norwegian researchers are encouraged by their institutions to participate in media interviews and to report them in national electronic databases. However, media interviews and other popular forms of research communication offer almost no academic merits or financial gain. Thus direct structural and economic incentives are lacking. Still the survey results indicate that the researchers have an average of two media appearances yearly, and more than 90% of the respondents agreed that research communication through journalistic interviews is important. Our study also found that a third of the researchers experience difficulties and find interactions with journalists frustrating, a finding that supports the reviewed studies from the UK and US.

In sum empirical studies seem to indicate that researchers are generally motivated to contribute to news stories, but still they seem to have a rather negative picture of how research news reports are presented in the media and understood by the public. This persistent participation in research communication despite that lack of incentives and negative experiences is a paradox.

One limitation of these quantitative studies is that they have investigated either motives or experiences, or at least analysed the two aspects separately. To explain the paradox of researchers’ attitudes towards the media, we believe it is necessary to let the researchers tell their stories of “being in the media” and how motives and experiences are interconnected. We assume that the individual researcher goes through a process whereby the motives behind seeking media coverage influence what type of media institution or journalist is deemed acceptable, and then how the meeting with the journalist, and the resulting news story, is assessed by the researcher. This experience may, again, influence future motivation, choice of media channel or journalist, and so on. To understand such mental processes and how people look at the world, qualitative interviews are suitable (Connelly & Clandinin 1990; Kvale 1996; Silverman 1985)

With the aim of better understanding the paradoxes surrounding motivations for and experiences of media interviews among today’s Norwegian researchers, we conducted an in-depth, narrative-based interview study with researchers. Specifically, we were interested in exploring the underlying motives for communicating research results in the media, how researchers from various academic disciplines experience communicating with and through journalists, and how their motivations shape their media experiences.
Theoretical Framework and Analytical Approach

Studies in the field of research communication in the media commonly describe encounters between journalists and researchers as a cultural clash (Reed 2001). In many ways, researchers and journalists represent conflicting professional cultures with colliding motives and aims, as well as conflicting views on control and ownership of the research news reports (Peters et al. 2008b). While both researchers and journalists are trained to reveal truths about the world (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2007), there seem to be some small but significant differences regarding how the two groups believe the truth is best conveyed to the public. In 1995, Peters conducted a seminal study of research communication across several countries and found quite similar results on differences in motivation and views on the role of science news between researchers and journalists (Peters 1995; Peters et al. 2008a). One difference that has been confirmed in several studies is researchers’ insistence on accuracy in reporting their findings, in contrast to journalists’ aim of conveying an interesting and comprehensible story (Peters 1995; Radford 2007).

Whereas Peters describes scientists’ encounters with journalists as a “struggle for control over the communication process” (Peters 1995, p. 42), studies of journalist-researcher interaction within science communication have often taken the perspective of the journalist. Descriptions of journalists’ experiences offer insights into how the motives and cultural values of journalists contribute to shaping the encounter between the two professions. For example, one study of journalists across several countries finds that challenges due to the culture clash are frequent (Lassila-Merisalo 2011). Journalists worry about their news sources, for example that researchers have hidden agendas and are financially motivated. Thus they have a critical view of researchers’ credibility and try to balance their stories by citing other opposing sources. Such strategies are in line with advice from journalism textbooks (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2007). One Norwegian example is how, in his introductory book for science journalists, scholar of science journalism Harald Hornmoen emphasizes that journalists should be aware of possible financial agendas and the need to balance researchers’ accounts with counter-arguments (Hornmoen 1999). Ideally then, science journalists should critically assess science news items before reporting them.

However, during the past fifteen years, parts of the traditional news press, such as newspapers, have been under financial strain and the labour market for journalists is undergoing substantial changes. For Norwegian journalists, getting permanent employment and specializing in one field has become difficult, as newspapers are increasingly forced to rely on all-round and freelance journalists. Media researchers have warned that it is difficult to live up to the ideals of critical and thorough journalism, particularly political and science journalism, under the current strained circumstances (Barnett 2002; Brumfiel 2009; Göpfert 2007).

In some contrast to studies on experiences of encounters between researchers and journalists that have reported conflict, the few in-depth studies of researchers’ motivations, such as Smith et al.’s interview study among cancer researchers and journalists from the US (Smith et al. 2010), have found strong general support of communicating research through the media. The authors report that “Interviewees frequently articulated the value of mass media in communicating scientific information as being either obvious or unquestionable.” (p. 212). In a survey of UK researchers’ intentions to publicly disseminate their findings, Poliakoff and Webb find that researchers are more driven by their own attitudes than by what others expect them to do (Poliakoff & Webb 2007).
It has been argued that in order to understand researchers’ motivations for seeking media coverage, it is vital to explore their professional role. Besides conducting the research, teaching and disseminating research in academic fora are traditionally seen as basic components of researchers’ role, and in this endeavour researchers have a responsibility towards research participants to disseminate results truthfully (Kalleberg 2012). Kalleberg further argues that researchers are also expected to serve as experts and critical voices in relevant public discourses. Common categories of researchers’ motives for media contact seem to be branding (i.e., increasing the visibility of the institution); accountability (i.e., legitimizing use of funding); education (i.e., educating the public about science); and enabling democracy and usefulness (i.e., informing the debate and helping the public or politicians make informed decisions) (Løvhaug 2011; Smith, Singer, & Kromm 2010). These studies indicate that researchers’ motivations for contributing to news stories are connected to their professional identity. They span from instrumental motives, which contribute to the legitimization of research, to motives grounded on researchers’ professional role as experts who manage knowledge of relevance to society.

As mentioned above, our approach also leans on the somewhat contrasting studies of researchers’ experiences as news sources. These suggest that even when researchers are fairly content with the news reports they are involved in, they still continue to be suspicious of journalists in general (Besley & Nisbet 2011). It has been postulated that this phenomenon should be discussed in light of the notion that accuracy is a key component when news sources assess the credibility of news stories (Ørsten & Burkal 2014).

Although it seems to have been established as a fact that difficulties in communication between researchers and journalists are connected to differences in professional cultures, little is known about how motives contribute to shaping the experiences researchers gain from meetings with journalists. Increased knowledge of the interplay of motives and experiences from the researchers’ perspective may contribute to strengthening the dialogue between two professions that are rooted in different cultures.

A narrative interview study of how researchers experience the encounter with journalists is well suited to uncovering the relationship between motives for contributing to news stories and experiences of being interviewed. Such an approach allows us to uncover researchers’ perspective on the dialogue with journalists, and to interpret these experiences within the context of knowledge on the journalists’ perspective. “[...] narratives are one of the natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to organize and express meaning and knowledge” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p153). Concentrating on researchers’ narratives allows us to emphasize the meaning of their narratives in a social and temporal context. Thus, we can uncover how researchers regard their experiences as being shaped by their motives as well as by immediate concerns within the context of their meeting with the journalist. Explicitly taking the subjective point of view, the qualitative research interview lends itself to uncovering the meanings of experiences.

Methods
Interview participants were recruited among the academic staff at a medium-sized Norwegian university, and among all the researchers at a large private research institute.
Data collection

We purposively selected participants among respondents in a survey conducted during the spring of 2013, the aim being to achieve variation in gender, age, career, discipline, and type of research institution they were employed at. In an in-depth study, the aim is not to include as many participants or carry out as many interviews as possible, as this would render the analysis superficial. Hence, when recruiting participants, we aimed for variation in experience and attitudes (according to their answers in the earlier survey), because we expected that findings based on the potential common themes across the interviews would be more robust (Patton 2005). We recruited participants in a continuous process of preliminary analyses and targeted recruiting. We stopped the interview process when we had conducted 17 interviews, because we had, at that point, material that was sufficiently rich and an amount that was manageable within our chosen analysis framework, and because the last few interviews did not seem to offer any new key findings (Carlsen & Glenton 2011). For a profile of the participants, see Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Academic field</th>
<th>Academic level</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Interviews per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Health sciences</td>
<td>senior</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>junior</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>senior</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>senior</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>senior</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Health sciences</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Health sciences</td>
<td>senior</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>junior</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We initially contacted the participants by email, and subsequently telephoned them in order to arrange the time and place for the interviews. The interviews were audio recorded and were all conducted during the autumn term of 2013. BC conducted 11 interviews and HR conducted six interviews. The format of the interviews was open and explorative. We started each interview by informing the participant about the motivation for the research project and about the three main themes we wanted the participants to talk about: Their academic field and career, their overall experience with journalistic research communication, including positive and negative encounters, and media processes that they remembered in detail. We rarely had to prompt the participants to cover all of
these themes and, in general, interrupted only to ask for clarifications and to check our interpretation of the participants’ stories.

Analysis

Each interview was first summed up by the interviewing author and then discussed between the two authors as a preliminary analysis in order to plan further selection of participants. When 17 interviews had been conducted, we had the first five transcribed by a research assistant. Both authors read the transcribed interviews meticulously, listened through all of the interviews and noted the main emerging themes for coding. The authors discussed and agreed upon the key themes of the interviews and subsequently, one author (BC) coded and condensed the findings in a matrix as a cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman 1994), while the other author (HR) summed up each interview in condensed narratives representing the main findings in each interview. When comparing and sorting the narratives and categories that emerged from the material, we noted a high degree of consensus between the findings generated by the two approaches. Finally, the authors agreed upon a presentation of the main findings that combines the results from both analyses.

When interpreting the interview material, we kept in mind that the participants in the present interview study are not representative of any larger population, as participants in qualitative studies seldom are, and we therefore do not claim that our findings are in any way universal. However, we will argue that while not being universally generalizable, our findings are nonetheless valid and thus represent a genuine range of motives and experiences that can be found among researchers of today.

An additional aspect of the interview study that is worth reflecting upon is the fact that we, as academic researchers ourselves, are interviewing our peers, this having both advantages and disadvantages. While it enabled us to easily take on the role of confidante and secured our understanding of the context, e.g. the limitations and possibilities of the researchers’ professional role, it may also have rendered us blind to some characteristics of the researchers and their roles. However, the clear advantage was that the interviewees provided honest and straightforward accounts of their views on and experiences of encounters with journalists. If an outsider position can be argued to strengthen the objectivity and emotional distance of the researcher, it can also be argued that only insiders can truly understand the nature of the question asked (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007)

Although we had selected participants with a variety of characteristics, the interviewees conveyed a consistent set of experiences and attitudes regarding interaction with journalists, and views on the role of the researcher in society at large. In the following, we will attempt to depict the core of these findings and illustrate the key points using representative extracts from the interviews. Thus, all interviewees have not been cited and some interviews have been used more than others. Some details have been rewritten to ensure anonymity.

Motivations for Research Communication through the Media

Nearly all of our participants seemed to be, or at least to initially have been motivated to be interviewed by journalists. When telling us their stories of positive and negative interactions with journalists, the participants repeatedly returned to their reasons for
conceding to media interviews. They listed several motives for, and the aims of, their interactions with journalists. Strikingly, most of the interviewees clearly felt that disseminating results through the media was an integrated part of the researchers’ job.

That’s why we’re in this business, to make a difference. We’re not doing research because we have some random idea that we are completely indifferent to the relevance of. What we want is to do research so that it will have some impact on society or on clinical practice or [...] (Participant 16)

Such utterances seem to imply that seeking media attention is not something researchers primarily do to concede to external demands placed on them by their research institution, funding agencies, or by other actors among the public. Rather, it is something they feel strongly obliged to do as researchers. Hence, the findings seem to indicate that research communication through the mass media has become an internalized idea among researchers of today.

The interviews consistently conveyed the view that communicating research through the media is an essential part of making research count, and being interviewed by journalists is the easiest way of accessing the media, thereby of reaching the public. The interviewees put considerable weight on the argument that if the research is relevant and important, it is also important that the findings be communicated. The researchers quite explicitly explained why this aim of spreading useful information seemed so imperative to them.

Firstly, we have a genuine interest in [research communication] and we believe it is important to convey this for the sake of nature, since we work with conservation, and we support conservation with our research. It’s important to portray, for example, why one should preserve a waterway, well yes, that’s because the results say such and such. These are enormous and important issues. [...] People can’t do anything but rely on this kind of expertise, so that’s why it’s important that we actually convey this kind of expertise [...]. If you have results that you feel are important, then you have to get them out there. (Participant 9)

As this quote illustrates, many researchers felt compelled to communicate their research beyond academic circles. Scientific knowledge needs to be dispersed and to be of use to the general public, special groups, funding agencies and politicians, and the researchers felt responsible for this. Based on the theories and earlier studies of, among others, Løvhaug (2011) and Smith et al. (2010), we had not expected that usefulness would appear as the most important motivating factor. According to their models, we would have expected the researchers to put more weight on education of the public and accountability. However, these, and other motives also played a role, albeit a minor one, according to our informants.

Some participants mentioned the need to make a new research field, their institution or even themselves known to the academic world, as well as to potential funding agencies, and that media attention was encouraged by the PR departments or unit leaders at the research institutions, and sometimes by current funding agencies. Compared to writing their own popular science articles, interviews were seen as a more effective strategy for getting media coverage of the research, thereby attracting students, research funding, or increasing job opportunities. Some participants had experienced that media
coverage resulted in new cross-disciplinary research, funding, and that their research reports were read more widely.

Where I work now, there’s almost an agenda that we should be in the press. We have to talk about what we do and it’s important to share our results. […]

You might say there are commercial interests as well. We know that publicity is also good promotion for us. It can generate assignments too. (Participant 9)

Additionally, there were some references to having a sense of duty to report back to the taxpayers what comes out of publicly funded research.

A few participants mentioned basic values of educating the public about research in general and thereby contributing to enhancing democracy. Others found it irritating to witness what they deemed to be uninformed or misinformed public debates about a topic they had more detailed knowledge about, and thus they wanted to inform the debate.

Motivation emerged as a key feature in the interviews, because it was both a prerequisite for, and a consequence of, the different encounters with the press. It both influences, and develops from, the encounters. Quite a few of the researchers also said that they enjoyed the attention media coverage entails, explaining that media coverage gave them a “good feeling”, because many people would become familiar with the project or the subject they were working on. They enjoyed the feedback and the opportunity for communication with the public that they had experienced through media attention. Still, the personal benefits of media appearances were presented as meagre compared to the societal value, and they were not mentioned by all respondents.

