

MEDIÁLNÍ STUDIA

MEDIA STUDIES

JOURNAL FOR CRITICAL MEDIA INQUIRY

Special Issue: Emerging topics of media and communication scholarship in Europe: Alumni of the ECREA doctoral school of 2020

Exploring moving interviews:

A three-step approach to researching how wheelchair users navigate

Lisa Schulze

Encountering algorithms in the urban space:

a matter of knowledge. An enactive ethnography of riders' work

Francesco Bonifacio

De-coding Instagram as a Spectacle: A critical algorithm audit analysis

Lydia Kollyri

**"Am I really cursed?" self-disclosure in a spiritual Facebook group:
conceptualizing networked therapeutic culture**

Berit Renser

They get a lot of news from Facebook:

The impact of social media on parental news modeling in the digital media landscape

Josephine Lehaff

The relational UX:

Constructing repertoires of audience agency in pioneer journalism practice

Bissie Anderson

**Partner or model? The Latin-American perception of the EU in the supranational
audiovisual policies**

Marina Rossato Fernandes

2/2021

MEDIÁLNÍ STUDIA | MEDIA STUDIES

Journal for critical media inquiry

**SPECIAL ISSUE: EMERGING TOPICS OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION
SCHOLARSHIP IN EUROPE: ALUMNI OF THE ECREA DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF
2020**

Guest Editors:

Andra Siibak

Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt

Risto Kunelius

François Heinderyckx

Ilija Tomanić Trivundža

MEDIÁLNÍ STUDIA | MEDIA STUDIES

EDITORIAL TEAM:

Editor-in-chief:

Tae-Sik Kim, Ph.D. (Masaryk University)

Editors:

Mgr. Jitka Horáková (Palacky University)

Mgr. Andrea Průchová Hružová Ph.D. (Charles University)

Mgr. Iveta Jansová, Ph.D. (Masaryk University, Palacky University)

Mgr. Lukáš Slavík (Masaryk University)

Mgr. Michal Tkaczyk, Ph.D. (Masaryk University)

Graphic design, page layout:

Bc. Petr Barták

EDITORIAL BOARD:

PhDr. Petr Bednařík, Ph.D. (Charles University) – chairman

Mgr. Michal Bočák, Ph.D. (University of Presov)

Young-Gil Chae, Ph.D. (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies)

PhDr. Jiří Hoppe, Ph.D. (the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic)

prof. PhDr. Jan Jirák, Ph.D. (Charles University)

PhDr. Jakub Končelík, Ph.D. (Charles University)

Mgr. Marek Lapčík, Ph.D.

Mgr. Jiří Mertl, Ph.D. (Západočeská univerzita)

Doc. Peter Mikuláš, Ph.D. (Constantine the Philosopher University)

Marco Milani, Ph.D. (University of Bologna)

Simona Mitroiu, Ph.D. (Alexandru Ioan Cuza University)

PhDr. Daša Nováčiková, PhD. (Constantine the Philosopher University)

PhDr. Jaromír Volek, Ph.D.

Mgr. Lenka Waschková Císařová, Ph.D. (Masaryk University)

Mgr. Renáta Sedláková, Ph.D.

Mgr. Jaroslav Švelch, Ph.D. (Charles University)

Maja Vodopivec, Ph.D. (Leiden University)

ADVISORY BOARD:

prof. Sercan Hamza Bağlama, Ph.D. (Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University)
doc. Nico Carpentier, Ph.D. (Charles University)
Iván Zatz-Díaz, Ph.D. (Pratt Institute)
prof. Christine Evans, Ph.D. (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee)
prof. Ann Gray (University of Lincoln)
prof. Matt Hills, Ph.D. (University of Huddersfield)
prof. Yongsuk Hwang, Ph.D. (Konkuk University)
prof. Dejan Jontes, Ph.D. (University of Ljubljana)
prof. PhDr. Jiří Kraus, DrSc. (Univerzita Karlova)
prof. Eric Kramer, Ph.D. (University of Oklahoma)
prof. Valentina E. Marinescu, Ph.D. (University of Bucharest)
Monika Metyková, Ph.D. (University of Sussex)
prof. Zrinjka Peruško, Ph.D. (University of Zagreb)
prof. Bogusława Dobek Ostrowska (University of Wrocław, Silesia University of Education)
prof. Winfried Schulz (Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)
prof. Andra Siibak, Ph.D. (University of Tartu)
Marquard Smith, Ph.D. (University College London)

Periodicity: twice a year
Place of publishing: Prague
Registration number: E 19821
Online ISSN 2464-4846

Publisher: Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Smetanovo nábřeží 6,
110 00 Praha 1
Company ID: 00216208, VAT No.: CZ00216208.
E-mail: medialnistudia@fsv.cuni.cz
Volume 15, Number 2, December 2021
For more information and the magazine content, please visit our website at
<https://medialnistudia.fsv.cuni.cz/>

CONTENTS

Andra Siibak, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Risto Kunelius,
François Heinderyckx, and Ilija Tomanić Trivundža
Introduction to Special Issue..... 62

STUDIES

Lisa Schulze
**Exploring moving interviews:
A three-step approach to researching how wheelchair users navigate** 68

Francesco Bonifacio
**Encountering algorithms in the urban space: a matter of knowledge.
An enactive ethnography of riders' work** 85

Lydia Kollyri
De-coding Instagram as a Spectacle: A critical algorithm audit analysis..... 103

Berit Renser
**"Am I really cursed?" self-disclosure in a spiritual Facebook group:
conceptualizing networked therapeutic culture**125

Josephine Lehaff
**They get a lot of news from Facebook:
The impact of social media on parental news modeling in the digital media landscape**145

Bissie Anderson
**The relational UX:
Constructing repertoires of audience agency in pioneer journalism practice**165

Marina Rossato Fernandes
**Partner or model?
The Latin-American perception of the EU in the supranational audiovisual policies**..... 188

Mediální studia | *Media studies* 2/2021 Special Issue byla podpořena dotací
Odboru médií a audiovize Ministerstva kultury ČR.

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

EMERGING TOPICS OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION SCHOLARSHIP IN EUROPE: ALUMNI OF THE ECREA DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF 2020

ANDRA SIIBAK

University of Tartu

PILLE PRUULMANN-VENGERFELDT

Malmö University

ILJA TOMANIĆ TRIVUNDŽA

University of Ljubljana

FRANÇOIS HEINDERYCKX

Free University of Brussels

RISTO KUNELIUS

University of Helsinki

Media and communication studies is a diverse field and this has both benefits and drawbacks. On one hand, the field is inclusive in its approach to different aspects of media, to different mediums, to content and practices relating to media. On the other hand, the inclusivity may result in relative distance. For example, media policy research may have little in common with an audience scholar when it comes to theories, questions or methods. European Media and Communication Research and Education Association's (ECEA) Doctoral Summer School has always sought to balance the strive for specialisation, specific themes or focuses on different corners of the media and communication studies, and the perceived need to have a general meeting place where the diverse voices could meet and at least encounter each other.

The Doctoral Summer School for 2020 was unfortunately forced to move online due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential for creating a joint meeting platform was challenged. Furthermore, the summer school had also to move its activities from nice European July to a frosty and dark December-February period, extending the 2020 activities into 2021. University of Tartu, instead of being able to host us in their 19th century premises, had to provide inclusive online space for our work and activities. Thanks to the online format, the summer school was able to reach out to a broad community of academic colleagues, to whom we would like to extend our warmest thank yous, as the colleagues from across the globe joined the Big Blue Button to engage with student projects, give feedback and share their experiences.

The pandemic also made us reconsider what does it mean to do pan-European collaborations. A lot of work of the summer school related to supporting the emerging scholars, giving them space to present and discuss their work happened in smaller, more specialised groups or flows. At the same time, cross-cutting issues that bring together the field and community around us, still had an important space in the programme. For example, senior colleagues were sharing their academic life hacks and main editors of the journals were invited to share their views about academic publishing during roundtable discussions. Also, different practical workshops, e.g. research ethics, writing abstracts, self-branding in academia, and different research methods, were held. During these sessions we really experienced how the spirit of the Summer School was able to grow despite the hard conditions brought along by the pandemic. In fact, we experienced how the ideas and ideals of Summer School where we strive to create spaces of sharing and caring, were expanded during those online sessions. And, to be honest, during 2020-2021, we have all needed a bit more of both.

The current special issue „Emerging topics of media and communication scholarship in Europe: alumni of the ECREA doctoral school of 2020“ contains seven articles which illustrate that the field of media studies is increasingly large and diverse, and intersects with a number of different other research fields and interests. We are humbled by the intelligence and curiosity of the participants of the summer school, who are willing to explore and extend the boundaries of media and communication scholarship.

In this special issue, in addition to the traditional core focus on media use and media production, the policy transfer, urban spaces, disability studies and other areas productively interact with media studies. These interactions bring attention to marginalised groups or marginalised areas corresponding to the ethos of European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School - facilitating both productive encounters of diverse viewpoints, but also building awareness and respect to the different corners of the field. Furthermore, we really believe that the range of topics presented in the doctoral school are not only a precious indicator of the emerging objects of interest but should also be viewed as the early stage of trends for years to come. Below we will provide a short overview of all the empirical papers included in the special issue.

The first article by **Lisa Schulze** “Exploring moving interviews: A three-step approach to researching how wheelchair users navigate” makes three unique and valuable contributions to media and communication studies. First, its location within urban media spaces draws our attention to the way digital and physical spaces interconnect. The digital devices as well as analogue media provide individualised media layers that supports media users in navigating the space. However, second point that emerges from Lisa Schulze’s paper is related to the marginalised voices in media and communication research. By working with wheelchair users and looking at the ways in which media provides navigation layer to their lived experiences with the cities, the paper justly critiques the lack of attention on disabled media users. Taking

a view that disability is socially constructed, and different from the underlying medical condition, Lisa Schulze's work brings attention to an often ignored group's media practices. Third contribution of the article is methodological. Moving interviews provides a valuable lense of looking media in the context of mobility, but also looking ways in which we can include people with the diverse mobilities as part of our investigative practices.

The second article of the special issue, written by **Francesco Bonifacio**, continues the theme of understanding how media is layered on the physical spaces. An insider perspective from working as food delivery rider, biking around Milano, delivering food and engaging with the different communities of riders has allowed Francesco to add some really rich and valuable experiences to the whole discussion of digital technologies, algorithms and changes within society. In this interdisciplinary study located at the intersection of work sociology and media studies showcases how algorithms produce urban space, and how navigating such space can have specific monetary value for the riders. Enacted decoding of the algorithmic platforms also changes the rider's perspective of time, proposes strategic actions in accepting and rejecting delivery work, and even creating clear winners and losers in the business. The paper is a valuable addition to the field of media studies to showcase how media use and understanding of mediated processes contribute to hierarchies within professions not necessarily perceived as media-related.

The topic of algorithms is also explored in the third paper of the special issue where **Lydia Kollyri** makes an important methodological contribution by suggesting algorithm auditing method as a useful approach for critical studies of platformization. In the present paper, Lydia introduces the findings of three separate audits investigating the existence of a filter bubble on Instagram. The findings of the audits indicate that Instagram users are relatively likely to encounter more mainstream and commercial content regardless of their interests. Furthermore, the findings suggest that users who tend to follow soft topics, are also more likely to be trapped within a filter bubble. Thus, the paper not only makes an important contribution in the line of studies exploring the consequences of personalization algorithms, but also provides novel thought-provoking knowledge on the topic.

Berit Renser's paper provides insights into a Facebook group for spiritually inclined people who seek solutions and remedies to their daily worries and concerns, offering thereby a fascinating exploration of how therapeutic culture emerges on social media. Relying upon discourse analysis of posts, ethnographic observations, and interviews, Berit studies the motives and experiences of people who self-disclose in the group, the discursive framing of problems by both help-seekers and advice-givers, and the overall progress of self-disclosure. Berit's interdisciplinary study, which is located at the intersection of the studies of the global therapeutic culture, (g)local sociocultural context and social media studies, contributes to the academic discussion of self-disclosure and privacy on social media, suggesting that within some contexts the need for help encourages self-disclosure, with possibly

unforeseen consequences for the participants' privacy. Furthermore, by introducing a concept "networked therapeutic culture" that refers to the dialogic and interactive therapeutic culture that has emerged on social media Berit makes a valuable conceptual contribution to the field.

One cannot get passed the topic of social media also in the next paper included in the special issue. **Josephine Lehaff** draws upon semi-structured interviews and a card sorting exercise with 18-25 year old Danes (N=24) to report about their everyday news behaviors. Although previous research has raised questions about the impact of parental news modeling on children and young people's socialization into news-users in the era of individualized digital technologies, Josephine's paper provides interesting new insights on the topic. By employing the use of laughter as index of perceived face-loss pointing to sources of embarrassment in interview subjects' news repertoires, Josephine makes an intriguing methodological contribution. Furthermore, interpreting laughter as a paralinguistic facework, enabled Josephine to capture the fact that the young adults in her sample felt oftentimes uncomfortable with their parents' news habits.

Bissie Anderson's paper also deals with news consumption and audiences of news media. In particular, Bissie applies multi-method design to explore how is the audience interpellated in the pioneer journalism encoding process. In-depth interviews with 12 pioneer journalism producers from UK legacy newsrooms are triangulated with in-depth analysis of two artefact with divergent interactivity options to study the process meaning production, in pioneer journalism UX design practices, providing fascinating insights on the issue. The findings of this explorative study, suggest that pioneer producers give considerable thought about active audiences and aim to guide the user through a preferred audience experience. Thus, Bissie's paper proves highly significant in advancing our understanding of how journalists negotiate and maintain their authority in an age of active audiences and increasingly distributed news production.

In the final article of the special issue, **Marina Rossato Fernandes** investigates the perception of European Union in the Latin-American context within two institutional frameworks - the South American trade bloc Mercusor and RECAM, its supra-national institution in charge of audiovisual sector. Although both institutions were inspired by the European Union, their perception of European Union as an actor differs, which in turn influences policy transfer and policy implementation processes. On the basis of qualitative document analysis, and semi-structured expert interviews, Rosato Fernandes shows how Mercusor's undefined image of European Union reflects in uncritical policy transfer process, while RECAM's operations are guided by its perception of the European Union as a strategic partner, seeking cooperation with mutual benefits. The article shows that the different perception of the European Union influences the process of policy development and implementation (e.g. the bottom-up approach of RECAM and top-down approach of Mercusor) and results in limited practical implementation of stated policy goals.

Organizing the ECREA doctoral school was possible thanks to the support of many institutions. We are grateful for ECREA for offering several scholarships for the participants and for providing invaluable support for this initiative. We also want to express our gratitude for the support of the Baltic Association for Media Research (BAMR), the institute of Social Studies at the University of Tartu, and the Doctoral School of Behavioral, Social and Health Sciences. We are also thankful Dr. Tae-Sik Kim, the editor-in-chief of *Mediální Studia/Media Studies* and the whole team behind the journal, for fruitful co-operations. We are also deeply grateful for all the participants of the doctoral school - doctoral students and senior scholars - who despite of the ongoing pandemic were able to invest their time, energy, and expertise into making the 2020 ECREA doctoral school and publishing this special issue into a success.

Andra Siibak, member of Academia Europaea, is a Professor of Media Studies and Program Director of the Media and Communication doctoral program at the Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia. Her main field of research has to do with the opportunities and risks surrounding internet use, datafication of childhood, new media audiences and privacy. Together with Giovanna Mascheroni she co-authored a monograph “*Datafied Childhoods: Data Practices and Imaginaries in Children’s Lives*” (2021) published by Peter Lang. Andra was the main local organizer and one of the flow managers for the ECREA doctoral school in 2020.

Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, member of Academia Europaea, is a professor in media and communication, Malmö University since November 2016. She comes from University of Tartu where she obtained her PhD and worked last as a professor. Her research interests have focused on questions of cultural citizenship and participation in various online and offline contexts. She has studied engagement in museums, libraries and within the context of public broadcasting. She has also worked internet users and social applications of new technologies. She is currently the international director of European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School and has been engaged with the summer school as student, teacher, and organizer since 2004. She has participated and been a leader of different national and international projects. She has published over a hundred articles both in journals and as book chapters and has been part of the editorial team for more than ten books.

Risto Kunelius is a professor in Communication Research and the director of Helsinki Inequality Initiative at the University of Helsinki. Previously he has served as a professor of journalism research and the Dean of Social Sciences and Humanities at University of Tampere. His research interests include theoretical questions of media and power, mediatization and social theory, the changing role of journalism and development of public sphere(s). He studies these issues as they intersect with contemporary, complex social and political problems. Most recently he has published on global climate change coverage and on surveillance and journalism. He has participated in numerous doctoral summer schools as a lecturer and mentor.

François Heinderyckx is full professor at Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

where he teaches media sociology and political communication. His research interests include journalism and news media, political communication, audience studies and media literacy. He is a member of Academia Europaea and a Fellow of the International Communication Association. He was among the founding members of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) in 2005 and was the President of ECREA from its creation until 2012. He was also the 2013-2014 President of the International Communication Association (ICA). He is the Series Editor of the Wiley Blackwell – ICA International Encyclopedias of Communication and a member of the Advisory or Editorial boards of a dozen international academic journals.

Ilija Tomanić Trivundža is an Associate Professor at the Department of Media and Communication Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and a researcher at Social Communication Research Centre at the same faculty. His primary research interest spans across the field of visual communication with special focus on social and political role of photography in contemporary mediated communication. He is a co-editor of journal *Membrana*.

EXPLORING MOVING INTERVIEWS: A THREE-STEP APPROACH TO RESEARCHING HOW WHEELCHAIR USERS NAVIGATE

LISA SCHULZE

University of Salzburg

ABSTRACT

Navigating and following a route is a regular practice for many people. However, how do people who use a wheelchair plan and follow routes? To answer this question, a three-step process of data collection was used: online interviews, moving interviews and reflection interviews. By drawing on my experiences with five participants, this article argues that conducting moving interviews with wheelchair users is a useful method for studying mediated communication in urban spaces and reflects upon the challenges and opportunities this three-step method holds.

Keywords: navigation ▪ wayfinding ▪ maps ▪ disability ▪ wheelchair ▪ accessibility ▪ mobility ▪ space ▪ moving interviews ▪ ethnography

1. RESEARCHING WHEELCHAIR NAVIGATION

Navigating and following a route is a regular daily practice for many people. Technological developments allow us to move from one place to another without much effort, even in unknown environments. Media, in the form of paper maps and guidebooks, have long helped the traveller, and digital media – mapping and tracking apps using GPS technologies – are making navigation easier for everyone. However, how does navigation look like for people using wheelchairs? What kind of navigation media and technologies do they use? Can they as easily rely on a smartphone application like *Google Maps* or a paper map and have all the information accessible that is necessary to navigate to a desired destination?

Studies that examine the navigation of wheelchair users often stem from the fields of computer science, human-computer interaction and software development and usually address the design of software (e.g., Mascetti et al., 2020; Tanert & Schöning, 2018; Ding et al., 2007; Beale et al., 2006; Levine et al., 1999; Yanco, 1998). These studies focus on how software for apps or other online services could be

improved and how spatial data can be made more accessible, but tend to exclude the lived realities of users of navigation services. Among the very few studies that look at the use of navigation services from a communication studies perspective, Savino et al. (2020) argue that user behaviour on *Google Maps* consists of different types of interaction: Search, Place, Direction and Map View Manipulation (Savino et al., 2020, p. 1). The Map View Manipulation is the most used interaction that captures how users explore surroundings on *Google Maps* by zooming in and out or by panning (Savino et al., 2020). Their work shows that *Google Maps* is used for more than text-based location searches and can embed a combination of different services and knowledge of a place (Savino et al., 2020, p. 9). However, while Savino et al. (2020) demonstrate how navigation media are embedded in the everyday lives of the users, they do not consider wheelchair users.

When it comes to the disability and media studies, these mostly focus on the lack of access to and the accessibility of digital media (see Fox, 2011; see also, e.g., Trevisan, 2017) rather than showcasing the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of the limited media. There is hardly any research on how wheelchair users actually perform navigation with the help of (digital) media, and the systemic exclusion seems to result from methodological choices. This article addresses the gap by proposing an ethnographic approach in mobile methods, the moving interviews. Moving interviews, being the centre of a three-step approach, allow exploring the use of media to support navigation of wheelchair users. The context of disability and space will frame the potentials and challenges of the method for communication studies.

Building on the work with my interview partners Mike, Anna, Alex, Veronika and Fritz, this article outlines the key elements of moving interviews as enabling tools for media research in urban space. The lessons learned from the moving interviews inspire more inclusive communication and media studies, since the method is applicable for a diversity of study participants – able-bodied or disabled. This article has the following structure: after the contextualisation of disability and space, I will argue for the choice of moving interviews as opposed to other mobile research methods. By bringing selected examples from the fieldwork, I will go through the three-step approach of the moving interviews that I conducted in Berlin. I conclude with the discussion of inclusivity in communication research and the benefits and challenges of the three-step process of conducting moving interviews.

2. HAVING A DISABILITY OR BEING DISABLED?

Even though the wheelchair is a central object to this text, the different bodies that might use a wheelchair are not. All the different terms that try to grasp what disability entails give insight into different understandings of disability. A disability focus foregrounds the participants' everyday lives as wheelchair users who are 'being disabled' by conditions that they experience (Alper, 2017, p. 22). Of course, this

understanding cannot ignore physical differences but they are not the focus when it comes to understanding disability as a whole experience.

A definition of disability is approached differently from various disciplines. On the one hand, there is a medical perspective that focuses on bodily limitations due to physical prerequisites or acquired conditions and thus distinguishes between bodies with disabilities and bodies without disabilities, understanding disability as an “individual deficit” (German Federal Government Commissioner for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, 2020, para. 1). In disability studies and other related disciplines, on the other hand, this medical approach has been more and more discarded. Here, disability is perceived through a “social model” (Alper, 2017, p. 22). The focus shifts from physicality per se to the lives of people who fall under the broad concept of disability: “This model holds society accountable for shaping the lived experience of disability and its potential to enhance and detract from an individual’s life as well as our collective culture” (Alper, 2017, p. 22; see also Shakespeare, 2013), thus, distinguishing between impairment (physical impairment) and disability (the socially constructed environment that ascribes disabilities to different bodies and ‘disables’ people in their lives) (Alper, 2017, p. 22). The sociocultural model of disability expands the social view to include representation, personal experience and identity (Oliver, 1990; Gleeson, 1997). As Anna, one of my study participants articulated, a disability can also be a feature or characteristic of one’s identity or a community of belonging: “[disability] has become a part of my identity and I don’t know if I would want to change that”.

Disability is thus a complex construct infused with ideas and attributions, while also including practices and experiences. Disability and non-disability are influenced by social discourses (Alper, 2014, p. 7f.) and hierarchies, by how surroundings are designed, and what experiences are made. Whether a life without disability exists at all remains questionable: “Disability is central to the human experience. At one time or another, those of us who are ‘temporarily able-bodied’ will become disabled, whether as part of the aging process or unexpectedly at any age” (Alper, 2014, p. 1f.). Ultimately, there is no clear-cut definition for the term disability: “What is clear is that each individual with a disability understands their own relationships to disability, their bodies, and society in unique ways” (Alper, 2014, p. 8; see also Linton, 1998). The participants’ wheelchairs and the use of their wheelchairs is not to be understood as a metaphor for a lack of mobility, but rather as tools for overcoming existing barriers in space. One method to examine how wheelchair users navigate will be discussed in more detail in the following sections that will focus on mobile methods and elaborate on how they were made use of with references to empirical data.

2.1. Walking/Wheeling/Moving Interviews?

Mobile methods such as the mobile interview (Finlay & Bowman, 2017), the go-along interview (Bergeron et al., 2014; Carpiano, 2009) or walking in thirdspace (Moles,

2008) cover a range of methods for data collection while both the researcher and the participant move through space. These mobile methods, whereby the researcher accompanies the research participants while they access places, originate from ethnography (Møller Jørgensen, 2016, p. 35f.). Their characteristic of being “on the move” (Finlay & Bowman, 2017, p. 263) allows for the researcher to grasp “the social organization of ‘moves’” (Büscher & Urry, 2009, p. 103) and to explore how navigation takes place and how space is perceived. Mobile interviews involve movement “through any mode of transit, including by foot, bicycle, car, and public transportation” (Finlay & Bowman, 2017, p. 263).

Considering my choice of participants, the mobile method ‘walking interviews’ seemed especially suitable because it does not take place in a ‘stationary’ manner, but while walking to a destination. Walking interviews cover the whole navigation process: the formulation of a destination, the planning of the route, the actual following of the route and reaching a destination. The researcher accompanies the participant during the entire process, and asks questions about what they observe and experience (Evans & Jones, 2011). Walking interviews address the constitution of meaning by experiencing the participants’ everyday lives (Breidenstein et al., 2013, p. 31), and the interviewees can consciously pay attention to places or objects relevant to their navigation, such as obstacles, route sections, special places, or road signs that might have meaning to them. The participants are asked to ‘think out loud’ during walking interviews, which offers the chance that interviewees do not have to generalise about a multitude of events and situations afterwards, but rather to experience and reflect on a situation in real time, providing information about their thoughts (Bilandzic, 2017, p. 406).

Following these instructions, the method looks well suited for studying navigation media use for wheelchair using participants. Remarkably, according to Laurence Parent, studies making use of walking interviews rarely include wheelchair users (Parent, 2016, p. 524). Even more so, socio-geographer Jana Kühl’s (2016) article on walking interviews even explicitly excludes wheelchair users: “A walking interview requires physical ability to visit relevant places on foot. This requirement excludes participants with restricted mobility from the sample. To avoid exclusion, interviews with mobility-impaired persons were carried out as stationary interviews” (Kühl, 2016, p. 41). The author gives neither the reason why movement on foot is necessary for conducting the interview nor a definition of mobility impairment. This requirement does not only eliminate wheelchair users from a sample but all people who may be ‘restricted in their mobility’ in any way. Where does restricted mobility begin then and where does it end? How about people who use a stroller, a walking stick or who are wearing high heels? Wheelchair users are able “to visit relevant places” (Kühl, 2016, p. 41) because of the wheelchair. Kühl’s (2016) requirement follows a possibly unintentional yet significant understanding of disability, using a set of assumptions and stereotypes about individuals with disabilities that ultimately discriminate and disable people from being part of a study.

Since wheelchair users are not envisioned within walking interviews, I considered broadening the concept by using the term wheeling interview as proposed by Laurence Parent (2016), herself being a wheelchair-using researcher. Her wheeling interviews are characterised by the fact that both the researcher and the participant move during the interviews using wheelchairs. Following their example, in the first phase of developing the methodology, I also rented a wheelchair to explore the possibility. However, I had to give up on this idea as I simply was not in the physical shape needed to roll the wheels of my wheelchair much longer than five minutes at a time and was not able to brake fast enough on even the slightest slope. I returned the wheelchair, feeling embarrassment and admiration at the same time. I was ‘restricted in my mobility’ and my bungling attempts to manoeuvre a wheelchair would only have hindered my participants in our wheeling interviews. To comprehend wheelchair navigation as an experience of moving through space, insights about the practice and related tool use can be gained by empathetically following and listening to my interview partners. Hence, I suggest the term moving interview, as a way to de-centre the mode of moving, and foreground the mobility itself.

3. THE THREE-STEP PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION

Moving at the core of the method meant that my interview partners used a wheelchair and I accompanied them by foot. I extended the moving interview to a three-step combination of methods, a comprehensive and pandemic-compliant examination of the mediated navigation practices. This three-step process consists of (1) online interviews, (2) moving interviews, and (3) reflection interviews. The online interviews focused on the part of navigation that is “[...] trip planning at the kitchen table” (Montello 2005: 260), and supported investigating mobility practices also with Covid-19 related lockdowns. The participants planned a route to the house of an imagined friend without actually leaving their apartments. We met in video meetings for about 30-45 minutes via the platform WebEx. Via screen-sharing, participants showed me how they chose and used the tools and other media to plan a route.

Participant	Age	Wheelchair	Destination	Media	Other tools
Alex	42	active wheelchair	a museum	smartphone - <i>Google Maps</i> application, public transport application <i>BVG</i>	skills and strategies learned from his military training
Anna	32	active wheelchair	new workplace	smartphone - <i>HERE WeGo</i> application, public transport application <i>BVG</i> , foldable paper map, underground map	bus- and metro drivers who install portable ramps

Participant	Age	Wheelchair	Destination	Media	Other tools
Fritz	52	electric wheelchair, hand-controlled	a coffee shop	PC – <i>Google Maps</i> website, <i>wheelmap.org</i> , foldable paper map, underground map	–
Mike	46	electric wheelchair, mouth-controlled	a friend's new address	voice assisted laptop - <i>Google Maps</i> website voice assisted smartphone – <i>Google Maps</i> application	assistant, portable ramp
Veronika	62	electric wheelchair, hand-controlled	a park	smartphone - <i>HERE WeGo</i> application, <i>Google Maps</i> application	her dog

Table 1

The first moving interviews were held during the summer and autumn months of 2021. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants. During the moving interviews, I positioned myself next to or slightly behind the respective participant, used my smartphone to record our conversations and took photos of objects or moments along the way that were in some way significant to their movement. This way, “the participants [and I] share virtually the same visual field” (Lee & Ingold, 2006, p. 80). The respective participant was encouraged to express his or her thoughts during our moving interview and I asked follow-up questions. The shared physical movement through space, in which we both move at a similar pace to the same destination, made us both engage socially with one another (Lee & Ingold, 2006, p. 79f.). The moving interviews allowed me to experience the participants’ navigation and their use of navigation tools as I accompanied them throughout the entire process. We started by determining a destination, planning modes of transportation and route sequences, followed and updated the route if necessary, and finally reached the destination.

Step 3, the reflection interviews, gives the chance to reflect upon our experiences. We sat opposite to each other and looked into each other’s eyes, which allowed us “to communicate with far more precision and subtlety than they otherwise could” (Lee & Ingold, 2006, p. 79). This interview phase is important for reflection, because during the moving interview, we sometimes were distracted by some parts of the route, like crowded streets, and occasionally missed other elements that should have been focused on, like a decision to update the route or a detour that was not spoken about in that moment. This step made space for questions about elements on the route that were missed during the movement. In hectic situations like changing trains in crowded stations, for example, there is no time and no capacity to reflect on the tools used. The reflection interviews, usually taking place at a coffee shop or restaurant close to the destination lasted for 15-25 minutes.

4. STEP 1: ONLINE INTERVIEWS FOR NAVIGATION

Adapting to Covid-19 limitations, I developed a version of the data collection that was compatible with the pandemic restrictions. I extended the two-step process (moving interviews and reflection interviews) by adding a preceding third step: the online interviews. These comprised the scenario that the participant would plan a route to the house of an imagined friend.

The online interview with Mike virtually took us to plan a trip into a suburban area of a German city to visit an imagined friend. We both sat in front of our laptops and he immediately proposed to share his screen, so I could watch him open the *Google Maps* website. Mike uses a voice assistant to control all his media devices, and he started telling his computer to select the user mode for motorists. Planning a route to a new destination, he first looks at the route that *Google Maps* suggests for car drivers to get an overview: “it is guaranteed to have good surfaces. But I know, for example, um, that I wouldn’t go along the main road because there are just too many cars” (Mike). Therefore, in a second step, he compares the suggested route for car drivers with the bicycle route: “The bicycle route [...] has the additional advantage that you have an altitude profile, which is very practical for me because I can then see if it might be too steep somewhere” (Mike). He claimed: “You have to outsmart the system a bit” (Mike), meaning that he assembles a good route from bits and pieces from different route options. He combines the *Google Maps* bicycle route option with street view images of the surfaces to estimate if the route fits his requirements.

Online interviews allowed me to watch Mike, Anna and Alex plan routes and explain which tools they chose. As we could not actually follow the route, I asked questions like “What would be your next step now?”, “What do you bring with you?” or “What if you got lost there?”. The imaginary visit scenario, combined with questions, made the participants recall other experiences they had had while navigating. Mike told me about his last holiday trip on an island in the Indian Ocean: “[...] once, I [...] went down a very steep hill [...] and unfortunately, I had underestimated the risk and I fell over. [...] That was a bit annoying, but that’s just the way it is” (Mike). Navigation is always a negotiation of certain aspects of space, the materiality of the wheelchair and body, and the information about the route. Their complex reference systems are different from that of other people who use a different wheelchair, another tool, or none to travel and navigate. “[...] everyone has different mobility requirements, or navigation requirements, and everyone has different conditions, so you can’t compare a hand wheelchair that you have to roll yourself with an electric wheelchair” (Mike). Diverse interpretations of accessibility became visible when Mike shared his experiences of visiting the Elbe Philharmonic Hall in Hamburg, a newly built orchestra house that claimed to be fully accessible:

From an architectural point of view, they’ve put a lot of emphasis on this great escalator, which they also advertise everywhere, but it’s just not accessible. Instead,

wheelchair users have to use the garage entrance and an elevator to get up there. [...] that's stupid. And with a €12,000,000 building, sorry, but you could do better. (Mike)

My participants did not have hard feelings towards inaccessible infrastructures that were historical or built several years ago. However, they resented feeling excluded from new buildings, especially places that have personal meaning for them.

The online interviews were a great starting point and allowed seeing the different media the participants used and their value in use. However, they were limited, creating an artificial situation only pretending to travel along a route. Thus, the online interviews complement, but do not replace the next step: the moving interview

5. STEP 2: MOVING INTERVIEWS

The moving interview begun with a meeting at a pre-arranged meeting point, a bus stop near the participants' apartment, in front of or inside their homes. The participant would then tell me where we would be headed. I did not limit their choice of the destination: Every mode of transport was allowed, and the distance was estimated in accordance to the time they were willing to spend, but it was a place they had not been to before. The participants chose different destinations: Alex opted for a museum he had always wanted to visit. Anna needed to go to a place where she would meet her colleagues later that day and did not want to get lost, thus using the interview to check the route beforehand. Fritz and Veronika did not prepare a fixed destination and asked me to define one. Despite asking the participants to choose a destination before we meet, it does not always work, and some participants struggle with this exercise. Therefore, after meeting Fritz and realising how hard this task could be for some participants, I prepared a few possible destinations for the following interviews. The broad categories like a park, a coffee shop or a restaurant helped Veronika to formulate one particular destination of this category, making the task easier.

5.1. Planning a route: Making use of media

For all the participants, planning a route begins with using media. Most digital navigation systems let one choose a specific user mode to navigate: cyclist, pedestrian or motorist (e.g., in *Google Maps*, *Waze* or *Apple Maps*). All these modes come with assumptions about the respective user group to make their navigation as convenient as possible. The cyclist mode, for example, will give information about the slope of a path and will only offer routes that avoid stairs, as Alex told me while we planned our route. Fritz made use of a combination different media, namely a paper map and online services. He used *Google Maps* to search for a coffee shop as his destination and then compared the information on the coffee shop shown by *Google Maps* with the information from a website called *wheelmap.org* to make sure that this place has

a wheelchair-accessible bathroom, but no stairs. *Wheelmap.org* is a website that displays information on the accessibility of public places, which is provided by users of the website. However, this website does not provide a route-planning service.

My participants did not feel represented in any of the navigation media. They combine different modes and services to create a route that suits them best. Each option brings its own advantages and disadvantages. One helpful feature mentioned was the visual representation of surfaces, since none of the route options contains information about the ground surfaces, the width of paths or possible obstacles. Yet, such information is of utmost importance for wheelchair users; for example, for Fritz and Veronika who use an electric wheelchair, cobblestones can be dangerous. However, information on ground surfaces is hard to find and can only be accessed through *Google Street View*, as Alex mentioned. However, the images shown there are not available for every location and they are often not up-to-date.

5.2. Following a route: Making use of space

While we were moving through an area of Berlin with a ground surface that was in poor condition, I understood Fritz's rather pragmatic approach to how he handles (pre)defined places within the infrastructure around him. Upon encountering hindrances, he will find ways or make use of options that are actually not created for wheelchair users but need to be used to reach his destination. As we went on the pavement, we encountered a poorly parked car that blocked Fritz from following his path. He therefore went right onto the road, around the car, and back onto the pavement, waiting for me, as I had to run to catch up with him. It is impossible for me to get around a badly parked car on a busy road in Berlin at a speed of 20 km/h, as Fritz using an electric wheelchair could easily do. This situation made me aware of our different requirements and capabilities when following a route. Me not being able to follow Fritz in his fast wheelchair influenced our movement and was most certainly the reason he avoided going on the street for the rest of our interview.

A similar situation happened during my interview with Veronika. As we were crossing a road, we noticed that the other side of the road had a very high kerb. Veronika quickly drove on the street until she found a lower kerb to get onto the pavement again, while her dog followed her on the pavement. As I caught up with her, she told me: "I'm not so sure if it is legal for me to drive there but I do it anyway. That's just the way I am." (Veronika). With Alex, we faced several obstacles that were uncircumventable for him, such as high kerbs, a poorly parked car and tree branches that had fallen on the pavement. Alex often uses the bicycle lane, despite wheelchair users legally counting as pedestrians. My interview participants have developed ways to avoid barriers and obstacles using an existing infrastructure, even if it is not intended for them. The legal definitions do not make much sense as wheelchair users share hardly any requirements with pedestrians concerning ground surface or width of the path.

The moving interviews allowed me to understand that the space we moved in comes with affordances. The surfaces the participants encounter determine how they plan and conduct routes, how destinations are set and what navigation tools are selected. As the psychologist Jamer J. Gibson claims: „The affordances of the environment are what it offers” (Gibson, 2014, p. 56). However, the natural environment is designed to fit the specific needs of a group of humans to make life easier for them but not for others (Gibson, 2014, p. 56). The infrastructures and the material form of space come with information on how to use it, what practices it allows (Cresswell, 2015, p. 70). Thus, the moving interview turned out to be a useful method, not only to research how people move and what media and other tools they used during their journey, but also to study the affordances of space. Exploring how the participants interacted with space and what types of interaction it offers showed how space functions as a reflection; it reveals hierarchies, notions of power, ideologies, and values (Soja, 1996, p. 6). Veronika and I went to a park that turned out to be inaccessible for her, Fritz and I went to a coffee shop that did not have a wheelchair-accessible bathroom, and Alex and I had to overcome a step at the door to enter a coffee shop. Those design decisions represent each place’s visitors and reveal whose needs are considered, who is considered a legitimate participant (Drüeke, 2013, p. 38). By designing space, landscapes, cities and infrastructures a certain way, some people are included, and others are excluded. The participant’s strategy to use the streets or bicycle lanes as a form of appropriation of space, re-claiming a part of public infrastructure as the area created for pedestrians does not represent their needs. These appropriation strategies allow making a place of their own.

5.3. Moving safely

The participants told me that safety was the main factor determining whether a route can be followed, needs to be updated or even cancelled. During the interview with Anna, we came across an emergency telephone at an underground station that she told me was very important in case a lift is broken at the station and one misses the last train at night. Veronika shared a story of being locked into a park at night and not getting out because she could neither open nor climb over the already locked gate. Both cases show what clearly applies to everybody: being able to call for help is very important, and media technologies, especially a smartphone or the mentioned emergency phone, are vital here. These examples also show that even regular situations can become dangerous for wheelchair users. A broken lift is a mere inconvenience for most people can lead to precarious situations for wheelchair users.

Anna explained using the public transport service app to check the lifts. “[the application] is very topical [...]. There was a broken lift at Hermannstraße yesterday [...] we should better go by bus” (Anna). Media technologies and the processing and availability of real-time information on lifts throughout the city is a particularly important feature mentioned by my participants. The Berlin public transport

application, therefore, serves an important purpose: “they have information on all the lifts” (Alex). While the Berlin public transportation service does not maintain all the lifts, they service most of those that are located at public transport stops, as Anna explained. Information on which lifts throughout the city are broken, where accessible toilets are located and when they are open are issues that directly influence how the participants plan routes and where they travel.

While Fritz and I were on the move, he told me that maintaining a certain degree of orientation is crucial, meaning that he always has a sense of where he is, or as Daniel Montello puts it, where he is relative to his goal and what obstacles there are in his way (Montello, 2005, p. 264). For Alex, his smartphone and a navigation app are therefore always present during navigation. He uses them to plan a route, to follow and to update it occasionally when he faces an obstacle. Albert Borgmann (1984) claims that technological devices, including navigation media, have a negative effect on memory and cognition, “resulting in loss of engagement with the environment and others” (cited in Leshed et al., 2008, p. 1675). Increasingly, people are losing their ability to practice wayfinding without the help of GPS (Aporta & Higgs, 2005, p. 740ff.), presumably being one result of the growing disengagement with their environment (Leshed et al., 2008, p. 1675). As a countermeasure, Fritz planned his route using a paper map, memorizing smaller sequences of the route, thus ensuring that he would not be too distracted from the actual surroundings while following that route. Similarly, Veronika told me that it is necessary for her to be more engaged with her surroundings than it might be for other people. At the same time, she was not afraid to rely on navigation media when going to unknown areas: “[the smartphone] is so convenient, it knows so much!” (Veronika). The services her smartphone offers in means of navigation are very important to her: “Mobility is what is most important” (Veronika), she said. Her dog Emi is an assistant in this context as well. She will hold doors, push the buttons on a lift, she makes Veronika feel safe and she will know her way back home from many areas of Berlin. Alex also mentioned that, as a trained soldier, he always tries to keep track of where he is located: “Some details always strike me [...] I immediately notice which side of a tree the ivy grows [...] that is, where the sun is highest” (Alex).

To navigate, the participants use different strategies and tools that help them to make sense of the information around them. Navigation media are one of those and using them does not mean that one is disengaged from their surroundings. I experienced the participants paying close attention to objects, people, and infrastructures they come across. Using navigation media alters their experiences of place as they add information to their surroundings without making their own detailed observation and constant consideration of information obsolete.

