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The Democratic Significance of Everyday News Use: Using Diaries to Understand Public Connection over Time and beyond Journalism

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that journalism scholars should strive to understand the democratic significance of everyday news use, and that such an interest requires us to tackle some methodological and conceptual challenges. We utilize the concept of public connection as a starting point for prioritizing aspects of everyday news use that are most relevant to democracy. Based on a review of existing methods—surveys, interviews and digital trace data—we propose an approach that facilitates analysis beyond the moment, and beyond single platforms or providers, and which situates journalism and news as part of intricate media experiences in everyday life. Our approach centres on media diaries to achieve these aims, and we illustrate its relevance for public connection research with a case from Norway.

Introduction

Why does news matter, and why should researchers study everyday news use? These questions are central to journalism studies, audience research and political communication. One way to answer them is by underlining the societal significance of news. In democratic societies, this societal significance hinges on the role of news in fostering connections between the sphere of politics and the lives of citizens, thereby providing foundations for citizen engagement. News use is considered important to how citizens vote in elections or mobilize on political issues (Elvestad and Phillips 2018), but it is also ingrained in people's everyday routines and experiences (Schrøder 2015; Swart et al. 2017). Rising political populism and polarization, and destabilization of established political patterns and behaviours, accentuate the need to understand citizens' everyday societal orientations through news use.

Understanding everyday experiences with news is, however, a methodological and conceptual challenge. This challenge is not new (Hagen 1994; Bird 2013), but defining everyday news use as a research topic has recently become even more complicated.

Digital transformations have severed the link between ad-funding and news provision, led to a 24/7 news cycle, and increased fragmentation of audiences across and beyond established news actors and digital platforms. Journalistic news content is thoroughly mixed into the media feed people encounter, which again is embedded in a variety of everyday practices. With the variation, complexity, and difference in patterns and meanings of everyday news use in digital society, it is difficult for researchers to gain an overview, let alone a deeper understanding, of this phenomenon.

To develop further research on everyday news use it is therefore essential to prioritize approaches that can make sense of the societal significance of news—to develop new concepts and methodologies that strengthen our understanding of why news matters. This article asks how the audience turn in journalism research (e.g., Costera Meijer 2019) can develop a stronger agenda for researching the democratic significance of everyday digital news use. As an answer, we develop and demonstrate an integrated conceptual and methodological approach to how this can be achieved.

We argue that the democratic significance of everyday news use calls for investigation beyond the moment, and beyond single platforms or providers. Scrutinizing here-and-now experiences with using a specific media technology (e.g., the smartphone), or with isolated online services (e.g., Facebook), captures aspects of contemporary news use that are prominent and widespread—but not the most relevant to understand what news use means for democracy. Instead, it is necessary to ask how people in their everyday lives use news to connect to public issues that they find meaningful beyond the moment, and to develop methodological and theoretical approaches to understand how people engage with news—or not—in the mundane enactments of their roles as citizens.

In the article we discuss key challenges that audience-centred journalism research faces in understanding the complexities of digital news use. On that basis, we highlight "public connection" (Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham 2010), re-vamped to cater for datafied cross-media user practices, as a concept suited to prioritize democratic significance. Next, we conduct a critical review of key methodological approaches with a systematization of different qualitative and computer-assisted digital trace data options. As this discussion underlines the need to investigate citizens' public orientation over time and beyond journalism, we propose an approach suited to capture temporality as well as integration in everyday lives: A three-pronged qualitative methodological approach centred on media diaries, supported by interviews, and a re-thought framework of public connection. The paper illustrates the proposed approach with a case from Norway. We argue that our contribution highlights the need for journalism research to venture beyond mainstream news outputs to grasp how audiences engage with news as mixed with, and relative to, other aspects of public connection. This implies to critically revisit understandings of "news" as distinct from other forms of media content, and to study news use as ingrained in other everyday practices.

Complexity in Everyday News Use and the Need to Prioritize Democratic Significance

The epitome of everyday news use in the datafied communicative landscape is a person on-the-go, quickly scrolling on the smartphone. Maybe she will click on an article from the online version of a legacy newspaper appearing in an algorithmically curated social media newsfeed, follow a link shared by a friend in a messaging thread, or be tempted by an incoming push alert with a captivating headline. Or maybe she will keep scrolling through a checking cycle (Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink 2015; Ytre-Arne et al. 2020) that bridges personal communication and management of daily activities with exposure to the kind of information typically defined as "news." Such use can appear more or less incidental, but with different groups being more attractive to news exposure, as produced by a wide set of actors including news organizations, advertisers, and algorithms (Thorson 2020; Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi 2018). Checking the phone, swiping and maybe clicking occurs repeatedly throughout the day, in a range of situations and spaces, entwined with a variety of activities, as mundane media use (Sandvik et al. 2016). And while the smartphone is the preferred platform for news in many countries (Newman et al. 2019), it is still used in combination with other old and new media as part of cross-media practices (Schrøder 2011) through which users encounter news in the everyday.