Keeping in mind the fact that being driven by professional duties rather than by personal benefits is the expected and more politically correct answer, the intensity with which the researchers argued for the significance of research news lead us to have confidence in this finding. Also, given the incentive system of the research institutions, we are inclined to believe that this represents the interviewees’ true feelings.

Motivating factors summed up according to salience:

1. **Usefulness**: It was consistently seen as important that research should inform and be of use.
2. **Visibility**: of a research institution, research group, or research field in order to recruit students, researchers, or secure financing.
3. **Accountability**: Show taxpayers or funding agencies what results from their funding.
4. **Attention can be fun**: A feeling of meaningfulness (e.g., when friends and family suddenly see and understand what the researcher’s job entails).
5. **Democracy**: The argument about educating the public about research in general.

**Researchers’ Experiences: The Stakes are High**

As expected, based on earlier studies and our own recent survey, the great majority of our participants said that they had mostly had positive encounters with the media. However, as they reflected upon this they often seemed to best remember the negative exceptions to this norm. Clearly, leaving research dissemination to a journalist was not
always experienced as successful. When researchers felt that the news report had been inaccurate, this led to frustration, especially because their motivation to enlighten the public means that it is essential that the information not be distorted.

I mean, what good is research if only other academics read the articles and have access to those facts, and most people don’t know about it?[…] What worries me is if we get some results that you think are more than just someone sitting and arguing for one thing or the other, and if you think there actually is a kind of truth to it, and then they present it completely differently, or quite the opposite?! And especially when it’s about issues like immigrants. In this case, I think that the majority population needs to know the way things actually are, because there is so much nonsense being written. (Participant 6)

The different motives of researchers compared to those of some of the journalists may explain why the researchers sometimes felt used or “misused” by the press. There was general agreement among the participants that the style and competence of journalists varied greatly and, thus, their experiences also varied. The participants categorized journalists and their encounters with them into two main types, and explained how what they perceived as the varying competence and attitudes of the journalists resulted in either “good” or “bad” research communication.

There’s a very big difference in the quality of the journalists who call. […] This journalist managed both to ask sensible questions and then to actually extract the essence of what I said and portray it in an interesting way. While other times it’s just, well, you spend lots of time editing it, because you just cannot be quoted on what the journalist says that you said. (Participant 14)

The positive experiences were associated with what they saw as open, interested and competent journalists who listened and wrote news reports that were better written, and more interesting, than the researchers believed they could have written themselves. The meetings with “competent” journalists were sometimes described as a creative process where the outcome, in the form of a research news story, was a joint production between the researcher and the journalist that neither party could have produced on his/her own.

I’ve had many positive experiences. […] You meet one of those open, competent journalists. They can improve my text a lot better than I could do myself, and we learn from each other in the process. It gets so much better than what I could’ve done alone, and what they could’ve done, because we have a good dialogue. […] So that type of research-based news report, written by, clearly, incredibly talented journalists, that really is a joy! (Participant 12)

As we see here, among the researchers in our study, an acceptable result, or a “good” media story on research news, was defined as a simplified, but not skewed, account of research findings that combined the two motives of informing the public and arousing their interest.

On the other hand, the researchers mentioned “those with an agenda”, or those whom they categorized simply as incompetent journalists. Encounters with this type of journalist, they felt, often resulted in incorrect and misleading articles, unless the researcher was given the opportunity to put a great deal of time and effort into rewriting
the entire article. The researchers defined a “bad” experience with the media mainly as one resulting in a news article that misrepresented the scientific facts. Dealing with an “incompetent” or “tabloid” journalist, and thereafter being partly responsible for a faulty or tendentious news article, was commonly described as “disagreeable” or “intimidating”. Such experiences also evoked strong feelings, which were described using terms such as “being fooled”, “unfairness” and even “despair”.

I think it’s really bad if there’s something that comes out wrong. And I think it’s unfortunate because it seems like I’m the one who said something wrong too. And I haven’t, but they take privileges and just write things. […] I would not say that I have a relaxed attitude towards journalists. I always find it quite a nerve-racking event. I have to be constantly updated and up to scratch and everything has to be right. (Participant 13)

Deliberating over the varying quality of media coverage, interviewees were under the impression that some journalists failed to acknowledge the researchers’ competence and role, or the importance of their research findings.

The larger newspapers, they want things to be correct, and they phone at eleven at night if they have to, “No, now I need to get this thing here. Am I quoting you correctly now if you say such and such...?” You get that very rarely with smaller newspapers and they like things a bit fresher, and often throw in some personal comments every now and then. […] I think it’s a bit strange. As a researcher, you have to, in a way, double underline the right answer and be very aware of not using the sources incorrectly […]. “She said the sea level is rising by ten metres.” “No, I did not say that, I said that there are incredibly large uncertainties, because if the large ice-sheets melt, we’ll have a completely different situation than we have today, where only the small ice-sheets are melting and contributing to the sea level, so then you’re talking about maybe one to three metres.” So when you get the ‘ten-metres’ in your face, it’s tough. I’m thinking, “That was not what I said!” (Participant 4)

The above quotations exemplify why, in spite of the participants’ mostly positive experiences, being exposed in the media (the encounters with journalists, the resulting news stories and their aftermath in the form of reactions from other researchers or the general public) was frequently described as tense.

Although the more experienced participants were more relaxed about media exposure, and had experienced that the end result was normally acceptable, many continued to feel that they risked unpleasant or “degrading” experiences. They found it necessary to be “on guard” and, if possible, negotiate with the journalist in order to avoid unfortunate errors. The following is an account from an experienced health researcher who felt that he had neglected to be sufficiently alert in a recent meeting with a journalist. He felt that he, himself, had been ridiculed and the youths he had been studying had been stigmatized in the news report:

Even if you, as a researcher, try to interpret the data from a certain angle, you cannot know whether your article will be viewed or interpreted from a stigmatizing perspective. So […] how should you do research and disseminate your findings knowing full well that you can’t quite control the consequences of what you do,
but that you might have an ethical obligation to think about, “what can these results be used for?” And who is it that might benefit from the results and who could you harm? (Participant 16)

A bad experience with the media had led this researcher to reflect on his ethical responsibility as a scientist. He has also put a lot of thought into the challenges of negotiating where the researcher’s responsibility ends and that of the journalist begins.

The researchers told repeated stories of the ways in which journalist could be to blame for faulty research news, and why this was seen as problematic. Commonly, the researchers described bad experiences that they felt had occurred because the journalist had misunderstood the facts, or had deliberately put the facts in a misleading context, resulting in a faulty or distorted representation of the research.

There are lots of people who like to say that the climate will be wetter and wilder, but ‘wilder’ is a term that we never use, because we don’t know whether there will be more storms. But the fact that it rains more, we do know. And when I was interviewed and I said, “Yes, what is the biggest challenge?” “It is rainfall and how it destroys infrastructure and we don’t have good enough drainage [...].” And of course, the big headline, “‘Wilder climate’, the researcher says.” And the journalist was in the room, because he sat there writing and then he put it online right away, and I said, “I did not say ‘wilder’.” He said, “Yes, but more rain is ‘wilder’”. “No, ‘wilder’ means stormy weather and more like ‘Sandy’ comes to Norway type hurricanes.” “Yes, but it’s catchier.” So I said, “But that’s not what I said.” [...] It was his journalistic slant on it; that this meant ‘wilder’. (Participant 4)

The participants mainly judged the media experience in relation to the resulting news stories and their consequences. When the news story did not reflect the research findings correctly, the main concern among all the researchers was the potential societal consequences that faulty media stories could have. By creating misunderstanding among the public, people could be misinformed or misguided, or a vulnerable group could be hurt. In their deliberations about what their responsibility would be and what the journalist’s responsibility would be, the risk of hurting a weak third-party was a disturbing element, because the influence of the research on the researched is seen as part of the researcher’s ethical responsibility.

I didn’t realize, at the time, that lots of smaller newspapers get cases from each other. So the case from the first professional newspaper was picked up and it was like Chinese whispers. Suddenly, someone had posted a comment about how being a bit of a show-off was typical male behaviour, and my results do not show that. I have never said that, but it was slipped in in parenthesis and spread to umpteen newspapers that have picked up this case. [...] I mean, that detail, which was wrong, doesn’t have much to say in the grand scheme of things, [...] but if I had researched whether a new treatment regimen works, for example, then it would have been a real crisis if it came out wrong, because if it takes hold then it may be of importance. [...] Then you can, for example, be worried that lots of people will stop taking their medications, that it actually has some kind of consequence for life and health. (Participant 14)
How negative the experience of being misinterpreted is and to what degree the researcher is willing to overlook the misinterpretations seem to depend on whether or not the results are likely to have societal consequences.

I concluded that it could have a positive function. Unlike, for example, when health news is being distorted, and then it could, in a way, be detrimental to people perhaps, right? So then it becomes ethically problematic. But, in my case, I decided that it doesn’t matter. As a researcher, one is very concerned about truth, but I suddenly became a little more pragmatic. It doesn’t sound very professional, but it was, in a way, true enough and it has played a positive role. (Participant 3)

The participants often underlined that after going through a process of learning and adaption to the media, they could increase the likelihood of an open and respectful dialogue between themselves and the journalist, and thereby the chances of a “good” news report. However, in spite of this, the researchers’ attitudes towards appearing in the media often continued to be characterized by ambivalence and a sense of risk-taking. The interviewees found it important to inform the public, but at the same time they tended to feel nervous about getting the news story right. They found it important to keep some control over the news story so as to reduce the risk of misinforming the public (and, secondly, to avoid coming across as foolish). Thus, the interaction with the press was repeatedly described as a tense process, even though most of the time the results are acceptable.

Summary and concluding remarks

The findings support and elucidate the initial assumption drawn from our survey, namely that researchers are generally fairly satisfied with their media coverage, though they find the process difficult. For the researcher, the stakes are high.

To further explain the paradox surrounding researchers’ experiences of media interviews, the findings can be summed up as follows:

1. Disseminating research through the media is internalized in researchers’ professional role.
2. Their most important motive for contributing to news stories is to spread useful information.
3. Because researchers feel responsible for research news being useful and not causing harm, it is imperative to them that news stories present facts correctly and not in a distorted frame.
4. Researchers feel tense when in contact with the media, because in their experience some journalists lack competence or do not share the researchers’ aim to provide correct information.
5. Thus, researchers’ attitudes towards research communication in the media are characterized by ambivalence.

A common finding in our data was that disseminating research through the media is a duty that comes with the job, i.e., it is not predominantly something that the research
institution, funding agencies, journalists or the public demand from researchers. The researchers’ main motivation for seeking media coverage was that they wanted their findings to be of use, that is, to increase understanding or inform decisions and attitudes in society at large. This includes helping people make informed decisions about health and lifestyle, for example, as well as supporting policymakers.

Interestingly, Smith et al. find that, at least in the field of cancer research, the aim of making usable information available to the public is valued by researchers and journalists alike (Smith et al. 2010). When producing a research news story, the researcher and journalist need to work together to strike a balance between arousing attention and achieving simplicity and accuracy. It seems that common ground can be found in the usefulness of research news. Some of our participants emphasized how a good dialogue with a competent journalists had led to popularization of their research in news stories that had made their results interesting and understandable to the public without twisting the conclusions, thus, supporting their reasons for spreading information. The encounter between researcher and journalist is one between two professions with different frames of reference. Still, it may build on a common interest and therefore negotiation between the different frames is possible. Hence, sometimes the co-operation between researcher and journalist works and the result is “beautiful”, as one of our participants put it.

Although the researchers in our study reported mainly having had positive media experiences, they also underlined that meetings with journalists sometimes had consequences that they deemed unfortunate, which they explained in term of the lack of competence among some journalists. This finding supports warnings from the field of journalism research; in the strained situation for journalism during recent years, it is plausible that the competence of some journalists who report research news is inadequate to fulfil the aim of assembling and verifying facts before reporting them in a meaningful and understandable context.

Owing to some unfortunate experiences, the researchers often feel tense during the processes surrounding media attention. When a news story misrepresents their research, they worry about possible negative consequences for the public. An interesting discovery in our study is therefore the ambivalence that characterizes the researchers’ narratives concerning their negotiations with journalists. On the one hand, researchers may be enthusiastic about communicating their results through the media and they gradually learn to accept the journalistic form of writing, including the simplification of complex issues. On the other hand, they are worried about, and uncomfortable with, errors they feel routinely occur in news stories, or about their statements being framed in a misleading way.

Finally, we wish to stress that the most important and novel finding to emerge from the present study is the recognition of what is at stake for researchers. It should be emphasized that, across academic disciplines, researchers’ primary reason for seeking media attention is not branding, not attracting funding, not accountability and not personal gain. Their primary motive is that they feel responsible for the overarching principle that research results should serve a purpose in society. It follows, therefore, that it is equally important to the researchers that the news stories correctly report the research findings.

The present study reveals a link between researchers’ main motivations for seeking media coverage of their research findings and their sporadic experiences of conflict with journalists. We would argue that in this conflict lies the essence of the cultural clash
between researchers and journalists, and that in this clash we may also find the key to improving research communication. Acknowledging what is at stake for the researchers as news sources may potentially inspire research institutions to better support researchers in their encounter with the media, and it may also have an instructive effect on the researchers and journalists themselves when they negotiate research news stories.\(^1\)

**Note**

1. We would like to thank Professor Dag Elgesem for his valuable help and advice with the literature review and revision of the manuscript.

**References**


Besley, John C., & Nisbet, Matthew (2011) How scientists view the public, the media and the political process. *Public Understanding of Science, 22*(6), 644-659.


Silverman, David (1985) Qualitative methodology and sociology: describing the social world. Gower Publishing Ltd.


BENEDICTE CARLSEN, PhD, Research Professor, Uni Research Rokkan Centre, Bergen, benedicte.carlsen@uni.no

HANNE RIESE, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Education, Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen, hanne.riese@psyhp.uib.no
How to Describe and Measure Obstacles of Narrative Immersion in a Film?

The Wheel of Immersion as a Framework

Thomas Bjørner, Andreas Magnusson & Robin Pascal Nielsen

Abstract

The aim of this study is to describe and measure obstacles of narrative immersion in a film. Inspired by a literature review within both game research and film studies, we propose a circular model to describe the dynamic process of different levels of involvement viewers can be in while watching a film. The evaluation is based on a 3D animation short film we have developed to achieve total immersion among viewers. The methodological design involved an attempt to decrease viewers’ involvement in the animation film by using distractions during the viewing. The study follows a mixed method strategy combining observation, a questionnaire and a structured interview. The results revealed that viewers react very differently to the distractions. For some viewers, the animation film was not the perceptual focus, where others were totally immersed. The number of distractions was not dependent on whether the film was watched individually or in groups, and for all participants, the distractions occurred in certain rhythms.

