

Introduction

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Introduction: News consumption as a democratic resource – News media repertoires across Europe

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Abstract:

This article introduces the Special Section of *Participations*, in which audience researchers from twelve mostly European countries report on a joint comparative research project about repertoires of news consumption and their democratic implications. The first part outlines theoretical and analytical challenges for news audience research arising from the rapid transformations in current media landscapes, notably the emergence of digital, mobile and social media. We briefly describe our theoretical indebtedness to Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere, and the recent attempts to redefine the classical notions of democratic citizenship towards the everyday lifeworld. The second part describes the project's anchorage in media systems theory, according to which national mediascapes can be compared not just on a one-to-one basis, but in terms of their potential membership of one of a finite number of supranational media systems defined in terms of shared structural and institutional characteristics. The third part describes the project's unique fieldwork design, which followed a tailor-made version of Q-methodology for building audience news

repertoires with greater transparency and reliability than is possible with traditional qualitative methods. This introduction thus provides the shared framework of understanding within which the Special Section's contributions should be read: The first section includes ten articles, which each presents the findings from one national analysis of national repertoires of news consumption. The second section presents four articles, which in different ways embark on comparative analyses of news repertoires enabled by the Q-methodological framework.

Keywords: news repertoires, audience research, citizenship, media systems, Q-methodology, mixed methods, comparative research

Introduction

The new convergent media scene, which supplies an abundance of informative and entertaining contents with different levels (high and popular) of sophistication, combined with ubiquitous possibilities for mediated social interaction, creates optimal conditions for people to find news in accordance with one's political interests, cultural capital, literacy skills, socio-cultural predispositions, and everyday activities (Lunt & Stenner, 2005, Tsfat, Tukachinsky, & Peri, 2009, Shaefer, Weimann, Tsfat, 2008).

The twelve-country research project reported in this Special Section analyses various aspects of people's news media repertoires, referred to in various terms such as cross-media news platforms, (Schröder, 2010), structured media repertoires (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006, Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2006) or habits of media consumption across particular media constellations (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007). Our interest in news repertoires is based on the fact that consumption of news is an important democratic resource; consequently, in addition to mapping people's news repertoires in twelve mostly European countries, our project also explored the relationships between people's news repertoires and patterns of civic engagement and political involvement of news consumers. The contributions to this Special Section are all founded on the democratic importance of mapping people's news repertoires; they differ with respect to the extent to which they report on the civic implications of these news repertoires.

Another basic assumption in this cross-national comparative study is that the historical context of the political, cultural and regulatory environment in which media and news are consumed affect people's media consumption. This relates to the broader institutional media environment or media system (or media landscape) in which the media produce and distribute content, and in which audiences and publics interact with them.

Therefore one of the questions we pursue in the comparative study is whether and how news repertoires are different or similar, in the different media systems that the national media cultures can be grouped into? In other words, how are the practices of news consumption related to the media systemic context in which the practice takes place.

Any examination of this question^s is indebted first of all to the seminal study by Hallin and Mancini (2004), who constructed a systemic, cross-cultural approach for comparing media systems by analysing the links between the media's institutional structures and the socio-cultural conditions in each society. In the context our project, Peruško and her colleagues (Peruško, Vozab & Čuvalo, 2013) took yet another step forward by including necessary indicators of media cultures in the digital age, and by including audience practices in the analysis of media systems (or 'landscapes').

The cross-cultural research project of European audiences reported in this Special Section took place in ten European countries, Israel and New Zealand. It originated at the initiative of Hanna Adoni and Hillel Nossek in the encounter between communication researchers from different countries in the context of the EU COST Action Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies (2010-2014) (IS0906), and most of the empirical and analytical work was conducted after this Action came to a formal close. This introduction presents the common theoretical framework and research methods that were followed in the following country articles and the comparative and cross-thematic articles.

The new communication scene: internet, media convergence and audience transformation

The rapid and unprecedented changes in communication technologies over the last couple of decades, accompanied by a constant decline in newspaper readership and news consumption from traditional flow television channels, have once again revived McLuhan-inspired questions of the displacement of the 'old' media by the 'new' media of the internet and its various platforms, such as social media and mobile phones. Similarly to earlier periods, however, 'the prophecies of doom', holding that the old media will completely disappear, are not being fulfilled (Adoni & Nossek, 2001; Nguyen & Western, 2006). Instead, a new media scene is emerging, one which is more in tune with Ithiel de Sola Pool's (1984) prophetic vision of an intricate and convergent web of media and content, all at the disposal of communication audiences.

The new media technologies have irreversibly brought about changes in the production, content and consumption of news. In the area of news media content, for instance, 'infotainment', i.e. the blurring of the boundaries between entertainment and 'serious' news, which was already happening under the regime of television news, has been further enhanced by social media. Furthermore, the universal spread of social media and mobile phones has created unprecedented conditions for news' consumers to become 'prosumers', i.e. to generate and circulate among large audiences whatever contents they define as 'news'. Recent political events in connection with the US presidential election in 2016 have clearly demonstrated that one of the risks of this phenomenon lies in dubious sources potentially promoting 'alternative truths' or 'fake news', distributed by social media and, at times, accepted as truth by sections of the public, the politicians, and even sometimes the editors of trusted legacy media.

The combination of old and new media has created multiple media ensembles, from which news consumers can compose their personal media repertoire. Not too long ago, the notion of 'repertoires' was mainly used to characterize the consumption of cultural goods and, according to Bourdieu, served as determinants of social status, as well as a means of distinction between individuals and social strata within the society. The consolidation of the cultural repertoires was neither random nor serendipitous. It was a consequence of growing up in a certain 'habitus' typical of a specific social group, whose members acquired the appropriate cultural capital, which, in turn, determined their cultural repertoires as well as their lifestyle choices (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In previous research (Adoni & Nossek, 2001) we have pointed out that the different types of literacy required for the use of various media also constitute an important part of this cultural capital, and, as such, affect the patterns of media usage. The contemporary media scene, characterized by the increasing fragmentation and autonomy of news consumers, offers individuals new opportunities to use their cultural capital, to exercise their skills through various literacy types, and to determine which structured media news repertoires they are interested in (Hasebrink, & Popp, 2006; Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2009).