The image we have described represents the fragmentation, contextual integration and multilayerdness of everyday news use. Facing such an image, anyone risks getting lost figuring out details, rather than prioritizing aspects of the phenomenon that are most essential to answer key questions. We argue that scholars contributing to the audience turn in journalism should be aware of this risk, and respond by prioritizing a democratic perspective. A point of view building on the fundamental question of why news matters in democracy, provides one way of defining which aspects of the complexity of everyday news use to study. There are alternatives, such as privileging the most novel aspects of early adopters' practices, or to focus on how providers of journalism could hang on to audiences. However, we consider that a democratic perspective refers to fundamental rationales for studying everyday news use, and also holds urgent relevance to ongoing debates on polarization, misinformation or disengagement in the datafied media landscape.

Journalism scholars have argued for the need to rethink or even retire the relationship between democracy and journalism (Zelizer 2013; Peters and Broersma 2016), but our primary concern here is not whether a democratic perspective is useful to understand journalism. Instead, we consider news use as a phenomenon rooted in people's everyday lives and in society, and ask how we can develop a user-focused perspective to capture everyday experiences with news in a societal context, by conceptualizing users as citizens. This perspective implies leaving behind grand visions of journalism's ideal mission, in favour of a realistic, empirically grounded critical discussion aimed to carve out a robust and feasible role for journalistic news (Nielsen 2017; Moe 2020). Democracy is not the only thing that makes news significant for users, and news is not the only thing citizens need to maintain their roles in a democracy. Our interest lies in figuring out how news use matters for democracy.

In the following, we will develop and demonstrate an integrated conceptual and methodological approach for doing so. To outline which aspects of everyday news use that a democratic perspective mandates us to highlight, in a context where citizen ideals building on already unrealistic expectations are further challenged by digital transformations (Ytre-Arne and Moe 2018), we need a concept that bridges news use in the everyday in digital societies with a realistic democratic perspective. Otherwise different models of democracy share ideas of news use as central to foster political knowledge amongst citizens, while differing in assessments of how much political knowledge (and by extension news use) is needed, desirable and realistic. However, to answer the question of *how* news use presumably fosters political knowledge, or fulfils other aspects of citizens' democratic roles, the concept of "public connection" (Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham 2010) is a useful starting point.

The normative expectations of the public connection concept are that citizens should, in order for democracy to function, pay some degree of attention to a public world and to matters of common concern, but there are many possible routes to doing so (Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham 2010; Kaun 2012; Nærland 2019). The question of what it really means to pay attention (or not) to issues of common concern is key (Ørmen 2016), and fruitfully explored in an everyday user-centric perspective (Swart et al. 2017; Hartley and Pedersen 2019) and as changing over time (Peters and Schrøder 2018). The question, then, is how we best can approach the complex phenomenon of everyday news use to grasp its role for public connection.

Review of Approaches: Surveys, Interviews, and Digital Trace Data

Several research traditions in journalism studies attempt to map and make sense of the complexity of news use. It seems reasonable to distinguish three main approaches, linked to different methodologies: Survey analyses, interview analyses, and digital trace data analyses. We will in turn discuss which aspects of everyday news use these approaches capture, and how relevant these aspects are in a democratic perspective focussed on citizens' public connection.

Survey Analyses

Surveys of respondents' attitudes to, and recollection of practices with, news remain a staple of research in this field. Different data from different markets abound, but a key resource for the last years is the comparative Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al. 2019). Well-known limitations and biases of survey research in general aside (Hovden and Moe 2018), for systematic identification of patterns and correlations across societies and over time, survey analyses are hard to beat.

In such surveys, news use is typically sought measured through questions about frequency or time spent (e.g., Thurman and Fletcher 2019). With the current always-on push-message-based everyday lives of media users, the former seems less fruitful to pursue: it appears increasingly difficult to use number of encounters with news when it is potentially spread across platforms and publications. The latter, time spent, while resonating better with user practices, also has its downsides. As Groot Kormelink and

Costera Meijer (2020) argue, the time you spend on something does not equal inter-est, attention or engagement. Furthermore, how experienced you are will impact on the time needed for a task (like news browsing), and different tools or equipment (or platforms, devices and genres) also matters, they facilitate different "temporal experi-ences with news" (Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer 2020, 271).

Another way to measure people's relations to news is by asking for interest (Newman et al. 2019). Again, this is a useful variable to relate to different aspects of news use (e.g., choice of news providers, or socio-economic variables), but less helpful for grasping citizens' public connection: there are many ways to connect to the public, and many topics to focus attention on, and collapsing these together as a singular interest in news risks reducing the complexity of actual news use too much (Moe, Ytre-Arne, and Nærland 2019).

For our specific purpose, then, characteristics of survey methods such as reliance on pre-defined variables are accentuated by the interwoven nature of public connec-tion, while there are persistent difficulties in figuring out relevant measurements of how news use in everyday life matters for public connection.