Keywords: immersion, narrative, emotion, short film, mixed methods, 3D

Introduction

Immersion is used in many different contexts and refers to very different understandings, even within the same field. We are going to use the term immersion within the context of watching a 3D animation film. Most people have experienced how films have the ability to draw them in. This could be seen as reflecting shared emotions with the characters or whether viewers are affected by the film through evoked emotions (Hemenover & Schimmack 2007; Tan 1996). The experience of total immersion occurs when viewers focus almost all of their attention on the film, and when it is so involving that they do not notice things around them, such as the amount of time that has passed or another person calling their name (Jennett et. al. 2008).

A literature review of the research on immersion shows that the majority of studies concern interactivity in computer games and virtual reality (Brown & Cairns 2004; Calleja 2011; Ermi & Mäyrä 2005; Jennett et al. 2008; Murray et al. 2007; Qin et al. 2009; Ryan 2001). The literature within cinematic immersion is rather scarce, so in the present study we would like to focus on immersive experiences in a 3D animation short film that concentrates on the narrative. There are studies focusing on technological advances and how they are related to immersed experiences (Recuber 2007; Nedelcu
2013). There are other studies indicating that the extent of immersion is determined by the narrative influences of the story (Brown & Cairns 2004; Busselle & Bilandzic 2009; Douglas & Hargadon 2001; Gross & Levenson 1995; Visch et al. 2010), but very few attempts have been made to describe the complex experiences viewers may have of achieving a state of total immersion in a film.

The main research question for the present study is: How can we describe and measure obstacles to narrative immersion in a film experience designed to achieve total immersion? As part of this highly complex question and as a way to answer it, we have framed three sub-questions: A: What obstacles are there in a narrative experience, and how are they interrelated? B: Why do attentional distractors cause viewers to drop out of involvement at certain stages, but not at others? C: Are distractions affected by whether the viewing is taking place individually or in groups?

Theoretical Background

As there are different perspectives and descriptions of the term immersion, it is difficult to find a single unified definition that covers all aspects of immersion. There are already proposals for classifying different types of immersion (Ermi & Mäyrä 2005; Ryan 2001), but each type is also linked to other perspectives within cognitive and emotional processes. Temporal immersion is described by Ryan (2001) as the suspense or information holdback of a certain narrative structure that triggers the viewer’s curiosity through uncertain future events in the narrative construction. Similarly, as described by Bordwell (1985), it positions the viewer as an active participant. From a psychological and cognitive point of view, this can be explained using a mental model: the cognitive structures that symbolize different aspects of the surrounding world (Grodal 2009; Johnson-Laird 1983).

The sensation of emotional immersion is generally described as the level of emotional investment in a narrative that is experienced by the viewer (Ryan 2001). Similar concepts of empathy and sympathy are described from a psychological and philosophical perspective by Coplan (2004) in her characterization of the link between observers of fictional narratives and the characters in those narratives. This focus can also be found in transportation theory, where full engagement in a story is conceptualized as a distinct mental process, an integrative melding of attention, imagery and feelings (Green & Brock 2000: 701). Transportation theory (Green & Brock 2000) is conceptualized from a reading context, but also describes some fundamental conditions for media enjoyment, which comes from the experience of being immersed in a narrative world (Green, Brock & Kaufman 2004).

Scholars have studied immersion in order to understand the implications of the story, plot, and the cognitive mechanisms the viewer interacts with when constructing and understanding the story (Bordwell 1985; Oatley 2002; Ryan 2001). In an audio-visual context, studies have shown how viewers’ experience can be hindered (Busselle & Bilandzic 2009) when narrative immersion competes with other mental processes for cognitive and emotional resources (Busselle & Bilandzic 2008). Any external distractions that interrupt the narrative experience – such as noises, visual stimuli, and hunger – may have this effect, meaning that a negative component of narrative immersion is distraction (Busselle & Bilandzic 2009).
The Wheel of Immersion

For describing and exploring obstacles to narrative immersion in a film, we will propose a circular model (called the Wheel of Immersion) that focuses on the narrative experience and its subsequent story-related features. The basic tenet in the Wheel of Immersion is that viewers go through a dynamic progression of different levels of involvement by overcoming obstacles to narrative processing.

From a game perspective, Brown and Cairns (2004) discuss the idea of categorizing immersion into three levels of involvement: Engagement, Engrossment, and Total immersion. According to Brown and Cairns (2004), immersion is a degree of involvement with the media that moves along a path over time. The problem with this path is that it only shows the degree of involvement increasing, where each level is available if certain barriers are overcome. Moreover, Brown and Cairns’ (2004) model lacks a description showing what happens when involvement is completely lost and how to recover the different levels again.

In the present study, we propose to alter Brown and Cairns’ (2004) linear path of immersion over time and make it into a circular Wheel of Immersion that also includes a level of reality. The Wheel of Immersion is divided into four different levels – our own, Reality, and the levels from Brown and Cairns (2004): Engagement, Engrossment, and Total immersion. Brown and Cairns (2004) describe their understanding of immersion from a game perspective, whereas we transfer some of the concepts into an animation short film context. This is not unproblematic, of course, because these are two different media and different contexts. But the narrative experiences and the emotional and cognitive effects of playing computer games and watching films also have some great similarities. The most intense immersive narrative experience has been described across different media as transportation (Green & Brock 2000), flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), presence (Lee 2004; Murray et al. 2007; Witmer & Singer 1998), and total immersion (Brown & Cairns 2004; Jennett et al. 2008). Essentially, these experiences have similarities regarding the users’/viewers’ feeling of entering into a narrative world where it is possible to be fully absorbed in a story. Feelings of empathy and sympathy towards characters and the situations they are in are found across different media (Blanchet 2005; Coplan 2004; Hemenover & Schimmack 2007; Smith 1995). Lee (2004) explains how lack of medium awareness is actually a defining element of an immersion-related experience.

The different levels in the Wheel of Immersion (Figure 1) represent how involved the viewer is with the medium and how aware he or she is of the surrounding reality. The different levels have associated arrows that point at other levels, representing what level the involved viewer typically can reach from his or her current level, or what level he or she can descend to if there are distractions. For example, when a viewer has reached the level of engagement, he or she can return to the level of reality or progress to engrossment. However, he or she cannot reach the level of total immersion directly, as the level of engrossment must be achieved first. Black lines have been placed between three of the levels to represent the obstacles the viewer must overcome in order to reach the next level.
From Reality to Engagement

A viewer typically begins at the level of reality. The construct of reality in the context of audio-visual media is very complex and used in many different ways (Grodal 2002). We define reality as the level at which the viewer has total awareness of the surroundings and has no involvement with (or perceptual attention to) the film. This has also been described as nonengagement or disengagement (O’Brien & Toms 2008) or what Tan (2008) labels as “the executive space”. Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) use the term “the actual world”. We agree with other scholars (Busselle & Bilandzic 2009; Grodal 2002; Tan 2008) who suggest that it is easier for audience members to be involved in a story within a mediated world than in reality. From reality, the viewer has to overcome three human-dependent obstacles – access, investment and preference (Brown & Cairns 2004) – in order to progress to engagement. Brown and Cairns (2004) use the term “barrier” to describe elements that have to be overcome before reaching another level, but they do not provide a theoretical explanation of this labelling. A barrier is normally a physical structure that blocks or impedes something. We use the term obstacle instead to describe both physical, cultural, and psychological/cognitive issues that lead to obstruction of the progression towards reaching a more intense immersion experience.

The obstacle of investment is the time and effort the viewer has to invest in the film in order to affect his or her attention and keep focused. Preference refers to the individual viewer’s interest in the animation film and style, as the viewer will not keep focused if he or she finds it unappealing. For this reason, only a person who has, or develops, an interest in the film will be able to maintain his or her attention at a high enough level to overcome the obstacle. Access relies on the sensory feedback in which visuals and sound need to correspond in an appropriate manner. For example, access is difficult when the sound and visuals are unsynchronized in a film.
**From Engagement to Engrossment**

Engagement is the level where the viewer is focused on the film with a low level of involvement yet still highly aware of his or her surroundings. Engrossment is where the viewer has total focus on the film with a high level of involvement. The viewer becomes less aware of the surroundings, knowing that they are there but finding them irrelevant and trying to ignore them. Referring to game construction, Brown and Cairns (2004) describe the barriers to proceeding from engagement to engrossment. It does not make sense to use the game construction label in this context. Instead we would like to propose two other obstacles to progressing to the level of engrossment: the narrative and Audio-Visual Expectations. The *narrative* obstacle is another term for narrative-driven immersion, which can be described as the “desire for the knowledge that awaits her at the end of narrative time” (Ryan 2001: 140). In other words, the narrative obstacle can be defined as suspense or information holdback of a certain narrative structure, similar to what is described within temporal immersion (Ryan 2001). The narrative obstacle implies that viewers’ curiosity can be triggered through uncertain future events in the narrative (Bordwell & Thompson 2010; Busselle & Bilandzic 2008). The obstacle *Audio-Visual Expectations* is based on viewers’ perceptions, which include both what is immediately perceived in a certain context and how the viewer can refer to prior experiences. These perceptual strategies have already been well described in different ways, e.g., in Grodal’s PECMA flow theory (1997; 2009) or Tan’s (2008) two mental spaces (an executive space and an entertainment space).

**From Engrossment to Total Immersion**

Total immersion occurs when viewers are so involved that they detach themselves from the surroundings and lose their sense of time and place (Brown & Cairns 2004; Jennett et al. 2008). Consequently, their full focus is on the animation film, which creates a feeling and thought of being present within the film. Brown and Cairns (2004) describe how empathy and atmosphere have to be overcome if one is to progress to the level of total immersion. We will use the same terms as Brown and Carins (2004), but put them in the context of film. Furthermore, below we propose to add an obstacle: *sympathy*. The *empathy* obstacle is inspired by the sensation of emotional immersion (Ryan 2001), meaning that it can be defined as a level of emotional attachment that the viewer has to the characters and the situations they are in. Empathy can be achieved because the human mind is able to simulate emotions, even though the source is fictional (Ryan 2001). When viewers empathize with a character, they take his or her psychological perspective and experience it in their imagination, to some degree, in order to simulate what the character is feeling (Blanchet 2005; Coplan 2004; Smith 1995). However, while empathizing with a character, viewers will still maintain a sense of separate identity (Coplan 2004). This means that even when one is deeply empathizing with what a character is experiencing, the separate sense of the self is never lost. Like empathy, the *sympathy* obstacle is inspired by the sensation of emotional immersion, and the level of emotional attachment the viewer has with the characters. However, instead of feeling *with* the characters, as happens in empathy, the viewer feels *for* the characters and the situations they are in (Blanchet 2005; Carroll 2001; Smith 1995). While sympathizing with the characters, one does not have to share the same experience (Coplan 2004).
Sympathetic emotions are typically triggered by characters’ emotions, which create the emotional response of feeling sorrow or concern for a distressed person, without feeling the same emotions (Coplan 2004). Lastly, sympathy can only be achieved when one has a cognitive understanding of the situation the characters are in, and a cognitive understanding of what the characters themselves are feeling in that situation (Blanchet 2005; Smith 1995).

Along with the aforementioned empathy and sympathy, atmosphere is the final obstacle that a viewer must overcome to reach total immersion. We will use the same definition as Brown and Cairns (2004), who define atmosphere as “the graphics, plot and sounds combin[ing] to create this feature” (Brown & Cairns 2004: 1299), meaning that the combination of these elements is essential to creating the feature of atmosphere. But, inspired by Immanuel Kant (2007 [1793]), we propose to divide atmosphere into “beauty” and “sublimity”. As described in §16, beauty “is immediately coupled with the representation through which the object is given (not through which it is thought)” (Kant 2007 [1793]), meaning that beauty relies on its form and representation and has to be considered a subjective judgment. The sensation of the sublime is connected with emotions, and Murdoch (1959) describes the difference between beauty and the sublime, based on Kant, in this way: “Whereas beauty results from a harmony between imagination and understanding, sublimity results from a conflict between imagination and reason” (Murdoch 1959: 44).

Methods

A 3D Animation Short Film

A 3D animation short film was made to test the Wheel of Immersion. Inspired by the narrative of the short film Paradox (Haccoun 2006), we developed a 3D animation short film using parts of the original soundscape from the Paradox film. The film is about two men trapped at the bottom of a well; the men appear to be from two different periods of time and are arguing about what is at the top of the well. We used Autodesk Maya 2010 and Adobe After Effects CS5 to create the 3D animation short film. The animation film is 15 min and 34 s in duration and includes two characters and two environments, which were modelled and animated to resemble Paradox (Haccoun 2006). The first environment represents the well and is where most of the dialogue takes place. The second environment represents the world surrounding the well, including sculpted and textured terrain, a skydome and animated clouds created from 3D fluids. The characters and camera movements in the animation film were created using a combination of key frame animation and graph editor in order to move the rigged characters around, creating a smooth transition between each of the motions. To ensure that the animation would follow the soundscape from the original film, a sound file-import was made to the timeline of Maya.

As well as the modelling and animation, some visual and technical effects were implemented to create a stronger atmosphere and A/V expectation. This included lowering the frame rate to achieve a more cartoon-like appearance, making a fog effect using fractal noise and implementing dust particles to create more atmosphere in the two environments.
We chose to make the film in 3D for optimal perception and involvement, the aim being that some viewers could reach the level of total immersion. Using the 3D perspective (and non-physical nature), it was possible to give the film new spatial awareness. As Jones (2007) describes, the lack of physicality in the 3D perspective gives new omnipotent perceptions in relation to the ability to depict, engage and navigate cinematic space. Brown (2012: 264) also argues that the very nature of 3D makes a film even more immersive. We follow what most 3D CG features, namely focusing on what Power (2009) calls the naturalistic coding orientation with stylized 3D character models and high-profile dialogue actors.

