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Setting the stage for news engagement: A case study of news audiences in Sweden

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Abstract

How audiences engage with news has not always gotten a lot of attention in academic and industry research; and, even then, it is often studied in terms of exposure and interaction. This does not fully capture the dynamism and multidimensionality of this phenomenon; and industry attempts to apply market principles to engagement risks depoliticizing and reducing it to economic values. Rather than poking a stick at audiences from a distance, it is best to contextualize their engagement (and disengagement) within their lived experiences. It is not enough that news is *available* for people to give it attention but that it has to be embedded in a meaningful and compelling way in their day-to-day lives.

What this thesis sets out to do is to situate news engagement within the lived experiences of Swedish audiences; and look into the ways in which cognitive and affective engagement plays into their performance as a news audience. It adopts Dahlgren and Hill's *parameters of media engagement* model to map this phenomenon across six dimensions of *contexts*, *motivations*, *modalities*, *intensities*, *forms* and *consequences*. In doing so, it approaches engagement not simply as an isolated encounter with news but something that happens at the intersection of personal, political and socio-cultural circumstances. Taking a qualitative approach in the study of news audiences allows for them to elaborate upon their subjective experiences with such content.

Sweden makes for a unique setting to study the multidimensionality of news engagement given its history with public service broadcasting; and the commercialization of broadcasting and digitalization of news within the last three decades. Furthermore, this digitalisation has changed how news is found and gets around; and the subsequent 'scale game' in the news industry has contributed to a surplus that has led to news fatigue, analysis paralysis and even disengagement. Sorting through this information has become just as much the responsibility of audiences as it is of an editorial staff.

This thesis finds that how they engage with news is not just a means to get information but a cognitive and affective experience that is constitutive of their identities as news audiences. In an individualistic society, how they come to check and follow the news becomes demonstrative of how they see themselves as news audiences: well-informed versus ignorant, critical versus gullible. However, there can be no tangible outcomes to such news practices. They cannot be caught up on all the news and, no matter how many sources they check, all they can achieve is a fragmented and selective representation of what is being reported in the news. It is through the affects that are patterned along with how they engage with news that they come to feel, in their own ways, that they have kept up or been critical enough of it. When considered alongside other competing or complementary affects of engagement, their performance as an audience becomes an ongoing negotiation of how responsible they should be about keeping up and being critical of the news.

Keywords: *News audiences, engagement, media, subjectivity, identity, emotion, affect, performance, public sphere, factuality, trust, mediatization, neoliberalism, journalism, Sweden*

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Because journalism.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"You're miserable, edgy and tired. You're in the perfect mood for journalism."

(Ellis and Robertson, 1998, p. 133)

News has become embedded in everyday life — blaring on car stereos, blinking onto bus monitors, buzzing with phone notifications— that there is rarely a moment when people are not an audience to it (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p. 68). A consequence of being surrounded by media is that everything starts to look like a performance to them, even how they choose to check and follow the news (ibid., pp. 72-73). It becomes demonstrative of how they see themselves as a news audience: informed versus ignorant, critical versus gullible. It is as if the stage lights had wandered into the gallery, making it apparent whether they had been paying close enough attention to what was going on; and, more often than not, they are the only ones there. It is as much a performance for an imagined audience as it is for a real one (ibid., p. 92).

What is in it for them? To put it simply, it is to *feel* like an informed and critical news audience. There is an affect — that is, a bodily feeling — whenever they engage with such content (Burkitt, 2014, p.11). It cannot be described using basic emotions, such as happiness or anger; but it *is* there, unconscious and in the "background" (Burkitt, 2014, p. 11; Wetherell, 2012, pp. 3, 12). It is the feeling that they are all caught up with news because they have been getting phone notifications about it throughout the day; or the feeling that they have the bigger picture because they looked at multiple news sources. Audiences associate or "[pattern] together" these affects with how they choose to engage with news; and, therefore, it becomes affective practices through which they can *feel* whether they have kept up or been critical enough of it (Wetherell, 2012, p 14). These subjective states of feeling, in turn, are expressed as emotions (Hill, 2018). Affect and emotion, then, are the cues to their performance as a part of a news audience.

But, sometimes, it can be a lot to take in. In a study conducted early 2019 in 38 countries, the Reuters Institute found that 28 percent of their respondents said the news wore them out and 32 percent actively avoided it (Newman 2019, p. 26, 27). Studies have acknowledged that the surplus of news that appears online has led some audiences to feel fatigued or paralyzed when analyzing it (Park, 2019, p. 1; Newman, 2019, p. 26, 27). Some have chosen to disengage with it altogether (ibid.).

When engaging with news feels like a chore, a farce, a *pain*, audiences start to rethink their performances. It is not enough that news is simply *available* for people to pay attention to it, as it needs to be embedded in a meaningful and compelling way in their day-to-day lives (Swart, Peters and Broersma, 2016, p. 912). This is because how audiences engage with news is a "powerful subjective experience" (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 3). It is a phenomenon that happens within different contexts, under different motivations, through different modalities and more; and it is changing *all* the time.

What this thesis sets out to do is to situate news engagement within lived experiences; and look into how cognitive and affective engagement plays into their performance as a news audience. As such, it follows the "affective turn" in journalism and media studies, which has turned its attention away from positivist assumptions about rationality toward an investigation of affectivity and emotionality in news (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019; Kotisova, 2019). Its qualitative approach to news audiences draws out thick descriptions about their subjective experiences (Rapley, 2007, p. 15). This thesis takes Swedes between the ages of 20 and 40 as its sample, given that they would have had distinct experiences with news media growing up through the commercialization of broadcasting and digitalization of news in the country (Bolin, 2017, pp. 22, 35). Therefore, this thesis puts forth two research questions:

1. How can the *parameters of media engagement* model by Dahlgren and Hill be applied to news engagement?
2. In what ways do affect and performance shape news engagement?

This thesis starts by challenging assumptions about how commercialization is at fault for what is wrong with the news industry and argues that it needs to be considered in context (Phelan, 2014, pp., 3, 9; Peck, 2013, pp. 142, 153). It further rallies against the dichotomy between rationality and emotionality in academic and industry research about news, given that they are both characteristic of participation in the public sphere (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016, p. 17). It then turns its attention to news audience research, and how it needs to better situate engagement within lived experiences.

The thesis continues by elaborating upon the basis of its design: Dahlgren and Hill's *parameters of media engagement*, a model that maps the phenomenon across the variables of *contexts*, *motivations*, *modalities*, *forms*, *intensities* and *consequences* (upcoming, pp. 3-4). It then details its phronetic and social constructionist approach to studying news audiences; and the sampling and qualitative methods used to gather the empirical material for analysis.

Finally, the thesis addresses three key themes in the findings: one, *the responsibilities of keeping up with and being critical of the news;* two, *the performances of an informed and critical news audience*; and, three, *the feeling of engaging with news*. The first theme details how participants maintained their engagement because of what they considered to be their civic, social or professional obligation to do so. How responsible they felt about keeping up with news depended upon their identities and experiences with it; and how responsible they felt about being critical of it depended upon whether they recognized the "constructed character" of its representations (Andrejevic, 2013, p. 33). The second theme elaborates upon how participants performed their engagement, specifically how the affective patterns of their news practices allowed them to achieve a subjective feeling of having kept up or been critical enough of news. Yet there are other competing affects to engaging with news, which brings the analysis to its third theme. Participants are continuously negotiating and renegotiating their news practices against the stresses of being emotionally vulnerable to negative or unfortunate news; needing to form an opinion about every current event or issue; and/or having to be wary about what they read, watch

or listen to in the news. It is not all bad though, as some participants acknowledged that the news also makes them feel secure.

This builds up toward the conclusion that, in the absence of any tangible outcomes, audiences can only *feel* that they have done enough to keep up and scrutinize the news. This is because there is no way for them to be informed of *all* the news; and that, no matter how many sources they check, all they can achieve is a fragmented, selective account of what is being represented. When considered alongside the other competing or complementary affects of engagement, their performance as an audience becomes an ongoing negotiation of how responsible they should be about keeping up and being critical of the news.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This thesis should best start by "setting the scene," so to say, if it is to examine the performance and affect of news engagement. This chapter does just that by, firstly, doing away with assumptions about how commercialization alone has eroded the democratic function of journalism; and, secondly, questioning the dichotomy between rationality and emotionality in academic and industry research about news. It then goes into conceptualizations of factuality, trust and credibility and how that relates to the ways in which audiences check and follow the news.

The chapter then follows this up by detailing how academic and industry research has approached news audiences and engagement; and argues for a contextual approach that considers the dynamism and multidimensionality of this phenomenon. It then looks back at affect studies related to news before, finally, closing out with an argument for why the mediatization of news engagement should be considered "from below."

Blaming the money and emotion

Sweden has both public and private news organizations, much like other Scandinavian countries (Westlund and Weibull, 2013, p 158; see Appendix 2 for a summary of how news provisioning has developed throughout the decades in Sweden); yet the latter has been the subject of criticism because it needs to turn a profit. Mainstream commercial news media has to certainly be understood within its corporate infrastructure; which, since the 1980s, has impressed the "instrumentalist rationality of the market" upon its culture (Phelan, 2014, pp. 3,9). Yet to conclude that such interests have diminished journalistic institutions' independence and democratic function would be overly-simplistic; and these arguments often ignore what it "could, or should try to be" (Muhlmann, in Phelan, 2014, p. 91).

It is never *just neoliberalism* that is at fault for what is wrong in journalism, as it is "socially embedded" and present among complementary and antagonistic forces (Peck, 2014, p. 145). To suggest otherwise would be to assume that audiences are simply passive recipients to the effects of media messaging, one that regurgitates neoliberal logic. Neoliberalism should instead be an "*occasion* for explanation" rather than a substitute for it; and that it is in a "context of context" (ibid., pp. 142, 153, emphasis in original), where news engagement receives its due complexity.

This bears repeating what has long been established as the purpose of journalism. For a democracy to thrive, its citizens have to be informed and connected; and, for them to be informed and connected, they can turn to the news (McNair, 2000, p. 1). News allows citizens to participate in the public sphere, the communicative space where people come together to discuss "what [is] practically necessary for the interest of all" (Habermas, 1989, p. 83). This democratic function is based upon the assumption that each citizen is capable of keeping their elected officials in check (Curran et al., 2009, p. 6).

Swedes certainly recognize this democratic function of news given its history with public service broadcasting (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2013, p. 316). The institutionalization of objectivity and impartiality in how news is reported, among other values, has contributed to how they understand journalism in relation to themselves as audiences and the political and societal institutions that are the subject of their coverage (ibid., p. 309-323).

But this responsibility invites scrutiny. News media is often blamed for the deterioration of the public sphere, contributing to "'a crisis of civic culture and engagement'" (Dahlgren, in Schrøder and Phillips, 2007, p. 891). As established, this has been attributed to the commercialization of news, but also its tabloidization, adversarialism and oversimplification (McNair, 2000, pp. 1-2; Örnebring and Jönsson, 2004, p. 283). Hard news has given way to soft news; and "serious" reporting and analysis has diminished in favor of more "infotainment" (McNair, 2000, pp. 3-4), all arguably meant to appeal to the lowest common denominator.

These criticisms are founded on the assumption that news is meant to be rational and based on reason, that it should be objective and impartial (McNair, 2000, p. 10; Allan, 2004, p. 71). It has to present "facts and rational arguments," rather than "ideological or emotional" ones (Raejimakers and Maeseele, in Zou, 2018, p. 5). The public sphere is, after all, where citizens put aside their personal interests and emotions to discuss what is best for everyone (Habermas, in Zou, 2018, p. 5). Emotion takes away from detail, scrutiny and context; and "popular" journalism provokes "emotions over understanding" (Pantti, 2010, p. 170). It is associated with commercial interests appealing to what audiences want in order to drum up more clicks, more views, more profits.

The rational-critical distinction in academic and industry research, thus, turned a blind eye to emotionality and subjectivity; but that did not mean journalism was entirely without either (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p 2). Emotion is part of how journalists get their message across to audiences, inviting them to affectively engage through language, style, narrative structure and affecting quotes (Zou, 2018, p. 8). They have always "outsourced" emotion by using what sources say or their anecdotes to dramatize abstract and complicated issues[1], as Wahl-Jorgensen found with Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism from 1995 to 2013 (2019, p. 2). There is also subjectivity in how journalists decide on what current events and issues to be included in the news agenda and what information or sources are to be added to their stories (O'Neill and Harcup, 2009).

A criticism of the dichotomy between rationality and emotionality is how the experience of political life is itself messy and agonistic (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p. 2) and there is no way to avoid subjectivity when engaging with news. Emotionality does not make audiences any less likely to draw upon their political knowledge or make informed decisions (Richardson, Parry and Corner, 2013, p. 175) and, in fact, it allows people to engage and identify with issues rather than undermine rational debate (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016, p. 17).

[1] Media professionals have certainly come to recognize this themselves and have since been transparent about how it "is used and with what intentions" (Pantti, 2010, p. 177); and some have even institutionalized emotion and "personal journalistic discourses" in reporting (Kotisova, 2019, pp. 3-4).

Media engagement is a "powerful subjective experience" (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 3), and news engagement should also be recognized as such. The empirical utility of using engagement as the analytical lens to examine affect, emotion and cognition is that how audiences choose to check and follow the news is situated within the context of their lived experiences. There is a measure of subjectivity, after all, in how they choose to maintain their cognitive and affective engagement, as what they read, watch or listen to is considered against an "existing scheme of knowledge and feeling" (Corner, 2011, p. 91). This can certainly lead to a lot of individual variance in how they might interpret the news; yet, at the same time, "how our social development and position encourage us to read" and feel about it (ibid., p. 3) cannot be ignored. Analyzing news engagement then needs contextualization; and it has to start with the audience.