Interview Analyses

While surveys are much used in quantitative news use research, a similar position on the qualitative side of the methodological spectrum is held by interviews. Interviews are part of triangulating qualitative studies of news media repertoires (Hasebrink and Hepp 2017), and essential to explore people's experiences with journalism (Boczkowski et al. 2018; Ytre-Arne 2012), providing a flexible approach to capture informants' own words and reflections (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Schrøder et al. 2003).

To analyse complex user practices, qualitative studies of news use have expanded the interview technique toolbox with focus groups (e.g., Heikkilä and Ahva 2014), think-aloud approaches or video-ethnography-assisted interviews (e.g., Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer 2018; Edgerly 2017; Schwarzenegger 2020). These meth-odological innovations are tailored to grasping mundane and otherwise soon forgot-ten encounters with news, including in-the-moment navigation and interpretation, and to delve deeper into physical and embodied experiences that are difficult to articulate. Groot Kormelink (2020) reviews the merits of these different methods by returning to the old argument on the centrality of the research question as guiding principle for whether a technique is fruitful (e.g., Schrøder et al. 2003, 53). We argue that if the research question refers to democratic aspects of everyday news use, multi-layeredness and physical embodiment are not necessarily the most relevant aspects to capture. Instead, a stronger focus is needed on engagement with the public issues of the news, and how such engagement is integrated in daily life, beyond mundane, rou-tine news encounters.

A related challenge is how to situate news in relation to other aspects of people's public connection. Here, interviews should have the significant advantage of allowing for more flexible lines of questioning than surveys, taking an informant-centred approach to what news is. However, especially when starting from the perspective of journalism research, studies of news use risk news-centrism. Even when explicitly

Table 1. Systematic overview of digital trace data approaches.

	Logging on device	Logging on service
Independent of user involvement	(Spyware)	Netvizz (Rieder 2013), yourTwapperkeeper (Moe and Larsson 2013)
Dependent on user involvement	Proxy server or app (Van Damme et al. 2015; Thorhauge 2016; Thurman and Fletcher 2019)	Digital Footprints (Bechmann and Nielbo 2018)

acknowledging news' entangled life in actual media practices (Groot Kormelink 2020), such a perspective seems to consider news as a distinct thing, separated from other forms of media content such as social media updates or information from friends—like an ingredient in a salad bowl rather than a stew.

What these approaches risk missing, then, is temporality as indication of engagement beyond the moment, and a non-news-centric starting point which manages to see news as thoroughly integrated, not just mixed, with other forms of media content. A third kind of analyses—of digital trace data—seems to address these challenges.

Digital Trace Analyses

After the past years' hype of "big data" and its relevance for media and communication studies (see boyd and Crawford 2012 for a much-quoted critique), our field still grapples with the up- and downsides of employing data from the traces left behind by users in digital media (e.g., Lomborg, Dencik, and Moe 2020). If we focus on the task of analysing news use, a division into four categories is helpful. Table 1 separates between, first, logging of data based on device or terminal (e.g., a desktop computer, a smart tv or phone), and logging on service (e.g., a social medium, a website or content provider). Second, the table distinguishes between data that does not require consent or active involvement from the user, beyond cookie approval or similar, and data collection that depend on such involvement, e.g., by installing a specific app or facilitating data transfers. Each of the resulting four alternatives can be illustrated.

The first resulting category would entail data being collected via people's devices without them knowing. While it is perfectly possible to argue that the business model underpinning hardware manufacturers rely on such practices, for external researchers, this alternative would entail spyware installation, and be thoroughly ethically off bounds.

The second option, logging data via a service without users' consent, however, emerged as a much-exploited opportunity, especially as social networking services' Application Protocol Interfaces (APIs) allowed for data extraction from external programs. Important examples include the Nettvizz tool (Rieder 2013) which facilitated data collection from (parts of) Facebook, and different tools for Twitter API data extraction (e.g., Moe and Larsson 2013). More recently, this opportunity for data collection seized following privacy scandals and increased monetization of data (c.f. Bruns 2019; Puschmann 2019; Ben-David 2020 for views on the impact of this so-called "APIcalypse"). Practical and ethical considerations notwithstanding, this alternative fails to tackle the cross-media, cross-platforms and cross-providers nature of news use.

The third option—logging on service, but with consent or involvement from users—has been successfully employed in several studies, for instance by Bechmann (Bechmann and Nielbo 2018). While the practical limitations of relying on external data providers, and the ethical problems with some kinds of such data are handled with this alternative (albeit with the cost of number of informants typically shrinking), it still leaves the problem of moving beyond the designated service (e.g., Facebook).