Yuan (2011) rightly claims that this situation offers a challenge to several existing theoretical frameworks for the study of media and news' consumption, such as uses and gratifications theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974), cultivation research (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorelli, 2002), agenda-setting research (McCombs, 2004) and theories of the social construction of reality (Adoni & Mane, 1983). The common features of all of these approaches were that, (a) they tended to focus on non-convergent old media, such as television and newspapers, and (b) they were congruent with a media scene consisting of a relatively small number of media, upon which their selective audiences were highly dependent.

The central theoretical question of our research project, as elaborated in the next section, bears upon the relationship between various types of cross-media news repertoires and their potential role as vehicles of civic engagement and political participation for each individual citizen-consumer.

On Habermas's shoulders

Like most media research oriented towards the public sphere, the conceptual framework of our cross-cultural study is anchored in Jürgen Habermas's (1989) theorizing of this concept and its concomitant understanding of civic participation. In his seminal treatise, Habermas concentrated on 18th-century England, the emergence of the bourgeoisie and, accordingly, the dominant print media, newspapers, magazines and books. The basic assumption was that an increasing supply of informative content in these media provided the citizens with the necessary materials for deliberative discussions with their fellow citizens in the free public space (i.e. 18th-century society salons and the newly-established coffee houses), as the ultimate tool for reaching rational political decisions for the general good.

In subsequent theoretical and empirical works in the areas of communication, political science and cultural studies, including Habermas's own later analyses (Habermas, 2006), serious attempts have been made to redefine democratic citizenship and to include, in addition to rational political deliberation, the 'wider cultural practice, which, in itself, includes emotional and aesthetic communicative practices in the realm of the everyday, based on people's cultural identities, commitments and competences' (Scannell, 1996, Schrøder, 2011: 4). These new cultural dimensions of political behavior are related to the private and emotional aspects of people's lives and are often connected to the consumption of mediated entertainment, as well as to social media (Bennet & Entman, 2001; Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001; Livingstone, 2005; Jones, 2006; Van Zoonen, 2005). Dahlgren (2006: 282) suggested relocating the focus from the formal arena of parliamentary politics towards 'the microdynamics of democracy' in everyday life, which includes the discursive interaction between cross-media news consumers, as well as their individual capacity to develop democratic literacies.

One of the notions which was developed within this approach is that of deliberative (or discursive) democracy, in which deliberation, as opposed to the formal act of voting, is central to a decision-making process (Bessette, 1994). For Fishkin the basic principles of democratic deliberation include: a) information; b) evidence-based balance; c) diversity; d) conscientiousness, and d) equal consideration (Fishkin, 2011, ch. 5).

The deliberative process is a precondition for a variety of participatory activities defined on a continuum, from the minimalist act of voting to maximalist participation activities, which include a range of everyday activities both in the private sphere of family and workplace and in the public sphere (Carpentier, 2011). These activities include expressions of public opinion as well as participation in institutionalized political, cultural, social and communication activities. Carpentier claims that '...participation becomes defined as a political – in the broad meaning of the concept of the political – process where the actors involved in decision-making processes are positioned towards each other through power relationships that are (to an extent) egalitarian' (Carpentier, 2011:354).

The potential for news to become a crucial democratic resource is anchored in the optimistic assumption that cross-media consumption of news may create a socio-political situation congruent with a deliberative democracy process, albeit one less organized and rigid, and more free-flowing and immersed in everyday social interaction. The opportunity to compare between different news sources may empower the individual citizen-consumer, and may enable him or her to choose and receive relevant, diverse and balanced information on a variety of subjects.

Because the consumption of news is a part of everyday life, social media interactions and the direct interaction with other people around news may, in principle, create social conditions in which individuals are capable of developing an orientation to the arguments of other people. Since they are all 'friends', and thus a certain degree of trust may exist between them, they will obtain a more or less equal consideration, and their opinions will be weighed against the available evidence. This approach is very much in tune with Jenkins's

(2006) notion of a cultural shift based on the interaction between media convergence, participatory culture and collective intelligence.

It is a central assumption of this study, as further elaborated below, that people's cross-media news repertoires, mediated by different dimensions of 'perceived worthwhileness' (Schrøder & Larsen, 2010), may form the social and political conditions in which the principles of deliberative democracy can be practiced in everyday interactions, through old and new media, interwoven with inter-personal interaction. More specifically, this assumption holds that cross-media news repertoires, composed through each individual's personal (but socially anchored) choices, may (in principle and in reality) help towards developing skills for filtering the abundant quantities of information they receive, and towards assembling a balanced variety of information. The cross-media news repertoires may be included in people's discursive engagement with other people, online and/or in face-to-face communication.

At this stage it must be emphasized that an alternative, rival hypothesis can be formulated regarding the potential of news repertoires to become a central democratic resource. According to the rival hypothesis, an intensive usage of the communicative and social possibilities provided by forms of internet communication (such as simultaneous many-to-many contact with other individuals, communities and networks, voicing one's opinion and receiving immediate reactions, as well as an opportunity to generate more weighty types of content) may create in the individuals a false impression of being politically active, which may restrain them from engaging in off-line civic and political actions such as contributing to community, meeting and interacting with other people, demonstrating, or being active members of political organizations.

