

Beyond the Here and Now of News Audiences

A process-based framework for investigating news repertoires

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Beyond the Here and Now of News Audiences: A Process-based Framework for Investigating News Repertoires

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Abstract

Research into people's digital news use centres on the here and now, which means sustained attention to the processes influencing changing consumption patterns is often perfunctory. Accordingly, this article advances journalism studies scholarship by developing a comprehensive analytical framework to investigate such processes, focusing on the emergence, maintenance, and (re)formation of audiences' news repertoires in everyday life and across the lifespan. First, we delineate the repertoire concept and its insights for audience research, before crafting a heuristic to illustrate how faster and slower timescales interact to influence these practices. We then synthesize diverse concepts of different theoretical ancestry to develop analytical prisms around socio-spatial context, technology, and the individual, which guide research inquiries alert to the transformational processes of news repertoires. Finally, we introduce an empirical agenda to operationalize our conceptual treatment, elucidating methodological premises around diachronic change, identity-formation, and sense-making that capture why publics develop a relationship with journalism.

Keywords: audience and reception studies, diffusion of innovations, domestication theory, everyday life, journalism studies, media habits, media sociology, news audiences, news repertoires, space, timescales, uses and gratifications

Beyond the Here and Now of News Audiences: A Process-based Framework for Investigating
News Repertoires

How do people get news, what lies behind their choices, and why does this matter? These beguilingly simple questions have implicitly formed the foundation for key conceptual enquiries in journalism studies since its inception. News audiences matter for without them, the main purposes of journalism – acting as a watchdog, information source, intermediary between people and government, and so forth – are meaningless. In this respect, when it comes to understanding audiences, the stakes are high. Their practices establish everything from journalism’s economic feasibility, to its democratic impact, and sociocultural role (Peters & Broersma, 2018; Peters & Witschge, 2015). However, the appearance of a number of worrisome symptoms in recent decades – from ongoing financial distress in the news industry (Bell, 2016), to decreasing public trust (EBU, 2016) and debates around “fake news” and “post-truth” politics (Benton, 2016), to name a few – are indicative of a potentially unhealthy change in the relationship between journalism and the public(s) it aims to serve. For these reasons, scholars and journalists alike are understandably preoccupied with figuring out how people are being news consumers in a transformative, digital age. However, sustained attention to the processes influencing these changing patterns of consumption is often perfunctory. This article aims to advance journalism studies scholarship by developing a comprehensive framework to investigate such processes, taking its point of departure from the *emergence, maintenance, and (re)formation of audiences’ news repertoires in everyday life and across the lifespan*.

Media repertoires, a broader category which includes news repertoires, can be defined as “the entirety of different media that a person regularly uses [and] can be regarded as relatively stable cross-media patterns of media practices” that change incrementally over time (Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017: 4).¹ These social and spatiotemporally-contextualized constellations, through their

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gradual habituation at the individual level and aggregation across social groups, provide both structure and meaning in everyday life. To understand why this is significant, we might compare exemplars of news consumption in the era of mass media versus today. Previously, news consumption had a highly visible presence in public life, from newsstands, to commuters reading newspapers on public transport, to parents watching the evening news on the living room TV. Moreover, these patterns were fairly stable in terms of choice of news media, place, and timing (Peters, 2015). Nowadays, news consumption is far less predictable. From social media feeds where news and personal updates interweave in a virtual environment based on algorithmic personalization (Bruns, 2017), to the continued growth of smartphones as a media device (Newman et al., 2018), to the gradual emergence of “dark” social media platforms (i.e. messaging apps) to discuss public affairs (Swart, Peters & Broersma, 2018), how people are socialized to see, share, and talk about news is undergoing a radical transformation. The individualization of media devices, fragmentation of outlets, and personalization of consumption increasingly renders news use a personally-visible, but publicly-*invisible* practice. It is unclear what impact this will have on future inclinations to consume journalism – to highlight but one example, unlike many adults, most current youth will grow up not necessarily recognizing that others are watching, reading, or listening to the news. The steady audience rituals of the mass media era, which conveyed symbolic power to the news industry through journalism’s apparent centrality to democratic and sociocultural life (Couldry, 2012), are thus gradually being de-ritualized, and how new ones will form is uncertain (Broersma & Peters, 2013; 2017). Building on this understanding, this article synthesizes a range of conceptual and methodological approaches for studying media use in order to develop a process-based framework for investigating the development of audiences’ news repertoires over time.

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Discussions surrounding the so-called “crisis” or even “collapse” of journalism (e.g. Alexander, Breese & Luengo, 2016; Javnost, 2015; McChesney & Pickard, 2011; Zelizer, 2015), might also aptly be characterized as a “crisis of audiences”, in terms of not knowing: what they want, are willing to pay for, the changing function of news in their everyday lives, the public relevance it has for them, and so forth. Recent years have accordingly seen a resurgence of research, an “audience turn” that has witnessed scholars trying to uncover how digital news ecologies are changing the ways and reasons people get news, as well as the appropriate conceptual and methodological strategies to uncover this (e.g. Bird, 2011; Costera Meijer, 2016; Heikkilä & Ahva, 2015; Lewis et al., 2014; Loosen & Schmidt, 2012; Schrøder, 2016). Research has emphasized a number of trajectories, from shifting patterns of consumption (e.g. Newman et al., 2018), to uses of news on mobile/social media (Hermida et al., 2012; Westlund, 2015), differences across countries and sociocultural variables (Fortunati et al., 2014; Van Damme, Kobbarnagel & Schrøder, 2017), willingness to pay (Chyi & Lee, 2013; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017), and evaluations of trust (Turcotte et al., 2015; Urban & Schweiger, 2014), amongst others. In simplified terms, the empirical tendency is toward: looking at what is watched/read/listened to; how often and for how long; over what outlets/platforms; and people’s valuation of these experiences. While useful interventions that share a common desire to capture how news use is changing, such research tends to centre on the here and now. This is potentially troublesome, for if we are trying to understand shifting patterns of news use, the implications for journalism, and the broader significance for societal communication, by necessity this demands looking to the processes which drive how, why, when, where, and with whom certain repertoires become meaningful. This demands greater attention to the specificities of time and its passage. Despite being something people experience daily as an integral part of existence, time is often relegated analytically by social scientists “as an implicated rather than explicated feature of their theories

and empirical studies” (Adam, 2004: 3). While an attention to temporal considerations is slowly growing in journalism studies (see Bødker and Sonnevend, 2018), efforts to date have remained focused on digital news production and content (for an exception see Keightly & Downey, 2018).

