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*Published in:*  
Journalism Studies

*DOI (link to publication from Publisher):*  
[10.1080/1461670X.2015.1129285](https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1129285)

*Creative Commons License*  
Other

*Publication date:*  
2017

*Document Version*  
Accepted author manuscript, peer reviewed version

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Swart, J., Peters, C., & Broersma, M. (2017). Navigating cross-media news use: Media repertoires and the value of news in everyday life. *Journalism Studies*, 18(11), 1343-1362.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1129285>

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**NAVIGATING CROSS-MEDIA NEWS USE**  
**Media repertoires and the value of news in everyday life**

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**Citation:** Swart, J., Peters, C., & Broersma, M. (2016). Navigating cross-media news use: Media repertoires and the value of news in everyday life. *Journalism Studies*, (ahead-of-print), doi: 10.1080/1461670X.2015.1129285.

**Link:** <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1129285>

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# NAVIGATING CROSS-MEDIA NEWS USE

## Media repertoires and the value of news in everyday life

Joëlle Swart (University of Groningen), Chris Peters (Aalborg University Copenhagen), and  
Marcel Broersma (University of Groningen)

The current news media landscape is characterized by an abundance of digital outlets and increased opportunities for users to navigate news themselves. Yet, it is still unclear how people negotiate this fluctuating environment to decide which news media to select or ignore, how they assemble distinctive cross-media repertoires, and what makes these compositions meaningful. This article analyzes the value of different platforms, genres and practices in everyday life by mapping patterns of cross-media news use. Combining Q methodology with think-aloud protocols and day-in-the-life-interviews, five distinct news media repertoires are identified: 1) regionally-oriented 2) background-oriented 3) digital 4) laid-back and 5) nationally-oriented news use. Our findings indicate that users do not always use what they prefer, nor do they prefer what they use. Moreover, the boundaries they draw between news and other information are clearly shifting. Finally, our results show that in a world with a wide range of possibilities to consume news for free, paying for news can be considered an act of civic engagement. We argue that perceived news use and users' appreciation of news should be studied in relation to each other to gain a fuller understanding of what news consumption entails in this rapidly changing media landscape.

**Keywords:** audience studies; cross-media; digitalization; everyday life; media repertoires; news use; Q methodology; value

### Introduction

The current news media landscape is characterized by an abundance of information. Not only has digitalization resulted in a proliferation of available news sources, people now have more power to navigate the news content they want to use, when, where and how. Therefore, news users increasingly choose their own trajectories across the media landscape and follow the news on multiple media platforms (Picone, Courtois and Paulussen 2014). Previous studies have tried to map these changes in several ways. One possible avenue measures actual news use, employing quantitative measures such as web metrics analyses to track news users clicking behavior (e.g. Boczkowski and Mitchelstein 2013) and surveys to map self-declared usage rates (e.g. Mitchell, Holcomb, and Page 2013; Newman, Levy, and Nielsen 2015; Yuan 2011). Such studies address questions about which news outlets are most frequently used or on what stories users spend the most time. A second strand of research considers shifting user preferences, typically employing qualitative methods including interviews and focus groups to uncover the importance of news in users' everyday lives (e.g. Van Cauwenberge, d'Haenens, and Beentjes 2013; Zerba 2011).

Both lines of research then try to establish claims about what current news consumption looks like. However, by focusing on either patterns of perceived news media use *or* the perceived importance of platforms and outlets, one might not be able to grasp the complexity of news use. For instance, Chyi and Lee (2013) found that online newspaper users might actually prefer the print rather than digital newspaper format. Similarly, Chyi and Chadha (2012) noted that despite lowering circulation numbers, users still rated print newspapers as more enjoyable for news than smartphones, e-readers, desktops and laptops. And although 68% of smartphone owners use

their phones to follow breaking news, it leads to mixed experiences: users feel productive and happy, but also report distraction, frustration and anger when using the device (Smith 2015). In short, device use does not necessarily bear close affinity to preference.

This paper therefore combines the study of cross-media news use with an analysis of the perceived importance of news media, using a media repertoire approach (Hasebrink and Popp 2006). Previous studies tend to approach repertoires in a somewhat delimited manner, distinguishing based on users' media device preferences (Hasebrink and Domeyer 2012), ideologies (Edgerly 2015), topics (Yuan 2011), or genres, brands or frequencies of use (Trilling and Schoenbach 2013). While all productive entry points, this paper instead employs a broader notion of *value* to encapsulate a wide range of potential factors. It identifies a complex interplay of influences and multifaceted dynamics and thus evaluates the meanings of news repertoires for users in two ways. First, using Q methodology with think-aloud protocols, we distinguish five distinct news media repertoires and discuss why users construct these specific combinations. Second, employing day-in-the-life and in-depth interviews, we augment this data with a cross-repertoire analysis, investigating the value that news and information have in users' everyday lives. The results from both avenues are then combined to further conceptualize the complex relationships between the use and appreciation of journalism in the digital age.

### Studying news use

Traditionally, news companies have focused on measuring exposure to media products to analyze audience behavior, tracking viewing rates or clicks (Napoli 2011). Even with recent rhetoric about news users as productive and generative entities, news institutions have – under the influence of datafication (Lewis 2014) – often reduced audiences to quantifiable aggregates, which have become easy to track online with detailed traffic metrics at news producers' disposal (Anderson 2011). The rapid proliferation of news media outlets and content in combination with users' limited attention span has resulted in an increasing interest in exposure studies: simply put, finding “hard data” on what audiences do and do not use (Webster 2011).