This hypothesis is related to Merton and Lazarsfeld's notion (1948) that mass media might have a hypnotizing effect on its respective audiences, by creating a false sense of participation in the public space. They warned that a confusion between, on the one hand, receiving information by consuming news and watching what is happening 'outside' on a screen, and, on the other hand acting upon it, might lead to a complete divorce from social action.

There is no easy way to resolve this issue. However, in today's complex world it is still safe to say that following the news from a variety of sources (i.e. building one's personal news repertoire) is an important prerequisite for people of obtaining knowledge about what goes on in the world, at local, national, and global levels, and thus for engaging in both the everyday conversations and the more formalized political discourses that build the kind of 'public connection' (Couldry et al. 2007) which a democratic order requires.

As elaborated in the next section, cross-cultural comparative research in the area of news consumption and civic engagement is one way in which we can pursue a better understanding of the nexus of news consumption and civic engagement.

The challenge of cross-cultural comparison of institutional frameworks of media use

The societal environment (in the widest sense) in which media and news are consumed has a significant influence both on the processes and outcomes of consumption. This societal influence affects the diversity of media types and content available to people, which can be traced back to the broader institutional media environment or ‘media system’, in which the media work, produce and distribute content, and in which audiences/public interact with the media.

One of the questions we pose in this comparative study is how news repertoires and the reasons people give for using the news are different, or similar, in different media systems? In other words, how are people’s practices of news consumption related to the media systemic context in which the practice takes place?

Why compare media systems and not just countries? Looking for broader types of media systems with common features, which are able to explain not only the structural aspect of media environments or landscapes, helps in identifying common patterns in media-related practices within groups of countries. Basing the comparisons on media system typologies is useful in shifting the focus from a particular country to the structural or institutional characteristics that shape the media and media related practices in a group of countries, which share similar features.

The gold standard for comparing media systems is the Hallin and Mancini (2004) typology of three western systems – the Liberal North Atlantic (Great Britain, Ireland and the USA), the Democratic Corporatist model (the Nordic countries, Germany and Austria), and the Mediterranean Polarized Pluralist model (Greece, Italy, France, Portugal and Spain). Basing their model on the relations of the press and the political system, Hallin and Mancini showed how four media system dimensions, which critically define a media system, vary between the three well-known country groupings they consequently identify.

More recent comparative research, led by a critique of this press/politics-based model as a result of the developments of the digital media environments, provides new insights into similarities and differences between media systems. These recent quantitative operationalisations show slightly different country groupings, while at the same time confirming the soundness of the original model in terms of the theoretical relationships between the variables (Peruško, Vozab & Čuvalo, 2013, Brüggemann et al. 2014).

However, the changes to the media environment in times of deep mediatization (Couldry and Hepp 2017) mandate a revision of the concept of media system (Chadwick 2013), a revision which would address both the changed affordances of the new hybrid media landscapes, but also recognize the need to shift the focus in media system analysis away from the media and politics to a broader understanding of what media landscapes are about in a digital and globalized age. At the same time the concept of news is also being revised under the influence of the digital communication environment, in which entry into

the public sphere is no longer guarded only by the legacy mass media, but is open to groups and individuals through many different channels including blogs and various social media.

One such conceptualization is the model of digital media landscapes developed by Peruško, Vozab and Čuvalo (2015), which is useful as a macro framework that adds to our understanding of variations in news practices and choices in the mediatized media environment (Peruško 2017). Their digital media landscape model is built on four composite dimensions, which define the digital media system: institutional inclusiveness, digital media market, media culture, and globalization. The first dimension measures the quality of democracy, freedom of expression, and the level of social and economic development in the country in question, and is partly the operationalization of the political system as the fifth dimension included in Hallin and Mancini's original typology. The digital media market dimension surveys the diffusion and character of both legacy and digital media environments, including print, television, and Internet based media and services (including social networks).

The media culture dimension seeks to take account of the true character of contemporary media systems, which includes much more than just news. Finally, the dimension of globalization acknowledges the changed international flows in the global network society, in which the state is no longer the only influence on the how the media operates, and what audiences can do with them. Each dimension was operationalized by multiple variables and predominantly aggregate data, and was applied to 33 European countries in a cluster analysis to obtain country groupings.

Five 'models' or types/clusters were found: the Inclusive cluster, the Convergent Cluster, the Peripheral cluster, the Non-inclusive cluster, and Israel. The characteristics of the clusters are presented in **Table 1** (source: Peruško 2017).

In their analysis of the comparative dimensions which differentiate media systems Hallin and Mancini (2004) include patterns of news consumption (as newspaper circulation per capita) as one salient indicator, which differentiates the southern (Mediterranean polarized pluralist) media system with low circulation from the two northern (democratic corporatist northern European and north-Atlantic liberal) media systems with high circulation. Quantitative comparative research also shows that the media systems as contextual environments of media practice influence the practices of audiences, for instance in regard to use of online or legacy media (Peruško, Vozab, Čuvalo, 2015, Xabier & Wu 2017); in regard to places of media use and types of media users (Aroldi et al, 2015); and in regard to online practices of engagement (Peruško and Vozab, 2015). Xabier and Wu (2017) show that the populations in the Nordic countries have the most equalized newspaper use (Denmark is an outlier here with less equalized characteristics, more similar to those of Germany and the Netherlands), television and the Internet, while the differences within the respective populations are the largest in the southern Mediterranean countries. Their study unfortunately does not include central and eastern European post-socialist countries. Earlier research has shown that different media environments in different countries influence variations in audiences' knowledge (Curran et al. (2009) and