Rather than do away with emotionality and subjectivity, journalists — and scholars, too — should consider how they both can facilitate participation in the emotional public sphere. How news media can contribute toward the emotional public sphere is certainly not a question that often gets asked, as Pantti (2010, p. 170) argues:

> "This question is relevant given that emotions are not merely personal expressions but that emotional experiences and practices are articulated by cultural discourses and governed by social rules (Hochschild, 1979)."
>
> (Pantti, 2010, p. 170)

This is not to say that being rational or emotional is any better or worse but, simply, that they are both characteristic of such participation (Richards, 2010, pp. 302-303) and attention should be put toward making them both work toward democracy rather than deriding either. Such research is important as audiences develop increasingly intimate relationships with technology (Beckett and Deuze, 2016), making it harder to stay away from the news.

Factuality, trust and credibility

The definition of news has been thrown into "flux" given how digitalization has changed its production, distribution and reception (Bengtsson and Johansson, 2020, pp. 2-3). It used to simply refer to a journalistic commodity that is produced and packaged according to its truth claims, immediacy, tone and values related to newsworthiness; but scholars have had to move past this characterization and, instead, consider what it means within the everyday lives of audiences (ibid.).

That being said, the participants in this thesis have continued to bring up Anglo-American journalistic values of objectivity and impartiality (Bengtsson and Johansson, 2020, pp. 2-3) when talking about their engagement with news. What makes this thesis different is that, one, it is the audience — not industry or academic researchers — framing their engagement according to these traditional definitions; and, two, that they recognize such values cannot be absolute.

The participatory affordances of online platforms have made users aware of the "constructed character of representation" or, to put it differently, that they cannot trust everything that is represented online (Andrejevic, 2013, p. 33). Those who grew up with such platforms would be just as wary of how news reports on current events and issues, especially as misinformation has remained a salient topic following its widespread circulation during the 2016 U.S. presidential election on social networking sites (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 45).

If sorting through the surplus of information online is just as much a personal value as it is a public one (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 67), part of being a news audience then is picking out what is factual and relevant to them. Broadly speaking, what makes news factual is that it has facts and informs audiences about the world (Hill, 2007, p. 3). Factuality refers to how audiences perceive what they are reading, watching or listening to as being based in reality, which they do by reflecting upon "factual experiences, imagination [and] values" (Corner and Peels, in Hill, 2007, p. 3). That being said, factuality is not based on whether it is a one-to-one representation of

a real-life referent but how it appears “authentic” and “true to life” to them (Hill, 2007, pp. 3, 109). Therefore, it is entirely subjective how audiences come to perceive the news as being factual, a process which could include what they already know about the referent but also the generic forms they associate with professional journalism.

How audiences determine the referential integrity of news involves genre work, a dynamic and ongoing process in which they interpret what they are reading, watching or listening to by reflecting upon their previous experiences with such content (Hill, 2007, p. 2). These experiences then become the generic material for when audiences engage in genre work in the future (ibid.), such that a familiarity with a particular style of news — whether that be in its presentation, visuals or language — might come to be associated with trustworthiness. This was certainly the case with how participants in this thesis recognized the differences between the simple but grounded style of daily newspapers compared to the exaggerated style of “evening news” tabloids.

These generic forms are not indicative of the actuality of what is being reported but, rather, suggestive of the professional values of that particular news organization. Therefore, working through the factuality of news also involves trust in these organizations to present factual information. Audiences need to perceive them as having the “ability,” “benevolence” and “integrity” to deliver upon that trust, which is to say that they will be capable and deliberate in delivering quality information (Fletcher and Park, 2017, p. 1283). Despite this expectation, there is not the absolute certainty that such organizations will deliver on that outcome (Kohring and Matthes, 2007, p. 238). They have to take journalists at their word, if you will. Therefore, audiences cede control over to news organizations but also reduce the complexities of an “open future,” such as doing away with the fuss of working through the factuality of emerging events and issues in an information-saturated digital age (ibid.).

Trust is usually referred to in relation to media credibility. What makes a news organization credible is that it is expert and trustworthy, often assessed in relation to how impartial it is

(Kohring and Matthes, 2007, p. 233). However, these characterisations — which dates back to the Yale Communication Research Program's 1959 study on the influences of communication resources — has been criticized for its lack of theoretical clarity; and questioned over whether expertise and trust are characteristics of or conditions for credibility (ibid., pp. 233, 237). Furthermore, such studies often approach news organizations as simply facilitators of information, which ignore how editorial selectivity over the news agenda is also a condition of trust (ibid.).

Audiences certainly do not have to fully trust news organizations. Trust is about how confident audiences are in that they will expertly and ethically carry out their responsibilities; whereas distrust is about how confident audiences are in that they will do neither (Fletcher and Park, 2017, pp. 1283-1284). Low trust, then, is about the uncertainty that news organizations will deliver upon those positive expectations rather than the certainty that they will not (ibid.). Furthermore, just because audiences distrust a news organization does not mean they will stop engaging with it. In fact, it has been shown that those who distrust mainstream news organizations still keep up with current events and issues through them (Tsfati and Cappella, 2003, p. 251).

That all being said, this thesis approaches audiences as being aware that what is represented in the news is a construction that journalists put together. They may not totally trust these representations, but they continue to engage with such news organizations with the understanding that what they put out may be biased, incomplete or even incorrect. This, in turn, informs what news practices they choose to take up.

Narrowing news audiences down

News audiences have not always gotten a lot of attention in industry and academic research (Allan, 2004, p. 121-123). Those working in the news industry only had a vague understanding of their audience and, even then, were often wary of what market research had to say (ibid.). Any

claims about how news use had changed was not based on what audiences had experienced but what journalists and editors had assumed about them (Meijer and Kormelink, 2014, p. 665). There was also a "newsroom-centricity" to journalism studies, which contributed to extensive research on how news is produced but largely ignored how it is situated within the everyday lives of audiences (Wahl-Jorgensen, in Meijer and Kormelink, 2014, p. 666).

If there was any consideration of audiences, it mostly focused on news use in terms of reach, as measured through circulation numbers and ratings; and exposure, as documented through survey responses (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzch, 2020). However, these measures were much too narrow given that they were limited to what was observable about engagement and did not get at the subjectivity and dynamism of the phenomenon. Another reason was that those surveyed tended to overestimate how much they engaged with news three to eight times more than they usually do, though this was attributed more to bad recall rather than a social desirability bias (Prior, 2009, p. 137).

However, industry and academic research have had to rethink audiences as the digitalization of the news industry has shown them to be increasingly autonomous and fragmented (Meijer, 2020). Where traditional broadcasting once approached them as simply passive recipients, audiences could now pick and choose from the "extraordinary abundance" of audiovisual content (Helberger, 2015, p. 326). The introduction of online platforms in the late 1990s changed how audiences found news. They did not have to visit the front page of online news sites to look for articles and videos, as search engines had given them the option to find and directly access what was relevant to them (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 53). News aggregators and social networking sites also allowed people to circumvent the front page by providing direct links to content across different websites (ibid.). Furthermore, participants in this thesis said digitalization removed restrictions on when, where and how much it cost to engage with news; and, thus, gave them access to more sources than before, when their families might have only gotten one or two newspapers and/or watched the evening news on television.

But this had a knock-on effect on the news industry (see Appendix 2 for a brief summary on this); and the organization of news production and distribution around platforms contributed to yet more narrow measures of reception (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 53-56, 67). News organizations started to depend on quantified user demand as a means to track circulation online (Carr, in van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 53), using click-through rates, shares, reactions and other metrics to determine how well articles, videos and other such content were performing on *Google* or *Facebook* (Columbia Journalism Review, 2019; Reuters Institute, 2019). The problem with relying on platform definitions of engagement only began to sink in for publishers after a change in *Facebook*'s algorithm in 2018 de-emphasized news content and resulted in declining web traffic to their proprietary websites; and when the platform overestimated the amount of views their videos were getting by as much as 60 to 80 percent (Columbia Journalism Review, 2019; Moore, 2016). That is, in defining engagement, platforms were also defining its terms.

On the academic side of things, research looked into either online news use, as measured through analyses of web analytics and clicking behaviour; or news exposure, as analyzed through interviews or focus groups (Swart, Peters and Broersma, 2017, p. 1343). Yet how audiences perceived their use or the importance of news did not always match up with how they actually engaged with it (ibid.). For instance, online news audiences reportedly prefered physical newspapers yet there has been a decline in circulation numbers in the U.S. (Chyi and Chadha, 2012, p. 432).

One of the concerns of journalism studies was the "battle for attention," arguing that it could lead to further fragmentation and the formation of filter bubbles or echo chambers (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch, 2020). However, news audiences have been shown to get a wide range of news through search engines, social networking sites and news aggregators (ibid.), which raises a question about how wide a net should be cast to study the ways in which audiences choose to check and follow the news.

> "Rather, it is about tracking when people feel connected with news stories, current events, others, or publicness as a whole: what do they perceive as engaging or disengaging? A user-based perspective could thus bring clarity to these discussions about what engaging with news and public affairs is and when civic engagement becomes meaningful."
>
> (Swart, Peters and Broersma, 2017, p. 911)

Simply looking at news use and exposure does not fully capture the dynamism and multidimensionality of how audiences engage with news (Swart, Peters and Broersma, 2017). For instance, clicking behavior is too crude a measure for determining why audiences visit some news stories and not others (Kormelink and Meijer, 2017); and their frequent use of smartphones to check for breaking news does not necessarily mean they prefer it (Swart, Peters and Broersma, 2017, p. 1344). Furthermore, applying market principles to news engagement puts it at risk of being depoliticized or reduced to economic values, such as how the news industry has quantified user demand as a measure of audience attention (Dahlgren, 2013; van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 53).

Such measures do not contextualize news engagement within their everyday lives or consider how the social, cultural or experiential relates to their "sense-making practices" (Bengtsson and Johansson, 2020, p. 4). For example, news use and exposure does not account for the media landscape as a whole (Swart, Peters and Broersma, 2016, p. 1344) and news engagement has since been recognized as a cross-media phenomenon (Schrøder, 2015, p. 61). Audiences rarely — if ever — get their news through just one medium and, as such, they should be considered relationally to one another rather than remotely (Swart, Peters and Broersma, 2016, p. 1345). To this point, how audiences choose to engage with news depends upon how it is experienced differently from medium to medium.

Opening up engagement

So far, this thesis has shown that measures of news use and exposure in academic research are too narrow for engagement; and that the quantification of user demand in industry research reduces it to simply depoliticized, economic values. All they can really say is that audiences had "encountered the content" without really providing any depth to what it took for them to get there and what happens after they do so (Kziazek et al., 2016, p. 505; Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 3). To draw conclusions or to take action based on these measures while ignoring the larger context of engagement is to, as they say, mow the lawn while the house is on fire.

These approaches have shown how tricky it can be to define engagement, how it varies between disciplines and has come to include "virtually every post-exposure dimension of audience behavior" (Napoli, in Kümpel, 2019, p. 166). It has certainly been acknowledged as being complex but, rather than take on the whole megillah, research often narrowly focuses on facets of the phenomenon, such as "attentive *reading*" (Kümpel, 2019, p. 166, emphasis in original) or its interactivity (Ksiazek et al., 2016, p. 504).

As established, audience studies have previously approached engagement in terms of attention. They certainly need to *pay attention* before they can engage with news but, given how much competition there is for it in today's dense media environment, it has become increasingly sporadic (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 5). It has been argued that there might be just *too much* news, as its surplus has caused audiences to "tune some content out" or "simply ignore the news altogether" (Lee et al. 2017, p. 255). It is not enough that news is available to catch their attention, but that it has to also be "meaningful and perhaps enjoyable too" (Swart, Peters and Broersma, 2017, p. 912).

The term participation has been used to describe the "observable behavior" that follows the subjective experience of engagement (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 6). Given the democratic function of news, participation has to relate — however explicitly or remotely — to power relations (ibid., p. 7). It has been defined as being more than just "interaction" (ibid.) but this thesis argues that audiences may consider engagement to be its own form of political

participation. That is, they may not simply engage with news as a means to gather information but, through its association with certain "lifestyle elements," come to see it as demonstrative of their civic identities (Bennett and Segerberg, 2011, p. 771).

More often than not, such research takes a uses-and-gratifications approach to how audiences engage with news, whereby engagement fulfills a psychological need to find information, socialize or to be entertained (Kormelink and Costera Meijer, 2015; Ksiazek et al., 2016, p. 504). However, this approach generalizes participants on an "individualistic or society-wide level" and media as something that has an effect on them (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998). Such effects research is problematic because audiences respond to messages in different ways based on their past experiences and social configurations (Bolin, 2017; Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998). News engagement calls forth different — sometimes, simultaneous — identities and, as such, audiences cannot be said to be one thing or another during such a phenomenon (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 27). This was certainly reflected in the empirical data, as participants identified as citizens, teachers, students and professionals among other things when they engaged with news.

Researchers should certainly avoid putting too much emphasis on reception at risk of "unwanted assumptions about 'influence'" and the passivity of audiences (Corner, 2011). Such studies are often isolated to intense moments of engagement rather than considered within the larger context of the media encounter. To this point, it is better to "assume less and investigate more" when examining the relationship between media and subjectivity; as engagement is, after all, an inquiry into experience, cultural resources and the challenges that come with it (ibid.).

After all, engagement is dynamic and multidimensional (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 3). Therefore, this thesis adopted Dahlgren and Hill's *parameters of media engagement* model to map this phenomenon across six variables: the *contexts*, *motivations*, *modalities*, *forms*, *intensities* and *consequences* of how audiences engage with news (ibid., p. 15). In considering these six parameters in relation to one another, it avoids drawing conclusions based on a limited

set of observable behaviors and situates engagement within the lived experiences of audiences. It does not only account for the moment in which they engage with news but the trajectories toward and beyond engagement, which could include the dissemination or remaking of information (Ksiazek et al., 2016, p. 504). As such, engagement is not anchored in a particular time or space (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 3), as it matters when, where and with whom audiences engage (or disengage) with news.