The final option, then, logging traces on a device, with the involvement of users, has resulted in innovative studies with interesting results for our understanding of news use. In practice, this alternative allows for collection of data either through active contribution from a limited number of informants (e.g., by sending data on smartphone use to the researcher, Thorhauge 2016), or a more passive mode where an app is installed with consent on a user device, which then collects and transfers data to the researcher. An interesting example of the latter is Thurman and Fletcher (2019) use of commercial provider comScore's panel data to study time spent on online newspapers websites and apps. A succinct example of the former is Van Damme et al. (2015), who used an app installed on a limited number of informants' devices. As alone-standing data, while escaping the problems with self-reporting of practices found with surveys (Prior 2013; Dilliplane, Goldman, and Mutz 2013 for diverging arguments), the strategy does not escape the critique levelled at time spent measurements. Also, the tools typically come with practical limitations, such as excluding certain devices or operating systems (see Thurman and Fletcher 2019). A way to circumvent this critique could be to combine the trace data with data that facilitates reflection from the informant (see Van Damme et al. 2015; Ørmen and Thorhauge 2015).

Methodological Challenges: Understanding Attention over Time, through and beyond Journalism

All three approaches discussed above offer relevant contributions to capturing different pieces of the puzzle of everyday digital news use, by focussing respectively on mapping patterns of use, analysing experiences with news, or tracking use through digital traces. As such, the approaches also entail necessary prioritizations about which aspects of everyday news use to highlight, as the challenge of understanding complexity can hardly be solved by addressing every aspect simultaneously.

What this discussion leaves us with is a remaining challenge of studying the dimensions of news use that could signal a deeper, more stable, or more meaningful engagement with society through continued attention. We suggest that two essential signs to look for are citizens' continued orientations to self-defined issues of interest, and integration of news in everyday life. We should not prioritize pre-determined or strictly defined understandings of what constitutes "news," or what is considered important public issues. Instead, attention to self-defined topics of interests allows us to account for diversity in public connection, and to examine orientations in a more flexible manner. Likewise, integration in everyday lives is crucial to ensure that what we consider public connection is actually significant and relevant to different citizens in different situations. We further consider that while news use and attention could be

fleeting and ephemeral, and that these tendencies are potentially accentuated by digital and fragmented news use, continued attention with returning news encounters is more relevant for a democratic perspective, as a signal of a deeper engagement.

This implies, first of all, to move beyond snapshots of news exposure and problematic platform-specific measures such as time spent, to analyse how people reflect upon and engage with public issues over time (Heikkilä and Ahva 2014), through and beyond journalism. Second, to fully understand what the everyday context implies, news use should be studied as intertwined with a range of daily activities in domains such as work, at home and in local communities. Third, we need a user-centred approach to what news is and what it means to people. We therefore need to ask how citizens in the context of their everyday lives connect with self-defined issues of interest (Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham 2010), and engage with these beyond the soon forgotten moment of scrolling on the smartphone.

Approach: Media Diaries and Recurring Interviews

Corresponding to the challenges discussed above, we propose an approach suited to capture aspects of everyday news use that are significant to democracy, as conceptualized through the idea of citizens' public connection through and beyond media. Methodologically, our proposal is centred on media diaries supported by interviews, thereby allowing for scrutiny over time of how citizens pay attention to and engage with issues of public concern, within the context of their everyday lives. We will outline how we applied this approach in a qualitative study of Norwegian news users, discuss which aspects of everyday news use it brings forward, and test it through an analytical example.

The material we will draw on to illustrate this approach stems from a larger recently concluded research project, for which we in 2016 recruited 50 informants in Norway asking them to participate in a qualitative media use study with two individual in-depth interviews and a media diary in between (Moe, Ytre-Arne, and Nærland 2019). Informants were recruited seeking to mirror the Norwegian population according to criteria such as age, gender, education levels and occupations, and minority and rural/urban representation.

The first interview started with the informant's background, including work, family situation and local community, before exploring media repertoires, and culture and entertainment preferences through day-in-the-life questions and reflections on changes over time. For instance, we asked informants to talk to us about an ordinary day in their lives, including but not limited to which media they used, and then to reflect upon how these everyday experiences had changed in the past five years. The interviews further delved deeper into social media use with think-aloud talking through their Facebook feed, and included a discussion of interest in political or social issues and citizen ideals. The interview guide was designed to explore each issue through the lens of informants' experiences and preferences, rather than through preconceived notions on the centrality of news or specific definitions of "news" or "political issues" as clear-cut entities. In this key interest, as well as in the overall methodical design, we were inspired by the public connection study by Couldry,

Livingstone, and Markham (2010). However, our fieldwork more than a decade later sought to explore a significantly more digitalized cross-media landscape. This did not only lead us to a more dedicated focus on social media and mobile technologies, but also affected the ways in which we explored informants' everyday lives. For instance, whereas Couldry et al. asked about free time as an inroad to media use, we considered media as interwoven in work and practical chores as much as belonging to a sphere of leisure. We also included a segment on culture and public connection (discussed by Nærland 2019), but focussed less on informants' own delimitation of what constituted a public issue as such.