Table 1: European media landscapes in times of deep mediatization

| Media landscape | Countries* | System characteristics | Mediatization |
|-----------------|---|--|--|
| Inclusive | Austria, Denmark , Finland, Iceland, <i>Netherlands</i> , Sweden | Highest political inclusiveness, highest social inclusiveness, highest globalization, highly developed digital media market, highest imports & exports in cultural industry sector, and moderate TV concentration | Most pronounced structural mediatization indicators, except TV audience fragmentation; Internet and radio used in more places than in most other types (except Israel); most varied media use in common domestic places (with Convergent media system) |
| Convergent | Belgium , <i>Estonia</i> , France, Germany , Ireland, Italy , Malta, Slovenia, <i>Spain</i> , United Kingdom | High social and high political inclusiveness, highest globalization, higher to moderately developed digital media market, low TV concentration, and developed and open cultural industry sector | High to moderate structural mediatization indicators, Most active online audiences in public connection/ civic participation |
| Peripheral | Bulgaria, Croatia , Cyprus, Czech, FYRM, Greece, Hungary , Latvia, Poland , Portugal , Romania, Serbia Slovakia | Lower political and social inclusiveness, lower globalization, less developed digital media market and not significant cultural industry sector, higher TV concentration | Less advanced structural mediatization indicators More than average ubiquitous media use, on-line news use, points towards mediatization of practices (agency over structure) |
| Non-inclusive | Russian Federation, Turkey | Lowest political, social and economic development, lowest globalization, low Internet, but medium smartphone penetration, most fragmented TV audiences, lower position of public television, lowest import and export of culture | The lowest scores on all mediatization indicators except audience fragmentation; only moderate smartphone diffusion might speak to practices of mediatization. |
| Israel | Israel | Lower political and higher social inclusiveness, lower globalization, moderately developed digital media market (but highest social media diffusion), less open creative economy and highest TV concentration | Less advanced structural mediatization indicators, except social media penetration (linked to higher HDI) Most ubiquitous media users, points to mediatization of practice. |

Source: Peruško 2017

* In **bold** are countries included in the quantitative comparative audience study *Audiences Across Europe* (Jensen and Helles 2015), in *italic* are countries included in the present qualitative Q study, which also includes New Zealand.

Aalberg et al. (2010) among others). Most of these studies use the original Hallin and Mancini (2004) media systems classification of countries, and most are quantitative.

With the present study, we wish to contribute to this conversation with a different methodological approach and a different view of what constitutes a media system in the age of deep mediatization (see especially the article by Van Damme et al. in this Special Section).

Fieldwork design: a Q-methodological approach to repertoires of news consumption

As we noted above, the landscapes of news are undergoing dramatic transformations, as new digital technologies and softwares with affordances for democratic as well as more mundane forms of participation are emerging at a rapid pace. These transformations are accompanied by exciting opportunities and great challenges for legacy and born-online news organizations, struggling to define new business models and to create engaging content, and also for the citizen-consumers navigating in the cross-media landscapes of the 'media manifold' in order to build news media repertoires to serve them as resources in everyday life (Couldry 2012: 16).

Alongside these transformations of the hybrid media culture (Chadwick 2013), one thing that remains stable is the historical role of the news media as guarantors of the democratic order, or as Couldry, Livingstone and Markham have expressed it, as vehicles that are crucial for building 'public connection' to democratic agendas (Couldry et al. 2007). Along with the reality of upheaval, the (news) media remain pivotal as people's point of entry to the public sphere (Jones 2006; Dahlgren 2006).

News audiences play a decisive role for the eventual outcome of the transformative processes affecting the provision of news, and thus are the co-creators of the future shape of the news landscape, along with technological innovations, media industry interventions, and public regulation and subsidies, all embedded within the media systemic relations and affordances (Peruško et al. 2015; Hölig et al. 2016). The news audiences play this crucial role because the media technologies, platforms and softwares that end up proving themselves sustainable are those which news audiences, seen as a complex and aggregate entity, end up appropriating and domesticating above the level of critical mass. It is the news audience which holds the answers to questions like these: How will smartphones and tablets be used for news? Why is Facebook big for news audiences in most countries, but not Twitter? How will WhatsApp, Snapchat, and yet unknown social media challenge the current SoMe market leaders? Will the printed newspaper survive? Will Text-TV? Will TV news retain a dominant overall role for citizens? What role lies ahead for radio and radio news, as the DAB technology is phased in? How powerful will global players like Facebook (in the form of Instant Articles), Apple (in the form of Apple News) and Google be in the dissemination of news?

However, although the audience ultimately holds the answers to these questions, it would be reckless for audience researchers to adopt a predictive stance and try to make prophecies about likely developments, because with the current pace of change any scenario we might describe as likely is likely to be toppled by new technologies and services that will emerge from a realm beyond our imagination.

Thus deprived of predictive ambitions, news audience researchers should restrict themselves to offer a descriptive mapping and interpretation of the present reality of news media consumption, building a fact base for understanding the patterns and meanings of citizen-consumers' use of the news media manifold. In this pursuit we can rely on two kinds of major data sources in order to answer these research questions: One type of research maps the landscapes of news 'from a high altitude' using panel-based online surveys (but in recent years also forms of digital data tracking methods) in order to monitor trends in news consumption behavior, looking at audiences' navigation in and preferential selections from the available news platforms. One example of such research is the Reuters Digital News Survey, which carries out world-wide questionnaire-based annual measurements of news access and consumption, motivations for getting news, trust in the news, willingness to pay for online news, use of social media for news, news avoidance, and many other aspects of news consumption (see for instance Newman et al. 2017).

The other major type of fieldwork-based analysis of news consumption studies the experiential and meaning-making aspects of news consumption 'at ground level', so to speak, using qualitative methods to understand how people make sense of the news landscape and news content. One significant example of the qualitative approach is the range of studies carried out in the Netherlands by Irene Costera Meijer and Tim Groot Kormelink, for instance in their seminal mapping of the verbal acts news consumers use (read, listen, view, like, check, share, link, click, etc.) in order to describe how they use news media in everyday life (Meijer & Kormelink 2015).