The difficulty of studying such processes is partly one of conceptual synthesis, partly a realization of the significant empirical challenges that accompany it. In offering a multifaceted approach that draws upon different sub-fields of communication studies, media sociology, and related disciplines as appropriate, this article endeavours to advance scholarly understanding of the contemporary digital news audience, a fundamental object of analysis that cuts across many of journalism studies’ “core commitments” (Carlson et al., 2018). We first situate current discussions around audiences’ news repertoires, specifying key considerations. We then outline a systematic approach to conceptualize and operationalize temporal processes and experiences in relation to news audiences before introducing three analytical prisms – social context, technology, and the individual – that help guide the generation of research inquiries. Finally, we introduce an empirical agenda to operationalize our conceptual treatment, elucidating methodological premises around diachronic change, identity formation, and sense-making that capture how and why publics develop a relationship with journalism.

(Digital) News Use and Repertoires

In an era of rapidly changing possibilities for using media, the notion of “repertoire” has increasingly found its way into the mainstream of media audience research (e.g. Hasebrink & Popp, 2006; Schrøder & Kobbernagel, 2010; Taneja et al., 2012; Yuan, 2011). When it comes to journalism, the term has gained relevance to understand how people relate to the media that surround them in today’s high-choice media landscape, characterized by a hybrid “media manifold” (Couldry & Hepp, 2016: 55) of what has variously been termed traditional/legacy/offline media on the one hand and digital/new/online media on the other.

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However, it would be a mistake to assume repertoires are “new”, per se. Rather, the notion merely puts a label on a phenomenon which has long-existed, namely the fact that as people navigate through the media ecology they live in, they regularly use a variety of media – including but not limited to journalism – in order to meaningfully fulfill their needs for information and diversion.

In this respect, people’s media use must be seen as inherently cross-media – and always has been. From the ensemble of media that are available at a given point of time in their culture, people gradually build up a set of media (such as news brands, TV programs, weekly magazines, radio broadcasts, social media, etc.) into a repertoire which they routinely and habitually draw on in everyday life (cf. Bird, 2011). This is something producers of media content have long appreciated, and it would be a mistake to assume that audiences are all powerful when it comes to how repertoires are formed. Well-established concepts such as scheduling, flow, and branding, and more recently algorithmic personalization and “most read” lists, speak to the role that producers play in providing access to content, as well how they actively try to shape audiences’ habits (Ellis, 2000; Webster, 2014; Webster, in press). Cross-media use from the audiences’ bottom-up point of view, then, must to a large extent be conceptualized as a process based first on awareness, then deliberate choice, and finally on influences that reinforce the practice, situated in broader institutional and cultural contexts that prefigure these choices. In other words, a person becomes aware of a new media source – typically from producers or via peer groups – selects it on a trial basis, and then either integrates it into their routine practices or lets it slip back into the sea of non-relevant media. Media repertoires thus do not exist in a state of inertia – they can and do change. However, they tend to become automated and habituated over time.

In addition to this individual-based definition of media repertoires, some audience researchers define them as location- and situation-bound media ensembles, which belong in

identifiable domains such as the workplace, home, or transport (e.g. during commuting) (Taneja et al., 2012). For Robinson (2014), repertoires are produced by local communities of practice. Along other dimensions, repertoires can be composed of technological platforms, media brands, or content genres (Kim, 2016; Wolf & Schnauber, 2015). Hasebrink and Hepp (2017) suggest it is possible to bring these different perspectives on media repertoires together by adopting a non-media centric approach based on the analysis of “communicative figurations”. Communicative figurations are defined as scalable social worlds ranging from small social units like the family, through peer groups and societal institutions like a school or a workplace, to the entire public sphere of a nation. Each of these domains can be described in terms of its constellation of actors, its thematic framing (i.e. what the members of the figuration “do”), and its mediated and non-mediated forms of communication. These different communicative practices draw on a definable “media ensemble”, understood as the aggregated media repertoires of the domain’s actors.

It is important to stress that a (news) media repertoire is not just a concept for describing the sum of the media a person uses, like pearls on a string, but instead focuses on “the meaningful relation between them in everyday practice” (Couldry & Hepp, 2017: 55). For instance, as recent studies have noted (Kobbernagel & Schröder, 2016; Swart, Peters & Broersma, 2017), it is possible to identify certain shared subjective orientations by citizens toward patterns of cross-media, digital news consumption, such as “online quality omnivores”, “locally-oriented users”, and so forth. Such news repertoires share not only rank-order preferences for devices used to consume journalism but also, to varying degrees, preferred brands/outlets, purpose of use, context, and demographic characteristics of the individuals performing them. Accordingly, this kind of descriptive mapping is a valuable entry point to understand wider societal issues, such as how different people use news media as a democratic resource, entertaining diversion, socialization tool, and so forth.

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However, the precision of such descriptive mappings by individuals is complicated by the rapid emergence of social media as news distributors (Newman et al., 2018). Content produced by one outlet is no longer necessarily delivered via one of its own distribution channels, and similarly, the digital media ecology invites a reconsideration of assumptions about people using a fixed set of news outlets, being able to name them, and using them with a fairly constant frequency (Trilling, 2016). With the advent of social media and aggregators as news intermediaries, there is a tendency for news repertoires to become more volatile and unpredictable, because the news media encountered are often not individually chosen (consciously, routinely or habitually), but depend to some extent on the algorithms controlled by social media like Facebook and Twitter, which are activated by users' liking, sharing, and commenting interaction with elements in the news feed. This leads to a case where news stories are increasingly "unbundled", and often meet their users not as part of the curated content of a news producer, but as isolated stories accessed via aggregators and social media, where curation is "also undertaken by actors such as friends and social contacts, computer algorithms, and individual media users themselves" (Thorson & Wells, 2016: 310). In such a landscape, trying to classify where news stories/outlets actually originate from may make less analytic sense – from an emic perspective – than understanding how people perceive the interrelation of elements within their news repertoires, as well as the sociocultural origins behind their emergence.