To that last point, the social is particularly critical to this thesis on news engagement, as how audiences recognize journalism's authority and the importance of news in their everyday lives is based on what Taylor called the "social imaginary" (2013, p. 23). How audiences think of themselves in relation to others can stress certain expectations and legitimize practices (ibid., pp. 23,24), such as remaining civil when discussing news in a closed social networking space or keeping up with it as an obligation to their fellow citizens.

Engaging with news as an affective practice

News engagement is not often associated with the affective but, in studying how it coalesces with the cognitive, there can be an understanding of *"how socially meaningful relationships register in our body-minds and, at some level of awareness, are felt*" (Burkitt, 2014, p. 14, emphasis in original). Affect can be difficult to articulate because it is an unconscious, "background" feeling that cannot simply be described using basic emotions, such as happiness or anger (Burkitt, 2014, p. 11; Wetherell, 2012, pp. 3, 12). It is always present, but it ebbs and flows (Wetherell, 2012, p. 12). It emerges through "patterns of relationship," including how people perceive others or their surroundings; and can unconsciously color certain actions in particular situations (ibid. p. 6). This does not mean that it dictates what people do but that it makes them more likely to act in a certain fashion (ibid.). Affect, then, could be said to be "embodied meaning making" (Wetherell, 2012, p. 4).

Wetherell's concept of "affective practices" is conducive here in understanding how bodily reactions are associated or "patterned together" with thoughts, feelings, relationships and other components within everyday life (2012, p. 14). Such patterning brings the affective and cognitive together, the latter of which is subject to personal biographies as well as social factors, cultural norms and ideological perspectives (Burkitt, 2014, pp. 19-20; Zou, 2018, p. 4). As such, affect and emotion operates at both the individual and social level (ibid.). These patterns are made and remade, "interacting and recursive," and can come together in habitual or "distinct [ways] of doing things" (ibid.). However, this is not to suggest that people are at the whims of these unconscious affects. "Practice" refers to both the activity and its repetition (ibid., p. 23). In recognition of how "the past, and what has been done before, constrains the present and the future," the different possibilities — or "could be otherwise" qualities — can come to color affect (ibid., p. 23). Furthermore, personal identities and social configurations are multiple, unstable and dynamic; and, as such, affect should be considered similarly multifaceted (Burkitt, 2014, pp. 19-20).

The affect of news should be considered in the context of its production and reception. Indeed, news coverage of events or issues might adopt forms or framing devices because of the affective reactions associated with them (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p. 2). This is not to suggest that news production has "extraordinary powers of persuasion and ideological control on seemingly passive and powerless audiences," as the "could be otherwise" characteristic of affect invites a sense of agency in such engagement (O'Neill, 2011, p. 323). For instance, in response to news overload, audiences might depend on affective and emotional associations with particular people, issues or events as "cognitive shortcuts" to efficiently summarize information (Andrejevic, 2013, pp. 37, 39).

Just as important to how it is produced is where it is received. Digital technologies have brought about hybrid spaces that blur "public and private, civic and consumption-based, collective and personal narratives" (Papacharissi, in Zou, 2018, p. 3). Unlike the Habermasian public sphere, the conversations happening in these private or solo spaces are rarely just detached and rational

but affective and emotional too (Zou, 2018, p. 3; Dahlgren, 2013, p. 63). It creates and maintains "affective feedback loops that generate and reproduce affective patterns of relating to others," encouraging routines of sharing or commenting or linking out to such content (Papacharissi, in Zou, 2918, p. 5).

Taking on mediatization from below

Mediatization research has attempted to comprehend how media and communications informs the "transforming processes of culture and society," from the micro level where people encounter it to the macro level where it relates to "societal pillars like democracy" (Lundby, in Schrøder, 2017, pp. 87-88). Such an approach can draw a clearer picture of "vague and subtle media related transformations" in delimited settings, where a singular focus on production, representation and use would be too narrow (Andersson, 2017, p. 36).

Mediatization has been used to describe how media — often journalistic institutions — have come to be increasingly important in politics (de Vreese, 2014, p. 138; Strömback and Dimitrova, 2011, p. 32). Strömback and Esser conceptualized it as being made up of four dimensions[2], the third of which refers to how "media logic as opposed to political logic" has come to shape media content about politics and society (Strömback and Esser, in de Vreese, 2014, p. 138). For instance, Strömbäck and Dimitrova studied this dimension of mediatization in relation to media interventionism, including how journalists adopt a descriptive or interpretive style when representing a political event or how they frame it as a *"strategic game or a horse race"* (2011, pp. 33, 36); and de Vreese examined it in relation to news framing, which refers to how journalists fit political events into news story templates (2014, p. 148). Blumler and Gurevitch have also considered this dimension of mediatization in terms of whether journalism is "pragmatic" or "sacerdotal," that is, whether politics or journalists have more of a hand in news framing and setting the news agenda (1995, p. 89).

[2] This thesis will only discuss the most relevant dimensions to this literature review.

But any consideration of mediatization should start with what it exactly means by "the media." Strömback and Dimitrova argued that media should be recognized as a "social and cultural system" that makes and spreads "symbols, signs, messages, meanings and values" (2011, p. 33). Mediatization studies have certainly gone back and forth between all-encompassing definitions of "the media" as being either communication technologies or journalistic and digital media institutions; but this risks essentializing it, thus ignoring the "producers, investors, designers, peers and their role in the production of meaning" (Andersson, 2017, pp. 38-39). This parallels arguments that have been made in the news industry against "the media" as a shorthand for every journalist and news institution, though this is often used as a derogatory reference to them conspiring together (Farhi, 2016).

Andersson suggested that such studies need to identify which aspects of media are decisive in such transformative processes; and that, no matter if mediatization is referred to in relation to communication technologies or institutions, it has to include the social (Andersson, 2017, p. 39). This thesis certainly addresses how both aspects of mediatization has shaped news audiences, but what is definitive in the empirical data is how the relationship between audiences and journalistic institutions has transformed through digitalization. Indeed, participants addressed news both as symbolic content and material technology — that is, what it meant to them to engage with news and how they have chosen to do so — but also how these aspects were situated socially. What makes news engagement meaningful is based on shared beliefs, that doing so is a civic, social or professional obligation. This steers clear of analyses where journalistic or digital media institutions alone shape the experience of news.

For instance, the digitalization and "audiencization" of the news industry has brought up questions about the mediatization of news itself (Schrøder, 2017, pp. 87-88). Schrøder said that such research often regards audiences as simply "reactive;" rather than consider how their individual practices can come together to shape "media institutions and the media landscape" (ibid.). He argued for an approach to mediatization that considers audiences, through their

engagement with media as both "technological devices and symbolic content," can come to impact this landscape (ibid., p. 89).

While audiences *should* get more attention — that is, after all, partly the argument for this thesis — who gets to define which practices matter is just as important as what they actually practice. Consider, for instance, how the "pivot to video" strategy in 2016 saw news organizations lay off writers so they could hire more video producers (Moore, 2016; Owen, 2018). This was based on what *Facebook* had claimed were "users, in massive numbers, [shifting] to video from text," a claim later proven to be false because their metric had overestimated average viewing time by as much as 60 to 80 percent (ibid.). Such video content only attracted a fraction of what news organizations got in web traffic previously.

Most mediatization studies often start with an "elaborated theoretical framework" before going on to examine it through case studies (Andersson, 2017, p. 45). However, a top-down approach would put such studies at risk of media determinism, as it might overgeneralize the variegated contexts of social settings at the "micro-level" and be overly-concerned with proving its deductions (ibid.).

That being said, it has been questioned whether mediatization is simply a buzzword in media studies. Corner criticized the concept for lacking a "clear, independent identity" with any specific, distinguishing features from the research on media and society that came before it (2018, p. 89). Conceptually, mediatization may also be conflated with other political and social processes (ibid., p. 83). At the same time, giving these "variations across sectors and timescales" too much credit may also water down its theoretical efficacy (ibid., p. 83). There is certainly a risk of technological determinism in simply pointing a finger at online platforms for what is wrong in the news industry; yet, at the same time, the impact it has had on the production, dissemination and reception of news cannot be discounted either. Furthermore, talking about digitalization in broad strokes also risks making it into a boogeyman without addressing other exacerbating problems.

Mediatization can certainly be expected to be different based on when and where it happens; and, rather than making educated guesses and then finding empirical data that supports or debunks it, a better start might be just to approach it "from below" (Strömback and Dimitrova, 2011, p. 31; Andersson, 2017, p. 36). How news audiences can be approached "from below" is to consider the ways in which they, essentially, decide on how and where they interact with such content. Where previous research has been concerned about the degree in which media logic shapes the presentation and delivery of content (Strömback and Dimitrova, 2011, p. 36), a "bottom-up" approach considers the agency audiences have in negotiating the terms of their relationship with journalistic institutions.

Chapter 3

Taking a phronetic approach to news audiences

This chapter begins by outlining the phronetic and social constructionist methodologies behind how this thesis approached news audiences and their engagement. It then goes on to outline how the thesis adopted qualitative interviews to draw out detailed descriptions about each participants' subjective experiences; and what motivated the use of the *parameters of media engagement* model in organizing the interview guide.

The chapter then elaborates upon how sampling was narrowed down to a media generation who would have spent their formative years through the commercialization of broadcasting and the digitalization of the news industry in Sweden; how it was divided up between low and high intensities of news engagement; and the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on how this thesis approached news audiences.

It then goes into the ethical considerations of conducting qualitative interviews, specifically how consent was needed to set the terms of the social encounter and to ensure participants' privacy; and, lastly, the steps taken in coding and then analyzing the empirical material.

Methodological approach

This thesis adopted a qualitative approach so it could give news audiences a voice (Hermes, 2012, p. 198; Hill, 2015, p. 20) and bring about "well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanation of processes in identifiable local contexts" (Miles and Huberman, in Bazeley, 2013, p. 4). This was of particular importance in this study given that media engagement is subjective and multifaceted; and, as such, the themes within the findings needed to inform the conceptualization of the phenomenon. It was an ongoing process of revising definitions and concepts based on how participants described and interpreted their media experiences, as

opposed to a quantitative approach used to simply "test" hypotheses (Gubrium and Holstein, 2014, p. 36).

How academic and industry research has approached news engagement is an example of how instrumental rationality has come to define much of the sciences over the last two centuries; but it could arguably be balanced out with an examination of its value rationality (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 53, 130). The "Rationalist Turn" in many key scientific developments, such as the information or computer sciences, has blinded "individuals and society to even conceptualize a nonrationalist present and future" (ibid.). For instance, even as publishers recognize the problems with "treating audiences not as individuals, but as a number," news organizations continue to grapple with what it means to reclaim the term "engagement" from a reductive platform definition (Columbia Journalism Review, 2019).

Examining the value rationality of news engagement requires a phronetic approach, which considers the variable and contextual values that are the basis for praxis (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 57). However, values — that is, "things that are [perceived to be] good or bad for man" — are relative and based upon experience (ibid, p. 60). The purpose of this approach is to question such societal values and interests toward "social commentary and social action" (ibid.) and, to this end, this thesis challenges the rationalist understanding of how audiences engage with news and considers one that situates the phenomenon within their lived experiences.

Despite the emphasis on subjective values, a phronetic approach does not give in to foundationalism or relativism (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 131). For instance, this thesis questions the basis upon which measures of attention and interaction can stand in as an explanation for engagement and, instead, argues that the parameters of this phenomenon deserve further exploration. At the same time, it does not resign to the assumption that how audiences engage with news is so idiosyncratic that it is impossible to discern any patterns between them. It is in examining the shared attitudes within its social and historical contexts that keeps this study from sliding into relativism (ibid., p. 130).

To wit, how audiences engage with news cannot be reduced to "predefined elements and rules unconnected to interpretation" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 136). It needs context. For instance, structures do not simply shape engagement, just as much as engagement does not happen despite them (ibid., p. 138). News engagement at both the structural and actor level need to be considered in relation to one another.

Indeed, a phronetic approach has to consider the situational ethics of participants' daily news practices (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 134, 136). To put it differently, the decision to engage with news is not based solely upon what it can do for participants but how it is situated within their everyday lives. For instance, some participants listened to news podcasts while taking public transportation because they would otherwise have little time to keep up with current events (Donna, 25, unemployed Malmö woman); while others took hiatuses as a means to temper the stresses and frustrations of continuously engaging with news (Ben, 25, Kalmar political clerk). Furthermore, in a cross-media news environment, such media practices and experiences are relational (Schrøder, 2011, p. 6). Participants' previous experiences with media, whether intentional or not, leaves an impression upon them that colors how they choose, make sense and possibly participate in and through media (ibid.).

A social constructionist approach was also adopted in that it critically examined the "taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world and ourselves" (Burr, 2015, p. 2). To put it another way, the conditions for how people checked and followed the news may not be based upon material referents. They could be historically and culturally-specific constructions, ones maintained through the social process of communication (ibid., pp. 3-5). The perception that journalism, as an institution, has utility and authority is maintained insofar as people continue to recognize and act upon its rules and functions (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p. 26). For instance, the relationship between journalism and its audience — say, as an educator or a check upon public institutions — is based upon social, cultural and historical circumstances in Swedish

broadcasting, and this relationship remained so long as each stakeholder recognized its resource and adopted its practices (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2013, p. 309).