The high altitude gaze thus registers the selective activity through which people decide which news platforms to consume in the supermarket of news, while the ground level study analyzes the ways in which people domesticate news platforms and media formats as they interpret the meanings which these media have for them in their everyday life-worlds (Picone 2016:130). In our cross-national project we try to be methodologically innovative in blending these two perspectives, looking at people's selective practices through a lens of meaning-making: Using a tailor-made variety of Q-methodology we explore how people make sense of the available news media in the 'communicative figurations' of daily life (Hepp 2013), how they build news repertoires from the ensemble of news media, and how these news media repertoires may be related to participation in democratically relevant everyday practices.

A tailor-made Q-methodological approach to news consumption

The Figures and Tables which come out of survey-based studies of news consumption (showing such aspects as the frequency and duration of news consumption on various

platforms, variations in the trust of different news brands, etc.) can be seen as an evidence-based statistical picture of the audience-created power balance between a given country's news media. However, one should not forget that such pictures of news consumption are a product of the everyday acts of thousands of people, who, from the rich supply of news media, choose those brands which they see as useful and meaningful resources for their life-world activities.

In order to deepen our understanding of news consumption, we therefore need to explore these lived experiences with news media, as contextualized in the communicative figurations of everyday life, and we need to do so in a manner that recognizes both the ultimately non-media-centric nature of people's integration of media into their everyday pursuits (Morley 2009; Krajina et al. 2014), and the sometimes central role that media can play in the maintenance of these pursuits.

In our twelve-country project, our recipe for doing this is qualitative. Our research interests here encompass a diversity of questions, such as: How do people make sense of their news media preferences? How are people's choices from the media ensemble interrelated and contextualized in everyday life? How can cross-media news repertoires be constructed with a qualitative approach?

Additionally, we wish to explore how news media repertoires may interrelate with forms of democratic engagement and participation; this objective will be dealt with in the next section of this introduction. It is a further ambition to also compare national news repertoires across cultures, which is demonstrated by the four comparative articles in this Special Section.

In order to meet the objective of understanding the sense-making aspects of news media use in each country through a repertoire-oriented research strategy, we have applied a tailor-made Q-methodological approach, which was first designed and applied by Schrøder & Kobbarnagel (2010) in a study in Denmark, and extended to a two-country comparison by Courtois, Kobbarnagel & Schrøder (2015). The statistical foundation and procedures of the present twelve-country analysis are described in greater detail in Kobbarnagel & Schrøder (2016), as well as in the article by Van Damme, Kobbarnagel & Schrøder in this Special Section). For selected introductions to mainstream Q-methodology, see Stephenson (1953); Rogers (1995); Brown (1993); Watts & Stenner (2012).

Q-methodology can be seen as a mixed method approach, which integrates qualitative and quantitative procedures in order to find patterns in qualitative data (Davis & Michelle 2011). In our usage of the method, it is fundamentally qualitative, but as we explain below, during the interview the qualitative sense-making data undergo a process of quantitative translation that enables us to arrive at analytical generalizations in the form of news consumption patterns, or 'repertoires' (Schrøder 2012).

The qualitative fieldwork starts with 36 individual depth-interviews, in which the participants (recruited from a principle of maximum demographic diversity, see Table 2) provide a day-in-the-life narrative of one 'yesterday with the news media'.

Table 2: Demographic diversity of the national samples (N=36)

| | | |
|------------------|----------------|----|
| Gender | Female | 18 |
| | Male | 18 |
| Education | Lower level | 12 |
| | Bachelor level | 12 |
| | Master level | 12 |
| Age | 18-34 | 12 |
| | 35-60 | 12 |
| | 61+ | 12 |
| Geography | Capital city | 12 |
| | Major city | 12 |
| | Provincial | 12 |

The second stage of an interview session consists of a card puzzle game, in which participants sort 36 news media cards on a 2-dimensional pyramidal grid with a continuum from ‘plays a role in my life’ to ‘does not play a role in my life’ (see **Figure 1**). The news media cards comprise a mixture of technological platforms and news formats, for example National TV news on a public service channel; Light TV current affairs; Radio news on a commercial channel; Free daily printed newspaper; International news providers’ online news; News via Facebook; News via a news aggregator; etc.

It was an important consideration for the empirical setup that the media systems in the twelve countries were moderately different: although many news media trends are clearly transnational or global, both the devices and the formats become ‘territorialized’ differently across the countries. Consequently the researchers from the different countries negotiated for our common set of news media to have maximum fit with their media system, as the number of media cards had to be limited to a maximum of 36. Among the challenges we had to solve these were the most salient:

Social media: in all countries Facebook is a significant player for news, but Twitter shows more variation: thus for some countries news from Twitter ought to be an independent category, while for others it could be groups under ‘other social media’.

Some countries have a more regional media system than others, especially in the area of broadcasting, while others would be able to manage with cards about only national broadcasting players.

Text-TV is still important in some countries, but extinct in others. How should we instruct participants to handle cards with media that did not exist in their country?

Informants are differentially familiar with the different media technologies and softwares within and across countries: How should we instruct participants to

handle cards with media that existed in their country, but which meant nothing to them?

The issue of ‘non-existing’ (at most two in any country) and ‘unknown’ news media types was handled by instructing participants to place such cards in the neutral middle column on the grid (which numerically counts as zero), where they disturb the factor analysis the least.

The other concerns listed were handled by using an inclusive media list with 36 media platforms and formats (see **Appendix 1**).

Figure 1: The card-sorting of one Danish informant



During the placement of the news media cards on this continuum the participant ‘thinks aloud’, as they reflect on the appropriate relationships between the situational and contextual roles of the 36 news media in their everyday life. At the end of the card sorting, the grid represents an accurate relational map of the participant’s universe of news media.