The moving interviews vary greatly in duration, some lasting 40 minutes, others almost 2 hours. They are strongly influenced by factors such as the weather or impressions of the destination. For instance, during Veronika’s moving interview, we were hit by a huge storm and arrived at the destination being soaking wet and

cold. The park we were headed for turned out to be surrounded by stairs so that we could not even access it. We reflected on these experiences during the last step, the reflection interview.

6. STEP 3: THE REFLECTION INTERVIEWS

After reaching the destination, the respective participant and I found some place to sit and speak about our experiences during the movement while having a warm drink.

Building on the moving interviews, the participants reflected on how they moved, made choices and interacted with other people and objects. Their reflections focused on the feeling of belonging to a certain place or being represented in the design of a place, and how this goes hand in hand with being a participant, or belonging to society. Referring to a damaged piece of pavement that we had encountered earlier, Alex said, “I do feel forgotten sometimes”. On my way to meet him, I had already passed this piece of damaged pavement without paying any attention to it. Moving with Alex, I realised the significance of the pavement’s condition not only for the way he would move but also for the way he felt and positioned himself within society. The moving interview method highlights both the importance of experiencing situations with the participants, and the reflection of the experiences in this third step. During this third stage, I ask more questions and let the participants reflect and expand on topics that they may have mentioned beforehand.

With Anna, Veronika and Fritz, for example, the reflection interviews focused very much on data security and reflections on their own media use. I found two opposing strategies here: Veronika who claims to follow a minimal data strategy to avoid *Google* services on mobile devices: “Who knows what they do with my data?!” (Veronika); or Fritz who does not even own a smartphone because it makes him feel less autonomous. On the other hand, for Anna and Alex, the convenience of *Google* services and the public transport service application outweighs all data concerns.

Another topic in all reflection interviews is accessibility. We rarely spoke about it during the movement, but as soon as we search for a place to sit down for a cup of coffee and realise that the destination point is not accessible at all, as with Veronika or Alex, the topic came up naturally. Not being able to easily grab a cup of coffee in one of the biggest cities of Europe is frustrating for the participants. Anna told me: “I try not to get angry [...] I just don’t want to”. When we spoke about the term ‘accessibility’ and what it means and contains for the participants, it became clear that accessibility does not only mean that wheelchair users can enter a building or get to a certain spot in just any way, rather it means that they should be enabled to do so in the same way as others (cf. Napolitano, 1995, p. 33). Realising and reflecting on the fact that most shops or even parks have at least one step that makes them not wheelchair-accessible, confirms Rob Kitchin’s claim that space and its design directly exclude disabled persons (Kitchin, 1998, p. 345). However, the participants saw a great potential for

more accessibility through media technologies, for example, by expanding existing navigation services to display wheelchair-friendly bathrooms.

7. CONCLUSION

The moving interview method introduced here allowed me to experience parts of navigation and movement through the participants' eyes and how navigation takes place with the help of technologies. A whole set of related concepts are needed to understand experiences of mobility, participation and navigation as a wheelchair user. The three-step process of data collection presented here, (1) online interviews, (2) moving interviews and (3) reflection interviews, produces a wide variety of data. For instance, audio recordings, photographs, maps, and notes. Every researcher can decide which of these to record. I recorded continuous audio, and took photos of objects and situations, pointed out by the participants or noticed by myself. For future moving interviews, I plan to attach a camera to the wheelchair (cf. Parent, 2016) that will continuously record to experience, for example, to what extent underground maps or information boards are accessible at a sitting height, and how this might influence the movement and choices of wheelchair users.

The online interviews have their limitations, as both the participant and interviewer need to have a stable internet connection. Secondly, online interviews are limited to certain groups of people. For instance, Veronika and Fritz preferred not to speak on the phone or via video call because they are often not understood due to their speaking disabilities, making telephone calls tedious and unpleasant. Inevitably, some elements of the online interviews re-emerged during the moving interviews, where the participants pointed out that they had already covered that issue in the online interviews, and felt a bit reluctant to repeat themselves, e.g., "but I already told you that" (Anna) or "as I said last time" (Alex). Although these statements show me how well a merely imagined wayfinding without actual movement can be performed from home, the step of the online interview is apparently not essential. The combination of methods showed me that not all uses of media technologies are reflected upon, and that the participants adapt their media use according to the circumstances. Being able to observe media use in situ reveals practices that might be overlooked in oral recounting and demonstrating the usefulness of moving interviews for studying mediated communication on the move and mediated navigation. Excluding wheelchair users from studies that use a mobile method is in no way justifiable. Moving interviews allow investigating how people perceive and move through space and how they make use of media to do so.

Moving with the participants (1) has enabled me to co-experience a part of the participants' mobility in real time, including how they navigate, what tools they use and how they perceive their surrounding and make use of it, but (2) has also exemplified that my presence as a non-wheelchair user accompanying wheelchair users influences the way they move during the moving interviews. Adapting to me following

them on foot most certainly influenced the routes the participants chose. However, the media use and needs differ even between an active wheelchair, an electric wheelchair or a hand bike. The interviewer will not be able to replicate all conditions, and walking along is most likely enough.

Despite the limitations, moving interviews allow the researcher and the interview partner to share similar experiences during the movement. The think-aloud approach led to a continuing reflection of what was encountered, and we discussed topics that would most certainly remain subconscious or not be recalled in a stationary interview. However, to compensate for the walker's field of vision differing from that of the one sitting in a wheelchair, adaptations or additional data collection might be needed. The aspects of different speed and different vision fields can and must be reflected upon but do not negate the value of the profound and diverse data that these moving interviews generate.

One major lesson learned of these moving interviews lies in the reflection of my position as a researcher, as I have had to reflect and challenge my standpoints, opinions and knowledge. Even though an estimated 1-2% of the world's population use a wheelchair (WHO, 2008; Wheelchair Foundation, 2021), these people are often-times not considered in many aspects of life, be it the design of spaces or technological devices. Working with moving interviews made me aware of ableism as a mind-set that many people unintentionally hold: "Ableism is the intentional or unintentional discrimination or oppression of individuals with disabilities" (National Conference for Community and Justice, 2021, para. 3). Several situations during the interviews challenged my ableist position. Mike talking about enjoying hiking in the mountains surprised me, as I had no idea then that mountain hiking was even possible for him as a wheelchair user. I assumed it to be very dangerous and would come with a lot of effort for himself and his assistants. Mike was very kind and made me question why I thought that way. Eventually, I concluded that although my assumptions were friendly and stemmed from concern for Mike's safety, they also showed my ableist standpoint, I pushed myself to reflect on it since.

Throughout the data collection and encounters with the participants, I have been confronted with my own unintentional conclusions that have not been mine to make. For instance, rain is no more of a problem to Veronika in her electric wheelchair than it is for me, not all wheelchair users will use their wheelchair all the time, but will still be called wheelchair users, and being outdoors in the mountains is definitely an activity to be pursued by wheelchair users. Just because one cannot imagine a person doing a particular action, this does not mean it is not possible. Moreover, although our motivations might be considerate on the surface, researchers are in no place to exclude people from certain areas of life. By using moving interviews, I see the ease of excluding entire groups of people from research projects (as both researchers and participants), how we do not question certain requirements, and how we fail to reflect on traditions of how studies are conducted. Wheelchair users, as well as many other people, often experience multiple layers of oppression and exclusion. Even

academia itself often (re-)produces ableism (Parent, 2016, p. 524) without being scrutinised. As researchers, we need to reflect on our imaginations and standpoints and find ways to make research feasible for different bodies. Moving interviews can include people of different bodies who inevitably come with different experiences of space that are not to be ignored. Ultimately, if we cannot imagine a wheelchair user – or any other person – experiencing space as fully and complexly as non-wheelchair users do, we need to learn better.

Lisa Schulze is a doctoral student and research assistant at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Salzburg, Austria. She completed the Master's programme *Media Culture* at the University of Bremen, Germany. Her research interests include navigation and media use, space and mobile media, disability, accessibility and qualitative research methods.

LITERATURE

- Alper, M. (2014). *Digital youth with disabilities*. MIT Press.
- Alper, M. (2017). *Giving voice. Mobile communication, disability, and inequality*. MIT Press.
- Aporta, C., & Higgs, E. (2005). Satellite culture – global positioning systems, Inuit wayfinding, and the need for a new account of technology. *Current Anthropology*, 46(5), 729–753.
- Beale, L., Field, K., Briggs, D., Picton, P., & Matthews, H. (2006). Mapping for wheelchair users: Route navigation in urban spaces. *The Cartographic Journal*, 43(1), 68–81.
- Bergeron, J., Paquette, S., & Poullaouec-Gonidec, P. (2014). Uncovering landscape values and micro-geographies of meanings with the go-along method. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 122(2014), 108–121.
- Bilandzic, H. (2017). Lautes Denken. In L. Mikos & C. Wegener (Eds.), *Qualitative Medienforschung. Ein Handbuch* (2nd ed., pp. 406–413). UVK.
- Borgmann, A. (1984). *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry*. University of Chicago Press.
- Breidenstein, G., Hirschauer, S., Kalthoff, H., & Nieswand, B. (2013). *Ethnografie. Die Praxis der Feldforschung*. UTB GmbH.
- Büscher, M., & Urry, J. (2009). Mobile methods and the empirical. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 12(1), 99–116
- Carpiano, R. M. (2009). Come take a walk with me: The “Go-Along” interview as a novel method for studying the implications of place for health and well-being. *Health & Place* 15, 263–272.
- Cresswell, T. (2015). *Place. An Introduction* (2nd ed.). Wiley Blackwell.
- Ding, D., Parmanto, B., Karimi, H. A., Roongpiboonsopit, D., Pramana, G., Conahan, T., & Kasemsupakorn, P. (2007). Design considerations for a personalized

- wheelchair navigation system. *Proceedings of the 29th Annual International Conference of the IEEE EMBS Cité Internationale, Lyon, France*, pp. 4790–4793.
- Drüeke, R. (2013). *Politische Kommunikationsräume im Internet. Zum Verhältnis von Raum und Öffentlichkeit*. transcript.
- Evans, J., & Jones, P. (2011). The walking interview: Methodology, mobility and place. *Applied Geography*, 31(2), 849–858.
- Finlay, J. M., & Bowman, J. A. (2017). Geographies on the Move: A Practical and Theoretical Approach to the Mobile Interview. *The Professional Geographer*, 69(2), 263–274.
- Fox, S. (2011). *Americans living with disability and their technology profile*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2011/01/21/americans-living-with-disability-and-their-technology-profile/>
- German Federal Government Commissioner for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für die Belange von Menschen mit Behinderungen). (2020). Die Bedeutung der UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention. https://www.behindertenbeauftragter.de/DE/Koordinierungsstelle/UNKonvention/Bedeutung/Bedeutung_node.html
- Gibson, J. J. (2014). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Gleeson, B. J. (1997). Disability Studies: A historical materialist view. *Disability and Society*, 12(2), 179–202.
- Kitchin, R. (1998). 'Out of place', 'knowing one's place': Space, power and the exclusion of disabled people. *Disability & Society*, 13(3), 343–356.
- Kühl, J. (2016). Walking Interviews als Methode zur Erhebung alltäglicher Raumproduktionen. *Europa Regional*, 23(2015), 35–48.
- Lee, J., & Ingold, T. (2006). Fieldwork on foot: Perceiving, routing, socializing. In S. Coleman, & P. Collins (Eds.), *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology* (pp. 67–85). Berg Publishers.
- Leshed, G., Velden, T., Rieger, O., Kot, B., & Sengers, P. (2008). In-car GPS navigation: Engagement with and disengagement from the environment. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems. Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY*, 1675–1684. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1357054.1357316>
- Levine, S. P., Bell, D. A., Jaros, L. A., Simpson, R. C., Koren, Y., & Borenstein, J. (1999). The NavChair Assistive Wheelchair Navigation System. *IEEE Transactions on Rehabilitation Engineering*, 7(4), 443–451.
- Linton, S. (1998). *Claiming disability. Knowledge and identity*. New York University Press.
- Malpas, J. (2012). The place of mobility: Technology, connectivity, and individualization. In R. Wilken, & G. Goggin (Eds.), *Mobile Technology & Place* (pp. 26–38). Routledge.

- Mascetti, S., Civitarese, G., El Malak, O., & Bettini, C. (2020). SmartWheels: Detecting urban features for wheelchair users' navigation. *Pervasive and Mobile Computing*, 62, 101115, 1-19.
- Moles, K. (2008): A Walk in Thirdspace: Place, Methods and Walking. *Sociological Research Online*, 13(4), 31-39.
- Møller Jørgensen, K. (2016). The media go-along. Researching mobilities with media at hand. *MedieKultur. Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 60, 32-49.
- Montello, D. R. (2005). Navigation. In P. Shah, & A. Miyake (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of visuospatial thinking* (pp. 257-294). Cambridge University Press.
- Napolitano, S. (1995). Mobility impairment. In G. Hales (Ed.), *Beyond Disability: Towards an enabling environment* (pp. 30-35). Sage.
- National Conference for Community and Justice. (2021). *Ableism*. <https://www.nccj.org/ableism>
- Oliver, M. (1990). *The politics of disablement*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Parent, L. (2016). The wheeling interview. *Mobile methods and disability. Mobilities*, 11(4), 521-532.
- Savino, G.-L., Sturdee, M., Rundé, S., Lohmeier, C., Hecht, B., Prandi, C., Jardim Nunes, N., & Schöning, J. (2020). MapRecorder: Analysing real-world usage of mobile map applications. *Behaviour and Information Technology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2020.1714733>
- Shakespeare, T. (2013). *Disability rights and wrongs revisited*. Routledge.
- Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Blackwell.
- Tannert, B., & Schöning, J. (2018). Disabled, but at what cost? An examination of wheelchair routing algorithms. *Proceedings of the 20th International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction with Mobile Devices and Services* (p. 46).
- Trevisan, F. (2017). *Disability rights advocacy online: Voice, empowerment and global connectivity*. Routledge.
- Wheelchair Foundation. (2021). *Wheelchair Needs In The World*. <https://www.wheelchairfoundation.org/fth/analysis-of-wheelchair-need/>
- WHO (World Health Organization). (2008, May 13). *Guidelines on the provision of manual wheelchairs in less resourced settings*. <https://www.who.int/publications/item/9789241547482>
- Wiener, J., Büchner, S. J., & Hölscher, C. (2009). Taxonomy of human wayfinding tasks: A knowledge-based approach. *Spatial Cognition & Computation*, 9(2), 152-165.
- Yanco, H. A. (1998). Wheelesley: A robotic wheelchair system: Indoor navigation and user interface. In V. O. Mittal, H. A. Yanco, J. Aronis, & R. Simpson (Eds.), *Assistive Technology and Artificial Intelligence. Applications in Robotics, User Interfaces and Natural Language Processing* (pp. 256-268). Springer-Verlag.

ENCOUNTERING ALGORITHMS IN THE URBAN SPACE: A MATTER OF KNOWLEDGE. AN ENACTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY OF RIDERS' WORK

FRANCESCO BONIFACIO

Catholic University, Milan

ABSTRACT

In the academic debate, an increasing number of studies has addressed the disciplining function of the algorithmic management upon food-delivery workers. The technological infrastructure has been understood as a tool in the hands of the management, against which workers can only resist or succumb insofar as they comply (or not) with algorithmic prescriptions. Less attention has been given to what the interaction with algorithms is made of. By adopting riders' point of view, this article explores the meanings and competences attached to such interaction, which shapes workers' spatial and temporal experience. Framing the everyday encounters with algorithms as a "site of knowing" (Nicolini 2011), the paper shows the emergence of a professional vision (Goodwin, 1994) within (a part of) riders' community. The research draws on six-months Milan-based observant participation during which the author worked as a part-time rider, integrated with 21 in-depth interviews with workers and a small survey (n=130).

Keywords: food-delivery work ▪ platform economy ▪ algorithms ▪ urban space ▪ practice theories ▪ ethnography

1. INTRODUCTION: ADDRESSING THE SPECIFICITY OF A NEW OCCUPATION

Among the increasing number of platform labours, food-delivery couriers – the so-called riders – have achieved the greatest public visibility. In the academic debate, a growing interdisciplinary literature – ranging from labour law to economic sociology – has addressed this work in reference to broader socioeconomic processes related to the platformisation of society (Van Dijck et al. 2018, p. 2). Riders have been understood alternatively as the labour function in the process of capital accumulation (van Doorn & Badger 2020), as the symbol of contractual and wage precarity characterizing platform capitalism (Goods et al. 2019), or as the protagonists of

a new stage of class struggle led by the emerging informal unions (Marrone 2021; Tassinari & Maccarone 2020). Moreover, the research has understood food-delivery work as a generic labour within the platform economy examining cross-cutting organisational issues, such as the so-called algorithmic management (Stark & Pais 2020). Griesbach and colleagues, for example, have framed food-delivery as a "rapidly expanding sector of platform work" (2019, p. 2) comparing it to the "companies such as Uber, Lyft, Instacart, TaskRabbit, Mechanical Turk, Care.com that use cloud-based technology to bring workers and consumers together" (ibid., p.1). Similarly, Veen et al. have dialogued with empirical studies carried out in several different working environments, identifying the algorithmic management as a distinct feature of the "app-based platform-work" (Veen et al. 2020, p. 2). This homogenizing trend finds a theoretical legitimacy in contributions that advanced the adoption of normative frameworks rooted in critical theories for the study of the gig economy as a whole (Gandini 2019; Woodcock & Graham 2019). In particular, Gandini has recommended using the Marxist approach of labour process theory to study "what is unique about the gig economy, as a way of working through (and for) a digital platform" (Gandini 2019, p. 1040), framing the platform as the "point of production: intended as the 'place' where the labour process is enacted upon workers" (ibid.). Focusing on the consequences carried by the algorithms intermediation of the labour process, these studies have undeniably refined our understanding of the platform as a new economic model. On the contrary, by disregarding the specificity of such occupation, less attention has been given to what the interaction with algorithms is actually made of. Overall, riders have been understood as (more or less) resistant in relation to the algorithmic management, insofar as they comply (or not) with algorithmic prescriptions. This article argues that by adopting the riders' point of view, we can shed lights on the meanings and competences attached to such interaction, shaping workers' spatial and temporal experience. Framing the everyday encounters with algorithms as a site of knowing (Nicolini 2011) of the work-practice, I will show the emergence of a professional vision (Goodwin, 1994) within (a part of) riders' community.

The paper proceeds as follow. First, I will start by reviewing the literature on algorithmic management. Then, I will briefly illustrate the theoretical framework of the research, addressing the epistemological and methodological challenges related to the study of algorithms *in use*. This theoretical reflection will set the stage for discussing empirical results in the last sections, where I will try to illustrate riders' spatial and temporal experience resulting from how they practically understand algorithms.

2. THE LITERATURE ON ALGORITHMIC MANAGEMENT

Consistently with the above-mentioned tendency to understand food-delivery work as a generic labour within the platform economy, this paragraph presents a synthesis of the empirical literature produced on different platform labours to situate our

argument. Mostly rooted in critical theories, these studies share a common perspective on the role of algorithms at work, conceiving technology as an element determining the organizational structure, hiding the hand of the management (Gandini 2019) – yet, without eliminating it. Overall, this literature advances an understanding of algorithms as opaque codes carrying out informative asymmetries between managers and workers, which are reported to strengthen the structure of power between capital and labour in favour of the former. Accordingly, Vallas and Schor have proposed the image of the "digital cage" (2020, p. 278), paraphrasing the famous metaphor of the "iron cage" used by Weber to describe modern processes of bureaucratization. Through an extensive literature review, Kellog, Valentine, and Christin (2020) have identified six ways in which algorithms can be employed for control purposes: by "limiting" available courses of action; by "recommending" some choices instead of others; by "recording" job performances and "evaluating" workers; and by disciplining workers "rewarding" them or "replacing" them with others. An early influential research in the field of algorithmic management is the one conducted by Rosenblat and Stark (2016) on Uber drivers, in the American context. Drawing on drivers discussions on the web, the authors illustrated several algorithm-mediated techniques through which the platform exerts an indirect control over drivers, reducing their autonomy. Techniques such as surge pricing and reputational systems are seen as a form of "soft control" (ibid., p.3768), where the middle management is being replaced by customers. Rosenblat and Stark's research has inspired many of the studies produced subsequently, both on the experience of Uber drivers (Chan & Humphreys 2018; Rosenblat 2018), and on other workers in the platform economy. In the case of riders, similar conclusions are reached by Shapiro's ethnographic study (2018) in the US, as well as by Barratt et al. (2020) and Veen et al. (2020) in the Australian context. In addition, several authors have stressed the presence of platforms' gamified inclinations (Gerber & Krzywdzinski 2019; van Doorn 2017) aimed at stimulating workers' performances. In food-delivery work, the emergence of gamified affordances has been observed by van Doorn (2018), in the transition from a stable pay system (on an hourly or piece base) to a dynamic one (built on variable pay and bonuses).

Despite the risk that algorithmic management may reduce workers' ability "to resist, elude, or challenge the rules and expectations that firms establish as conditions of participation" (Vallas & Schor 2020), several studies have showcased the workers' agency in regaining control over the labour process. Drawing on a literature review, Graham and Ferrari identified three strategies – manipulation, subversion, disruption – through which workers attack the so-called "fissures" of the algorithmic power, understood as the "moments in which algorithms do not govern as intended" (2021, p.2). For example, Rahman (2019) observed how UpWork's freelancers elaborated a way to circumvent the platform's reputational metrics by forming personal alliances with customers to keep the level of their own ratings. In a similar case study, Jarrahi and Sutherland have described workers' agency as a "meaning-making strategy to open the black box" and to "circumvent or manipulate algorithms to their own

advantage" (2019, p. 585). Such strategies have been described in terms of "algorithmic competence" (Cheng & Foley 2019; Kaine & Josserand 2019), "work games" (Manriquez 2019) or "tactical quantifications" (Irani & Silberman 2013). In relation to food-delivery work, several authors have emphasized riders' ability to resist algorithmic control on an individual level (Griesbach et al. 2019; Newlands 2021; Shapiro 2018; Veen et al. 2020), remarking the difficulty of translating it into a collective plan.

Nevertheless, despite observing a higher or lower capacity to circumvent the algorithmic control, I argue that the meaning of riders' interaction with algorithms cannot be automatically understood in terms of resistance. On the contrary, it must be empirically questioned with reference to the practice wherein it is situated. If we want to understand how algorithms work in terms of "constituting and being constituted in and through practice" (Bucher 2018), the riders' work-practice needs to become the empirical focus. Therefore, a precise notion of practice is needed.

3. WORKING AS A RIDER, USING AN ALGORITHM

Despite disagreeing about the identification of its constitutive elements, practice theories share a common perspective in the way they reject traditional dualisms in sociological thinking such as body/mind, individual/structure, social/material (Reckwitz 2002). Reckwitz has provided an extensive definition of a practice, as "a routinized type of behaviour, which consists of several elements interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz, 2002, p.249). Accordingly, a practice is recognised as a discrete entity only as the result of how these elements provisionally – while quite stably – interweave one another. In this case, riders' work results from the interconnection between a body, the platform mediating the work, a certain type of urban knowledge, means of transport, urban materiality, rules, discourses and representations. As such, it is recognised and represented differently from other similar practices, such as cycling for recreational or commute purposes. Notwithstanding their internal differences, practice theories share a relational perspective on materiality (Gherardi 2016; Schatzki 2010; Shove 2016), that is particularly beneficial to discuss the interaction between riders and algorithms. In short, it implies to question the role and the meaning played by materiality in relation to specific practices, moving from the study of *technology as such* to the *technology in use*. Given their ubiquitous character, the role played by algorithms fundamentally depends on how we delimit the boundaries of our research object. Richardson suggests to focus on the delicate coordination of different social agents – restaurants, riders and customers – in space and time to realise the delivered meal (2020). For this purpose, algorithms are best understood as things working in the background, as infrastructures. Conversely, being focused on what riders do during their everyday work-experience as we were in this research, algorithms are more conveniently

understood as material resources used by riders, as “something that is used or transformed radically in the course of the practice” (Shove, 2016, p.156). This analytical shift does not solve the epistemological and methodological issues on what it means to use algorithms. More precisely, it does not clarify what are we supposed to look at when we address the interaction between riders and algorithms.

4. EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES ABOUT ENCOUNTERING ALGORITHMS

Technically, an algorithm can be defined as "a set of coded procedures to transform an input into the desired type of output" (Gillespie 2014). More specifically, as noted by Giardullo, "an algorithm works through input data, that must be organized in the way they can be handled according to the operations envisioned by the algorithm itself" (Giardullo 2020, p. 217 trans. by me). At an early stage, the theoretical reflection on algorithms has mainly focused on their discriminatory functions, highlighting the lack of neutrality in the automated decision-making process (Diakopoulos 2014; Pasquale 2015). This perspective has emphasized the opaque nature of algorithms, representing them as poorly intelligible entities with a high "social power" (Beer 2017). Gradually, this approach has been complemented by the reflection that arose at the intersection between media studies and science and technology studies, which expressed a greater sensitivity towards the performative nature of algorithms, returning attention to the users' agency (Velkova & Kaun 2021). As I briefly mentioned at the end of the last section, this new interpretive strand has suggested shifting the focus from the effects of algorithms *as such* to how they are *used* (Aragona et al. 2020) as part of social practices (Bucher 2018).

Now, while it may be intuitive to think of algorithms as something used by social agents, it is certainly less obvious to understand what it does mean to use an algorithm, given its opaque and invisible character. From this standpoint, I share Gillespie's position, according to whom the best way to understand how algorithms matter to social phenomena is to be concerned with the “insertion of procedure into human knowledge and social experience” (Gillespie 2016). Accordingly, Gillespie has advocated using the term ‘algorithm’ as an adjective rather than as a noun (ibid.). The notion of 'algorithmic imaginary' (Bucher, 2018) is a pivotal example of such adjectival use¹, relating the interaction with algorithms to a matter of knowledge, to the extent that users “perception and knowledge [of how algorithms work] affect their use of social media platforms” (Bucher 2018, p.17). Consistently with Bucher's perspective, algorithms may be understood as a "site of knowing" (Nicolini 2011) of the riders' practice: riders learn how to proficiently use algorithms by making sense of their opaque operation, trying to infer the inputs they compute in the process of decision making. And this knowledge, recursively, shapes the practice itself. In this

1 others being “algorithmic culture” (Striphas 2015) or “algorithmic identity” (Cheney-Lippold 2011)

vein, it's worth noting that by no means does the notion of algorithmic imaginary imply a free-floating perception of the technology. Rather, Bucher associates the imaginary of algorithms to a kind of practical knowledge – that is, knowing “in order to engage meaningfully with and find [the] way around an algorithmically mediated world” (Bucher 2018, p.98) – that echoes concepts such as practical understanding (Schatzki 2001) or practical logic (Bourdieu 1990).

In order to explore how an algorithmic imaginary operates, a methodological tactic advocated by Bucher is to scrutinize the “phenomenological encounters with unknown knows” (Bucher 2018, p.61) when riders make sense of the algorithms functioning. Focusing on such encounters allows us to grasp what other sources of know-how are connected to an algorithmic imaginary, and it enables us to observe how the work-experience “takes shape [...] through encounters with algorithms” (ibid., p.62). It is not easy to isolate these encounters since algorithms permeate the entire work practice, pre-mediating (Jansson 2013) riders’ spatial and temporal experience. However, it is possible to identify a few circumstances where the relevance of algorithms is tangibly evident – in Bucher terms when an algorithm comes to matter – related to the occasions when riders have to make decisions: where to wait for a delivery when to close and to pick up the order and, most of all, whether to accept or reject it. Focusing on such circumstances, in what follows, I will show the everyday encounters between riders and algorithms. Before, a brief methodological account of the research is needed.

5. METHODOLOGY: AN ENACTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

This paper draws on six-months observant participation between January and July 2020, during which I have worked as a Glovo² part-time rider. The study took place in Milan, which is a remarkable context due to the food-delivery market penetration. The choice to work for Glovo was partly dictated by convenience. I applied to all the platforms many times. Glovo provided me with an account in less than 24 hours, as did Uber Eats. Deliveroo and Just Eat never accepted my application. Hiring strategies are one of the many elements of differentiation between food delivery platforms, which riders themselves commonly acknowledge³. Exploring how different platform affordances prefigure the work-practice exceeds the scope of this paper, although it is definitely an aspect of interest. During my fieldwork, I had contacts with different groups of workers, also joining them in their off-work activities. Moreover, I integrated my ethnographical observations with 21 interviews with workers and few interviews with restaurant managers. Also, a survey was personally administered

2 Glovo is a Spanish food-delivery platform that operates in Milan together with many other companies, the bigger ones being Uber Eats, Deliveroo and Just Eat.

3 As instance, Uber Eats is often portrayed as the sub-Saharan riders’ app, while Deliveroo is the app of professional riders. The accusation of illegal hiring of immigrants against Uber Eats provides more than a proof in this sense.

in the physical space to a small, statistically unrepresentative sample of workers (n=130). The primary goal of the survey was to improve the recruitment of the most informative cases for in-depth interviews. Secondly, drawing on a preliminary analysis of ethnographic observations, the survey meant to collect information about the most salient aspects of the work-practice (e.g. deliveries rejection, the work vehicle, workers' sociality with other colleagues, etc.) to explore any possible associations. An in-depth discussion of the survey construction and analysis exceeds the scope of this paper. In this paper, survey data will be used to triangulate qualitative information related to a specific aspect – riders' interaction with algorithms – to strengthen our main argument. In particular, to show the emergence of a professional vision (Goodwin 1994) that, while referred to many aspects of the work, is particularly evident when it comes to the interaction with algorithms.

Methodologically, working as a rider brought opportunistic and epistemic advantages. From the first point of view, approaching riders with a backpack on my shoulders has certainly helped to contain their potential mistrust towards my role as a researcher, exposing me first-hand to the social dynamics I wanted to study. A further opportunistic advantage was the possibility to interact personally with the platform, taking screenshots of the app's graphical interface. Epistemic advantages concern the chance of addressing my work practice and its transformation over time as a specific object of inquiry. In this vein, I have followed Loic Wacquant famous "enactive ethnography"⁴ of the boxing gym in the black ghetto in Chicago (Wacquant 2015). Wacquant has emphasized the importance of "entering into the theatre of action in some ordinary capacity" (2015, p. 6) to investigate the way the sociologist appropriates "the cognitive, ethical, aesthetic and conative patterns that engage in the everyday those who inhabit it" (Wacquant 2002, p. 7). By identifying my initiation into the occupation as a specific analytical object, I was able to reconstruct the formation of my dispositions towards the work practice. Recursively, I could also detect the forms of knowledge required by practice in order to participate diligently for its analytical reconstruction. In addition, the in-depth interviews with other workers allow me to provide a polyphonic picture of the rider's experience. In what follows, I will try to combine notes from my own learning journey together with fragments of interviews with workers.

6. THE ALGORITHMIC-MEDIATED PRODUCTION OF SPACE

As briefly mentioned, riders are usually paid variably for each delivery they fulfil during the hourly slots when they are registered to work. In the case of Glovo, the price of each delivery is contingently calculated by adding a fixed component to a

4 According to Wacquant, the notion of *enactive ethnography* emphasizes that, like any participant, also the researcher enters the field of enquiry from his or her own social and incarnate position, which must be reflexively objectified in order to corroborate the validity of the scientific claims produced.

variable one. The latter is the sum of the distance calculated by Google Maps between the rider and the restaurant, and the distance which separates the restaurant and the customer. To optimize the amount of money gained by delivering within a limited time, one of the most crucial competencies concerns the orders' evaluation. Discriminating between good and bad gigs informs the decision about what orders should be accepted or re-assigned.

"[...] It's 8.30 pm, and I get a new order: the restaurant is near, but the delivery address is very far, approximately in Vigentino. I don't know that area at all. [...] I need to think about it: if I accept this order, it will take me really far: what will the streets be like? Wide, busy, more dangerous? For sure, it is paid more than the average: 7 euros and something. But is it worth getting that far for 7 euros? What if I refuse this order and wait for others to arrive? If I accept this, and then I make another one, I could reach 11, 12 euro. If I refuse this, instead, I could maybe make three deliveries till 10 p.m. [...] Partly out of laziness, I click on the red button, and I get this screenshot that pushes me to reconsider my decision. Perhaps it just pushes me to consider my decision carefully". What I am sure about is that I am wasting time. So I decide to accept the gig, and I start pedalling towards the restaurant [...] I deliver the food; I close the order, and I check the map: I am almost out of the active area. I did not see many restaurants along the road. I guess that in order to receive new gigs, I must go back. And quickly, because it is 9.15 p.m. and my work hours end at 10 p.m. I pedal for 10 minutes, and when I reach via Isonzo, I stop at the traffic light, and I realise that I got an order for Corso di Porta Vigentina to be delivered back outside of the city centre."
(Fieldnote, 28/1/2018)

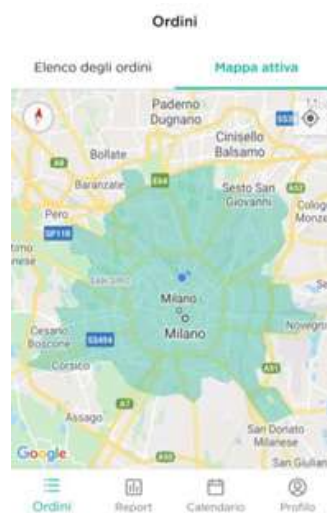


Figure 1. Active area to receive orders. Screenshot produced on the 10/2/2020

As the novice that I am in this episode, I show a very poor algorithmic imaginary. I assume that if I re-assign this gig, I may receive a better one, but I do not disclose any other criteria to properly evaluate the delivery I am assigned to. Only after I have delivered the meal to the customer, I realise I am almost out of the area where orders can be assigned – the one highlighted in green in the app (Figure 1). I don't even consider the scarcity of restaurants that I will find in the customer area, which represents another fundamental node of a rider's mental map (Lynch 1960), influencing the further probability of receiving new orders. Indeed, such seemingly trivial evaluation criteria are the product of a gradual learning journey with the job. As Giovanni states:

"At the beginning, I used to accept everything they sent me...crazy far destinations...Now I don't do those things anymore, because...how to say, because I can choose the deliveries I want to do. After a while you learn to manage them...you learn that it is not convenient to do those deliveries where there are no more pickups, because then you will add the return route where you will be unloaded of orders, right? You will pedal for free...then, it's very important that where you're going there's something else."

(Giovanni, 46, M)

As Giovanni points out, it is not only important how much the delivery is paid. It is essential that "where you're going there's something else" to avoid making what he calls the "unloaded routes": driving without orders in charge, and therefore without being paid. Accordingly, days poor of "unloaded trips" and "big tubs"⁵ are those where, as Dolores notes, the algorithm made you run well.

"Last Monday in 7 hours I made 80 euros, though...80 euros I went back and forth between Corso Garibaldi and Chinatown, but all day long... that is, they are super easy deliveries, and at the end of the day you say "I'm not even cooked". There is also the algorithm that made you run well, then there are also bad days, like today... that is today they wanted to send me from here to pick up in Corso Garibaldi and then to Via Tortona... but guys, it's one thing if I get from here to Via Tortona between one delivery and the other I arrive from here to via Tortona... you send me from here to Buonarroti, from there to Washington and so...so the algorithm makes you run well, but when it wants you to do 7 km in one go you say "but why?"

(Dolores, 30, F)

As these instances show, riders become "algorithmically recognizable" (Gillespie, 2014, p.184) by virtue of their geo-localization which, recursively, constitutes a main dimension upon which they can articulate the algorithm in the practice. By

⁵ Big tubs are those long routes with no possibility of taking shortcuts.

distinguishing between good and bad orders, good and bad city areas riders enact a practical understanding of the functioning of the algorithms entangled with a practice-referred knowledge of the city. With the latter, I mean a way to conceive the urban space that is oriented by the goal of the practice or, in Schatzki's terms (2001), by its teleological structure: to optimize the amount of money gained by delivering within a limited time. By conceiving the urban space, a rider pays attention mainly to what matters for that specific practice – e.g. the concentration of restaurants and offices – while ignoring other nodes of the city – e.g. the concentration of clubs. The analytical distinction between a knowledge of algorithms and a knowledge of the city makes the difference insofar as they do not rely on the same source of learning. Basically, one could be an algorithmic-competent rider while knowing very little about the geography of the city and vice versa⁶. Also, it clarifies that an algorithmic imaginary hardly operates in isolation while it is interwoven with other competencies relevant to the practice. In this case, mobilizing a practice-referred knowledge of the city, a rider can make the informed decision of accepting or rejecting a delivery with criteria other than the mere price of the gig, as I did in the opening fieldnote (“for sure, it is paid more than the average”). Elaborating a practice-referred mental map (Lynch 1960), a rider can distinguish the areas where to work more proficiently, evaluating each gig in relation to its spatial coordinates. In such a cognitive process, the urban material arrangement (Schatzki 2010) is assigned of a practice-referred meaning consistent with the algorithmic logic of the orders allocation. For bicycle riders, for example, working in mainly pedestrian areas increases the possibility of higher fees because the platform sets the rate of each delivery on the basis of the route calculated by Google Maps according to the modality of transportation by car, without considering the route actually travelled to fulfil the delivery. Therefore, working in pedestrian areas enables one to make shorter trips than those recommended by the app, gaining the same amount of money. As Santiago said:

“the further away you go from downtown Milan, the closest you get to... to do the routes like a car... for example... you go north, to Bicocca, those places... you get offered 6 euros... you can trust you are going to cycle like crazy, you are going to do at least 6 km or 6,5 km... why? Because, you know, in that area... it's only streets, wide streets, so if you get paid that amount of money in the north part of Milan, be prepared to pedal... because you are going to follow almost the same route as a car, pretty much the same, the same... it's a completely different world up there... but downtown that's when it gets beneficial for us, for people on bikes...”

(Santiago, 30, M)

⁶ As instance, this is what happens to an expert rider whereas he decides to work in another city, confirming that “the nature of knowledge depends upon the practice at hand and the site-ness within it”, and that “shifting sites necessarily implies some shifting in the knowing” (Nicolini 2011. p.605)

This is thoroughly illustrated by Antonio, a rider working with an electric bike:

I'm chilling out with Antonio in Lambrate [...] Several riders on motorbikes are hanging on waiting to pick up their delivery in the restaurant next to us. He says: "you see here, wide streets, long orders, the prevalence of motorbikes, too much speed to be competitive with my e-bike. I'm competitive downtown, in pedestrian areas, because there you're competitive with bicycles. [...] The delivery from downtown... by downtown restaurants, about a three km long... that's mine, that's an e-bike one because a regular bicycle is too slow for that distance and a motorcycle would be slow because you would have to park it and then walk the remaining distance... so that delivery is mine, for those who have e-bikes, or those who can handle working many hours on bikes"

(Antonio, 50, M)

Santiago and Antonio's mental maps are strictly referred to the work-practice at stake. Here, I want to stress that their ability to discriminate between different areas of a city is the result of a learning journey with the job, which reflects the entanglement of different sources of knowledge (algorithms-related or not). Experiencing an algorithm-mediated space, then, means also learning the spatial coordinates relevant for the work-practice: what the roads to reach the places look like (e.g. if there are pedestrian areas). Many riders even remember what the buildings where the orders are addressed look like: if they have an elevator, if it is possible to leave the vehicle inside, or if the delivery comes from regular customers who are inclined to give tips. These seemingly trivial details are fundamental for recognizing a good delivery.

7. THE ALGORITHMIC-MEDIATED PRODUCTION OF TIME

Besides its spatial arrangement, riders' work practice is defined by a specific temporal structure. Time-related issues are crucial to riders, who must literally fight against their limited amount of time to optimize their incomes. As Santiago argues:

"the longer we wait, the more we lose, it's some kind of battle against time, the more you deliver, the more you win, so you need to save as much as possible when it comes to time...save time...save time...so when it comes to waiting time, that's our worst enemy, because this is just where we lose money."

(Santiago, 30, M)

Aside from driving faster through the city and other work tricks, saving time has much to do with the accurate selection of orders – e.g. rejecting those coming from

restaurants that make couriers wait for a long time – calling into question the classificatory issue related to evaluating a gig. That is, again, a matter of knowledge.

“At the beginning, I couldn't choose anything because I didn't know anything; I used to go everywhere... now, if a delivery takes 20 minutes and they give me 3 euros, I don't take it, because it's not profitable for me... either because it's far away, or I know that the restaurant takes too long, or that the customer will make me wait... that's how you choose a delivery: you have to evaluate all these things that above all affect the time it takes to complete it and how much money they give you...if I know that it takes me half an hour to make a delivery but they give me 6.50 euros for it I'll do it gladly because in any case maybe in the other half-hour I'll make 3,4 euros and I'd have easily made 10 euros in a hour. Then, it's not a matter of speed, but of the head.”
(Valentino, 36, M)

But time issues also concern the temporal organisation of the work within the day and the week. As Southerton observes, temporalities are organised collectively (2003). For instance, the temporality of food-delivery work arises from how different practices – food-consumption practices and food-production practices above all – are connected (Blue 2019; Shove et al. 2012). Obviously, deliveries are more concentrated at lunch and dinner times, especially at weekends. In order to boost riders to work during the so-called “high-demand hours”, platforms as Glovo and Deliveroo penalize those who do not attend them by reducing their rating, thus impacting on further possibilities to book work hours. In the case of Glovo, this modality is even more perverse: the platform registers the number of deliveries made each night of the weekend, and it compares them with those made 28 days before. If a rider worsens his performance, his rating loses as many points as the number of deliveries missed. Such algorithmic prescriptions constraint the temporal organisation of the practice by virtue of weaving its rhythms in terms of calm and rush times, creating what Southerton calls the “hot spots” (2003, p. 20), those moments when “the sense of feeling harassed and constantly worried about ‘time’” (ibid.) is concentrated. On those occasions, a great part of the riders’ ability to “gain control over the temporal rhythms” (Southerton 2003) lies on their algorithmic imaginary.