This is, by no means, to suggest this thesis is the cure-all for what is ailing the news industry; or the glue that holds audiences from further fragmenting into filter bubbles or echo chambers (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch, 2020). A phronetic approach does not come with any predictive theories, just context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 140). Rather, this thesis is just one voice in an ongoing conversation about "how things may be done differently" when it comes to thinking about how audiences engage with news; and, honestly, could be supplanted if someone else puts forth "a *better* alternative" (Nehamas, in Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 131, emphasis in original).

Design of the research

Early on, this thesis was interested in whether affect was related to whether audiences adopted certain news practices over others. It started with exploratory interviews conducted from December 2019 to January 2020 with four Swedes and a Dane residing in either Skåne and Kalmar counties in southern Sweden. They were asked a total of 27 questions, which looked into the time, space, manner and feeling of news engagement; and how they responded helped to narrow the scope and relevant literature for this thesis. The findings from these interviews were needed to explore early assumptions about how this demographic chose to check and follow the news, as the literature that informed this study had different national contexts. These observations were included in a methods diary, which informed subsequent steps taken in the development of the interview guide, sampling and analysis (See Appendix 7 for a sample of the methods diary).

Given the different societal and institutional impact on how these early participants engaged with news, this thesis chose to contextualize the phenomenon using the *parameters of media engagement* model (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 3). The final interview guide included 12

questions, split up between the categories of *news forms and modalities*; *news in context*; *news intensities and consequences*; *news motivations*; and *other* (see Appendix 6). Some of these categories paired parameters together, given how closely certain questions addressed the both of them. This spoke to how these parameters are related to each other in one way or another.

The exploratory interviews and literature informed the preliminary interview guide, which was then trialed and revised over two pilot interviews conducted Feb. 18 and 22, 2020, in Lund and Malmö. This shaved the initial total of 23 questions down to the final 12 questions, divided between the five categories of the *parameters of media engagement* model. Some questions were changed or omitted because participants gave redundant answers to a few or them or had trouble answering the more ontological ones ("What do you consider to be news?" / "What is the function of news?"). Instead, the revised interview guide started with "little questions" and built off participants' answers with follow-up questions (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 133) about what they considered to be the meaning or feeling of news within their everyday lives. To this point, the interview guide invited participants to first describe forms and practices they associated with news and then consider how it contributed toward their cognitive and affective engagement.

All in all, thirteen qualitative interviews were conducted between Feb. 18 and March 28, 2020, with Swedes, between the ages of 22 and 33, residing in Skåne and Kalmar counties in southern Sweden. They were invited to give "thick descriptions," or detailed responses about their subjective and lived experiences (Rapley, 2007, p. 15), given that how audiences engage with news is dynamic and multidimensional (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 3). The duration of these interviews ranged from 26 minutes at the shortest and an hour and 20 minutes at the longest. Only the interview with Mona on March 16, 2020, was under half an hour long, given the brevity of her responses (See Appendix 1 for the full list of participants for this thesis). This informed how the researcher phrased follow-up questions in subsequent interviews, so participants were encouraged to elaborate upon their responses.

Qualitative interviews were recognized as being social encounters where the interactions between researcher and participant shape that particular account of experiences, emotions and opinions (Rapley, 2007, p. 15). "Neutral*istic*" conduct was adopted in conducting the interviews, in that attempts were made to facilitate conversation but not assert any opinions or make any appreciative or critical statements (ibid., p. 21). Furthermore, analysis considered how certain prompts or responses may have influenced how participants gave their answers. That being said, these answers should not be considered idiosyncratic to that particular encounter. They are still "reflexively situated in the wider cultural arena," in that they are not formulated outside of the contemporary ways in which people understand, discuss and experience media (ibid.).

These conversations did not strictly follow the interview guide, as what matters in qualitative interviewing is simply that it "*enables you to gather contrasting and complementary talk on the same theme or issue*" (Rapley, 2007, p. 18, emphasis in original). They followed the flow of the conversation, using follow-up questions to clarify, build up or redirect participants' answers toward a more nuanced and thematic account of their media engagement (ibid., p. 18). For instance, some participants were coaxed away from speculating upon why other people checked and followed the news and, instead, were encouraged to focus upon their own engagement. This is, after all, where qualitative research shines:

> "The strength of qualitative media research is in its understanding that listening to people is an art; it needs to be taught and learned and mastered. Its strength is in understanding that it matters who is listening to whom, that we all have our specific, historical locatedness and so on and so on (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983; Gray 2003)."
>
> (Hermes, 2012, p. 192)

For instance, given that the interview addressed the taken-for-granted ways in which audiences perceive news ("Show me where you get your news and tell me what makes it look like news?"), there was a need to be aware of whether participants needed more time to think through their

answers or whether they were getting stuck. More often than not, waiting a moment before moving on to the next question was the difference between a resigned answer or a descriptive one. At other times, there was a need to draw their attention to certain facets of their engagement ("What about the style / content / visuals makes it look like news?) for them to elaborate upon their experiences. Participants were also invited to show their preferred means of engaging with news during in-person interviews and over video calls, such as scrolling through news and social networking sites on their mobile devices or personal computers (See Appendix 8 for how this was managed over video calls).

Sampling for the research

This thesis needed a critical case that could "activate more actors and basic mechanisms in the situation studied" in a way that a typical, average case could not do (ibid., p. 78). Bolin's perspective on media generations informed the decision to examine news engagement among participants who grew up amid distinct changes in news provisioning — and, by extension, reception — from the 1980s onwards (2017, pp. 22, 35). He suggested that age cohorts are located in a particular time and space that has its own historical and social circumstances; and this informs their generational experiences (ibid., p. 40). Bolin added that media factors into the social formation of generations, specifically in their appropriation of media and their unique experiences with mediatization (ibid., p. 42). The diffusion of technology and the changes in the provision of news in Sweden could then be said to inform the mutual bonds of that particular generation (Westlund and Weibull, 2013, p. 148). Given the affordances, stresses and distractions of the digital age, how participants engaged with news was more likely contingent upon them working through its forms, practices, motivations and consequences.

As such, the sample was narrowed down to Swedes between 20 and 40 years of age, as this potential generation would have had similar media experiences during their formative years (Bolin, 2017, pp. 22, 35). Those born during and following the 1980s would have grown up with, one, personal digital and mobile devices and, two, the dissolution of the public service monopoly

on broadcast television in Sweden (ibid., p. 34). The diffusion of technology and the changes within the news industry were societal events and processes that informed these generations' mutual bonds (Westlund and Weibull, 2013, p. 148).

> "As young people are lacking in experience compared to older people, fresh contacts will have a deeper impact on the young than on the old, and '[a]ll later experiences then tend to receive their meaning from this original set, whether they appear as that set's verification and fulfillment or as its negation and antithesis' [...]"
>
> (Bolin, 2017, p. 12)

Sampling was further narrowed down to the variability of social processes rather than just socio-demographics, as this offers a "more direct and deeper analysis of the observed characteristics" (Gobo, 2006, pp. 411, 413). Specifically, the sample was (mostly) split between seven participants who said they had a high intensity of news engagement and six participants who said they had a low intensity of news engagement. This followed what Corner called the *stages of engagement*, which he used to refer to the continuum between short-form and sustained, embedded engagement (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 20). For instance, some participants described how checking the news was embedded in their everyday routines, such as watching television news over breakfast or scrolling through a news application while riding public transportation; and others stated that it was an infrequent practice, such as only searching for news when it was pertinent to school, work or their social groups. Given the similarities in news provisioning during their formative years, the only difference between participants would be the intensity of their engagement rather than contrasting national or historical contexts.

Participants were sought out by asking personal contacts and interviewees from the exploratory phase if they knew anyone who matched the sampling criteria. A snowballing method was adopted in that interviewees were asked about whether they knew anyone with a similar or different perspective who could be interviewed as a part of this study (Patton, 2015, p. 298).

They were considered "well-situated people" given that they were the subjects of the study (ibid.). A total of 13 participants were interviewed before there was a saturation of themes in analysis.

And then there was this pandemic…

The initial five interviews from Feb. 18 to March 13, 2020, were conducted in person; and the subsequent eight interviews from March 16 to 28, 2020, were conducted over video call. The decision to conduct interviews over video call was made as a preventative measure against the spread and health risk of the COVID-19, or coronavirus, pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020).

Video calls allowed for remote observations of participants (Nehls et al., 2014, p. 146; see Appendix 8 for further reflections) though there were limitations to how much could be observed. For example, participants had to switch between the front and back cameras of their mobile devices so they could show what they were doing on their computers; but this led to them being out of view. Furthermore, given that these remote interviews were conducted in the researcher's home, his companion animal occasionally interrupted the conversation[3]. That being said, there were no longer any geographic limitations to conducting interviews, such that the sample could be expanded to include a participant in Kalmar County (ibid., 2014, p. 146).

The COVID-19 pandemic also changed the context in which participants engaged with news as some of them went from a low to high intensity of engagement because they wanted to stay informed about how it was developing or, simply, they just had more time on their hands (Ron, 27, technician). This informed some of the follow-up questions during interviews, such as "what do you think about the coverage of the coronavirus?"; and the subsequent analysis of their responses.

[3] The researcher lived in a studio apartment and could not hide from his cat.

Ethics of the research

A consent form was prepared and given to participants before the start of every in-person interview; and dictated to them before every phone or video call interview. It was needed to ensure that participants were informed about what the study was about and the consequences of being involved in it (Christians, 2005, p. 144).

The form briefly described what was being studied; disclosed how their personal information will be used; and asked for their consent to the terms. Specifically, they were informed that they will not be identified by their legal names but that other general information about them, such as their age, stated gender and city of residence, will be disclosed in the study. They were also told that they could choose not to answer any of the questions or stop the interview at any time. Participants then either signed the form or had their verbal consent recorded.

There was a need for consent in order to safeguard the privacy of participants against unwanted or potentially damaging exposure (Christians, 2005, p. 145). They might refer to controversial political, social or even personal issues during the interview and, as such, they needed assurance that their responses would not find their way back to them. One of the participants, for example, divulged details about her/his previous employment that might have negative consequences if she/he were identified.

Furthermore, caution was also exercised when discussing news events that might be traumatic for participants. This included the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic over the course of the thesis; the 2017 terrorist attack along Drottninggatan pedestrian street in Stockholm; the 2011 terrorist attacks in Utøya, Norway; and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack in the U.S. This is not to say the researcher avoided asking about these events altogether. He only asked questions as a follow-up to earlier responses related to such events and, even then, made a concerted effort not to push them for answers if it might cause them harm.

Analyzing for the research

The empirical material for analysis included interview transcriptions and field notes on participants' body language and use of mobile devices and computers to check the news. Interview transcripts were read at least three times over to heighten theoretical sensitivity, that is, an awareness of the "concepts, meanings and relationships within the data" (Seale, 2018, p. 368). Impressions and personal comments were written down in memos as these transcripts were being read, which were then referred to in subsequent revisions of the interview guide, coding and analysis (ibid., p. 368). For example, it was observed that participants were more likely to give detailed answers to abstract questions if they started by answering more descriptive ones. Starting with the generic forms of public and commercial news allowed some participants to reflect upon what they considered to be its implied values and consequences.

A thematic coding scheme was used to home in on "what a phenomenon, event or social interaction 'looks like' to the individual," given the social constructionist approach taken in this study (Seale, 20182, p. 367). Such coding identified segments of the interviews that could be said to be thematically or structurally related (Bruhn Jensen, 2012, p. 251). This made analyzing hours worth of interviews more manageable as it summarized them into descriptive labels and made it easier to draw comparisons across the findings (Seale, 2018, p. 367). An iterative zig-zag approach was adopted in thematic coding, in that early analysis of the empirical material informed the further gathering of data (ibid., p. 369). Such an approach allowed the study to address emergent topics in the interviews and to achieve a saturation of themes (ibid.).

The empirical material was coded both deductively, whereby the use of academic and non-academic literature informed the development of some themes ahead of analysis; and inductively, which allowed for detailed exploration of themes through the empirical material (Seale, 2018, p. 368). For example, categories and subcategories such as *perception of representations in news* and *factuality* were based upon the literature (Hendriks et al., 2016, p. 1102; Schrøder, 2015, p. 62). These were expanded upon through *in vivo* codes informed by

terms and phrases drawn directly from the interviews, such as *fitting news into everyday life* and *setting boundaries to engagement* (Seale, 2018, p. 372). Another example would be the subcategory *objectivity* under the category *perception of representations in news*, which is founded upon participants' descriptions of how tabloid or 'evening news' organizations attempted to draw people using emotional appeals.

To make sure interpretation was representative of the object of study (Cornish, 2014, p. 81), this thesis established inter-coder reliability by reviewing coding and categorization with supervisor Annettte Hill. There are certainly many ways of drawing categories from the data, which depends upon the "purposes, perspectives, experiences, and knowledge" of the researcher doing so (Bazeley, 2013, p. 150). Having Hill look through these codes, categories and themes prevented the research from "making unjustifiable leaps of the imagination" (Cornish et al., 2014, p. 81).

All in all, a total of 2,030 codes were organized into three themes, eight categories and 13 subcategories. The first theme *keeping up with news* included the categories *obligations for keeping up with news*, which was divided up between the *personal*, *social*, *civic* and *occupational*; and *strategies for keeping up with news*, which is sorted according to the different ways participants achieved the subjective feeling of being caught up on the news. The second theme *being critical of news* included the categories *perceptions of representations in news*, which is related to whether they recognized its constructed character; and *responses to representations in news*, which is sorted according to how participants achieved the feeling of having been critical enough of news. The third theme *feeling of news* included the categories *being emotionally available when engaging with news*, *being wary of representations in news*, *forming an opinion when engaging with news* and *feeling secure when engaging with news*.