When repertoires change – as they do, oftentimes seamlessly – it is typically due to the subjectively experienced "worthwhileness" of different alternatives, including media that may not declare themselves "journalism". How these outlets, brands, genres, platforms and devices form our "news diet", and why some potentially replace others, can thus be conceptualized in terms of:

- *spatiotemporal dynamics* – such as situational and individual scheduling fit;

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- *material factors* – from perceived affordances of technology to cost of consumption; and
- *social, political and cultural aspects* – such as peer group influence, ability to participate and connect to various publics in everyday life, and facilitation of democratic engagement (Schrøder & Kobbernagel, 2010).

Tentatively, we may say that a news repertoire changes when one or more of these considerations underlying the worthwhileness balance causes the repertoire to “recompose”. To go back to the exemplar raised in the introduction, recent qualitative (Swart, Peters & Broersma, 2018) and quantitative (Newman et al., 2018: 12) studies have shown that “dark” social media platforms are becoming increasingly popular to share and discuss news, with people finding they “offer more convenience, greater privacy, and less opportunity to be misunderstood.” In this way, new media alternatives sometimes act as replacements while other times they are complementary.

In recent years, such “newness” is typically envisioned in terms of the quite visible changes in the technological affordances of journalism, its cost, discursive and multimodal content, or participatory potential. However, a recomposition of a news repertoire could just as easily occur in relation to a situation where the news media landscape is perceived to be relatively constant, but something changes in the life circumstances (the communicative figurations) of the individual. Here we could think of entering such new life stages as moving away from home, joining a political or cultural movement, becoming a parent, and so forth. In this respect, the media manifold available for different generations at a given point across their lifespan surely plays a significant role in how news practices change in everyday life, although how this is taken up is, of course, not uniform. Simply put, one’s stage in the lifespan, individual differences, and the historical specificity of the media environment are co-constitutive factors that shape possibilities around the formation and maintenance of news repertoires. An individual’s

news repertoire should accordingly be understood as a meaningful constellation of interrelated sources of information and vehicles of interpersonal and public discussion over time. News media, in this sense, have dual significance: providing reference points for the passage of time as well as shaping individual experiences of time in everyday life (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

The interplay between different drivers recomposing the aggregate of news repertoires thus has significant implications for the entire information ecology, for the news industry, and for democratic processes. However, one aspect which repertoire-based approaches need to develop further is greater attention to the temporal processes underlying their (re)formation. News audience repertoires are not birthed fully-formed nor are they mysterious phenomena that emerge from the ether. As the remainder of this article demonstrates, understanding news repertoires demands explicit consideration of how they develop unevenly through different temporal processes and experiences that interact in the material, political, and sociocultural milieu.

The Intersecting Timescales of News Repertoires

Although time is an implied feature of much social research, time as a specific concern – and associated notions of speed, acceleration, time-space, and so forth – is often contingent to other considerations (Adam, 2004; Hassard, 2016). This has also been the case in journalism studies. A recent special issue of *Journalism* on “The Shifting Temporalities of Journalism” opened by arguing that “apart from recent work on journalism and memory, as well as ongoing discussions of speeded-up news cycles, an explicit focus on temporality has largely been missing from journalism studies” (Bødker & Sonnevend, 2018: 3). Similarly, in a forthcoming special issue on “Conceptualizing Change in Journalism Studies”, Carlson and Lewis (2018: 3) assert that despite fresh attention being directed to matters of journalism and time, a presentism bias still exists in studies of digital news, which demands more temporal reflexivity on the part of researchers around “the need for an analytical approach that balances change and stasis [and] the need to

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address issues of scale in which it is difficult to discern passing fads from deeper shifts that may lead to new institutional forms.” Zelizer (2018: 112), argues that “an underdeveloped picture of news temporality lingers in part because its lack of clarity has as much to do with the horizon of journalism scholars as with that of the news per se,” adding that oftentimes the focus “plays to a notion of speed that by and large overwhelms other aspects of temporality” (p. 113, see also Wajcman & Dodd, 2017). Such claims indicate that a lack of attention to time in journalism studies may soon be a thing of the past. However, the temporality of news audiences does not appear to be a key focal point of this scholarly disquiet.

In the aforementioned special issue, for instance, while nuanced considerations around events, immediacy, speed, representations of time, and many others were raised, only one article (Keightly and Downey, 2018) dealt with audiences directly. Similarly, recent time-focussed concepts gaining traction in journalism studies such as “slow journalism” (Le Masurier, 2015) or “time layers” (Neiger & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2016) are sophisticated attempts to rethink the production and content sides of news. For news audiences, however, attention to time is still largely tied to conventional orientations of past, present and future. Yet thinking about the development of news repertoires demands a more dynamic starting point around how temporality is conceived. This is admittedly challenging, as the social analysis of time includes everything from myths and stories around it, to mapping longitudinal change, theorizing the way time is experienced to give meaning to everyday life (be it disruptive, monotonous, or fleeting), and others (Adam, 2004). While capturing all possible conceptualizations in one research design is likely impossible, being sensitized to the richness of time helps encourage research into digital news audiences that moves beyond formulaic snapshots at a given moment.

Indeed, conceptualizing a more true-to-life picture of how repertoires (re)form over time – and the different meanings people attach to them – requires considering the interrelation of the

divergent and uneven temporal processes and experiences which influence them. Everything from which news media one's parents consumed when one was a child (Peters, 2012), to what political affiliation we take up (Garrett, 2009), which media outlets and platforms emerge over a lifetime (Westlund & Färdigh, 2015), what events capture our attention (Schudson, 1998), and many other temporally-contingent influences potentially shape the news repertoires one generally has and why. As Adam (1995: 5) notes, "Everyone, it seems, holds a very exclusive, personal meaning-cluster of time, a distinct but not fixed composition, one open to changes and linked to shifts in personal circumstances, emotional states, health, age and context." In terms of news audiences in particular, Keightly and Downey (2018: 100), conceptualize this as "the experiential arenas in which temporal meaning is produced at the juncture of times – embodied, social, cultural, historical, and technological," what they call "zones of intermediacy." Papacharissi (2015) notes that technologies bridge locations separated in time and space while simultaneously facilitating interaction, which affords audiences an affective ability to situate themselves and their biographies in fast-moving stories. Such relational, embedded and intersectional aspects of time are essential to understand the changing practices of news users and their significance. That being said, while such arguments are persuasive, the question remains: how to operationalize time in a way that allows research into the development of news audiences' repertoires to be pursued?