Today is a diamond⁷ day, but few orders are coming in. Giovanni is quite desperate because last month he delivered 10 orders, and if he doesn't confirm this number tonight, he will lose as many points on his rating as the number of deliveries missed. [...] From the height of his experience, Andrea tells him that a rider should never ever get to “make 10 diamonds” on a Saturday, in May, because “summer months are around the corner, ready to bite into

7 Graphically, the Glovo's app marks with a diamond those slots corresponding to high-demand hours.

your rating". Giovanni answers that Glovo does not allow refusing deliveries over a certain amount. And Andrea replies: "But it's not just about refusing deliveries...this is where the real mischief comes in...picking up an order late or delivering it voluntarily late...for example, if you have made 3 orders so far, you are half an hour away from the end of one shift, you receive one, and you would have to do four orders to balance what you did 28 days ago... you accept that one, but you take it veeeeery calmly, you may pedal as you do when you are in holiday...otherwise, you may close the order later, and if Glovo calls you say "oops, sorry, I didn't notice". In that way you don't get any more orders, and you don't have to re-assign anything."

(Fieldnote, 16/6/2020)

These episode show that learning how to “manage time”, to “save time” or to “have a certain rhythm” is strictly related to the interaction with algorithms. An ultimate example of the sort is the idea of “working for the rating”, which expresses a different way to work on the weekends compared to weekdays:

“during the weekend, I almost don’t care about money, I work for the rating, I care about the numbers of deliveries that I make, and so I accept only short ones even if they are paid badly [...] But this also means you shouldn’t do too many deliveries. If you do 9,10,11 deliveries on Saturday night, then, the next month you will need to make at least the same amount, and maybe it’s summer already, the overall demand is less, and your rating will easily fuck up”

(Dolores, 30, F)

Deciding to gain less today to grant future income in a stable way entails an ability to discriminate between good and bad gigs that stems from a certain algorithmic imaginary. “Working for the rating” expresses a specific way in which algorithms are practically understood, a way of using algorithms that shapes the practice wherein they are situated. In this vein, it is worth observing that selecting orders is also associated with a higher income. Drawing on the ethnographic findings, the orders’ rejection was employed in the survey as a proxy variable of riders’ algorithmic imaginary⁸. The following graph (Figure 2) shows a difference of income between riders who refuse at least one orders’ per day (the curve in red) and those who never reassign orders (the curve in blue). On average, the former earns 187,50 €⁹ more than riders who do not refuse orders.

8 As we observed, rejecting orders lie on the competence to evaluate each delivery

9 For all the interviewees, the income was collected for the month of May 2020, in order to neutralise possible distortions linked to seasonality or occasional events. Data were elaborated by means of a regression model where: number of working hours, the platform, length of employment, place of residence (inside or outside Milan) and vehicle (normal bicycle/e-bike or motor vehicle) were used as regression variables of control. The regression enables to exclude that such association is spurious. Also, it shows its statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). Despite

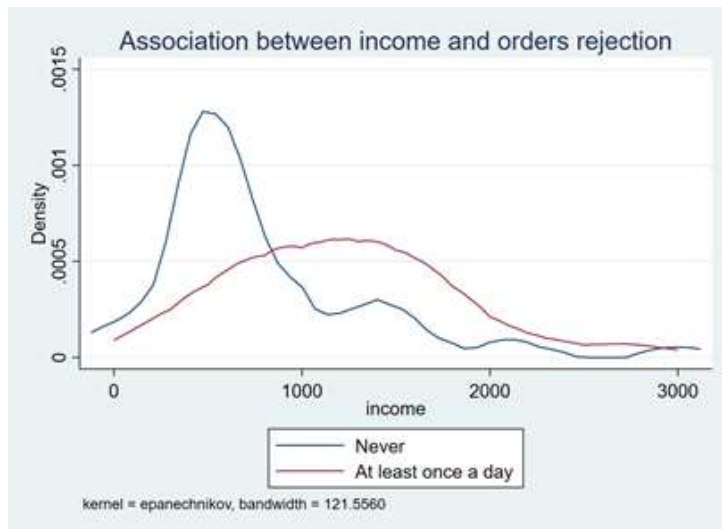


Figure 2 Association between income and daily orders' rejection. Graph elaborated with Stata by the author

This graph, we argue, confirms the heuristic benefit of conceiving the interaction with algorithms as a “site of knowing” (Nicolini 2011). As a source of practical knowledge, the algorithmic imaginary also affects the immediate consequences of the work-practice wherein it is situated: namely, riders’ remuneration.

8. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have focused on the everyday experience of food-delivery workers to illustrate how a certain algorithm imaginary operates. I understood the algorithmic imaginary as a form of practical knowledge, and I stressed that, far from operating alone, it is interconnected with other competencies germane to the practice. In the last two sections, I discussed the phenomenology of such encounters, focusing on the spatial and temporal experience of the work. While many of the instances discussed in this paper constitute a form of negotiation of the algorithm power, I am more reluctant to label them as practice of resistance, as it is quite common in the literature. First, rather than the purposive intention to resist something, Andrea and the other riders express a professional orientation towards the work, resulting from articulating the algorithms procedures into the work experience (Gillespie 2016). Second, if understood as a form of resistance to the management control, Andrea and Dolores tactics remain confined within the perimeter of the “opportunities built in the labour process

the high variability of the values distribution of the second curve (certainly accentuated by the small sample size), if compared with a rider average monthly income calculated with the same dataset ($m=1041\text{€}$), a difference of 187.85€ (18%) is noteworthy.

itself" (Ferrari & Graham 2021, p.10) and little is known about their efficacy. As Massimo observed in his ethnography of Amazon distribution centres (2020), deviations from algorithmic prescriptions can still comply with the underlying organisation of the work. Thus, riders will likely end up normalising the mechanism of labour control rather than subverting the logic behind the technological infrastructure (ibid). Finally, if we look at the relationship with technology in a narrow sense, the category of resistance is inconsistent with the theoretical framework of this study. Representing riders as more or less resistant to the power of algorithms lies on a vision of the technology as a tool in the hands of the management, against which workers can only resist or succumb. On the contrary, I advanced an understanding of the meaning of such interaction from the riders' point of view, the social agents who enact and classify it in terms of greater or lower experience or professionalism. Thus, this article argues that riders are more than workers subjected by technologically mediated control. Most of all, it invites to see them as (more or less) competent workers: people who have learnt to do this job, contributing to define the canon of an occupation with a very weak standard both on a legal and praxeological point of view.

In conclusion, two final remarks about the limits and the potential developments of this study. First, focusing on the phenomenological encounters between algorithms and riders, I mostly addressed how an algorithmic imaginary operates rather than how it is constructed over time through experience and learning. As the first field note shows, part of this learning occurs on an individual level, resulting from what Shove, drawing on Giddens (1992), defines as the reflexive self-monitoring of the practice-as-performance. Conceived as integral to the practice, these moments provide "practitioners with feedback on [their] outcomes and qualities" (Shove et al. 2012), enabling them to determine what it means to do well – i.e. what it means for a delivery to be a good one. Recursively, self-monitoring informs the way how the practice evolves. Moreover, algorithmic imaginaries are collectively constructed in different micro-aggregations of workers that spontaneously gather in the city or in social media and group chats. Frequently, these micro-communities of workers display collective folk theories of algorithms (Ytre-Arne & Moe 2020) that are integral to the daily sharing of the work experience. Exploring how this knowledge is socially produced, and how it changes in different micro-communities of workers, is definitely destined to further contribute.

Second, as the graph reported above shows, the algorithmic imaginary I tried to illustrate here does not belong to all the riders that I had the chance to meet. Maybe, not even to most of them. I would even argue that assuming everyone to be aware of the computational functioning of algorithms is anything but obvious. A certain algorithmic imaginary is the result of a learning journey by means of participation in a practice that, as Lave and Wenger point out, "is performed in a number of social places, each of which entails different power and influence" (1991, p.81). To question what standard this occupation will take, further studies should consider more accurately the heterogeneity of social positions from which this work is practiced and represented.

Francesco Bonifacio is a PhD candidate in Sociology, organization, culture at the Catholic University, Milan. His main research interests focus on the platform economy and, overall, on the role of platforms, algorithms and datafication in social phenomena. Before, as part the Horizon 2020 project *Harvest*, he has studied the relationship between aging and digital technologies.

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aragona B, Arvidsson A, Felaco C. 2020. Introduction. Ethnography of algorithms. The cultural analysis of a sociotechnical construct. *ET*. (3/2020):
- Barratt T, Goods C, Veen A. 2020. 'I'm my own boss...': Active intermediation and 'entrepreneurial' worker agency in the Australian gig-economy. *Environ Plan A*. 52(8):1643–61
- Beer D. 2017. The social power of algorithms. *Information, Communication & Society*. 20(1):1–13
- Blue S. 2019. Institutional rhythms: Combining practice theory and rhythm analysis to conceptualise processes of institutionalisation. *Time & Society*. 28(3):922–50
- Bourdieu P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press
- Bucher T. 2018. *If...Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press
- Chan NK, Humphreys L. 2018. Mediatization of Social Space and the Case of Uber Drivers. *Media and Communication*. 6(2):29–38
- Cheney-Lippold J. 2011. A New Algorithmic Identity: Soft Biopolitics and the Modulation of Control. *Theory, Culture & Society*. 28(6):164–81
- Cheng M, Foley C. 2019. Algorithmic management: The case of Airbnb. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. 83:33–36
- Diakopoulos N. 2014. Algorithmic Accountability Reporting: On the Investigation of Black Boxes
- Ferrari F, Graham M. 2021. Fissures in algorithmic power: platforms, code, and contestation. *Cultural Studies*. 0(0):1–19
- Gandini A. 2019. Labour process theory and the gig economy. *Human Relations*. 72(6):1039–56
- Gerber C, Krzywdzinski M. 2019. Brave New Digital Work? New Forms of Performance Control in Crowdswork. In *Work and Labor in the Digital Age*, Vol. 33, eds. S P. Vallas, A Kovalainen, pp. 121–43. Emerald Publishing Limited
- Gherardi S. 2016. *Sociomateriality in Posthuman Practice Theory*. Routledge
- Giardullo P. 2020. Algoritmi, dati e piattaforme. In *Gli studi sociali sulla scienza e la tecnologia*, eds. P Magaudda, F Neresini. Bologna: Il Mulino
- Giddens A. 1992. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: Univ of California Pr. Reprint edizione ed.
- Gillespie T. 2014. *The Relevance of Algorithms*. The MIT Press

- Gillespie T. 2016. *2. Algorithm*. Princeton University Press
- Goods C, Veen A, Barratt T. 2019. "Is your gig any good?" Analysing job quality in the Australian platform-based food-delivery sector. *Journal of Industrial Relations*. 61(4):502-27
- Goodwin C. 1994. Professional Vision. *American Anthropologist*. 96(3):606-33
- Griesbach K, Reich A, Elliott-Negri L, Milkman R. 2019. Algorithmic Control in Platform Food Delivery Work. *Socius*. 5:2378023119870041
- Irani LC, Silberman MS. 2013. Turkopticon: interrupting worker invisibility in amazon mechanical turk. *CHI*
- Jansson A. 2013. Mediatization and Social Space: Reconstructing Mediatization for the Transmedia Age. *Communication Theory*. 23(3):279-96
- Jarrahi MH, Sutherland W. 2019. Algorithmic Management and Algorithmic Competencies: Understanding and Appropriating Algorithms in Gig Work. *Information in Contemporary Society*, pp. 578-89. Cham: Springer International Publishing
- Kaine S, Josserand E. 2019. The organisation and experience of work in the gig economy. *Journal of Industrial Relations*. 61(4):479-501
- Kellogg KC, Valentine MA, Christin A. 2020. Algorithms at Work: The New Contested Terrain of Control. *Academy of Management Annals*
- Lave J, Wenger E. 1991. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press
- Lynch K. 1960. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press
- Manriquez M. 2019. Work-Games in the Gig-Economy: A Case Study of Uber Drivers in the City of Monterrey, Mexico. In *Work and Labor in the Digital Age*, Vol. 33, eds. S P. Vallas, A Kovalainen, pp. 165-88. Emerald Publishing Limited
- Marrone M. 2021. *Rights against the Machines! Il Lavoro Digitale e Le Lotte Dei Rider*. Mimesis
- Massimo FS. 2020. Burocrazie algoritmiche. Limiti e astuzie della razionalizzazione digitale in due stabilimenti Amazon. *ET*. (1/2020):
- Newlands G. 2021. Algorithmic Surveillance in the Gig Economy: The Organization of Work through Lefebvrian Conceived Space. *Organization Studies*. 42(5):719-37
- Nicolini D. 2011. Practice as the Site of Knowing: Insights from the Field of Telemedicine. *Organization Science*. 22:602-20
- Pasquale F. 2015. *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ Pr
- Rahman HA. 2019. *Invisible Cages: Algorithmic Evaluations in Online Labor Markets*. Stanford University
- Reckwitz A. 2002. Toward a Theory of Social Practices. A Development in Culturalist Theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory*
- Richardson L. 2020. Platforms, Markets, and Contingent Calculation: The Flexible Arrangement of the Delivered Meal. *Antipode*. 52(3):619-36
- Rosenblat A. 2018. *Uberland: How Algorithms Are Rewriting the Rules of Work*. Oakland, California: Univ of California Pr

- Rosenblat A, Stark L. 2016. Algorithmic Labor and Information Asymmetries: A Case Study of Uber's Drivers. *International Journal of Communication*. 10(0):27
- Schatzki T. 2010. Materiality and Social Life. *Nature and Culture*. 5(2):123-49
- Schatzki TR. 2001. Practice Mind-Ed Orders. In *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, eds. TR Schatzki, K Knorr-Cetina, E von Savigny, pp. 42-55. Routledge
- Shapiro A. 2018. Between autonomy and control: Strategies of arbitrage in the "on-demand" economy. *New Media & Society*. 20(8):2954-71
- Shove E. 2016. Matters of practice. In *The Nexus of Practices: Connections, Constellations, Practitioners*, pp. 155-68. Taylor & Francis
- Shove E, Pantzar M, Watson M. 2012. *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How It Changes*. London
- Southerton D. 2003. 'Squeezing Time': Allocating Practices, Coordinating Networks and Scheduling Society. *Time & Society*. 12(1):5-25
- Stark D, Pais I. 2020. Algorithmic Management in the Platform Economy. *S-IJSD*. 14(3):47-72
- Striphas T. 2015. Algorithmic culture. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. 18(4-5):395-412
- Tassinari A, Maccarone V. 2020. Riders on the Storm: Workplace Solidarity among Gig Economy Couriers in Italy and the UK - Arianna Tassinari, Vincenzo Maccarrone, 2020. *Work, Employment and Society*. 34(1):35-54
- Vallas S, Schor JB. 2020. What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig Economy. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 46(1):273-94
- Van Dijck J, Poell T, De Waal M. 2018. *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press
- van Doorn N. 2017. Platform labor: on the gendered and racialized exploitation of low-income service work in the 'on-demand' economy. *Information, Communication & Society*. 20(6):898-914
- van Doorn N. 2018. *Thoughts on Deliveroo's introduction of distance-based pay in Berlin | Platform Labor*. <https://platformlabor.net>
- van Doorn N, Badger A. 2020. Platform Capitalism's Hidden Abode: Producing Data Assets in the Gig Economy. *Antipode*. 52(5):1475-95
- Veen A, Barratt T, Goods C. 2020. Platform-Capital's 'App-etite' for Control: A Labour Process Analysis of Food-Delivery Work in Australia. *Work, Employment and Society*. 34(3):388-406
- Velkova J, Kaun A. 2021. Algorithmic resistance: Media practices and the politics of repair. *Information, Communication and Society*. 24(4):523-40
- Wacquant L. 2015. For a Sociology of Flesh and Blood. *Qual Sociol*. 38(1):1-11
- Woodcock J, Graham M. 2019. *The Gig Economy: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge; Medford, MA: Polity Pr. 1. edizione ed.
- Ytre-Arne B, Moe H. 2020. Folk theories of algorithms: Understanding digital irritation. *Media, Culture & Society*. 0163443720972314

DE-CODING INSTAGRAM AS A SPECTACLE: A CRITICAL ALGORITHM AUDIT ANALYSIS

LYDIA KOLLYRI

Cyprus University of Technology

ABSTRACT

In 2016 Instagram integrated personalization algorithms into its system, promising to show the moments they believe we will care about the most. The platform's personalization logic and its commercial nature raise concerns regarding the emergence of filter bubbles and "individual realities", privileging topics that reflect a firm market logic and represent a reality where capitalism dominates. The present study aims to investigate the existence of a filter bubble on Instagram, posing the following questions: Do filter bubbles exist on Instagram? Do Instagram algorithms favor commercial soft topics? The study employs the algorithm auditing method, impersonating a user interested in soft-topics and another one involved in public-oriented topics by creating fake accounts. Both accounts' recommendations were collected and analyzed qualitatively. The analysis shows that Instagram algorithms render certain topics much more salient, generating a filter bubble of soft topics that closely resembles what Debord introduced as Spectacle.

Keywords: Instagram ▪ spectacle ▪ filter bubble ▪ personalization ▪ audit studies ▪ algorithms ▪ critical internet studies

1. INTRODUCTION

“To improve your experience, your feed will soon be ordered to show the moments we believe you will care about the most”, Instagram announced in March 2016, while introducing a new personalization algorithm. Since then, the platform has become more algorithmic and increasingly computational (Carah & Shaul, 2016). Personalization algorithms have raised discussions regarding their implications on democracy, polarization and stereotyping behavior (Cheney-Lippond, 2011). Despite being often framed as neutral information mediators, critical approaches argue that users can be isolated in “filter bubbles” with severe repercussions (Just & Latzer, 2017; Pariser, 2011).

Many studies have tried to investigate the consequences of personalization algorithms and the existence of filter bubbles on several platforms, such as Facebook,

Twitter and Google (Feuz et al., 2011; Bakshy et al., 2015; Salehi et al., 2015; Kulshrestha et al., 2017; Barker, 2018) – with mixed results thus far. In the context of Instagram, there are few studies on personalization to date. Skrubbeltrang et al. (2017) focus on the exploration of users' beliefs about personalized algorithms, whereas Stoica et al. (2018) explore social recommendations and their effects on gender and homophily. Other studies look into algorithmic awareness (Fouquaert & Mechant, 2021) or how influencers interact with Instagram algorithms, and may control them to their benefit (see Cotter, 2019; O'Meara, 2019). Individuals devote a remarkable proportion of time and energy to Instagram: they “like” 4.2 billion photographs on average per day (Aslam, 2019) while being exposed to a vast number of images. However, is this content what they really care about the most?

Instagram is a platform that has been integrated into people's life, constituting an everyday activity. As noted by Abidin (2016), some researchers still tend to overlook the significance of Instagram, characterizing it as mere entertainment or junk. However, I argue that we should not turn our back on things that may seem trivial or “superficial”, as the familiar is not necessarily understood (Hegel, 1807/1977). Instagram was created to inform people about the world around them (Kiss, 2013), as its core is everyday life. At the same time, Instagram consists of over 25 million brand accounts (Smith, 2019), confirming that part of its content has commercial character. In addition, the platform's personalization logic and its commercial nature raise concerns regarding the emergence of filter bubbles and “individual realities” (Just & Latzer, 2017: 248), privileging topics that reflect a firm market logic and represent a reality where capitalism dominates. The present study aims at investigating in depth the existence of a filter bubble on Instagram posing the following questions: Do filter bubbles exist on Instagram? Do Instagram algorithms favor commercial soft topics?

2. INSTAGRAM ALGORITHMS, COMMERCIALITY, POPULARITY AND FILTER BUBBLES

A decade ago, Pariser (2011) popularized the term “filter bubble” referring to the decrease of information diversity that people receive online. According to this approach, personalization renders possible that users encounter content based on their previous online actions and history, being enclosed in predetermined endless loops of information. On the one hand, several studies have already indicated its presence in social media and web search (Feuz et al., 2011; Bakshy et al., 2015; Salehi et al., 2015; Kulshrestha et al., 2017; Barker, 2018) and its harmful repercussions, like stereotyping behavior, political polarization (Wolf, 2016; Cheney-Lippold, 2011; Pariser, 2011), adverse effects on knowledge gain (Beam, 2014) and “different individual realities” (Just & Latzer, 2017:248). Barker (2018), focusing on creative process actions, argued that Google's personalization practices limit exposure to qualitative stimuli necessary to trigger creativity and new ideas. On the other hand, some studies challenge these impacts, as people may maintain a “diverse information diet” across

online spaces or entirely avoid platforms that tend to provide them with one-sided information (Burns, 2019; Dutton et al., 2017).

In the case of Instagram, the filter bubble assumption is currently underexplored. Researchers from Columbia University (Stoica et al., 2018) studied social recommendations on Instagram and their effects on gender and homophily. Focusing on the platform's algorithms from a computational perspective and using statistical analysis, the study reveals that algorithms can worsen pre-existing inequality and homophily. Instagram is a commercial platform and a strong corporate tool for businesses that disseminate their content via their accounts. Examining the Instagram activities of the Smirnoff brand and fashion retailer "General Pants", Carah and Shaul (2016) highlighted that Instagram has become more algorithmic in the ways it presents images' and brokers' attention. Brands and businesses use algorithms to engage users with their brands and increase visibility. This can affect the standardization of specific content, like how the human body is represented (ibid). Also, influencers seem to familiarize themselves with how algorithms work and accordingly formulate tactics to gain visibility (Cotter, 2019). Instagram has never distinguished advertisements and brands from the content shared by ordinary users (Carah & Shaul, 2016). As the platform consists of a remarkable number of businesses, the recommended content may be affected by the brands' visibility strategies. The role of advertisers and brands that advantageously promote their content and the platform's commercial nature raises concerns about whether personalization favors a marketplace predominantly for advertising purposes and creates a "commercial filter bubble".

Although Instagram's algorithms are sealed entities, affinity and popularity are two essential criteria used to algorithmically suggest content to users (see Mosseri, 2021). In the page "Search and Explore" Instagram's algorithms recommend content tailored to each user (affinity); these posts "are selected automatically based on things like the people you follow or the posts you like" (Instagram, n.d). More specifically, Instagram claimed that some of the most significant factors for a post to be recommended are the user's history of interacting with the person who posted, information about them and the user's activity (Mosseri, 2021). At the time of writing, popularity is also an essential component for a post to go viral on Instagram: "The more comments and likes you get, the likelier you are to find your place on the Instagram Explore page" (Carter, 2019, para. 24). Many websites and blogs suggest tips to users to become more popular and make it to the Explore page. Two standard pieces of advice are, first, to exploit the popular hashtags and brand names and, second, to follow Instagram trends (see Moreau, 2019; see Forsey, 2019). These suggested practices provide vital clues about the existence of a popularity loop. Additionally, some of the top hashtags of 2020 and the most famous Instagram categories (Gotter, 2020) show that popular topics relate to soft and entertaining topics. Thus, what the algorithm chooses to display along with brands' promotion practices may play an essential role in forming of popularity and establishing of specific kinds of "privileged" topics.

Although Instagram can be seen as a platform that exists merely for commercial and entertainment purposes (Abidin, 2016), in the last few years, it has been embraced so widely by users that it has become a tool for engaging with other causes such as social movements, political content, and topics pertaining to social advocacy and human rights, like body positivity, feminism, etc. (Mahoney et al., 2016; Crowder, 2021; Savolainen et al., 2020). Several politicians utilize Instagram for political influence, while social movements leverage it towards a collective goal (Cornet et al., 2017; Ekman & Widholm, 2017). However, even that content can sometimes be conducive to capitalist interests (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). A recent study (Afnan et al., 2019), for example, has indicated that commercial accounts exploit the popularity of social movements' hashtags, like the #MeToo, to increase their products' visibility promoting commodified posts. The findings revealed that one in five posts sampled with a hashtag related to the MeToo movement had a commercial aspect (ibid).

Instagram is a commercial platform, but at the same time, a place of visual public culture (see Manovich, 2016), and when algorithms become arbiters of culture, we have to ask how it is shaped and whether diversity is promoted. These concerns echo users' concerns, as documented by Skrubbeltrang et al. (2017), who investigated more than 8000 users' comments regarding the implementation of algorithmic personalization on Instagram. According to Skrubbeltrang et al. (2017) users are most concerned about the prevalence of commercial interests and the domination of mainstream content on their feeds. Hallinan and Striphas (2016:122) explicate the risks for content diversity with "algorithmic culture":

The production of sophisticated recommendations produces greater customer satisfaction which produces more customer data which in turn produce more sophisticated recommendations, and so on, resulting—theoretically—in a closed commercial loop in which culture conforms to, more than it confronts, its users.

These concerns point to the question of whether Instagram users are exposed mostly to recommendations of mainstream and commercial content, thus being enclosed in a filter bubble. Given that Instagram is part of people's everyday life and has simultaneously been quite uncritically incorporated into it (Carah & Shaul, 2016), it is vital to investigate the stimuli and content to which users are exposed.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Three empirical audits of Instagram were held. These audits focus on exploring algorithms as a recommendation system and the existence of filter bubbles and their nature, emphasizing the Explore page of Instagram, as it has been characterized as "one giant recommendation engine" (Titlow, 2017). By the term *audit studies*, I refer to the research design that reveals the potential unwanted consequences of algorithmic

systems (Sandvig et al., 2014). The current research design belongs to the type of “sock puppet audit studies” in which researchers impersonate users, usually by creating fake user accounts (ibid). This study proposes algorithmic audits as a method employed in critical approaches to the study of platformization (see Poell et al., 2019). The diagram below (Figure 1) shows the procedure and the research questions of each audit study.

IN SEARCH OF A POTENTIAL FILTER BUBBLE

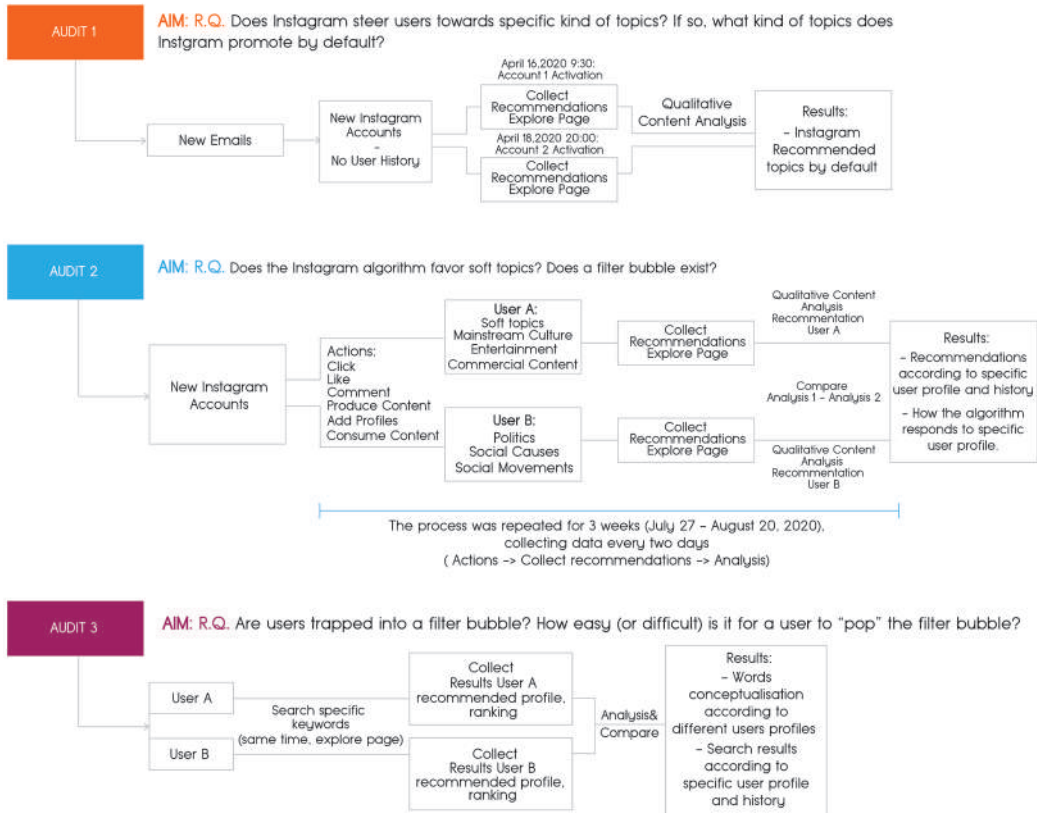


Figure 1. Three empirical studies of Instagram regarding the investigation of the existence of a filter bubble.

3.1. Audit #1 methodology

The recommendations made to users without previous use history were collected to answer the first research question (see Figure 1). To achieve that, two new mobile devices were utilized, and two new email accounts were created and used to make two new Instagram profiles. Since the Instagram content is renewed almost every minute, the profiles were activated in different moments in time to explore whether there are different kinds of results over time. The first one was activated at 9.30 on

April 16, 2020 (Audit1.1), the second profile at 20.00 on April 18, 2020 (Audit1.2). Given that different locations may result in different recommendations, it should be mentioned that both profiles were activated in Nicosia, Cyprus.

In both cases, the data was collected by taking screenshots of each post on the Explore page, together with its tags, text, profile name, etc., also marking the order in which they appeared on the Explore page. The first 80 posts were captured. Furthermore, at the time of data collection, Instagram also recommended images organized by categories, like food. The first ten photographs of the first two recommended categories, namely *décor* and travel, were also gathered.

Next, the posts of Audit1.1 and Audit1.2 were analyzed qualitatively, applying an open coding process, coding for the topics of each post (e.g. topics related to architecture, shopping emerged, etc.). This analysis aimed at showing which topics Instagram recommends by default. In addition, the number of likes, text, hashtags, timestamps and the commerciality of each post were recorded and analyzed by the same process. Furthermore, the profile of the user who posted each image was visited, collecting information concerning its type (namely a business profile, a photographer's profile, etc.), and the number of its followers. The profiles were visited through a third mobile device and account so as not to influence the new accounts' use history. These elements were included in the analysis to understand if they play a role in the (algorithmic) decision about which posts appear on the Explore page and to what extent they affect the Instagram algorithm.

3.2. Audit #1 results

Nature and architecture-related photographs seem to dominate the recommended content of both Explore pages, like waterfalls, the sea, sunsets, monuments and buildings depicting their interior or exterior design. In particular, 65 out of 88 images belonged to these topics¹. Both categories represent the space surrounding people, either natural or constructed, something that is undeniably part of everyday life. The vast majority of the images come from business profiles, namely architects, architecture studios or professional photographers aiming to promote their services. On the one hand, the content is top-notch and professional and can inspire, but on the other hand, it depicts a distant reality for many people. Luxury buildings with concrete, glass and stylish aesthetic accompanied by hashtags related to minimalism, which is perceived as a lifestyle accepted by the wealthy population (Nikolic & Vasilski, 2018), are displayed. Furthermore, the first category Instagram recommends is *décor*. The initial photographs of which depict atmospheric rooms decorated with brands, like Channel, Prada or Apple products, featuring consumerism as a part of an ideal lifestyle. Regarding the nature-related images, fascinating, unique landscapes prevail, captured and edited with professional techniques resulting in idyllic places emanating

1 Nature/Landscape: 20 (Audit 1.1), 19 (Audit 1.2), Architecture: 12 (Audit 1.1), 14 (Audit 1.2).

positivity. The texts that accompany them imply that those landscapes are part of the photographers' everyday life or that they are places they can easily visit, "can't wait to get back in the Tuscany" (see Figure 2), "I'd probably go back to the waterfalls in the rain...". The content shares a specific aesthetic, catching users' eye with its atmosphere or style, highlighting the importance of aesthetics and appearance.

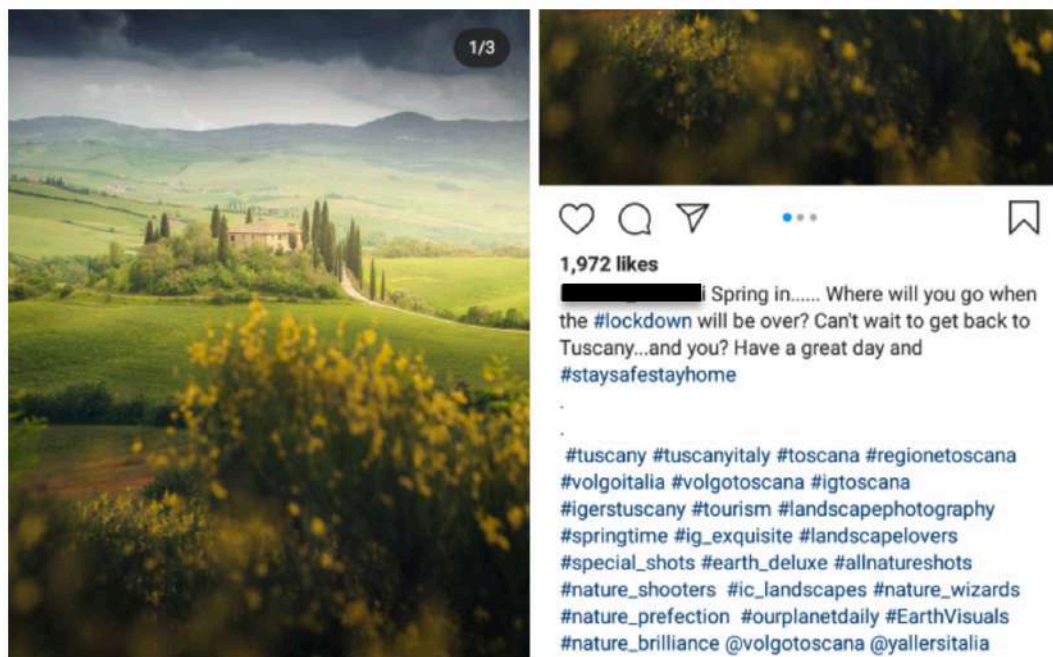


Figure 2. Photographer's image

The majority of the pictures that appeared in both accounts belong to commercial profiles. Several hashtags accompany almost every image, a tactic usually employed to gain more visibility. In addition, phrases like "Check out more at" or "Do you like it?" are used to engage ones audience. Most of the accounts that emerged during the data collection were popular accounts with many followers or likes. Based on this finding, popularity seems to be a critical factor that drives an image to the Explore page as well as marketing strategies that commercial accounts employ.

This analysis shows that a new Instagram user without prior use history is mainly recommended commercial content related to soft topics and an ideal everyday life, coming from business accounts. We can argue that popularity plays an essential role for an image to appear on the Explore page, especially when Instagram cannot associate the posts with users' previous activity and use history. Although there are accounts that pertain to news or social causes and movements, with thousands of followers and likes (see Yang, 2020), such accounts did not appear in the data gathered, raising concerns about how the platform promote the content. On Instagram's

outset, Kevin Systrom claimed he created an app because of his love for photography (see Hartmans, 2020). Presently, however, the retro photographic character of Instagram has been blended with its commercial purposes.

3.3. Audit #2 methodology

To answer the second research question (see Figure 1), a user profile (User A) was constructed, with a preference for soft topics, namely mainstream and commercial content, indicated by clicks, likes, comments, posts and connections to profiles as well as following the most popular topics on Instagram (see Puttkamer, 2019) (see Figure 3 for more details). This procedure was repeated for two days. To fortify the User A's history, approximately four to five profiles (recommended by Instagram) were followed each day of the data collection period. User A also searched for some profile names to enrich ones history with other soft topics, e.g., luxury lifestyle and travel. Furthermore, the user liked the recommended photos that were aligned with their preferences, while also watching all 'stories' of the followed accounts and reacting to them to increase engagement. Hence, this profile mimics and represents a user aligned with soft topics.

This process was repeated simultaneously with a second profile (User B), which user indicated preference for non-commercial and non-mainstream accounts (see Figure 3 for more details). Each profile was cautiously chosen to represent a more alternative perspective. The profiles found were visited and reviewed through a third account and mobile device so as not to affect the profile's history. Those that met the criteria of an alternative profile, namely having as their aim political and social action (Atton, 1999) and also being non-commercial and non-mainstream, were followed by User B. In particular, none of the aforementioned profiles had any commercial interests and most were not popular in terms of followers and likes. Otherwise, the same process as in case of User A, i.e., liking photos, following accounts, was followed. Thus, the second profile represents a user interested in public affairs and non-mainstream, non-commercial topics.

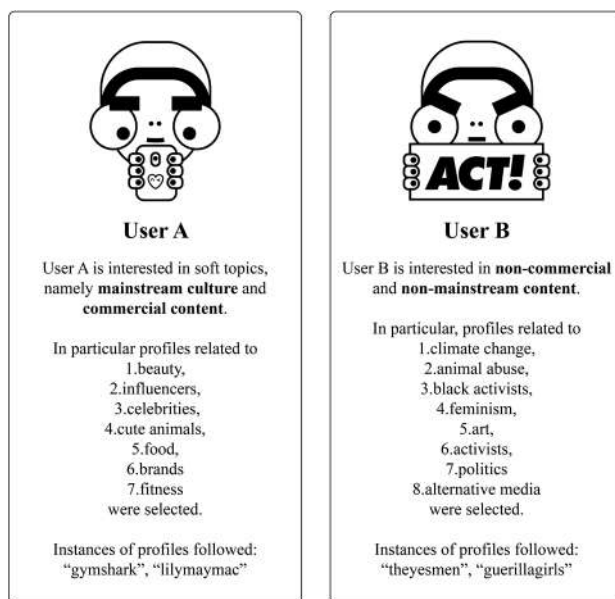


Figure 3. The main characteristics of the profile owners behind two “fake” accounts

Both accounts' recommendations were collected. The posts appearing in the first two scrolls on the Explore page of each account were gathered. Screenshots were taken of each image/video, keeping track of their order (see Figure 1 for more details), gathering in total 474 images. The data collection ended when saturation was reached; namely, no more new and distinct material showed up.

Next, qualitative content analysis was conducted, applying an open coding process to the collected data. This method is traditionally applied to text, but it can also be used for images and videos (Pennington, 2017). According to Pennington (2017), the codes can represent categories that exist at the surface level or reflect more profound levels of meaning. The specific analysis focuses on the topics of each image/video, analyzing what it is represented in the photograph and marking each post's commerciality. A multi-coder analysis was not feasible, which is considered a limitation of the current study. However, the codes regarding each post's thematic category were easily enacted, as there was much evidence on the surface of the visual content. After the analysis, three broad thematic categories emerged related to a. soft, mainstream and commercial topics, b. non-commercial topics and c. unspecified topics. The unspecified category contains all unclear topics (e.g., the profile of the Embassy of Kazakhstan) that did not fit any of the previously mentioned categories.

3.4. Audit #2 results

3.4.1. The filter bubble of the Spectacle

Analysis of the content of the Explore page of User A, indicates a close following of the user's preferences. More specifically, 233 out of the 237 posts in the sample were

related to consumerism, appearance and ideal life. One photograph was related to a non-mainstream topic, namely autism, and three were grouped under the unspecified category.

These findings suggest that a filter bubble of mainstream and commercial content clearly appears, narrowing down the stimuli to soft topics for mass consumption. In total, the User A received only one image unrelated to their interests, indicating that personalized algorithms do fulfill their purpose by providing users with information closely related to their proclaimed interests. The image related to autism appeared on the first day of the data collection. After this, while the continuous selection of soft topics enriched User A's history, no similar topics emerged, limiting users' choices to those related solely to their interests. The 233 images recommended to User A represent an ideal lifestyle where brands and consumerism prevail, resembling what Guy Debord introduced as the spectacle (see Debord, 1967/2002). Debord asserts that "in societies where modern conditions of production prevail, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived is now merely represented in the distance" (1967/2005:7), demonstrating a connection among economy, capitalism and the spectacle. In the "spectacle", media bombard audiences with images representing an ideal life that is far removed from one's actual everyday life. Representation becomes more important than actual living, as capitalism has occupied social life, generating to people the aspiration to work to fulfil the imposed wants. The spectacle can be seen as an instrument of the economy that generates pseudo-needs and new desires. A vast number of photographs that appeared in User A's feed belonged to brands, different influencers or promoters of luxurious experiences, celebrities, and attractive users with perfect bodies. Thus, during the one month-long data collection, User A came across images depicting an ideal reality with expensive clothes, amazing landscapes, happy families and couples. Many of the objects surrounding these personas had a price tag depicting everyday life organized around the needs of the dominant economy. In Debord's views of the spectacle, the commodity has succeeded in totally colonizing social life (Debord, 1967/2002:37); in a similar vein, User A received content that represented various trivial everyday moments, from meals to family gatherings, with latent commerciality, representing a reality where a strong market logic has spread across several aspects of the everyday.

Thus, on the content revealed to User A, a positive ambiance is created, while the platform's algorithm disregards topics that may trigger concerns about the complexities of everyday life, defusing contradictions (see Debord, 1988/1998). A good illustration of this is that no post related to current affairs at the time of data collection (Covid-19, the Beirut explosion, the US presidential election) emerged in the feed. Thus, user A is urged to engage with fitness tips and celebrity profiles but does not receive even a small proportion of content related to more non-commercial topics increasing diversity. Another reality, a simulacrum, is constructed, comprised of advertisements, commodification, and trivial concerns, possibly manufacturing

false desires and interests (Armano & Briziarelli, 2017). In short, we can see a filter bubble of the spectacle emerging.

By the same logic, we would expect to encounter another homogeneous sphere created through Instagram to fit the second user’s interests (User B), namely politics, social issues, etc., given that personalized algorithms tend to reflect users’ preferences. However, in the second case, a “reverse filter bubble” did not appear. Overall, 232 pictures were gathered from the User B profile, of which 120 belonged to non-commercial topics related to social causes, 92 were categorized as soft topics and 20 images were grouped into the unspecified category.

The differences between the first two categories are crucial. Although the user’s interests focus on sociopolitical issues, even in radical forms (anarchy, anticapitalism), the recommendations by the Instagram algorithm still contained a relatively high number of images related to celebrities, gossip, influencers, and beauty. Despite the fact that the user’s history was constantly being loaded and fortified by the researcher’s actions, ignoring the recommendations of soft topics, the user continued to receive images related to soft topics in the course of the entire analysis period (see Figure 3).