Reflections on the research

It should be disclosed that the researcher previously studied journalism; and worked as a journalist for eight years in the U.S.[4]. This meant that there was a need to acknowledge personal and cultural assumptions, given the differences in industry and academic approaches to news engagement and the different national contexts; and attempt to suspend them (Hammersley, 2013, p. 53). Media engagement is, after all, subjective and, in recognition of its plurality and contradictions, such studies need to "assume less and investigate more" (Corner, 2011, p. 87). As established, qualitative interviews are a collaborative process between both researcher and participants (Rapley, 2007, p. 15). Rather than impose a particular interpretation upon their experiences and emotions, the researcher simply followed the conversation in order to achieve the "thick description" needed to get at participant's subjective and lived experiences (ibid., pp. 15, 21). As such, this study could be said to "give voice to groups of audience members," which is what defines audience studies (Hermes, 2012, p. 198).

[4] The researcher also has experience with web and social media analytics.

Chapter 4

The performances and affective patterns of news engagement

The research questions asked were, one, *how can the parameters of media engagement model by Dahlgren and Hill be applied to news engagement*; and, two, *in what ways do affect and performance shape news engagement?* To answer these questions, this thesis adopted a qualitative approach so participants could provide "thick descriptions" — that is, "*elaborated* and *detailed* answers" (Rapley, 2006, p. 15, emphasis in original) — about their subjective experiences when engaging with news. The *parameters of media engagement* model was necessary to fully contextualize this phenomenon, given that it is dynamic and multidimensional (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 3) and that its affect is both mutable yet embedded in everyday life (Hill, 2019, p. 57). Therefore, theories related to subjectivity, performance and affect were particularly salient to this analysis.

This analysis drew upon mostly hour-long interviews with 13 participants, between the ages of 22 and 33, who resided either in Skåne or Kalmar counties in southern Sweden (see Appendix 1 for more information). The age range of these participants meant that they would have spent their formative years through the commercialization of broadcasting; the expansion of news media on different online platforms; and the assimilation of digital and mobile technologies in Sweden (Westlund and Weibull, 2013, p. 150; see Appendix 2 for a summary of Swedish news provisioning). According to the empirical data, this informed how they each chose to check and follow the news. For instance, participants were familiar with the affordances of using search engines, such as *Google*, to find and compare information across multiple news sources; and social networking sites, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, to share and discuss it.

The three themes that came up in the empirical material and subsequent analytical coding included keeping up and being critical of news and the feeling of engaging with it. This informed the sites of analysis: the responsibilities and performance of being informed and critical; and how the feeling of engagement shaped news audiences. How responsible participants felt about either

staying informed or being critical of the news depended on what they considered to be their civic, social or professional obligations in doing so, and this was entirely subjective to each of them. The thing is, there can be no tangible outcomes to keeping up or scrutinizing the news, because there is no way for them to be caught up on *all* the news or to find a *completely* factual and objective account of what is being reported. As such, acting upon these responsibilities is performative, as participants can only achieve a subjective feeling that they have done enough to stay informed and be critical.

It is important to preface that how the participants in this thesis chose to engage with news is not indicative of what other audiences will do, given that there are different circumstances for the various mediations at this analytical level (Andersson, 2017, p. 46). That being said, in considering such engagement within its social and historical context (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 131), this thesis was able to find patterns between the values that formed the basis of praxis and the associated affects of responsibility, pressure, vulnerability and so on.

The responsibilities of keeping up and being critical of news

Participants often talked about how they engaged with news in relation to how responsible they felt about keeping up and being critical of it. Keeping up with news was a means for them to stay informed about current events and issues; which they understood as a condition of their civic, professional or social identities. Being critical of news was a means to address the factuality and liminality of news; so they can feel confident about having done enough to gather and vet information. This is not to say that every participant felt fully responsible for doing either; but that they negotiate these obligations as they engage with such content.

Subjectivity

The responsibilities of keeping up and being critical of news was related to what each participant considered to be her or his obligation as, say, a citizen, activist, student among other identities.

Leslie, a 25-year-old Helsingborg teacher, said it was her "responsibility as a democratic citizen" to stay informed about current events and issues; and to "practice that muscle" of being critical of news sources. She not only scrutinized news — and, in fact, source criticism is part of the curriculum she taught her students — but regularly listened to news podcasts, such as *Ekot*, every morning and set up push notifications on her phone to feel up to date.

> "As I learned more and more about how fragile the democratic system is as well, I think we really need to care for it; and I think we need to learn to make constructive decisions based on what we think is true."
>
> *Leslie, 25, Helsingborg teacher*

In this statement, Leslie identified herself with the collective *we* that had to participate in the political sphere, as mediated through news; but also set herself apart from an implied *them* that made ignorant, ineffectual decisions. She and other Swedes needed to "care" for democracy; and that it could regress if they did not give it attention. Taking care of democracy required that they make informed and factual decisions about the direction of the country, which can only be achieved by keeping up with what the news has to report on current events and issues. The responsibilities of keeping up and being critical of news informed how some participants saw themselves as news audiences, an identity that is constructed through "the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not" (Gay and Hall, 1996, p. 4). Continuing to fulfill these responsibilities distinguished them from the ill-informed and the reactionary, therefore making them feel as if they were better citizens, activists, students and so on.

At the same time, what was involved in keeping up and being critical of the news differed between participants. 33-year-old Lund teacher Chris recognized the function of news in being able to "develop properly" and "be a democratic citizen;" yet limited his engagement to simply reading the headlines in the *SVT Nyheter* mobile application. His "brain gets tired" from what he considered to be negativity and polarization in the news, which he argued could lead to others relying on their emotions rather than their critical thinking when engaging with it.

> "The root of philosophy is to think for yourself and to temper yourself against not being ruled by emotions but be ruled by your rationality. And I think that's kind of the root, one of the big roots of why things are crazy in the world. It's because people just go by emotions, and they don't use their rationality."
>
> *Chris, 33, Lund teacher*

It is not just Chris' identity as either a citizen or a rationalist or even a news reader that informed his experience of engaging with news, but his memories of having "overdosed from too much news" and negativity. As such, he had to and will likely continue to negotiate just how responsible he was for either keeping informed or being critical of the news. At the very root of this decision is whether Chris can continue to fulfill these responsibilities while maintaining an affect that he considered fitting.

How Leslie and Chris engaged with news illustrative of the *stages of engagement*, which can be charted along a continuum between circumstantial *exposure* and more purposeful *engagement* (Corner, 2011, p. 91). How Chris sporadically checked the *SVT Nyheter* mobile application was an example of short-form engagement (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 20), as it is through this brief and intense mode that he is able to feel informed about current events and issues without being overwhelmed by it. How Leslie regularly checked the news and set up notifications for herself is an example of long-form engagement (ibid., p. 21), as this sustained and embedded mode made her "not feel in the dark" and "more secure in [her] actions" as a citizen and teacher. This came to define their experience of keeping up and being critical of the news, as experience is the "emotional lessons derived from the 'lived reality' of subjectivity" (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 9).

Factuality

How critical participants were of the news also depended on whether they recognized the "constructed character of representation" (Andrejevic, 2013, p. 33) or, to put it simply, that what

was reported in the news may be a partial or altered representation of its real-life referent. Generally, they accepted that factuality, objectivity and completeness were not always stable categories when engaging with news. For instance, 27-year-old Lund university student Andy said that his experience working as a political communicator has made him aware that information is not always neutral. He noticed this in how some news organizations would repeat the talking points of a press release to the benefit of the political or commercial organization that sent them.

> "I didn't think that news came from a place but that's maybe the thing I've realized: that news always comes from someone, that news journalist will very rarely have good scoops anymore like those good-old fashioned things."
>
> *Andy, 27, Lund university student*

Andy recognized the constructed character of representation in such press releases, specifically in how they may contradict reality to portray their stakeholders favorably; and how it is reported given what he considered to be a lack of follow-up about such claims. This informed his understanding that what is covered in the news is always to the benefit of another person or group with a vested interest and, therefore, cannot be fully objective or comprehensive.

Most of them engaged with different news sources with the understanding that what is being reported is conditional and that it is up to them to build out a (subjectively) bigger picture or not. Participants often talked about how news represented an event or issue in terms of whether it was factual, objective or complete. This was not always based upon what they knew of the referent but what they recognize as the generic forms of fact-based, unbiased journalism.

They recognized the constructed character of news in whether it appeared to be factual, that is to say, that its content had facts and informed them about the world (Hill, 2007, p. 109). Ron, a 26-year-old Malmö technician, said his previous experiences with misinformation and badly-sourced stories have made him wary of the news. He brought up a debunked article on

Facebook, which reported that dolphins had returned to Venice, Italy after a decline in human activity because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon looking for more information, Ron could not find any primary sources supporting this claim. He may not completely distrust the news; but he is more cautious about it being misleading or taken out of context.

> ”I’ve also learned that, just because you read [different] examples of how it happened or different numbers of death, that doesn’t mean “Oh, how could I know what’s true?” What that tells me is, “Oh, we don’t really know yet. It’s more speculation,” so I might not take this to the grave.”
>
> *Ron, 26, Malmö technician*

How participants determined factuality was not based on real-life referents — Ron was certainly not skimming Venetian canals for dolphins — but their subjective “criterion of truth” (Hill, 2007, pp. 3, 109). They could only recognize news as being “authentic” and “true to life” (ibid.) by identifying its generic forms, including how it is sourced and framed.

Another instance of this was 25-year-old Kalmar political clerk Ben getting frustrated over how *SVT Nyheter* had conflated the severity of COVID-19 in Sweden with China through the *Facebook Story* feature. It had used a photograph of two nurses administering a flu shot in Sweden next to one of a “casket on wheels” being taken out of a Chinese hospital. At the time of the interview, there had been no reported deaths related to COVID-19 in Sweden. Ben, thus, worked through the referential integrity of *SVT Nyheter’s* presentation by, one, reflecting upon what he knew about the pandemic; and, two, how the pairing of these two photographs implied the situation is comparable to China. The photographs and report, by themselves, were not misleading; but it was through how it was presented together that Ben assessed that it was inaccurate.

Participants were also made aware of the constructed character of news whenever it appeared to take sides or exaggerate an event or issue. Most of them recognized that it could not be entirely

objective but, generally, trusted both public media and mainstream commercial news organizations to be factual in their reporting. Participants often addressed objectivity when talking about "evening news" organizations, such as *Aftonbladet* or *Expressen*, which 25-year-old Malmö journalist Perd described as regularly making "a hen out of a feather" and using sensational headlines so that audiences would click through on their stories. Despite this, he did not consider such organizations to be any less factual for adopting practices that make events or issues appear "bigger than maybe it is."

> "As long as I know that, I would say it's fine because I know that it's a bit twisted — maybe some things — but I know that the center of it is still factual, and I trust the reporter to have done a good job with it."
>
> *Perd, 25, Malmö journalist*

In this statement, Perd expressed that he was confident about working out what was factual and what was exaggeration in "evening news." He recognized its generic forms, whether that be its emotionally-charged language or its "twisted" presentation. Despite this, Perd said this had no bearing on how much he trusted the journalists reporting on the event or issue. He was aware of what it took to get attention online — no doubt informed by his own professional experience as a journalist — and that there were no ulterior motives to how such content was presented beyond getting audiences to click on it. It should be clarified here that Perd does not work for a news organization he or other participants considered to be "evening news;" and that this thesis will not identify where he works in order to maintain his anonymity.

On the other hand, Tom stated that objectivity could be its own contrivance. The 27-year-old Malmö freelance photographer went to *SVT* for "baseline," unbiased information; but said the public media organization, in wanting to remain "neutral," may avoid reporting on certain events or issues. As such, he visited — and even put money toward — the news organization *ETC* because their niche is to report on stories that might be pertinent to their left-leaning target demographic.

> "If you see how they report on, like, [President Jair] Bolsonaro in Brazil, state media would be, like, "here's the new president. He likes this and this and he's going to do this and this and la-dee-la-dee-da." And *ETC* would bring up everything, like, the stuff he said in the past and what he's trying to do and why this is bad for everyone."
>
> *Tom, 27, Malmö freelance photographer*

In engaging with *SVT Nyheter* and *ETC,* Tom recognized how the values that informed either news organization could lead to blindspots in their coverage. He attempted to address these shortcomings by reading and comparing both of them, thus feeling as if he has a more comprehensive understanding of current events and issues. Therefore, the juxtaposition between *SVT Nyheter* and *ETC* is performative, as it was what he subjectively thought was needed to get at the bigger picture.

Participants also recognized the constructed character of representation in news when they notice a news story is incomplete. They may decide to fill in the blanks if they thought something was missing in a report about an event or issue, such as 23-year-old Lund university student April turning to other news sources if she considered it to be lacking in context. Looking up additional information could also be a reflex among participants, as they have grown up with multiple news sources being immediately accessible to them online. Even if content is hidden behind a paywall, participants were familiar enough with the affordances of search engines to look up what other news sources are saying about a particular event or issue. Perd (25, Malmö journalist) said he often looks up additional information across multiple news outlets to get an accurate, "broader picture."

> "It's impossible for every outlet to get every detail of it, so you check multiple sources, multiple outlets about a certain story if there are different details of it in

> another outlet, just to see that they correspond with each other. If two or three or four news outlets say the same then it's probably right."
>
> *Perd, 25, Malmö journalist*

There are similarities between how participants described the constructed character of representation in news and the traditional journalism values of objectivity and rationality, which espouse that news is meant "to be cool, rather than emotional, in tone" (Schudson, in Zou, 2018, p. 5). It was also certainly reminiscent of what the Yale Communication Research Program defined in 1959 as *credibility* (Kohring and Matthes, 2007, p. 233), which is based upon how informed and impartial a news source appeared.