A simple starting point is thinking in terms of the different timescales that influence us as news users. Timescales, commonly understood, are the time it takes for different processes to occur. For news consumption, everything from the simple behaviour of opening a news app (a matter of seconds) to the development of the mass press (a period of centuries) are processes that potentially influence what causes people to become news consumers and how this changes over time. In beginning to adapt our thinking in such a manner, it is necessary to consider "the ways in which individuals in communities integrate activity and meaning-making across timescales from

the events of a minute to those of a day, from those of a day to those of a lifetime” (Lemke, 2002: 69). Just as all human interaction “plays out on multiple timescales, which makes it an ecologically complex phenomenon” (Uryu et al., 2014: 42), people’s interactions with the news and relation to journalism is similarly complicated. This is not to say that we need to consider *every* possible timescale that has an influence, or *all* possible experiences associated with time, but rather the timescales that *could* impact the (re)formation of a person’s repertoire – focusing in on those we deem most crucial to a given research inquiry. The ratiocination behind such a perspective is that news repertoires are not stable, but emergent. As Lemke (2000: 276), notes, “there is always also a higher-level process already in place, already running on its own longer timescale, and this sets the context that constrains what is likely and what is socially appropriate at the next.” The intersection of different timescales, however, need not be so strictly scalar.

A related approach is to consider the experiential dimension of interweaving temporalities, pivoting not on hierarchy but rather on how different timescales interrelate within different temporal ranges of analysis (see Figure 1). The wavelines in the figure illustrate the parallel non-synchronicity of technological, sociocultural, and individual timescales impacting how repertoires change, and adds a series of “temporal ranges” which focus on the stability, or conversely, precariousness of different combinations (see Uryu et al., 2014).² The basic human want for news, for example, is a fairly stable configuration encompassing timescales from the very slow (cultural metanarratives around news) to the very fast (involuntarily eye movements when glancing at headlines) in its practice. However, collective patterns of engagement and common repertoires are more uncertain, being driven not just by institutional processes of development (slower), but also being premised on how shifting emotional registers around news are experienced (faster timescale). As Uryu et al. (2014: 46) note, “when it comes to understanding the dynamics of timescales [...] the slow is an integral part of the fast.”

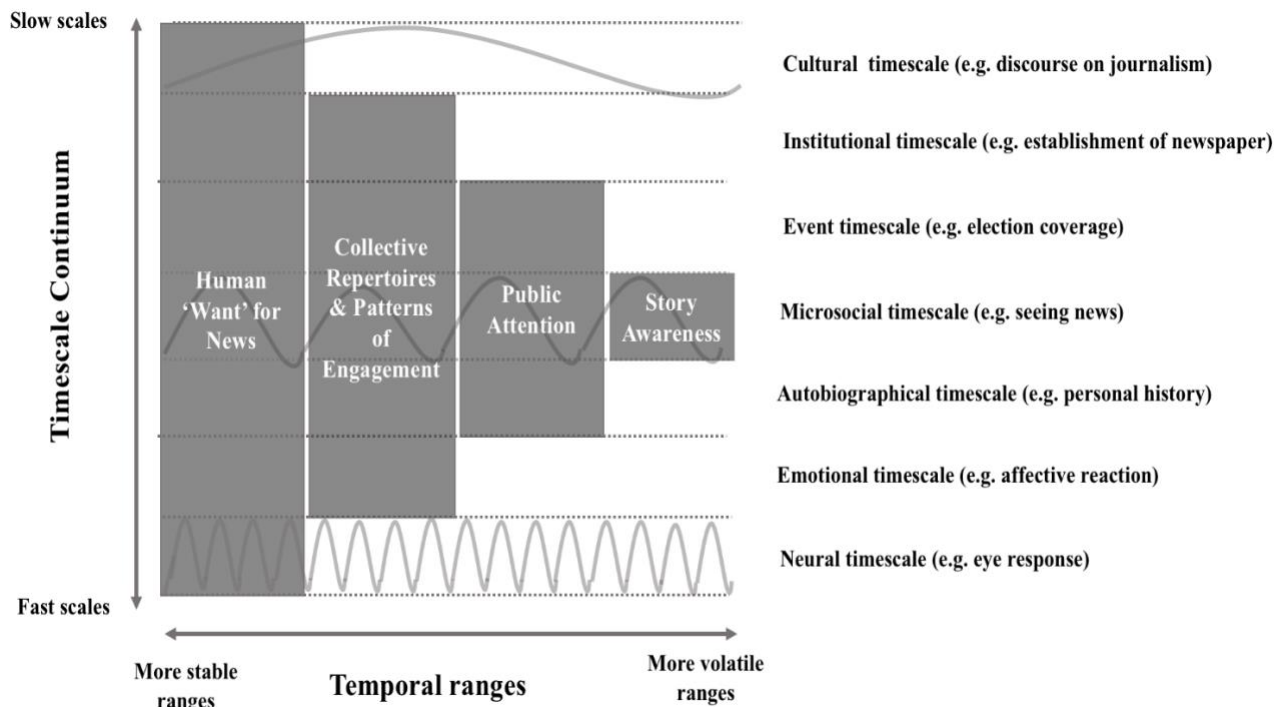


Figure 1. Heuristic model to understand timescales and news audiences (inspired by Uryu et al., 2014)

By identifying a comprehensive set of timescales, and considering their interrelation explicitly, we open up a nuanced and systematic approach to view the way temporal processes come together in the emergence of news repertoires. However, the seemingly infinite number of possible timescales one could consider as relevant raises the obvious question of how one moves from heuristic identification to actually determining in practice which timescales are relevant to a given research inquiry. One line of attack is to consider possible timescales through interrelated analytical prisms, such as social context, technology, and the individual, which can guide and stabilize the process of sifting through the sands of time (see Figure 2). Each prism in Figure 2 not only builds on established theoretical traditions and concepts in communication and media studies to understand media audiences, such as domestication theory, diffusion of innovations, uses and gratifications, media habits, and others, they also reflect a number of recent “turns” in social theory, such as the spatial, material, and sensory (see also Pink and Leder Mackey, 2013).