Media choice studies finding their origins in the uses and gratifications approach (see Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 1973) have tried to map the successfulness of different media amidst the heavy struggle for audience attention, by asking users to estimate the frequency or time investment of their news media use in absolute numbers (Yuan 2011). However, Prior (2009) demonstrated that measuring news media use via such surveys is problematic, because users tend to overestimate their own use up to eight times as high as their actual use. Therefore, to investigate perceived news use in a way that might be closer to people's actual use patterns, it is more fruitful to let users *rank* different news media *in relation to each other*, to measure perceived news use more accurately and, quite crucially, relationally. This underlies Q methodology research designs, which operationalize choices between possibilities relative to one another (see Watts and Stenner 2012).

In their work on the concept of polymedia, Madianou and Miller (2012) found that users tend to perceive media devices as a communicative environment of affordances. Users assess what different media can do for them in a given situation, how they complement each other and what social and emotional consequences their media choices have in different contexts. In a similar fashion, we might expect news media to be analyzed in relation to each other instead of individually. Much user research (e.g. Chyi and Lee 2013) tends to concentrate on the use of only a few news media, rather than the entire media landscape, and then only discretely rather than relationally (Helles et al. 2015; Yuan 2011). We argue that in order to fully understand how audiences experience news use, we should look at news consumption holistically. In this study,

we therefore conceptualize media use in terms of the entire, meaningfully structured composition of media a person regularly uses. We apply a media repertoires approach (Hasebrink and Popp 2006; Hasebrink and Domeyer 2012), analyzing how people combine different media technologies, brands, genres and products to structure their everyday life and fulfill their needs for information, entertainment, opinion formation, sociability and engagement. In other words, we ask which distinctive news media repertoires news users compose out of the media outlets that are available to them.

The question then becomes: what makes news repertoires valuable enough in news users' everyday lives to select these combinations of news media and to ignore others? Partly, the perceived importance of news media comes from its immediate relevance and usefulness to users, supporting both collective and individual interests (Picard 2010). News for example allows users to monitor current affairs so they can take action if events threaten to affect them (Schudson 1998) and different outlets can be more effective than others in fostering civic engagement, social interaction, and a sense of belonging (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham 2007). In addition, as Costera Meijer (2013) notes, users also want to enjoy journalism; some media outlets are undoubtedly preferred because they provide individuals with a more desirable emotional experience of involvement when they are consumed (Peters 2011). Topic can also play a role: scandal news, for instance, often draws people to an outlet because it provides moral dilemmas they can connect to their own experiences (Bird 2003), while local news has long been privileged by audiences for its immediate topical affinity, although the strength of this relationship is increasingly questioned (Nielsen 2015). Furthermore, news not only helps people to understand what is happening and their position in the world, it can have value in ways unrelated to its actual content. The act of consuming news helps structure and provide meaning within the flow of everyday life, and the rise of digital technologies creates new communicative spaces and patterns of engagement (Peters 2015).

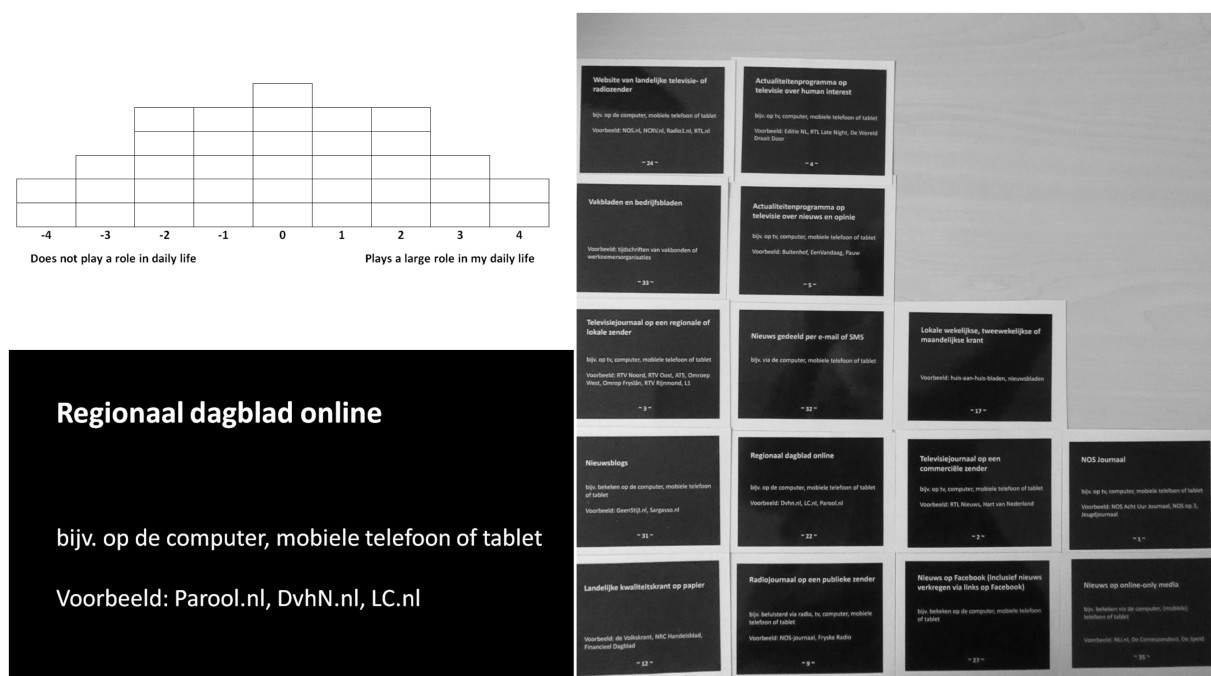
Schröder's (2015) notion of "perceived worthwhileness" attempts to capture the complex interrelationship of these factors underlying news media repertoires, focusing on time spent, situational fit, normative pressures, public connection possibilities, price, participatory potential, and technological appeal. In this article, we use a similarly broad conceptualization to investigate what makes news media valuable within individuals' repertoires and what role these configurations play in their daily lives. To understand the value of news requires to consider the meaning of user patterns and the motivations underlying the appreciation of news in concert.

