

DDF Project Description · DFF-projektbeskrivelse

Beyond the Here and Now of News

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1. Purpose

Journalism is often proclaimed to be the ‘lifeblood of democracy’. Extending the metaphor, the past decade has witnessed the appearance of a number of worrisome symptoms – from ongoing financial distress in the news industry (Bell, 2016; Kaye and Quinn, 2010), to decreasing public trust (EBU, 2016; Peters and Broersma, 2013) and the growth of ‘fake news’ and ‘post-truth’ politics (Benton, 2016; Tanz, 2017), to name a few – indicative of an ‘unhealthy’ news media that puts society at risk. The relationship between journalism and the public it aims to serve is evidently transforming, leading to widespread debate about its ‘crisis’ or even ‘collapse’ (see *Javnost*, 2015; McChesney and Pickard, 2011; Zelizer, 2015). In such a rapidly-changing media environment, with such high stakes, it is essential to understand the formative conditions behind news use. ***This project aims to heighten our knowledge of the significance of news for contemporary audiences by investigating its social and spatiotemporal integration within the flow of everyday life and across the lifespan.***

Given the sheer scope of change over the past decade, research in journalism studies tends to focus on how journalism is adapting. When audiences are considered, it is typically in terms of: patterns of consumption (e.g. Newman et al., 2017), mobile/social news use (Bruns, 2017; Westlund, 2015;), demographics (Lee, 2013), and assessment of outlets (Urban and Schweiger, 2014). In simplified terms, the tendency is: looking at what is watched/read/listened to; by whom; how often and for how long; on what outlet/platform; and people’s valuation of these experiences. While useful interventions that share a desire to capture how news use is changing in a digital era, such research centres on the here and now. Knowledge of the processes underlying these choices is mostly absent. ***This project argues that in order to understand what makes news (continue to) matter to citizens, innovative research is needed that takes its conceptual and empirical point of departure from the emergence, maintenance, and (re)formation of people’s news repertoires.***

The digital tools bequeathed to news audiences over the past decade have fundamentally altered the ways different publics may develop a relationship with journalism and the forms these take. Faced with an abundance of choice, we are only starting to understand how people combine different media into comprehensive patterns of exposure, or repertoires (Hasebrink and Hepp, 2017; van Damme et al., 2015). Moreover, there is a limited understanding of the reasons behind this and the effects. In this respect, the ***broader, interrelated research questions*** which drive this project are:

1. When, where, and in what social circumstances do news repertoires form?
2. What are these repertoire practices, why and under what conditions do they change?
3. How do the actions of news organizations impact what audiences find meaningful over time?

2. Theoretical Foundations

Asking how people form news repertoires may sound straightforward, but the beguilingly simple nature of this query belies its significance. Without audiences, the historical purposes of journalism – acting as an information source, watchdog, intermediary between people and governments – are fairly meaningless (Peters and Witschge, 2015). The move to a digital, social, and mobile news landscape has presented a paradox in this regard: while some audiences have marshalled such tools to take advantage of a more diverse, networked, and participatory news landscape, the use of these exact same tools by others has led to filter bubbles, passivity, or full-scale avoidance (Nielsen et al., 2016). Well-known conceptual approaches about journalism’s role in facilitating a healthy public sphere (Habermas, 1991) have been reworked in light of digital civic cultures (Dahlgren, 2009), yet searching questions remain about how journalism can facilitate forms of ‘public connection’ (Couldry et. al, 2007). Similarly, established theories that depart from the user’s perspective on the domestication of technologies (Silverstone and Haddon, 1996) have been challenged in terms of their adaptability from household to mobile media contexts (Hartmann, 2013). Coming to grips with these more uneven, varied processes requires scholarship attuned to the contextual balancing acts people perform with media (Helles, 2016), and the everyday life (Bird, 2003) and life course (Riley, 1987) factors shaping meaning-making processes in different ‘communicative figurations’ (Hepp, 2013). **A key contribution of this project is to revisit and, based on its research, update such established conceptual frameworks to grasp the ongoing relevance of news in everyday life.**