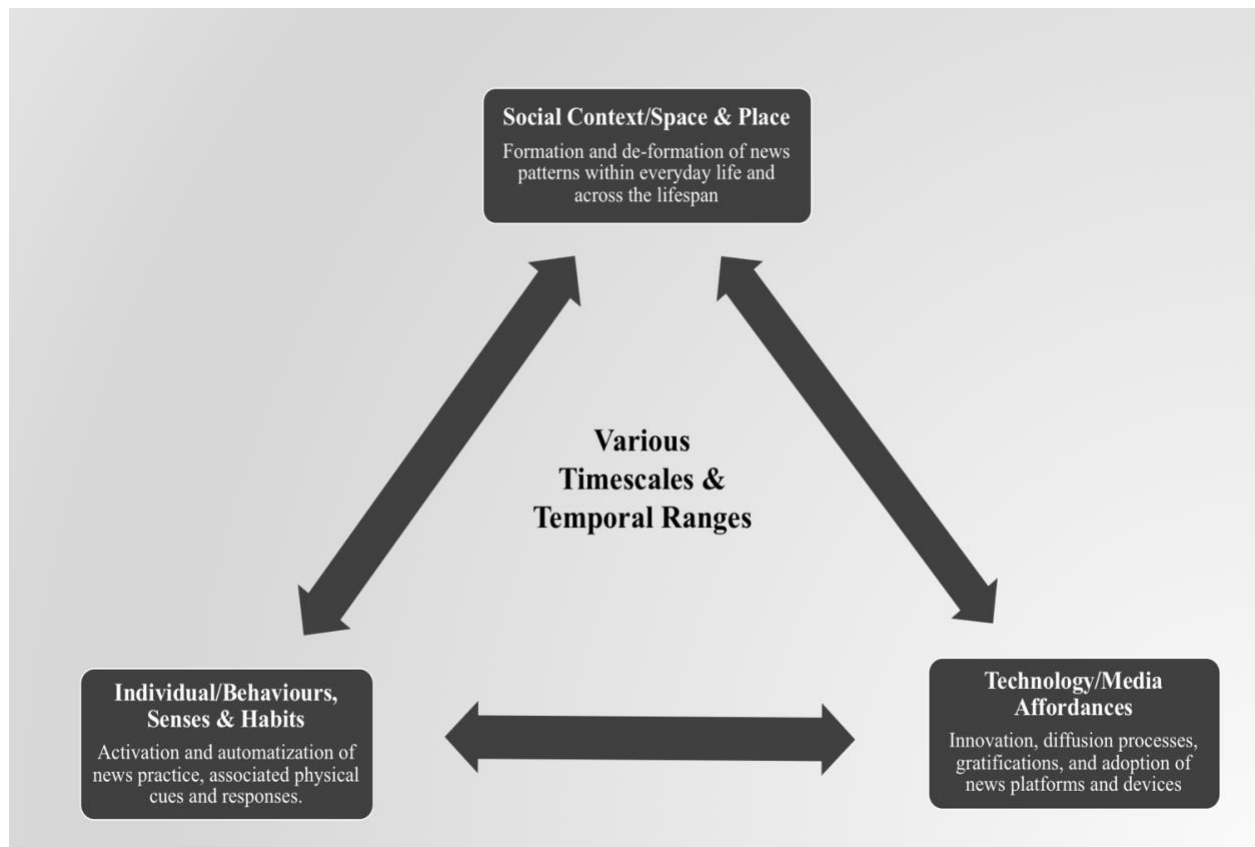


Figure 2. Analytical prisms to orient audience research and select relevant timescales

News Repertoires and Social Context

As research into media use has long informed us (e.g. Morley, 1986; Silverstone, 1994), contextual locations and social connections play a significant role in repertoire formation and emergence. Mediated public connection practices generally take place in social groups (Couldry et al., 2007), a tendency that continues to significantly shape the ways people connect through news in a digital era (Heikkilä and Ahva, 2015; McCollough, Crowell, & Napoli, 2017). Newer equivalents through which news circulates, such as social media platforms (Picone, 2016) or messaging apps (van Damme et al., 2015), may transform the spatial and communicative character which shaped previous interactions around news in group settings like the family (Jensen, 1990) or workplace (Boczkowski, 2010). Nonetheless, research seems to indicate that

learnt engagement with the news remains a profoundly socialized practice, albeit one that rarely lives up to the normative ideals of informed citizenship (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018).

In this regard, the different *spatiotemporal contexts* in which audiences enact different parts of their news repertoires are *layered, textured environments created by social histories, human interaction, and technological extension* in the broadest sense (Peters, 2015). Such an understanding of media use, which resonates with earlier studies on domestication theory, is premised on the active role of people in social groups negotiating the meaning, adoption, and integration of new technologies in practices of everyday life through the stages of appropriation, objectification, incorporation, and conversion (Silverstone, 1994). In today's mobile, "always-on" technologies, the vastly greater range of media available "brings potentially greater complexity in managing a repertoire of media, but also more scope for investigating decisions about when to use different technologies and services, and in what combinations" (Haddon, 2016: 17; also Hartmann, 2013). Madianou and Miller's (2013) concept of "polymedia", for instance, points to the centrality of emotions motivating interpersonal communication repertoires – when to text versus call, or Skype, email, etc. – as previous financial and situational limitations to choice of media are alleviated. Such a prism on social context, accordingly, encourages investigating when, where, why, and in association with whom new media forms are *chosen*, and how such choices affect the relational balance between the *combined components* of a repertoire.

This dual understanding is essential, as even when a new media technology has found its place within the repertoire of an individual or group, the process of negotiating its meaning and interrelations with other media is never complete. As people's cultural and social circumstances change, a media technology may go through a period of re-domestication, or even de-domestication where it disappears from the media repertoire (Bertel, 2016). For instance, Karlsen and Syvertsen's (2016) analysis of "reverse domestication", wherein media users become so

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concerned about the time-consuming, invasive, addictive role of certain media forms that they consciously try to remove them, addresses tension points around the interweaving social, spatial, and temporal experiences of media. Video games, social media, or in former times, excessive television viewing, are common examples where people try to reduce the habitual role of “harmful media” in their own, or their family’s, media repertoire. This may take the form of reducing the time spent on certain media, removing them from the household, or substituting more culturally-legitimate media for “trashy” media. In other words, while media repertoires are inherently emergent, emergence is not always additive or a like-for-like replacement.