The cards are numbered and are placed in numbered columns on the grid, with the value zero in the middle column; values from +1 to +4 on the right, and values from -1 to -4 on the left. Therefore, it is possible to conduct a factor analysis of the 36 individual news media configurations, using a Q-methodological approach (Kobbernagel & Schrøder 2016). Each factor represents a repertoire of news consumption.

As mentioned above, our analysis of news media repertoires is an essentially qualitative analysis of the participants’ sense-making of their news media experiences, which is augmented with a quantitative translation device in the form of the card sorting on the grid, which lends itself to a factor-analytical interpretation. This is a unique form of repertoire analysis based on qualitative data. Repertoire analyses are normally based on responses to survey questions, and are thus an indirect measure of news preferences based

on reinterpretation of the respondents' indications of, for instance, time spent on or frequency of use of various news media (Wolf & Schnauber 2014; Papathanassopoulos et al. 2013; Helles et al. 2015; Taneja et al. 2012). The Q methodological approach constructs its data from the participants' direct indication of which news media matter to them and which do not. Another contrast between other repertoire analyses and ours is that we employ a unique set of 36 news platforms and formats (see **Appendix 1**), whereas other studies usually remain at the level of the big media technologies: TV, Newspapers, Online, and Radio.

In all participating countries, the fieldwork recipe outlined above was rigorously followed. The national analyses resulted in twelve country-specific news repertoire ensembles, each made up of between four and nine news repertoires.

Each of the factors in a national repertoire comes with a set of factor scores, i.e. a ranked list of the news media that shows which of the 36 news media play important vs. less important roles in the lives of the participants who constitute the repertoire (see Appendix 3). The factor analysis also shows which subset of the 36 participants share the news repertoire in question.

A news user's personal repertoire originates in a number of orientations, which, in different combinations, can be traced to his or her ranking of the 36 news media. Obviously the most important orientation is to the informative or entertaining content, which the user encounters in his or her chosen news media. This orientation is not overt in the ranked lists that constitute the factors, so therefore we have to first base the analysis of the country repertoires on the orientations that can be read off from the lists; among these orientations we have relied on the following for drawing a first portrait of the news consumption visible in the repertoires:

- Technological orientations (which platforms are used?)
- General content categories (overview vs. depth, light vs. serious)
- Geographic orientation (local/regional, national, international)
- Quality (public service vs. tabloid)
- Lean-back (receptive, common agendas) vs. lean-forward (search, personalization)

In light of these dimensions we went on to analyze the salient news preferences of the country repertoires noting the following features

- Which news media occur in each repertoire's Top 5
- Highest-ranked print newspaper in each repertoire
- National public service TV, or 24-hour TV news, in each repertoire
- The rank of Text-TV news
- Highest-ranked radio news in each repertoire
- Highest-ranked newspaper online in each repertoire
- Highest-ranked public service broadcaster (PSB) online

- Highest-ranked social media (Facebook or Twitter)
- The rank of news aggregators in each repertoire
- Highest-ranked international news provider

The interpretation of the factor rankings according to these parameters is based primarily on the news media that occur in the top-10 of each repertoire, where the top-5 represent the two right-most columns in the grid (values +4 and +3), and the top-6 to 10 represents the five news media located in the next column (value +2).

Ten country-specific news repertoire ensembles are reported in separate articles this Special Section of *Participations*: Belgium (Flanders), Belgium (Wallonia), Croatia, Germany, Estonia, Israel, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, and The Netherlands. For different reasons, the country studies from Denmark (see Kobbarnagel & Schrøder, 2016), and Spain are not included in this Special Section.

To varying degrees the country articles supplement their descriptions of the repertoire profiles with verbal statements made by the informants who belong to a given repertoire (see for instance the articles about Flanders, Croatia, Israel, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, and Portugal). This possibility to add thick description to the more skeletal repertoires is a consequence of the way we adapted classical Q-methodology for our methodological design. In Q-methodological studies the standard procedure is merely to get the participants to sort a stack of cards covering the discursive field under investigation; sometimes participants are here asked to comment on their sorting, or on the analytical ‘type’ they belong to.

Our fieldwork design benefits from the extensive initial day-in-the-life phase, in which the participants tell us in their own words, before any mention of the card sorting, how news media form a – more or less prominent – part of their typical everyday life. Also the card sorting is followed up with an after phase in which the participant’s narration can continue, offering a deepening understanding of the way they sorted the cards while thinking aloud. This means that when the factor analysis has produced the repertoires and listed the participants who belong to each repertoire, the analyst can assemble and analyze the interview transcripts that belong to each repertoire, thereby coming to better understand why and how the news media configuration relate contextually to the participants’ lives.

In the country articles, each repertoire comes with the demographic profile of its participants, to the extent that a discernible pattern can be detected from the age, gender, education, and urbanicity dimensions. This demographic profile is not intended to provide the ‘hard facts’ about the ‘kind of people’ who represent a repertoire; rather it is meant to be ‘read backwards’ so to speak, i.e. to validate the soundness of the repertoire, when the demographic profile appears plausible for the news media diet in question. For instance, if a repertoire with a heavy preference for print news (the Danish repertoire 6) turned out to consist of young, low-educated participants, instead of (as is the case) old, high-educated

participants, this might have then been seen as something that cast doubt on the validity of the repertoire.