In addition to producing rich materials in its own right, the first interview constituted a priming for the diary to follow, which took a similar approach of asking about informants' lives and their attention to public issues through and beyond media. We employed several questions soliciting individual or joint replies, e.g., "Thinking about media you used today, did anything capture your interest?," "Please tell us a little more about an issue you took interest in, for instance did you discuss it with anyone?," "If you used social media today, can you remember something you noticed, shared or commented on?" The wording of the diary questions deliberately allowed for more or less media-centric answers depending on the informants' preferences, and deliberately started simply and with everyday experiences ("What did you do today?") rather than with specific questions on news use.

Diaries are a useful tool for capturing "life as it is narrated" (Kaun 2010, 133), creating a space that could provide informants with more freedom of expression and reflection as compared to an interview situation, thereby enabling closeness to everyday experiences. The temporal dimension is embedded in the diary methodology, distinct from a qualitative open-ended survey by being designed for repeated entries by the same informant (cf. Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham 2010; Correa, Scherman, and Arriagada 2016; Cantijoch, Galandini, and Gibson 2016 for different uses of diaries). The set-up of our diary was designed as a combination of a log of attention to issues, and a space for reflection. Informants were given the choice of format, all but one opting for a digital diary with email reminders and responses through an online form. The diary was distributed for daily entries for one week and then weekly entries for three weeks, assuming that the kind of issues noticed could be different on a daily or weekly basis. Both the diary entry form, and in follow-up e-mails, we encouraged informants to keep filling in the diary even if they had missed entries before. While there was considerable difference in the length and number of replies each informant produced, most stuck with the diary to some degree, with 38 of 50 producing diary materials.

The second interview followed up on the diaries of the informant group overall, where some issues stood out across the material (e.g., the 2016 US presidential election) but also on the interests, habits and life events that appeared from the individual entries of each informant (e.g., re-watching the West Wing, listening to podcasts, being preoccupied with moving house, welcoming a newborn). The interview guide was designed to revisit a number of the topics and questions from the first interview, utilizing the diary material to get closer to how individual informants defined and

interpreted public issues, or how attention to society appeared in the everyday practices of people with different lives.

Altogether, the data collection period covered roughly a 5 month stretch, from late summer, when life was turning back to normal after vacation time, via the diary phase in mid-autumn, through to the last interviews conducted with the religious and festive Advent approaching. Seen from the perspective of the informants, it is possible to reverse-engineer which issues that appeared on the news agenda in Norway and with views to the world, and how these issues were interpreted and related to in everyday contexts, also beyond journalism.

In our approach, interviews and diaries appear in a particular order, but the internal balance between these methodological elements is not given by the research design. The diary could be considered to support the interviews, or the other way around, depending on which questions are posed to the material and the choice of analytical strategy to answer these. While the interviews offer more extensive reflections from each informant on a number of topics, the diary is key to capturing relations between life events and public issues as these evolve in the life of each informant over time. We therefore consider the diary as essential to answer questions pertaining to attention and public connection through everyday news use.

Our argument is that this approach is fruitful to capture a number of aspects of news use particularly relevant for public connection, and thereby for understanding the democratic significance of everyday news use. The approach offers insights into how different citizens define and interpret issues of public concern, and enables identification of salient public issues capturing attention across the informant group, while also allowing for discussion of how and why individuals distance themselves from certain issues. These interpretations and experiences are rooted in events and circumstances in the everyday lives of informants, allowing for a less media- and news-centric and pre-determined understanding of how news matters in a democratic context. With the development of new methods for tracking journalism's audiences, these approaches to understand attention, salience, and interpretations of public issues remain crucial to answer "so-what"-questions pertaining to journalism's role for citizens and in democracy.

Case: Political Interpretations and Temporal Dimensions of Sports News across and beyond Media