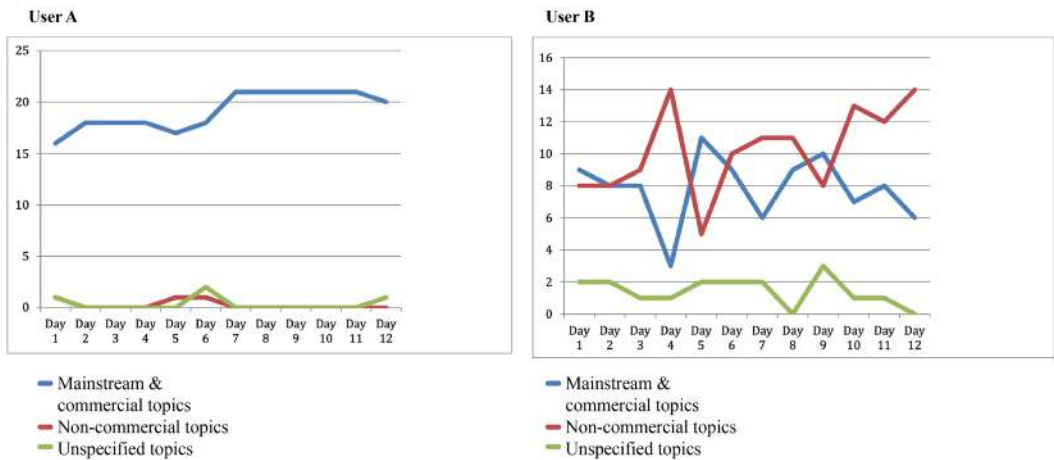


Figure 4. Topics during the data collection

Pariser (2011:11) claimed that “if we never click on the articles about cooking, or gadgets, or the world outside our country’s borders, they simply fade away”; yet in this case, although the user never clicked on soft topics, they were still prominent in the feed, raising concerns about the non-or under-representation of diverse topics. In the algorithmic world of Instagram, it seems that more complex issues and the realities of diverse social groups are less likely to be present in users’ feeds. The algorithm urges users to engage with more mainstream content, which may be more appealing and profitable than an activist group, as it may keep users on the platform for more extended periods of time . At the same time, it creates and promotes a space

for businesses that also pay to be advertised on the platform. These results also confirm the concerns of users themselves, as revealed in the study of Skrubbeltrang et al. (2017). As Bucher has argued (2017:3), commenting on algorithmic politics, “we need to be attentive of the way in which some realities are always strengthened while others are weakened”. In the case of Instagram, it seems that a reality related to the spectacle prevails.

3.4.2. The Instagram lifeworld

The non-commercial content User B received (N= 120 images), could be interpreted to reflect the lifeworld (Habermas, 1985), i.e. the domains of actions characterized by social interaction and cooperation. These posts reflect topics related to a world that is actually experienced, e.g. accounts linked to social causes, movements and news. In total, user B was recommended 120 images related to ones interests. More specifically, 14 categories of specific topics emerged (see Table 1).

Table 1. Topics User B

TOPICS	NUMBER OF IMAGES
news (Covid-19, D. Trump, the Beirut explosion, politics)	46 (CNN, Ajplus, Huffpost, Nowthisnew, The Guardian, Worldeconomicforum (1), The Daily Beast)
informative	8
environment	6 popular media 5 other media
black people	6
political figures	5
users' empowerment	5
activism	5 celebrities-activist 1 activist
feminism	6
alternative users and anti-Trump profile	4 alternative user 4 anti-Trump profile
LGBT	4
UNICEF	4 UNICEF 2 UNICEF-Covid
satire - current affairs	3
animal	1
art	1

The vast majority of images dealt with news (see Table 1) and thus brought User B up to date regarding current affairs and matters besetting society. Although User B had expressed their interest to lie more with alternative and unpopular sources, CNN and other mainstream media sources dominated in the recommendations and news updates, and gossip and celebrity news also appeared. The two remaining images, which did pertain to popular media, came from accounts publishing only positive news without political references. The first profile was most popular, with 1.8 million

followers; the second had 326 K followers but simultaneously promoted t-shirts. Six images from the environment category also were distributed by mainstream popular media (CNN, Bloomberg) and five by non-institutional users. The latter profiles had high numbers of followers; profiles with lower metrics did not appear. The results thus suggest that the content for User B's feed mainly came from well-established and popular accounts which had a large following, indicating that although Instagram appears to be recommending information regarding social causes, these recommendations are made within the confines of popularity, commerciality, and capitalism.

Even though the results reveal that the algorithms in Instagram tend to favor popular, institutional and well-established sources, the posts shown to User B also displayed some images representing more alternative views, e.g. regarding feminism and black people (see Table 1), confirming that diverse content exists on Instagram. Five images (N=230), coming from three popular accounts devoted to empowering people, also came up. The platform also suggested activists' profiles to User B, but five out of six suggestions could be referred to as celebrity activists' accounts. Four images in the sample were posted by ordinary users who expressed a more alternative voice and enjoyed quite a big follower base, while posts by the fifth user whose profile was publicly presented to be against Donald Trump, appeared four times.

3.5. Audit #3 methodology

To find an answer to research question number three (see Figure 1), I searched for specific keywords in the Explore page through both the profiles of User A and User B simultaneously to avoid a possible time effect on the results. The search terms were related to alternative topics, such as "feminism", specific topic categories, such as "technology", and issues related to sociopolitical realities of the day. The word "party" was also included, as it can refer to both a political group and a celebration. The final search words were "feminism", "woman", "crisis", "technology", "black", "body", "virus", "party".

The search results, namely the recommended profiles and their ranking, were collected for both User A and User B. The process started on August 29, 2020, and was completed on December 11, 2020. During this period, recommendations were collected on six different days (29/8, 6/10, 13/10, 2/11, 26/11, 11/12) to increase the possibility of getting diverse content. The profiles were then analyzed through qualitative content analysis and compared. In particular, each account was analyzed regarding its topic and commerciality, and the order of appearance. My aim was to investigate how easy (or difficult) the platform renders for users with a specific online behavior to come across specific non-mainstream, non-commercial content. In addition, this design allowed me to explore how the algorithm conceptualizes specific topics, such as technology and feminism, according to particular user histories. Ultimately, the possibility of users being trapped within a "filter bubble" was investigated on Instagram by comparing system recommendations. The third and final step was to explore

how easy (or difficult) it is for a user profile focused on soft topics to “pop” the filter bubble, through the use of active search.

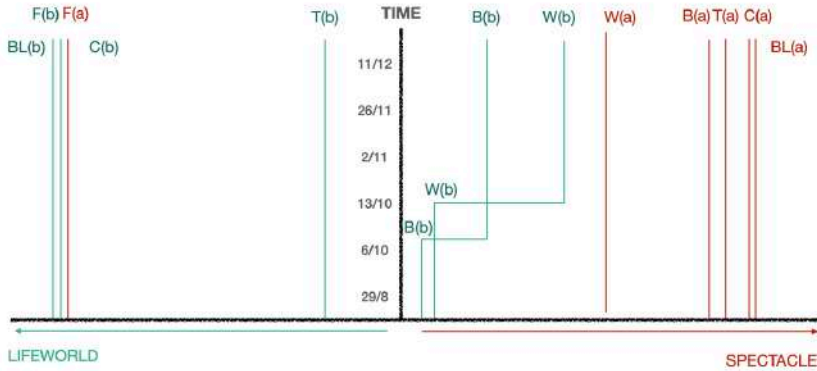
4.6. Audit #3 results

The findings indicate that in several occasions, similar outcomes between the search results carried out between User A and User B occurred. For example, when searching content with the keyword “feminism” profiles related to female empowerment topics, motivational quotes, and groups of people who share a feminist perspective emerged in both accounts, and in several instances both users were recommended the same profiles. Such similarities in the results could possibly be explained by the specific nature of the search term as it can hardly be interpreted into something unrelated to its actual meaning. Both users also received similar recommendations of brands and fitness accounts with a particular representation of the body when searching for the content related to “body” and “woman”. Although User B first received some results related to famous body positive movements, these profiles decreased over time and the profiles pertaining to fitness and ideal body types started to dominate. Accounts of alternative body shapes also occurred in the User A results, but only twice, and in both occasions these accounts were placed at the bottom of the rank.

Responses to search queries with keywords like “crisis” and “black”, however, brought different results for User A and user B, in both occasions the recommendations were aligned with each profile’s history. When typing in the word “black”, User A received suggestions of fashion influencers, girl bands, products, cars, etc., while User B received mostly recommendations of movements supporting black people. When using “crisis” as the search term, climate change related results dominated User B’s suggestions; while User A received irrelevant, generic results about nails, cartoons, and music, and just one profile regarding the crisis in Venezuela. When typing in the most ambiguous of the search terms - “party” - User B did encounter accounts related to political parties, but also similar to User A, whose feed was full of event planners, did also receive recommendations of party planners. The latter finding, however, could be interpreted as an indication of the existence of the spectacle which aims to distract users from social concerns, pushing them towards consumerism (see Debord, 1967/2005). The findings also revealed that User A was solely recommended business accounts, while User B was also recommended commercial content, despite the fact that their history was unrelated to commercial interests. The search word “technology” wielded results following more or less similar pattern.

Overall, it was somewhat difficult for User A to come across content unrelated to soft topics. The only case that this user received non-mainstream recommendations was when searching for “feminism”, indicating that a filter bubble exists. The findings of my study suggest that even when a user with a history related to soft topics actively searches for different content, the search results are still related to their activity and interests. Although User B received more diverse content keyword

searches for “body” and “woman” lead also in his case to commercial and mainstream topics, indicating that commercial sources are more likely to be suggested by the algorithms, even when persons’ interests and previous history would suggest otherwise. Relying on such findings one could claim that user A is trapped into a filter bubble of the spectacle, as algorithms render it challenging to come across other perspectives, while user B received more diverse suggestions related both to lifeworld and spectacle. However, over time the user’s recommendations resembled more the spectacle in specific keywords (see Figure 5).



keywords: feminism (F), crisis (C), black (BL) body (B), woman (W), technology (T)

profile A (a)
profile B (b)

Figure 5. Audit #3 Results

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of my audit studies indicate that Instagram users are relatively likely to encounter more mainstream and commercial content regardless of their interests. First and foremost, without use history, algorithms endorse and bring into attention posts created by business profiles with many followers and likes promoting their services and products. However, although alternative accounts related to social causes have also been gaining fame on the platform over the last few years, Instagram does not recommend these kinds of topics by default. A possible explanation may be that the images recommended to users have followed marketing strategies, such as a call for action or the use of hashtags, and Instagram seems to “reward” them. Users with a tendency to follow soft topics are thus more likely to be enclosed in a filter bubble of the spectacle. They encounter entertaining posts presenting an ideal reality surrounded by brands. As Debord claimed (1967/2005:15) “the illusory paradise that represented a total denial of earthly life is no longer projected into the heavens, it is embedded in earthly life itself. The spectacle is the technological version of the

exiling of human powers into a ‘world beyond’”. Users with more diverse interests, however, are also urged to engage with mainstream content following Instagram’s personalized suggestions entrapping them into a filter bubble that consists of mainstream, commercial topics presenting an ideal life full of opportunities for material consumption, where satisfaction equates with commodities and is turned into an ideal representation of consumer society. According to Debord (1967/2005:27):

“The spectacle is a permanent opium war designed to force people to equate goods with commodities and to equate satisfaction with a survival that expands according to its own laws. Consumable survival must constantly expand because it never ceases to include privation.”

In addition, I found that users cannot easily “escape” the bubble: when User A actively searched for specific keywords like “black”, “party” or “body”, algorithms suggested content related solely to their interests, in contrast to User B who received more diverse outcomes, e.g. recommendations to accounts that amplify black people’s voices. Thus, it is most difficult for users to “pop” the filter bubble and find information unrelated to their interests, especially if they are attuned to mainstream topics.

Kevin Systrom, Instagram’s co-founder, mentioned years ago: “I want to see not just content from my friends but my morning news on Instagram, from multiple channels”; “to be the place I learn about the world” (Kiss, 2013). It seems that his vision has not been fulfilled, as the platform mostly promotes an ideal reality, neglecting social issues and news through which users would learn about the world. The emergence of a “filter bubble of the spectacle” can have several repercussions. Firstly, following the ideas of Debord (1967/2005:11), the more of a spectator one becomes, the less one lives, as “the more he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires”. Being constantly bombarded with goods such as expensive cars, stylish clothes, ultimate travel destinations and high-tech gadgets on Instagram, may thus have an impact on people’s needs and “desire for more” (see Grosser, 2014). The spectacle on Instagram can therefore be seen as an instrument of capitalism, driving users towards consumer society, generating pseudoneeds. Individuals are urged to be immersed in contemplating the images proposed by the dominant system and capitalism, living the lives of others, a life full of products, instead of understanding their real desires and needs. According to Debord (1967/2005:20), “the spectacle is capital accumulated to the point that it becomes images”, this statement described, at that time, a new mode of capital where society moved from industrial capitalism to a consumer society. Nowadays, consumer capitalism is incarnated on Instagram, where corporate platforms have even more opportunities to silently penetrate individuals’ lives. This is possibly why Instagram has become such a robust corporate tool. It seems that the economy and the contemporary spectacle are inseparably connected, creating a spectacle controlled by capitalism even more (see Debord, 1962). Both accounts’ recommendations, especially

User A's suggestions, consisted of brands, businesses and users who sell products and services. Instagram posited that users become more interested in a brand when they see ads for it on the platform, while 83% of users discover new ones on the Explore page (see <https://business.instagram.com/igb/a/ads-in-explore>). Instagram exploits these statistics to attract more business profiles and by extent profits. Thus, by constantly encountering this type of content, users are more likely to discover a brand or make a purchase, possibly affecting their desires and needs attuning to capitalism. Consumerism is intensified while the platform raises its profits. User A encountered content that represents an enormously positive and promising reality where capitalism reigns, urging users to engage with brands instead of the reality surrounding them. Instagram commercial accounts embrace and promote positive content so as to drive users to engage more with their brands (Mazzarolo et al., 2021). In addition, being exposed to standardized content, users are urged to reproduce mainstream content. At the same time, this may limit their creativity (see Barker, 2018), as algorithmic culture "sort, classify, and hierarchize people, places, objects, and ideas, and also the habits of thought, conduct, and expression that arise in relationship to those processes" (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016:119). As Debord claimed (1967/2005:17), there is a shift from being into having and from having into appearing. It does not matter who individuals are or even what they possess; it matters how they appear to be, and Instagram provides a paradigm to be reproduced, as "the passive acceptance it demands is already effectively imposed by its monopoly of appearances, its manner of appearing without allowing any reply" (Debord, 1967/2005:12). This bubble contains standardized content, a reproducible, ideal, and positive lifestyle that can lead to a "daily passivity manufactured and controlled by capitalism" (Debord, 1962).

Secondly, questions are raised regarding the extent to which non-popular accounts have the possibility to disseminate their content and reach a broader audience. User B consistently viewed radical content on Instagram and did not like or click on any post unrelated to ones interests. Nevertheless, 92 images related to commercial topics were recommended to him, and several of the 120 images related to the "lifeworld" were derived from well-established, popular, and mainstream media sources. It is reasonable to assume that users who make mixed choices on Instagram but are still interested in topics related to the lifeworld may receive even fewer non-mainstream and alternative suggestions.

This study also confirmed the significant role of popularity in content dissemination, as the most common topics that emerged in the collected data were related to the most popular hashtags and topics of Instagram at the time of the data collection. In addition, in Audit 1 and Audit 2, popular business accounts that leveraged much-advertised marketing strategies emerged on the Explore page, possibly at the expense of non-commercial content that does not follow marketing tips. on-commercial profiles can also exploit these strategies, but this means that their content should be redefined and follow specific guidelines, sometimes jeopardizing their aim (see Afnan et al., 2019; Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021). In addition, business profiles

are provided with tools, such as advanced Instagram insights, statistics, and metrics, to develop a better strategy, while non-commercial profiles do not usually have such analytics at their disposal.

Although Instagram is a commercial platform, its very content is created not only by businesses but also ordinary users and individuals who want to leverage the platform to express themselves or even bring about social change. Users may produce and resist invisibility without rejecting the system and making their actions visible (see de Certeau, 1984). A problematic aspect of the Debordian spectacle was that individuals were excluded from its production, as they were just receivers and spectators. Nowadays, users can participate in its formation. Instagram seems to reward users with visibility and embrace an effective neoliberal subject, as Marwick (2013:13) stated, referring to a subject who “attends to fashion, focused on self-improvement, and purchases goods and services to achieve self-realization. He/she is comfortable integrating market logics into many aspects of life, including education, parenting, and relationships”. To conclude, on a more positive note, although we might expect more diverse content to be recommended to User B due to the logic of personalization, the penetration of non-mainstream content in a commercial platform can be seen as an opportunity for users to break the mainstream bubble and undermine the spectacle, even in a hugely commodified sociotechnical environment such as Instagram. Still, how easy is it for the users to deny this possibility for popularity and participation and dissociate themselves from the spectacle or even subvert it? Future studies might investigate this question focusing on user practices. In addition, audit studies may sometimes provide “fuzzy glimpses” on how the algorithms operate (Diakopoulos, as cited in Kitchin, 2017:24). Thus, researchers can repeat the present inquiry utilizing real users’ accounts instead of constructed ones. Additionally, the study has not focused on big data. The appropriate tools can be developed to enable researchers to collect recommendations (i.e. the Explore page) from Instagram’s mobile version with the help of methods introduced by computational social sciences.

Lydia Kollyri is a Ph.D. candidate in Critical Internet Studies at the Cyprus University of Technology. She holds a B.A. in Communication and Internet Studies from Cyprus University of Technology, and she is a scholar of the Onassis Foundation, Greece. Her research focuses on critical approaches to the study of digital media and the interplay among platforms, algorithms, and users. Email: gk.kollyri@edu.cut.ac.cy, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0660-4246>

Acknowledgments

Lydia G. Kollyri is supported by a scholarship from the Onassis Foundation, Greece [Scholarship ID: F ZO 034/1-2018/2019].

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abidin, C. (2016). "Aren't these just young, rich women doing vain things online?": Influencer selfies as subversive frivolity. *Social media+ society*, 2(2).
- Afnan T., Huang H., Sclafani M., Bashir M, (2019). Putting a price on social movements: A case study of #metoo on instagram. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*. 56 (1), 1-9
- Armano, E., & Briziarelli, M. (2017) (Eds). *The Spectacle 2.0: Reading Debord in the Context of Digital Capitalism*. University of Westminster Press.
- Aslam, S. (2019). *Instagram by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts*. Retrieved January 15, 2019 from <https://www.omnicoreagency.com/instagram-statistics/>
- Atton, C. (1999). A Reassessment of the Alternative Press. *Media, Culture & Society* 21. 51-76.
- Bakshy, E., Messing, S., & Adamic, L. A. (2015). Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook. *Science*, 348(6239), 1130-1132.
- Barker, R. (2018). Trapped in the Filter Bubble? Exploring the Influence of Google Search on the Creative Process. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 18(2), 85-95.
- Beam, M. A. (2014). Automating the news: How personalized news recommender system design choices impact news reception. *Communication Research*, 41(8), 1019-1041.
- Brathwaite, K. N., & DeAndrea, D. C. (2021). BoPopriation: How self-promotion and corporate commodification can undermine the body positivity (BoPo) movement on Instagram. *Communication Monographs*, 1-22.
- Bucher, T. (2017). The algorithmic imaginary: exploring the ordinary affects of Facebook algorithms. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(1), 30-44.
- Burns, A. (2019). *Are Filter Bubbles real?*. UK: Polity Press.
- Carah, N. & Shaul, M. (2016). Brands and Instagram: Point, tap, swipe, glance. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 4(1), 69-84.
- Carter, R. (2019). How to Get on the Instagram Explore Page. Retrieved July 15, 2020, from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/instagram-explore/>
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*, (S. Rendall, Tans.), Berkley: University of California Press.
- Cheney-Lippold, J. (2011). A new algorithmic identity: soft biopolitics and the modulation of control. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28(6): 164-181.
- Cornet, V. P., Hall, N. K., Cafaro, F., & Brady, E. L. (2017, May). How image-based social media websites support social movements. In *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI conference extended abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 2473-2479).
- Cotter, K. (2019). Playing the visibility game: How digital influencers and algorithms negotiate influence on Instagram. *New Media & Society*, 21(4), 895-913.

- Crowder, C. (2021). When# BlackLivesMatter at the Women's March: a study of the emotional influence of racial appeals on Instagram. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 1-19.
- Cwynar-Horta, J. (2016). The commodification of the body positive movement on Instagram. *Stream: Culture/Politics/Technology*, 8(2), 36-56.
- Debord, G. (1962). Perspectives For Conscious Changes in Everyday Life. Retrieved March 14, 2021, from <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/everyday.html>.
- Debord, G. (1967/2005). *Society of the Spectacle*. (K. Knabb, Trans.). London: Rebel Press.
- Debord, G. (1988/1998). *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. (I. Malcom). Verso
- Diakopoulos, N. (2013). *Algorithmic accountability reporting: On the investigation of black boxes*. A Tow/Knight Brief. Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Columbia Journalism School.
- Ekman, M., & Widholm, A. (2017). Political communication in an age of visual connectivity: Exploring Instagram practices among Swedish politicians. *Northern lights: Film & media studies yearbook*, 15(1).
- Feuz, M., Fuller, M. & Stalder, F. (2011). Personal Web searching in the age of semantic capitalism: Diagnosing the mechanisms of personalization. *First Monday*, 16(2).
- Forsey, C. (2019). How to Use Instagram: A Beginner's Guide, Retrieved August, 24, 2021 from <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-to-use-instagram>.
- Fouquaert, T., & Mechant, P. (2021). Making curation algorithms apparent: a case study of 'Instawareness' as a means to heighten awareness and understanding of Instagram's algorithm. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-21.
- Gotter, A. (2020). *Instagram Hashtags: How to Find the Most Popular Hashtags and Connect with New Followers*. Retrieved May 10, 2021 from <https://www.shopify.com/blog/instagram-hashtags>
- Habermas, J. (1985). *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (T. McCarthy Trans.), Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hallinan, B. & Striphas, T. (2016). Recommended for you: The Netflix Prize and the production of algorithmic culture. *New Media & Society*, 18(1), 117-137.
- Hartmans, A (2020). *The rise of Kevin Systrom, who founded Instagram 10 years ago and built it into one of the most popular apps in the world*. Retrieved April 10, 2021, from <https://www.businessinsider.com/kevin-systrom-instagram-ceo-life-rise-2018-9>
- Hegel, G.W.F. (1807/1977), *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Miller, Trans). Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Instagram. (n.d). *How are photos and videos chosen for Search & Explore?* Retrieved April 9, 2021, from <https://help.instagram.com/487224561296752>
- Just, N. & Latzer, M. (2017). Governance by algorithms: reality construction by algorithmic selection on the Internet. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(2), 238-258.

- Kiss, J. (2013), Retrieved September 20, 2021 from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/oct/11/instagram-kevin-systrom-world-domination>
- Kitchin, R. (2017). Thinking critically about and researching algorithms. *Information, communication & society*, 20(1), 14-29.
- Mahoney, J., Feltwell, T., Ajuruchi, O., & Lawson, S. (2016, May). Constructing the visual online political self: an analysis of Instagram Use by the Scottish Electorate. In *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 3339-3351). ACM.
- Manovich, L. (2016). *Instagram and contemporary image*. New York: Manovich.net
- Marwick, A. E. (2013). *Status update: Celebrity, publicity, and branding in the social media age*. Yale University Press.
- Mazzarolo, A. H., Mainardes, E. W., & Innocencio, F. A. (2021). Antecedents and consequents of user satisfaction on Instagram. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 39(5).
- O'Meara, V. (2019). Weapons of the chic: Instagram influencer engagement pods as practices of resistance to Instagram platform labor. *Social Media+Society*, 5(4)
- Moreau, E. (2019). *11 Instagram Tips for Beginners*, Retrieved August 24, 2021 from <https://www.lifewire.com/instagram-tips-for-beginners-3485872>
- Nikolic, M., & Vasilski, D. (2018). Minimalism in contemporary architecture as one of the most usable aesthetically-functional patterns. *Facta Universitatis, Series: Architecture and Civil Engineering*, 15(3), 333-345.
- Pariser, E. (2011). *The filter bubble: What the Internet is hiding from you*. New York: Viking.
- Pennington, D. R. (2017). Coding of non-text data. In Sloan, L., & Quan-Haase, A. (Eds). *The SAGE handbook of social media research methods* (232-251). Sage
- Poell, T., Nieborg, D., & Van Dijck, J. (2019). Platformisation. *Internet Policy Review*, 8(4), 1-13.
- Salehi, S., Du, J. T., & Ashman, H. (2015, August). Examining personalization in academic web search. In *Proceedings of the 26th ACM Conference on Hypertext & Social Media* (pp. 103-111). ACM.
- Sandvig, C., Hamilton, K., Karahalios, K., & Langbort, C. (2014, May). *Auditing algorithms: Research methods for detecting discrimination on internet platforms*. Paper presented at the Data and Discrimination: Converting Critical Concerns into Productive Inquiry, Seattle.
- Savolainen, L., Uitermark, J., & Boy, J. D. (2020). Filtering feminisms: Emergent feminist visibilities on Instagram. *New media & society*, 1461444820960074.
- Skrubbeltrang, M. M., Grunnet, J., & Tarp, N. T. (2017). #RIPINSTAGRAM: Examining user's counter-narratives opposing the introduction of algorithmic personalization on Instagram. *First Monday*, 22(4).
- Smith, K. (2019). *50 Incredible Instagram Statistics*. Retrieved October 2, 2021, from <https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/instagram-stats/>.

- Stoica, A. A., Riederer, C., & Chaintreau, A. (2018, April). Algorithmic Glass Ceiling in Social Networks: The effects of social recommendations on network diversity. In *Proceedings of the 2018 World Wide Web Conference* (pp. 923-932).
- Titlow, J. P. (2017). *How Instagram Learns From Your Likes To Keep You Hooked*. Retrieved April 9, 2019, from <https://www.fastcompany.com/40434598/how-instagram-learns-from-your-likes-to-keep-you-hooked>
- von Puttkamer, I. (2019). *Top 10 most relevant Topics on Instagram*, Retrieved February 20, 2020 from <https://blog.fanpagekarma.com/2019/04/18/top-10-most-relevant-topics-on-instagram/>.
- Yang, W. (2020). Top Instagram Accounts to Follow for Social Justice & Activism Content. Retrieved September 20, 2021 from <https://crescendowork.com/workplace-inclusion-blog/2020/7/24/top-instagram-accounts-follow-diversity-inclusion-social-justice-activism-content>

“AM I REALLY CURSED?” SELF-DISCLOSURE IN A SPIRITUAL FACEBOOK GROUP: CONCEPTUALIZING NETWORKED THERAPEUTIC CULTURE

BERIT RENSER

Tallinn University

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the therapeutic culture in social media and looks at a Facebook group for spiritually inclined people who seek solutions and remedies to their daily worries and troubles. This study is based on discourse analysis of 498 posts, combined with ethnographic observation and interviews. To understand how the therapeutic culture is shaped in social media, I analyse the motives and experiences of people who self-disclose in the group, the discursive framing of problems by both help-seekers and advice-givers, and the progress of self-disclosure. I propose the term networked therapeutic culture to describe the dialogic and interactive therapeutic culture that has emerged on social media and can be characterised by, first, the more accessible platform for speaking out, second, its shaping of the therapeutic discourses and third, how it affords accumulating self-disclosure in return for help.

Keywords: networked therapeutic culture ▪ social media ▪ Facebook ▪ new spirituality ▪ help-seeking ▪ self-disclosure ▪ wellbeing

1. INTRODUCTION

“Why is everyone getting sick around me—am I really cursed?” is a typical question encountered in a Facebook group for spiritually inclined people. The group, comprising of 30,000 members brought together by interest in spiritual and pagan topics, is an active discussion board where people seek to raise their wellbeing by publicly asking for counsel on how to deal with their everyday problems. Some may suffer from health issues, others struggle in toxic relationships, facing grief or loneliness. There are those who seek advice from traditional healers, hoping to solve their problems with the help of spiritual guidance, yearning for a better future promised by clairvoyants. However, the bulk of the group is made up by those who are happy to

have a chat and receive advice from their peers. While these Facebook corners may be regarded as fountains of misinformation and bastions of anti-scientific thought, inspiring a steady stream of dismay, contempt and mockery in media (Orav, 2018), it makes sense to contemplate, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, why people choose to turn to peers in spiritual Facebook groups for advice and while doing so, reveal themselves to large audiences.

On the following pages, I will analyze the self-disclosure practices among the users of the largest Estonian spiritual Facebook group as they seek help from peers to a variety of problems related to mental health, money, work and home, spiritual matters and interpersonal relationships or, in general, voice concern over their wellbeing.

The approach sits at the intersection of the studies of the global therapeutic culture, (g)local sociocultural context and social media studies. The therapeutic culture refers to the prevalence of a psychological mindset outside of the traditional domains of psychology (Madsen, 2014), where the language of therapy has made revealing one's emotions widely acceptable, changes the boundaries between the public and the private self (Illouz, 2008), endorses self-help practices, and builds on the ideals of individual choice, autonomy, and self-responsibility (McGee, 2005). While in Estonia the cultural figure of therapist is not well represented, the main carrier of the self-reflective endeavours may be seen in new spirituality (Uibu, 2016a)–an umbrella term for spiritual-religious beliefs and practices widely popular in Estonia. This therapeutic culture in its many forms, from psychological to spiritual counsel, has commonly been popularized by the media: through seminars, self-help books or talk shows (Illouz, 2008). In the digital age, therapeutic culture moves online, appearing in YouTube videos, online diagnostic questionnaires, Facebook memes and healing or spiritual practices (Rimke, 2017). Here, the affective claims to suffering are even further amplified, accelerated and complicated in social media (Chouliaraki, 2020). However, there is still little research available on how social media affords the therapeutic culture—a gap this ethnography-inspired study seeks to fill.

I will demonstrate in the article, by looking at the characteristics of therapeutic culture and self-disclosure in online spaces, that help-seeking motivated self-disclosure in this group is shaped by reasons for and previous experiences with help-seeking, discursive frames available for presenting help-seeking questions and answers, and the ambivalent social media affordances that encourage further self-disclosure. Based on the analysis, I conclude the article with proposing the concept of networked therapeutic culture.

2. THE THERAPEUTIC CULTURE

The “Triumph of the Therapeutic” (Rieff, 1966) was already claimed to have happened half a century ago, but the outlook has changed significantly since then. The rise of the therapeutic cultures has been connected to the rise of the importance of

psychology in the 20th and 21st century, also called the psychologisation of society, which reduces social, political or moral questions to psychological issues (Nehring, Madsen, Cabanas, Mills, & Kerrigan, 2020a). It can be seen as a hegemonic discourse that offers a discursive scheme to look at the self and the world (de Vos, 2010). Similarly, Illouz (2008) points out that the emotional language of the therapeutic culture frames how we talk about and understand emotions, thoughts, and behaviours or their hierarchies: what is normal or pathological. In fact, much of the therapeutic discourses relies heavily on psy-knowledges (Illouz, 2008), concentrates on positive psychology (Illouz, 2020), happiness (Fanti, 2020), mindfulness (Nehring & Frawley, 2020), or resilience that often denies negative feelings, depicts the self as a repository of inner strength and emphasizes individual responsibility, while urging to be grateful for everything, including suffering (Rimke, 2020). In this way, striving for wellbeing and positivity may be the solution, but also the cause behind the conditions that give rise to the therapeutic culture.

Earlier work saw therapeutic culture in mainly negative terms as the result of rising individualism and waning religious authority (Rieff, 1966), and interpreted the increasing role of private matters in public space as narcissism (Lasch, 1979), cultural decline (Rieff, 1966), and cultivation of victim mentality (Furedi, 2004). More recently, however, authors have pointed out that the therapeutic culture has an empowering potential, since it has made suffering socially acceptable (Wright, 2008), offers new discursive spaces for speaking out about injustices (Salmenniemi, 2017) and should therefore be regarded as a strategy for emotional coping (McLeod & Wright, 2009). Furthermore, Lilie Chouliaraki (2020) has argued that social media reorganizes the who, when, and how one can claim personal suffering by democratizing access to broadcasting and claiming victimhood.

The reasons behind engagement with the therapeutic culture may be manifold. The neoliberal ethos of individual responsibility suggests that complex social problems can be solved by simple individual actions. Anthony Giddens has proposed that the modern self feels a loss of significance and hopes to find a cure to it from the looking glass—something he calls the “reflexive project of the self” (Giddens, 1991). Furthermore, self-diagnoses and self-help become necessary when other experts fail or when gaps in social support are felt (Seear, 2009; Lubi, Uibu, & Koppel, 2018). More specifically, within the post-Soviet context, people have been shown to turn to therapeutic practices as a way to renegotiate subjectivity in the changed ideological context, cope with labour and other inequalities and to fill gaps in healthcare (Salmenniemi, 2017). Therefore, reasons behind engagement in the therapeutic culture fluctuate between wider sociocultural context, local conditions and personal experiences.

The focus on the individual and the decline of religious authority is not only the cornerstone of the therapeutic culture, but also connects to the rise of the new spirituality—an umbrella term for spiritual-religious beliefs and practices (Uibu, 2016a). These practices in and of themselves have been described as a hybrid of therapeutic

culture, self-help and spiritual quests (Heelas, 2009), where the supernatural dimension often permeates all other ways of dealing with distress (Koenig, 2004). The two approaches to healing and salvation, therapeutic and spiritual-religious, have merged to an unprecedented extent (Hanegraaff, 1998, p. 46). Both discourses have entered schools, gyms, etc., contributing to their popularization (Illouz, 2008; Pagis, 2020) and increasing blending. For example, Michael Pagis (2020) has shown how popularization of bodily practices like yoga, meditation, mindfulness or alternative healing practices have spread from non-Western religious spaces to Western hospitals, mental health clinics and gyms. So does the therapeutic sneak into traditional Indian faith-healers' practices who mix psy-discourses with traditional healing (Siddiqui, 2020), while psychological experts often provide spiritual guidance (Moskowitz, 2001). In fact, spirituality can be seen as a cultural toolbox (Uibu, 2016b) where the spiritual tools are frequently intended to help reach non-spiritual goals, from health to fitness, motivation and even entertainment where spiritual aspects are often optional (Kraft, 2014, p. 306). Overall, new spirituality and therapeutic culture overlap significantly and it is difficult to say whether one is witness to secular ideas with esoteric roots or spiritual beliefs borrowing from psy-discourses.

3. SELF-DISCLOSURE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Self-disclosure is integral to finding spiritual guidance as well as participating in the therapeutic culture. By self-disclosure I mean the provision of personal information to other individuals about oneself or any other people or events somehow affecting the self. While self-disclosure is often triggered by life stress (Stiles, 1987), opening up about negative feelings is considered good for mental health, has therapeutic functions and is hence called the "talking cure" (Corcoran, 2000). Self-disclosure is also regarded as a necessary precondition for receiving social support (Lu & Hampton, 2017), building connectedness, reducing loneliness (Deters & Mehl, 2013) and depression (Frison & Eggermont, 2020), and enhancing general wellbeing (Huang, 2016).

It can be argued that social media has ambivalent affordances for self-disclosure. By affordances I mean a range of technological conditions that are perceived by users as requesting, demanding, allowing, encouraging, discouraging or refusing certain behaviours and are always relative depending on who they afford and how the subjects who engage perceive the affordances (Davis & Chouinard, 2016). Most platforms share features and functions that encourage self-disclosure, such as invitations to share personal information in status updates, profiles, etc. (cf. de Vos 2020; Trepte, 2015). Oftentimes, self-disclosure depends on perceptions of the audience or the "imagined audience" (Litt, 2012). While help-seeking self-disclosure on social media is usually addressed to potential helpers or the so-called ideal, sympathetic audiences, social networking sites also include nightmare audiences (Boyd & Marwick, 2011; Murumaa-Mengel, 2017), such as malicious users who engage in

various forms of cyberbullying. Group dynamics such as flaming, trolling, harassment (cf. Kwan & Skoric, 2013) that unfold on social media may discourage its users from self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure is typically discussed in the context of privacy since privacy is required as a precondition before opening up to others. The two are in a dialectic relationship where one needs to give up privacy in order to speak out (Masur, 2019). Computer-mediated communication in general confuses the typical boundaries one may have when opening up, because it challenges our understanding of our audiences and our privacy. For example, online communication blurs the borders between the public and the private (e.g., Papacharissi, 2010), the affordance of anonymity has been observed to reduce perceived vulnerability (Krämer & Haferkamp, 2011) and positively affect self-disclosure (Walther, 1996). On the other hand, privacy is threatened by social media recommendation and connection algorithms that foster forced connections by associating otherwise disparate data points (van der Nagel, 2018). Yet, as self-disclosure has multiple social and personal benefits as mentioned above, social media users have been found to react to these ambivalent affordances by engaging in various privacy-enabling practices, including strategic information sharing, social steganography and self-censorship (Oolo & Siibak, 2013), vaguebooking or in other words blurring the meaning of the content to be understandable for only the intended audience (Child & Starcher, 2016), editing already posted content (Georgalou, 2016) or producing more generalized information (Krämer & Haferkamp, 2011).

4. CONTEXT AND METHODS

This research was conducted in Estonia where, before foraying deeper into therapeutic culture, we must first take into account two important local sociocultural factors: spread of spiritual beliefs and practices and the relatively limited support network for wellbeing. As many as 34% Estonians consider themselves as spiritual and 59% believe in people with supernatural abilities (Kantar Emor, 2017). Estonians' religious affiliation is therefore best characterised by "believing without belonging" (Ringvee, 2011, p. 45). Furthermore, media has played a significant role in resurrecting spiritual and magical practices among Estonian people. During the Soviet period, folk healers were portrayed as national heroes who shared expert advice and useful health tips (Kõiva, 2015), and still today, healers and spiritual advisers enjoy wide popularity in mass media (Lauri, 2015; Vahter, 2018). In the age of social media, many of the older healers as well as new ones have started working or promoting themselves online. The Facebook group under investigation is an example of one of those popular groups ran by healers. In this case, the group is led by two people who call themselves either witches or sages and who see themselves as helpers and advice-givers, often taking on the roles of psychologists (Renser & Tiidenberg, 2020). The group also gathers over 30K people (as of June 2021) and has gained almost 15,000 followers since I first

joined it in 2017 (for comparison, the total population of Estonia is slightly more than 1.3 million). It also has vibrant discussions among regular members who do not necessarily consider themselves as “healers”, but are interested in mystical, spiritual and esoteric ideas or seek advice from peers or witches in the group. Overall, the group reflects a wide variety of syncretistic beliefs and practices which are typically chosen and tailored to satisfy individual needs (Uibu, 2016b, p. 16).

While therapeutic culture has been regarded as partly grown out of the rise of the authority of psychologists, institutionalized mental health and wellbeing support has been systematically underfunded in Estonia (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2020). I consider wellbeing as a combination of “having”, “loving”, “being” or a mixture of material, interpersonal and personal development conditions (Allardt, 1993). A continued erosion of any of those aspects may contribute to deterioration of mental health. Recent initiatives to improve the situation point to a crisis in the availability of psychological support, as evident in the rising numbers of help-seekers and growing psychologists’ waitlists (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2020). Further, mental health issues are stigmatized, 62% Estonian population does not want anyone to know of their mental health issues (Faktum & Ariko, 2016), yet mental health problems, among which depression is the most prevalent, account for a quarter of the total of all health issues (Vos et al., 2015). In this article, I limit my focus on the public discussion among the regular group members to such topics that concern the help-seekers’ wellbeing, excluding all posts that deal with physical health (which is a very broad topic in itself that deserves a separate discussion).

I was welcomed in the Facebook group by one of the administrators who calls herself a witch. For the current article, I conducted an online ethnographic study and collected approximately 1,000 posted questions from the group since 2017, out of which roughly a half is concerned with physical health and the remaining half deals with wellbeing in general. The analysis was followed by ethnographic interviews. The respondents were found and the final eight selected with the help of the group administrator who encouraged and invited members in a public post to share their stories with me. The interviews took place both online and offline, subject to restrictions of COVID-19. During the interviews, I asked the respondents to comment on their Facebook activities and their posts, to get a broader understanding of their social media use. In addition, to contextualize some interpretations of the post and interview analysis, I set up a short online survey which I sent to some people personally after they had posted in the group. All interviewees were female, as were 16 out of the 19 respondents who filled out the survey, which also mirrors the gender makeup of the group. Altogether, I analysed eight interviews, 498 posts and their comment threads, and the survey answers, using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to identify significant topics, and discourse analysis (Gee, 2011) to determine the discursive framing within the posts.

As I will also show in the analysis, there was a conflicting understanding between the members of the group whether the Facebook group of 30,000 people and

designated as Private by Facebook was in principle public or private. I was mindful of this complexity when developing my approach to research ethics. First, I obtained informed consent from all interviewees and survey respondents to analyze and use their responses as well as their group posts. Any material from the posts of other users I gathered with the blessing of the administrator and used it with careful consideration of my respondents' anonymity. This applies to both their identities in real life as well as in networked space (where they often use pseudonyms or partial names. This means that I have modified the details of the interview quotations to protect my respondents from any unexpected harm. Also, the screenshots seen in the article are rough re-enactments of original posts which I re-created to anonymize the users, following the logic of ethical fabrication (cf. Markham, 2012; Tiidenberg, 2017). None of the help-seekers mentioned in the analysis can be traced back based on the information presented in the article.