2.1 The Changing Contexts of News Audiences

In recent years, an ‘audience turn’ has emerged in journalism studies (see Bird, 2011; Costera Meijer, 2016; Loosen and Schmidt, 2012), focusing on changing activities, patterns and experiences of use. Notwithstanding this, research still largely ignores how sociality and different time-spaces shape people’s repertoires (exceptions include: *Journalism Studies*, 2015; Picone et al., 2015; Wolf and Schnauber, 2015), despite key works illustrating their influences on audiences’ formative experiences (e.g. Silverstone, 1994; Morley, 1986). The emergence and modification of different spatiotemporal practices of news consumption potentially change what news use *is* (Sheller, 2015), in terms of its social and emotional resonance in a rapidly-changing, polymedia landscape (Madianou and Miller, 2013; Papacharissi, 2015; Peters, 2011; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). Actions that were once habitual, automatized forms of media consumption formed by repeat behaviour, tend to transform in unstable contexts (LaRose, 2010). Accordingly, a rich understanding of these experiences, and how and why these change, demands considering the **relationship between the spatiotemporal contexts, material affordances, and emotions of news consumption**. Otherwise, we risk ignoring much of what grounds the financial viability and democratic remit of journalism.

2.2 The Democratic Role of Journalism

The roles attributed to journalism in most Western democracies are exceedingly familiar, typically holding in common, at least in principle, that the public needs journalism even if it doesn't always actively engage with it (Schudson, 2008; Strömbäck 2005). However, the relationship is a double hermeneutic (Giddens, 1987) in that audiences engage with journalism, as well as discourses of its *raison d'être*, and thus change it as an object. Accordingly, as people shift their relationship with news, established democratic functions may appear to destabilize (Broersma and Peters, 2017). Longstanding worries over tabloidization (Sparks, 2000), or recent concerns about fake news (Wardle, 2016), for instance, both speak to fears over the consequences if citizens are uninterested or unable to distinguish quality news. While the idea that journalism is under threat is not unique to the digital era (Alexander et al, 2016), there are some key changes from the audience's perspective in terms of: journalism's role as an information source in an 'infoglut' of alternatives (Andrejevic, 2013); its watchdog status in an era of whistleblowers (Brevini et al., 2015); and representative function for communicating politics and forming 'publics' (Dahlgren, 2013). Increasingly a 'participation' paradigm emphasizing personal choice (Livingstone, 2013), rather than a 'mass communication' paradigm emphasizing public service, is applied when discussing journalism's role for audiences. Such a fundamental repositioning begs the question: **what are the democratic implications if what was once deemed an institution geared to the civic collective begins to speak to and envisage its audiences primarily as individuals?** Empirical research is needed to assess journalism's (ongoing) function in democracies through the eyes of the audience.

3. Research Design and Methodology

The design of the research program is purposefully multi-methodological, so that each work package (3.2a-d) builds on its predecessor to provide different perspectives, but complementary insights, into how audiences develop and evaluate news repertoires (on the importance of such an approach, see Hill, 2013; Jensen, 2013; Schröder, 2016). The project team, composed of 5 main members (PI, CI, PhD 1, PhD 2, RA), work collectively across these sub-projects to share knowledge and data sets. They meet regularly with an expert advisory group that provides critical engagement and comparisons (see 4.2, 4.4). The two, empirically-driven PhD projects – **Project I: 'Developing News Repertoires in Everyday Life'** & **Project II: 'News Habits across The Lifespan'** – triangulate data sets to provide detailed patterning of everyday activities, generational differences, cultural practices, and affective features of news use. These inform the development, by the PI and CI, of a processual theory of news repertoires, situating these spatiotemporal practices in material (technological), economic (financial), and cultural (sense-making) contexts to elaborate on the sociopolitical implications of how people engage with journalism historically, and going forth.

3.1 Scope and sampling

Given the depth of the research proposed, the original empirical collection limits itself to the Danish context. However, where relevant, we will include international cases and parallel projects to add a comparative angle (e.g. the CI's upcoming fieldwork project 'Between normative and lifeworld understandings of news' at Reuters Institute, see also **3.2a, 3.2d, Enclosures**). It is important to note that with so many possibilities for audiences to get news, an exhaustive accounting of these is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, the design rationale is to understand general tendencies on repertoires and their transformation through work package **3.2a**, augment this with rich understandings of key practices beyond the here and now of news consumption (**3.2b, 3.2c**), and bridge these findings within journalistic practice through **3.2d**. Our previous work on large research projects (e.g. PI's work on the 'New News Consumer') indicates the most suitable and flexible approach in this regard is an iterative sampling process, where strategies are determined on the basis of: 1) information from key actors within the network; 2) main findings from successive work packages; and 3) transformations in the media environment over the project duration (see **3.3, 4.2**).

3.2a Changing news repertoires (ALL – 16 months + replication of Q sort (3 months) in Year 3)

- **Methodologies:** Background research; Literature review; Q sort + think aloud & interviews
- **Objective:** To map out Danish news repertoires and situate these within the literature.