As with many qualitative studies, ours presents us with a wealth of potential inroads to illustrate how news use is entwined in daily routines across platforms, how issues become political or not, are coupled with face-to-face encounters in different social settings, fluctuate over time—or how the specific approach facilitates reflection on news coverage. The most dominant news story in the diary material, as in the Western world at large at the time, was the 2016 US Presidential election campaign, as the victory of Donald Trump occurred at the end of the diary period and before the second interview round. The insights our approach brings to this event enable us to understand temporal dimensions in drastically shifting interpretations before and after the election, but also how Norwegian news users reacted to the election as an event
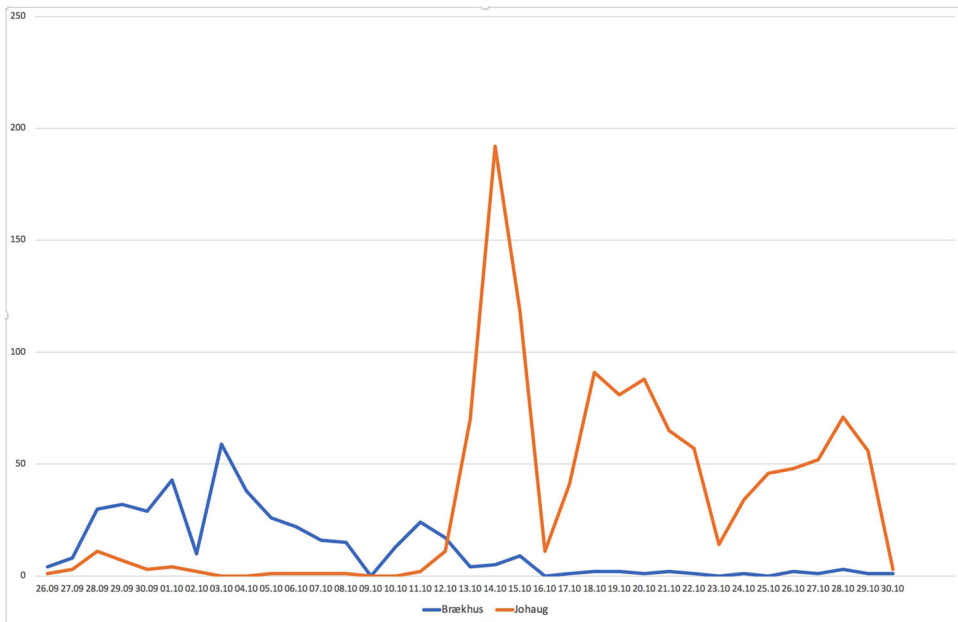
Figure 1. Search result, all Norwegian print newspapers (355 publications, $N = 1608$), search terms "Brækhus" (boxer, blue line) and "Johaug" (skier, orange line), week 39 (one week prior to data collection) to week 43.

affecting their lives and personal wellbeing (Moe, Ytre-Arne, and Nærland 2019): For instance, kindergarten teacher Lene wrote in her diary about feeling ill and staying in bed, listening to a podcast about The West Wing and wanting Trump to go away.

Yet, the merits and limitations of the approach can usefully be tested by looking at examples of public issues that are less obviously political by default, selecting a "difficult case" to test the merits of the approach. A series of more mundane or trivial issues came and went in the diary period and appear ephemerally in the entries of some informants. Here, we select the case of sports news to illustrate our points (cf. Nærland 2018 for a discussion focussed on TV fiction and public connection). Sports news is at the outset less obviously relevant to democracy, but is nevertheless "a powerful tool for the projection of national identities" (Mauro 2020, 1). While extensively covered across platforms and providers, sport represents blurred boundaries between news and entertainment genres, as a commercialized and popularized "soft news" category with socio-cultural and personal resonance for audiences, discussed in social media and everyday contexts.

Among the mentions of sports in our material, two events stand out as particularly useful for the present discussion. The first concerned boxing. Saturday October 1st, Norwegian boxer Cecilia Brækhus defended her world championship title. What made this an extraordinary event, was the location: for the first time in some 25 years, a national ban on professional boxing was lifted, and the televised match was held in a big arena in Oslo, hyped by organizers and the media rights-owner, a commercial broadcaster. Norway's conservative Prime minister introduced the match on live television, and

was, together with her Minister of culture, present to cheer and congratulate the winner. News coverage quickly moved passed the event itself, and focussed on the role of the Government figures, leading to a series of critical commentaries the following week.

Short of two weeks later, another piece of major sports news broke as the celebrated Norwegian cross-country skier Therese Johaug was charged for use of banned substances, in the form of medication for sunburned lips. The story was covered massively across national media, with a live press conference, extensive commentaries, and investigative reporting in Norway and internationally to uncover timelines, causalities, blame, and consequences for the athlete, for Norwegian sports and for national pride and identity (Wagner and Kristiansen 2019).

Figure 1 illustrates the amount of coverage of the two stories, and their different lifespan: The build-up to the Oct 1st boxing match, followed by a dip on the Sunday, and then the commentaries on Monday (Oct 3rd), which constitutes a peak that slowly fades out. The diary entries on the story are concentrated accordingly to the first days of the week, during the daily entries phase of our data collection. The skier story breaks with the press conference, to live on with waves of coverage over the following weeks. We find comments in the diaries for the first week of weekly entries (week ending Oct 16th), and for the consecutive next weeks too. At the outset, then, the two stories—while being similar in covering successful female Norwegian athletes—differ both in their direct link to sports achievements and in their longevity as news stories.

In what follows, we will use the two cases to discuss how public issues are ingrained with everyday habits and interests of different news users. While, as we will show, sports were not a particular interest for our informants, the diary format allowed us to track when and how these specific sports news stories popped up, evolved and were interpreted by various informants. For instance, the story about the skier clearly transcended the sphere of sports and became part of headline news, social media entertainment, everyday conversations, and media critique—capturing the attention also of those who did not care about sports as such.

We will make three points. First, that cross-media is a given in people's public connection. Second, that public connection relies on face-to-face encounters to be digested and negotiated, and that these conversations are central to how issues become political, and thus more relevant for public connection. Third, that attention over time matters for public connection and distinguishes between more or less salient public issues.