The nexus of news media repertoires and civic engagement

In addition to drawing maps of people's news repertoires in different countries, it was a key objective of our study to be able to explore the nexus of news media repertoires and democratic engagement and participation; this issue was therefore addressed as an integral part of the day-in-the-life conversations, usually following the Q-sorting phase of an interview. Moreover, in order to obtain systematic, analyzable insights into daily democratic practices we deemed it necessary to have a more factual record; hence at the end of each interview we administered a short questionnaire about five themes to do with communicative engagement and participation in democratically relevant activities; each of the themes listed here comprised between 4 and 12 questions to be answered on a Likert scale (for the complete questionnaire, see **Appendix 2**):

1. How do you share or participate in news coverage?
2. How important to you are different news media-related online communicative activities?
3. What role is played by social and cultural activities in your life?
4. What political activities did you participate in during the last month?
5. Which news sources are relevant for you in daily conversations?

Among other things, the questionnaire was designed to enable us to illuminate whether those representing a given news repertoire also substantially share online communicative, deliberative practices and forms of participation in political activities. While the findings from this part of the study are planned for another joint publication, some of the country articles in this Special Section offer pre-view glimpses of the insights provided by this analysis (see the articles about French-speaking Belgium, Estonia, and Germany).

Going comparative with Q-methodology

We embarked on the twelve-country study of news consumption in order to explore whether a Q-methodological repertoire study would lend itself more readily to cross-national comparative analysis than comparative studies based on a traditional qualitative approach. For each of us the lure of comparative research was based on the belief that using the same method in the different countries would mean that knowing more about the news consumption of 'the Other' would work as a sensitizer to understanding our home scene better: 'Many elements that we intuit to be specific to a media culture can only be made more precise through comparison with other media cultures' (Hepp 2013: 139).

This would also mean, we hoped, that through comparative studies we would come to understand the territorialization of translocal processes of mediatization better in the

area of news media. Across different countries we share many of the recent translocal developments in the mediatized cultures of news: some years ago most countries experienced the emergence of 24-hour TV news channels and free dailies; we are all seeing the rise of online platforms for the dissemination of news; and we are currently experiencing the rapid growth in ubiquitous mobile news acquisition, and the opportunities for participation and user-generated content. But in spite of doubtless uniform tendencies, it is likely that such processes are territorialized differently.

It has been conventional wisdom in our field that qualitative comparison across nations and cultures faces more challenges than quantitative comparison:

Quantitative data is straightforwardly coded and can be analysed statistically by anyone; qualitative research demands interpretation of the data in context, by the researcher who collected the data (...). Similarly, data files of numbers can be collated, circulated and analysed across different countries, while transcripts written in different languages cannot. (Livingstone 2003)

We believed that qualitative analyses of news consumption fortified with Q-methodological patterns in the form of repertoires would lend themselves to comparison more transparently and reliably. Partial support for this belief was found in the comparative Q-methodological study by Courtois et al. (2015) of news repertoires in Denmark and Flanders.

Above we coupled this knowledge interest in cross-national comparison with media systems theory, asking how news repertoires and the reasons people give for using the news are different, or similar, in different media systems, i.e. how people's practices of news consumption are related to the media systemic context in which the practice takes place?

We invite our readers to answer this question in two ways:

One way is by reading a selection of the different country studies we present in this Special Section, and seeing for oneself how, for instance, the citizens of Germany and the Netherlands compose their different news repertoires, how they talk about their news media choices, and how these repertoire ensembles fit with the respective media systems.

The other way is by reading one of the four comparative articles, in which researchers in the project pursue different kinds of comparative strategy:

Ragne Kõuts-Klemm and Maria José Brites systematically analyse the similarities and differences between the Estonian and the Portuguese repertoire systems, by focusing selectively on those repertoires in the two countries in which online news preferences are salient

Kristin Van Damme and Joëlle Swart compare the Dutch and the Flemish news repertoire systems by pooling the 72 Q card sorts from the two countries and

subjecting them to a new factor analysis resulting in a new set of cross-national repertoires.

Stanislaw Jedrzejewski compares the rankings of public service news outlets across repertoires from nine countries.

Kristin Van Damme, Christian Kobbernagel and Kim Christian Schrøder undertake a second-order factor analysis of the repertoires of nine of the countries that participated in the study.

We believe that each of these studies demonstrates in its own way different aspects of the potential for systematic comparative analysis of audience practices which a Q-methodological approach offers the audience analyst. With or without a comparative dimension we believe that the Q-methodological news repertoire approach constitutes a promising way to build knowledge about news consumption. The news repertoires spring from people's life histories and current life worlds, that is, how their daily working and domestic lives are organized in contexts of space and time with spouses, partners, children, colleagues, friends, neighbors and other significant others. Such insights may ensure that public debates about the sociocultural and political roles of the news media are building on an understanding of just how complex people's everyday life with the media are below the statistical averages.

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Appendix 1:

News platform and format categories for the Q cards (well-known national news brand examples were given for each category)

TV

1. national TV news bulletin on a public service channel
2. national TV news bulletin on a commercial channel
3. regional/local TV news bulletin
4. TV current affairs, light
5. TV current affairs, serious
6. TV news, national 24-hour TV news channel
7. TV news foreign/international providers
8. News on Text-TV

Radio

9. Radio news on public service
10. Radio news on commercial channel
11. Radio current affairs

Print

12. National daily quality newspaper, print
13. National daily tabloid newspaper, print
14. Free daily newspaper, print
15. National news magazines or weekly quality newspaper, print
16. Local/regional daily newspaper, print
17. Local weekly/bi-weekly/monthly news publications, print

Online news media sites

18. National quality newspaper online
19. National tabloid newspaper online
20. Free daily newspaper online
21. National news magazines/weekly quality newspaper, online
22. Local/regional daily newspaper online
23. Local weekly/bi-weekly/monthly, online
24. National PSB online news
25. National commercial broadcaster's online news
26. International news providers' online news

News from social media

27. News on Facebook
28. News on Twitter
29. News on other social media
30. News on online video sharing media
31. Blogs with news

Other news sources

32. News received by email or SMS

33. Professional and party-political magazines
34. News via news aggregators
35. News from born-online news media
36. News online, not provided by media

Appendix 2:

Supplementary Survey Questionnaire about civic engagement (selected aspects)

Q1. During an average week, in which, if any, of the following ways do you share or participate in news coverage? (yes/no)

Share a news story via Social Network (like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, etc.)