If participants recognized that what is being represented in the news can not be absolutely factual, objective or complete, then keeping up with news and being critical of it cannot have tangible outcomes. There is no magic number to how many articles, videos or audio recordings they need to consume to be fully informed, because there will always be more to read, watch or listen to. Participants could find and compare more sources; but they would only achieve a fragmented and selective representation of what is being reported in the news rather than a complete and objective one.

The question, then, is why participants would maintain a high intensity of engagement with news if it did not make that much of a difference. The answer is that such engagement is performative, in that how participants checked and followed the news is meant to achieve a subjective feeling of being an informed and critical news audience. That is to say, it is just as much about *feeling* informed and critical as it is about *being* informed and critical. If there was no sure way of *being* either, how participants engaged with news was based upon what they subjectively thought was needed to fully keep up with and scrutinize it. Therefore, what they considered to be enough was partly based upon the affect they associated with the ways they chose to engage with news.

The performances of an informed and critical news audience

Participants adopted different strategies for both how they kept up with news and scrutinized it in order to maintain their performances as an informed and critical audience, even if there was no one around to witness it. This is related to the proposition that everything in the world needs to be constituted as an event "made to perform for those watching or gazing" and that people, too, conduct themselves as if they are the object of attention for a real or imagined audience (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, pp. 78, 88).

How participants perceived the intensity of their engagement played into their performance as an informed news audience. To wit, their performance was based upon whether they had sustained their engagement for what they considered — or, rather, felt — to be enough. They realized their parts by either fitting news into their daily routines; depending on other people to set the news agenda for them; or setting boundaries to their engagement.

They found a place for news in their daily routines by either *snacking* on it, setting up notifications for it or putting it on in the background. Participants often *snacked* on news — that is, they checked in on it sporadically throughout the day — to take a break from their moment-to-moment activities or to fill time in between them. Tom (27, Malmö freelance photographer) routinely checked *SVT* and *ETC* as he started and ended work; or whenever he had downtime. Participants, such as Leslie (25, Helsingborg teacher) and Gerry (27, Lund university student), said they also brought up the news on their phones whenever they took public transportation.

Several participants set their mobile devices up to notify them about news. For example, Leslie (25, Helsingborg teacher) received notifications from *Omni*, a news aggregation application; and *SVT* and *CNN*, her preferred sources for national and international news. She has previously been stressed about getting such notifications; but, ultimately, felt safe being "in the know" through them. Leslie brought up the example of the U.S. assasination of Iranian general Qasem

Suleimani in January 2020. She was concerned that the two nuclear powers could go to war; and relied on her notifications to stay informed about how the situation was developing.

Other participants put the news on in the background as they went about their daily activities. For instance, Tom (27, Malmö freelance photographer) listened to news on the radio as he goes about his morning routine because he does not "like it being totally quiet when [he wakes] up." Ben (25, Kalmar political clerk) also listened to the news as he went about different household tasks so "half his brain is connected to it over a few hours" and that he can "mentally scroll down" through the biggest stories of the day. However, not all participants shared this practice. Andy (27, Lund university student) had to give his full attention to news because he "wouldn't be able to actually take in the things that [he's] listening to if [he] is doing something else."

A number of participants also depended on other people to set the news agenda for them, which included professional journalists and those within their social, professional or online circles. For example, Tom (27, Malmö freelance photographer) said it was "comfortable" to watch television news go through the most important stories of the day, as he considered it to be more well-rounded than if he were to look for articles and videos on his own. He cannot skip ahead to the most relevant parts and, as such, would have to take in the entirety of the news broadcast. While *SVT Nyheter* may avoid certain stories because it might make them look biased, Tom still trusted public news organizations to give him a general overview of what was newsworthy. Similarly, Perd (25, Malmö journalist) set time aside on the weekends to go through several physical newspapers, not only because it featured what the editorial staff considered to be their best content that week but also so he could keep up with what is being covered and discussed among right-leaning news organizations. Otherwise, most of what he read during the rest of the week was "left-leaning."

Both Tom and Perd have a high level of trust for such news organizations, that is, they can confidently expect them to produce factual content (Fletcher and Park, 2017, pp. 1283-1284). They maintain their engagement with such organizations even though they may not necessarily

agree with their editorial agenda or stance. If sorting through a surplus of information online is now just as much a personal value as it is a public one, then Tom and Perd ceded some control over to news organizations so it was less complex to find what was relevant and important to their development as citizens (Kohring and Matthes, 2007, p. 238; van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 67).

What is important to return to here is that this is based upon their subjective schemes of "knowledge and feeling" (Corner, 2011, p. 91). To wit, Tom (27, Malmö freelance photographer) said that public media organizations *SVT* and *SR* are "pretty big in Sweden" and that Swedes "know it's not biased" — an opinion that many participants shared — yet this must be contextualized within a political tradition where "government institutions are generally trusted" (Weibull, 2013, p. 37) and a media landscape where it has had a monopoly for much of its broadcasting history (Bolin, 2017, p. 34). Perd's (25, Malmö journalist) trust in news organizations needs to be understood within the context of his professional experience as a journalist, whereby he can draw upon his institutional knowledge to work through whether they are trustworthy or not.

A few participants, such as Chris (33, Lund teacher) and Ron (26, Malmö technician), depended on their friends to inform them about important events or issues they should read up on. Chris said he does not have a "big need" to regularly check up on news because of this; and Ron said he is not concerned about missing out on it because he is confident he "will eventually hear about it." However, there were participants who were wary of just getting the news from their friends and family. Ben (25, Kalmar political clerk) said he was often around people with the same political views as him and, as such, was trapped in a "filter bubble" where shared news was biased toward that particular orientation. This made it difficult for him to learn about different points of view, which he considered to be his civic and occupational responsibility.

Chris and Ron's trust in what their friends tell them is relevant is an example of private or solo spheres, a space for "networked yet privatised mode of sociality" (Dahlgren, 2013, p. 63). This was, in itself, a means of control over the surplus of information, whereby they can *imagine* their

friends having similar “practices, dispositions, tastes, and horizons of expectations” when it comes to how they look for and scrutinize news (Dahlgren, 2013, p. 63; Taylor, 2013, p. 23).

A few participants managed the stress of keeping up with news by, essentially, setting boundaries to their engagement. This might appear contrary to staying informed about what is going on around them, but some of them maintained the intensity in which they engaged with news by occasionally stepping back from it or narrowing down what they read, watched or listened to. Those who were frustrated or overwhelmed when they checked the news occasionally took a break from it, which most commonly happened with difficult events or issues. For instance, Gerry (27, Lund university student) said he has had to take longer breaks from news coverage about the COVID-19 pandemic but only in response to him spending more time reading about it.

> ”I’ve thought about how I engage with media, actually, at the moment; and I usually read a lot during one day, maybe different sources in different media and then I feel overwhelmed, so I sort of distance myself and I’m maybe not reading so much for two or three days.”
>
> *Gerry, 27, Lund university student*

How participants performed as a critical news audience depended on whether they could demonstrate their media literacy skills, even if they are the only people around to notice them. This is not to say that such critical skills are inconsequential when evaluating news, as established in the example of Ron (26, Malmö technician) comparing both secondary and primary sources to determine whether a news story is trustworthy. Rather, in recognition of the constructed character of representation in news, the best participants can do is to achieve a subjective feeling that they have fully vetted the information before them. As such, they realized the part of a critical news audience if they achieved scale when engaging with news, demonstrated their critical skills or discussed current events or issues with other people.

Most participants achieved scale by searching and comparing information across multiple news sources, which made them feel as if they had a more comprehensive and objective understanding of the reported event or issue. For instance, Perd (25, Malmö journalist) said that it was "impossible for every outlet to get every detail" and often looked through several sources to make sure he had not missed anything. He also considered the consistencies and discrepancies between these sources so he could feel more confident that he had accurate and objective information. April (23, Lund university student), in the interest of being "objective" and not wanting to just "hear one side of a story," also compared how different sources portrayed or interpreted the same event or issue. This was not always consistent among all participants. Looking across multiple news sources required active engagement and, as Andy (27, Lund university student) described it, people might not "have the energy or the time" to do so. Several of them also narrowed down what they read, watched or listened to, as previously established, so that news engagement was more manageable.

Deciding to search and compare more information on an event or issue certainly depended on how participants perceived the news organization reporting on it. For instance, Perd (25, Malmö journalist) said he read *Aftonbladet* because it is often "first with the big story" but also followed it up with "another source just to make sure and also to get a broader sense of what the story is about." Chris (33, Lund teacher) did not feel the need to look for more information after reading what *SVT Nyheter* had to report on the 2018 Sweden wildfires because he did not "see why [...] state-owned media would lie about the forest fires."

Participants demonstrated their critical skills by working through its factuality and the generic forms of news. Some of the ways in which they assessed news was to determine if it was being sensational; misrepresenting an event or issue; or lacking in transparency, either in how it was reported or whether there might have been any commercial or political motivation behind it. They considered news to be sensational if it was framed or presented in a way to get audiences to read, watch or listen to it. However, participants did not consider sensational and factual news to be mutually exclusive; as participants said a story could play up certain details or frame it in an

emotional way but still, as Perd (25, Malmö journalist) claimed, have a factual "center." Leslie (25, Helsingborg teacher) related such content to a "genre of clickbait," which often left out important details in their headlines so audiences would have to click through to find out more about it. She said a "true news article" would include the most important details in their headlines rather than withhold it so audiences will click through.

Participants also considered the style of news when considering whether it was sensational or not. Ben (25, Kalmar political clerk) said there was a "degree of serious-ity" that came with the "basic" presentation of news, such as a color scheme that was limited to black fonts against a white background or visuals that depicted "normal, everyday and, perhaps, pedestrian" occurrences. This was in contrast to what Andy (27, Lund university student) and April (23, Lund university student) identified as the use of large, bold and colorful fonts used to draw attention; and what Ron (26, Malmö technician) and Tom (27, Malmö freelance photographer) described as photographs that are meant to be alarmist or suggest an emotional character.

Several of them assessed whether a news story had misrepresented an event or issue, often by identifying how closely it stuck to the facts of something that had actually happened. It bears repeating here that past experiences with news and misinformation informed these assessments; and, as such, what participants came to understand as factual and objective journalism was entirely subjective. For instance, Ron was also suspicious of a *Facebook* post that had promoted a story about the Russian government releasing 500 lions to scare Moscow residents into self-isolating during the pandemic because — besides being laughable and "crazy" — he has previously seen users "post things or articles that are just horse shit."

Therefore, participants engaged in *genre work* when being critical of news, drawing upon the generic material they have previously collected on it to assess what they are seeing in front of them (Hill, 2007, p. 89). That is to say, they considered what they have seen previously, interpreted what they were reading, watching or listening to and determined how it related to their sense of what is news (ibid.)

Participants also worked through the news with other people, often by reflecting on it together or debating it. Some of them compared their concerns and opinions against those that came up in the comments section of news websites and social networking sites, including Ron (26, Malmö technician) and Tom (27, Malmö freelance photographer). Ron said it was "comfortable" to find other users who agreed with him because he did not want to be the "only one being scared of something," specifically in relation to news coverage about the pandemic. He also looked through the comments section to see if there were any similar reactions whenever he thought an article or video was "being outrageous or being shocking." Similarly, Tom said it was "empowering" to find other people who agreed with him or shared his reaction but, more often than not, found it entertaining to see "people hating on people" in either comical or poorly-worded comments.

Generally, participants avoided the comments sections of news websites and social networking sites because, according to Ben (25, Kalmar political clerk), there were "a lot of misunderstandings" and people who "want to misunderstand like that." That is to say, he believed other people were likely to argue or antagonize one another rather than have a constructive discussion. However, he distinguished between the comments sections for national news sources and his local *Barometern*, as he believed trolls and bots were not as concerned with the limited reach of the Kalmar publication. The latter was also different because its comments section was mostly made up of people who knew one another in the city.

> "While Kalmar is a big town, it's not really that big so people kind of know each other, so they can't be awfully rude to each other, which I think keeps it somewhat clean most cases and is especially the handful of people that really engage in it, like commenting on different articles."
>
> *Ben, 25, Kalmar political clerk*

Ben trusted the comments section of *Barometern* to be more constructive because of its social imaginary, that is, "the ways people imagine their social existence" through the use of "images, stories and legends" (Taylor, 2013, p. 23). It informed how Ben thought of himself in relation to the other people participating in the conversation which, in turn, legitimized certain practices and placed expectations upon him if he were to comment (ibid., pp. 23, 24). To wit, there is no way that Ben could be absolutely sure that these terms would be reciprocated (Kohring and Matthes, 2007, p. 238), as it is simply based upon how he has seen interactions go down in the comments section. Yet these interactions allowed him to affectively orient himself to the particular mood of the conversation, such that he has to conduct himself in a communal and "clean" manner (though he also has a professional obligation to conduct himself well online).

Participants emphasized the importance of having a comfortable environment where they trusted other people to discuss the news on the same terms as them. For Gerry (27, Lund university student), this was the difference between sharing and discussing news on *Facebook* and in a closed environment through the messaging application *Telegram*. *Facebook* had transformed from a platform "for quite close friends" to one that included acquaintances and colleagues, such that Gerry felt he had to be "more anonymous" and, as such, did not share any news. However, Gerry felt that he could have a constructive discussion about long-form journalism in *The New Yorker* and *The Guardian* with his two friends on *Telegram*, even though they are of different political orientations.