**Test Design**

Setting up a good narrative immersion experiment is immensely difficult. In order to test which level of involvement viewers reached, and their progression through the Wheel of Immersion, we used a mixed method strategy combining an experiment (viewers watching the developed 3D animation film), an observation, a questionnaire
and a structured interview. By employing mixed methods, we improved on previous attempts at measuring immersion based only on self-reporting questionnaires (Busselle & Bilandzic 2009; Green & Brock 2000; Visch et al. 2010) or on interviews (Brown & Cairns 2004; O’Brien & Toms 2008).

The final test included 38 subjects. Three additional pilot tests were conducted to eliminate presupposed information given during the test itself. The locations were arranged to provide minimum visual disturbance, meaning that posters, clocks, and unnecessary pieces of furniture were removed. Test participants were allowed secondary media, such as mobile phones, to distract them during the viewing. This was allowed because the aim was to provide as natural an environment as possible during the experience. However, this also created some uncontrollable variables.

Test subjects were chosen among university students between 19 and 28 years who had no prior knowledge of the study. The subjects were randomly assigned to one of four groups: Individuals With Distracters (IWD), n=10; Groups With Distracters (GWD), n=9; Individuals Excluding Distracters (IED), n=10; Groups Excluding Distracters (GED), n=9. To avoid rumours being spread about the test setup and use of visual distracters, each subject was instructed to remain silent about the test.

**Figure 3. Test Setup**

First, the subjects were briefly instructed to watch an animation short film. They were seated in a sofa and watched the animation on a 24” television screen. The distance from the sofa to the television screen was 2.5 meters. No information was given concerning the film’s content or visual distracters. In order to decrease the IWD and GWD groups’ involvement, twelve black/white visual distracters were shown for 5 seconds (fade-in for 2 seconds, blank image for 1 second, and fade-out for 2 seconds), 5 meters from the test subjects (at a 30 degree angle). The visual distracters were displayed at the same time in the animation film for each subject/group with distractions. Furthermore a thirteenth colour image, together with a high frequency bell sound, was used in the ninth minute of the animation film.
Video Observation

Video observation was used to capture viewers’ emotional responses and see when they lost their attention while watching the 3D animation short film. We looked at interruptions in viewers’ attention to determine how focused they were. The camera was hidden so the subjects were not aware that they were being observed. This was done to achieve the as natural a viewing situation as possible and to avoid the subjects becoming suspicious about the visual distracters or looking into the camera. For ethical reasons and to ensure good research practice, we informed the test subjects about the video observation in the debriefing (after the questionnaire and interview). They were all informed that the data obtained could only be kept with their permission. A framework of observational criteria was created for analysing the observed results, as illustrated in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Framework for Analysing Video Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quick eye movement beyond the screen between 0-1 second</td>
<td>Low distraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer eye focus beyond the screen between 1-2 seconds</td>
<td>Medium distraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick head movement beyond the screen between 0-1 second</td>
<td>Medium distraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer eye and/or head movement beyond the screen between 1-2 seconds or more</td>
<td>High distraction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used to measure self-reported levels of involvement; it consisted of 28 questions. We used a paper-and-pencil questionnaire, which was given to test subjects after they had watched the animation film. The questions were structured according to the progression in the Wheel of Immersion. The questionnaire was divided into eight sections, and the response alternatives were constructed using a five-point Likert scale.

Some of the specific questions for measuring level of involvement were inspired by the work of Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) and Green and Brock (2000). There are still limitations and problematic issues associated with questionnaire measures. As well as relying on participants’ subjective opinions, they are also retrospective and rely on the subject’s memory, which may only give incomplete reflections. This is why the questionnaire measurement should be combined with other methods.

Interview

In addition to the paper-and-pencil questionnaire, each subject participated in a brief individual interview. A structured interview (Bjørner 2015) was designed so that each interview consisted of exactly the same questions, in the same order. The purpose of the interview was to determine whether the subjects felt totally immersed at any time.
### Table 2. The Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Neutrally</th>
<th>Somehow</th>
<th>Yes fully</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Investment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 The animation film grabbed my attention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Preference</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 The animation film was appealing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 I enjoyed the overall style of the animation film</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Access</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 I felt that the visuals and sound matched each other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 I consider the sound and visuals to be integrated with the story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Narrative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 While viewing, I frequently received interesting cues from the story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 While viewing, I wanted to know how the events would unfold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 I wanted to learn how the story ended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. A/V Expectation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The scenery was consistently logical and convincing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The environment in the animation film is similar to the world I live in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The scenery evokes personal memories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.1 Empathy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At tense moments in the film, I could feel the emotions the characters felt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the film, I at certain times lost my sense of self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never really shared the emotions of the characters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.2 Sympathy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt sorry for some of the characters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I recognized the emotional situation some of the characters were in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was concerned for some of the characters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thomas Bjørner, Andreas Magnusson & Robin Pascal Nielsen
How to Describe and Measure Obstacles of Narrative Immersion in a Film?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.1. Atmosphere: Beauty</th>
<th>Very unaffected</th>
<th>Unaffected</th>
<th>Neither unaffected nor affected</th>
<th>Affected</th>
<th>Very affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the animation film how affected were you by the following atmospheric elements?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visuals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall narrative</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Slightly</td>
<td>Neither unaffected nor affected</td>
<td>Somehow</td>
<td>Yes fully</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 7.2. Atmosphere: The sublime | |
| The atmosphere of the animation film evoked emotions in me |
| While viewing, I had the sensation of something greater than me |

| 8.0 Distractors | |
| I found my thoughts wandering while watching the animation film |
| I had a hard time keeping my focus on the film |

| 9.0 Total immersion | |
| During the animation film, I lost track of time |
| At times during the animation film, I forgot that I was in the middle of an experiment |
| During the animation film, my body was in the room, but my thoughts were inside the world created by the story |

during the film. The interview consisted of the following three questions: (a) Did you notice the visual distracters? If yes, which ones? (This question was constructed to evaluate the degree to which the subjects felt interrupted by the imposed visual distracters) (b) Did you experience total immersion? (c) At which specific moments did you feel particularly immersed?

**Total Immersion**

By using the branches of the triangulated test setup and comparing the observational chart, questionnaire, and interview responses, we could see that Subject 7 (from the IWD group) did not progress far in the Wheel of Immersion and did not reach the level of total immersion. This is indicated in Figure 4, where the visual distracters and the subjects’ distractions are displayed on a horizontal timeline representing the duration of the animation film (15 min, 34 s). Above the timeline are the subjects’ distractions
throughout the film, while the visual distracters are displayed beneath the timeline. The
distraction marked ‘Reality’ illustrates the points in time when the bell sound and image
from the visual distracters are intended to force the subject out of the immersive level.

**Figure 4. Frequency of Subject 7’s Distractions, based on video observations**

The observational chart (Figure 4) illustrates how Subject 7 was constantly distracted.
The video observation indicates that Subject 7 even displays periods of time when the
animation film was not the primary perceptual focus. The level of the distractions was
compared with Subject 7’s questionnaire responses and his interview statements, such as
“This film did not capture my interest”, and “I didn’t feel immersed at any time during
the film”. In the questionnaire, Subject 7 responded “not at all” or “very unaffected” to
almost all items on investment, preference, access, narrative, A/V expectation, empathy,
sympathy and atmosphere (both beauty and the sublime), but “yes fully” to item 8.1 (I
found my thoughts wandering while watching the animation film) and item 8.2 (I had
a hard time keeping focus on the film). Elements indicating that Subject 7 was not totally
disengaged the whole time can be seen in item 3.1 (I felt that the visuals and sound
matched each other) and 3.2 (I felt that the sound and visuals were integrated with the
story), where Subject 7 answered “somehow”, which means that there was some atten-
tion to the film, at least to some of the overall visual and sound elements. We believe
that the only reason Subject 7 stayed, invested time (remaining to the very end of the
animation film) and put some focus on the film was because of the experimental set-up,
which may have caused some feelings of obligation to stay. Based on findings from the
mixed methods, Subject 7 is estimated to have barely reached the level of engrossment
in the Wheel of Immersion. This indicates that Subject 7’s level of immersion constantly
alternated between the two basic levels of reality and engagement and that he had total
awareness of his surroundings with no perceptual attention during most of the animation
film. Subject 7 barely overcame the obstacle of investment, preference, whereas he to
some extent overcome the access obstacle.

In the opposite end of the spectrum we find Subject 8 (also from the IWD group), as
this subject reached the level of total immersion. Subject 8 was only distracted seven
times during the film (see Figure 5), and all these distractions were measured as low:
Triangulating the data, it appears that Subject 8 overcame all the obstacles and is estimated to have reached the level of total immersion several times during the animation film. The findings indicate that Subject 8 was in a mental process characterized by an integrated melding of attention, imagery and feelings (Green and Brock 2000), and identified with one character in the film, which was also stated during the interview. In the questionnaire, subject 8 answered “yes fully” to all items on investment, preference, access, narrative, emotions, sympathy and atmosphere: the sublime and total immersion. Subject 8 answered “slightly” to the items covering A/V Expectations, which might have something to do within the genre and the perception of what is immediately perceived in this specific (and rather artificial) viewing context, which may be related to subject 8’s brain mechanics. In response to both item 8.1 (I found my thoughts wandering while watching the animation film) and item 8.2 (I had a hard time keeping my focus on the film), Subject 8 answered “Not at all”. This indicates that Subject 8 easily kept focus on the film, despite the distractions. In the interview, Subject 8 answered the question “Did you experience being fully immersed?” as follows: “I would say so, yes’. The findings also indicate that Subject 8 lost awareness of time and place, as he was not able to determine the duration of the film. In the interview, Subject 8 said: “Yes I completely recognize the sensation of forgetting time and place during the film”.

The Social Aspect and Progression
When comparing the video observation of the different groups (both the frequency of the distractions and the social aspects of the subjects), two interesting observations can be made. The groups (GED and GWD) were either highly social, talking a lot to each other, or they respected maintaining a mutual silence, keeping their focus on the animation film. In other words, some groups were easily distracted by social activity, whereas other groups aimed to focus fully on the animation film. Group 4.2 showed almost no distractions at all, with only six instances of low distractions (eye movements beyond the screen between 0-1 second), whereas Group 3.2 was more distracted, with 18 low distractions, five medium distractions and five high distractions (which is still fewer than Subject 7).

The results from the groups (GED and GWD) were slightly different from what was anticipated. It was expected that the groups would show a much higher level of distractions due to the social aspect, but as the observations reveal (especially for Group 4.2),
this was not the case. The results indicate that the level of distractions from watching
the film with a small number of people (in this case three subjects) could have very
different effects on the level of involvement in the film.

Of all subjects, it is estimated that 10 out of 38 achieved the level of total immers-
ion. In the IWD group, 2 out of 10 indicated that they had reached total immersion,
while one individual reached engrossment. In the IED group, four out of 10 reached
total immersion, while one overcame the obstacles to reach engrossment. For the group
test, two out of nine are estimated to have reached total immersion, while two subjects
most likely reached engrossment. Finally, in the GED group, four out of nine reached
total immersion, while only one subject reached the level of engrossment. In general, it
was extremely difficult to determine exactly what level of involvement the test subjects
reached, due partly to the very dynamic process of involvement during the animation
film.

One interesting result is that subjects’ distractions seem to appear in certain rhythms
or waves. The data indicate that the subjects were more distracted in the beginning of
the film, whereas they were less distracted in the end, which could be explained by the
narrative obstacle in the Wheel of Immersion. This includes both the general plots and
information holdback, or what Bordwell and Thompson described as the cause and ef-
fect, time and space (Bordwell & Thompson 2010). Using Tan’s terminology (2008),
it is caused by the entertainment space being higher in the beginning and in the end,
owing to the paradigm of scenarios with emotions.

Figure 6. Frequency of Subject 6’s Distractions. Distractions appear in certain rhythms

Figure 6 illustrates Subject 6’s frequency of distractions during the animation film, show-
ing how the distractions occur in certain rhythms. To illustrate how the wave structure
of the visual distractions is repeated several times throughout the film experience, set
brackets are placed around each cluster of distractions. Similar rhythms can be observed
for almost all subjects, regardless of exposure or lack of exposure to distractions. The
findings seem to indicate a higher concentration of distractions around the sixth minute
of the animation film, which might have been caused by some perceptual and cognitive
brain mechanism factors. But this pattern might also be a story-related matter, meaning
simply that ‘not much happens’ in the sixth minute. As expected for the subjects exposed
to distractions, many distractions occurred around the ninth minute, where the subjects
were forced into a state of reality by the loud, frequent bell sound and coloured image.
Conclusions and Further Developments

The aim of the present study was to describe and measure the complex experiences viewers’ might have along the path to achieving total immersion in a 3D animation short film. The study focus was on the narrative experience and its subsequent story-related features. Clearly, trying to describe and measure the extent of involvement viewers might have while watching a narrative-driven media context is very complex indeed. This complexity is caused by the individual viewers’ different narrative understandings, attentional focus and other perceptual brain mechanisms, which are at present difficult to measure in any precise manner. There are quite a number of different theoretical perspectives, in relation to both immersion and mental models perspectives in a media context. But there is still a need for greater clarity regarding viewers’ involvement in narrative processing with further empirical data, also in the area of film watching. The present study has used a mixed method strategy that combines some rather traditional methods, but some supplementary data from a neuroscience paradigm may also be useful. We propose altering Brown and Cairns’ (2004) immersive linear path of time into a circular model called the Wheel of Immersion. The circular model includes a level of reality, engagement, engrossment and total immersion; its purpose is to give a more dynamic understanding of how viewers progress to different levels of involvement by overcoming obstacles in narrative processing. The obstacles may be able to explain why attentional distractors cause viewers to drop out of immersion at certain stages, but not at others. A crucial point is actual time, which is often ignored as a factor of narrative experience. Further research is needed to investigate both the levels in the Wheel of Immersion, as well as the different obstacles.

The methodological design involved attempts to decrease viewers’ involvement in the animation film by using distractions during the viewing. We observed that viewers reacted very differently to the distractions, in that some were very distracted and did not have the animation film as their primary perceptual focus. Other viewers kept their focus on the animation film seemingly without effort. Our study shows that viewers exposed to external distractions can reach total immersion, remaining focused on the film and having the sensation of forgetting time and place. In the present case involving a short film, the mental condition of high-focus watching could be maintained, despite experimental attempts to interrupt the narrative immersive experience.