## **Methodology**

Q methodology was used to discover patterns of opinions about the everyday value of news.<sup>1</sup> In this method, participants provide their viewpoints by ranking a set of items according to a subjective dimension, such as agree-disagree or important-unimportant, while thinking aloud. All 'Q Sorts' are then compared and contrasted through factor analysis, to identify participants' shared orientations to the topic (Michelle, Davis, and Vladica 2009; Watts and Stenner 2012).

Using quota sampling, we recruited 36 participants of mixed gender, age and educational level in three different regions.<sup>2</sup> Data was collected from October to December 2014, in three phases. First, in a 10-15 minute day-in-the-life interview, we asked participants to recall the previous work day and describe their news use from the moment they got up until they went to bed. This stage served to map participants' recall of daily news use without any prompts and prepared them to talk about their news values and experiences in the succeeding phases of the interview. Second, the respondents sorted a deck of 36 cards on a normally distributed grid while thinking aloud about their decision making criteria. The grid, displayed in Figure 1 below, ranged from "does

Q methodology is a mainly qualitative method that does not attempt to infer from a sample of people to the overall population of people, but instead selects a set of statements to represent a larger population of all possible opinions on a certain topic (Van Exel and De Graaf 2005). In our case, the set of 36 news media cards was designed to represent the entire media landscape. We carefully ensured that our Q set contained all possibly relevant news media in two ways: before data collection, our card deck was first tested in a small-scale pilot (n=5). Consequently, during data collection, participants were asked after each Q sorting whether any news media were missing from the card deck. Both procedures did not produce cause for adjustment.



Data analysis consisted of two parts. First, we calculated correlations between the 36 Q Sorts by performing a factor analysis in SPSS on the quantitative data of the card sorting exercise using principal component analysis and varimax rotation, resulting in a typology of five different news media repertoires.<sup>3</sup> The results of the factor analysis were then read alongside transcripts of the day-in-the-life-interview, think-aloud stage and semi-structured in-depth interview, to interpret these repertoires. Thus, our news repertoires are grounded in both the qualitative interviews *and* the quantitative card sorting data. Second, the day-in-the-life-interview and semi-structure in-depth interview were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006), allowing us to discover patterns in perceived importance of news across different media repertoires. Each interview was coded line-by-line in Atlas.TI to generate a list of initial codes, of which the most frequent then were tested against the total set of interviews to develop focused codes. From these focused codes, theoretical codes were formed and tested. This process resulted in three key

insights. Below, we first address the media repertoires that were found. Then, we continue to discuss the overall conclusions that can be drawn from the qualitative data set.

## Media repertoires

With the help of the factor analysis, we distinguished five different news media repertoires: regionally-oriented news use, background-oriented news use, digital news use, laid-back news use and nationally-oriented news use. The repertoires and their characteristics are displayed below in Table 1. Appendix I lists the Q Sort values for each card for each news media repertoire.

News repertoire	Regionally-oriented	Background-oriented	Digital	Laid-back	Nationally-oriented
<i>Characteristics</i>					
<i>Most important news media</i>	Regional dailies, regional or local TV, text TV, radio broadcast on public channels, TV broadcast on public channels	Quality newspapers print and online, news magazines print and online, TV broadcast on public channels	Online-born news media, websites of broadcasters, quality newspaper online, international news websites	Facebook, free local print newspapers, professional magazines, TV broadcast on public channels	Light TV current affairs programs, TV broadcast on commercial channels, Facebook, quality print newspaper
<i>Least important news media</i>	Twitter, Facebook, other social media, news magazines online, quality newspapers online, light TV current affairs programs	Text TV, Facebook, free print newspaper, radio broadcast on public channel, news via email or text messaging	Facebook, popular and quality print newspapers, free newspaper online, radio broadcast commercial channels	News via news aggregators and personalized news services, free newspaper online, international news websites	TV broadcast on 24 hour news channels, text TV, local newspapers print and online, international TV broadcast
<i>Geographic focus</i>	Regional	National and international	National and international	Regional and national	National
<i>Motivation to use news</i>	Civic duty	Education and social connection (active)	Compulsion and opinion formation	Monitoring and social connection (as side-effect)	Entertainment and social connection (integrative)
<i>Value of news use</i>	Structure everyday life	Knowledge and understanding	Awareness and engagement	Basic personal awareness and security	Relaxation
<i>Likelihood to pay for news</i>	Average - high	High - very high	Average - high	Very low - low	Average - high
<i>Mode of news use</i>	Lean-back	Lean-forward	Lean-forward	Lean-back	Lean-back
<i>Demographics</i>	Age 35+, lower educated	Age 35+, lower educated	Age 35-, male, higher educated	Age 35-, regional city	Female, capital city