In a similar vein, a limited number of news consumption studies have focused their analytical attention on understanding how some people become “news avoiders” or to some extent try to reduce their exposure to news, because they find that news tends to depress them, or make them angry, or because they see mainstream news media as biased and unreliable (Ksiazek, Malthouse & Webster, 2010; Strömbäck, 2017; Toff & Kleis Nielsen, 2018). Such inquiries, however, would benefit from further attention around the social contexts that influence repertoire reformation, allowing “for strategies of rejection and resistance”, when it comes to “how news users handle media complexity” (Karlsen & Syvertsen 2016: 37). Exploring such processes means drawing on a range of explanatory factors with a certain familial resemblance to the worthwhileness dimensions mentioned earlier: from financial circumstances, to spatial/situational constraints, technological affordances, temporal frameworks, and the role of peers in influencing choices (Haddon, 2016; Schröder & Kobbernagel, 2010). Such parallels indicate the contribution a broad process-oriented repertoire theory can make in the area of how we conceive of the motivations behind and embrace of novel news media in everyday life.

News Repertoires and Technology

When we consider the focal point of much research informing journalism studies over the past couple decades, it is often premised on trying to understand how digital technologies impact the production and circulation of news and, by association, how the awareness of these new devices and platforms may potentially be taken up by audiences (e.g. Pavlik, 2001; Singer et al., 2011, van Damme et al., 2015). Recent efforts to map such changes globally, on a yearly basis, have also increasingly looked to get behind changing use to elucidate declared rationales for taking up, or conversely abandoning, given media that form part of broader repertoires (e.g. Newman et al., 2018). Some researchers argue that self-report survey measurements are a problematic approach to map changing repertoire use, preferring the “hard data” of smartphone log data, internet clicks, and the like (Webster, 2014). While such debates centre on the accuracy of different usage-inspired methodologies, at their core they are all driven by the question of why does person X start doing/using Y, with media use acting as a starting point for such inquiries.

In this respect, while such research may not necessarily share its epistemological assumptions, a technological analytic prism often bears affinity to the uses and gratifications (U&G) model of media selection. In outlining the model’s continued relevance for the era of “new media”, Ruggiero (2000: 13) argues that “fully focusing on the social and cultural impacts of new communication technologies may be premature until we grasp more fully how and why people are making use of these media channels.” The point here is that the emphasis in U&G toward considering what people do with media (rather than what media does with them) provides a strong common platform for audience research that can be triangulated with other approaches (Schrøder, 1999). Such research tends to emphasize the *functional possibilities of communicative devices* and *people’s assessments thereof*, also putting one in mind of the analytical priorities of a diffusion of innovations (DOI) understanding of media, where the *phases of adoption* and

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communication channels underlying the decision to adopt new technologies are key (Rogers, 2003). Applied to media in particular, by considering: 1) the perceived economic, social, and contextual advantage of new innovations versus competing alternatives; 2) their compatibility with current social practices; 3) ease of use and adoption; and 4) penetration within the general population, such frameworks usefully inform research into the gradual integration of new media platforms and devices, replacement of old, and reconfiguration of repertoires in the broader set of possibilities dictated by changing digital landscapes (see Wejnert, 2002).

Accordingly, it's no surprise that the model has found favor amongst academics studying recent audience developments in journalism. Chan-Olmsted, Rim and Zerba (2013), for instance, combine DOI with a related technology acceptance model (TAM), finding that the factors most significantly affecting young adults' adoption of mobile news technology (perceived relative advantage, ease of use, and utility) were different than those influencing their usage level or willingness to pay for content (device cost and its multifunctionality). Wolf and Schnauber (2015), in a slightly different vein, adopt what they admit is the "rather technical" perspective associated with diffusion theory to investigate the role of mobiles in Germans' news use. Looking at technical potential in terms of "portability, always-on connectivity, and context sensitivity, and further their social appropriation" (p. 762), they found that the ubiquitous access to information and flexibility of place, time and situation of news consumption associated with mobile news were significant predictors of its incorporation into cross-media news repertoires. Conversely (perhaps attributable to the earlier endpoint of their data set), Westlund and Färdigh (2015) found Swedish audiences were typically single media users, with new platforms replacing the old. Looking to the "displacing and complementing" effects of different media amongst different age cohorts, they compared the development of news use over 27 years (from 1986-2012), finding cross-media use was a relatively new, limited phenomenon, mostly restricted to

younger cohorts. In this way, a technological prism often invites statistical modelling to consider changing repertoire patterns and their associated temporalities.

News Repertoires and the Individual

Finally, the idea of looking at how different timescales impact news repertoires at the level of the individual focuses upon the (often seemingly invisible) processes that are acquired, activated, sensed, habituated and automatized in the everyday. The idea of habit, as ingrained as it is in everyday speech, often takes on a common-sense understanding to convey a sense of repeated media use (habitual), or to explain its routinized character (it's a habit). However, what constitutes a habit and why they occur is complex (for a thorough overview, see LaRose, 2010). Having roots in the media effects tradition (Gentile & Walsh, 2002), oftentimes the aim of such studies is to link values, attitudes, motivations and psychological outcomes with the uses of media and then to model these (Turel & Serenko, 2012), which can prove challenging,

Recognizing that dual conscious and nonconscious processes determine media consumption behavior, it is likely that there is a habitual component in many repeated media behaviors. But also, no media consumption behavior is purely habitual because "executive control" may intervene at any time and the extent of influence exerted by habit depends on individual experiences and contexts (LaRose, 2010: 215).

In this regard, enquiries about how news repertoires are negotiated at the level of the individual are best approached not in a Boolean sense of what is or is not a repertoire but rather in terms of what experiential significance do routinized news media activities have, how does this develop, and what types of *change and instability in the media environment* and the *individual lifeworld have a destabilizing impact on formerly durable enactments*. This demands a precise terminology surrounding: which repeated activities become autonomous and non-conscious to facilitate cognitive effectivity; how such patterns deepen over time; what emotive aspects are fulfilled by

these behaviours, and to what extent we self-regulate such activities (Diddi & LaRose, 2006; LaRose, 2010). The significance of an analytic prism on the individual is to concentrate upon those *naturalized processes* that shape audiences' attitudinal disposition toward diverse media practices, their development, automated character, and relative degree of cognitive engagement.

In this respect, the individual factors behind news repertoire formation are already alluded to in news audience scholarship. Sometimes this is in response to direct engagement with the psychological literature on habits, as when Diddi and LaRose (2006) look to how increasing habit strength for “news junkies” gradually moves from actively “getting their fix” to an automated and unconscious process over time. Many will recognize parallels with the U&G literature in such claims, and LaRose and Eastin (2004) argue that gratifications are one of many possible outcomes from media use, which are continuously updated. While a somewhat crude distinction, it could be said that U&G approaches often study media use from the perspective of the discrete moment, whereas habit literature tends to emphasize automaticity over time. For instance, Taneja et al. (2012) use the habit construct to help explain how the availability of media in people's regular daily patterns relates to their cross-media repertoire formation across different locations.