5. SELF-DISCLOSURE IN A SPIRITUAL FACEBOOK GROUP

5.1. Reasons for and previous experiences with help-seeking and self-disclosure

Members engage in intentional self-disclosure in order to receive answers to what they perceive to be important personal matters. In many cases, by the time the participants decide to reach out to the group, they have already sought information from other sources, considered contacting professionals or simply have no clue as to the nature of their problem and the competency best suited to provide the solution. In the interviews, several participants map out their previous efforts to seek help, taking them to Google and forums, friends and relatives, or other media and self-help books. Other times, police, family advisers, doctors, mental health professionals, also witches, therapists, alternative medicine practitioners are mentioned as someone whose counsel has already been sought or who are next on the list of potential helpers. In fact, all my respondents confessed to having earlier experiences with witches and healers, often from decades ago, as the reason for joining the group in the first place. While some people reach out to the group as their first resort, for others it is the last—all followed trajectories were personal and different, but often reflected the complexity of issues. Here, Asta, one of my interviewees, posts a message where she seeks help for her dandruff problem, while, in fact, she suffers from stress caused by being a single mother of five and fighting with an alcoholic ex-husband over finances:

At the time, I was raising five children alone on my own. Then my ex-husband decided to sue me, demanded that I pay him every month, because he has a disability and I left him—but I left a healthy man, it was himself who ruined his health with his drinking... And finally I got psoriasis on my head—dandruff and itching all over. Went to a skin doctor and was told that it was my nerves doing it. I then looked for help everywhere—I got some

vitamins, one was 30 euros pack and the other was 75 euros pack. Expensive, right? Then I asked the people in the Facebook group, all sorts of things they told me I should try, but all of which turned out to be completely useless. And then, when I was already about to accept that nothing could help me, I turned to Piret [one of the witches in the group]. I had heard that she could make the tensions in your body go away... . Whom else could I still have turned for help? (Asta)

In many cases, participants choose self-disclosure in the group over alternative options because of the shortcomings in the accessibility of services, such as lack of available appointments, high costs or long distance. The group's popularity and relevance builds on crowdsourced answers from its members and administrators and the more responders in the network, the more useful it becomes for its participants. Furthermore, many of the participants are expatriate Estonians, which may be reflective of the cultural and linguistic barriers they may have when encountering these services while living in a foreign country. In this context, the digital space that can be accessed regardless of the many limitations imposed by distance, time and money eradicates at least some of the problems that offline services have.

In addition, trust in the institution or knowledge about the possibilities play a major role in the choice one makes. A certain prejudice towards doctors and psychologists can make them seen as someone who is "not interested in the root causes of problems, but only wants to prescribe medications". Police, typically, "won't bother to help anyway". Furthermore, while participants oftentimes confess to feelings of inferiority, worthlessness, loneliness, and suffer from depression, anxiety, panic attacks or constant fatigue, mental health related posts rarely recommend the help of mental health professionals unless the problem has been stated very clearly as I will discuss in the following paragraphs. This possibly reflects the lack of knowledge and experience of how to or with whose help to deal with those problems, stigmatization of the issue in the culture in general and the limits of mental health support in Estonia.

5.3. Discursive framing of problems and solutions

After choosing to self-disclose through the mere act of posting about one's problems, participants also choose their discursive framing. Here, three main culturally informed discursive framing strategies of problems and solutions emerge: psychologization, spiritualization and rationalization.

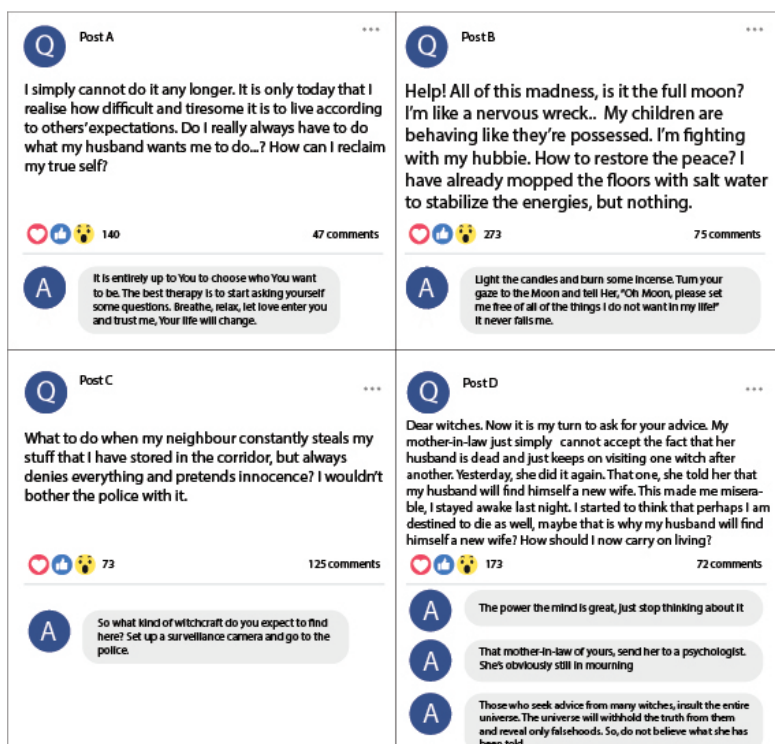


Figure 1. Post A: Example of psychologization. Post B: Example of spiritualization. Post C: Example of rationalization. Post D: Example of typically mixed discourses. (Ethical fabrication of Facebook posts)

The first discursive frame that draws on therapeutic culture is interested in the psychological aspects of the self or what I call psychologization (Figure 1, Post A). It presents the self as the root cause of all our woes and troubles and suggests all problems can be remedied by simply changing our thoughts and behaviour. The expressive emotionality or confession that is characteristic of therapeutic culture is also present here and is most conspicuous in those examples which use impassioned language to describe a series of setbacks and failures and the related emotional distress. Here, positive thoughts do not result from being well, but rather the wellbeing is a condition to be attained by “thinking positive”. It is notable, at the same time, while therapy culture heavily promotes “positive thinking”, it is rarely found in the posts of those who seek it, but is used by the ones who give advice. The former are characteristically mired in negative thoughts and feelings which they came to express. Thus, the comments suggest all mental and physical illnesses, as well as bad luck and relationship troubles, are born out of these negative thoughts, not caused by any structural problems. For example, victims of workplace bullying who “just cannot take it anymore” are advised to “look into the mirror” and reflect upon the truth that “every coin has two sides”. As it appears, failures and illnesses are seen to be caused by

“wrong thinking” and should recede when forced to confront with positive thoughts and actions, such as smiling, forgiving, letting go or expressing gratefulness.

The second discursive frame is spiritualization (Figure 1, Post B), where the cause and/or solution of the problem is attributed to external agents, such as curses, inherited behaviour patterns, certain auras, energies, etc. According to these accounts, the root of the problem/solution lies not within, but without, in some external spiritual or magic factors which we can still somehow manipulate or change. Bad omens and negative meanings are looked for in objects, people, environment and dreams. Often, these descriptions draw from folklore and popular culture it is known that the lunar cycle can affect one’s mood and behaviour, sleep disturbances might be caused by the radiation of water veins, while protection may be offered by certain medicinal herbs, red string, when worn, can ward off misfortune, various spells and incantations should also not be overlooked. We know from earlier studies that anxious people are more likely to be superstitious (Wolfradt, 1997) and people who place the locus of control in the exterior, as it is in the case of bad omens, are more prone to pessimism (Dember, Martin, Hummer, Howe, & Melton, 1989). Hence, the mild hints of feelings of anxiety, fear and doubt that are consistently veiled in mystical events and tied to spiritual or supernatural phenomena, suggest one’s wellbeing may be the main driving force behind many of the posts also when not so explicitly expressed.

The last discursive frame is that of rationalization where both common and uncommon problems are explained in normal, everyday terms (Figure 1, Post C). Rationalization appears to be a frequent strategy of choice when dealing with the most common and easily identifiable problems, such as theft, in which case the “rational” option would be going to the police. Following the “rational” scenario, victims of domestic abuse and violence may be directed to a battered women’s shelter for help, one’s legal problems might be solved with the help of a good professional lawyer, and it also makes sense to try regular pharmacotherapy to alleviate one’s anxiety and depression. Well-informed answers often means the person responding has experienced a similar problem themselves and relates to the advice-seeker on the basis of their personal experience.

The size of the social media group and the constant flux of users between groups, however, facilitates the borrowing of techniques which are used in other groups as well as in other media channels and social contexts. The scope of the group and the members’ different experiences allow combining various discursive frames that are not necessarily opposite, but complementary to each other. Thus, we can observe collapsing discursive frames within a single individual post (Figure 1, Post D). Such an approach to different coping tools and their application is encouraged by the neo-liberal conception of freedom of choice and the right to seek personalized solutions which fit one’s preconceived beliefs and to use coping tools which freely mix and match science and supernatural, mundane and spiritual.

The discursive frames used by the participants also shape their understanding of problems and their solutions. One noteworthy problem that surfaces from interviews

and is reflected in the posts is the lack of knowledge of how to define or frame certain problems and who is best suited to solve these problems (see also Figure 1, Post D). The often-arcane language which conceals emotions and places fault in the self, coupled with the typical brevity encouraged in social media posts, obfuscates the problem statements for the audience. The help-seeker, in many cases, may disguise and downplay her real problem as a mild spiritual or emotional distress. However, such obfuscation makes it difficult to get and give good advice, which, when intersecting with Facebook groups' affordances, leads to what I describe in the next section as accumulating self-disclosure.

5.4. Accumulating self-disclosure

The group as social context and Facebook as technological context condition the help-seeking and giving practices and related self-disclosure on the platform. The networked nature of these groups affords what I am referring to as accumulating self-disclosure, by shaping how privacy is perceived and audiences imagined in these groups, as well as whether Facebook is perceived as encouraging or discouraging algorithmic connections.

First, many of the group members consider the group as private, since it is designated as such by its administrators, regardless of the fact that it only takes three questions to answer concerning the applicant's interest in the group to become its member among more than 30,000 others. The help-seekers emphasize the important contribution of administrators to this perception of privacy, as they oversee and enforce the group rules. Besides their role as helpers, supporters, entertainers and educators, their role as enforcers of discipline is mentioned as a major incentive for joining this particular group. The administrators can accept members and decline applicants, approve or reject their contributions and ask them questions for background check before acceptance, such as their reasons behind joining. Enforcement of group rules (e.g. no negative readings, no fishing for customers by outsiders, etc.) gives a sense of security and privacy. In addition, members often describe the group based on the assumption of ideal audiences and characterize their peers as "knowledgeable", "smart" or "experienced" who give good advice, share their intimate thoughts, participate in discussions and function as "a supportive family" that fulfills the users' needs. The group is seen as a source of sense of belonging and well-being and reading posts has become part of their daily routine.

The supportive community offered by the imagined audiences and the perceived privacy resulting from tightly enforced rules encourages self-disclosure. This, however, leads to a snowballing effect where the disclosure of one person encourages other people to share similar experiences, as is shown in Figure 2. Here, comment B answers to post E with a personal story of loss, that of her own unborn baby. In these cases, members of the group often join the discussion in the hopes of finding consolation and solace for themselves as well. This assumes the swapping of the roles of

the help-seeker and the help-giver—easily accomplished in a community where the conventional adviser (therapist, doctor, marriage counselor, spiritual guide or other) has been replaced with decentralized experts. The level of perceived privacy in the group and trust in the good intentions of its members and the quality of the content, strengthened by the feeling of belonging, encourage the advice-seekers to self-disclose and relinquish their privacy in exchange for help.

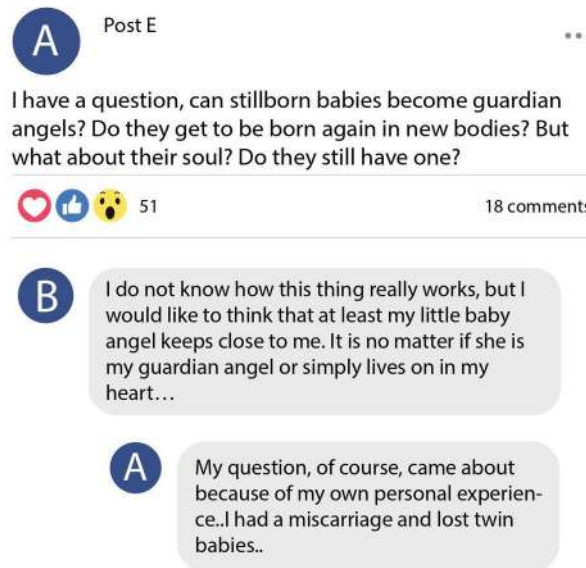


Figure 2. Post E: Example of accumulating self-disclosure by sharing experiences (comment B) and divulging further details (comment A from the initial help-seeker) in discussions.

However, some members have a heightened sense of privacy and are therefore less inclined to divulge their intimate secrets, preferring to vaguebook their posts, as they are discouraged by the size of the group and the threat of sensitive personal information leaking beyond the confines of the group. Marta gives a description of how information is passed on from one friend to another, eventually spreading to people outside of the group, making it impossible to keep track of who receives the information, especially in a small country like Estonia. The interviewees are also worried of self-disclosure to nightmare audiences: either their own family members, colleagues or friends or people who intend to stigmatize, shame and mock self-disclosure. Elsa explains, the problem may lie in the mere act of participation in this type of group—there is a certain stigma attached to esoteric gatherings that may be frowned upon in the work environment.

Second, even despite these fears and occasional choice of complete secrecy, the respondents still posted their questions in the hopes of receiving valuable feedback, but did so by vaguebooking, hiding the meaning of the content or even editing and

deleting their posts afterwards. In effect, the advice-givers looking to overcome the brevity and vagueness of the original post, worded as such to control the vulnerabilities associated with self-disclosure in compliance with the group rules, ask clarifying questions to understand the specific situation. This coaxes the help-seeker herself into full disclosure of the premises of her original post, in order to improve the relevance of the advice to her actual situation, as is shown in Figure 2, Post E, comment A. Here, the user starts revealing herself a bit further as she feels the received answers may not help her to find the solution to her problem. Therefore, while Facebook as a platform and the group as a social context may at first discourage in-depth descriptions of oneself by limited post length and the large potential audience, shortened and vaguebooked posts may unintentionally have an opposite effect of encouraging accumulating self-disclosure as a result of the interaction within the comments section in order to receive more relevant answers.

Third, accumulating self-disclosure may be involuntary and rather encouraged by Facebook's algorithmic connections. Here, the participants may not truly comprehend the extent of all the connections to their person that exist on the platform. For example, Facebook enables easy search of its users' posting histories within the group as is shown in Figure 3, and unless the corresponding privacy settings have been turned on by the user, also common friends, interests, photos and personal statuses are visible to anyone digging for contextual information.



Figure 3. Posts F and G: examples of accumulating self-disclosure by virtue of algorithmic linking of posts by the same person over time. (Ethical fabrications of Facebook posts)

One can easily find the same person's posts within the group(s) throughout the year(s), rendering it easier to track down personal narratives for additional helpful clues from their past. Advice-givers often use these tools to determine the context of the person's problems: its duration, depth, or any personality clues. In several cases, when a group member has posted a question, the other members have turned to the post and used it for their own purposes. As seen in Figure 3, Post G, comment A, the advice-giver discovered that the help-seeker had been struggling with her work already for two years—a fact that gave her further context for the reply. Such realizations, brought about algorithmically, have been mentioned in the interviews as discomfiting for the help-seekers who mention the feeling of their personal space being invaded once someone refers to the narrative picked up through algorithmic disclosure.

6. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

I propose the term networked therapeutic culture to describe the dialogic and interactive therapeutic culture that has emerged on social media and can be characterised by, first, the more accessible platform for speaking out, second, its shaping of the therapeutic discourses and third, how it affords accumulating self-disclosure in return for help.

First, social media, where anyone has access to broadcasting their pain, reorganizes the who, when and how one can claim personal suffering (Chouliaraki, 2020). It offers a new discursive space for speaking out (Salmenniemi, 2019) for those whose voice may have been less heard and on topics that have been suppressed. While social media as such, and this group in particular, encourages self-disclosure, it also rewards the users for posting their personal stories with high levels of attention and engagement, help and advice from others. On the other hand, it makes other people's posts publicly available and sets these as standards of what is regarded as normal within the group. With consistent participation and encouraged by seeing other members receive answers, users' confidence in the group grows, making it a viable alternative for help seeking, should the need suddenly arise. This becomes especially crucial when the participant is unaware of official or offline alternatives or these may be inaccessible because of their higher entry barrier or other structural reasons. Social media groups help to seemingly overcome structural problems of access to help, offer an alternative to institutional support, tackle psychological barriers one may have with reaching out to experts and set a low bar for participation. In addition, seeking help from the group gives the participant the sense of agency and self-responsibility that the neoliberal culture requires us to have.

Second, the new and the more accessible platform and the help-seeking groups within it simultaneously expand and shrink the language of the therapeutic culture. Therapeutic culture may reveal itself in other closely connected phenomena, such as new spirituality. As shown in the analysis above, members of the studied group

relied on discourses of psychology, spirituality and rationality to frame how they disclosed their problems. The networked nature of social media easily enables us to bring together different discourses that may not otherwise be readily compatible. In this way, therapeutic advice has become decentralized, opposing any specific expertise, and leaves the participants entirely to their own devices when choosing the correct answers. However, the networked nature and the fear of losing privacy contribute to simultaneous shrinking of the therapeutic language, resulting in less detailed descriptions, shielding of important contextual information and conforming to the fast-paced consumption of Facebook posts.

Third, social media affords accumulative self-disclosure and it does so in three main ways. Most typically, self-disclosure in help-seeking posts encourages audience members to also share their own experiences and disclose their own stories within the comment feed, creating a snowballing effect of self-disclosure and contributing to the expansion of the therapeutic culture and the interchangeability of the roles of the help-giver and the help-seeker. In addition, the help-seeker herself may share more information than originally intended. Lack of privacy and nightmare audiences discourage self-disclosure and induce short problem descriptions with little context. These posts, in turn, often require further clarification in order for the audience members to be able to offer help that feels substantial. Social media also allows the disclosure of help-seeker's information algorithmically, as it shows a list of her earlier posts within the same group. The "therapeutic narratives of selfhood" (Illouz, 2008) are thus not only told by the help-seeker herself, but are algorithmically exposed and shaped by connecting different data points (van der Nagel, 2018). Thus, self-disclosure in the networked therapeutic culture always triggers further disclosures that are possibly unintended or unwanted. While users seek help on social media, they contribute to the further shaping and expansion of the networked therapeutic culture.

Finally, I suggest that this analysis and the conceptual framework of networked therapeutic culture provides an empirical analysis of peoples' help-seeking behaviours online at a time when mental health and wellbeing have been systematically stigmatized and underfunded, and social media groups increasingly rise to fill the gaps. Future research might ask whether these networked therapeutic cultures go beyond the local spiritual domain described in this article and one may ask, especially during the times of isolation and stress resulting from COVID-19, which other themed communities people seek help from, how these groups shape the discourses and understanding of (mental) health and how these groups contribute to or disrupt the effective solving of a pandemic-related (mental) health crisis. This hopefully enriches the ongoing discussions around public healthcare policies and health misinformation. Furthermore, the article contributes to the academic discussion of self-disclosure and privacy on social media, suggesting that within some contexts the need for help encourages self-disclosure, with possibly unforeseen consequences for the participants' privacy.

Berit Rensser is a Junior Research Fellow and a PhD candidate in Audiovisual Arts and Media Studies at the Baltic Film, Media and Arts School of Tallinn University, Estonia. Her current research is focused on social media, therapeutic cultures and new spirituality, and how these relate to health and wellbeing.

REFERENCES

- Allardt, E. (1993). Having, Loving, Being: An Alternative to the Swedish Model of Welfare Research. In M. Nussbaum & A. Sen (Eds.), *The Quality of Life* (pp. 88–94). Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. London: SAGE.
- Child, J. T., & Starcher, S. C. (2016). Fuzzy Facebook privacy boundaries: Exploring mediated lurking, vague-booking, and Facebook privacy management. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 54, 483–490.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2020). Victimhood: The affective politics of vulnerability. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420979316>
- Corcoran, P. (2000). Therapeutic Self-Disclosure: “The Talking Cure” and “Silence.” In P. Corcoran & V. Spencer (Eds.), *Disclosures* (pp. 118–148). London, UK: Ashgate Publishing.
- Davis, J. L., & Chouinard, J. B. (2016). Theorizing Affordances: From Request to Refuse. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 36(4), 241–248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467617714944>
- De Vos, J. (2010). Christopher Lasch’s the culture of narcissism: the failure of a critique of psychological politics. *Theory and Psychology*, 20, 528–548.
- De Vos, J. (2020). Digital therapeutic culture. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures* (pp. 233–244). Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dember, W. N., Martin, S. H., Hummer, M. K., Howe, S. R., & Melton, R. S. (1989). The measurement of optimism and pessimism. *Current Psychology: Research and Reviews*, 8, 109–119.
- Deters, F., & Mehl, M. R. (2013). Does Posting Facebook Status Updates Increase or Decrease Loneliness? An Online Social Networking Experiment. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4(5), 579–586.
- Emor, K. (2017). Emor Passwordil: üle poole eestlastest usub kõrgemaid jõude ning ülivõimetega inimesi. Retrieved from <https://www.emor.ee/blogi/emor-passwordil-ule-poole-eestlastest-usub-korgemaid-joude-ning-ulivoimetega-inimesi/>
- Faktum & Ariko. (2016). *Elanikkonna teadlikkus, suhtumine ja hoiakud vaimse tervise teemal. Elanikkonna küsitlus*. Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonia. Retrieved from: https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/eesmargid_ja_tegevused/

- Norra_toetused/Rahvatervise_programm/elanikkonna_teadlikkus_suhtumine_ ja_hoiakud_vaimse_tervise_teemadel_2016.pdf
- Fanti, A. (2020). Happiness imperialism. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures* (pp. 55–70). Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Frison, E., & Eggermont, S. (2020). Toward an Integrated and Differential Approach to the Relationships Between Loneliness, Different Types of Facebook Use, and Adolescents' Depressed Mood. *Communication Research*, 47(5), 701–728. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650215617506>
- Furedi, F. (2004). *Therapy Culture. Cultivating vulnerability in an uncertain age*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2011). *How to Do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Georgalou, M. (2016). 'I make the rules on my Wall': Privacy and identity management practices on Facebook. *Discourse and Communication*, 10(1), 40–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481315600304>
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hanegraaff, W. J. (1998). *New age religion and western culture: esotericism in the mirror of secular thought*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Heelas, P. (2009). Spiritualities of Life. In P. B. Clarke (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. Online Publication: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588961.013.0043>
- Huang, H. Y. (2016). Examining the beneficial effects of individual's self-disclosure on the social network site. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 57, 122–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.12.030>
- Illouz, E. (2008). *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Illouz, E. (2020). Resilience. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures* (pp. 83–91). Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429024764-9>
- Koenig, H. G. (2004). Religion, Spirituality, and Medicine: Research Findings and Implications for Clinical Practice. *Southern Medical Journal*, 97(12), 1194–1200.
- Kraft, S. E. (2014). New Age Spiritualities. In J. A. Petersen (Ed.), *Controversial New Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Krämer, N. C., & Haferkamp, N. (2011). Online Self-Presentation: Balancing Privacy Concerns and Impression Construction on Social Networking Sites. In *Privacy Online* (pp. 127–141). Berlin: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-21521-6_10
- Kwan, G. C. E., & Skoric, M. M. (2013). Facebook bullying: An extension of battles in school. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(1), 16–25.
- Kõiva, M. (2015). Saatekirjaga rahvaarsti juures. *Mäetagused*, 62, 25–54. <https://doi.org/10.7592/mt2015.62.koiva>

- Lasch, C. (1979). *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. New York: W.W. Norton. <https://doi.org/10.3817/0679040187>
- Lauri, U. (2015). Maaleht püstitas tänase tiraažiga uue rekordi. *Lääne Elu*. Retrieved from <https://online.le.ee/2015/01/08/maaleht-pustitas-tanase-tiraažiga-uee-rekordi/>
- Litt, E. (2012). Knock, Knock. Who's There? The Imagined Audience. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 56(3), 330–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2012.705195>
- Lu, W., & Hampton, K. N. (2017). Beyond the power of networks: Differentiating network structure from social media affordances for perceived social support. *New Media and Society*, 19(6), 861–879. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815621514>
- Lubi, K. (2020). Vastutustundlik tervisekäitumine kui helesinine unelm. *Müürileht*. Retrieved from <https://www.muurileht.ee/vastutustundlik-tervisekaitumine-kui-helesinine-unelm/>
- Lubi, K., Uibu, M., & Koppel, K. (2018). Teaduslikult alternatiivmeditsiinist. *Eesti Arst*, 97(8), 409–415.
- Madsen, J. O. (2014). *The therapeutic turn: how psychology altered Western culture*. London: Routledge.
- Markham, A. (2012). Fabrication as ethical practice: Qualitative inquiry in ambiguous Internet contexts. *Information Communication and Society*, 15(3), 334–353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.641993>
- Masur, P. K. (2019). *Situational Privacy and Self-Disclosure*. *Situational Privacy and Self-Disclosure* (1st ed.). E-book: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78884-5>
- McGee, M. (2005). *Self-Help, Inc*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McKim, A. (2014). Roxanne's Dress: Governing Gender and Marginality Through Addiction Treatment. *Signs*, 39(2), 433–458.
- Ministry of Social Affairs. (2020). *Vaimse tervise roheline raamat*. Tallinn. Retrieved from https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/news-related-files/vaimse_tervise_roheline_raamat.pdf
- Moskowitz, E. (2001). *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-fulfilment*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Murumaa-Mengel. (2017). *Managing Imagined Audiences Online: Audience awareness as a Part of Social Media Literacies*. Dissertation, University of Tartu.
- Nehring, D., & Frawley, A. (2020). Mindfulness as a self-help fad. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures* (pp. 119–134). Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429024764-12>
- Oolo, E., & Siibak, A. (2013). Performing for one's imagined audience: Social steganography and other privacy strategies of Estonian teens on networked publics. *Cyberpsychology*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2013-1-7>
- Orav, A. T. (2018, August 22). Mida teha, kui keegi hüüab „kabuu-kabuu?” Facebooki-nõiad annavad nõu. *Eesti Ekspress*.

- Pagis, M. (2020). Embodied therapeutic culture. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures* (pp. 177–190). Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429024764-17>
- Papacharissi, Z. (2010). *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network S*. New York: Routledge.
- Renser, B., & Tiidenberg, K. (2020). Witches on Facebook: Mediatization of Neo-Paganism. *Social Media and Society*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120928514>
- Rieff, P. (1966). *The triumph of the therapeutic: Uses of faith after Freud*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Rimke, H. (2017). Self-help ideology. In *The SAGE encyclopedia of political behaviour* (pp. 734–737). London: SAGE.
- Rimke, H. (2020). Self-help, therapeutic industries, and neoliberalism. In D. Nehring, O. J. Madsen, E. Cabanas, C. Mills, & D. Kerrigan (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures*. Kindle Edition: Taylor and Francis.
- Ringvee, R. (2011). *Riik ja religioon nõukogudejärgses Eestis 1991-2008*. Dissertation, University of Tartu.
- Salmenniemi, S. (2017). ‘We can’t live without beliefs’: Self and society in therapeutic engagements. *Sociological Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026116677194>
- Salmenniemi, S. (2019). Therapeutic politics: critique and contestation in the post-political conjuncture. *Social Movement Studies*, 18(4), 408–424. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2019.1590692>
- Seear, K. (2009). The third shift: Health, work and expertise among women with endometriosis. *Health Sociology Review*, 18(2), 194–206. <https://doi.org/10.5172/hesr.18.2.194>
- Siddiqui, S. (2020). Faith healing. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures* (pp. 268–277). Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stiles, W. B. (1987). “I Have to Talk to Somebody”: A Fever Model of Disclosure. In V. Derlaga, J. & J. H. Berg (Eds.), *Self-disclosure: Theory, research and therapy* (pp. 257–282). New York: Springer International Publishing.
- Tiidenberg, K. (2017). Ethics in Digital Research. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection* (pp. 466–481). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Trepte, S. (2015). Social Media, Privacy, and Self-Disclosure: The Turbulence Caused by Social Media’s Affordances. *Social Media and Society*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115578681>
- Uibu, M. (2016a). Elu tõelise olemuse tunnetamine, moodsa aja religioon või umbluu – Uue vaimsuse erinevad nimetamis- ja käsitusviisid Eestis. *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri*, 99–121. Retrieved from <https://www.etis.ee/Portal/Publications/Display/6eccc7c7-6f7a-4cc7-9ddb-566cf4024eb2>

- Uibu, M. (2016b). *Religiosity as Cultural Toolbox: A Study of Estonian New Spirituality*. University of Tartu. Retrieved from https://dspace.ut.ee/bitstream/handle/10062/54063/uibu_marko.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- Vahter, T. (2018, October 3). Esoteerika vabariik. *ERR*. Retrieved from <https://kultuur.err.ee/866096/tauno-vahter-esoteerika-vabariik>
- van der Nagel, E. (2018). 'Networks that work too well': intervening in algorithmic connections. *Media International Australia*, 168(1), 81–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X18783002>
- Vos, T., Barber, R. M., Bell, B., Bertozzi-Villa, A., Biryukov, S., Bolliger, I., ... Murray, C. J. L. (2015). Global, regional, and national incidence, prevalence, and years lived with disability for 301 acute and chronic diseases and injuries in 188 countries, 1990–2013: A systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013. *The Lancet*, 386(9995), 743–800. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)60692-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)60692-4)
- Walther, J. B. (1996). Computer-mediated communication: Impersonal, Interpersonal, and Hyperpersonal Interaction. *Communication Research*, 23(1), 3–43.
- Wiseman, R., & Watt, C. (2004). Measuring superstitious belief: Why lucky charms matter. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 37, 1533–1541.

THEY GET A LOT OF NEWS FROM FACEBOOK: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON PARENTAL NEWS MODELING IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

JOSEPHINE LEHAFF

University of Roskilde

ABSTRACT

The popularization of digital technologies has called into question the role of parent-child behavior modeling in news socialization in the modern media landscape. On these technologies, news coexists with many other types of content, rendering its use externally invisible and thus less available for imitation with potential consequences for younger generations' future news use and civic orientation. This article reports on the everyday news behaviors of a quota sample of 24 Danes between ages 18 and 25 based on a combined qualitative methodology. An analytical design using laughter as index of face-loss points to sources of embarrassment in interview subjects' news repertoires, uncovering a young audience that is aware of but uncomfortable with their parents' news habits. This is in part a result of social media, where parents' liking, commenting, and sharing behaviors simultaneously make their news practices more available for observation and less available for idealization.

Keywords: Facework ▪ Laughter ▪ Mobile news ▪ News use ▪ News literacy ▪ Parental influence ▪ Social media ▪ Young adults ▪ Qualitative audience research

1. INTRODUCTION

Parental behavior modeling is a bedrock of child socialization: children learn by seeing their parents do, and parents' behaviors influence children into adulthood (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 2001). This is an important component in the development of civic participation and orientation behaviors, including news use (Jennings, Stoker & Bower, 2009). Seeing their parents consume news – reading the morning paper, listening to radio news programming on the road, or watching evening news – instills children and adolescents with models of news behavior that are reproduced later in life (Cobb, 1986; York & Scholl, 2015). However, with the move of news use

onto individualized digital technologies, socialization to news users can no longer be taken for granted. On popular technologies and platforms, news coexists with many other types of content, rendering its use less observable and consequently less available for imitation (Peters et al., 2021; Edgerly et al., 2017; Peters, 2012). This raises questions about younger generations' future news use and by extension their future civic orientation and participation.

This article draws from encounters with 24 Danes between the ages of 18 and 25, asked about their news practices. Using semi-structured interviews and a card sorting exercise as elicitation device (Picone, 2018), the study design promotes reflections about a broad spectrum of sources that young adults turn to for information. This includes social media, which hold a significant position in young adult news repertoires (Peters et al., 2021) but inspire mixed feelings and little esteem (Sveningsson, 2015). Analytically, this article uses laughter as paralinguistic marker of facework (Goffman, 1967) to identify sources of embarrassment in the news repertoires of young adults. The analysis reveals a young audience that is uncomfortably aware of their parents' news habits. While parents still influence young adults' developing news repertoires in the modern media landscape (Edgerly et al., 2017; York, 2019), the young adults in this article enshroud parental news practices in laughter, as behaviors they witness jar against their ideals and norms of news and media use. Social media are an important source of their knowledge of and discomfort with parents' news practices. Regardless, subjects express both a hopefulness and an expectation that they will themselves grow into better news repertoires with age, even if their parents have not.

2. MODELING NEWS USE

The idea that children learn media behaviors by observation is old, and research dedicated to the process spans many decades, media landscapes, and technologies. Modeled parent behavior has been associated with offspring reading (e.g. Notten, Kraaykamp & Konig, 2012) and television habits (e.g. Bleakley, Jordan & Hennessy, 2013; Webster, Pearson & Webster, 1986), as well as computer, internet (e.g. Vaala & Bleakley, 2015) and mobile phone use (e.g. Hefner et al., 2019). Across technologies, news use has drawn academic interest in particular for its function as predictor of future civic participation and orientation (e.g. Conway et al., 1981; Jennings, Stoker & Bowers, 2009; York, 2019; York & Scholl, 2015). Accordingly, parent-to-child intergenerational transmission of news use has been demonstrated repeatedly through the years, and parental modeling has been offered as explanation for the parent-child resemblance of patterns of newspaper use (e.g. Chaffee, McLeod, & Atkin, 1971; Clarke, 1965; Cobb, 1986; York & Scholl, 2015), use of television news and public affairs content (Chaffee, McLeod, & Atkin, 1971; Conway et al., 1981; Kim, 2019), and cross-media news selections, or repertoires (e.g. Edgerly et al., 2018).

Such research has also shown that modeling behavior is a complicated process.

One complication noted by Clarke (1965) in a study of 15-year-olds' newspaper use was the disparity between the interests of children and adults. Children have children's interests and parents adult interests, and so a parent's interest in public affairs will not automatically transfer to their child. In keeping with this, the study found transference of newspaper content preferences from parent to child to be only modest. However, Clarke (1965) found that greater amounts of overall parent-child interaction combined with parental interest in public affairs and newspaper use did increase children's interest in public affairs, as "interaction provides opportunities for the child to gain social recognition from his higher-status parent. A high degree of social contact also means that a parent is a more visible model to the child" (p. 544). Similarly, Chaffee, McLeod, and Atkin (1971) found that parental modeling in isolation had little impact on adolescent newspaper readership, but that parent-child communication of public affairs importance in combination with news behavior modeling was impactful on adolescent news viewership and newspaper reading. Cobb (1986) added more influential factors to this, such as perceived time availability for newspaper reading, access to a newspaper in the home, and demographic variables, but still found that "heavy readers" of newspapers among their adolescent subjects reported the highest newspaper readership by the male parent, compared to "sporadic readers", "scanners", and "apathetic readers".

Common to radio and television media, which have dominated previous news media landscapes, is an immediate observability: television news can be seen and radio heard by others in the room. Thus, in addition to providing a means for parents to model news use, television and radio create a media landscape in which children and adolescents are subjected to news content (Conway et al., 1981). However, the role of television and radio have changed, their use becoming increasingly individualized as prices of media devices have fallen, no longer restricting their presence to one communal living space in the home but dispersing them through a multi-screen home for individual use behind closed bedroom doors (Livingstone, 2007). Nonetheless, the television continues to be found in communal living areas where parents often remain in control of the remote, and parent television news use remains predictive of adolescent television news use (Edgerly et al., 2017).

The newspaper affords a different mode of observable news modeling. Whereas television and radio allow others in the room to vicariously observe content, both the television and radio artifacts are multi-genre devices with significant non-news uses. Consequently, their presence is not associated specifically with news use. The newspaper differs in this respect. Although newspapers contain non-news-related content and such content is an important appeal for users (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991), the newspaper artifact is prototypical (Rosch, 1978) of news. This prototypicality impacts the potential for symbolic coding, which is key to the retention process in observational learning. During symbolic coding, a general symbolic value is extrapolated from specific actions observed under specific circumstance so that a similar behavior may be performed under similar circumstances (Bandura, 2001).

The strong association between newspapers and news content means that modeling of newspaper-reading should with greater likelihood result in some form of news media use, whether by “matched modeling”, where the parent behavior is copied using the same media, or “generalized modeling”, where the extrapolated symbolic value is transferred to a different media good, such as television news watching or online news-reading (Edgerly et al., 2017). In keeping with this, parental newspaper reading has been found to predict general future news use by offspring (York & Scholl, 2015). In contrast to the vicarious observability of television or radio news and the strong news association of the newspaper, seeing a parent attentively looking at a mobile phone can symbolically translate to a wide variety of media uses, from YouTube-viewing to news reading, and may be modeled as any of these. Consequently, observational learning of news use may be undermined by the move of news use onto less vicariously visible digital formats (Peters et al., 2021; Edgerly et al., 2017; Peters, 2012).

Edgerly et al. (2017) found that children still model parental news use, including device-specific matched modeling, and offer a number of explanations why this may be the case: children may form an impression of parent digital news use when borrowing parents’ electronics; they may see their parents’ screen when spending time together; they may hear their parents discussing news while using individualized digital devices, or they may be encouraged by their parents to use digital devices for news. However, an additional explanation is that much digital news use occurs via social media, where it is visible. Just as youth are aware of their own public and political actions on social media and how they may be interpreted and judged by onlookers (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Thorson, 2014), youth are also able to see, interpret and judge the actions of others. While children may have less direct access to observe digital news practices in the room, they can observe these virtually, with greater specificity, and longer: even after moving out, a young adult can see their parents liking, commenting, and sharing news on social media. The results of this analysis show that young adults do not only render judgement on the news that they are exposed to via social media and their own practices therewith, they also see and judge their parents’ news behaviors as they are made visible on social media. This raises new questions about parent-child news socialization and observational learning in a media landscape dominated by social media, calling on us to consider digital news technologies as making news use *differently* visible, as opposed to less visible.

3. METHODOLOGY

This article reports on a study using a combined qualitative methodology of semi-structured interviews and a card sorting exercise to learn about everyday news seeking habits among young adults. The interviews were conducted among a quota sample of 24 Danes between the ages of 18 and 25, taking place in June/July 2019. Although participants were selected with an equal distribution in terms of gender,

geographic location (provincial city or rural/capital city), and job or educational status (Peters et al., 2021), the salient demographic characteristic for the purpose of this analysis is one that unites them all: their age, participants having all grown into adulthood in a news landscape characterized by the predominance of digital media. The analytical design draws on linguistics traditions analyzing, categorizing and theorizing functions of laughter as a tool to preserve face (Goffman, 1967) in spoken communication (e.g. Adelswärd, 1989; Nesi, 2012; Phipps, 2016; Wilkinson, 2007).

Although young adults have normative conceptions about what constitutes good news use, their information seeking practices may not conform to these ideals (Costera-Meijer, 2007; Sveningsson, 2015). This can affect their esteem of themselves as news users and civic participants and their self-reporting, as they dismiss practices that are not aligned with their ideals (Sveningsson, 2015). Of course, discrepancies between news practices and ideals are not isolated to young adults, similar gaps resulting in feelings of discomfort among some adult news users (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). In an interview setting, such discomfort can be related to a loss of face, instigating processes of facework and repair that allow participants to disassociate themselves from incidents where gaps between practice and ideal are laid bare (Goffman, 1967). Conversely, instances of facework can serve as indices of such gaps, allowing us to infer news norms and ideals by their breaches. To this end, laughter serves as a practical index when analyzing interviews, being an audible and often-transcribed expression (Myers & Lampropoulou, 2016) that may flag a perceived face threat (Adelswärd, 1989). For instance, Nesi (2012) finds instances of instructors' laughter during lectures to serve as means of recovering or bolstering lecturers' competence face in connection with teasing students, lecturer error, and disparagement of out-group-members. Phipps (2016) notes uses of laughter during intercultural research encounters: for social repair when politeness conventions are breached, for intercultural repair, for performance of professional competence, and – significantly for the use of interviews in this study – for the presentation of the self with the unfamiliar and consequently imagined researcher. Thus, in the context of this study, participants are not responding to breaches with news ideals held by the researcher, but ideals superimposed onto the imagined researcher by the participant. In other words: the ideals are their own. Accordingly, the transcribed interviews were explored for instances of laughter for subsequent coding and analysis in a process informed by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to identify news ideals held by the participants in the study.

During the research encounter, participants were asked about their everyday practices with information sources and media and to sort 35 cards with prompts covering a range of information sources and media according to significance in their news repertoires (Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017). The variety of information sources represented on the media cards, which included Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, online broadsheet newspapers, analogue broadsheet newspapers, online tabloids, analogue tabloids, tv news, radio news, influencers and more, was developed to reflect

the broadness of young audiences' news repertoires and commonality of popular sources and technologies herein (Peters et al., 2021), including information sources young adults have been shown to have mixed feelings about (Sveningsson, 2015). This format presented many risks of face loss by virtue of its design, the broadness of both questions and card-prompts broaching subjects that could otherwise have been avoided to preserve face (Goffman, 1967). Additionally, interview participants agreed to repeat the interview process at a later date, making them less "free to take a highline that the future will discredit" (ibid; 7). Importantly, only participant-initiated laughter was included for coding and analysis, as the interest was on young adult's own news preferences and ideals. To qualify, laughter must be in response to their own sense of face-loss rather than an appeasement of the interviewer's loss of face or the interviewer's recognition of participants' loss of face.