**Table 1:** Media repertoires and key thematic characteristics

### 1. Regionally-oriented news use

Respondents with the regionally-oriented news use repertoire scored relatively high on the perceived importance of regional newspapers and regional television, along with text TV and

national TV and radio broadcasts on public channels. Lowest ranked all three social media cards, the websites of news magazines and online quality newspapers.

Analyzing the day-in-the-life interviews, regionally-oriented participants appeared to have strikingly habitual ways of using news. When asked to describe yesterday's news use, they naturally transitioned into describing a typical daily use pattern instead. Radio and television programs were mentioned by broadcasting time rather than by name. Even though participants with this media repertoire owned interactive TV, tablets and smartphones, they rarely utilized these platforms: instead of watching on demand, they rather sat down for the 8 o'clock news every evening. Despite their sometimes decades-long traditions of media use, these participants found their news media choices difficult to explain. René (63) for instance explained his 40-years subscription to regional daily *Dagblad van het Noorden* for example by saying: "That's just part of it. That's just part of your experience of the day."<sup>3</sup>

Participants with this repertoire considered regional news providers important because the events these report were perceived to have a higher impact on their everyday life. Ivo (51), living in an area that endures frequent earthquakes due to the onshore gas drillings that provide a substantial source of income for the Dutch government, said: "The last earthquake happened just two, three kilometers away. The news, what's happening in these surroundings, it affects you. Something happening abroad, that can be awful or important too, but it doesn't affect you that much." These participants also felt it was easier to relate to news happening close by, because regional news was more likely to feature people and places that they knew and recognized. Karen (55) felt the free local newspapers, delivered door-to-door, were essential for her to keep up: "When you live in a village, there's more to find in a local than a regular newspaper, because its focus is more regional. Regular newspapers focus on Groningen or Delfzijl or whatever, so when you live in a village, you really need that local newspaper."

## 2. Background-oriented news use

Participants with the background-oriented news media repertoire showed a preference for quality newspapers, weekly news magazines and serious current affairs TV programs. Notably, international news broadcasts and international news organization websites were ranked higher than in all other groups. Of perceived little importance were text TV, Facebook and the public channel radio news broadcast.

Background-oriented participants easily drew connections between what was happening in the world and their own lives, naming both regional (earthquake damage), national (increase in burglaries) and international issues (oil prices). Following the news allowed participants to make sense of what they perceived as an increasingly complex society, where issues in different parts of the world become increasingly entwined. Participants with this repertoire enjoyed learning something new. For them, news was not so much about hearing about breaking events, but more about gaining knowledge about the world and connecting to public issues in general. Such issues were frequently discussed with others, both face-to-face and online.

These news users preferred to consume news in a lean-forward rather than lean-back mode. Vincent (71) and Frans (49) for example said they disliked services such as push messages or RSS feeds: they would rather visit websites to check for news themselves, because they felt an urge to be in control of their news use to deal with the abundance of available information. Edwin (37) didn't follow any news organizations on Facebook and didn't subscribe to Whatsapp news services for the same reason: "I choose not to, because I keep myself up-to-date about news and information proactively. I don't need to be reminded about it, because I do it anyway." He



perceived smartphone notifications as intrusive: “In the middle of a meeting, in the middle of a conversation, a business call, then it fails to achieve its goal. Then it doesn’t pull me in, but pushes me away. I look at it when I want to.”

### *3. Digital news use*

The distinguishing medium for the digital news use repertoire was news from online-born media. Websites of national and local broadcasters, online quality newspapers and websites of international news organizations also ranked high. Commercial radio broadcasts, print popular and quality newspapers, free online newspapers and Facebook scored lowest.

Participants with this repertoire noted that news felt like an addiction: its negativity gives you a bad feeling, yet it is extremely difficult to break away from. Participants in this group in the day-in-the-life interviews said to frequently visit a fixed number of 3-5 websites and apps in a fixed order. These “checking cycles” (Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink 2014) contained relatively many online-born news media - i.e. media without a traditional print or broadcast counterpart - the distinctive news medium within this repertoire. Contrary to participants with other media repertoires, digital news users showed little attachment to legacy news media brands. Traditional and online-born news sources, national and international, were mixed and then compared to get a full picture of world events.

Users with this repertoire had a very critical attitude towards the news and questioned the objectivity of the news media they used, both traditional and new. However, perceived subjectivity wasn’t a reason to avoid news media: in their opinion, such news media were still valuable because it allowed them to understand the viewpoint of the other. Daniël (33): “I think it’s funny to see how certain news events and items are being addressed differently. That’s just interesting. The whole Syria thing, making Assad looking bad... When you read news from another spectrum everything is totally turned upside down. Then it is interesting: what’s true and isn’t?”