The immersive progression was demonstrated by numerous subjects who showed similar rhythms of distractions, regardless of whether or not they had been exposed to distractions. For subjects in the distraction groups, we observed that they were more distracted in the ninth minute of the short film when they were forced into a state of reality by the loud, frequent bell sound and colour image. Our findings indicate that distractions were not dependent on whether the viewing was taking place individually or in groups. Some individual subjects were even more distracted than some of the subjects watching in groups, and some group viewing was highly focused on the film. In future research, it would be interesting to focus on these complex social group dynamics. Why were some of the groups tested either highly social, talking a lot to each other, while others were silent and focused on the film?
References


Materialist Perspectives on Digital Technologies

Informing Debates on Digital Literacy and Competence

Holger Pötzsch

Abstract
The present article brings critical media research and science and technology studies (STS) into dialogue with approaches to digital literacy and digital competencies in educational contexts. In particular, it focuses on material aspects of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as technical infrastructure, economic conditions, ecological consequences, and code-based as well as embodied forms of impact, and argues that digital applications and devices have ambiguous and often contradictory affordances and effects that need to be addressed in academic literature and pedagogical practice. The main objective is to inform on-going debates on the nature and content of digital literacy and digital competence from a critical materialist vantage point, and to facilitate learning and teaching about, rather than with, digital technologies by highlighting salient issue areas in need of continued critical attention.

Keywords: digital media, digital competencies, media literacy, ICTs, education, materialism, STS

Introduction
Due to rapid technological developments, the digital has become a recurrent theme in contemporary discourses on education. From EU-funded studies (Ferrari 2012) via OECD-projects¹ to national curricula², concepts such as digital skills, digital literacy, digital competence, or new media literacy are in continuous use. However, as, among others, studies by Lund et.al. (2014), Ottestad et.al. (2014), Beck and Øgrim (2009), Erstad (2010), Haugsbakk (2011), or Buckingham (2006) have shown, what precisely amounts to digital skills, literacy, or competences is in continuous flux in line with changing technological frames and the shifting demands of teachers, students, educational institutions, and society at large.

The present article will not engage in this debate at a conceptual level, but presents a perspective ‘from the sideline’ of critical media studies that directs attention to technological, economic, and environmental aspects of increasingly ubiquitous digital technologies. The aim is to provide summaries of recent empirical findings in these fields and, this way, to inform debates about digital technologies in general, and about digital literacies and competencies in particular.
Aligning itself to a recent “move toward materiality” in media and communications research (Packer and Crofts Wiley 2012: 4), the article will address five thematic areas:

1. Technological infrastructure and issues of surveillance and privacy
2. Political economy, ownership, and the exploitation of immaterial labour
3. Ecological implications of a fast growing ICT industry
4. Implications of information management applications
5. Problems of manipulation, attention management, and affective design

The article concludes that, to enable children and young adults to use, appropriate, and, if need be, resist increasingly pervasive digital technologies in a reflective and competent manner, contemporary education has to convey knowledge about these technologies at all the levels introduced above in addition to providing users skills and access to particular devices. Initially, however, a few words need to be said about current advances toward digital technologies in educational research.

Education and the Matter of Digital Technologies
In a critical analysis of key Norwegian policy documents and national curricula from 1980 to 2006, Haugsbakk (2011) identifies a series of discursive operations in the field of education that reflect a fundamental change in pedagogical principles and relations to new technologies. He highlights changes in the rhetoric of the documents with a marked shift toward what he terms a form of techno-determinism from the mid 1990s onward that, according to him, increasingly sidelines pedagogical expertise and transforms teachers from responsible educators to recipients of ready-made technological solutions.

Arguing from a similar vantage point, Beck (2011) has warned against the increasing pace of public debates and political decision-making regarding the inclusion of ICTs in education that threatens to disregard evident pitfalls of, and the underlying power structures driving and fuelling, these processes, while Missomelius (2014) points to ambivalences in technologies such as MOOCs and OER that under certain circumstances can facilitate learning and teaching, but that also afford an outsourcing of responsibilities and activities from educational institutions to learners (pp. 7-8).

Taking note of this important strain of criticism, the present contribution will, nevertheless, turn focus away from debates about the inclusion of particular technological solutions into educational practices. Rather, I direct attention to the inherently ambivalent affordances and effects of digital technologies, and embed these in economic, societal, cultural, and ecological contexts. This way, I hope to support approaches to digital/media literacy and competence that aim at teaching about these technologies as well as improving user skills and educational practices.

Critical approaches to ICTs’ shifting roles and functions in societal contexts have already had some impact on pedagogical and didactic debates. Several scholars have developed frameworks that take into account the inherently ambivalent aspects of new technologies and have adjusted key terminologies accordingly. Erstad (2010: 67-69), for instance, introduces five conceptual dimensions that can serve as a viable matrix for endeavours to include critical approaches to digital technologies into syllabi and
educational practices. He argues for the use of the overarching concept of media literacy that enables attention to both analogue and digital technologies, incorporates a historical dimension of technological change, and “relates to broader aspects of living in media saturated societies, and not only skills in operating applications or information handling” (p. 58).

Erstad distinguishes his extended understanding of media literacy into the following subdomains: 1) basic user skills, 2) media technologies as objects of knowledge, 3) the changing technical conditions of knowledge dissemination in specific educational subjects, 4) impacts on learning strategies, and 5) digital ‘Bildung’ as a new form of overarching cultural competence. In particular Erstad’s dimension 2: ‘Media technologies as objects of analysis’ and dimension 5: ‘Digital Bildung/cultural competence’ can be productively informed by the critical research highlighted in the present article.

Another useful template is introduced by Beck and Øgrim (2009) who distinguish between three interconnected layers forming what they term contemporary digital competences: 1) user skills, 2) technological expertise, and 3) knowledge about technology’s role in culture and society. In their case, in particular layer 2 and 3 would be well suited to productively address such issues as technological infrastructure, surveillance and privacy, economic and ecological contexts and costs, information management, and the modulation and commodification of human attention that will be raised in the following sections.

In sum, media literacy, digital literacy, or digital competence are today understood as encompassing more than merely instrumental skills to increase the efficiency of uses of digital (and other) technologies in classrooms and beyond. Rather, as for instance Buckingham (2006: 267-268) has argued, these terms refer to the formation of multiple capacities in and through educational practices. According to him, these include the capacity to critically assess information sources and representational conventions, to understand the inherent situatedness of processes of production and reception, and to acquire technological meta-skills as well as user skills.

From Participatory Networks to a Digital Enclosure: The Ambivalent Affordances and Effects of Contemporary ICTs

According to Pimple (2014), an omnipresence of networked computational devices that are “embedded in just about anything” and the multiple functions and effects of which often remain “undetected by the casual observer” (p. 2) pose reason for “major concerns” (p. 3). The present article will address the material infrastructure, political economy, environmental impacts, and epistemological as well embodied effects of current digital technologies. In directing attention to issues of dataveillance and privacy, questions of ownership and the exploitation of immaterial labour, the growing ecological footprints of digital technologies, as well as questions of information and attention management, I hope to productively inform on-going debates about digital competencies and literacies.

Technological Infrastructure: Surveillance and the End of Privacy

Today, each computer or smart phone not only receives but also constantly emits information. Continuously disseminated data packages contain updates on location, direction
of movement, search and browse history, as well as social networks, lists of friends, their interests and locations. The significance of practices of mining of such “big data” for targeted advertising and state surveillance is today apparent (Andrejevic 2007, 2013; Morozov 2013; Fuchs 2014; Pötzsch 2015a&b). Andrejevic (2007), for instance, has warned that an increasing ubiquity of sensors in responsive technical environments is creating a “digital enclosure […] an interactive realm wherein every action and trans-
action generates information about itself” (p. 2) that is captured, stored, and mined for business- and security-related purposes. As such, new participatory media ecologies not only afford empowerment and liberation (Mitra & Watts 2002) or facilitate political mobilisation (Barassi & Treré 2012), but also entail new practices of management and control (Morozov 2011; Andrejevic 2007).

As the classified files leaked by former NSA operative Edward Snowden have re-
vealed, mass surveillance and control, rather than emancipation and freedom, are today the most prominent features of global networked communication. In this particular case of clandestine state surveillance, the very material infrastructure of global networks – fibre optic cables, server parks, mobile phone towers etc. – plays a crucial role.

According to Galloway (2004) and Galloway and Thacker (2007), contemporary digital networking technologies exhibit a “two-fold dynamic” (Galloway & Thacker 2007: 41) regarding emancipation and control. With regard to the Internet, the authors detail that code-based transmission protocols such as IP and TCP distribute agency across a vast array of nodes, while a physical infrastructural layer enables a system of centralized management and control. This two-fold architecture, they argue, makes for instance the Internet both a distributed rhizomatic network where every connected node, in principle, can directly interact with any other (the basis of an alleged liberating potential of this technology), and a rigid structure of control that channels all traffic through certain pivotal hubs such as root servers, key fibre-optic cables, or mobile phone towers (enabling control and surveillance).

Gellman and Soltani (2013, 2014) and Gallagher (2013) have described the technol-
ogical applications through which the NSA’s PRISM programme successfully tapped into precisely these material networks underlying communication via the contemporary Internet. This was achieved by either gaining access to the physical infrastructure mentioned above, or by compromising the security and encryption tools of major communication operators and Internet service providers such as Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Yahoo, and others.

The amount of data that is extracted from global communication networks by state and non-state actors exceeds the capacity of human interpretation and analysis, and demands an automated form of assessment by means of algorithm-driven data mining applications. Andrejevic (2013) for instance details how tools for web analytics, predictive analytics, as well as sentiment and behavioural analysis routinely sift through sets of globally acquired big data and automatically identify patterns and deviations that lead to concrete policy recommendations or commercially motivated measures. Such tools for the reading and analysis of big data also create certain expectations in various scientific circles regarding an improved capacity to work with otherwise unmanageable datasets.

One problem connected to these developments is the decreased significance of human reasoning in analytical processes. As Andrejevic (2013) argues, in a “post-comprehension era of information processing” (p. 35), understanding of individual cases
is increasingly replaced by algorithmically identified patterns in abstracted sets of big data that highlight correlations, but are unable to place individual cases in their proper contexts. As such, uses of big data are ridden with certain sets of implicit assumptions that can compromise their applicability and might lead to unintended consequences. According to boyd and Crawford (2012: 665-674), among the problems connected to big data-driven analytics are a new digital divide between those with and those without the capacity to productively use this data, a tacit demise of contextual knowledge, a misled belief that big data necessarily is whole data and not a peculiar subset, and “apophenia” – a practice that identifies patterns “where none actually exist” (p. 668). As Johnson (2014) argues, raising awareness for such potential pitfalls in algorithm-based analytics is of great significance for debates regarding the use of web-based analytics as potential assessment tools also in educational contexts.

Without loosing sight of the multiple beneficial uses of big data analytics, social media, and digital networking technologies in educational practice and society at large, the examples provided above indicate the necessity of particular competencies that are required by contemporary citizens to responsibly and productively navigate new technologically saturated environments. These competencies include 1) technical expertise of how digital networks as material structures operate, 2) a critical understanding of the multiple functions of ICTs as both facilitators of communication and exchange, and as means for economic, political, peer-to-peer, and self-surveillance, 3) basic legal knowledge regarding privacy rights and copyright regulations, 4) basic programming skills, as well as 5) mathematical skills that sensitize young adults for potential benefits, frauds, and flaws connected to algorithm-driven forms of automated analysis and prediction.

**Political Economy: Who Owns the Cloud, and Why does it Matter?**

In their historically inflected approach to interactive technologies, Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter (2003) criticize a “myopia” (p. 6) of techno-determinist discourses that selectively isolate a single aspect of complex life worlds – technology – and overstate its significance for socio-political, cultural, and economic developments. Questioning ideas of radical ruptures between so-called analogue and digital eras, they identify processes of production and consumption as a key continuity linking rather than separating the two eras. As such, they argue, “the paradox that is lost in […] visions of digital progress is that genuinely new technocultural innovations […] are being shaped, contained, controlled, and channelled within the long-standing logic of a commercial marketplace dedicated to the profit-maximizing scale of cultural and technological commodities” (p. 21)4. As such, it seems that in a digital age of participatory media, cloud computing, and virtual worlds, ownership of the means of communication, and financial as well as political control over global networks still matters. This implies that the political economy underlying digital ICTs emerges as a key field of critical research and education.

Today, apparently ephemeral digital data stored in the virtual, global cloud still exists somewhere as a material configuration in, for instance, a particular server. This server, together with the building around it, the fiber-optic cables interconnecting it, and the electric grid powering it, is owned and controlled by someone who has access to, can exploit, or simply disconnect the stored data. These underlying conditions become particularly sali-
ent in cases of conflict between interests of owners and those of a general public. Zajacz (2013) for instance has shown how the whistle-blower site Wikileaks, after it had released classified US military and diplomatic cables, was exposed to multi-platform attacks by US authorities that were not only directed at undermining the anonymity of Wikileaks’ sources, but also targeted the site’s material infrastructure and economic basis. US agencies pressured important Internet Service Providers, such as Amazon and Yahoo, to ban Wikileaks from their servers and forced PayPal to freeze assets and return donations. This action again triggered a retribution from the side of the digitally networked movement *Anonymous* that directed distributed denial of service attacks at various involved actors and platforms (Fuchs 2015: 89). The case of Wikileaks, as such, illustrates well the ambivalent affordances and capacities of participatory media ecologies that can both facilitate oppressive state measures and aid collective action at a grass root level.

Criticizing a continued concentration of media and technology companies in the hands of a few major global businesses, Wood (2009) has argued that terms such as participatory media, web 2.0, or social media, often function as a “commercial gloss” (p. 170) that has a tendency of de-emphasizing issues of ownership, influence, and control. “MySpace is of course owned by Rupert Murdoch” as she elegantly puts it (p. 170). From a similar point of view, Olsson (2010) has asked whether “contemporary media ecology […] should be understood as an ecology in which various forms of user participation are in fact produced – or even manufactured – by organized interests?” (p. 102). Addressing such underlying economic conditions of ICTs not only enables a critical perspective on contemporary media-saturated societies, but also provides useful tools for an analysis of the economic and political force-fields within which demands for an inclusion of ever new technologies into virtually all areas of public services, including education, emerge.

In spite of the many economic and social benefits of participatory technologies, it seems that McChesney (2013) is right, when he identifies an underlying logic of ownership, capital accumulation, and surveillance “as the elephant in the room” of Internet studies (p. 13). The logic through which global capitalism “dominates social life [and] defines our times” (McChesney 2013: 13), however, becomes palpable not only in issues of ownership and control of material infrastructure, but also in the exploitation of immaterial labour through the monetization of user data and crowd-sourced products.