Not all instances of laughter were indexical of facework related to news norms for which reason instances of participant-initiated laughter were subsequently manually sorted for relevance and thematically coded. For instance, the following sequence in the interview encounter with Camilla was not included in analysis despite apparent relevance for multiple coded themes, as the laughter was not ultimately an instance of facework connected to news use:

"I actually got the History Magazine when I lived home, but I don't anymore because now I have to pay for it. My mom, she obviously had some sub...subscrip... yeah. [laughs] Well, she had those on some newspapers." (Extract 1, Camilla)

Judging from its placement in the flow of speech, Camilla's laughter here is not pointed at her disuse of news media used by her mother or her unwillingness to pay for news but is best explained as a retrospective index (Glenn, 1989) of linguistic incompetence at the failure to self-repair the mispronunciation (Wilkinson, 2007) of "subscription" [Danish *abonnement*]. This laughter is an instance of facework, but based on its relative temporal closeness (Sacks, 1989) to the mispronunciation in the ongoing flow of speech, not related to norms of news use. Conversely, Ayesha's (F, 24) laughter upon mentioning the kinds of news content she received via a family Whatsapp group exemplifies news-related facework, underlining a disclaimer:

"Some of it's from Facebook, where people just write posts and stuff, and then there's a picture. Those are the things I often don't believe. [laughs]" (Extract 2, Ayesha)

Two themes stood out in the coding and analysis of laughter-passages in the 24 interviews. The first was related to *technology* and the second to *family*, parents especially. The focus of this article is on these themes, building on a many-decades-long academic concern with the role of parents in the socialization of children and young

adults into news users. Parents remain an influential factor in young adults' developing news repertoires in the modern, digital media landscape (Edgerly et al., 2017; York, 2019). However, the laughter in the sequences that follow in this article indicates tensions in their role in news socialization.

4. LAUGHABLE NEWS PRACTICES

4.1. Media brands and technologies

Interview subjects illustrated the impact of parent-child modeling in their developing news repertoires in terms of choice of media brands and technologies. For instance, Anna (F, 23) identified her parents as the source of her preference for one Danish national broadcaster over the other, expressing a sense of collective familial identity by virtue of the shared preference. Social media have made news-sharing part of identity expression, changing how adolescents relate news use to identity and the role of news in identity formation (Andersson, 2018); however, news use and identity were also intertwined in young adults' news repertoire outside social media. For Anna, the choice of media brand was tied to family identity:

“I sometimes watch DR’s programs [Danish public broadcaster]. Not TV2 [Danish national television station]. I’m not really from a TV2 family. I’m from a DR family [laughs].” (Extract 3, Anna)

Using the names of the two national news broadcasters as attributive nouns to modify *family*, Anna establishes two conflicting types of families: TV2 families and DR families. As hinted by her laughter, the conflict between the two media is synthetic: DR and TV2 featured prominently together in multiple news repertoires found in the study (Peters et al., 2021). However, the dichotomy that Anna constructs signals media choice to be more than a matter of preference. To Anna, the choice between DR and TV2 was part of a family identity which she emulated with her own news use. Her prioritization of DR over TV2 established her belonging to the type of family that uses DR as opposed to TV2.

In their early years, "children watch television news because that is what their parents are watching" (Conway et al., 1981, p. 166). Ostensibly, this has decreased with the multiplication of media devices in the home and increase of bedroom culture (Livingstone, 2007), but as Jakob (M, 22) illustrated, parents continue to shape their children's news media environment (Nathanson, 2015). Reflecting on his use of television programming, Jakob laughingly recollected televised morning and evening news shows as a “natural” part of the daily routine hearkening back to his childhood home, where the television was a feature of a common area and lighter news formats provided a shared backdrop:

“Good Morning Denmark [televised Danish morning show] is the kind of thing that’s just running on the TV while we’re in here [the common living space], and it’s been that way since I was really little. It’s just been like a completely natural [laughs] part of the daily routine that at some point during the day you’d either watch Good Morning Denmark or Good Evening Denmark [televised Danish evening chat show]. And Debatten [televised political debate program] starting this past year, I think. I think I watch that more than my parents.” (Extract 4, Jakob)

Jakob’s parents have directly shaped his news media environment in a way characteristic of the news media device of choice: the television. In Jakob’s childhood household, the ‘family television’ served as a feature of the communal space (Livingstone, 2007). In this way, Jakob’s parents have not just visibly modeled news use as by reading the newspaper at the breakfast table but have directly made Jakob a news user from a young age by creating a communal habitat audibly and visually immersed in news. Jakob went on to reproduce this setting in early adult life by integrating televised news programming into his own home space. Jakob’s reproduction of the news-immersed communal space in his own home was a true reproduction of its origin in that it included the same medium, the television, matching the model provided by his parents (Edgerly et al., 2017), and the same programming, Good Morning and Good Evening Denmark. The laughter in the extract can be related to the status of the programs in question: both belonging to the popular lifestyle and inspiration genre of news programming rather than the “hard news” genres typically prescribed by civic ideals. His laughter thus served to distance Jakob from his parents’ and his own naturalized news practices. In support of this reading, Jakob immediately went on to explain that the family’s regular programming also included DR Debatten, a well-respected political debate show regularly guested by experts and prominent political figures, emphasizing the significance of this program in his own media repertoire.

4.2. News literacies

Despite examples of reproduction of modeled parental news use in early adulthood, interview participants described a schism between their own technological reality and that of their parent generation. One aspect of this was a perceived gap in media literacies: young news users were unimpressed by the parent generation’s adoption of newer digital formats and ability to distinguish “quality” news from “low quality” news. For example, Anna (F, 23) was confident in her own ability to find her way around digital media sources, but expressed that a lack of digital literacy might have repercussions for her mother’s news repertoire:

“I can usually find my way around a website, regardless of how user friendly it is. But I think most media do pretty well in terms of user friendliness. So,

it's not something I think about all that much. I think it's more of a problem for someone like my mom if she can't figure out how to find the news she wants. Because she's a little less, how can I put it, tech savvy. [laughs].” (Extract 5, Anna)

Digital literacy is one of many media and media-related literacies taught in Danish schools to enable students to find and evaluate information in the modern media landscape (Tinggaard Svendsen & Munk Svendsen, 2021). As news has increasingly moved online where it is impacted by general issues of online accessibility as well as algorithmic individualization, digital literacy has also become an important component of news literacy (Swart, 2021b). However, for those for whom significant leaps of media digitization took place only in adulthood, this learning is not as easily come by, exacerbating the tensions between the news and media practices of parents and their children in young adulthood.

Navigating digital media is a fundamental part of digital and news literacy, but the proliferation of social media in news repertoires has made matters still more complicated, bringing algorithmic literacy to the fore. This literacy can challenge and intimidate even young adults who have grown up with social media (Swart, 2021a). For instance, Saafia (F, 23) emphasized her mother's civic interest before questioning her news literacy and ability to compensate for the role of algorithmic curation in her news repertoire:

“She's very politically oriented and publicly oriented. [...] But she does get a lot of her information from Facebook, so it's very – Facebook takes up a lot of space, and the news they want you to see, right. It's the stuff that Facebook gets to the top you see [laughs].” (Extract 6, Saafia)

Despite this criticism of her mother's use of Facebook, Saafia ranked Facebook as one of the two most significant sources of news in her own news repertoire, Instagram taking the other top ranking.

Regarding her own reliance on Facebook, Saafia expressed similar concerns, making laughing reference to issues of algorithmic inscrutability once more:

“I don't follow Politiken [Danish broadsheet newspaper] much. It's mostly if something pops up on Facebook... because Facebook has done a good job adapting it to what you're looking at, I think. All of a sudden a lot of things show up that you look at [laughs].” (Extract 7, Saafia)

The repeated laughter indicated a sense of unease about the opaque influence asserted by Facebook on her own and her mother's news repertoires and Saafia's responsiveness to this influence. In her 'algorithmic imaginary', the sensemaking of how algorithms work and what they should do (Bucher, 2015), Saafia emphasized

the influence of online tracking and ascribed Facebook an active role in her mother's news repertoire, but also in her own.

Ultimately, Saafia's algorithmic imaginary, while simplistic, showed an awareness that algorithmic news curation is a feature of Facebook and that Facebook consequently influenced the news that she and her mother saw. This is an important component of news literacy in the modern media landscape that not all young adults possess (Swart, 2021a; Cotter & Reisdorf, 2020). Despite this, Saafia's reliance on Facebook for news was undeterred, in keeping with previous findings that media literacy may not translate into practice among young audiences (Swart, 2021b; Vraga et al., 2021). Regarding Saafia's continued reliance on Facebook, it is interesting to note that Saafia ascribed different degrees of agency to herself and to her mother in relation to Facebook's algorithm. When describing the algorithm's influence on her own news use, Facebook was "adapting it to what you're looking at". Here, the algorithm was impacted by her own actions. However, in the context of her mother, Facebook showed "the news they want you to see". Saafia thus expressed a more positive experience of the Facebook algorithm in her own media use than the significance she ascribed it in her mother's new repertoire, illustrating that young audiences' affective impressions of algorithmic curation not only vary between positivity, neutrality and negativity from group to group (Swart, 2021a) but also vary from case to case.

While digital and algorithm literacy have become increasingly significant given technological developments, core news literacies such as recognition of journalistic content and information evaluation (Potter, 2004) remain relevant in young audiences' perception (Swart, 2021b). However, in this matter, too, interview participants expressed concerns about older generations' capabilities. Said Ayesha (F, 24):

"There's the stuff in the family Whatsapp group where they share all kinds of stuff. [...] I never take it seriously. [laughs] [...] It can mean something to me if it happens to be articles I trust and stuff. But some of it's from Facebook where people just write posts and stuff, and then there's a picture. Those are the things I often don't believe [laughs]." (Extract 8, Ayesha)

Ayesha laughs, signaling a perceived distance as well as paralinguistically distancing her own conceptions of news-ness (Edgerly & Vraga, 2020) from that of her family. Young audiences' process of information evaluation is closely linked with their recognition of journalism (Edgerly & Vraga, 2020; Swart, 2021b), and so for Ayesha, because information shared on Whatsapp by her family did not belong to the journalistic media genre, its credibility and legitimacy were inherently flawed.

Additionally, participants were not necessarily impressed with their parents as sources of news. Thus, interview participants' laughter was tied to the role their parents played as conveyers of news, questioning the worthwhileness (Schrøder, 2015; Schrøder & Steeg Larsen, 2010) of the news they conveyed.

“If they’ve heard something scary, like about drugs or something [laughs]. They’ll go ‘oh, this can happen if you drink too much alcohol’ [laughs]. It’s mostly scare tactic news, they’ll show me. So that’s pretty funny [laughs].” (Extract 9, Lærke)

Lærke bucked against what she deemed to be ‘scare tactic news’, meant as instruments of socialization by her parents as opposed to civic information, laughing, perhaps in embarrassment at an infantilizing news function superimposed onto her by her parents, which clashes with normative symbolic associations between adulthood and news use illustrated in this study (Peters et al., 2021) and previous research (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991). Her explanation furthermore indicates discrepancies between parents’ and their young adult children’s conceptions of the public connection aspect of worthwhileness: parents and their children in these cases do not share the conception of what constitutes a “matter of concern” (Schröder, 2015; Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2010). As noted by William (M, 24), “My mom will often say something or other. It rarely interests me, but of course I end up with the stories just the same.” (Extract 11, William)

4.3. Social media news practices

In addition to cringing at their news literacies, interview subjects were unimpressed by parents’ public behavior in connection with news on social media. Exemplifying this, Lærke laughed at her father’s activities on Facebook,

“Sometimes my bio-dad will tag me in something. He’s really into that. [laughs]”, adding “if it’s some weird Trump thing, I might not read it [laughs]”. (Extract 12, Lærke)

This tagging behavior conflicted with preferred social media news-sharing practices expressed by interview subjects, where privacy and discretion were at the fore. Interview subjects showed great awareness of their online presentation of self, finding certain engagements with news, in particular sharing and commenting, unappealing (see also Andersson, 2018; Storsul, 2014).

The line between appropriate and excessive levels of exposure on social media is of course not constant or consistent within generations, nor necessarily distinct between generations. For instance, when asked whether she ever commented on news articles shared on Facebook, Saafia (F, 23) said:

“No, only if there’s something funny, then I would of course just tag someone.” (Extract 13, Saafia)

As for sharing news in other ways, her answer was no, explaining:

“You’ve learned to stay out of it. [laughs]”. (Extract 14, Saafia)

For Saafia, acceptable levels of visible online participation included tagging. However, this was not true in all contexts. Although Lærke’s father and Saafia shared a visible social media practice in tagging, Saafia’s answer indicated a sentiment shared by other interview subjects: the appropriate level of visible participation was lowered when it came to politics. Subjects did not want to hear about the politics of others online, nor did they want to share their own.

Much as participants expressed that appropriate levels of online visible participation were lower when it came to politics, they also indicated that their comfortable levels of political visibility were lower on social media than off social media. That is, participants were private about their political opinions online in ways that they were not offline. This hesitation has previously been related to the ‘context collapsed’ nature of social media, where young social media users find themselves communicating with many disparate social contexts at once (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Thorson, 2014). For participants, commenting on or sharing an article, which by parents might be considered a small act of engagement, requiring “relatively little investment” and “driven primarily by an intuitive willingness to present oneself and forge one’s identity rather than produce information” (Picone et al., 2019), was not experienced as particularly small. Thus, when asked whether she ever joined in debates, Laura (F, 21) remarked,

“Yeah, I may do that. [laughs] Family birthdays can get a little intense.”
(Extract 15, Laura)

However, whereas she might participate in heated political debates with family, she kept such discussions offline to avoid the more volatile tone she experienced online. Similarly, Saafia described a sense of vulnerability to conflict in online participation with political news content:

“It depends on how much knowledge I have in an area, too, because when it’s about the animal world I’ll comment a lot, but that’s also because I’m sure about what I know, compared to politics – there are so many rights and wrongs according to other people because it’s very personal with your opinions. So on that topic, I’m a bit reluctant. So I’ll mostly say those things in public. [laughs] With friends or family. And colleagues. When we talk about it in there, it’s easier to say your opinion. Compared to writing it down where you’re easily misunderstood.” (Extract 16, Saafia)

The discrepancy between her norms regarding acceptable visible online and offline

levels of engagement evokes an uncomfortable laugh from Saafia, whose answer illustrates how the combination of politics and social media creates a particular sense of vulnerability (Thorson, 2014). She might discuss things online, and she might discuss politics, but politics became a loaded subject on Facebook. The reasons for this may be threefold: a perceived lack of knowledgeability about politics which opened her up to loss of face (Mascheroni & Murru, 2017; Peacock, 2019), the dependence on written argumentation which she found more difficult and prone to misinterpretation than face-to-face argumentation, and the openness to stranger interlocution given by Facebook (Thorson, 2014). Saafia and Laura both expressed a preference for political discussion in social contexts involving close others as part of a strategy to avoid incivility, demonstrating the interrelatedness of preferences previously demonstrated to prevent young adults from participating in online political deliberation (Peacock & Leavitt, 2016).

Ayesha (F, 24) similarly described the combination of Facebook and politics as one of which she was especially wary in spite of her political interest and willingness to participate in political discussion offline and willingness to participate on Facebook in other contexts than political discussion. Her concerns about the combination of Facebook and political discussion, however, did not center on avoiding engaging with strangers but avoiding involving her parents whom she knew to have different politics from her own. Ayesha, who is of Pakistani descent, explained:

“There’s a page I’ve started [using], and it’s Pakistani, which is very liberal compared to the Pakistani conservative things... So I’ve started reading that a lot and following their page and stuff. [...] So just to feel that I’m supporting them in a way, right? By sharing – well, I don’t share their content because I can’t. [laughs] My parents follow me on Facebook. [laughs] But just by reading it and like it and things like that.

I: So you can like things without worrying about you parents?
They’re not smart enough to see that I’ve liked it. [laughs].” (Extract 17, Ayesha)

Ayesha’s comments contrast with the preferences expressed by other respondents in this study and in other studies related to social media (Peacock & Leavitt, 2016). However, it demonstrates a desire to protect relationships, a factor that has previously been related to avoidance of the subject of politics among young adults (Peacock, 2019), and a more general avoidance of contentious topics previously demonstrated in close relationships (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Ayesha furthermore exemplified how, in an otherwise context collapsed network such as Facebook (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Thorson, 2014), a degree of inscrutability in functionalities may serve as a network affordance for young users looking to avoid older publics, their parents in particular.

4.4. Looking to the future

Despite their concerns about the news practices of the older generations in their lives – be they lacking in digital, media, or news literacy or incompatible with the social media presentation norms of young adults – interview participants associated civic interest and news practices with adulthood and both aspired and expected to grow into better news repertoires with age (Peters et al., 2021). Still, even specific aspirations and expectations could run contrary to the practices they saw from their parents. For example, asked to reflect on what she imagined her news repertoire would look like in the future, Saafia, who previously described her mother as getting “a lot of her information from Facebook”, responded:

“I hope I’ll have become grownup enough to dial down Instagram and Facebook a little [laughs] and moved on to something else.” (Extract 18, Saafia)

The symbolic association between adulthood and the newspaper (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991) may well have evolved with the proliferation of digital media, but the association between adulthood and “real” news persisted, even in the face of contradicting parental modeling.

Importantly, Saafia’s ambition to decrease her reliance on social media in favor of more “real” news sources was not being enacted. When asked whether she was making changes to her news practices to realize her hope, Saafia’s answer was a blunt “No,” immediately followed by laughter. This discrepancy between practice and ideal similarly appeared among other interview subjects, just as it has been demonstrated previously among young news users (Costera-Meijer, 2007; Sveningsson, 2015).

The failure to live up to personal ideals of news use is not specific to young adults. In a study of the news habits of 50 Norwegian adults, participants expressed discrepancies between their “informed citizen” news ideals and actualized news practices, the gaps between interrelated news and civic ideals and actualized news practice ultimately becoming a source of discomfort for some (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). Young adults can explain their own lacking interest in “real” news with their youth and lacking identification with conceptions of “citizenship” that make news use relevant (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991) or justify their use of social media for news as “only a pastime” in the face of legitimacy concerns (Sveningsson, 2015), but these justifications may not extend to parents given young adults’ association of civic interest with adulthood.

Whereas portable digital technologies make news use externally invisible (Peters et al., 2021; Edgerly et al., 2017; Peters, 2012), social media lend a new and more detailed visibility to news use. On social media, young adults can observe specific media and news choices via their parents’ liking, commenting, and sharing behaviors even as they reach young adulthood and move out and thereafter. In this way, social media lays bare gaps between their parents’ news behaviors and citizenship

and news ideals. Thus, the difference between the digital news landscape and pre-digital news landscapes is not that parents' news behaviors are less available for observation, but that they are less available for idealization. This may impact their potential for symbolic coding in behavior modeling (Bandura, 2001), making parents' media practices less appealing to emulate.

It should be noted that this does not mean that offspring have ceased to model parent news behavior. In fact, in an article raising the question of parental news modeling in the digital media landscape, Edgerly et al. (2017) find both modeling and matched modeling of parent news behavior. Other studies considering modeling in digital formats have similarly found resemblances between parent and child news behaviors, additionally pointing to instances of reverse modeling where parents learn news and media behaviors from their children (e.g. McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002; Nelissen et al., 2019; York, 2019). Parent-child news modeling remains relevant in spite of the technological developments which shape today's news landscape, but the modeling is not unidirectional, nor is it embraced without question. Young adults supplement this modeling with digital and social media literacies taught by education and experience which, however imperfect, lead them to a slew of cognitive and behavioral strategies for judging and ensuring news quality (Swart, 2021a, 2021b). Conceivably, the sense of disappointment made possible by social media visibility may inspire young adults to be more critical of their own news use and more cautious in their implementation of literacy practices even as they model parental news behaviors.

5. CONCLUSION

The move of news use onto digital technologies has raised questions about the impact of parental news modeling on children and young adult's socialization into news-users in the modern media landscape (Peters et al., 2021; Edgerly et al., 2017; Peters, 2012). In this landscape, common news behaviors lose vicarious visibility from across the living room, making them less available for modeling (Bandura, 2001). Where parents might once be seen holding a copy of the daily paper or watching the evening news, they may now be seen with a laptop or scrolling on a mobile phone. However, digital media do not render parent news use invisible, lending new and clear visibility on social media. Using laughter as an index of perceived face-loss to point to deviations from news ideals held by 24 young adult participants in Denmark, this article demonstrates an awareness of parents' news use that hindered idealization. Via their social media presence, young adults are still able to see their parents using news. Not only this, but with the help of parents' likes, shares, and comments, young adults are able to see what news their parents are using. However, in this observability lies a potential problem for news socialization. Whereas the newspaper artifact allowed youth of earlier generations to imagine the significance and quality of whatever it was that their parents were reading about the world, the parent generations'

current social media practices leave less room for imagination. The problem does not seem to be that young people do not see their parents using news, or that they do not want to be news users themselves, but that young people – seeing the news their parents use and their ways of using it – aspire to be better news users. Without exactly knowing what that looks like.

Josephine Lehaff is a PhD fellow studying news use at the Department of Communication and Arts at Roskilde University. Her dissertation centers on the role of affect, emotion and norms for news audiences' repertoire formation and news use in the hybrid media environment, employing pragmatic and semiotic methods of analysis to study the subject qualitatively. She is part of the research project *Beyond the Here and Now of News* about news audiences' shaping and re-shaping of their news repertoires over time, with funding from Independent Research Fund Denmark.

Acknowledgements

This article is part of the research project “Beyond the Here and Now of News”, funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark under grant number 8018-00061B. Details on the project can be found at: www.ruc.dk/en/beyond-news.

REFERENCES

- Adelswärd, V. (1989). *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 12, 107–136.
- Affi, W. A., & Guerrero, L. (2000). Motivations underlying topic avoidance in close relationships. In S. Petronio (Ed.), *Balancing the secrets of private disclosures* (pp. 165–180). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Andersson, Y. (2018). To share or not to share?. In Y. Andersson, U. Dalquist, & J. Ohlsson (Eds.), *Youth and News in a Digital Media Environment: Nordic-Baltic Perspectives* (pp. 149–159). essay, Göteborg: Nordicom. ISBN: 9789188855022
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication. *Media Psychology*, 3(3), 265–299. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0303_03
- Barnhurst, K. G. & Wartella, E. (1991). Newspapers and citizenship. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8:2, 195–209, DOI: 10.1080/15295039109366791
- Baxter, L. A., & Wilmot, W. W. (1985). Taboo topics in close relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 2, 253–269. doi:10.1177/0265407585023002
- Bleakley, A., Jordan, A. B., & Hennessy, M. (2013). The relationship between parents' and children's television viewing. *Pediatrics*, 132, 364–371.
- Bucher, T. (2017). The algorithmic imaginary. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(1), 30–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1154086>

- Chaffee, S. H., McLeod, J. M., & Atkin, C. K. (1971). Parental influences on adolescent media use. *The American Behavioral Scientist (Pre-1986)*, 14(3), 323.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory a practical guide through qualitative analysis*. SAGE.
- Clarke, P. (1965). Parental Socialization Values and Children's Newspaper Reading. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 42(4), 539-546. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769906504200403>
- Cobb, C. J. (1986). Patterns of newspaper readership among teenagers. *Communication Research*, 13(2), 299-326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365086013002008>
- Conway, M. M., Wyckoff, M. L., Feldbaum, E. & Ahern, D. (1981). The News Media in Children's Political Socialization. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45(2), 164-178. <https://doi.org/10.1086/268648>
- Costera-Meijer, I. (2007). The paradox of popularity. *Journalism Studies*, 8:1, 96-116, DOI: 10.1080/14616700601056874
- Cotter, K., & Reisdorf, B. (2020). Algorithmic Knowledge Gaps. *International Journal Of Communication*, 14, 21. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/12450/2952>
- Couldry, N., Livingstone, S. & Markham, T. (2007). *Media Consumption and Public Engagement. Beyond the Presumption of Attention*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McDevitt, M., & Chaffee, S. (2002). From Top-Down to Trickle-Up Influence. *Political Communication*, 19(3), 281-301. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01957470290055501>
- Edgerly, S., Thorson, K., Thorson, E., Vraga, E. K., & Bode, L. (2017). Do parents still model news consumption?. *New Media & Society*, 20(4), 1263-1281. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816688451>
- Edgerly, S., Vraga, E. K., Bode, L., Thorson, K., & Thorson, E. (2018). New Media, New Relationship to Participation?. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95(1), 192-212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699017706928>
- Edgerly, S., & E. Vraga. (2020). Deciding What's News: News-Ness as an Audience Concept for the Hybrid Media Environment. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 97(2): 416-434.
- Glenn, P. (1989). Initiating shared laughter in multi-party conversations. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 53:2, 127-149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570318909374296>
- Goffman, E. (1961). *Encounters: Two studies in the sociology of interaction*. (6. print.). Indianapolis; Bobbs-Merill.
- Hasebrink, U., and Hepp, A. (2017). How to Research Cross-Media Practices?. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 23(4): 362-377.

- Hefner, D., Knop, K., Schmitt, S., & Vorderer, P. (2019). Rules? Role Model? Relationship?. *Media Psychology*, 22(1), 82–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2018.1433544>
- Jennings, M., Stoker, L., & Bowers, J. (2009). Politics across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined. *The Journal of Politics*, 71(3), 782–799. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381609090719>
- Kim, M. (2019). Parental Influence on Adolescent Preference for Television Public Affairs Content. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 96(2), 497–515. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018754910>
- Livingstone, S. (2007). From family television to bedroom culture: young people's media at home. In: Devereux, E (ed.) *Media Studies: Key Issues and Debates*. London: SAGE, pp. 302–321.
- Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately. *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114–133. doi: 10.1177/1461444810365313
- Mascheroni, G., & Murru, M. F. (2017). “I Can Share Politics But I Don't Discuss It”. *Social Media + Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117747849>
- Myers, G., & Lampropoulou, S. (2016). Laughter, non-seriousness and transitions in social research interview transcripts. *Qualitative Research*, 16(1), 78–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794114561346>
- Nathanson, A. (2015). Media and the Family. *Journal of Children and Media*, 9(1), 133–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2015.997145>
- Nelissen, S., Kuczynski, L., Coenen, L., & Van den Bulck, J. (2019). Bidirectional Socialization. *Communication Research*, 46(8), 1145–1170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650219852857>
- Nesi, H. (2012). Laughter in university lectures. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 11(2), 79–89.
- Notten, N., Kraaykamp, G., & Konig, R. P. (2012). Family Media Matters. *Sociological Perspectives*, 55(4), 683–706. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2012.55.4.683>
- Peacock, C. (2019). (Not) Talking Politics. *Western Journal of Communication*, 83(5), 581–599. <https://doi-org.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/10.1080/10570314.2019.1597157>
- Peacock, C., & Leavitt, P. (2016). Engaging Young People. *Social Media + Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116637096>
- Peters, C. (2012). Journalism to go. *Journalism Studies (London, England)*, 13(5-6), 695–705. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2012.662405>
- Peters, C., Schröder, K. C., Lehaff, J., & Vulpius, J. (2021). News as They Know It. *Digital Journalism*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1885986>
- Phipps, A. (2016). Performing intercultural pragmatics. In D. Gałajda, P. Zakrajewski & M. Pawlak (Eds.), *Researching second language learning and teaching from a psycholinguistic perspective* (pp. 149–165). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31954-4_11

- Picone, I. (2018). Digital news users ... and how to find them. In S. Eldridge II & B. Franklin (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of developments in digital journalism studies* (1st ed., pp. 143–154). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315270449-12>
- Picone, I., Kleut, J., Pavlíčková, T., Romić, B., Møller Hartley, J., & De Ridder, S. (2019). Small acts of engagement. *New Media & Society*, 21(9), 2010–2028. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819837569>
- Potter, W. (2004). *Theory of Media Literacy: A Cognitive Approach*. New York: SAGE.
- Rosch, E. (1978). Principles of categorization. In E. Rosch & B.B. Lloyd (Eds.), *Cognition and categorization* (pp. 27–48). Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, New Jersey.
- Sacks, H. (1989). An analysis of the course of a joke's telling in conversation. In R. Bauman & J. Sherzer (Eds.), *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking* (pp. 337–353). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511611810.022>
- Schrøder, K. C. (2015). News media old and new. *Journalism Studies*, 16(1): 60–78. <https://doi-org.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/10.1080/1461670X.2014.890332>
- Schrøder, K., & Steeg Larsen, B. (2010). The Shifting Cross-Media News Landscape. *Journalism Studies*, 11(4), 524–534. <https://doi-org.ep.fjernadgang.kb.dk/10.1080/14616701003638392>
- Storsul, T. (2014). Deliberation or Self-presentation?. *Nordicom Review*, 35(2), 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2014-0012>
- Sveningsson, M. (2015). “It's Only a Pastime, Really”. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), 205630511560485–. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604855>
- Swart, J. (2021a). Experiencing algorithms. *Social Media + Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211008828>
- Swart, J. (2021b). Tactics of news literacy. *New Media & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211011447>
- Thorson, K. (2014). Facing an uncertain reception. *Information, Communication & Society* 17:2, 203–216, DOI:10.1080/1369118X.2013.862563
- Tinggaard Svendsen, J, & Munk Svendsen, A. (2021). Digital directions. *Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy*, 1, 6–20. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1891-943x-2021-01-02>
- York, C. (2019). Is It Top-Down, Trickle-Up, or Reciprocal?. *Communication Studies*, 70(4), 377–393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2019.1614965>
- York, C., & Scholl, R. M. (2015). Youth antecedents to news media consumption. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 92(3), 681–699. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699015588191>
- Ytre-Arne, B., & H. Moe. (2018). Approximately Informed, Occasionally Monitorial?. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 23 (2): 227–246.
- Vaala, S. E., & Bleakley, A. (2015). Monitoring, Mediating, and Modeling. *Journal of Children and Media*, 9(1), 40–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2015.997103>

- Vraga, E., Tully, M., Maksl, A., Craft, S., & Ashley, S. (2021). Theorizing News Literacy Behaviors. *Communication Theory*, 31(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtaa005>
- Webster, J., Pearson, J., & Webster, D. (1986). Children's television viewing as affected by contextual variables in the home. *Communication Research Reports*, 3(1), 1 - 8.
- Wilkinson, R. (2007). Managing linguistic incompetence as a delicate issue in aphasic talk-in-interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39(3), 542-569. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.07.010>

THE RELATIONAL UX: CONSTRUCTING REPERTOIRES OF AUDIENCE AGENCY IN PIONEER JOURNALISM PRACTICE

BISSIE ANDERSON

University of Stirling

ABSTRACT

This article examines how “pioneer journalists” (Hepp & Loosen, 2020) in legacy newsrooms create preferred audience experiences through their UX practices in a networked media ecosystem where journalism’s epistemic authority is increasingly contested. Grounded in the encoding/decoding paradigm (Hall, 1973, 1980), this study combines semi-structured interviews with 12 journalism pioneers in London-based legacy newsrooms, with the in-depth analysis of the multimodal/interactivity features of two example stories. The findings suggest that audiences are interpellated through the construction of various repertoires of agency, grounded in empathy, for a closer, more immediate, and active involvement in the story. By creating ‘relational UXs’ that try to control the travel of meanings and the production of emotions, pioneers in legacy news organisations place a stronger emphasis on the relational renegotiation of epistemic authority, a strategy to simultaneously embrace active audiences and sustain journalism’s traditional raison d’être – making sense of the world for the public.

Keywords: pioneer journalism ▪ innovation ▪ UX design ▪ encoding/decoding ▪ audience engagement ▪ epistemic authority

1. INTRODUCTION

As an institution that is in the business of meaning-making and knowledge production, journalism has historically occupied an authoritative position that allows it to persuade the public of its discourse of truthfulness and transform journalistic interpretation into a convincing picture of reality (Broersma, 2010, Ekström, 2002). Its performative power lies in its truth regime, which “remains its *raison d’être*” – by constructing meaning, it claims to represent “a reality the public can act upon” (ibid., p. 1). Eldridge and Bødker (2019) stress that journalism is a distinct form of knowledge in that it is public and shared – it is through the circulation of its ever-growing

range of products that it comes about, addresses, and interpellates, the audience, and performs its societal function. For news to be knowledge, it “makes an implied epistemic claim as to its veracity, supported by the institutionalized nature of its production” (Carlson, 2020, p. 231).

However, as publics get increasingly involved in actively co-constructing media messages, through access to more, and more varied, types of information and different, often conflicting, representations of reality, journalism’s performative power and with it, its “authority and status as a meaning-broker” (Matheson, 2000, p. 571) is arguably abating and its epistemic authority challenged (Broersma, 2013, Carlson, 2017, Ekström and Westlund, 2019). In an age when journalistic audiences are exposed to the fallacy behind journalism’s claim to truth, aware that “news does not convey the truth but a truth” (Broersma, 2013, p. 43), news organisations are finding it harder to reclaim their performative power, and hence the authority that results from it. This epistemic crisis of journalism has led to demands for its reinvention (Broersma, 2013), not least by acknowledging that journalistic authority is not a fixed position to be taken for granted, but “a contingent relationship” between journalists and other actors and forces, in which journalists’ right to be listened to needs to be constantly renegotiated and legitimized (Carlson, 2017, p. 182). In conditions of networked journalism and sociotechnical news production, some argue, this process should not be one-way, but relational: as Ananny (2018) points out, a free press should be “an infrastructure for both speaking and hearing – for individual and collective autonomy”, with journalists seeing themselves as “the creators of listening environments” (p. 190).

One of the ways journalists have responded to the challenge has been through pioneering new, experimental storytelling formats, and increasingly prioritising UX (user experience) design practices – striving to construct and ‘configure’ an accurate image of their audiences, in seeking to better understand and engage them (Appelgren, 2014, Borges-Rey, 2016). Because, ultimately, journalistic authority is contingent on whether the public accepts journalism’s epistemic claims (Carlson, 2017), it becomes important to explore the production of meaning vis-à-vis audiences in journalistic UX design practices as efforts to protect and reclaim journalistic authority. How the notion of active audiences plays into the co-construction of meaning in journalism and how audiences are interpellated in a “post-industrial” media ecosystem defined by increasingly networked modes of production (Anderson et al., 2012; Castells, 2010) become important questions if we seek to shed light on the ways in which journalists understand, employ, and negotiate “relational authority” (Carlson, 2017).

This article examines the process of encoding, or meaning production, in pioneer journalism UX design practices in UK legacy newsrooms. “Pioneer journalism” here is understood as individuals working for the digital operations of legacy newsrooms who experiment with organizational forms, products, and structures, seeking to re-imagine journalism, and particularly its relation to audiences and the public (Hepp & Loosen, 2021). Taken as “models or imaginaries of new possibilities”

(ibid., p. 5), these communities of practice could serve as an important empirical point of departure to examine journalism's discursive re-imaginings and possible futures.

The central research questions that this article seeks to answer is:

- **How is the audience interpellated in the pioneer journalism encoding process?**

This is broken down into the following sub-questions:

- *RQ1: How do pioneer journalists in legacy news organisations construct the image of their audience through the process of ideation?*
- *RQ2: What is the preferred audience experience and how does it manifest in journalism stories (artefacts)?*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the turn of the century, journalism has been forced to seek ways to adapt to new channels, editorial cycles, and logics of media production. Reconnecting with the public in an era of sharply decreasing trust and rising cynicism (Brants, 2013) is considered one of the major challenges facing journalism as a social institution whose normative societal function is to build and connect communities (Broersma & Peters, 2013). In an increasingly participatory culture, the traditional dynamics of knowledge production have changed, with demands to narrow the distance between media producer and consumer (Hanusch & Banjac, 2019), as the reader now arguably takes on a more active role in the construction of meaning.

Fittingly, and reflecting industry concerns, journalism scholars over the last decade have been preoccupied with the need to “(re)-discover the audience” by studying the changing relationship between journalists and audiences in a networked media ecosystem (Loosen & Schmidt, 2012), which has led to the “audience turn” in Journalism Studies research (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2017). Anderson et al. argue (2012) that ‘post-industrial journalism’ needs to prepare for a future in which audiences will be ever-more active participants in the process of co-producing meaning and reality. How journalists construct the image of, listen to, and connect with, their “imagined audience” (Nelson, 2021), therefore, becomes central to their legitimacy and performative power.

These developments have led to the increased prominence of ‘pioneering’ practices such as UX design in journalism, which have resulted in new storytelling formats that put the audience at the centre of the user experience (Anderson & Borges-Rey, 2019, Appelgren, 2017, Borges-Rey, 2016). The afforded audience agency goes beyond narrow technological conceptions of interactivity, as suggested by Anderson & Borges-Rey (2019) and requires further investigation of the different dimensions of the encoded user experience (UX).

2.1. Encoding/Decoding and the role of 'active audiences'

The notion of “active audiences” is not new; it emerged at the height of mass media and mass communications and was a central concept in the tradition of British Cultural Studies, particularly in the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s. Hall’s Encoding/Decoding theory (1973, 1980) conceptualised the ‘audience’ as active participants in the communicative process by adopting different cognitive ‘reading’ positions of media texts. The encoding/decoding paradigm views encoding as the product of the articulation of discursive, social and material forces, whereby media production involves “constructing the message and packaging it into meaningful discourse” (Hall, 1980), informed by socio-material conditions, frameworks of knowledge, professional codes, and assumptions about the audience. Meaning is produced in the dialogic process between encoder and decoder, based on shared language conventions. Therefore, there has long been an acknowledgement that meaning production is a contingent, relational process which is the product of ‘articulation’ of two distinct yet ‘determinate’ moments – encoding and decoding, each of which has its “own specific modality, its own forms, and conditions of existence” (ibid., p. 128). Hall distinguishes between the denotative (literal) and connotative (associative) meanings of a sign, arguing that it is at the level of the latter that “the sign enters fully into the struggle over meanings” of culture, taking on “more active ideological dimensions” (1980, p. 133).

The ‘active audience’ notion is expressed in Hall’s theory in the acknowledgement that readers can adopt different cognitive ‘reading positions’ when presented with media messages – accepting wholesale the encoded message as created by producers, negotiating its meaning (accepting some elements while rejecting others), or altogether opposing it through rejection, misinterpretation or subversion. The sign-as-realised and the sign-as-experienced, therefore, may or may not overlap due to the inherently polysemic nature of the (linguistic) sign and the arbitrary nature of signification, as proposed by Saussure and widely acknowledged by linguists. But while these dominant readings are not closed, they are likewise, not completely open to random interpretation. Although decodings cannot necessarily be guaranteed or prescribed, the process of encoding is significant as it constructs ‘preferred readings’ which act as “maps of meaning” while also, at the connotative (deep) level of signification, serving as “maps of social reality” (ibid., p. 133).

2.2. Encoding in the age of networked, interactive media

While developed in conditions of mass communication/mass culture, Hall’s encoding/decoding model was prescient in that it conceptualises the meaning production/encoding and reception/decoding structures as an *open system* and the process of decoding as active reception even before the advent of digital media and the Internet. Hall’s model was originally applied to the study of TV audiences (Hall, 1973, 1980;

Morley, 1974, 1980), and more recently, translated to the context of digital culture through studies of media resistance (Woodstock, 2016) and interactive media affordances (Shaw, 2017). But has it stood the test of time?

The proliferation of increasingly sophisticated technological affordances and networked media production has had a transformative impact on the process of journalistic meaning production, a process that is now more complex than in the past. Carlson (2020) identifies a range of shifts in journalism's circulation from one-to-many broadcasting structures to digital platforms, which have epistemic consequences for journalism - i.e., for its production of knowledge, its forms, and the public acceptance (or not) of its knowledge claims. These shifts include, for instance, changes in the packaging of news, whereby the different contexts and forms in which they appear may alter the originally encoded meaning and journalists' use of interaction traces in increasingly prominent audience measurement practices (Carlson, 2020, pp. 236-237). What has changed since Hall's encoding/decoding model, is that the public can now directly feed into the meaning of an encoded media message, now armed with the agency, however illusory it may be, to alter or augment that meaning in a highly mediatized environment. In this environment digital intermediaries wield increased amount of power as infrastructures of knowledge production, but also structures of governance with their own values and ideology (Couldry, 2020). Furthermore, digital media arguably blurs the distinction between the two interpretive communities - those of producers and consumers - which are now "drawn together by the circulation of news" (Eldridge and Bødker, 2019, p. 286) and are becoming increasingly enmeshed in the process of meaning production. This makes the circulation of journalism in the interactive digital media ecosystem a more complex process, in which technological mediation plays an equally important part in the process of signification as the linguistic and social dimensions of encoding and decoding (Bødker, 2016). It is therefore important to examine how the process of encoding is changing in this progressively interactive and networked media ecosystem.

2.3. Crafting the UX through constructions of the "imagined audience"

While early newsroom conceptions of audiences saw them as passive recipients of news in a top-down process of communication (Gans, 1979, Schlesinger, 1978), there has long been an acknowledgement that audiences exercise some (however minimal) influence on editorial decisions. In the pre-digital, industrial period, audiences were constructed mainly through outsourced means such as marketing or audience measurement organisations (Ettema & Whitney, 1994, Napoli, 2010). With the advent of digital media, audience construction has evolved to an integral part of the newsroom activities, through in-house UX design and audience analytics. The audience features at the design stage of encoding, whereby producers strive to predict and configure the user journey through the ways they construct interactive stories (Anderson

& Borges-Rey, 2019). The “preferred” reading, or, if we are precise, the *preferred experience*, is created with the painstaking discursive construction of the audience “in the mind’s eye” (Robinson, 2019). Serving up stories that would resonate most strongly and using audience engagement analytics to inform that practice, is therefore becoming a central part of journalism practice. The increased influence of the imagined audience on editorial practices is well documented, along with efforts to better understand audiences through the capture and analysis of user interaction data, which supposedly sheds light on how audiences interact with journalistic content (Anderson, 2011; Lamot & Paulussen, 2020; Zamith, 2018). Some scholars (e.g., Nelson, 2018, Steensen, Ferrer-Conill, and Peters, 2020) have questioned just how much this narrow “technical-behavioural” approach helps journalists to really know their audience, arguing that it instead reinforces old marketized, industrial conceptions of the audience. Acknowledging the relational nature of journalism production and being responsive to audience needs, on the other hand, are seen as a route to restoring the power and authority of journalism (Brants, 2013; Carlson, 2017; Lewis, 2020).