For digital news users, using the news was an individual practice. Lars (28): “For me, it’s absolutely not the social component. [...] That people watch news to discuss it with others the next day, then I think: really? [...] I really can’t imagine that.” Although participants with this repertoire were very much politically engaged – albeit in a “micropolitical” rather than traditional fashion (see Banaji and Buckingham 2013) – most of them hardly discussed the news with others, distinguishing them from those in other repertoires.

### *4. Laid-back news use*

The laid-back news media repertoire was characterized by media that allow the news to come to you, such as Facebook, free local newspapers and professional magazines at work. Regionally oriented media were ranked relatively high. Sorted lowest were news aggregators, personalized news services and news portals, which take some effort to set up and require active choices.

Participants in this group had relatively little interest in news. Kevin (30) for instance felt the topics portrayed in the news had little relevance to his own life: “You can’t change a thing of what has happened. You don’t do anything with it. It doesn’t affect what I do myself.” Because of their low interest in news, these users didn’t want to spend too much effort on it, and if they used news media, these had to be very easy to use. Although news websites and apps might be perceived as low-effort news media by journalist professionals, these users experienced this

differently. Kevin: “Online might sounds easier, but it’s not comfortable to read. You have to search for news, instead of it being presented to you. I don’t like that.”

Users with the laid-back news media repertoire were typical monitorial citizens (Schudson 1998): they monitored the news so that they would be alerted in case an event would happen that required them to take action. Nadine (29) for instance said to follow the news to know “what is about to go wrong. What they expect will happen.” Knowing that nothing bad had happened in areas affecting their life-worlds was comforting and provided a sense of security.

For these users, following the news is very much a social experience. Costera Meijer (2006) describes how young people see news as an important basic service, which they hardly use because if it’s really important, they’ll hear about it from others. These participants had a similar way of consuming news, but ten years later with the rise of social media, such news sharing had become far more mediated. For example Evert (26) wasn’t very interested in news and did not visit many news websites himself. However, he regularly encountered news on Facebook in his timeline, because his friends shared news stories. Reading the headlines of these stories and occasionally clicking one or two was sufficient to keep up to date about big news events happening, without having to actively search for news. Similarly, Whatsapp was found to be an increasingly important means to receive, share and discuss news with friends, colleagues and family in a more private setting.

#### *5. Nationally-oriented news use*

Participants with the nationally-oriented media repertoire ranked highest on quality print newspapers, TV news broadcasts on commercial channels, light current affairs TV programs and Facebook. Websites of popular newspapers and radio broadcasts on commercial channels also ranked relatively high compared to other news media repertoires. Local newspapers and 24-hours news broadcasts ranked lowest.

For participants in this group, the news was a way to relax, at home or as a break in between difficult tasks at work. Light news media were perceived to meet these needs for relaxation and diversion best. Marina (41) for instance enjoyed checking the website of popular newspaper De Telegraaf: “It’s popular and so I read it. It’s very easy to read. When I’m at work, I rather read De Telegraaf than de Volkskrant, because otherwise you have to think about it and you only have five minutes.”

The relatively high ranking of popular and light news media does not mean that these participants were uninterested in hard news topics such as politics or economics. Many of them engaged in political activities: they just used other sources to do so than the background-oriented and digital news users. A mix of serious and light news media was also helpful in establishing everyday connections. Nina (30) mentioned reading the newspaper gave her confidence: “Let’s say we meet each other in the train, that you just know what is going on. For work, it’s extra, there I certainly cannot be running behind.” To be able to talk along with others at the hairdresser, at work or elsewhere, respondents combined popular and quality newspapers, serious and light TV current affairs shows, and gossip news and more traditional news genres into one very diverse media repertoire.

## Cross-repertoire analysis

### *News media use isn't equal to news media appreciation*

Next to analyzing each individual media repertoire, we also performed a qualitative analysis of the data set as a whole, to draw conclusions about the value of news that ran across repertoires. Firstly, a comparison of the results of the day-in-the-life interview with the card sorting exercise and think-aloud protocol highlighted an interesting discrepancy: participants' perceived importance of news media (i.e. media they ranked as playing the largest role in their daily life) did not fully match their perceived news consumption (i.e. media they said to use the most). Even though most participants used news media in a very habitual manner, they did not always *enjoy* the news media in these routines. On the contrary: participants frequently accused news media they used of being unreliable, out of touch with their own political views, too negative, too boring, too expensive, too complicated to understand or delivered infrequently. Yet, despite these complaints, they continued to use them.

In practice, it appeared to be very difficult to break with news habits, because these are so closely embedded in news users' everyday lives. This effect was strengthened by the fact that news use, except for participants with the digital news repertoire, was a social activity. Couples listened to the radio news bulletin together while waking up and shared newspapers with family and neighbors. Bart (62): "I'm not too fond of *Dagblad van het Noorden* when it comes to news. [...] We've been talking about ending our subscription, because we can read it online too. [...] But on Saturdays, it's relaxing to have a newspaper on your doorstep in the morning, reading during breakfast." Apparently, continued situational fit, availability and accessibility of a news medium can prolong a news habit for a long time, even when news preferences change.