Andrejevic (2007, 2013), Morozov (2011, 2013), and Fuchs (2012) have shown that both businesses and state agencies automatically assemble and exploit user data on a massive scale. The very business models of companies such as Google, Facebook, Microsoft, or Yahoo are based on the extraction, refining, and subsequent sale of user data, including profiles, behavioural patterns, and consumption habits (Andrejevic 2011, 2013; Fuchs 2012).

In addition to this, users of online applications make significant contributions to the global economy by creating genuinely commons-based solutions (Sandoval 2015), or by improving devices or games they use through practices of beta-testing, modding, or fan fiction (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013). However, often users are not sufficiently rewarded for their labour in economic terms (Fuchs 2014: 103-121). In “informational capitalism” (Fuchs 2010), the inherently passive consumer of media content is transformed into an active prosumer who continuously makes tacit contributions to a global value creation chain. In the context of this development, Fuchs (2012) has denounced
the “exploitation of the internet prosumer commodity” (p. 139) through the increased “collection, storage, assessment, and commodification of personal data, usage behaviour, and user-generated data” (p. 155).

These forms of exploitation of immaterial labour are afforded by what Schäfer (2011) refers to as a form of “implicit participation” (p. 105) in the digital production process. Implicit participation unfolds not as a conscious and voluntary contribution, but as the result of a “default design feature” (p. 105) of information systems that exploit user activities by for instance commodifying online traces, or by taking possession of tacit improvements to software application made by users. As a result of this, argues Sandoval (2015), a clearer distinction between commercial and genuinely common-based applications and solutions becomes necessary.

Knowledge regarding the modus operandi of contemporary information-based economies and critical awareness of the advantages and pitfalls of practices of crowd-sourcing and user-profiling, should not only inform debates about digital competencies and literacies, but should also become part of discussions regarding the possible inclusion of digital technologies into classrooms and other educational settings. Here in particular a distinction between genuinely commons-based media and commercial products has to be further highlighted.

*Ecology: The Material Footprint of Digital Technologies*

Another material dimension of contemporary digital ICTs that should be subjected to critical scrutiny in research, politics, and teaching is their growing ecological impact. An often-assumed environmental benefit of digital communication compared to its analogue counterpart has long been treated as a self-evident truth informing both public discourse and political decision-making. The notion that reading a newspaper online rather than receiving the paper version by mail, or that using email instead of physical letters to communicate with others, entail considerable benefits for the environment is still held by many and constitutes an effective apologetic frame that somewhat disables critical attention to the growing environmental and societal costs connected to the production, powering, as well as the increasingly rapid disposal of digital devices that has been highlighted by scholars such as Carli (2010a&b), Gombiner (2011), Maxwell and Miller (2012), and Lager Vestberg, Maxwell, and Raundalen (2014).

The energy required to power the Internet is augmenting considerably (Gombiner 2011). A huge amount of the electricity consumed by server parks and datacentres are used to cool down ever more powerful machinery. According to Maxwell and Miller (2012: 29) the average energy required to power data centres has risen from 750-1000 watts per square meter in the mid 1990s to 1500-2000 watts by the end of the 2010s. In addition to these increases in average energy costs comes an explosion in the number of datacentres and server parks worldwide (Maxwell & Miller 2012: 29). As a result of these developments, writes Gombiner (2011: 120), in 2010 the combined ICT industries accounted for approximately 2 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions – roughly the same as the aviation industry.

The point here is not to unduly criticise for instance Google for offering the important services they do. It is, however, a sobering fact that the main increase in energy-intensive online activities is the result of spare time occupations in industrialized
countries, such as streaming videos or playing online games. As such, activities carried out over the Internet not necessarily replace ecologically more damaging actions that previously had been conducted offline, but are often comprised of new pursuits that cause additional energy demands rather than reducing environmental impacts caused by established activities.

As a consequence, optimistic forecasts regarding the beneficial impact of digital communication technologies on the environment have to be critically reassessed. For instance, estimates indicating a reduction in paper production due to emails as well as digital books and documents that were expected to lead to the emergence of paper-free offices did not materialize (Cali 2010a). As Maxwell and Miller (2012: 61) show, in spite of the introduction of digital technologies on a massive scale, paper production for office work rose by 44 per cent between 1990 and 2008. Neither did the predicted decrease in business-related travel or transportation of goods by air or land occur.

In another strain of criticism, Orisakwe and Frazzoli (2010) assert that, today, e-waste is “the fastest-growing component of the solid-waste stream” (44) and “one of the largest known sources of heavy metals, toxic materials and organic pollutants” (43). Consumption patterns in industrialized nations are responsible for most of the electronic debris. Still, more than 80 per cent of it is dumped or processed under often avert working and safety conditions and with devastating ecological and health-related effects, in the Global South (Maxwell and Miller 2012: 101-108). Only fractions of this garbage are reused or enter a recycling system, while the vast majority disappears in global “hidden flows” (Cobbing 2008: 5).

The production and disposal of digital technologies is seldom the subject of public debate, yet causes increasing societal and ecological costs. Mills (2013: 3), for instance, states that by 2013 the combined activities of the ICT industry – including resource extraction, production, powering, and disposal – consume almost 10 per cent of global electricity production, twice the energy consumption of global aviation. Knowledge about these issues emerges as an important element of contemporary digital literacy and competence. In particular the fact that the costs and unintended consequences mentioned above often remain underemphasized in public discourse relating to digital technologies places a key responsibility on educational institutions to convey such data to foster a critical and competent citizenry, and to seriously entertain the question of how many technical devices really are necessary in schools to teach about digital technologies and their potential benefits and drawbacks.

Information Management

In his book *iSpy*, Andrejevic (2007) points out that the “hip, tricky little ‘i’” (p. 4) signifies the ambiguities of the interactive revolution in that it implies both “solipsistic customization” and the “democratic […] ability to talk back” (p. 5). As the present section will show, the “solipsistic customization” identified by Andrejevic not only applies to targeted advertising and customisations of online solutions, but to a growing extent also refers to a tacit individualisation and tailoring of the information users can access via digital networks. As such, the processes highlighted by Andrejevic acquire immediate saliency for issues related to information and media literacy in particular in educational contexts.
Graham, Schroeder, and Taylor (2013) have recently argued that “[b]y shaping both what we know and how we know it, search engines – and those who design and control them – are able to wield an immense amount of social power” (p. 1368). Search engines and news services function as both gatekeepers and intermediaries between rapidly growing online content and users. In these processes, the “perennial question” (p. 1368) emerges of how the veracity of, for instance, search results can be validated given the secrecy surrounding search algorithms combined with the significant economic incentives of private enterprises “to orient the results page in self-serving ways” (Rieder and Sire 2014: 195), and coupled with the welcome option provided to state actors to “architecturally alter” search engines “to serve political regimes” (Jiang 2014: 212).

The introduction of a certain bias in search results, however, matters not only in relation to clandestine advertising or state propaganda, but has an even more significant epistemological dimension. Focusing on underlying processes of information selection, Pariser (2011) and Bucher (2012) have shown how page and edge rank algorithms deployed by Google and Facebook customize search results and news feed updates. They explain that factors such as users’ browser histories, past and present location, social networks, past purchases, and online interactions with others, influence the paradigm of results delivered back to users. This development makes Google’s search engine increasingly “reflect [users’] own interests” (Pariser 2011: 3), while an “algorithmic editorial voice” predisposes the appearance of content on Facebook (Bucher 2012: 1167). In both cases, allegedly unbiased sources of information exhibit an in-built tendency to put forth results that are in correspondence with traced individual preferences.

Page and edge rank algorithms have been introduced with the objective to improve the perceived relevance of search results. However, the way through which such filters tacitly predispose which information becomes available, and which remains hidden, have led Miller and Record (2013) and Mager (2014) to warn of possible implications for the formation of individual and collective beliefs. According to Miller and Record (2013), the tendencies afforded by these technologies might facilitate the formation of echo chambers where users are increasingly exposed to viewpoints and attitudes similar to their own, rather than exchanging arguments with fundamentally opposed positions. As such, rather than including previously excluded voices into a public conversation, the techniques of customization of social media and search engines might, in the long run, further fragment public discourse and contribute to an undermining of shared processes of political deliberation in democratic societies.

Such questions of information management are often duly covered in traditional approaches to media literacy in general and digital literacies in particular. Nevertheless, the specific affordances of algorithm-driven filters and sorting mechanisms predisposing the paradigm of information made available via widely used online applications, deserves special attention. As such, knowledge regarding the underlying economic incentives, possibilities for political instrumentalisation, and algorithmic modi of operation, as well as an awareness for the availability of alternative tools for finding and sorting content on the net, constitute crucial elements in a set of relevant 21st century digital competencies and skills.
Attention Management and Affective Design

Besides information management, also the ways by which digital media attract and administer human attention require critical scrutiny. Drawing on cognitive and neuroscientific approaches to attention, Hayles (2007, 2012) has identified a technologically facilitated “generational shift in cognitive styles that poses challenges to education at all levels” (2007: 187). She argues that the rapid spreading of digital devices to virtually all areas of life entails a shift away from “deep attention” that is characterized by long-term concentration on a single object under the exclusion of outside stimuli, to a modus of “hyper attention” that rapidly switches focus, thrives with multiple and simultaneous information streams, and requires constant stimulation and gratification (pp. 187-188).

Avoiding the pitfalls of both apocalyptic and apologetic approaches, Hayles points to advantages in each mode of attention, yet maintains that ubiquitous digital technologies heavily privilege hyper attention. Given an inherent plasticity of the human brain, she argues, technology-saturated environments entail potential neuro-physiological long-term effects that, so far, are poorly understood (Hayles and Pötzsch 2014: 98-99).

Attention, however, is not only changed, but also administered and commodified in and through commercial digital technologies (Ash 2012; Andrejevic 2011; Faucher 2014; Rogers 2014). In an era characterized by information abundance, attention emerges as a critical resource and the target of various forms of commodification and exploitation. Micro-level affective design features amplify and modulate human engagement along a variety of technical applications and media forms and formats from online newspapers attempting to maximize the number of clicks and the time spent on their website for the sake of generating revenues, to apparently cost-free entertainment products that create affective links to particular products or services and maintain user attention through constant rewards and positive feedback (Andrejevic 2011, 2013). According to Rogers (2014), research should therefore critically address the various roles played by “technologies of attention, from the iPhone to Adderall […] in establishing a more malleable subject” (p. 3).

Faucher (2014) has connected the design features of digital applications that afford practices such as profile management, celebrity emulation, and status enhancements to capitalist values of the entrepreneurial self, competitiveness, and conspicuous consumption. According to him, at the level of technical procedures and protocols, commercial social media applications contribute to a global process that “recode[s] the social as derivative of the economic” (p. 40) and, this way, often implicitly reproduces and strengthens capitalist values and subjectivities. As such, even though for instance dull mathematical exercises can be sweetened by rewards and shared ranking systems, the underlying processes still invite for a competitive mindset and focus on maximisation of individual rather than shared benefits (Missomelius 2014). Schrape (2014) issues a similar criticism when connecting techniques of gamification – the use of game mechanics in non-game contexts – to new ways of forming docile subjectivities, while Bogost (2011) warns that the logics of gamification and affective amplification imply a reduction of complex human beings to behaviouristic machineries that can be managed through simple stimulus-response cycles.

In spite of these critical assertions, in particular non-commercial social media applications such as wiki technologies, peer-to-peer networks, and open access or open code solutions clearly point to more inclusive, common-based usages of digital technologies (Jarvis 2011; Sandoval 2015; Handley 2013). Brox (2012) and Brox and
Jakobsen (2014), for instance, have shown how cost-free web 2.0 applications can be productively integrated in educational practices at various levels, while McGonigal (2011) has pointed to a variety of productive applications of games in such areas as education, health, and work.

In line with what has been said above, digital competence should on the one hand include knowledge about, and skills in the use of, genuinely common-based and non-commercial digital applications. On the other hand, however, this competence should also include a sound understanding of the modus operandi, and forms of address, of commercial digital applications and games. This knowledge should enable children and young adults to critically assess and productively counter forms of implicit and explicit moulding and management of their attentive potentials, and provide them with a critical distance to apparently ephemeral and ubiquitous technologies.

Conclusion

As the examples presented in the sections above indicate, digital technologies have mixed affordances and ambiguous impacts and effects. Digital applications such as Google, Facebook, or Twitter on the one hand facilitate social mobilisation and provide new opportunities to disseminate and receive information. On the other hand, however, the same technologies enable increased commercial and state surveillance, leading to new forms of commodification and control. In a similar manner, a tacit customisation of data flows increases the perceived relevance of search results and updates, yet at the same time tacitly limits what can be known and what information can be accessed by whom. While digital technologies on the one hand appear like energy-efficient replacements of analogue counterparts that enable new forms of communal interaction and co-production, a different perspective highlights their growing ecological and societal costs and draws attention to new forms of exploitation and exclusion.

Taking materialist approaches to media- and communications research as a point of departure, the present article introduced a series of studies that directed critical attention to precisely this mixed nature of digital technologies. In highlighting challenging aspects in such fields as technological infrastructure, economic conditions, environmental impacts, information management, and affective design, I suggested that these issue areas need to be addressed in contemporary pedagogical theory and practice to facilitate the development of children and young adults into competent, reflective, and critical citizens.

Notes

2. The Norwegian National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion from 2006, for instance, includes digital competence into a set of basic competences along with writing, reading, or arithmetic.
4. In spite of their critical stance, Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter (2003) carefully avoid possible charges of technological dystopianism. They make explicit that “our argument is not that multimedia systems are intrinsically oppressive, vacuous, or malign. It is rather that their potential is being narrowed
and channelled in ways that betray their promise, even as that potential is promoted with the rhetoric of choice, interactivity, and empowerment” (p. 22).