It is particularly interesting to explore this phenomenon in the context of legacy news organisations, whose organisational culture is “a gravitational force, anchoring organisations to their pasts” (Küng, 2017, p. 36), which sometimes holds back digital experimentation in legacy newsrooms. Examining how “pioneer journalists” who are situated in legacy newsrooms understand and enact the process of encoding vis-à-vis audiences would shed light on how these negotiations take place in an environment defined by a push-and-pull between tradition and innovation, legacy organisational culture, and new ways of working (Eldridge et al., 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

To examine how ‘pioneer’ journalism producers think about their work in relation to their audiences and how that process of ideation manifests in the journalism story (artefact) as a preferred audience experience, I apply a multi-method design whereby in-depth interviews with 12 pioneer journalism producers are triangulated with in-depth analysis of two artefact with divergent interactivity options. This allows me to see how design strategies, expressed in the interviews, lead to the material construction of different repertoires for the news audiences.

The interviews were carried out in March 2018 in six legacy London-based newsrooms considered to be at the forefront of digital innovation in journalism - the *Financial Times (FT)*, the *BBC*, the *Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *The Times/Sunday Times*, and *Wall Street Journal EMEA*. Through a mix of purposive and snowball sampling, whereby I contacted individual digital journalism producers widely known as “pioneers” in the industry and asked them to nominate other interview participants, I ended up with a sample of 12 respondents of varying levels of seniority and a variety of roles - three Heads/Deputy Heads of Digital Journalism, three Digital/Interactive Editors, three Data Journalists, and three Senior Designers/Developers (Table

1: Interview participants¹). The in-depth semi-structured interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. The conversations revolved around the participants' digital journalism production practices, processes and products, with a focus on 1) how the audience features in their editorial and UX design decisions, 2) their conditions of production, and 3) how the respondents, as "pioneers", navigate the legacy organisational culture. The interviews were transcribed, hand coded and analysed, using the method of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 1: List of interview respondents

Role	News organization
Head of Interactive News	Financial Times
Head of Digital Delivery	Financial Times
Senior Data Journalist	BBC
Data Journalist	BBC
Visuals Editor	Guardian
Head of Digital Journalism	Telegraph
Deputy Head of Digital	The Times and Sunday Times
Senior Newsroom Developer	The Times and Sunday Times
Data Journalist	The Times and Sunday Times
Interactives and New Formats Editor	The Times and Sunday Times
Executive Producer	Wall Street Journal EMEA
Head of Graphics	Wall Street Journal EMEA

The aim was to get a rich and nuanced picture of the participants' experience and shed light on what Hall (1980) refers to as journalists' "professional code". The "professional code" is a central feature of the encoding/decoding model that determines encoding by applying "criteria and transformational operations of its own, especially those of a technico-practical nature" (p. 136). While it is 'relatively autonomous', journalism's professional code is relegated to a sub-category of the "dominant-hegemonic code" in the encoding/decoding model (ibid.), suggesting that elite media ultimately reproduce power structures and reinforce the hegemonic order of the day. Therefore, exploring how audiences are interpellated in pioneer journalism practice would begin to shed light on the deeper, ideological dimensions of encoding in a networked, interactive media age, including how their professional code relates to dominant-hegemonic structures.

To explore the deep, ideological, dimensions of pioneer encoding, the data that emerged from the interviews were triangulated through a mix of multimodal (Jancsary, Höllerer and Meyer's, 2015) and interaction design analysis (Adami, 2015; Segel & Heer, 2010) of two digital journalism artefacts along three dimensions - 1)

¹ Many of the interview participants have since changed organisations, but largely work in similar roles.

denotation (surface structure, manifest content); 2) connotation (rhetorical, associative meaning, deep structure); 3) functionality (interactivity and afforded audience agency). I chose two innovative journalism stories mentioned by my informants for this artefact analysis. They represent the opposite ends of Segel & Heer's author-driven/reader-driven continuum (2010) (or explanatory/exploratory axis), offering different levels of interactivity and type of audience agency. *The Uber Game* (by the *Financial Times*) sits at the reader-driven, exploratory end of this continuum, offering a high level of user agency, whereas *Born Equal, Treated Unequally* (by *The Telegraph*) can be placed at the author-driven, explanatory end. Other studies (e.g., Anderson & Borges-Rey, 2019) have opted for analysing artefacts that sit halfway on the explanatory-exploratory axis, where the author-driven encoding approach is balanced out with optional interactivity, through a "dip/dive UX design" (p. 1267). In contrast, this article uses the maximum variation principle to analyse, and compare, two artefacts with completely different UX approaches – one more heavily prescribed by the authors, the other – requiring more active tactile participation.

The two artefacts are analysed using Jancsary et al.'s (2015) critical reconstruction multimodal discourse analysis approach, which helps explicate both the denotative and connotative functions of manifest content. This, in turn allows me to juxtapose them with observations from the interview data to unearth the communicative purpose as performative text and shed light on the authorial intent behind the design and production decisions (encoding). Through this analysis the textual artefact (the story) is seen as "material residue[s] of a sign-maker's interest" and a "window onto its maker" (Jewitt, 2017, p. 33).

I also draw on Adami (2015), who suggests that interactivity should be studied as both an aesthetic (syntagmatic) surface-level feature and a functionality, which helps explicate the afforded audience agency. The three analytical dimensions – denotation, connotation, and functionality – shed light on the preferred audience experience as constructed by pioneer journalism producers. When combined with insights from the interviews, which examine the producers' discursive positioning in relation to the audience, we get a fuller picture of how the imagined audience is interpellated through the construction of preferred audience experiences.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Pioneering encoding practices in legacy newsrooms: From hype to routine

My interview data analysis indicated an increasingly networked and collaborative approach to production, across teams or between different functions within a team. Constructing the audience experience in today's newsrooms involves multiple stakeholders – from marketing to web development teams – and is no longer solely the preserve of the editorial functions of a newsroom. Computational thinking and traditional journalistic mindsets increasingly converge in legacy newsrooms studied

here (see also Borges-Rey, 2016). This is reflected in journalism projects with multiple bylines as designers and developers contribute in their distinct ways to the process of encoding.

This cross-pollination of cultures and skillsets has enabled my participants to drive innovative practices of journalistic ‘storytelling’, in a concerted effort to reimagine what journalism can do, particularly in relation to their imagined audiences. There was a general acknowledgement that digital journalism needs to move beyond the simple presentation of traditional news formats, such as the inverted pyramid article, towards web-native formats that put the audience first – explaining and contextualising what is happening in the wider world or letting them discover how a story personally relates to them. I also observed a tendency of experimentation with the affordances of digital media, and a drive to ‘templatised’ experimental story designs, and to routinize experimental story production. At the same time, the interviewees acknowledged the inert nature of legacy newsroom culture, resistance to change and a conservative attitude towards new technologies (Boczkowski, 2004; Lowrey, 2011; Paulussen, 2016). My respondents, all of whom were members of designated digital/visual storytelling teams, had all had to negotiate organisational structure and (individual and/or collective) agency in their everyday operations, oscillating between a desire to create innovative products and the need to attend to everyday routinised production tasks – an intraorganizational tension also identified by Boyles (2016). Often, they had to carve out the space, time and resources to work on experimental projects alongside their day-to-day editorial support functions, not unlike digital startups within a newsroom, whose cultural influence in digital teams I found to be strong. Indeed, as Küng (2017) suggests, in their efforts to innovate, news organisations take a leaf out of the start-up playbook, with canonical concepts such as agility, the pivot, normalising change, sprint development, the application of ‘design thinking’, and the prioritisation of UX (user-experience) now central to how digital teams perceive and perform their function in the newsroom.

But instead of existing as isolated startups, or “intrapreneurial units” within the newsroom that clash with a more conservative legacy organisational culture (Boyles, 2016, p. 229), pioneer journalist teams and their practices are becoming a more integral part of the newsroom. A respondent from the Financial Times described the normative reconstruction happening in their newsroom as a slow process, but one that is moving in the direction of normalising web-native storytelling, where pioneer production moves from the hype that used to define it to routine:

A lot of the efforts up until now have been about building that intellectual buy-in...but that fight has been won, everybody wants to do cool stuff, everybody wants to tell stories in a more digitally native format. How do we do that in practice in a news organisation that still needs to produce a newspaper every day, that still has some resource constraints - that is a very different question, and one that requires different skills. It doesn't require

evangelists, it requires managers, it requires people who think deeply about processes and workflows, not someone with an extremely unusual skillset who can execute some showpiece, which is I think where we were 5-10 years ago. (Interview, *Financial Times*)

4.2. Ideation: How pioneer journalists construct the image of their audiences

When reflecting on the process of ideation in crafting preferred audience experiences, the interview participants' perspectives converged around three main themes, which can be considered different dimensions of pioneer journalists' ideation when it comes to UX design in legacy newsrooms: 1) "audience first"; 2) *beyond 'bells and whistles' design*; and 3) *personal, interpersonal, and social resonance*.

First, the "audience first" theme reflects the crucial role that audience considerations play in digital journalism production decisions. It finds its expression in the interview participants' increased investment of resources in UX design practices. This means for example prototyping and usability testing, whereby they construct an image of their audience and try to steer the user experience whilst acknowledging that it is impossible for each individual decoding experience to be wholly predicted. My respondents tailor the affordances of technology to the specific story, rather than the other way round, and they often have to design "to the lowest common denominator to make sure everybody gets a consistently good experience" (Respondent at *The Times*).

Second, the respondents largely, and willingly, moved *beyond 'bells and whistles' design* as a means of audience engagement (i.e., towards a more meaningful application of interactivity, only when warranted) due to the resources it takes to create an interactive project, and the need to deliver content quickly and for multiple platforms. At the same time, there was an acknowledgment of the creative potential of the interactive affordances of digital media, which enable journalism producers to break the mould of routinised content production and deliver novel audience experiences, thus pushing the boundaries of what journalism can do. From the interviews, it became clear that there has been a pronounced move away from lavish uses of interactivity that defined longform interactive projects like *The New York Times'* Pulitzer-winning multimedia masterpiece *Snow Fall* and the *Guardian's Firestorm*. "Can we 'Snowfall' this?" (Dowling & Vogan, 2015), or designing large-scale, bells-and-whistles special projects, is no longer a preoccupation in newsrooms. Reflecting on what has changed since the publication of its acclaimed masterpiece *Firestorm*, a respondent at the *Guardian* explained:

Back then [in 2012] we didn't publish on mobile, so we could do these big, beautiful print-like visualisations and now the small screen really impacts that; if you do things that people can hover over or you expect people to

interact with, you have to think, is my finger big enough to touch that thing?
(Interview, *Guardian*)

A Data Journalist at the BBC I interviewed explained that scrolling, visual storytelling and image manipulation were the key trends in digital journalism production, moving away from pointing and clicking towards more plain, static, non-distracting, and immersive experiences. While not considered ‘interactive’ from a user perspective, however, these projects involve a lot of backend work – where this simplicity of representation is encoded in the interface by transitions, HTML manipulation, and lines of bespoke code. So, while it may not necessarily afford tactility as such, or user control, interactivity in newsrooms is achieved through a ‘layering’ of “code created with the intention of a visible output” on top of content management systems (Usher, 2016, p. 20). This reinforces Appelgren’s (2017) observation that high level of explicit interactivity has now been replaced by “an illusion of interactivity” and a more author-driven approach offering “only limited possibilities for the audience to make choices.”

Third, my respondents consistently talked about the need to *engage their audiences affectively*, and thus, perform their traditional public interest service by making every effort to *create stories that resonate* on an individual, interpersonal, and social level. They highlighted personal and social resonance, the evocation of empathy, and creating impact in the world. Interpellating audiences through personal resonance finds expression in the increasingly prominent “find yourself in the story” format of user experience, where users can enter personally relevant information such as their postcode for customised information. More than half of the interview participants stressed the need to generate empathy and emotional understanding when engaging audiences by involving them affectively and immersing them in the story. And a few interview participants emphasised their role as creators of impact and social resonance through their storytelling, which echoes journalism’s traditional public service.

4.3. Artefact manifestation: Preferred audience experiences in pioneer journalism stories

I will now turn to the analysis of two example stories to explore the three emergent themes in more depth. By doing so, I seek to understand how the constructed image of the audience manifests in the journalistic artefact, what the encoded “preferred experience” is, and what repertoires of agency are constructed for the audience in pioneer journalism practice. I will conduct a multimodal/interactive reading of the artefact through denotation, connotation, and functionality, followed by respondent reflections.

4.3.1. Born Equal, Treated Unequally

*Born Equal, Treated Unequally*² is, as explained by my respondent at the *Telegraph*, an “experimental scroll experience” blending verbal and visual semiotic resources, strategically published on International Women’s Day to coincide with the release of UK companies’ gender pay gap figures published by the UK’s Office for National Statistics in 2018. My respondent at the *Telegraph* explained that it is one of the pieces his team were most proud of, as it allowed them to use the affordances of interactivity creatively to tell an important story of social significance and generate emotional understanding by “making the issue come to life”.



Figure 1

Denotation. Instead of presenting the data through complex visualisations (or the increasingly popular ‘find yourself in the data’ personalization), the *Telegraph* uses a clean and simple design, and guides the reader through the story to illustrate the extent of (lingering) gender inequality. At the start, readers are presented with the idea of gender balance – the screen is split into two equal parts – male, realised in teal and female, realised in purple (Figure 1). The standfirst clarifies: “On International Women’s Day, we explore the gender pay gap”. The choice of verb reflects the UX design approach, which is author driven (Segel & Heer, 2010) – i.e., the authors have explored the issue and are now explaining it to the readers. As the reader scrolls down, a data visualisation showing girls outperform boys in English and Maths slowly

² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/business/women-mean-business-interactive/>

fills up the screen. A further scroll reveals that the percentage of young women who apply to university is higher than the male equivalent. Then a sharp turn in the narrative illustrates that despite all that, women are still severely underrepresented in political life, with only two female PMs in the history of the UK. Every scroll that follows reveals evidence that gender disparity exists in all walks of life – cultural heritage, recognition in art and science, business, and pay. Of the 33 Turner Prize³ winners since 1984, for example, readers are told, only eight are women. The picture frame illustration tilts heavily in the direction of men as the reader scrolls, connoting the idea of significant imbalance (Figure 2).

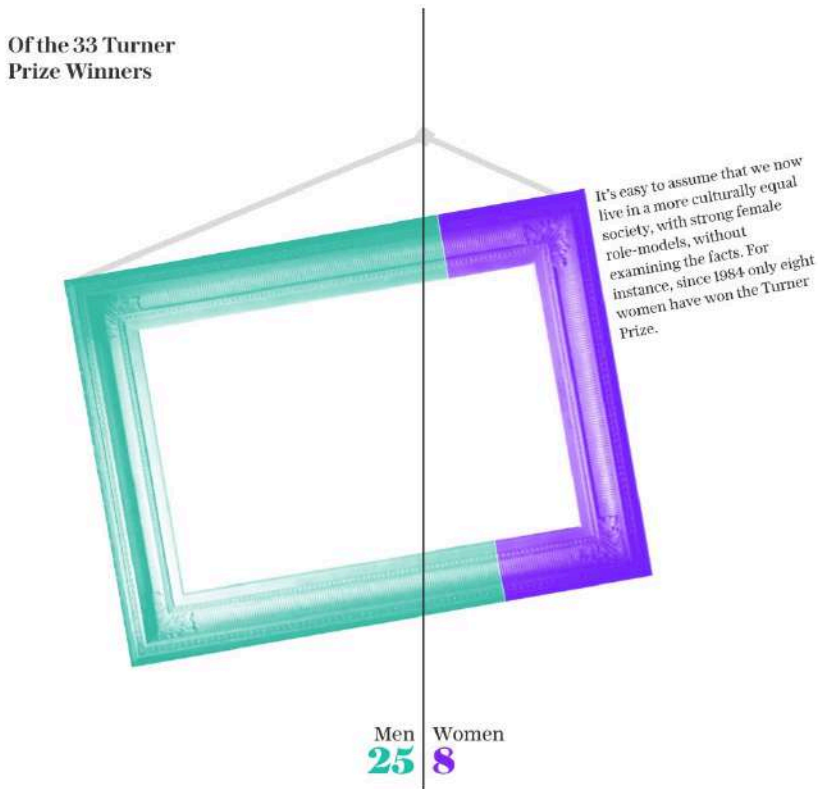


Figure 2

The piece is characterised by visual salience: the reader doesn't have to read the accompanying text to get the message. There is a congruence between the text and visuals. The text, kept to a minimum, serves an explanatory and contextualising purpose, reinforcing the visual narrative. Language is pithy and sentences are short, letting the visually displayed data tell the story.

³ The Turner Prize is a visual art prize awarded annually in the UK.

Connotation. The heavy messaging and visual salience of the *Telegraph* example connote the discourse of impact, which is typical of a campaigning piece of journalism. Indeed, the short comment piece at the end reveals the launch of the *Telegraph's* Women Mean Business campaign, encouraging female entrepreneurship. My *Telegraph* respondent explained that the purpose of the campaign was to encourage more support from the government for female entrepreneurs. The *Telegraph* story employs the topos of ongoing interplay between balance and imbalance through visual metaphor. That tension is expressed through the illusion of balance between the visual and the verbal, and the two sides of the screen, created at the start, and the ever-growing imbalance between the two modes and the two halves of the screen – the male and the female, respectively, as the reader scrolls through. The simple, clean interface reflects the equally clear and simple message: women are not equal, whatever people may say or think; here are the facts and data, which speak for themselves. You don't need to read the text to get the idea of growing imbalance, clearly conveyed in the oppositional juxtaposition of visualisations which fill up the two sides of the screen one scroll at a time.

Functionality. The “author-driven” design approach is reflected in the lack of haptic interactivity, apart from scroll, through which an illusion of interactivity is achieved, with each scroll building on the story narrative. By minimizing audience agency, the *Telegraph* thus constructs a self-contained story space, guiding the reader through the story and enhancing their understanding of the wider social issue of gender inequality. While not physically interactive, the piece achieves its performative power through its seamless UX, where less tactility means a more author-controlled, immersive experience. The linear sequence lets the narrative unfold in an uninterrupted way, with scrolling used as a rhetorical strategy to achieve the effect of emotional slog. Its visual cadence, therefore, seeks to elicit an emotional response through cognitive, rather than haptic, immersion.

My respondent at *The Telegraph* explains the ideation behind this UX approach as follows:

The challenge that I wanted to solve with this is, people say they're interested in that stuff but when you take them through stats, they just zone out and they go and read something more immediately grabbing, so how can we get really important stats in front of people but not lose them in 'death by graph'? And also, it's an emotive issue, so how can we bring out, make it feel much more alive than just showing the numbers or some graphs. So, we wanted to prompt reaction and we wanted the user experience to enhance that feeling of “Oh my God, I'm still going, it's never-ending, it's still unfair to women, it's insane.” Because when you scroll, it makes you feel like you're slogging through something in a way. It's almost like a seesaw where you keep putting stuff on men's side...

4.3.2. The Uber Game

*The Uber Game*⁴ is a multi-award-winning experimental news game produced by the *Financial Times* (FT), which immerses players in a story world where they put themselves in the shoes of an Uber driver to see if they can earn enough in a week to pay their mortgage bill.

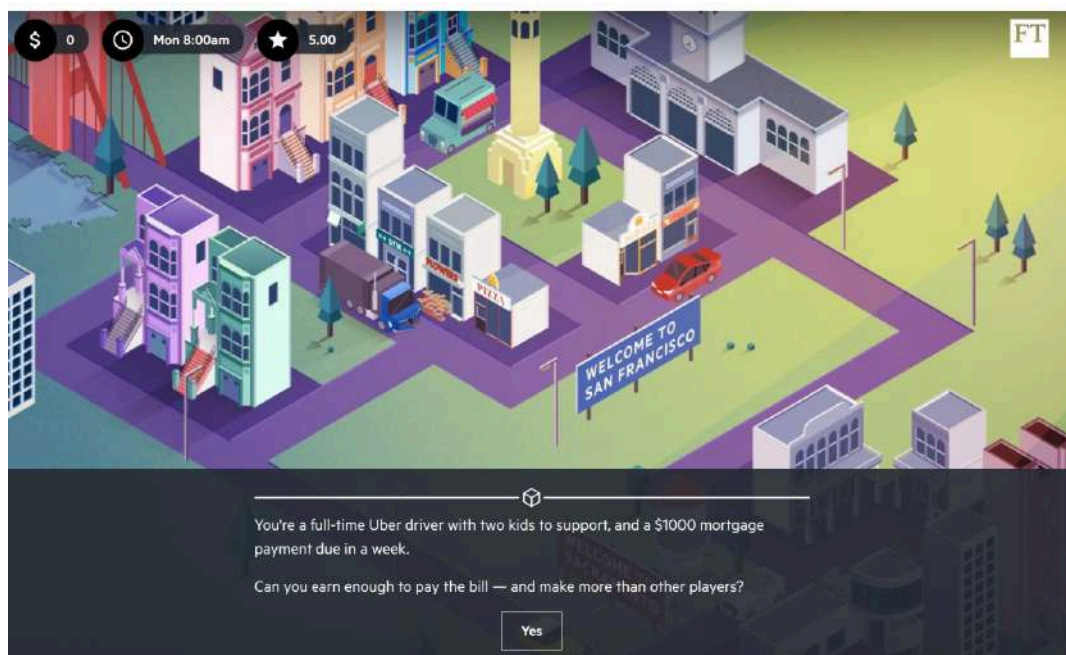


Figure 3

Denotation. My respondent at FT, who was behind creating the Uber Game, explained that the story world is based on a mathematical model built around data obtained through structured interviews with 30-40 Uber drivers. The gamified aesthetics of the piece, featuring an isometric illustration style, recreate everyday situations Uber drivers find themselves in (Figure 3), thus humanising their experience for the players. The laconic verbal prompts, based on anecdotal evidence from the interviews with Uber drivers, are crafted to convey the feeling of urgency and discomfort (and sometimes, even desperation). Direct speech is often used to recreate real real-life conversations. The verbal prompts convey a feeling of hard slog and physical exhaustion, e.g. “You turn off the app for a bit and stretch your aching legs, but a wave of exhaustion hits you.” It’s an uncomfortable existence, which is communicated by the emotional cadence of the game, highlighting the pressures and sacrifices in the life of an Uber driver (Figure 4).

⁴ <https://ig.ft.com/uber-game/>

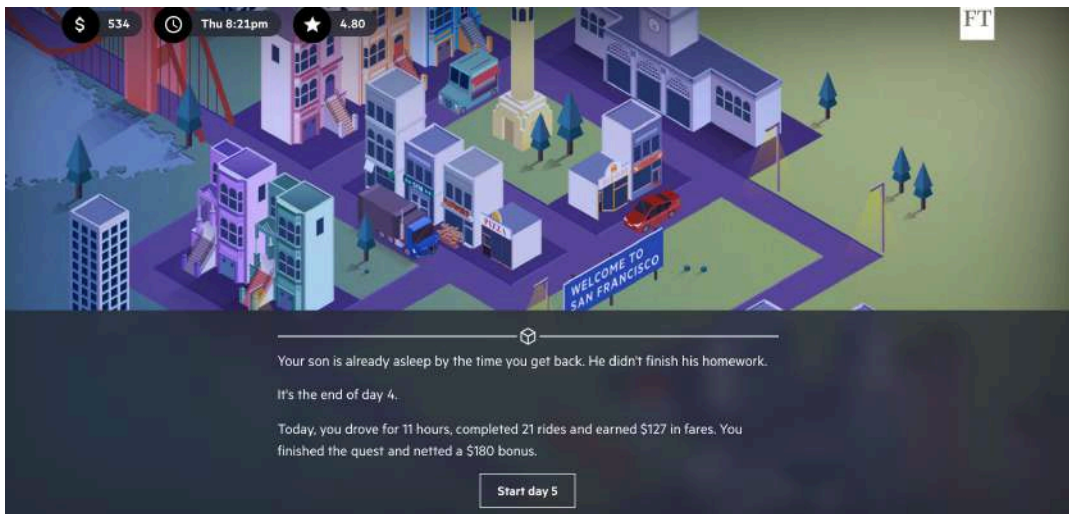


Figure 4

Connotation. The discourse of discomfort is conveyed through a mix of visual, verbal, and interactional rhetorical strategies. These include full screen ‘immersive’ illustrations, lifelike visual and verbal descriptions, change of colour to separate earnings from minus costs, short yet powerful sentences, phrases denoting physical states of exhaustion or disappointment, and transitions between screens, such as daily recaps of your progress, allowing the narrative to slowly unveil as you play through. By crafting a relatable experience and humanising it, inviting players to discover the topic for themselves through play, the creators of the Uber Game seek to evoke empathy and emotional understanding. By choosing a topic of universal concern – the gig economy, they seek to create resonance more widely. On a connotative level, The Uber Game acts as a metonymy for what one of my FT respondents described as “the social transformation of the economy towards casualised working,” with the stresses and strains of 24/7, always-on digital living, enabled by mobile apps such as Uber, mirrored through the lens of an Uber driver’s experience.

Functionality. The Uber Game nudges players to actively participate in the story world, while enhancing their understanding of the everyday reality of Uber drivers and educating the readership about the gig economy. Thus, as they play through, they become co-creators of meaning. The immersive effect of the news game is achieved through the salience of illustrations - each illustration fills the screen, accompanied by short verbal instructions with interaction options. The narrative unfolds as players are prompted to move from screen to screen, the transitions between which take place as players click the button or select from two options. The game is characterised by a high level of haptic interactivity: it takes about 60 clicks to complete, suggesting a long process of playful discovery and active participation in meaning-creation by players, who get rewarded for their interactions by completing the game and seeing how they perform (Figure 5).

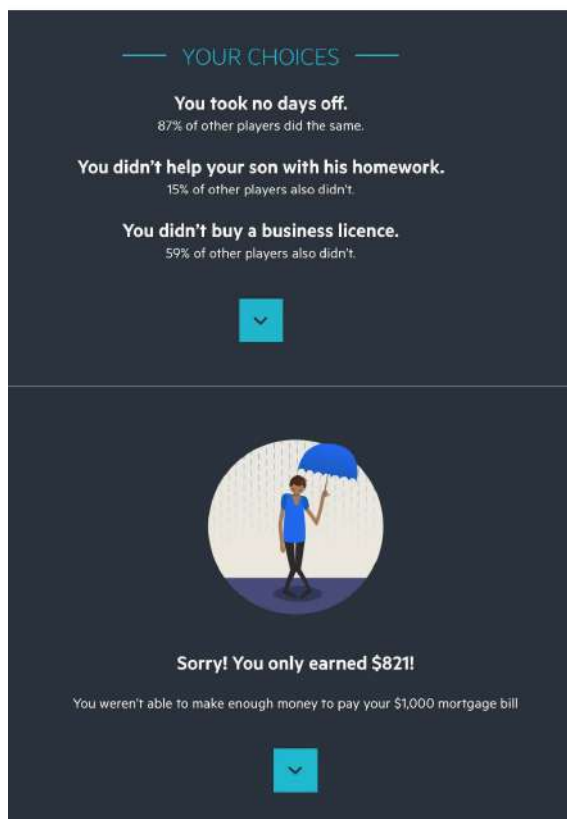


Figure 5

The creator of the Uber Game, whom I interviewed, explained the thinking behind the design approach as follows:

The difference with the game [compared to a traditional informational piece] is that you can mould [the UX] a bit more because you know they [readers] have given you permission to design an experience for them; they've entered this 'world', so you... could craft it a little bit more... There's a bit in the scene where you get a crack in the windshield on the third day and if you don't do anything about it, something bad will happen. So, you can design the emotional tenor of the piece to get people through to the end... so it's basically storytelling.

5. DISCUSSION: THE 'RELATIONAL UX'

Critical evaluation of both the interview and artefact data suggests that the *imagined audience* in these examples is interpellated through various discursive codes of relationality – personal relevance, empathy, and impact, thereby making personal,

interpersonal, and social resonance central to the process of encoding. This results in a ‘relational UX’, which includes the ways in which pioneer journalism producers imagine their audiences and position themselves in relation to them to (co-)produce meaning about the world. Within the preferred audience experiences are encoded various deep-level meanings (where audiences are interpellated through connotation) and types of functionality that construct repertoires of audience agency, as explicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Preferred audience experience in *Born Equal* (Telegraph) and *The Uber Game* (FT)

	Born Equal (Telegraph)	Uber Game (FT)
Denotation	Visual salience: play with colour and proportion	Visual salience: isometric illustration style
	Linear narrative flow	"You-try-it" UX
	Clean, simple desing	Gamified aesthetics
Connotation	Interplay between balance and imbalance	Discourse of urgency and discomfort
	Visual metaphor: male-female oppositional juxtaposition	Metonymy: Uber Game illustrating the gig economy
	Visual cadence: scrolling as emotional slog	Humanised experience and personification
Functionality (Agency)	Author-driven UX: seamless experience	Reader-driven UX: Personal discovery
	Cognitive immersion	Tactile immersion in the story world through play
	Minimized agency	'Cliff-hanger' approach: plot twists that urge further play
	Reader guided through the story	Co-creating the narrative through active participation
	Illusion of interactivity - perception of dynamic flow	Click-reward: players get rewarded for interacting

This explorative study points to a more mature view of digital interactive affordances, which also translates into a more selective use of interactivity, a more author-driven approach, and a simple, though still crafted, user experience. The desire to offer immersive, embodied experiences by symbolically positioning the user within the artefact could be driven by discursive constructions of the relationship between human and machine, in which the latter is seen as an “extension of the mind-body” and therefore interfaces try to mimic or recreate “the richer sensorium of human-to-human communication” (Dewdney & Ride, 2014, p. 260). It is a well-established view in the human-computer interaction literature that, as the technology evolves and diversifies, user experience design naturally follows a smoother, more intuitive approach in an effort to hide the layers of mediating technology for a more immediate connection with the user (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Pioneer journalism producers strive to offer immersive, self-contained experiences, whose meaning the reader is invited to co-create. This takes place through painstaking design work that constructs certain repertoires of agency, grounded in emotionality and empathy. These

repertoires can vary from minimized tactile agency where the reader is guided through the story, unveiling the narrative as they scroll through, to gamified personal discovery that uses click-reward tactics, encouraging the player to immerse themselves in the story world and co-create the narrative through active - haptic and cognitive - participation. While the two stories analysed here offer divergent approaches to interactivity, what they share is the emotional interpellation of the audience through the construction of *relational user experience*, thus reinforcing the observation that emotionality in modern-day journalism is becoming a news value in its own right (Steinke & Belair-Gagnon, 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Both repertoires of agency explicated in this article - making choices as an Uber driver and scrolling, respectively, have a narrativising effect - i.e., the stories' coherence and therefore, overall message, depends on readers' (or players') active involvement in the story.

The study's findings, therefore, suggest that in their effort to reimagine journalism, pioneer producers in legacy organisations give considerable thought to active audiences and to offering different, novel ways for readers to interact with the journalistic story on a deep, emotional level. Thus, in their construction of preferred experiences (whether they take a more openly interactive or paternalistic user experience approach), pioneer journalists create a complex relational dynamic between producer, audience, artefact and wider world, and construct a certain picture of reality, guiding the user through a preferred audience experience. This requires addressing the ideological dimension of the 'relational UX'.

On the one hand, the 'relational UX' could be interpreted as a commercial (and existential) strategy to sustain journalism's traditional gatekeeping function and its *raison d'être* - a core professional claim that journalists still have the authority to make sense of the world for their audiences. Recognising that they operate in an audience activity-enhanced media ecosystem and embracing active audiences, pioneer journalists appear to double down on their resolve to be seen as the *de facto* authority when it comes to constructing reality. Legacy journalism's pioneer production can thus be seen as a rhetorical process that seeks to reclaim its epistemic power by creating relational UXs that try to control the travel of meanings and the production of emotions.

On the other hand, while tackling topics of inequality (as seen in the story artefacts analysed), pioneer journalism producers seemingly challenge existing hegemonic orders (e.g., of work and gender, as seen in the two artefacts analysed). This problematises the encoding/decoding model's already paradoxical provision that, despite their 'relatively autonomous' professional code, legacy news organisations reproduce dominant-hegemonic structures in their signification of events and phenomena (Hall, 1980). Is it possible that, by constructing relational user experiences and new repertoires of agency, pioneer journalists in legacy news organisations have begun challenging dominant power structures, rather than continued to reinforce them? In seeking to protect the right to be listened to, are pioneer journalists also

creating relational infrastructures in which speaking and listening between audiences and professionals are mutually enabling, which, as Ananny (2018) argues, are essential to a free and socially responsible networked journalism? And what are the wider institutional implications of this emergent type of relational encoding for legacy news organisations' cultural dynamics and their position within hegemonic structures?

These are all important questions to address if we are to understand the political currency and epistemic force of the 'relational UX', including how it is embedded in broader societal structures of power. That task would be incomplete without considering the decoding end of the meaning-production chain. Whether the reader/player accepts, negotiates, or rejects the encoded preferred audience experience, how they use the afforded agency repertoires, and what their place is in the relational dynamic created by pioneer journalism producers, deserves further scholarly attention. Theory-grounded critical "user reception studies" would offer significant benefits to academics and journalism practitioners alike, in our shared goal to better understand audiences and serve the public through meaningful research and practice.

Bissie Anderson is a doctoral candidate at the University of Stirling where she is completing her PhD on knowledge production and audience engagement in global pioneer communities of journalism practice. She was Editor-in-chief of *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network* in 2019-2020 and Guest Editor of the special issue *#TogetherApart: Mediatization, (Inter)subjectivity and Sociality at a Time of Pandemic* (2021). Email: bissie.anderson@stir.ac.uk

REFERENCES

- Adami, E. (2015). What's in a click? A social semiotic framework for the multimodal analysis of website interactivity. *Visual Communication*, 14(2), 133-153.
- Ananny, M. (2018). *Networked Press Freedom*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press.
- Anderson, C. W. (2011). Between creative and quantified audiences: Web metrics and changing patterns of newswork in local US newsrooms. *Journalism*, 12(5), 550-566.
- Anderson, C. W., Bell, E., & Shirky, C. (2012). *Post-industrial journalism: Adapting to the present*. Tow Centre for Digital Journalism: Columbia University Academic Commons.
- Anderson, B. & Borges-Rey, E. (2019). Encoding the UX: User Interface as a Site of Encounter between Data Journalists and Their Constructed Audiences. *Digital Journalism*, 7(9), 1253-1269.
- Appelgren, E. (2017). An illusion of interactivity: The paternalistic side of data journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 1-18. Online First.

- Boczkowski, P. J. (2004). *Digitizing the News: Innovation in Online Newspapers*. Boston, MA: MIT Press.
- Bødker, H. (2016). Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model and the circulation of journalism in the digital landscape. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 33(5), 409-423.
- Bolter, J. D. & Grusin, R. A. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding new media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Borges-Rey, E. (2016). Unravelling data journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 10(7), 833-843.
- Boyles, J. L. (2016). The isolation of innovation. Restructuring the digital newsroom through intrapreneurship. *Digital Journalism*, 4(2), 229-246.
- Brants, K. (2013). Trust, cynicism, and responsiveness. In C. Peters & M. Broersma (eds.) *Rethinking Journalism: Trust and participation in a transformed news landscape* (pp.15-27). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Broersma, M. (2010). Journalism as performative discourse. The importance of form and style in journalism. In V. Rupa (ed.) *Journalism and meaning-making: Reading the newspaper* (pp. 15-35). NY: Hampton Press.
- Broersma, M. (2013). A refracted paradigm. In C. Peters & M. Broersma (eds.) *Rethinking Journalism: Trust and participation in a transformed news landscape* (pp.28-44). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Broersma, M., & Peters, C. (2013). Rethinking journalism: the structural transformation of a public good. In C. Peters & M. Broersma (eds.) *Rethinking Journalism: Trust and participation in a transformed news landscape* (pp.1-12). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Carlson, M. (2017). *Journalistic authority: Legitimizing news in the digital era*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Carlson, M. (2020). Journalistic epistemology and digital news circulation: Infrastructure, circulation practices, and epistemic contests. *New Media & Society*, 22(2), 230-246.
- Castells, M. (2010). *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Costera Meijer, I., & Groot Kormelink, T. (2017). Revisiting the audience turn in journalism: How a user-based approach changes the meanings of clicks, transparency and citizen participation. In B. Franklin & S. Eldridge II (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Digital Journalism Studies* (S. 345-353). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Couldry, N. (2020). *Media: Why it matters*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Dewdney, A., & Ride, P. (2014). *The digital media handbook* (2nd ed.). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Dowling, D. & Vogan, T. (2015) *Can We 'Snowfall' This?* *Digital Journalism*, 3(2), 209-224.

- Ekström, M. (2002). The epistemologies of TV journalism: A theoretical framework. *Journalism*, 3, 259-282.
- Ekström, M., & Westlund, O. (2019). Epistemology and Journalism. *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Communication*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.806>
- Eldridge, S. A., & Bødker, H. (2019). Confronting Uncertainty: The Contours of an Inferential Community. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 21(4), 280–349.
- Eldridge II, S. A., Hess, K., Tandoc, E. C., & Westlund, O. (2019). Digital Journalism Navigating the Scholarly Terrain: Introducing the Digital Journalism Studies Compass. *Digital Journalism*, 7(3).
- Ettema, JS, & Whitney, DC. (1994). The money arrow: An introduction to audiencemaking. In: Ettema JS and Whitney DC (eds.) *Audiencemaking: How the Media Create the Audience*. New York: SAGE, 1-18.
- Gans, H. (1979). *Deciding what's news* (1st ed.). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Hall, S. (1973). *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*. Stencilled Occasional Paper. University of Birmingham, Birmingham.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In: Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (eds.) *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*. Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge, pp. 128-138.
- Hanusch, F., & Banjac, S. (2019). Studying role conceptions in the digital age: A critical appraisal. In S. A. Eldridge II, & B. Franklin (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Developments in Digital Journalism Studies* (pp. 28-39). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Hepp, A., & Loosen, W. (2021). Pioneer journalism: Conceptualizing the role of pioneer journalists and pioneer communities in the organizational re-figuration of journalism. *Journalism*, 22(3), 577-595.
- Jancsary, D., Höllerer, M., & Meyer, R. (2015). Critical analysis of visual and multimodal texts. In Wodak, R. & Meyer M. (eds.) *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 180-204). SAGE.
- Jewitt, C. (2017). *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*, 2nd ed. Abingdon and NY: Routledge.
- Küng, L. (2017). *Going digital. A roadmap for organisational transformation*. Oxford, UK: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Lamot, K. & Paulussen, S. (2020). Six Uses of Analytics: Digital Editors' Perceptions of Audience Analytics in the Newsroom. *Journalism Practice*, 14(3), 358-373.
- Lewis, S. C. (2020). Lack of trust in the news media, institutional weakness, and relational journalism as a potential way forward. *Journalism*, 21(3), 345-348.
- Loosen, W., & Schmidt, J.-H. (2012). (Re-)Discovering the audience. The relationship between journalism and audience in networked digital media. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(6), 867-887.
- Lowrey, W. (2011). Institutionalism, news organizations and innovation. *Journalism Studies*, 12(1), 64-79.

- Matheson, D. (2000). The birth of news discourse: changes in news language in British newspapers, 1880-1930. *Media, Culture & Society*, 22, 557-573.
- Morley, D. (1974). *Reconceptualising the media audience: towards an ethnography of audiences*. Stencilled Occasional Paper. University of Birmingham, Birmingham.
- Morley, D. (1980). *The "nationwide" audience: Structure and decoding*. London: BFI.
- Napoli, PM. (2010). *Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Nelson, J. L. (2018). The Elusive Engagement Metric. *Digital Journalism*, 6(4), 528-544.
- Nelson, J. (2021). *Imagined Audiences: How Journalists Perceive and Pursue the Public*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Paulussen, S. (2016). Innovation in the Newsroom. In T. Witschge, C. W. Anderson, D. Domingo & A. Hermida (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism* (pp. 192-206). London: SAGE.
- Robinson, J. (2019). *The audience in the mind's eye: How journalists imagine their readers*. Tow Centre for Digital Journalism.
- Schlesinger, P. (1978). *Putting "reality" together: BBC News*. London: Routledge.
- Segel, E., & Heer, J. (2010). Narrative visualization: Telling stories with data. *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics*, 16(6), 1139-1148.
- Shaw, A. (2017). Encoding and decoding affordances: Stuart Hall and interactive media technologies. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(4), 592-602.
- Steensen, S., Ferrer-Conill, R., & Peters, C. (2020). (Against a) theory of Audience Engagement with News. *Journalism Studies*, 21(12), 1662-1680.
- Steinke, A. & Belair-Gagnon, V. (2020). "I Know It When I See It": Constructing Emotion and Emotional Labor in Social Justice News. *Mass Communication and Society*, 23 (5), 608-627.
- Usher, N. (2016). *Interactive journalism. Hackers, data, and code*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2019). *Emotions, Media and Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Woodstock, L. (2016). "It's kind of like an assault, you know": media resisters' meta-decoding practices of media culture. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 33(5), 399-408.
- Zamith, R. (2018). Quantified audiences in news production. *Digital Journalism*, 6(4), 418-435.

PARTNER OR MODEL? THE LATIN-AMERICAN PERCEPTION OF THE EU IN THE SUPRANATIONAL AUDIOVISUAL POLICIES

MARINA ROSSATO FERNANDES

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

ABSTRACT:

The EU has a strong influence on the development of audiovisual policies in Latin America. The paper investigates how the EU is perceived by Latin-American audiovisual institutions in two different supranational regions: Mercosur and Ibero-America. The findings are based on a literature review, qualitative document analysis, and semi-structured expert interviews. It reveals a lack of definition of the EU image where RECAM did not concretely define the EU and engaged in a blind policy transfer process, while Ibermedia perceives the EU as a strategic partner and seeks cooperation with mutual benefits. The paper provides a deeper understanding of what the EU model means to Latin America, going beyond its institutional framework, and proposes a reflection on the EU perception and how it could lead to different forms of dialogue.