> "I don't know how productive those sort of discussions are, relating to the comments sections; and that's what I really feel in this *Telegram* group, that it's partly meaningful because I sort of can see the arguments from the other political positions represented by the other two people in the group. But it's also a chance for me to sort of try to formulate arguments and to, like, test and analyze and so on in this very comfortable and closed setting where we know each other really well. "
>
> *Gerry, 27, Lund university student*

In this statement, Gerry described how it was more "comfortable" and "meaningful" to discuss news within the closed setting of *Telegram*. He was more uncertain about whether doing so on *Facebook* would be as "productive" because he is not as familiar with the other users participating in the conversation. How Gerry engaged with news, then, is another example of the solo sphere. The expectations that he has of his friends and the expectations they have of him are more explicit on *Telegram*, even if they were of different political orientations. There were clear boundaries to what sort of content would be shared, so Gerry could expect to adopt a more "professional role" when dipping into the conversation. As such, he was better able to manage the affect of engaging with news, where it would otherwise be uncertain in the torrent of news and opinions on *Facebook*.

The feeling of engaging with news

The responsibilities and performances of being an informed and critical news audience were both constitutive of how participants felt when engaging with news. The technical term for this feeling is affect which, in terms of engagement, refers to the mood of a particular media experience (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, pp. 17-18). This is not to divorce affective from cognitive engagement (ibid.). As this section will establish, how participants chose to keep up and be critical of news were "affective practices," whereby they associated or "patterned together" certain bodily reactions with their continued engagement (Wetherell, 2012, p. 14).

These affective practices were not one-dimensional, in that participants only achieved a subjective feeling of being all caught up and having factual, objective and complete information through them. Subjectivities and social configurations are multiple, unstable and dynamic; and it stands to reason that affect would be similarly multidimensional (Burkitt, 2014, pp. 19-20). Such practices were made and remade, "interacting and recursive," (ibid.), such that participants developed distinct ways of engaging with news.

How wary participants felt when engaging with news was related to how responsible they felt about being critical of the constructed character of its representations. Generally, they were wary about whether a news story might be used to manipulate them, either to capture their attention or influence their opinions; or whether it was comprehensive enough to fulfill their subjective obligations. As established previously, Leslie (25, Helsingborg teacher) stated she was suspicious of headlines online that held back information because she associated it with the "genre of clickbait." Ron (26, Malmö technician) was also skeptical about news stories that might be speculative, giving the example of *Aftonbladet* basing claims of "worst case scenarios" and unfavorable trends on small-scale research studies.

> "Sometimes, *Aftonbladet*, in digging into something one scientist said, they can blow that up to this big, big article, where there are just scientists going out with high-powered hypotheses [...] If one of them has these worst-case scenarios, then it's great for them to push that and they will get so many clicks."
>
> *Ron, 26, Malmö technician*

Ben (25, Kalmar political clerk) said it was his civic and occupational responsibility to diversify his news sources but was sad that there were "few newspapers with a serious angle that have different political opinions" in Sweden. He was able to find publications that scrutinized issues salient among those of different political affiliations than him. However, they only superficially addressed issues important to those of his own political orientation. For instance, Ben described *ETC* as constantly nagging its audience about how "it's the global capitalism that is the major problem" but not getting into any specifics.

Participants were also more wary of news depending on where they received it. Donna (25, unemployed Malmö woman) visited news websites to "learn about things" and, as such, was more inclined to focus on and scrutinize what is being reported. She suggested there was a dominant point of view in mainstream Swedish news that was "taboo" to oppose, given that it was the same as their target demographic. There were "implied enemies" in how such news organizations covered international events and issues, and this made her wary of whether their

reporting might lack nuance or might be reductive. Donna brought up how Swedish news organizations have covered U.S. President Donald Trump as an example.

> "'Cause Sweden hates Trump so much, you get very quickly, like, "Oh, it's his fault," which I'm not saying it isn't but it's kind of implied that that's what you're supposed to say so that kind of stops the debate right there."
>
> *Donna, 25, unemployed Malmö woman*

This was different from how she engaged with news on *Facebook*, where she only glanced at what her friends had posted and was more likely to trust it because of their shared political orientation. Therefore, her participation had the low affective intensity associated with the solo sphere (Dahlgren, 2013, p. 63). She may not consider *Facebook* as being a setting that is conducive for either a critical or focused engagement with news; but acknowledged that her fleeting engagement with her friends' post still informed what she knew about current events and issues. As a consequence, Donna may bring up something she read or watched on *Facebook* in conversation because of the relative certainty that such content had been filtered through her friends and was, therefore, trustworthy.

How obligated participants felt about having an opinion or picking a side when engaging with news depended on their subjectivities. Taking a stance was a means through which some participants could feel secure in their political identities, such as Tom (27, Malmö freelance photographer) who sought out reporting that was politically aligned with him so that he could "confront people that have what [he] would recognize as bad ideas or bad views." Similarly, Donna (25, unemployed Malmö woman) said having an opinion has more to do with "self image." She dated the practice back to when she and her friends were teenagers looking for news that supported their "super left wing, super liberal" opinions so they could set themselves apart from those of opposing political orientations. Identities, after all, are "more the product of marking of difference and exclusion" rather than something that is naturally occuring (Hall and

Gay, 1996, p. 4); and participants' political identities — and certainly their identities as part of an audience too — are continuously being shaped and reshaped as they engage with news.

Most of them stressed how important it was for them to come to their own conclusions, which made them wary of news organizations that appeared to foist a particular point of view upon them. Ben (25, Kalmar political clerk) said this can make such organizations appear patronizing.

> "That's not really the job of news, I think, to try to nudge you in a direction because they want you to think something when you read the article. As a reader, I feel that "you don't take me seriously." Because I'm a grown adult, I can read something then make up my own mind about it, so just give me the facts."
>
> *Ben, 25, Kalmar political clerk*

Other participants, like Chris (33, Lund teacher), said it can be "tiring" and "polarizing" to always form an opinion. He attributed this to the divisiveness of punditry on social networking sites, where users formed their identities around the combative opinions that "trickle down" from *Twitter* or blogging personalities. He has attempted to avoid being too emotionally invested in one side or the other; but said it was difficult when the very same pundits appear on televised debate programs and his friends ask him about his opinions on what they said. As a consequence, Chris felt he needed to take a position on most events and issues; and was "supposed to be upset about things."

> "[It is] a time of turmoil that we live in, morally, in Sweden with the *Sweden Democrats*, about immigration issues and feminist issues and political issues and there's a lot of polarization today, and you're either on side A or side B and you have to choose."
>
> *Chris, 33, Lund teacher*

In this statement, Chris suggested several issues that demanded his emotional investment whenever it appeared in the news. This often meant that he had to take up the affective

orientation of being "upset" about what one side or the other did rather than, in his own words, tempering himself against "being ruled by emotions." Being caught up in the rhetoric of taking sides feeds off such emotions; and doing so may come at the cost of self-reflexivity. To put it simply, Chris felt that he was being put on the spot, that he had to take a stand before putting in any thought. Therefore, he could not perform the responsibility of being critical of news.

How emotionally vulnerable participants felt when they engaged with news also depended on their subjectivities. For instance, Chris described himself as a formerly active environmental activist and vegan with a "big conscience." However, he has had to become more "stoic" — that is, emotionally detached — when catching up on the news because "he is just tired of being angry and upset about everything." Chris has tried to "make [his] world smaller" in the last several years by limiting his engagement with news.

> "I want to save the world and do my part in that way but then I moved away from that, at least in the sense I'm not doing it 100 percent but 50 percent. I have this issue of trying to take all of the world's problems onto me and so, to be able to handle all the problems, I can't take in all that."
>
> *Chris, 33, Lund teacher*

In this statement, Chris referred back to this identity as an activist in wanting to do right by the world and that it was something he was able to accomplish by engaging with news. He has had to weigh this responsibility against taking in "all of the world's problems," which he described as being exhausting and upsetting. What Chris had done then was to establish the boundaries of his affective engagement with news.

Several participants also felt secure in keeping up with news, often in relation to an ongoing event or issue that has a direct impact on their lives. For instance, Ron (26, Malmö technician) said he did not usually check the news that much throughout the week; but has found himself looking for updates on the COVID-19 pandemic on *Aftonbladet* and *Sydsvenkan* several times

throughout the day. He found the pandemic to be “scary” and “uncomfortable” out of concern for his own family and older relatives; and had consistently kept up with the news to make sure that he was doing “the right thing.” April (23, Lund university student), who did not purposefully check and follow the news, also said that it offered “a sense of coming together in a time of crisis.” She brought up the example of watching a television news report about the 2017 terrorist attack along the Drottninggatan pedestrian street in Stockholm with other students, which gave them a “sense of connection that you might not get from any internet.”

Situating news engagement within the lived experiences of audiences rarely brings about anything so binary as circulation or subscription numbers, shares or reactions and so on; but that is where its strength lies. Engagement is more than just the moment during and after participants’ encounter with news, but also what builds up toward it. How they come to think and *feel* through news does not happen in a vacuum, as it occurs at the intersection of social, political and cultural circumstances. It can certainly get messy but, at the very least, what this analysis has shown is that to just pass exposure or interaction off as engagement is to put lipstick on a pig.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine the parameters of news engagement; and how affect and performance shaped news engagement. The "parameters of media engagement" model was not only named in the first research question, but it was conducive toward answering the second question about performance and affect. Engagement is a multidimensional and "powerful subjective experience" (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, p. 3); and, as such, this phenomenon needed to be situated within its complementary and competing contingencies. In concert, they contribute toward how audiences chose to keep up and scrutinize news; and what it felt like to do so.

As such, tapping into the subjective was necessary for this thesis to understand how audiences negotiate the performances of engagement — how much is too much or too little — and how it is related to the mutable but embedded affect of news within their everyday lives (Hill, 2019, p. 57). Traditional academic and industry measures that have attempted to reduce engagement to reach, preference, attention and interaction can only remark on what is observable (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch, 2020); but audiences' own thick descriptions were better able to describe their subjective and lived experiences with news (Rapley, 2007, p. 15).

A social constructionist approach was adopted in studying this phenomenon because what audiences considered to be the parameters of engaging with news is subjective to each of them and relational to what is socially and institutionally accepted to be the right way of doing so. A consequence of digitalization is that audiences are just as responsible for sorting through a surplus of information as an editorial staff (van Dijck et al., pp. 57); and their identities and experiences of engaging with news would inform how they selected and scrutinized it. Therefore, what fulfills the criteria of being an informed and critical news audience has to be considered a social construction. This is not to give into relativism but, rather, to consider the historically-situated contexts in which these performances and affects come up in everyday life (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 130).

In mapping these parameters, it was unmistakable that how audiences chose to check and follow the news was not just a rational determination of what was worthwhile (Schrøder, 2014, p. 63) but also an affective one. The feeling of responsibility that came with either keeping up or being critical of the news was often in contention with the stresses of actually engaging with it. Therefore, they continuously negotiated between how they should perform as informed and critical news audiences and whether or not it feels right. To better illustrate this, this concluding chapter will reflect upon the key findings and how they relate to the two research questions:

How can the *parameters of media engagement* model by Dahlgren and Hill be applied to news engagement?

This thesis mapped the six parameters of media engagement in relation to one another, which included its *contexts*, *motivations*, *modalities*, *forms*, *intensities* and *consequences* (Dahlgren and Hill, upcoming, pp. 3-4). In doing so, it could make out the similarities and differences between them.

Contexts and motivations

How participants engaged with news was considered within the context of, one, how the relationship between journalists and audiences has changed and, two, how digital and mobile technologies have shaped the way they receive, search and scrutinize such content. For one, they each acknowledged that they had to keep up with current affairs and issues out of civic, professional and/or social obligations. They generally recognized that news is meant to contribute to informed decision-making in democractic society, a commonly-held opinion among Swedes that has been attributed to its history with public service broadcasting (Hill, 2007, p. 145). Indeed, most participants said they regularly kept up with *Sveriges Television* (*SVT*) and *Sveriges Radio* (*SR*) because they considered them to be reliable, factual and objective news

sources. They did not always share the same opinions of for-profit news organizations, however, as commercial interest might contribute toward frivolity, sensationalism or adversarialism.

Furthermore, digital and mobile technologies were introduced in Sweden during their formative years (Westlund and Weibull, 2013, p. 150). This shaped how they both received and searched for news; and whether they recognized the "constructed character of representation" in news agendas and reporting (Andrejevic, 2013, p. 33). Participants could access multiple news sources because they were not limited to any time, place or price. They could rely on search engines to look up information without having to go through a news organization's main website; and use social networking sites to share it with their friends, family and acquaintances (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 53). At the same time, the participatory character of such platforms led to them gaining a "practice-based awareness" about the "constructed character or representation" in news (Andrejevic, 2013, p. 33). That is to say, their experiences with such technologies informed their understanding that they could not trust everything they read, watch or listen to online. This also meant they had to be wary of news, as there was a chance it may not be factual, objective or even complete.

Modalities and forms

How participants assessed whether news appeared credible or objective was not based on what they knew of the actual event or issue but what they recognized as its generic forms, which included its style, language and what was included in the editorial agenda. For instance, most participants associated objective news organizations with their simple, "down to earth" presentation (Ron, 26, Malmö technician) and formal, unemotional language in their headlines and reporting (Ben, 25, Kalmar political clerk). Some of them also brought up articles, listicles and videos they considered to be frivolous; and how they were evidence of a news organizations' low credibility (Chris, 33, Lund teacher).

The responsibilities of keeping up with news and scrutinizing it motivated participants' engagement with such content. How responsible they were about doing either depended on whether they had a civic, professional and/or social obligation to do so, though this was subjective to each of them. This obligation was related to what participants identified as when they engaged with news, such as a citizen fulfilling her democratic responsibility (Leslie, 25, Helsingborg teacher) or an activist wanting to do her part for the environment (April, 23, Lund university student).

Intensities and consequences

This informed the intensity of participants' engagement with news. Some of them sustained their engagement by embedding news within their everyday lives, such as putting it on in the background as they went about household tasks (Ben, 25, Kalmar political clerk) or regularly watching it on television as a part of their evening routines (Ron, 26, Malmö technician). Other participants settled for fleeting engagement, such as choosing to just scan the headlines (Chris, 33, teacher). There were a few participants who chose to scrutinize the news by comparing news reports on the same event or issue; whereas others chose to rely on a handful of professional journalists to tell them what they needed to know.