Cross-Media Is a Given: News and Social Media Use is Interwoven in People's Public Connection

Our first point is that people's public connections build on interwoven practices of everyday media use, often combining news use across platforms and outlets in ways that are too closely ingrained to meaningfully discern as separate phenomena. Nearly a decade after Schrøder (2011, 5) established that "audiences are inherently cross-media," it is time to consider what it means to public connection research to accept cross-media as given. As our discussion of digital trace data showed, it is not

necessarily impossible to map which platforms and social media news feeds that expose people to a particular news story—but this is not really relevant to public connection as people do not experience these fine-grained details as salient to their engagement with a public issue, and instead follow issues across media repertoires.

In the media diary on Monday Oct 2nd, the judge Mads comments critically that he has noted "the Government's prostration to boxing," listing public service broadcasting, a major quality newspaper online, a regional paper in print and online, a major tabloid news sites, and Facebook, as where he followed this issue. He adds that he checked Facebook many times and read "some articles, but I cannot really remember anything in particular." This is an example of one of the more extensive replies to the details of where an issue was encountered. Other informants actually have less precise recollections and place less emphasis on the where, how, and when of digital news use. The priest Sara writes

> Five minutes on Facebook today, read an article on the boxing. Good to see that others also react to it. Have not shared or commented, but sometimes I press "like" – cannot really remember on what. Time on Facebook is usually not that meaningful.

As this quote indicates, it mattered to her to find that others shared her sentiment about the boxing story, but not which article she read and when she hit the like button. This takes us to our next point, which is to underline the significance of the social aspects of everyday news use—found in social media discussions for some informants, but more prominently in face-to-face encounters.

Face-to-Face Encounters Are Crucial for Public Connection by Facilitating Shared Interpretations and Making Issues Political

The diaries illustrate how conversation on public issues, in face-to-face encounters in everyday life, is key to public connection. Talking about issues facilitates interpretation, makes people care more or less, and is part of how news become meaningful beyond the moment. Such talk is also essential to how different issues are constituted as public and political, through shared interpretations. In a similar vein, Nærland (2018) argues that fictional entertainment has five functions for public connection: charging, deepening, providing affinitive motivation, introduction/extension, and solidification. Several of these refer to how engagement with an issue is deepened, extended in time, and interpreted in socio-cultural contexts.

In our diary material, examples of face-to-face discussions are brief and ephemeral, but of particular importance are recurring everyday situations of sharing a meal and talking about what goes on—over lunch with colleagues and at the family dinner table. The story of skier Johaug was extensively mentioned as something to talk about, as people discussed legal and ethical questions of who to blame, shook their heads at the excessive media coverage, made jokes with friends about the severe consequences of a bad choice of lip balm, or discussed what the scandal meant to the national self-image. Breaking on the same day that Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel prize for literature, these news stories were intertwined as the topics of the day:

> Drugged by lip-gloss. Suggested to my co-worker that she should send it to the national football team. They could use the performance enhancement and the moist lips. He

agreed, and said that even a doping scandal could not make their image any worse. Dylan gets the peace prize. No, wait, literature. The wife says it is an anticlimax, what will people talk about when they cannot complain he did not get it? (Henrik, journalist)

The literature prize to Bob Dylan. We discussed the doping story against Johaug that broke in the news today. We agreed that the athlete always has responsibility. At a party we discussed the doping scandal and the US election. Everyone agreed Dylan should have the prize (Venke, cleaner)

Both of these quotes show how conversation on public issues reinforces interpretations (the lip-gloss is a joke, the athlete is responsible). Such discussion is particularly important to ensure attention to political dimensions. The teacher Jens, for instance, commented in the diary:

I have been concerned the past few days with the prime minister paying tribute to boxing as a sport. A political mistake in my view. Misunderstood liberalism to allow professional boxing in Norway. […] Another day of discussion about what goes on in the news with colleagues and family. The channel we used: Talking. No social media use today.

Only one of the informants, a taxi driver with a strong interest in sport, mentioned the boxing match without alluding to its political aspects. He also related to the Johaug story as a sports story about a skier being banned from competition, not connecting it to the media criticism he displayed as a generalized sentiment elsewhere in the interviews. For other informants, however, conversation with others turned their attention to different aspects of public issues, including more explicitly societal and political dimensions they had not necessarily focussed on initially.

Temporality Is Key to Public Connection as Attention and Interpretations Shift over Time

The third point we wish to highlight on everyday news use and public connection is the significance of attention over time. As noted, the two events lived quite different lives on the news agenda, following different timelines. The boxing story had a long build-up ahead of the match, a peak right after, and then an aftermath lasting some days into the following week. The skiing story was breaking news, followed by extensive and long-lasting coverage for weeks and beyond.