An RA will be hired 4 months before the PhD start date (see **3.3**) to prepare a research report on news use in Denmark. This acts as a catalyst for the PhD literature reviews, which add theoretical frameworks and international comparisons. In Years 1 and 3, a replicating Q sort study will find patterns in Danes' assessments of journalistic options. In this method, participants rank items (i.e. different news media) according to a subjective dimension (e.g. relative importance), while thinking aloud. These sortings are analysed through quantitative factor analysis, then evaluated alongside transcriptions of the think-aloud protocols and semi-structured interviews to identify shared orientations (Davis and Michelle, 2011). This aspect of the work package updates Schröder and Kobbarnagel's (2010; 2016) studies of Danish news repertoires in 2009/2014, providing a crucial snapshot at the start of the project and longitudinal data on changing values and configurations.

3.2b – Forming news repertoires in everyday life (PhD 1, PI/CI – 12 months)

- **Methodologies:** Fast-response media diaries, log data and follow up interviews
- **Objective:** To investigate short-term reasons underlying changing news repertoires.

This sub-project generates data about changes in news use, issue awareness, and interest within the context of daily life. The possibilities for encountering and using different configurations of media have become more diverse with the rise of technology, which means that how we use such devices

has become more of a contextual, socially-contingent balancing act. In light of this, this work package relies on the ubiquity of the smartphone within the Danish landscape to conduct a series of fast-response, mobile media diaries (see Ohme et al., 2016). At regular intervals participants will provide short responses (a form of ‘experience sampling’ enhanced by spatiotemporal log data, see Sonck and Fernee, 2013) on the type of news they’ve recently engaged with, its resonance, and platform. These responses act as a starting point for follow-up interviews, treating the data as social artefacts dependent on the context of use and norms framing them (Thorhauge and Lomborg, 2016).

3.2c – Changing news habits across the lifespan (PhD 2, CI/PI – 12 months)

- **Methodologies:** Collaborative autobiography (visual and narrative); longitudinal surveys
- **Objective:** To investigate the development of news repertoires across generations and time.

This work package takes a long-term perspective, investigating news repertoires in terms of how the historical development of the media landscape, alongside generational and life-course factors, shapes engagement with (news) media technologies. Such an approach reveals how time and place shape these experiences, as well as the shifting influence of key factors such as gender, age, socio-economic circumstances, and societal expectations (Bolin, 2017). A combination of narrative histories (Brennen, 2013), and photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002), will be employed with follow up interviews. Taken collectively, such collaborative autobiographies (Lapadat, 2009) reveal feelings and memories about the ongoing, shared development of news. This is evaluated alongside longitudinal, quantitative data on media use across age cohorts and generations (**3.2a**)

3.2d – The news industry’s future audiences (PI/CI, PhD1/PhD 2 – 6 months)

- **Methodologies:** Targeted organizational ethnography
- **Objective:** To explore organizational strategies of audience generation and maintenance.

While work packages 3.2a-c look directly to audiences, this package situates this knowledge against the practices of the industry. Newsroom ethnographies typically focus on journalists and editors (Domingo and Patterson, 2011; Robinson and Metzler, 2016), but little attention is paid to news industry researchers and research departments. This oversight means we lack an understanding of the role this crucial group plays in enacting strategies around news audiences, and shaping journalistic understanding of them. Building on what is learned through stakeholder meetings (see **4.2**), the PhDs will observe and interview researchers and editors in leading broadcast, print, and online organizations (see **4.4**), to evaluate how audience research shapes journalistic practice and policies. This package helps reveal newsroom cultures and the political-economic structures shaping the field (Willig, 2013). Such findings help facilitate industry dialogue and public consultations that can gradually contest paradigmatic journalism mindsets (Anderson, 2013).

3.3 Research timetable and task distribution (staff with primary responsibility listed first)

Activity	Staff	Month	1	7	13	19	25	31	37	43
1. Project Design										
a. Industry background	RA, PI/CI		■							
b. Literature review	PhD1/PhD2, PI/CI			■	■					
c. Diary; Autobiographic	PhD1/PhD2, PI/CI				■					
d. Ethnography	PhD1/PhD2, PI/CI						■			
2. Data Collection/Analysis										
a. Q sort	CI/PI, PhD1/PhD2			■				■		
b. Diaries & follow up	PhD1, PI/CI					■	■			
c. Autobiographies & follow up	PhD2, CI/PI					■	■			
d. Organizational ethnography	PhD1/PhD2, PI/CI							■		
3. Writing/Dissemination										
a. Journal articles	PhD1/PhD2, PI/CI				■		■	■	■	
b. Special Journal issue & Edited book	PI/CI, PhD1/PhD2							■	■	■
c. Article-based dissertation	PhD1/PhD2							■	■	
d. Stakeholder & public reports	All			■		■		■		■
e. Monograph	PI/CI								■	■

3.4 Deliverables

Conference papers: Participants will each present at 1 international conference per year.