Other times, seemingly parallel conversations occur where similar questions are addressed but in conversation with completely different literatures, for instance that around sensory experiences. Parisi et al.'s (2017: 1514) recent special issue on “Haptic Media Studies”, for example, tries to grapple with “the complex nexus of touch, technology, and media” and how the increasing prominence of touchscreens changes the experience and motivation to engage with technology. Such literature, often grounded in the media ethnographic tradition, tends to be “concerned with how media are situated as part of the routine, habitual, tacit, normally unspoken sensitivities of everyday life (...) This refers in part to how people use media content consciously to create [their] sensory and experiential environment” (Pink & Leder Mackey, 2013: 678). In a

slightly different vein, Dimmick et al. (2011), adapt the idea of the “niche” from the media ecology tradition to investigate the use and feelings of mobile news media in the down-times or “interstices” of everyday life. When Costera Meijer and Kormelink (2015) synthesize a decade’s worth of quantitative and qualitative data to outline the broadening practices and terminologies people use describe how they interact with the news, the interest in behavioural development is evident, although the differentiation between conscious and unconscious use is left implicit. While technology and its material affordances come to the fore during such discussions, the crucial influence of time on *attitude formation and habituation* often goes missing. Such an oversight parallels the approach of many methodological approaches to understanding news repertoires, where time is crucial, but is not expressly operationalized (cf. Adam, 2004).

Towards an Empirical Agenda for News Repertoire Research

Taking a cue from Lemke (2000:286), that “it is not easy to study lives over the timescales of decades and lifetimes”, it is similarly difficult to study the emergence and transformations of news repertoires over time. Accordingly, our empirical reflections start from three premises, which build on our heuristic model of timescales (Figure 1), and analytical prisms (Figure 2).

- 1) News repertoires transform as a consequence of (at least) three different kinds of change, which operate on *parallel but non-synchronous timescales*. First, repertoire transformations may result from successive stages across the lifespan, which are concurrently shaped by one’s *sociocultural environment* and its changing temporal, spatial and related conditions for childhood, adolescence, work life, family formation, middle age, and old age. Second, (although not in a chronological sense), media repertoires may change as a result of *new media technologies*, with novel affordances, appearing on the scene. Finally, repertoires may change as a result of transformations in *individual tastes, habits and interests*, from personal

and interpersonal origins. Changes observed through these prisms are “infinitely intermeshed and interpenetrating processes” (Uryu et al. 2014: 44).

- 2) As people rebuild their media repertoires, they are *fundamentally engaged in identity construction*. “In our paid employment, as in our family and our leisure life, we are often involved in the long-term project of maintaining and enhancing, and perhaps occasionally revising, who we are” (Lemke 2000: 286). In these identity-building processes, individual dispositions and tastes – such as the long and still very present history of citizens’ politicized news engagement (Nechushtai, 2018) – are adapted to communities of shared values. These processes have been extensively investigated by audience researchers, studying media use from generational (Bolin & Skogerbø, 2013), biographical (Höijer, 1998) and migratory/diasporic (Madianou & Miller, 2013) perspectives. However, they have not been widely studied from a news repertoire point of view. To do so is complex, needing to capture how the sociocultural, political, technological, and individual timescales impacting repertoire change are nested into each other and proceed at different speeds.
- 3) *Human sense-making* is the *determining principle-in-the-last-instance* of repertoire formation, and plays out through the interplay of choices based on preferences, habits and routines, and structural dynamics of media-derived strategies (Webster, in press). Media users are knowledgeable agents engaged in micro-level, purposeful behaviour; however, in a loop of reciprocal causation, macro-level forces also condition choice (Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017).

To understand their interrelations, our toolbox must implement mixed-method designs.

A processual research design that takes these premises up can follow two chronological perspectives, namely *diachronic* or *synchronic*, both of which can be implemented within or across any of the three premises, depending on the temporal emphases and processes determined most relevant (see Figure 3). In the former, the research process “shadows” the repertoire change

process, using a longitudinal, iterative design, which traces the formation of repertoires as they happen. This requires implementing the same research procedure with planned intervals (monthly, yearly, etc.), as the research objectives require (cf. three-wave study by Ekström et al., 2013). The latter, a synchronic research approach, takes place in a “present moment”, and can take two paths: a) a memory-based discursive archeology of media use, in which participants take a retrospective glance at their media repertoires at specific moments in the distant or near past (different life stage, previous homeland, etc. – see Höijer, 1998); or b) a simulation of the historical process by adopting a generational lens, where a comparison of repertoires of different age cohorts provides insights about influences and preferences shaping the media universe over time (Taneja et al., 2018). Surveys and interviews are typical methods employed in both chronological perspectives, but a number of others are appropriate and desirable, depending on the objectives at hand. In our operationalization of these premises (Figure 3), we have listed each method under only one premise, based on best fit, with the implied understanding that some methods (e.g. metered data, netnography) could productively illuminate multiple lines of inquiry.

Methodological Premise	<i>Temporal Emphasis</i>	<i>Typical Processes</i>	<i>Possible Methods</i>
1. Repertoire (trans)formation involves parallel but non-synchronous timescales	Lifespan; Everyday life (routines and disruptions)	Appearance of new technologies; Changes in life stage	Netnography; Q-sort; Media diaries
2. Repertoire (trans)formation relates to identity construction	Generational, Autobiographic, Migratory	Development of political beliefs; Socialization around news consumption	Metered “big data” tracking; Ethnography; Life histories
3. Repertoire (trans)formation supports human sense-making practices	Experiential; Representational	Monitorial awareness of public affairs; Habit development and routinization	Experiments; Participant observation; Think-aloud protocols

Figure 3. Researching repertoire transformation (surveys and interviews are applicable across all three premises)

Reducing these methodological formats, somewhat coarsely, to a question of qualitative versus quantitative, there is a need for qualitative insights as people describe their media lives and reflect on changing repertoires, and for such findings to be channeled into quantitative investigations into the repertoires of larger populations. Here we briefly describe three such approaches, articulated in a large project funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark:³