Therefore, we analyzed users' motives for use and importance separately, to unpack this apparent paradox. In the in-depth interviews, participants emphasized six main reasons to decide to use a news medium or to use a news medium more frequently than others. First, one must be *familiar* with the specific news medium. This might seem obvious, but as Ronald (76) mentioned, the proliferation of available news outlets is so rapid that for news users, it is almost impossible to keep up with all the new websites and apps published every day. Second, there must be a *relative advantage* for the user: the benefits should outweigh the costs. Not only should a news medium be economically affordable and should one have time available for news use, a news medium must also be worth that price, whether it's money, time, effort or supplying personal data. Third, as Schröder and Kobbernagel (2010) also note, the decision to use a news medium has a spatial dimension: there should be a *situational fit* with the daily routines and lifestyle of its users. For instance Carlo (29) chose to receive his newspaper in a digital format, so he could read it on his tablet in the train on his commute. Fourth, *accessibility* influences users' decision to use a news medium. Froukje (75) hardly listened to the radio because of her hearing impairment and which print newspapers Frans (49) read depended on which of his colleagues brought theirs to work to flip through during lunch. Fifthly, the use of a news medium is dependent on the other news media that are consumed. For instance, Nathalie (27) said that since she checked her NU.nl app in the morning, she felt less pressured to watch the evening TV news broadcast, for it often repeated the things she already knew. Thus, a medium should *fit within the news media repertoire*. Finally, *normative pressures* influence news media use. Dominique (24) for example used Facebook to not miss out on "things people talk about at parties" and Elise (32) did not use Twitter, because none of her friends did. Surprisingly, while Schröder (2015) found that a news medium's participatory potential increased frequency of news use, participants in our interviews showed no desire to participate in the news making process: although the issues in the news should be linked

to their everyday lives, many news users seem to rather consume the news than to contribute to it. Similarly, contrary to studies by Purcell et al. (2010) and Hermida et al. (2012), describing options to personalize news homepages and share news through social media as frequently used features, such technological affordances only appealed to a minority of the participants in our study.

Although perceived news use and perceived importance of news media mostly overlapped, the rationales why a news medium was considered important were quite different from the above-mentioned reasons for use. First, news media were considered important when the news they reported was perceived to have a *high impact* on users' everyday life. Yet these high impact news media were not necessarily used more frequently: for example international television news was consumed infrequently, but found very valuable in case of global news events. Carlo (29): "When the MH17 crashed, CNN constantly reported the same news, but with updates every time. They're there and they'll stay there. You don't see that in The Netherlands that much." Second, when a news medium *strengthened participants' identity*, it was perceived as more important. When they had a subscription to a news medium, its card was usually sorted as playing a large role in daily life, even when respondents did not consume it frequently. Subscriptions are not only a sign of support for a certain news medium, they also indicate a sense of community, stemming from Dutch press history characterized by pillarization. Froukje (75) about her subscription to quality newspaper *Trouw*: "I was raised a Protestant. We always thought *Trouw* was a very nice newspaper. [...] It belongs to my roots." Third, the more the content of a news medium *fit the participants' personal interests and opinions*, the more they considered it as important. For example Nina (30) and Floor (28), both working in public relations, read popular newspaper *De Telegraaf* almost daily to scan the news on certain topics for their customers, but ranked these relatively low because they preferred other brands. Thus, their sorting on the importance of news media did not fully reflect frequency of use. Finally, when news media were perceived to *serve the public interest*, they were also considered important by the participants. What exactly constituted that public interest, or what was generally seen as news that everyone in the public should know, was influenced by shifting sociocultural norms. The next sections discuss these shifts in more detail.

### *What is considered news is changing*

The Q card sample contained a broad range of different news media, in order to capture the entire media landscape and to ensure we would obtain a full picture of participant's news repertoires. Similarly, we encouraged participants to talk about what they themselves considered to be news, instead of requiring them to follow any definition. Interestingly, in the interviews, participants drew different distinctions between what media did or did not count as "news media". They generally found it difficult to express what was or wasn't "news". Some participants held onto traditional genre conventions, such as Nina (30): "[It's] politics, culture, national news, international news, but not a nice picture of a celebrity, or a story about giving birth that I saw today." Others however felt that in the rapidly changing media ecology, these classic definitions of 'news' might no longer match the content that media provide. Elise (32): "[It's] everything that happens in the world. But outside of your private circle. When a friend of mine is moving, then I think it's 'little news', or whatever, you have to figure out a word for that. It's not news, but it is nice to know."

As Elise points out, news users, and researchers with them, lack a vocabulary to describe these new kinds of information. Be it interpersonal social media updates, hyperlocal citizen blogs or traditional news coverage, in everyday language, these are all classified by the one word "news". Even though all these types of "news" potentially offer new information, users experienced them as fundamentally different. Thus, what participants experience in their everyday life by consuming

news and the long-existing institutional settings and sociocultural norms about what news is or should be, no longer seem to match. At the same time, new standards that do justice to the current fragmented, digitalized media landscape are still being negotiated.

Despite these inchoate norms around re-classifying news, nonetheless many participants perceived social media in conservative terms vis-à-vis its journalistic status. Traditionally, news has been something that addresses public issues. Therefore, media that mostly supply interpersonal news such as Facebook, or very local newspapers, were often described by participants as “not really news” (Froukje, 75) or “disseminators of entertainment” (Edwin, 37). Yet, there was no other word to describe this than the general “news”. Second, participants mentioned that news is characterized by its focus on negative developments. Yet the architecture of many “new media” platforms lacks, or at least discourages, negative news. On Facebook, for instance, stories can only be liked, never disliked. For Daniël (33), therefore, it wasn’t a true news medium: “The disadvantage of Facebook is that it can only be about good news and the fun and nice things. When you put a political statement out there, you’ll be trapped into a corner pretty quickly. Facebook isn’t really the medium for that, it seems.”