Keywords: audiovisual policy ▪ Mercosur ▪ European Union ▪ Latin America ▪ perception

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) is an influential actor in Latin America. The creation of the South American trade bloc, the Mercosur, was inspired by the European Union (Dri, 2010; Medeiros, Meunier, & Cockles, 2015; Santander, 2005), as well as its supranational institution in charge of audiovisual policies, RECAM, that also aimed, since its creation, to learn from the EU experience (Canedo & Crusafon, 2014; Fernandes, Loisen, & Donders, 2020; Vlassis, 2016). The milestone of this relationship was the Audiovisual Mercosur Program (AMP), which aimed to transfer the EU model of supranational audiovisual policies to Mercosur, but it was incomplete and with modest accomplishments (Canedo, Loiola, & Pauwels, 2015; Fernandes, Loisen,

& Donders, 2021). At the Ibero-American level, the most important program to support audiovisual production, the Ibermedia Program, was inspired by the European MEDIA Program (Camacho, 2016; Falicov, 2012). Clearly, the European Union has a notable role in shaping the supranational audiovisual policies in Latin America.

Previous research mainly focused on the results of these policies (González, 2020; Moguillansky, 2011), cooperations (Canedo & Crusafon, 2014), and in the EU motivations in engaging on it (Vlassis, 2016). Little attention has been given to the Latin-American perspective towards the EU. Since the EU is still an influence in this region (Sanahuja & Rodríguez, 2019) and a reference to the audiovisual policies (Crusafon, 2009), the paper aims to investigate how the EU is perceived in the Latin-American supranational spaces (Fioramonti & Poletti, 2008) and how this image is articulated in the audiovisual policies. What are the main ideas implied when the EU is mentioned? Are they the same in different supranational spaces? Are there specific goals, ideas, mechanisms that motivated this dialogue? In sum, how is the EU defined, and what is envisaged when searching for a dialogue with it? In doing so, the paper provides a critical reflection on what the EU represents in the Latin-American context and contributes to a better understanding of what can be expected from this cooperation.

In order to do that, I investigated the ideas associated with the EU in two supranational Latin-American spaces: the Mercosur and the Ibero-American space. Based on literature review, qualitative document analysis, and semi-structured expert interviews, the paper provides a deeper understanding of how the EU is perceived by Latin America, going beyond a mere institutional or formal framework. This paper is an exploratory study that proposes a reflection on the EU perception and how it could lead to different forms of dialogue.

The article is structured as follows. First, the ideas involving the EU and its cooperation with Mercosur are exposed. Second, the methodology is outlined. Third, the findings are presented. The findings reveal a distinct perception of the EU at Mercosur and the Ibero-American space. RECAM lacks clarity in defining the EU and engaged in a blind policy transfer of audiovisual policies to access resources and to follow a broader cooperation agreement at the Mercosur level promoted by the EU. In contrast, in the Ibero-American space, the EU is perceived as a strategic partner where cooperation is beneficial for both. The results indicate the flexibility, or lack of definition, of the EU image.

2. EU AS A GLOBAL ACTOR

The European Union is a result of a long process of integration that started with an internal focus and was marked by closure (de Beus, 2010) to a shift towards external policies where it positions as a global actor (Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2010). It is composed of a set of institutions that promotes political and economic integration among the member countries. Besides its institutional structure, the EU has also a symbolic

dimension based on the ideas and values that it promotes, and it aims to spread its model of society (Olsen, 2002).

The EU portrays itself as a different global actor, with a global responsibility to spread universal values (Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2010), such as democracy, human rights, pluralism, and fundamental freedoms (Manners, 2002). The values are promoted as universal and are part of a civilian foreign policy in opposition to a military one (Söderbaum, Stålgren, & Van Langenhove, 2005). The EU would like to be perceived as a benevolent global actor although there are criticisms in accessing its distinctiveness (Cerutti & Lucarelli, 2008). Thus, the consolidation of its image is interrelated with its external perception and the EU seeks to export its 'model' to reinforce its legitimization (Radaelli, 2000; Santander, 2001; Söderbaum, Stålgren, & Van Langenhove, 2005).

Cultural diplomacy plays a decisive role in the promotion of EU values (Portolés, 2019). This strategy was reinforced with the approval of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (hereafter the 2005 UNESCO Convention) followed by the European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World (2007) that recognizes the role of the EU as a promoter of its ideas in external policy (Loisen & De Ville, 2011; Vlassis, 2016a).

The main ideas are the recognition of the two dimensions of cultural goods, their economic character but also their symbolic value. Thus, cultural products should not be negotiated by the free market rules, since they also carry cultural values. The EU acts as an international promoter of the 2005 UNESCO Convention and "seeks to promote cultural norms as part of its international economic and cultural relations" (Vlassis, 2020, p.19).

The main impact of the Convention was on the audiovisual sector due to its economic importance. The US did not sign the Convention and is constantly advocating for the liberalization of audiovisual services. Thus, the EU is in opposition to the US interest and the Hollywood domination of the audiovisual flows.

The EU audiovisual policy is based on this idea and combines a complex set of instruments and regulations to promote economic integration and assure cultural diversity (Donders, Loisen, and Pauwels, 2014). Besides the internal policies, the EU also advocates for audiovisual cooperation as a tool to promote diversity (Vlassis, 2016). One of the strategies to promote the internationalization of the EU audiovisual policy is through technical cooperation, which is the case of the cooperation with Mercosur (Crusafon, 2015). Thus, the EU has its own interests and actively invests in exporting its model.

3. EU AS A MODEL TO MERCOSUR

The Mercosur is the Common Market of the South created in 1991 by the Treaty of Asuncion (Mercosur, 1991) to establish a free-trade region among Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. It aims to create a common region with ambitious goals to

promote integration among the countries. The EU is the major donor of Mercosur and was the first global actor to recognize it as a bloc.

The Mercosur perceives the EU as a model for supranational integration and, in that respect, was inspired by it (Dri, 2010; Medeiros et al., 2015; Sebastian Santander, 2005). One month after the creation of Mercosur, a delegation visited the European Commission to develop a close relationship (Dri, 2010). One year later, the Inter-Institutional Agreement between the European Commission and Mercosur was signed; a set of agreements followed reinforcing the influence of the EU on Mercosur (Santander, 2005). These agreements enable training and technical and financial assistance where “the EU has tried to shape Mercosur according to its own programs and values” (Dri, 2010, p.59). Thus, the influence of the EU on Mercosur is perceived since its creation. Therefore, Mercosur perceives the EU as a model while at the same time the EU aims to export its model as an international strategy (Radaelli, 2000) and invested in the relationship with Mercosur. Thus, there is an alignment between the Mercosur perception of the EU as a model and the EU's self-promoted image as a model to be exported.

On the cultural level, Mercosur signed the Protocol for Cultural Integration in 1996 recognizing the importance of culture and respect for diversity in regard to the integration project. It agrees to promote cooperation and cultural exchange among members and to support the search for external funding and technical assistance (Mercosul, 1996). At the 1999 Rio Summit, the EU and Mercosur included cultural cooperation in the political and economic goals. The ideas included “diversity as a fundamental link of integration” (Summit, 1999, p.7) where the regions should act to “promote cultural diversity and pluralism in the world” (Summit, 1999, p.8).

In 2008, the Declaration of Mercosur Cultural Integration was approved, reinforcing its commitment to the cultural diversity promoted by the 2005 UNESCO Convention (Mercosul, 2008). The EU also had a role in cultural diplomacy, negotiating the 2005 UNESCO Convention, and engaged in cultural cooperation based on the diversity idea. The bloc followed the EU ideas about that. Besides the institutional and budgetary differences, there is a match concerning the ideas (Canedo, 2016).

Aligned with the Cultural Protocol, the advisory body for audiovisual, RECAM, was created in 2003 to promote audiovisual integration and legislative harmonization (Mercosur, 2003). RECAM is the main institution for Mercosur's audiovisual sector and it was also largely inspired by the EU audiovisual policies (Crusafon, 2009; Domínguez & Montero, 2009). RECAM recognizes the cultural and economic value of audiovisual and reinforces its commitment to “apply the common principle of cultural diversity” (RECAM, 2004, p.1).

Since its creation, RECAM has not only been searching for a dialogue with the EU but also has been looking to it as a point of reference (M.R. Fernandes et al., 2020). The milestone of its relationship was the Audiovisual Mercosur Program (AMP) that aimed to transfer the EU MEDIA Program to Mercosur but could just achieve incremental results (Canedo & Crusafon, 2014; Canedo et al., 2015; Fernandes et al., 2021).

It is possible to observe an alignment between the EU and Mercosur ideas on the three dimensions, the institutional broader framework of Mercosur, the cultural position based on cultural diversity, and the audiovisual sector aiming to integrate the market and promote cultural diversity. As shown in Figure 1, there is a match at the level of ideas between the two blocs and cooperation agreements in all these levels.

IDEAS	EU	Mercosur	Dialogue
Institutional	model to be exported	EU as a model	Regional Indicative Programme (2007)
Cultural	cultural diversity	cultural diversity	1999 Rio Summit 2005 Unesco Convention
Audiovisual	cultural and economic	cultural and economic	Audiovisual Mercosur Program (2008)

Figure 1: EU and Mercosur ideas (source: author)

The relationship between the EU and Mercosur involves a set of instruments that aims to establish political dialogue, development cooperation, and free trade. The negotiation is still ongoing and it could strengthen the Mercosur integration process (Sanahuja & Rodríguez, 2019).

In the audiovisual sector, the internationalization of audiovisual policy reflects a dimension of Europeanization (Crusafon, 2015). Europeanization is broadly understood as an influence of the EU institutions in shaping policies on different levels, internally and externally (Olsen, 2002). Europeanization produces policy changes in a process that can occur top-down or bottom-up (Börzel & Risse, 2000). This movement creates policy convergence and is also supposed to bring learning (Radaelli, 2008). However, the most evident convergence is at the discourse level, which does not imply convergence of decisions (Radaelli, 2008).

The policies drawn from the EU indicate aspirational movements since the receivers perceived them as functional or legitimate, and the access to resources can make the EU ideas more attractive (Olsen, 2002), but drawing from an abstract model can create more projection and aspiration than learning (Armstrong, 2006).

The auto-representation of the EU was largely researched, however, its external perception is still underdeveloped (Fioramonti & Poletti, 2008; Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2010; Serban & Harutyunyan, 2020) and can vary according to the topic or the region (Chaban, Elgström, Kelly, & Yi, 2013). It has an important role in Latin America and is considered to be a model, a partner, or a threat (Pecequillo, 2014). Recent research also indicates that the Latin-American perception of the EU is less influenced by ideas but rather focused on material investment and expertise access (Serban & Harutyunyan, 2020).

The paper will investigate how the EU is perceived and articulated in the audiovisual policies in Latin America. The aim is not to assess if there is a Europeanization,

but the challenges involved in it will be used to shed light on this process and broaden the debate.

4. METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to investigate how the EU is perceived by analyzing the ideas associated with it. The main focus is on Mercosur's audiovisual policies since it has several agreements with the EU and an audiovisual program based on policy transfer. Complementary Ibero-American documents will be added to expand the perception of the EU in Latin America.

To understand how the EU is perceived in the Latin-American audiovisual domain, 75 (1995 – 2021) documents were analyzed based on qualitative document analysis (Puppis, 2019; Karppinen and Moe, 2012). The data collected start from the Inter-regional Framework Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Mercosur signed in 1995 to date. All documents concerning the RECAM, AMP, and Ibermedia were included to access how the EU is perceived internally by these programs. Additionally, the cultural cooperation agreements between the EU and Mercosur that impact the audiovisual sector were included. The analyzed data are composed of 3 documents on cultural agreements, all RECAM documents, including 37 meeting minutes and 13 work plans, 3 documents related to the AMP, the cooperation agreement, the report evaluation of the program, and the Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) which the Audiovisual Mercosur Program (AMP) is part of. On the Ibero-American level, 15 official documents were analyzed, including the creation of Ibermedia, its reports, and the cooperation agreement between CAACI and EFAD. All of these documents are publicly available in English, Spanish, or Portuguese.

Additionally, to balance the lack of references to the EU in the Ibero-American audiovisual documents and considering that Ibermedia is a program with strong stakeholder participation, interviews were included in the analysis. Then, 16 Ibero-American producers and directors from 15 countries¹ were interviewed between January and March 2021. All interviews were conducted online by the author of the study. The interviewees were selected randomly from the database of films funded by Ibermedia and all were invited to recommend additional interviewees, creating a snowball effect (Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019). The interviews were conducted in Portuguese and Spanish where the same question was asked: “Do you consider the EU as a strategic partner to the development of Ibero-American audiovisual? If yes, how?”. This was an open question that aimed to identify if there is an openness to the EU audiovisual policies and what ideas implied as well as the form of dialogue proposed. At the request of some interviewees and in order to ensure open, honest conversation, the interviews were anonymized. The interviews provided a deeper

¹ Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Spain.

and contextualized comprehension (see Van Audenhove and Donders, 2019; Herzog and Ali, 2015) of the perception of the EU audiovisual policies identified through the document analysis. In the Mercosur case, the documents were the main source of analysis since they relied extensively on the EU and the dialogue with the EU came from a top-down perspective where the audiovisual sector was not actively involved. Figure 2 presents the data analyzed according to the topic it deals with. Relevant scientific literature was added to the analysis to provide a deeper contextualization.

The findings will be presented in two sections. First, the Mercosur perception of the EU on audiovisual policies will be represented by RECAM and the cooperation program with the EU, the Audiovisual Mercosur Program (AMP). Secondly, the Ibero-American space is represented by Ibermedia, its institutional authority, the Conference of Ibero-American Cinematographic Activities (CAACI), and Ibero-American producers.

Data Analyzed					
Cultural Policies	Mercosur			Ibero-America	
	Mercosur	RECAM	AMP	Ibermedia	Interview
Rio Summit (1999)	Interregional Framework Cooperation Agreement (1995)	Creation of RECAM (2003)	AMP Agreement (2008)	Creation of Ibermedia (1997)	16 interviews (2021)
Unesco Convention (2005)	Protocol for Cultural Integration (1996)	37 minutes meetings (2003-2019)	Evaluation Report (2015)	13 Reports (2006-2021)	
European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World (2007)	Declaration of Mercosur Cultural Integration (2008)	13 Work plans (2003-2019)	Regional Indicative Programme (2007)	Agreement CAACI-EFAD (2016)	

Figure 2: Data collected and analyzed.

5. MERCOSUR: THE EU AS AN EXPERT

5.1. RECAM

Cooperation with the EU was mentioned in RECAM’s earlier documents where it aims to include the audiovisual sector in the future Mercosur - EU agreement. RECAM proposes a “transfer of experience on the preservation of film patrimony, information system, design and execution of policies and programs” (RECAM, 2004b, p.3). In the following meeting, RECAM “recommends that its representatives take notes

on the cooperation proposal suggested by the European Union” (Recam, 2004, p.4). This statement suggests the leadership of the EU.

The first mention of the EU was already indicating cooperation, and specifically, a transfer of expertise. Mercosur justifies the Audiovisual Mercosur Program because it was following the Mercosur external strategy in the promotion of cooperation and the “experience of the European Union as a donor of technical cooperation was interesting for Mercosur” (Mercosur, 2009, p.1) and the strengthening of audiovisual would collaborate to regional integration.

The documents evidenced that RECAM had a general vision of the EU, not specifying which part of the institution it would like to exchange with and not presenting any analysis of the EU audiovisual policies considering its achievements and challenges. RECAM refers to the EU as “European Union” and not a specific institution or audiovisual program. It also appears as “EU representative on the audiovisual sector” (RECAM, 2004, p.4), “audiovisual sector of the EU” (RECAM, 2005, p.3). Even the visit of the RECAM delegation was directed to the “European Union” (RECAM, 2004b, p.2). The most specific was the “audiovisual sector of the European Commission” (RECAM, 2005, p.3).

Besides the technical knowledge, RECAM also demonstrates an interest in the “transfer of resources” (RECAM, 2004b, p.2) and in developing a cooperation proposal based on “what was exposed by the EU representatives and the financial resources made available for that bloc to the cooperation” (RECAM, 2004b, p.2). Chile demonstrated interest in the projects that RECAM “projects with the EU resources” (RECAM, 2008, p.5) indicating the importance of access to resources from the EU. RECAM perceives cooperation as “an opportunity to advance in the construction of regional audiovisual policies” (RECAM, 2009, p.5). Thus, the main ideas implied in the perception of the EU were the expertise that it has, and the resources that it would provide.

5.2. Audiovisual Mercosur Program

The AMP was part of the Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) that was “focused entirely on supporting regional integration, preparing for the implementation of the future Association Agreement and trade-related assistance” (European Commission, 2007, p.4). The program was divided into three priorities: Priority 1: support for Mercosur institutionalization, Priority 2: support for the deepening of Mercosur and implementation of the future EU-Mercosur Association Agreement, and Priority 3: efforts to strengthen civil society participation, knowledge of the regional integration process, mutual understanding and mutual visibility (European Commission, 2007, p.5).

The AMP is part of Priority 3 that also aimed to improve the perception of the EU in Mercosur society, which only sees it as a trade partner “while awareness of the EU as a political entity and knowledge of its integration history and programs are

very low” (European Commission, 2007, p.25). Thus, this program focuses on “creating increased awareness amongst future opinion makers and shapers through EU assistance (which) could potentially create aspirations to emulate and imitate the EU successes” (European Commission, 2007, p.25).

All the priorities were based on the idea of the EU as an expert in supranational integration where “the unique EU experience in the different fields of integration would give a special added value to the process” (European Commission, 2007, p.24). Then, the actions were focused on “the transfer of know-how” (European Commission, 2007, p.29), “transfer of EC experience” (European Commission, 2007, p.31), proposing “technical assistance and training” (European Commission, 2007, p.31), and “providing expertise and assistance for all issues relating to regional integration, the EU experience and the transfer of this experience” (European Commission, 2007, p.36). Thus, the AMP was based on the same transfer ideas and the proposal was centered around the idea of “setting up of a Mercosur Media Programme based on the EU MEDIA Programme” (European Commission, 2007, p.38).

This proposal is aligned with the ideas present in the RIP, where the EU promotes itself as a donor of expertise. However, this was not debated in the RECAM meetings. The documents did not indicate any analysis of the EU media policy or reflection on the results and challenges. No other audiovisual policy was taken into account. This indicates a movement that followed Mercosur's external policy promoted by the EU.

The AMP was perceived as coherent with other EU audiovisual programs, such as MEDIA, MEDIA Internacional, and other cooperation programs, such as Euromed (Mercosur, 2008, p.23). The AMP mentions the EU programs, but did not elaborate or explain to which extent the AMP would create a dialogue with these programs. Then, the goals established were there to “promote the sense of belonging in Mercosur through the access of their own audiovisual cultural contents” and focused on “strengthening the audiovisual as an instrument to favor the regional integration process” (Mercosur, 2008, p.24). These goals were related to the PIR and the Protocol for Cultural Integration, in the understanding of culture as a tool to boost integration, but it remains vague how these goals would be drawn from the EU MEDIA Program. Thus, even though the idea of the EU as an expert on supranational audiovisual policies was strongly evidenced in the documents, the operationalization of this expertise remained unclear and leaves us with certain unanswered questions such as: what are the instruments that the EU uses to implement its policies, or what are some of the concrete achievements that the EU can promote?

6. IBERO-AMERICAN AUDIOVISUAL SPACE: THE EU AS A PARTNER

The construction of a common audiovisual space in Mercosur overlaps with the debate at the Ibero-American level since the main Mercosur stakeholders are also engaged in this broader space. The idea of an Ibero-American audiovisual space is a long-lasting project that aims to create supranational mechanisms to integrate the

cinematographies in the region (Dominguez, 2008; Getino, 2007). This project was largely debated and the outcome of this bottom-up process was the creation of the Conference of Ibero-American Cinematographic Activities (CAACI) in 1989, and the Ibermedia Program in 1997.

Ibermedia is a development program to strengthen the Ibero-American market by funding audiovisual projects, mainly focused on co-productions. Today, it involves 23 member states: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Italy, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Ibermedia was inspired by the European MEDIA Program (Camacho, 2016; Fali-cov, 2012) since the EU supranational audiovisual policies were positively evaluated (Segib, 2009, p.27). When Ibermedia was founded, the idea was to “take as a model the supranational audiovisual integration policy, developed in Europe with the same purpose and positioning: to promote and consolidate a film and audiovisual industry that can compete in the markets with the North American giant” (Segib, 2009, p.27).

The ideas associated with the EU are related to the cultural diversity discourse on protecting the audiovisual industry because of its cultural and economic value. Even though the EU provided the initial inspiration for the founding of Ibermedia, there are almost no further mentions of the EU in any other Ibermedia documents, except for one excerpt from the topic of media literacy (Segib, 2014, p.12). Even there, the EU was only mentioned as an actor that promotes this topic and was not mentioned or described as a model to be followed.

Recently, CAACI and the European Film Agency Directors (EFAD) signed a joint declaration, expressing their wish to cooperate. This dialogue is reported by Ibermedia as “natural and needed” (SEGIB, 2016, p.61) since the two regions would be stronger in working together to promote their values. These values concern mainly the protection of cultural diversity. It also reveals that the dialogue was inspired by the hesitancy of the producers regarding the European Commission agenda for a Digital Single Market that could impact the co-productions among the regions if the EU decides to propose a regulation based on the exploitation of works on a territory-by-territory basis. Thus, it is motivated by the producer’s interests in guaranteeing market access.

This cooperation declaration is based on the 2005 UNESCO Convention, agreeing on the cultural and economic value of audiovisual products as well as pointing out the need to assure cultural diversity in the digital context. The joint declaration recognized that “Europe and Latin America share the same ambition for their audiovisual industries” (CAACI, 2016, p.1), and based on the same values of “cultural diversity, identity, and intercultural dialogue” (CAACI, 2016, p.1), “they require regulatory frameworks from Governments to deliver fair and balanced economic and cultural relations” (CAACI, 2016, p.1).

Then, a series of proposals were presented aiming to foster co-productions and promote the distribution and circulation of these co-productions. The proposals

were clear, indicating a specific EU institution related to the topic proposed and mentioning the goal that was to be achieved through the cooperation, evidencing knowledge of the EU audiovisual policies. Here, the EU is seen as a partner, and the dialogue is marked by “cooperation and exchange” (CAACI, 2016, p.2), where the EU can also be “inspired by CACI’s successful experience with the Ibermedia TV initiative (CAACI, 2016, p.3). Thus, there is a commitment to “establish regular communication” (CAACI, 2016, p.3) and to cooperate, but without the transfer idea.

The interviews with Ibero-American producers revealed an openness to cooperation with the EU. All the interviewees consider the EU a strategic partner to the development of the Ibero-American audiovisual sector. The ideas are mostly associated with “audiovisual policies to strengthen diversity” (Respondent 3, Producer from Paraguay) where “the debate should be focused on public policies that aim to strengthen diversity and not just market-oriented (Respondent 3, Producer from Paraguay). The EU is seen as a strong investor in its audiovisual sector with interesting policies in “cultural education and media literacy” (Respondent 2, Producer and Director from Ecuador). Thus, it is perceived as having a “high capacity of political interference” (Respondent 9, Producer and Director from Guatemala) in a combination of “political and economic influence” (Respondent 10, Representant of EGEDA² from Spain).

There was also some criticism on the EU relationships with the Ibero-American audiovisual sector where the EU is perceived as having an “erratic participation that lacks continuity” (Respondent 10, Representative of EGEDA from Spain). Another critique is the lack of direct investment by the European producers:

“The Europeans never invest in Latin-American cinema. When they search for movies to co-produce they just do it after receiving public funding, they did not anticipate the resources, there is no equity. So we can not think that the European producers are financing the Latin-American cinema, they finance themselves, and one part of this funding they put in the movie. But the final donor is the statal funding.” (Respondent 1, Producer from Chile).

Thus, the public fundings for co-production played an important role and the producers generally advocate for the creation of interregional funds between Ibero-American and European producers (Respondent 4, Producer and Director from Portugal; Respondent 6, Producer from Argentina; Respondent 10, Representative of EGEDA from Spain; Respondent 13, Producer from Colombia; Respondent 14, Producer and Director from Mexico; Respondent 16, Producer and Director from Peru) because the main idea for cooperation is through film co-production. They see the cooperation as an opportunity to increase co-productions, and consequently have more “access to funding” (Respondent 1, Producer from Chile; Respondent 6, Producer from

2 Association of Services for Audiovisual Producers

Argentina; Respondent 7, Producer and Director from Costa Rica; Respondent 8, Producer from Spain). They also see co-production as valuable to increase distribution opportunities (Respondent 7, Producer and Director from Costa Rica; Respondent 8, Producer from Spain), access to festivals (Respondent 5, Producer and Director from Bolivia; Respondent 7, Producer and Director from Costa Rica), and international market (Respondent 12, Producer and Director from Brazil; Respondent 15, Producer and Director from Panama).

Then, co-production is perceived as a tool to strengthen the audiovisual market and would be beneficial for both regions. The EU is perceived as an opportunity to collaborate where “everybody wins” (Respondent 4, Producer and Director from Portugal), since “the EU searches for good stories in Latin America” (Respondent 5, Producer and Director from Bolivia), and “would gain access to the Latin-American market” (Respondent 15, Producer and Director from Panama), so “it is not a help, the EU also needs market” (Respondent 11, Producer and Director from Dominican Republic).

The unanimous claim for strengthening dialogue with the EU shows that it is still an important actor in the Latin-American audiovisual sector. For the producers, the EU is perceived more as an opportunity to access funding for co-productions than as a model, and none of the interviewees mentioned the idea of transferring the EU audiovisual policies or the EU expertise.

7. DIFFERENT SHAPES FOR AN ABSTRACT MODEL

The findings evidence a difference in the perception of the EU at RECAM and the Ibermedia program. The EU aims to transfer the expertise to Mercosur to further develop a trade agreement with Mercosur. Several cooperations were signed with this purpose, impacting the Mercosur development (Dri, 2010). The EU effort towards Mercosur was aligned with its external policy that seeks to export its supranational model to increase its own legitimacy (Radaelli, 2000; Santander, 2001). The EU was also worried about its perception in Latin America and wants for the AMP to improve its image in the Mercosur society. Thus, the EU led the cooperation and invested in the region, which in return served as a motivation to RECAM which engaged in a transfer, because it considered this to be an opportunity to access material resources. Although the resources provided by the EU were limited (1.860.000 euro), they were attractive for RECAM considering its restricted budget (M.R. Fernandes et al., 2020). In the Ibero-American context, producers also highlighted the interest in accessing funding for co-productions. This is in line with Serban and Harutyunyan's (2020) argument that interest in resources plays a significant role in the Latin-American perception of the EU.

For Mercosur, the EU served from the beginning as a reference for supranational policy, attesting its perceived legitimacy (Olsen, 2002). The cooperation with the EU also increases the Mercosur legitimacy since it is engaging with a consolidated

institution (Medeiros et al., 2015). The same can be said about RECAM, where cooperation with the EU would increase its legitimacy and institutionalization. Thus, the search for increasing legitimacy played a role in the cooperation on both sides.

RECAM followed the Mercosur movement as it looked to the EU as a model. The AMP was based on the transfer idea that was part of a broader project to transfer EU expertise. The documents analyzed revealed a lack of clear understanding of the EU audiovisual policy since it did not present any study about it neither concrete strategies to translate the EU audiovisual policies to the Mercosur context. It does not mean that the EU had no achievements in that field. It does mean, however, that RECAM did not critically reflect before deciding to engage in a policy transfer, which resulted in incremental achievements (Canedo et al., 2015). This unreflected transfer indicates the perceived legitimacy of the EU (Olsen, 2002) where the audiovisual policies are perceived as functional even without studies. It also suggests a broader aspirational movement of Mercosur's integration project having the EU as a leading light.

The perceived match is mainly related to the ideas of the understanding of audiovisual as cultural and economic products that need protection based on the cultural diversity argument. However, convergence on the discourse did not guarantee the adoption of the same policies (Radaelli, 2008).

In the RECAM policy documents, the EU is always referred to as a whole, without any mention of a specific program or policy. Thus, RECAM perceived the EU as a political and cultural bloc without any nuances. RECAM looked to the EU as a model but it was not clear what model, if it is related to goals, to specific achievements, or just with the idea of cultural diversity protection. The EU was basically interpreted as a hermetic model and was not perceived completely, and consequently provided RECAM with a vague model that in its lack of concreteness can never be achieved, evidencing more an aspiration movement than an engagement in a learning process (Armstrong, 2006).

Without a clear definition, "the 'model' that emerges from Europe is idiosyncratic, subjective and contradictory" (Pratt, 2009, p.19), and it can be perceived in different ways. For RECAM, the EU is seen as an expert where Mercosur could draw or copy from. However, this perception mainly happens on the political level that is marked by a strong rhetoric character with a low capacity to translate into concrete achievements (Malamud, 2005). From a bottom perspective, the interviews with producers did not indicate the same perception of the EU.

On the Ibero-American level, the EU was also indicated as a model. However, here the reference was more specific: the Ibermedia program should be drawn from the EU MEDIA Program. The EU supranational audiovisual policies are perceived as a counterpoint to the US hegemony and the Ibero-Americans would like to follow the same purpose. Besides the concrete references, Ibermedia develops without the interference of the EU as a model. The documents did not further pursue this purpose and the transfer idea was never proposed. The recent dialogue between the two regions is based on exchange and cooperation discourse where both shared the same

ideas to develop the audiovisual sector. The Ibero-American producers perceive the EU as a strategic partner who could strengthen the audiovisual market by promoting co-production in a relationship that would be beneficial for both.

The Ibero-American space did not have a previous relationship with the EU, as is the case of Mercosur. Some of the countries' members are also part of the EU, such as Spain and Portugal, which could provide a better knowledge of the EU policies and influence the perception of it inside the Ibero-American space. Then, the Ibermedia perception of the EU is based on ideas, that can generate different kinds of dialogue.

Ibermedia is the result of a bottom-up process and it maintains the engagement with its stakeholders (Camacho, 2016; Moguillansky, 2019). Thus, the ideas of the producers are also reflected in the Ibermedia policies. The ideas towards the EU also reflect this bottom-up character, where the producers propose a dialogue based on co-production that could be beneficial for both parties, and an exchange of experience where the EU can also learn from Latin America. The Ibero-American position towards the EU contrasts with the Mercosur top-down approach developed at the political level where RECAM followed a previous EU - Mercosur agreement.

9. CONCLUSION

The findings evidenced that the EU is perceived differently at RECAM and Ibermedia. At RECAM, the EU is perceived as an expert and a model to be followed where dialogue was based on the transfer idea following a broader Mercosur - EU relationship. RECAM aimed to access resources and did not develop a clear investigation of the EU audiovisual policy, where the EU remains an abstract model.

At Ibermedia, the EU was initially pointed out as a model, but later was perceived as a partner. The dialogue is based on cooperation that is perceived to be beneficial for both regions. There is a clear understanding of the EU audiovisual policies and the stakeholders aim to access resources for co-production and consequently gain market access.

In both programs, the values are based on the cultural diversity principle and access to resources played an important role. However, the perception of the EU, the goal of establishing a relationship with it, and the form of dialogue differ.

Thus, the results indicate different perceptions of the EU since it is not a defined concept, in the sense that it can be mobilized according to the context. This exploratory study can motivate further investigations through assessment on how the EU is perceived differently at Mercosur and the Ibero-American space and how distinct perceptions influence the policy choices and impact the implementation of cooperations.

The EU definitely plays a role in shaping audiovisual policies in Latin America. It is nowadays still an important actor with a good fit in regard to the ideas. The regions can benefit from cooperation, but first, it is essential to have a clear definition of the EU and a critical analysis of it. It is recommended to define which EU institutions

would be engaged, what the goals are and the benefits of doing that, and what kind of cooperation would be promoted. In doing so, the EU can be translated into a clear goal and can help to avoid its perception as a hermetic giant in whose footsteps international cultural institutions should follow.

REFERENCES

- Armstrong, K. A. (2006). The “Europeanisation” of social exclusion: British adaptation to EU co-ordination. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 8(1), 79–100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2006.00223.x>
- Börzel, T. A., & Risse, T. (2000). When Europe Hits Home: Europeanization and Domestic Change. *European Integration Online Papers*, 4(15), 1–20.
- CAACI. (2016). *EFADs-CACI High Level Meeting, Toulouse*.
- Camacho, M. Y. (2016). *El espacio audiovisual iberoamericano (EAI): un proyecto regional*. Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora.
- Canedo, D. (2016). Identidade, diversidade e pertencimento como Recursos da integração regional: políticas culturais na agenda latino-americana e europeia. *XII Enecult*, 16.
- Canedo, D., & Crusafon, C. (2014). The European audiovisual policy goes abroad: The case of inter-regional cooperation with Mercosur. In K. Donders, C. Pauwels, & J. Loisen (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of European Media Policy* (pp. 526–541). <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137032195>
- Canedo, D. P., Loiola, E., & Pauwels, C. (2015). A Recam e a Política Cinematográfica do Mercosul: Promoção da Integração Regional e da Diversidade Cultural? *Políticas Culturais Em Revista*, 1(8), 2–20.
- Cerutti, F., & Lucarelli, S. (2008). *The Search for a European Identity: Values, Policies and Legitimacy of the European Union*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203926772>
- Chaban, N., Elgström, O., Kelly, S., & Yi, L. S. (2013). Images of the EU beyond its Borders: Issue-Specific and Regional Perceptions of European Union Power and Leadership. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51(3), 433–451. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12004>
- Crusafon, C. (2009). La política audiovisual del MERCOSUR y la influencia del modelo europeo. *Cuadernos de Información*, 25(1), 93–104.
- Crusafon, C. (2015). How European Media Policy Has Set the Pace of Its Development. In H. A. Bondebjerg I., Redvall E.N. (Ed.), *European Cinema and Television*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- de Beus, J. (2010). The European Union and the Public Sphere: Conceptual Issues, Political Tensions, Moral Concerns, and Empirical Questions. In R. Koopmans & P. Statham (Eds.), *The Making of a European Public Sphere*. Cambridge University Press.

- Dominguez, J. M. M. (2008). Diversidad audiovisual e integración cultural: analizando el programa Ibermedia. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 9, 95–118.
- Domínguez, J. M. M., & Montero, D. (2009). Europe as a partner. *Global Media and Communication*, 5(1), 77–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766508101315>
- Dri, C. F. (2010). Limits of the Institutional Mimesis of the European Union: The Case of the Mercosur Parliament. *Latin American Policy*, 1(1), 52–74. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-7373.2010.00004.x>
- European Commission. (2007). *Mercosur Regional Strategy Paper 2007-2013* (Vol. 2007). <https://doi.org/10.1093/rpd/ncr264>
- Falicov, T. L. (2012). Programa Ibermedia: Cine Transnacional Ibero-Americano O Relaciones Públicas Para España? *Revista Reflexiones*, 91(1), 299–312.
- Fernandes, M.R., Loisen, J., & Donders, K. (2020). Mercosur caught between lofty ambitions and modest achievements: a critical analysis of 16 years of audiovisual policy-making. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2020.1786544>
- Fernandes, M. R., Loisen, J., & Donders, K. (2021). Audiovisual policy transfer between Mercosur and the European Union has gone offtrack. *International Communication Gazette*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485211052169>
- Fioramonti, L., & Poletti, A. (2008). Facing the Giant: Southern perspectives on the European Union. *Third World Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590701762900>
- Getino, O. (2007). *Cine iberoamericano: Los desafíos del nuevo siglo*. Buenos Aires: CICCUS.
- González, L. (2020). Los 20 años del Programa Ibermedia: consolidación y nuevas dinámicas de cooperación para el cine iberoamericano. *Revista Eptic*, 22(3).
- Herzog, C., & Ali, C. (2015). Elite interviewing in media and communications policy research. *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, 11(1), 37–54. https://doi.org/10.1386/macp.11.1.37_1
- Loisen, J., & De Ville, F. (2011). The EU-Korea Protocol on Cultural Cooperation: Toward Cultural Diversity or Cultural Deficit? *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 254–271.
- Lucarelli, S., & Fioramonti, L. (2010). External perceptions of the European Union as a global actor. In S. Lucarelli & L. Fioramonti (Eds.), *External Perceptions of the European Union as a Global Actor*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203866917>
- Malamud, A. (2005). Mercosur Turns 15: Between rising rhetoric and declining achievement. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 18(3), 421–436. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570500238068>
- Manners, I. (2002). Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms? *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40(2), 235–258.
- Medeiros, M. de A., Meunier, I., & Cockles, M. (2015). Processos de Difusão Política e Legitimidade no Mercosul: Mimetismo Institucional e Mecanismos de

- Internalização de Normas Comunitárias. *Contexto Internacional*, 37(2), 537–570. <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0102-85292015000200007>
- Mercosul. *Protocolo de Integração Cultural do Mercosul.*, (1996).
- Mercosul. *Declaración de Integración Cultural del Mercosul.*, (2008).
- Mercosur. (2003). *Reunión especializada de autoridades cinematográficas y audiovisuales del Mercosur.*
- Mercosur. *Convenio de Financiación entre la Comunidad Europea y el Mercosur: Programa Mercosur Audiovisual.*, Pub. L. No. DCI-ALA/2008/020-297, 47 (2008).
- Mercosur. *Convenio de Financiación para El Proyecto “Programa Mercosur Audiovisual DCI-ALA /2008/020-297.*, (2009).
- Moguillansky, M. (2011). *Pantallas del Sur. La Integración Cinematográfica en el MERCOSUR.* Universidad de Buenos Aires.
- Moguillansky, M. (2019). Ibermedia, crisis y después: Acerca de las transformaciones recientes de la coproducción iberoamericana. *Archivos de La Filmoteca*, 76(1), 21–34.
- Olsen, J. P. (2002). The Many Faces of Europeanization. *JCMS*, 40(5), 921–952.
- Pecequilo, C. S. (2014). Brazil and the European Union: Partner, model or threat? In S. Cremer, Marjolein; Mors (Ed.), *The Dwarfing of Europe? A dialogue between Brazil, India, China and Europe* (Vol. 2, pp. 55–66). Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation.
- Portolés, J. B. (2019). Boosting EU-LAC Cultural Cooperation: Lessons learned from EU Programmes. In L. Bonet & H. Schargorodsky (Eds.), *The challenges of cultural relations between the European Unions and Latin America and the Caribbean* (pp. 51–83). Quaderns Gescènic.
- Pratt, A. C. (2009). Policy Transfer and the Field of the Cultural and Creative Industries: What Can Be Learned from Europe? In J. Kong L., O’Connor (Ed.), *Creative Economies, Creative Cities* (pp. 9–23). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9949-6>
- Radaelli, C. M. (2000). Policy transfer in the European Union: Institutional isomorphism as a source of legitimacy. *Governance*, 13(1), 25–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0952-1895.00122>
- Radaelli, C. M. (2008). Europeanization, Policy Learning, and New Modes of Governance. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 10(3), 239–254. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13876980802231008>
- RECAM. (2004a). *I Reunión Especializada de Autoridades Cinematográficas y Audiovisuales* (Vol. 2004).
- RECAM. (2004b). *II Reunión Especializada de Autoridades Cinematográficas y Audiovisuales*. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/cbdv.200490137/abstract>
- RECAM. (2004c). *III Reunión Especializada de Autoridades Cinematográficas e Audiovisuais do Mercosul.*

- RECAM. (2004d). *IV Reunião Especializada de Autoridades Cinematográficas e Audiovisuais do Mercosul*. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/cbdv.200490137/abstract>
- RECAM. (2005a). *I Reunion Extraordinaria de La Reunion Especializada de Autoridades Cinematograficas y Audiovisuales de Mercosur y Paises Asociados*.
- RECAM. (2005b). *V Reunion Ordinaria de La Reunion Especializada de Autoridades Cinematograficas y Audiovisuales*.
- RECAM. (2008). *XIII Reunião Especializada de Autoridades Cinematográficas e Audiovisuais do Mercosul*.
- RECAM. (2009). *XV Reunion Ordinaria de La Reunion Especializada de Autoridades Cinematograficas y Audiovisuales Del Mercosur Recam*.
- Sanahuja, J. A., & Rodríguez, J. D. (2019). Veinte años de negociaciones Unión Europea - Mercosur: Del interregionalismo a la crisis de la globalización. In *Fundación Carolina* (Vol. 2019). <https://doi.org/10.33960/issn-e.1885-9119.dt13>
- Santander, Sebastian. (2005). The european partnership with mercosur: a relationship based on strategic and neo-liberal principles. *Journal of European Integration*, 27(3), 285–306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036330500190156>
- Santander, Sébastian. (2001). La légitimation de l'Union européenne par l'exportation de son modèle d'intégration et de gouvernance régionale. Le cas du Marché commun du sud. *Études Internationales*, 32(1), 51–67. <https://doi.org/10.7202/704256ar>
- SEGIB. (2009). *Evaluación Programa Ibermedia 1998 - 2008*.
- SEGIB. (2016). *Manual operativo*.
- Serban, I. D., & Harutyunyan, A. (2020). The European Union as an International Donor: Perceptions from Latin America and the Caribbean. *European Journal of Development Research*, (0123456789). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-020-00321-9>
- Söderbaum, F., StÅlgren, P., & Van Langenhove, L. (2005). The EU as a global actor and the dynamics of interregionalism: A comparative analysis. *Journal of European Integration*, 27(3), 365–380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036330500190297>
- Summit. (1999). EUROPEAN UNION - LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN SUMMIT.
- Van Audenhove, L., & Donders, K. (2019). Talking to People III: Expert Interviews and Elite Interviews. In H. Van, M. Puppis, K. Donders, & L. Van Audenhove (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Methods for Media Policy Research* (pp. 179–197). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16065-4_10
- Vlassis, A. (2016). European Commission, trade agreements and diversity of cultural expressions: Between autonomy and influence. *European Journal of Communication*, 31(4), 446–461. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323116655506>
- Vlassis, A. (2020). European Union and online platforms in global audiovisual politics and economy: Once Upon a Time in America? *International Communication Gazette*, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048520918496>