Share a news story via email

Rate (or Like) or recommend a news story

Comment on a news story in a Social Network (like Facebook or Twitter)

Post or send a news-related picture or video to a Social Network site

Vote in an online poll via a news site or social network

Talk with friends and colleagues about a news story (e.g. by email, social media, instant messenger)

Talk with friends and colleagues about a news story (face to face)

Etc.

Q2. The importance of different types of media-connected activities (Rank 1 to 5)

Writing letters to the editor in a print newspaper

Voting (online or mobile phone/tablet) in media-invited polls

Participating actively in groups on the web

Expressing opinion (as a reaction) in social media: Blogs, Facebook, Talkbacks, Twitter, YouTube

Etc.

Q3. Which of the following cultural and social activities have played an important role in your every-day life during the last month? (Rank 1 to 5)

Meeting with family members not living in my home?

Meeting with my friends

Going out to movies

Going out to sports events

Going out to attend music concerts (classical, rock, pop, jazz, etc.)

Reading books (fiction and non-fiction, print and digital)

Etc.

Q4. Have the following social and political activities played an important role in your life during the last year? (Rank 1 to 5)

Membership in NGOs and activist groups (social justice, environmental issues, nature and animal protection – preservation)

Attending protests or demonstrations in the public space

Membership of a political party

Joining petitions of democratic intervention

Etc.

Q5. To what extent do different sources of news play an important role in choosing topics for face to face conversations and discussions with your friends and family? (Rank 1 to 5)

Printed Newspapers

News sites on the web

Television news and current affairs programs

Radio news and current affairs programs

Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

Etc.

Appendix 3:

News media rankings in the Danish 6-factor solution

| Ranking of news media in each factor (based on factor scores) | | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 | F6 |
|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | National TV news bulletin on a public service channel | 21 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 5 |
| 2 | National TV news bulletin on a commercial channel | 16 | 16 | 18 | 15 | 19 | 16 |
| 3 | Regional/local TV news bulletin | 34 | 8 | 13 | 11 | 7 | 7 |
| 4 | TV current affairs, light | 35 | 27 | 6 | 14 | 23 | 8 |
| 5 | TV current affairs, serious | 22 | 7 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 19 |
| 6 | TV news, national 24-hour TV news channel | 30 | 11 | 2 | 6 | 36 | 14 |
| 7 | TV news foreign/international providers | 33 | 12 | 23 | 3 | 28 | 36 |
| 8 | News on Text-TV | 36 | 5 | 5 | 34 | 8 | 34 |
| 9 | Radio news on public service | 19 | 1 | 15 | 23 | 12 | 20 |
| 10 | Radio news on commercial channel | 26 | 28 | 19 | 25 | 35 | 27 |
| 11 | Radio current affairs | 25 | 10 | 28 | 26 | 2 | 35 |
| 12 | National daily quality newspaper, print | 29 | 18 | 34 | 1 | 6 | 2 |
| 13 | National daily tabloid newspaper, print | 28 | 33 | 7 | 29 | 29 | 28 |
| 14 | Free daily newspaper, print | 9 | 14 | 22 | 35 | 32 | 1 |
| 15 | National news magazines /weekly qual. newspaper, print | 23 | 24 | 36 | 22 | 26 | 25 |
| 16 | Local/regional daily newspaper, print | 32 | 17 | 35 | 17 | 34 | 4 |
| 17 | Local weekly/bi-weekly/monthly news publications, print | 24 | 9 | 11 | 32 | 15 | 3 |
| 18 | National quality newspaper online | 1 | 3 | 8 | 12 | 10 | 22 |
| 19 | National tabloid newspaper online | 14 | 31 | 1 | 27 | 21 | 17 |
| 20 | Free daily newspaper online | 11 | 34 | 10 | 36 | 25 | 13 |
| 21 | National news magazines/weekly qual. newspaper, online | 15 | 30 | 33 | 20 | 13 | 29 |
| 22 | Local/regional daily newspaper online | 20 | 19 | 27 | 30 | 24 | 21 |
| 23 | Local weekly/bi-weekly/monthly, online | 27 | 21 | 32 | 33 | 18 | 12 |
| 24 | National PSB online news | 3 | 2 | 12 | 28 | 14 | 24 |
| 25 | National commercial broadcaster's online news | 18 | 20 | 17 | 18 | 20 | 18 |
| 26 | International news providers' online news | 5 | 6 | 30 | 9 | 33 | 33 |
| 27 | News on Facebook | 6 | 36 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 15 |
| 28 | News on Twitter | 31 | 35 | 31 | 21 | 5 | 32 |
| 29 | News on other social media | 13 | 32 | 24 | 2 | 27 | 23 |
| 30 | News on online video sharing media | 4 | 4 | 16 | 19 | 16 | 30 |
| 31 | Blogs with news | 10 | 16 | 20 | 13 | 30 | 26 |
| 32 | News received by email or SMS | 8 | 8 | 21 | 8 | 31 | 6 |
| 33 | Professional and party-political magazines | 17 | 27 | 25 | 16 | 3 | 11 |
| 34 | News via news aggregators | 7 | 7 | 26 | 10 | 17 | 10 |
| 35 | News from born-online news media | 2 | 11 | 14 | 24 | 22 | 31 |
| 36 | News online, not provided by media | 12 | 12 | 29 | 31 | 11 | 9 |