This is not to say social media cannot be valuable for following the news. The ability to share news that has been published on other platforms transforms Facebook and Twitter into user-friendly news feeds. Social media can be interesting for news because they enable you to view your friends’ patterns of news use, leading you to stumble upon stories you might otherwise never have encountered. For Floor (28) for example, who had a network of friends with similar news interests, Facebook had become her main gateway to news: “One will post a piece from *Vice* about drugs, the other from *3 voor 12*, and then another from *de Volkskrant*. [...] NU.nl, but also *de Volkskrant*, international media: I follow these all through Facebook.” For participants like Lars (28) however, whose friends hardly consumed nor shared any news from other platforms, Facebook wasn’t a place to find news at all.

#### *Paying for news is considered a form of civic engagement*

Studies attempting to establish direct links between news consumption and civic engagement have generally found only very marginal relationships between the two (e.g. Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham 2007; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2010). Although using the news can potentially lead to civic or political action, in practice, this rarely happens, often leading scholars to write pessimistic conclusions about the state of democratic societies (Banaji and Buckingham 2013). Our participants correspondingly showed few signs of civic engagement resulting from news use. However, the results also show that in a world characterized by an abundance of free news sources, consuming paid news media is now considered an act of civic engagement in itself.

During the in-depth interviews, some participants noted that they felt the need to “support” certain news media (Vincent, 71). Nathalie (27) mentioned she watched the local television news because she found it important that such local broadcasters would keep running. Bianca (40) chose to get a subscription to Amsterdam’s local daily even though she would rather read a different newspaper: “I have *Het Parool* as a replacement for *de Volkskrant*. I don’t think the quality is great, but I think Amsterdam deserves its own newspaper. It’s more an act of sponsoring that made me get a subscription, than—I’d rather have *de Volkskrant*.” Financial support to a news medium thus does not always mean users appreciate it, or vice versa. Regionally-oriented participants paid for news out of a strongly felt civic duty, rather than enjoyment – although for non-digital news products only. Participants with the digital news use repertoire were also relatively willing to pay for news, even though they felt following the news increased their feelings of pessimism about the state of the world and a lack of agency.

Supporting news media financially was perceived as a civic obligation, even though, and maybe precisely because, at the same time participants felt everyone should have unguarded access to the news. Bregje (62) for instance argued news should partially be free, because it is a public good: “A story about the earthquakes: that’s something everyone is entitled to read, right? Everyone in The Netherlands should be allowed to read that. But they block it.” When confronted with a paywall, Bregje would keep googling until she found the same information somewhere else for free: “I refuse to pay, because what I pay for today, is old news tomorrow.” While previous research limits such opinions about news as a public good to younger generations (American Press Institute 2015), our results suggest that this might be the case across all age groups.

This tension of viewing news as both a civic obligation and a civic right was reflected in participants’ intent to pay for news. Participants who didn’t spend any money on news expressed uneasiness when talking about not paying. Elise (32): “I think it’s something that you do even though you know it is wrong. It makes you think: yes, I should some time.” Although they thought news was valuable, yet, they didn’t want to pay for it in the near future. Similarly, those that did pay out of civic duty sometimes did so only reluctantly. Bart (62): “It’s quite expensive, a newspaper subscription. Two newspapers... Then I’m thinking – can we quit these things?”

## Conclusion

This paper looked at the various motivations underlying the construction of users’ news media repertoires, by analyzing the everyday value of news. Our results show that users do not organize their news media repertoires solely around devices (see Hassebrink and Domeyer 2012), but base their selection of combinations on a much wider range of considerations. The news repertoires found in this study are organized around four types of news media attributes. First, the regionally-oriented and nationally-oriented repertoires are based on *geographical focus*, in line with topic-related repertoires found in other countries (Trilling and Schoenbach 2013). Second, the background-oriented repertoire relates to the *genre* or form in which news is presented. Third, the laid-back repertoire refers to the mode of use and users’ *behavior* driving repertoire choice. Lastly, our Q Sort yielded only one *platform*-based repertoire, which was unsurprisingly organized around digital news use, reflecting current shifts in news exposure. Thus, it seems that as Edgerly (2015) notes, “the complexities of the new media landscape yield equally complex media repertoires”.

This concept of value provided a broad and inclusive framework to try to capture this complexity and avoid the limited meanings that terminology such as relevance or (frequency of) use tend to evoke. By letting users define the ways in which news media could play a role in their everyday lives themselves, this lens enabled us to include a wide range of possible ways the increasingly diverse supply of news media has become meaningful, adding to existing research in three ways. First, we demonstrated how considering both motives for use and importance of news media but separating these analytically allows us to solve a long-existing paradox: news users do not always use what they prefer, nor always prefer what they use. News media use and appreciation appear to be supported by different motivations, which presents significant challenges for news companies trying to create meaningful value propositions (cf. Picard 2010). Second, contrary to previous research (Schröder and Larsen 2010; Purcell et al. 2010; Hermida et al. 2012), we found that participatory affordances seem to have a limited influence. Most of our participants, across age and educational groups, preferred to consume news without actively engaging with it. Third, our study found changing understandings of “the news” and “civic engagement”, though not equally in all repertoires. Whereas most regional news users conceptualized these terms fairly traditionally, participants with digital and laid-back use were more likely to expand them to

include, for instance, infotainment websites (as being news) or the act of consuming paid news (as being civic engagement).