5. These numbers do not stand unchallenged. Walsh (2013) has noted that Mills’s (2013) study “goes with the very high end” of estimates regarding the electricity demands of the ICT industry. Nevertheless, Walsh concludes that Mills’s work “still raises the alarm about the growing energy demand from cloud services”. As such, Walsh recommends, Mills’s conclusions should be taken seriously. Cartier (2013), on the other hand, has criticized Mills’s findings and connected his results to vested interests of the two “coal industry lobbying groups” that financed the study. Indeed, a certain influence by the fund-raising body on sentences such as this can hardly be denied: “Electricity fuels the infrastructure of the world’s ICT ecosystem the Internet, Big Data and the Cloud. Coal is the world’s largest single current and future source of electricity” (Mills 2013: 3). Cartier himself, however, writes for MSN news – Microsoft’s online news service. As such, vested interests of financing bodies taken for granted, this charge appears to go both ways.

6. For peer-to-peer-based alternatives to commercial search engines see for instance Handley (2013).

References


Holger Pötzsch Materialist Perspectives on Digital Technologies


Schäfer, Mirko Tobias (2011) *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP.


---

HOLGER PÖTZSCH, Associate Professor, Department of Linguistics and Culture, UiT Tromsø, holger.potzsch@uit.no
Today, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) is the leading international organisation of journalists. It counts around 600,000 members in 139 counties, and calls itself “the global voice of journalists”.¹

The process leading up to the IFJ’s success started with a congress in 1894. Since then, its history is filled with short-lived organisations and political conflicts. Parts of this history are told in this book, consisting of four long articles written by five Scandinavian and one German scholar. As a whole, it is a tale more about failure than success and that is what makes it interesting.

One of these failures is the collapse of the International Organisation of Journalists (IOJ), which was the biggest international journalist organisation in the world until 1990. The former director of the IOJ, the Finnish media professor Kaarle Nordenstreng, was the director of the IOJ for 14 years. He is the leading figure in this book project and, in some ways, this is a loser’s tale about his own past.

An important task for a professional organisation is to produce the profession’s ideology. Logically, the first chapter is a condensed presentation of the development of professional ideology among journalists from the 1890s until today, written by the Norwegian, Svennik Høyer, and his Lithuanian colleague, Epp Lauk. This chapter is a gem, one of the best presentations of the topic available. Høyer and Lauk have managed to present their complex subject in a clear, nuanced way, without the heavy Anglo-American bias common in such presentations. It is recommended to any lecturer planning a syllabus.

It could be said that, in the beginning, there was talk. The first international journalist organisation, the International Union of Press Associations (IUPA) (1894-1914), was established by a congress in Antwerp in 1894, and continued to arrange journalist congresses until World War I. The IUPA paved the way for an endless row of organisations and committees, which left a strip of obscure abbreviations, such as the PCW, the IAJA, the FIJ, and the IFJAC behind them. Luckily, they also left archives.

The IUPA did not manage to get much done, but in his chapter on its congresses, Ulf Jonas Björk shows how already in 1894, the themes of their endless discussions were surprisingly modern: how to make journalism a respected profession; how to educate journalists, and how to establish an international code of ethics? In 2016, it is time to
ask whether such questions are possible to answer. Perhaps they are of the naturally disputed kind. Perhaps it is time to replace them.

The IUPA became a victim of World War I, and was replaced by the even weaker, United States-based Press Congress of the World (PWC) (1915-1926). The PWC was defeated by inner contractions. Both IUPA and PWC showed how deeply the journalistic field was divided, between journalists and publishers, commercial news organisations and idealists, different political directions, and between Europe and the United States.

In 1926, the League of Nations intervened in the journalistic field through the International Labour Organization (ILO). The result was the Fédération Internationale des Journalistes (FIJ) (1926-1940), the first modern international press organisation. The FIJ was based in Europe, and its members were journalists’ trade unions. It promoted a liberal press theory, concentrating on the professionalisation of journalists. The FIJ had limited success: it managed to create an international press card, and established an international press tribunal to enforce an international press code. The only problem was that only a few used the card, and the tribunal never started working. In the 1930s, the FIJ became paralysed by the political conflicts of the time but it survived until 1940.

In his chapter on the FIJ, the German, Frank Beyersdorf, presents a study of the themes and arguments in the troubled organisation. The chapter is detailed, and must be read slowly to avoid getting a headache but the right reader, who is probably a researcher, will find a treasure trove. Beyersdorf documents early historical examples of almost every thinkable ideological and practical conflict.

The IFJ was established in a decade when the American press developed the fundamentals of today’s liberal press ideology and press ethics. The FIJ was Europe-centric, and the European discussions on the topic were different from those in the United States. In this way, the history of the FIJ can be read as a correction to today’s standard tale of press history, which is heavily oriented towards the United States.

In the optimistic year of 1946, the International Organisation of Journalists (IOJ) (1946-1997) was established as the direct successor to the FIJ, supported by the United Nations and with a secretariat in Prague. This choice meant trouble. In 1948, the IOJ was split because of the communist coup in Czechoslovakia. The Western journalists’ unions left, and the IOJ became a Soviet-oriented organisation. In 1952, the Western journalist organisations established the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) (1952-). The Cold War would split the journalists’ international organisations for four decades.

Kaarle Nordenstreng’s tale of the struggle between the IOJ and the IFJ fills the last chapter, and to most readers this might be the most interesting one. Nordenstreng is walking a fine line. As the former president of the IOJ from 1976 to 1990, he writes the story of his own achievement, his organisation’s success and failure, and portrays its main antagonist. This is definitely not the last word on these conflicts but Nordenstreng is clear about his position, and knows this topic better than anyone else.

The IOJ and the IFJ were supported by their respective superpowers. The Soviet support to the IOJ was relatively open, while the IFJ was independent on paper. In 1967, it was revealed that the IFJ received secret support from the Central Intelligence Agency. Nordenstreng tells that the IFJ stopped this immediately. The IOJ got its own relative economic independence in a strange way: in the 1960s, the organisation was allowed to build its own capitalist island inside communist Czechoslovakia, with a publishing house and translating agency employing more than 200 people. Best of all, the IOJ was allowed to keep the profits.

The IOJ and the IFJ had different views on press freedom. The IFJ defended a liberal standpoint. The press should be free from any government influence, with no ideological obligations. The IOJ advocated a ‘responsible’ view, where journalists should work for peace and coexistence, two typical words in the more pleasant part of communist vocabulary. The journalist could not act independent of ideology, and the press should keep a balanced relationship with state power.
The IOJ expanded beyond the communist bloc through alliances with liberation movements in the third world. Journalists from the liberated colonies flocked together under the umbrella of the IOJ, which could offer resources and arrange congresses. As a result, the IOJ became the world’s biggest journalism organisation.

Nordenstreng is eager to tell how hard the IOJ tried to build bridges between East and West, and this also was his own personal motive. He presents the IFJ as a stubborn antagonist, rejecting all invitations for ideological reasons. On this point, his analysis looks somewhat naïve. By the end of communism in 1989, the IOJ collapsed like a house of cards. The organisation staggered on until 1997 and today, the remains of the IOJ are found in some cardboard boxes in Prague and Amman, Jordan, in addition to Nordenstreng’s own publications.

After the collapse of communism, the IFJ grew rapidly to its current position as the leading journalism organisation, defending the rights of journalists and disseminating a liberal view of press freedom. The story of these 25 years is mentioned briefly in Nordenstreng’s account, but probably deserves its own chapter.

One can be critical of Nordenstreng’s priorities and analysis, but he is relatively fair, and tells a story that is seldom told. His article is a good starting point for a fruitful debate about the effect of the Cold War upon journalism. In addition, he makes a valuable theoretical point in his conclusion:

It is naïve and self-deceptive to believe that international journalists and their associations could ever be completely apolitical. (p.180)

This conclusion is not only supported by the conflict between the IOJ and the IFJ: the history of international journalist organisations from 1894 until today tells the same story of journalism’s intrinsic link to politics and state power. It is impossible to avoid these links, but journalists can relate to them in different ways. The professional ideology, which dominates the press in free countries today, is only one possible version of this relationship. This book tells us how it changed, and that it probably will change in the future.

Magne Lindholm, Associate Professor
Department of Journalism and Media Studies
Oslo and Akershus University College

Notes

Graham Murdock and Jostein Gripsrud (Eds.)
Money Talks: Media, Markets, Crisis

“Crisis is a process of struggle, including struggles over its definition”. This paraphrase of Antonio Gramsci on page 192 summarises the argument presented in Money Talks: Media, Markets, Crisis, edited by Graham Murdock and Jostein Gripsrud. The book analyses the way political elites, the media, cinema, and the public make sense of, and talk about, the economy and the world of finance in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 financial crisis.

The book consists of four parts, each examining how finance is discussed in a dif-
fertent setting: insider talk examines the language of financial insiders and political elite; news talk examines financial news in the mainstream and financial press; screen talk consists of two chapters about the portrayal of the financial world in documentaries and movies, and everyday talk consists of a chapter exploring how Europeans make sense of the antecedents of the financial crisis and possible solutions.

A central theme in the book is the discourse battle between two different ways of talking about, and making sense of, the world of finance. On the one hand, there is the neoliberal economic ideological view, with an emphasis on striving for economic growth and minimum regulation. This view has grown in popularity since the 1970s and became the dominant way of looking at the economy and the world of finance in the years leading up to the crisis. On the other hand, we find a counter-narrative, which sees this neoliberal way of thinking as the cause of the crisis, and questions the basic assumptions upon which the financial system is built. Instead of austerity, this counter perspective would like to see the consequences of the crisis addressed by “privileging social justice and ecological sustainability over economic growth as the measures of economic success.” (p. 9).

Given the severity of the financial crisis, one could have expected that 2007-2008 would function as a critical junction, bringing the counter-narrative to the core of elite, media and public discourse. The empirical chapters in this book, however, show that this is not what happened. On the contrary, throughout the book, the analyses show that talk about the crisis is skewed towards the insider neoliberal perspective, leaving a critical, citizen perspective largely absent. Studying the communication networks within London’s financial district, Aeron Davis, for example, shows that the narratives which dominate these networks legitimise and help to maintain the dominant market ideology. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the other chapters exploring how elites discuss finance.

One could argue that the mass media are a more likely place to find alternative ways of understanding and making sense of the financial crisis. After all, the media have a normative obligation to be critical towards the dominant discourse and present a balanced account of the crisis. The four chapters exploring news talk, however, show that the media, in general, do not live up to these ideals. Analysing the way media in the United States and Great Britain cover economic growth, Justin Lewis and Richard Thomas found little criticism of the ‘growth is good’ paradigm. Likewise, Jostein Gripsrud shows that attention to causes and consequences of the crisis and the related moral dilemmas are largely missing from crisis coverage in the mainstream media. Ironically, the crisis seems to have strengthened rather than challenged the insider-oriented perspective on finance in the media. George DeMartino shows that, because of the crisis, economic resources became scarcer, leaving less money for alternative, critical reporting.

Surely, we would find more critical perspectives if we moved away from the mainstream media, looking at movies and documentaries, for example? From the movies and documentaries analysed in the book, there is again limited support for this. Although often critical of bankers, these movies generally do not question the fundamentals of the market. This is well illustrated by Anja Peltzer’s analysis of Oliver Stone’s movie Wall Street and its main character, Gordon Gekko. This movie exemplifies how the failures of the financial market are attributed to individual responsibilities rather than flaws in capitalism or the financial system. The movies and documentaries which did provide a more critical perspective were mostly unsuccessful in reaching a mainstream audience. The movies which did reach a broad audience largely fail to connect Wall Street to the personal lives of ordinary citizens.

These citizens are the focus of the final empirical chapter of the book, analysing how Europeans make sense of the economic crisis and possible solutions. This chapter shows how complex and diverse people’s constructions of the crisis are. Each of the empirical chapters does a great job laying bare and describing the narratives and discourses which
people use to make sense of the financial crisis. From a wide variety of perspectives, and using different analytical approaches, the chapters illustrate how uneven the perspectives are in the discourse of the crisis. The introductory and closing chapters by Murdock provide a good link between the media perspective and the broader economic and financial context. Several authors engage in a highly interesting normative discussion on what public discourse on finance should look like. The normative starting points come mainly from the public sphere perspective, but also draw on discussions of how best to inform the monitorial citizen (see, for example, the chapters by Jostein Gripsrud, and by Andreas Hepp et al.).

Reading the book will surely raise new questions for the readers. A first important question is why the financial crisis did not lead to more attention paid to alternative perspectives on the economy. The book’s main strength is in describing the prevalence of an insider, neoliberal perspective, rather than giving a theoretical explanation for this. A second important question which the book raises is related to the interplay between the discourses used by economic elites, mainstream media, cinema, and the public: how do these discourses affect one another? The book leaves these relationships largely untouched. Such connections could have been discussed with reference to concepts from media sociology or public opinion research, such as the propaganda model, indexing, Hallin’s spheres of consensus and deviance, or the spiral of silence. The interconnection between media and elite discourse on the one hand and public discourse on the other is especially interesting and could have been more developed. Of course, this limitation is somewhat inherent to an edited volume. To systematically address these interconnections would require a different setup.

The book does not hide its critical perspective on capitalism and the discourse surrounding it. In the concluding section, the authors explicitly argue that they see it as their task to speak out and take part in public debate on how to make sure public communication on finance becomes more inclusive. The book provides a good starting point for this discussion. Without doubt, the book will inspire further analyses of the interplay between elite, media and public discourse in the aftermath of the financial crisis.

*Arjen van Dalen,*
*Associate Professor*
*Centre for Journalism*
*Department of Political Science and Public Management*
*University of Southern Denmark*

---

**Kaarle Nordenstreng and Daya Kishan Thussu**
*

*Mapping BRICS Media*

**London:** Routledge, 2015, 272 p.

It was Jim O’Neill of Goldman Sachs who first coined the term BRIC in 2001, referring to the geo-political alliance of the emergent national economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China. By 2010 South Africa had been invited to join the group. The BRICS members are all developing or newly industrialized countries and were distinguished by their large, fast growing economies. More recently, the crisis afflicting many emerging market economies have called into question the growth model of the BRICS nations.
It may further be argued that an inherent weakness of the BRICS concept and hence of the point of departure of the anthology *Mapping BRICS Media* is that the five countries are different in just about every respect, including demography, level of income per head, economic structure, system of governance and – their media systems. Few of the contributors to *Mapping BRICS Media* seem to actually believe in BRICS as a coherent and strategic alliance either. Several of the chapters call into question the utility of trying to see the BRICS countries as anything other than a somewhat ad hoc grouping of nations that are at least as different as they are similar. As Colin Sparks puts it in his chapter, the use of the BRICS category can obscure more than it reveals. Sparks nevertheless stresses the concept’s powerful rhetorical significance, owing to the clear label it puts on the involved nations. And as we know, a great acronym is important to all branding and may very well explain some of the concept’s success.