In themselves, the diary entries revealed how news use for these two stories played out over time for our informants, and also illustrate the methodological difference between inviting daily and weekly diary entries. The daily rhythm of the first week of diary keeping coincided with the boxing event, and thus made it possible to see how informants followed the story across and beyond journalistic media through a day: Noted as a newspaper story in the morning, taken up as a topic for discussion during lunch at work, re-surfacing over dinner with family, and then popping up on social media again in the evening.

The story about the suspended skier, on the other hand, broke in the first week of weekly diary entries. Informants noted to have followed the story, and discussed it with others during the week, often mentioning it as part of a summary of several news stories, inviting comparisons between these. Social worker Synne noted a couple

of stories from national politics, before lamenting "And all the main stories, of course, like Trump and Johaug. But the media are done with the destruction [after hurricane Matthew] in Haiti …." In a more elaborate answer, journalist Henrik wrote

> A relatively uneventful week for me. [I] was in [capitol of Norway] Oslo at a seminar. Tried to "break the ice" with a joke about [national tabloid] dagbladet.no; "gonna check the Daily Johaug Mail." My seatmate, it turned out, works there. He told me that the click rates for the Johaug stories are crazy. Maybe not so strange as you have to scroll down to the basement on the front page to find anything else, but ok. (Henrik).

Even in the first week, several informants mentioned that they were "fed up" or "tired already" of the Johaug story, providing implicit and explicit media criticism of the extensive coverage. This continued over the next weeks. Henrik wrote again two weeks later:

> Still lots of Johaug. Apparently, she said something now. She thinks it is strange that people can question what she says, she is telling the truth and everything. I feel tired of hearing how tired people are of Johaug.

The priest Sara reflected in her diary on how attention to Johaug had repeatedly distracted herself and others from more important questions:

> I tried on three separate occasions to talk to people about what happens in relations between the West and Russia […]. Every time, it took three minutes and then Therese Johaug was the topic. I get that people care about it, but it makes me feel that we are so stupid. What happens in the world does not matter, just her using the wrong lip-gloss … I have been fed up with that story for a long time now. The worst was the main news broadcast starting with a story about how she was all alone. She is not alone – the whole country pities her, and she has people who love her. I bury people who actually lived their lives alone. […] It made me change the channel.

This outburst came two weeks after the story broke, reflecting a temporal dimension of how some issues become important to public connection by living in the public sphere and in everyday news use over time.

The approach we have suggested, then, facilitates discussion of temporality on two levels: The first concerns the attention of news users over time. The diary data allows us insights into which stories burst quickly and which ones lingers, not just in terms of actual media coverage, but in terms of attention as a combination of news consumption, social media use, offline meetings and individual "deliberation within." On a second level, the diary data in combination with the follow-up interviews, allow for a discussion of this temporality—in our case especially useful to tease out informants' views on news coverage and journalism, often here in the form of media critique.

Conclusion

We have argued that in developing the audience perspective in journalism research, we should focus on the democratic significance of everyday news use. To do so requires some conceptual and methodological reconsidering. We have discussed the merits of "public connection" as a concept apt to capture how citizens datafied cross-

media user practices might facilitate their attention to the public domain. Drawing on Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham's (2010) overall research design and understanding of the concept, we have developed it to account for datafied cross-media use further blurring lines between mediated and non-mediated public connection across different domains in everyday life. We particularly underline that research on news audiences needs to accept cross-media as a given, that everyday conversation is instrumental to make issues political, and that attention to and interpretations of public issues shift over time. Methodologically, we have systematized different qualitative and computer-assisted trace data options, underlining the need to investigate citizens' public orientation over time and beyond journalism. On that ground, we proposed a three-pronged qualitative methodological approach centred on media diaries, supported by interviews which we have argued is well-suited to investigate citizens' public orientation over time and beyond journalism.

A premise for our discussion is that the complexity of everyday news use mandates clear prioritization of which aspects to study. Our argument for a diary-focused approach is that this method prioritizes attention over time, and integration of public issues in everyday events and conversations. We consider these aspects of everyday news use as essential to public connection, and thereby to the democratic significance of news use. The other side of this argument is, of course, that there are other aspects of everyday news use our approach does not prioritize. As compared to for instance a think-aloud interviews, diaries capture less of in-the-moment news navigation. Compared to digital trace data analysis, diaries give less fine-grained insights into which platforms, media outlets or social media interactions that put users in contact with news. While diaries could be designed to facilitate logging of media use, we consider that they are most useful for doing this at the level of attention to issues, as we have shown in our case analysis. For our purpose of analysing public connection, attention to issues has the double advantage of being more directly relevant to key questions than the details of the media use practices that facilitated such attention.

The analysis we have presented to illustrate our approach emphasize how even in a context with widespread and relatively egalitarian news consumption patterns, the levels of attention as well as the areas which citizens orient themselves towards through and beyond news, varies over time and between groups. As such, we hold that the framework we propose facilitates sound evaluation of how these patterns matter for different citizens' role in democracy.

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