Central to this study's findings is the complex relationship between the use, appreciation and value of news. Aiming to understand how users nowadays navigate the high-choice media environment means taking into account both changing user behavior *and* shifting user preferences simultaneously to better understand the value of news. Conceptualizing news consumption is further problematized by continuing negotiations over what constitutes or should be "the news" and what it means or should mean to engage through such information. Thus, research would benefit from greater attention to these fluctuating definitions, as the everyday value of news for its users is bound to change with them.

## Acknowledgments

This article is part of the research project 'The New News Consumer: User-based Innovation to Meet Paradigmatic Change in News Use and Media Habits', funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and 10 leading news organizations. Details on the project – a collaboration between the University of Groningen and VU University Amsterdam – can be found at: [news-use.com](http://news-use.com). This paper is also associated with the international research project 'Consumption of News as Democratic Resources', organized by Hanna Adoni, Hillel Nosssek and Kim Schröder, although is based solely on the Dutch data. The authors would like to offer special thanks to Christian Kobbernagel and Kim Schröder for their helpful advice on Q-methodology. Our thanks also to two anonymous reviewers for engaging and constructive feedback.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> We selected twelve participants within each age group (18-35, 35-60, 61+), twelve participants within each educational subgroup (primary and/or secondary education, vocational education, university education) and twelve participants within each region (Amsterdam, the regional city of Groningen, and rural parts of The Netherlands), with an equal number of males and females. Participants in Amsterdam were recruited through the online marketing panel of publishing house De Persgroep; participants in the Groningen area were sampled through online marketing panel RegioNoord.

<sup>2</sup> The factor analysis yielded five factors, accounting for 58% of the variance. This solution explained the highest amount of Q Sorts with the smallest number of factors, while having at least three positive significant loading Q Sorts in each factor. Because our Q set contained 36 cards, factor loadings of  $\pm 0.43$  or higher were significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level (see Watts and Stenner, 2012, p. 107-109). Nine out of 36 respondents loaded significantly on factor 1, four on factor 2, five on factor 3, four on factor 4 and four on factor 5. Nine participants were confounded: their Q Sort loaded significantly on more than one media repertoire. Finally, two Q sorts didn't load significantly on any of the factors.

<sup>3</sup> To protect their privacy, participants are mentioned by pseudonyms. Age and the media repertoire of the participant however have been made explicit.

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## Appendix I: Typal factor arrays

Card	Regionally-oriented	Background-oriented	Digital	Laid-back	Nationally-oriented
NOS Journaal (TV news bulletin on a public service channel)	3	3	0	3	2
TV news bulletin on a commercial channel	2	-1	0	2	3
TV news bulletin on a regional or local channel	3	1	0	0	-1
Light current affairs TV programs	0	0	-2	-3	4
Serious current affairs TV programs	2	2	1	1	2
TV news bulletin and/or current affairs on 24-hour news channels	-1	2	0	-1	-4
TV news bulletin and/or current affairs on a foreign/international channel	0	2	-1	0	-3
Text-TV	4	-3	0	1	-4
Radio news as part of a general public service radio channel	3	-4	0	1	2
Radio news as part of a general commercial radio channel	-2	-2	-3	2	1
Radio current affairs programs	2	0	-2	-1	0
Daily quality newspaper, print	0	4	-3	2	4
Daily popular newspaper, print	2	0	-4	-2	0
Metro (free daily newspaper, print)	0	-3	-1	-2	1
News magazines, print	-2	3	-2	0	0
Print regional daily newspaper	4	1	2	3	0
Print local weekly/bi-weekly/monthly news publications	1	0	-2	4	-3
Quality newspaper online	-3	4	3	1	3
Popular newspaper online	1	-1	1	-3	2
Metronieuws.nl (free daily newspaper online)	-1	-1	-3	-4	-1
News magazines online	-4	3	-1	0	-1
Regional daily newspaper online	2	2	2	-2	0
Local weekly/bi-weekly/monthly news publications online	-2	1	-2	2	-3
National broadcaster's online news	0	1	4	-1	1
Regional broadcaster's online news	1	0	3	0	-1
International news providers' online news	-2	2	3	-3	-2
News on Facebook, including news via links on Facebook	-3	-4	-4	4	3
News on Twitter, including news via links on Twitter	-4	0	2	-1	1
News on social media, excluding Facebook and Twitter	-3	-2	1	1	-2
News on online video sharing media	0	-2	2	-1	-2
News blogs	-2	-2	1	-2	-2
News received by email or text messaging services	1	-3	2	2	-1

Professional and party-political magazines (trade union or professional associations' magazines)	-1	-2	1	3	0
News via news aggregators, personalized news services, or news portals	1	-1	-1	-4	1
News from -online-born news media	-1	-1	4	2	2
National, regional or international news online, not provided by media	-1	1	-1	0	-2

**Table 2:** Factor arrays with Q Sort values for each repertoire