The merit of the analysis of BRICS in Kaarle Nordenstreng and Daya Kishan Thusu’s *Mapping BRICS Media* is exactly that it presents valuable critical discussions of BRICS, and whether it at all can be called a geo-political alliance. Most of the contributors underscore the major limitations of the BRICS platform. An exception is Yuezhi Zhao, who in her chapter expresses a hope that the BRICS may gradually turn itself into an engine of growth for the global South. Zhao uses the BRICS cable project as an interesting illustration of the BRICS cooperation. The five countries had already begun thinking about a global internet without USA as its center, when the Snowden revelation about the extent of US surveillance provided the impetus to propel the issue. The BRICS cable was planned completed in 2015, but today, a year after the due date, the cable is still not completed and there no longer appears to be an active discussion about its creation.

The anthology outlines how the structure of the media systems in the BRICS five countries is similar to that in other developing countries. Television is very widely available whereas newspapers remain a niche product for the educated elite. In terms of the internet too, no single, clear discernible pattern unites the BRICS nations or distinguishes them from many other countries. In the case of the BRICS countries all major media depend primarily on commercial revenues, particularly advertising income, which invariably relates to the scale and structure of an economy. Advertising expenditure is concentrated amongst the relatively small group of people enjoying high incomes. The overall media market is likely to be polarized between generic material that reaches a relatively poor mass audience and a more diversified media serving niches within the wealthy elite. Extreme differences between the rich and the poor, societies marked by corruption and social injustice is a common trait of the BRICS nations, as for many other nations.

As a whole, *Mapping BRICS Media* describes the significant trend away from US-centric production and English language dominance towards multi-centric media systems – the international system revolves no longer around a Western/US centric basis only. Due to the considerable development that has taken place the last years, the one-way vertical flow of international television programs from US to the rest of the world has been encountered by multiple and horizontal flows. However, as the book also shows, this has more to do with the weakened US global media actor than with the role of BRICS as such.

Hence, more than being about the BRICS the book is about the limitations and even partly the irrelevance of the BRICS. Nevertheless, the focus on BRICS, does permit as Joseph Straubaar reminds us in his chapter, a focused study of five countries’ media in a political-economic context that throws light on the more general dynamics of global media developments in recent years. Part two of the book offers exactly such focused studies of the five countries in question. It presents timely and good analyses of the current media systems of each country, written by authors originating from the respective countries. The chapters illustrate for instance how the importance of the dominating family-controlled private conglomerates in Brazil; the rise of the digital media/social networks in the context
of globalization and growing fragmentation of the Russian society; the impact of the rapid expansion of media for instance from the economic liberalization of India in the 1990s – where the newspaper market has grown to become the largest in the world followed by an enormous growth of mobile telephony; the logic inherent in China’s state-controlled system and how the rise of grassroots media is giving voice to social forces that are reconfiguring the media landscape; and South African media ownership and concentration, competition and black empowerment are discussed.

The third and last part of the book offers comparative perspectives. Comparative communication research has become increasingly important in a rapidly globalizing media world and the south-south perspective of the BRICS framework offer a valuable frame for such undertakings. To look at the BRICS journalists comparatively is for instance a most interesting endeavor – here the BRICS frame seems less ‘forced’ and more relevant – it is productive to look comparatively into the possibilities and challenges of the media sphere in a selection of nations from all corners of the world. However, as the book Mapping BRICS Media shows, there is very little intra-BRICS media exchange and most of the BRICS nations continue to receive international news largely from Anglo-American media.

The fact that one could easily construct other groups of nations, perhaps with less catchy acronyms, to better capture the economic dynamic of the “rise of the rest” does not necessarily weaken the good analyses of five countries on three different continents in the so-called global South, which inhabits 43% of the world’s population (China 20% and India 18% respectively). Due to this important number it does of course matter for the rest of the world both how they perform economically and how the media function in these nations and many of the deliberations provide interesting dimensions to discussions about theoretically unpacking different concepts such as ‘global’ and ‘transnational’, or about reshaping internet governance and challenging cyber-sovereignty. The important point raised by Straubhaar that while the position of the BRICS countries may look emerging to the core nations, they may seem very well established and even dominant to others should not be underestimated. This reader even finds that this positively could have been developed further. Do the BRICS countries herald a new opening for a more democratic media scene? Or are they as Patrick Bond argued in his book BRICS: An Anti-Capitalist Critic, which came out more or less at the same time as the book under review, ‘sub-imperialists’? Bond’s point is that BRICS must be seen as a phenomenon rising within the framework of global capitalism that is increasingly predatory. To have employed such an approach for instance to see what happens in the regions when the one big powerful global actor is weakened and regional superpowers expand, would have been a highly relevant point of discussion in this context. All five countries share complex relations with their respective regions, partly due to their preponderant economic and military position relative to other states. Yet, none of the five member’s regional leadership project is uncontested, and this aspect would have been a very interesting one in relation to media systems, infrastructure, power and influence, but is not discussed in any detail in the contributions to the book.

Perhaps the most useful part of the concept of the BRICS, and of Mapping BRICS Media is, as Hamish McRae in The Independent once pointed out, that the concept makes us aware of the ongoing “seismic shift in power”. The centuries-old domination of the West is passing and a more multipolar world seems to appear, and even though BRICS may not be the most viable concept, its’ focus on the evolving multi-polarity, also within the media systems, is indeed productive.

Kristin Skare Orgeret, Professor
Department of Journalism and Media Studies
Oslo and Akershus University College
The collection entitled *European Cinema and Television. Cultural Policy and Everyday Life*, edited by Ib Bondebjerg, Eva Novrup Redvall and Andrew Higson is a product of the HERA financed (European Union), rather large international project known as Mediating Cultural Encounters through European Screens (MeCETES). The project is a Belgian, British and Danish ‘co-production’ which commenced activity in 2013. According to its website, the scholarly objective is to ascertain ‘how films and television drama enable audiences to encounter other European cultures, the conditions under which those fictions are produced and circulate within Europe, and their consequences for the project of cultural integration, identify [sic] building and diversity.’

Besides traditional academic outputs such as books, articles and chapters, the project has also nurtured a highly informative blog, regularly updated with a wide range of materials occasionally authored by outside scholars, independent of the core project group. In addition, several conferences and workshops have been organized. These have been highlighted by the noticeable participation of a line of industry professionals, policy-makers and non-academic commentators. In this way, productive encounters and discussions have been facilitated between individuals in professions that, even if symbiotically related, can otherwise be rather inaccessible to each other.

The book’s contributors are predominantly media and communication scholars but also include the occasional sociologist, cultural geographer, film studies person and even one official at the European Commission. Television – and especially the public broadcast drama variety – appears to be somewhat more in focus than film. Similarly, rather recent events take precedence over historical ones, while western and northern Europe receives considerably more consideration than audio-visual activities taking place in the eastern part of the continent (there is, nevertheless, a stimulating chapter about Eastern European auteurs’ relationships to the West by the prolific Ewa Mazierska).

This presentation is not meant to be harsh; it only wishes to underline that with a title signaling *European Cinema and Television* and just a single book volume at the editors’ disposal, there is only so much ground that can be covered. Large areas of relevance and interest obviously had to be omitted and certain priorities had to be made. With these provisions in mind, it may be suggested that the book and its thirteen contributors in various ways attempt to engage themselves precisely with the research project’s stated intentions as quoted above.

The introduction takes as its starting point the complex notion of ‘unity in diversity’ – adopted as the official motto of the EU in the year 2000. Elsewhere this has been termed the ‘double occupancy’ paradox while, corresponding with the EU motto, implying how the people of the European Union are at once European constituents and simultaneously citizens of a number of different and particular nation states. Moreover, the issue of identity is dealt with in several of the individual chapters. Accordingly, several authors refer to various studies which point out that national identification most often takes precedence over the recognition of oneself as European. People in the union do not readily identify
with some sort of common cultural heritage and a feeling of cultural identity. This lack of identification with the larger European project, is furthermore frequently one of the explanatory factors for one of the book’s pervasive themes. Consequently, and as was rather known previously, Europeans do not encounter or consume film, media and television products from other European nations nearly as often in their everyday lives as they see and consume their own domestic products and American fare. For now, at least, we are stuck with what two of the editors (and similarly authors) lament as the ‘weak structures for transnational production and distribution in Europe […] major barriers to securing greater cultural integration’ (p. 235), or as the third editor alternatively puts it, ‘Europe itself has little purchase, little meaning in terms of cultural identities or values’ (p. 148).

A majority of the chapters take a single nation as their case study, focusing either on television or film while inquiring into various layers of European, or in many cases more particularized, transnational connections, such as for instance the close cooperation going on between the sparsely populated, marginally located Scandinavian countries ever since the creation of the Nordvision venture between public service broadcasters (at the time, the only ones allowed) in 1959.

There are two entries concerning the UK. And as this review is written with the countdown to the EU referendum as a backdrop, it is impossible not to read the respective accounts as a sort of synecdoche, with the limited perspectives on the film industry and among policymakers providing a mirror of the larger population, relevant to the larger international political arena. Andrew Higson hence explains how a certain Euroscepticism pervades both film industry and film policy dealings. Incentive programmes during recent decades have accordingly been preoccupied with getting inward investment from the Hollywood studios so that the big budget, revenue attracting and work generating Harry Potters, James Bonds, Nanny McPhees and Wallace and Gromits can keep on coming. Furthermore, it is pointed out that for those Brits with global aspirations, looking westward is where the opportunities are located and how, paradoxically, the backing of an American studio probably offers the easiest mode of access to the deeply fragmented European markets. Perhaps cynically, Higson concludes that British cooperation with Europe, while underlining the non-involvement in Eurimages is, in the end, simply a series of funding opportunities and markets to be exploited. Tim Edensor, in his chapter on the mediatization of British national space, similarly suggests ‘[t]he national sense of Britishness is partly constituted by the habitual consumption of American popular cinema and music […] but to a much lesser extent, by European media forms, which are generally contextualized as exotic and distinctively foreign’ (p. 73).

A few of the chapters, in turn, exude a specific national allegiance as the basis for the argument. Of these, one is concerned with the complex and intangible notion of a European identity as seen through the European Capital of Culture initiative and hardly mentions film and television at all. Two entries, meanwhile, are descriptions of and inquiries into the not so transparent field of European audiovisual policy as introduced by the EU and the Council of Europe. Presumably written before the EU’s Digital Single Market initiative became a reality in May 2015, they both touch upon what are at present widely discussed issues regarding the failure to remove internal barriers regarding the consumption of and trade in, amongst other things, audiovisual products. On the one hand, there is the EU single market supposedly guaranteeing the free movement of goods, capital, services and people. On the other hand, however, there is geo-blocking, territorial restrictions regarding distribution and a trade still governed by copyright and licensing practices that do not recognize the EU as a single territory, effectively introducing internet censorship, severely limiting availability and underpinning digitally enforced price discrimination. Despite the abovementioned initiative, the signs indicating a path towards an emerging single market for digital services have been scarce. The potential of transnational devel-
opments with culture moving online appears unfulfilled in the end.

European Cinema and Television: Cultural Policy and Everyday Life is a substantial work in many ways. It provides data, detailed descriptions of practices and regulative policies as well as some of their consequences in the complex, fragmented, transnational, occasionally successful, but ultimately somewhat disordered, film and television landscape of Europe. Consequently, the majority of the book’s contributors provide accounts of weakly financed initiatives, of the occasional unforeseen consequences of certain programmes and of funds being allotted in ineffective ways. Yet, despite this criticism, there is limited inquiry regarding whether public policymaking, continued protection from US competition and sustained public financial support really provide effective tools as such with regard to the future development of this vital economic and creative sector. One text accordingly cites suggestions concerning how policies have tried to ‘protect’ the media sector while at the same time making it ‘competitive’, but it glosses over the circumstance of whether such contradictory policy goals are compatible in the end.

Almost fifteen years ago, American economist Tyler Cowen put forth a pessimistic examination of European film in the era of globalization. Particularly, he centred on the growing public intervention in the form of protection and increased economic support from the 1950s and onwards. Cowen summarized his argument: ‘As for European film, its best hope is to rediscover an economic and cultural dynamic that combines both commercialism and creativity. Such a dynamic will require reliance on international markets and global capital, and is unlikely to flourish in a narrowly protectionist setting’.1

As it basically asks for more global transnational cooperation, fewer trade barriers and less support, Cowen’s analysis may seem controversial and politically challenging. Still, and though limited to film, it appears relevant and finds its parallels in viewpoints presented in several recent publications on European film and television. Nonetheless, it represents a critically questioning perspective that is not given any real voice in the collection under review. That said, European Cinema and Television: Cultural Policy and Everyday Life represents an authoritative and significant contribution to the increasingly studied field that is the industries and regulative frameworks of European film and television.

Olof Hedling, Associate Professor Centre for Languages and Literature Lund University

Note

NORDICOM invites media researchers to contribute scientific articles, reviews, and debates. Sub-mission of original articles is open to all researchers in the field of media and communication in the Nordic countries, irrespective of discipline and institutional allocation. All articles are refereed.

Aims and Scope

Nordicom Review provides a major forum for media and communication researchers in the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The semiannual journal is addressed to the international scholarly community. It publishes the best of media and communication research in the region, as well as theoretical works in all its diversity; it seeks to reflect the great variety of intellectual traditions in the field and to facilitate a dialogue between them. As an interdisciplinary journal, Nordicom Review welcomes contributions from the best of the Nordic scholarship in relevant areas, and encourages contributions from senior researchers as well as younger scholars.

Nordicom Review offers reviews of Nordic publications, and publishes notes on a wide range of literature, thus enabling scholars all over the world to keep abreast of Nordic contributions in the field. Special thematic issues of interest are also published from time to time.

Nordicom Review is a scholarly journal published by the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom) a non-profit institution within the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Subscription

Subscriptions to Nordicom Review in hard copy or online with unlimited access to Nordicom Review in pdf-format are free of charge. Full details are available on www.nordicom.gu.se. All correspondence about subscriptions, changes of addresses, and back issues should be sent to Anne Claesson, Nordicom, Box 713, SE-405 30 Göteborg (anne.claesson@nordicom.gu.se).