- 1) The online news repertoires of a small panel of individuals can be explored through *netnographic mobile tracking*. Following Thorhauge & Lomborg (2016), who collected two kinds of data from users' smartphones (automated, where software created a log file with relevant geo-locational data; and manual, where participants used smartphones to take photos and screen dumps of use), one can add an iterative component so that the repertoire building of the same people is analyzed multiple times per year, over successive years, and supplemented with interviews to contextualize in relation to offline "legacy" news media.
- 2) The offline and online news repertoires of a large panel can be studied with an *integrated qualitative/quantitative method* combining day-in-the-life narratives, Q-sorts and qualitative interviews, to enable a strong form of analytical generalization based on factor analysis. Such designs, when implemented in successive iterations over multiple years, enable repertoire comparison during longer periods of institutional disruption, revealing interesting tensions. For instance, in two studies spanning a five-year period, printed newspapers plummeted in readership, yet were still deemed crucial outlets by Danish audiences (Kobbernagel & Schrøder, 2016; Schrøder & Kobbernagel, 2010).
- 3) Online news diets, or habits, can be measured with large-scale *metered "big data"* drawn from a large representative panel (Taneja et al., 2018). Following the second type of

synchronic design outlined above, this approach allows the changing repertoires of multiple age cohorts to be compared in relation to geography, topical focus and partisan leaning.

Equipped with such complementary methods (to which one could add others), scholars can bring together diverse pieces for mosaics of insight into repertoire (trans)formation.

Conclusion – News Repertoires are Inherently Emergent

The digital tools adopted by news audiences over the past decade have fundamentally altered the ways different publics may develop a relationship with journalism and the forms that these take. As we have seen, faced with an abundance of choice, we are beginning to understand how people combine different media into comprehensive patterns of exposure, or repertoires. Yet there is a limited understanding of the reasons behind this and the long-term implications for journalism. This article has argued for a more comprehensive temporal approach, process-based set of analytical prisms, and a flexible methodological agenda to advance an integrated framework that moves a research agenda on news repertoires forward.

The move to a digital, social, and mobile news landscape presents a number of paradoxes, chief among them being that while some marshal technology to take advantage of a more diverse, networked, and participatory news landscape, these exact same tools lead others to filter bubbles, passivity, or full-scale avoidance (Nielsen, Cornia & Kalogeropoulos, 2016). Well-known conceptual approaches about journalism's potential role in facilitating a healthy public sphere (Habermas, 1991) have been reworked and updated in light of these digital civic cultures (Dahlgren, 2009), yet searching questions remain about how journalism can facilitate forms of "public connection" (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2007). As new architectures unshackle audiences from the constraints of mass media, cross-media news repertoires emerge and reconfigure. Coming to grips with these uneven, varied processes requires scholarship attuned to

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the contextual, technological, and individual balancing acts people perform with media in everyday life, as well as life course factors shaping such meaning-making processes.

Amongst the many possible terms to describe what people “do” with news – from terms used during the mass media era such as read, listen, watch, consume, receive, discuss, etc. to newer phrases that resonate in the digital age such as surf, scan, share, participate, prosume, and so forth – we would argue that the particular conceptual strength of repertoires is its encouragement of an expressly holistic, relational focus that allows for all these possibilities. It is a term that *creates space to consider diverse modes* of audience participation, distinct gratifications, and differentiated engagement. It is a term which at its core *formulates research inquiries dynamically* around the ways people develop and stabilize different temporal relationships with media devices, outlets, platforms, practices and experiences. And it is a term which *prefigures a social dimension* of shared approaches toward navigating the digital landscape. While the notion – as with all concepts – is not without limitations, it offers a lens to more clearly approach a number of research questions, which still prove vexing. When, where, and in what social circumstances do news repertoires form? What are these practices, why and under what broader cultural, institutional, and historical conditions do they change? What are the demographic factors underlying news adoption and change? What role does news play in relation to a profound moment of change in the life course? How do news organizations impact what audiences find meaningful over time?

In this respect, we would argue that attempting to capture the shifting nature of news audiences’ repertoires, by necessity, will demand designing multi-method research programs, where successive work packages or phases of the project build on each other to provide different perspectives, and complementary insights. Trying to paint a holistic picture of how news audiences’ repertoires (trans)form in the digital era no doubt requires comparing data on

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considerations such as: detailed patterning of everyday activities, generational differences, cultural practices, life course factors, and affective features of news use, which will require larger collaborative projects than is often the norm in journalism studies. The sociopolitical implications of these expectations, experiences, and practices related to news must then be further situated in material (technological) and economic (financial) contexts if we want to offer robust findings that can be of use to news organizations in an era where capturing and retaining audiences continues to befuddle many in the industry.

We would offer a caveat that beginning to build such conceptual and methodological bridges more robustly demands a willingness to open oneself to critiques that one is playing in others' disciplinary sandboxes, often in ways that were perhaps unintended by their designers. For instance, a practice-based approach to media tends to view technologies and content formats being taken up within social contexts, whereas a design-inspired lens may focus on individual users' negotiations about the benefits of ICTs. Similarly, an everyday life perspective from a media sociological point of view tends to view media use in terms of rituals and meanings whereas psychologically-inspired studies into daily living focus on individualistic attitudes and behaviours. In this respect, the double-sided arrows linking the analytical prisms we propose in this article signal more than just interrelations – they are a plea for openness. In an age where academic publishing becomes ever-more specialized (despite calls for interdisciplinarity), the challenge in trying to bridge and balance traditions is being sympathetic enough to their aims and approaches to be faithful to them, without slavishly adopting all precepts to a degree that conversation with other epistemological outlooks is closed off. The specificity of individual research inquiries dictates which prisms and concepts come to the fore – but this should not foreclose intellectual curiosity in alternative approaches to “capture” the digital audience. In this regard, this article has undertaken a “working through” of different ways to bring temporal

specificity to the conceptual and methodological work on news repertoires, to better account for the social and material factors that drive audiences' processes of change, which are increasingly complicated to discern in a fragmented, digital era.

Notes

1. The focus in this article is on the idea of news repertoires, which should not be confused with the idea of interpretive repertoires in discourse analysis (e.g. Wetherell & Potter, 1988).
2. While both Lemke (2002) and Uryu et al.'s (2014) models offer useful starting points for building a heuristic to understand timescales in relation to news audiences, the level of abstraction in their models (scales ranging from near-instantaneous sub-atomic shifts to the existence of the universe) seems to deviate excessively from their object of study. Given the operationalizable aims of this article, we have departed quite sharply from this approach.
3. "Beyond the Here and Now of News", Danmarks Frie Forskningsfond (grant # 8018-00061B)

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