Journal articles: 8 in total – 4 (2 x 2) co-authored by PhD1/2 & PI/CI; 4 co-authored by PI/CI.

Special issue in Journal + Edited book: Arising from international conference. 2 papers by PhD1/PhD2; 2 by PI/CI; remaining from international experts (**see 4.2, CV for previous experience**)

Monograph: A theoretical and empirical synthesis of the project by the PI/CI.

Article-based dissertation: 2 PhD dissertations, adapting the journal articles/book chapters.

Public report: Consolidating and building from executive summaries for stakeholder meetings (**4.2**)

4. Knowledge Utilization

For journalism to harness digital media, innovate, and remain robust, detailed knowledge of audiences' formative processes is paramount. In response, this project offers innovative insights:

- **Academically** – Despite a recent 'audience turn' in journalism studies (Heikkilä and Ahva, 2015; Costera Meijer and Kormelink, 2016), the social, emotional and spatiotemporal processes leading people to seek out or change digital news use remain under-theorized (Peters, 2016).
- **Civically** – Although there is no doubt news continues to resonate amongst citizens desiring avenues for public connection (Couldry et al., 2007), more work is needed to unpack the relation of this within the rhythms of everyday life (Lefebvre, 2004), and across the perceived political potentiality of media (Banaji and Buckingham, 2013; Cammaerts et al., 2016).
- **Journalistically** – Repeated attempts to reinvigorate audience engagement (Batsell, 2015), or create constructive news (Haagerup, 2014) have had mixed success. Improved understanding of

the relation between audiences, technology, and business models is needed to protect journalism's public mandate and economic stability (Picard, 2014; Lewis and Westlund, 2015).

4.1 Relevance and target groups

The project places Denmark at the core of future efforts to research emerging audience practices in an era of digital journalism. Its findings stand to benefit a number of related stakeholders, including:

- News organisations: By generating findings that translate into economic models (for private sector), and which can be exploited to provide legitimisation (for public sector media).
- Politicians/NGOs/Advocacy Groups: By raising awareness about the shifting significance of journalism for fostering awareness, attendance, and actions surrounding public affairs.

4.2 Activities and project visibility

Beyond deliverables (3.4), the project will disseminate its findings and generate awareness through:

- Stakeholder meeting series 'Building a Relationship with News', twice per year, across project.
- International research visits for PhDs in Years 2-3 (see **Enclosures**) and PI & CI over duration.
- International academic conference, Year 4, leading to ERC application upon project completion.
- A project website will be created to communicate key information to the broader public.

4.3 International network

The PI and CI's networks will help ensure international recognition: they sit on the editorial boards of leading journals (e.g. *Journalism*, *Journalism Studies*, *Digital Journalism*); have active connections with leading international research centres for journalism research through collaborations or visiting appointments (e.g. Oxford Reuters Institute; LSE; Cardiff; Groningen); edit and publish widely in the field; and are prominent in international associations and networks (e.g. International Communication Association, EU COST Action). (please see **Enclosures & CVs**)

4.3 Advisory board: International advisors (*Int*); Scandinavian (*Scan*), Industry (*Ind*)

Laura Ahva (Senior Fellow, Tampere, *Scan*); **Stuart Allan** (Professor & Head of School, Cardiff, *Int*); **Marcel Broersma** (Professor & Head of Department, Groningen, *Int*); **Dennis Christensen** (Head of Audience Research, Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), *Ind*); **Ulrik Haagerup** (CEO, Constructive Institute, *Ind*); **Lea Korsgaard** (Editor-in-chief, Zetland, *Ind*); **Bent Steeg Larsen** (Director of Research, Politiken, *Ind*); **Stine Lomborg** (Associate Professor, Copenhagen, *Scan*); **Mette Mortensen** (Associate Professor, Copenhagen, *Scan*); **Zizi Papacharissi** (Professor & Head of Department, Illinois, *Int*); **Steen Steensen** (Professor & Head of Department, Oslo/Akershus, *Scan*); **Karin Wahl-Jorgensen** (Professor & Director of Research, Cardiff, *Int*)

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