The intensity of these engagements exemplified what each participant thought they needed to do as an informed and critical news audience. However, a key point of this thesis is that, no matter how much or how little participants checked and followed the news, there could not be any tangible outcomes to their engagement. That is to say, they could not possibly keep up with all news because there will always be more; and all they can achieve in being critical will still be a fragmented and selective representation of what is being reported on. Therefore, all they can accomplish is a subjective feeling of having done *enough* to keep up and be critical of news. This will be detailed as the thesis gets around to the second question on the performance and affect of how participants chose to engage with news.

The consequences of such engagement is that participants were able to feel satisfied that they had fulfilled their responsibilities in keeping up and being critical of news; and secure in knowing what was going on in the world around them. At the same time, participants felt they had to, one, be wary at all times; two, be ready to form an opinion; and, three, be emotionally open to whatever event or issue that is being represented in the news. What came to define their engagement then is how they came to negotiate their identities as part of a news audience against the stresses of keeping up and being critical of the news.

In what ways do affect and performance shape news engagement?

Participants performed their engagement with news according to what they thought they needed to do as an informed and critical news audience, even though it did not result in any tangible outcomes. They performed the part of an informed news audience through the intensity of their engagement, such as making news a part of their daily routines through push notifications (Perd, 25, journalist). They also proved themselves to be critical news audiences by demonstrating their media literacy, which included the practices of comparing multiple news sources, working through the factuality and generic forms of news and reflecting upon it with other people.

Participants had a "criterion of truth" when working through the factuality of news, though this was often based on whether it appeared "authentic and true to life" as opposed to whether it was a one-to-one representation of its real-life referent (Hill, 2007, p. 3). This criterion included what participants recognized as the generic forms of credible and objective news, such as journalists being transparent about the steps they took in reporting a particularly sensitive story (April, 23, Lund university student).

These performances need to be contextualized within two contemporary developments: the experience of being a diffused audience and the participatory affordances of the digital age. To wit, the embeddedness of media in everyday life has turned people into a diffused audience, whereby they are "an audience all the time" (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p. 68). A

consequence of media constituting everyday life is that everything becomes a performance — even "formerly innocent events" — such that people themselves become performers (ibid., pp. 72-73). As such, how participants chose to engage with news was not just pragmatic but performative, which could be for a real or imagined audience (ibid., p. 92). Furthermore, how they engaged with news should be considered within processes of individualization, through which individual actions come to be paired with particular "lifestyle elements" (Bennett and Segerberg, 2011, p. 771). Therefore, such actions become demonstrative of their identity, such as how sustaining engagement with news is an expression of their identity as an informed news audience.

As established, the digital age changed how news audiences received, searched for and shared information. Accuracy and comprehensiveness became personal rather than public values, as sorting through the surplus of information became just as much the responsibility of audiences as it is of an editorial staff (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 67). Participants gained a "practice-based awareness" about the "constructed character of representation" in news (Andrejevic, 2013, p. 33), having grown up with digital and mobile technologies. As such, they were each aware that they could not absolutely trust everything they read, watched or listened to online.

Furthermore, news production and distribution had changed in such a way that participants had to learn how to filter through the surplus of news, which was often received out of context. In chasing after quantified user demand, news organizations scaled the production of content so there was a better chance of catching the attention of users on online platforms (ibid.). Digitalization had also limited how much news organizations were able to set the editorial agenda because of how search engines and social networking sites had isolated their content and forced them to stand on their own economic merits (ibid.). Participants also had more news sources to choose from; so, if one is, say, locked behind a paywall, they could always go to another news website (Ron, 26, Malmö technician).

As such, news were props in how participants performed their engagement. Intensity, selectivity and scrutiny became means through which they could identify as an informed and critical news audience; and this is shaped in part by how the news industry had adapted to digitalization. What constituted this performance was subjective from participant to participant, as they each had a different idea of what it meant to be a news audience.

Affective modality worked in concert with the other contingencies of how participants engaged with news, especially as they could only *feel* whether they had done enough to keep up and scrutinize the news. This is an experience that was subject to personal biographies as well as social factors, cultural norms and ideological perspectives (Burkitt, 2014, pp. 19-20). Just as personal identities and social configurations are multiple and dynamic, this affect can be similarly multifaceted (ibid.).

Participants started with practices they associated with being an informed and critical news audience; but it is in their continued repetition that they became patterned together with certain affects (Wetherell, 2012, p. 14). Therefore, there was an affective character to how they engaged with news that told them whether they had done enough to keep up or be critical of news, such as the feeling of scale in checking multiple news sources or certainty when demonstrating media literacy. Therefore, affect allowed participants to experience "embodied meaning making" when they engaged with news (ibid., p. 4).

That being said, affects are mutable, "interacting and recursive" (Wetherell, 2012, p. 4). To assume that news practices are simply a means for participants to feel that they have kept up with or scrutinized news *enough* would be to ignore how it is characteristically protean and multiple. It is also in contention with the stresses of engaging with news, which include the feeling of having to always be wary, be ready with an opinion or be emotionally vulnerable.

As such, how participants chose to engage with news became a negotiation of its competing and complementary affects, complicating what it meant for audiences to stay informed and be

critical. The ways in which participants resolved this was to narrow down their engagement and, in doing so, make the stresses of engaging with news more manageable. For instance, some participants limited how much news they read, watched or listened to as a means to not feel overwhelmed by how much news is out there (Chris, 33, Lund teacher) or relied on news organizations they trusted to simply tell them what they needed to know (Anne, 25, unemployed Lund woman). Other participants chose to receive, share and discuss news within closed online groups where they knew what to expect from other people participating in the conversation (Gerry, 27, Lund university student), exemplifying the "networked yet privatised" sociality of the solo sphere (Dahlgren, 2013, p. 63).

There is a need to "assume less and investigate more," to use Corner's words (2011, p. 87), when looking into the subjective phenomenon of media engagement. This thesis contributes to the ongoing conversation about news audiences by, firstly, arguing against narrow, often value-laden definitions of engagement and, instead, contextualizing the phenomenon within their lived experiences. Secondly, it makes the case that how they engage with news is not simply a means to an end — that end being information — but a cognitive and affective experience that is constitutive of their performance as an informed and critical audience. Such an approach to news audiences may not share the simple instrumentality of putting user demand to numbers; but, if academic and industry research is to take them seriously, a sledgehammer needs to be put to these crumbling assumptions about engagement and rebuilt from the audience up.

News organizations need to integrate "emotions and everyday life with news using notions of public quality" (Meijer, in Beckett and Deuze, 2016, p. 4), and doing so requires that they understand who they are reporting *for* as much as who they are reporting *on*. The task of fostering audience loyalty and retention on proprietary websites and mobile applications can no longer rely on "treating audiences not as individuals, but as a number" (Columbia Journalism Review, 2019). How they can begin to take audiences seriously is to, really, do what their journalists have always done: watch how they *act* and listen to how they *feel*.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interviews

1. April, 23, female Lund university student. 1-hour-and-21-minute-long interview conducted Feb. 18, 2020, in Lund.
2. Jean, 24, female Malmö youth coach. 58-minute-long interview conducted Feb. 22, 2020, in Malmö.
3. Chris, 33, male Lund teacher. 1-hour-and-21-minute-long interview conducted Feb. 27, 2020, in Lund.
4. Tom, 27, male Malmö freelance photographer. 58-minute-long interview conducted March 3, 2020, in Malmö.
5. Anne, 25, unemployed Lund woman. 1-hour-and-8-minute-long interview conducted March 13, 2020, in Lund.
6. Leslie, 25, female Helsingborg teacher. 59-minute-long interview conducted March 14, 2020, over video call.
7. Mona, 22, female Lund university student. 26-minute-long interview conducted March 16, 2020, over video call.
8. Ben, 25, male Kalmar political clerk. 1-hour-and-11-minute-long interview conducted March 17, 2020, over video call.
9. Donna, 25, unemployed Malmö woman. 1-hour-and-11-minute-long interview conducted March 18, 2020, over video call.
10. Andy, 27, male Lund university student. 59-minute-long interview conducted March 20, 2020, over video call.
11. Gerry, 27, male Lund university student. 49-minute-long interview conducted March, 21, 2020, over video call.
12. Ron, 26, male Malmö technician. 1-hour-and-8-minute-long interview conducted March 23, 2020, over video call.

13. Perd, 25, male Malmö journalist. 1-hour-and-15-minute-long interview conducted March 28, 2020, over video call.

Appendix 2

Summary of Swedish news provisioning

The history of how the Swedish media landscape has developed throughout the years informed the approach this thesis took in studying news audiences. How Swedes understand their relationship with news can be traced back to the diffusion of new technologies and the changing values and experiences of journalism within the last century.

In 1925, Sweden was introduced to radios; and, within two decades, more than two million households had one (Bolin and Westlund, 2009, p. 112). The national radio broadcaster *Radiotjänst* was formed, and it established the principles of "factuality and impartiality" that have continued to define public service broadcasting to this day (Ekström and Djerf-Pierre, 2013, p. 15). Between 1925 and 1945, current affairs journalism emphasized content that was apolitical, educational or enlightening, which included academic lectures (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2013, p. 310-312). Newscasts were criticized for being "formal and dull," but they were still lauded for being objective and relating listeners to their communities (ibid.).

In 1956, the country was then introduced to television; and, within 20 years, three million households had one (Bolin and Westlund, 2009, p. 112). From 1945 through to 1965, both radio and later television news emphasized objectivity as it began to cover both political and social issues (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2013, p. 313). This was evidenced in how a balance between opposing views was sought for different programs and forms (ibid., p. 314). Another notable difference in journalism during this time is how it began to consider "the tastes of the listeners and viewers" (ibid., p. 313).

Between 1965 and 1985, journalism started to scrutinize political and social institutions (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2013, p. 317). Radicalization in both the European and U.S. political climates during the late 1960s through to the early 1970s led to news media emphasizing civic education and social criticism (ibid.) Despite early opposition, political institutions gradually

accepted the changing role of journalism toward the end of the 1970s (ibid.). Despite this, critical journalism also came to be associated with routine polarization and sensationalism (ibid.).

In the 1980s, Sweden was introduced to digital media and, in the early 2000s, 70 percent of households reported having a computer and 80 percent reported having a mobile phone (Bolin and Westlund, 2009, p. 112). Between 1985 and 2005, journalism accepted a more interpretive function, as journalists increasingly lent their expertise toward criticism, advocacy and even speculation on different types of programming (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2013, p. 313). The deregulation of broadcasting in the 1990s saw commercial firms establishing their own local and national news organizations; and public service broadcasting facing more competition from both domestic and international television news (Westlund and Weibull, 2013, p. 150; Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2013, p. 313). Such commercial organizations paid more attention to sensational, "soft" and practical news as opposed to political news, which audiences met with skepticism (ibid.).

The period between 1986 to 2011 can be further divided into five distinct "eras" of news provisioning (Westlund and Weibull, 2013, p. 150). The "*legacy media era*" from 1986 to 1990 is characterized by a strong newspaper following and public service institutions' continued monopoly on the broadcasting system (ibid., emphasis in original). The "*commercialization era*" from 1991 to 1995 is defined by the deregulation of broadcasting and the introduction of commercial news organizations; and the "*digitization era*" from 1996 to 2001 is marked by the introduction of online news sites and free "dailies" (ibid., emphasis in original). The "*cross-media era*" from 2002 to 2006 is characterized by legacy news media entering into online publishing; and the "*ubiquitous media era*" from 2007 to 2011 is defined by the diffusion of smartphones, laptops and tablets fitted with mobile broadband (ibid., emphasis in original).

Digitization and platformization have been particularly disruptive to the traditional revenue and distribution models of the news industry. To wit, commercial organizations have seen a third of their advertising revenue decline from 2008 to 2018; and they have continued to rely on federal

press subsidies, which was budgeted at 500 million SEK ($53 million USD) as of 2018 (Westlund, 2019, p. 83). Former newspaper organizations stomached most of this declining revenue; though television news organizations reported relatively stable figures (ibid.).

In that same period of time, the percentage of Swedes who read a newspaper everyday, regardless of platform, dropped from at least 80 to 55 percent (Nordicom-Sweden, 2018, p. 49). Between the early 2000s and 2018, the percentage that watched either public or commercial television news everyday declined from 55 to 36 percent; though, between 2008 and 2018, the percentage who listened to Sveriges Radio's four channels remained relatively stable (ibid., p. 33).

How they engaged with news differed along generational lines, with older audiences favoring traditional media and younger audiences spending more time with social media (Nordicom-Sweden, 2018, p. 83-84). That being said, audiences made the distinction that the latter was for entertainment content and posts from family and friends (ibid.); and that news found through search engines (30 percent) and social media (13 percent) was relatively less trustworthy (Westlund, 2019, p. 111).

Digitization has given people more options for accessing content, including search engines and social networking sites (Helberger, 2015, p. 326). Where traditional broadcasting once approached them as simply passive recipients, audiences now have to actively pick and choose from the "extraordinary abundance" of audiovisual content (ibid.). This could be considered as a democratization of news, but it could also be seen as contributing to disparities between those familiar and unfamiliar with the web environment and stresses in "keeping up with it all" (Dahlgren, 2013, p. 40).

News organizations have notably struggled with this development, as it has limited their ability to set editorial agendas and rendered traditional revenue models obsolete. The introduction of online platforms in the late 1990s have reconfigured online news distribution and, in turn,

wrested editorial control away from news organizations (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 53). People do not have to visit the front page of online news sites to look for articles and videos, as search engines have given them the option to find and directly access relevant content (ibid.). News aggregators and social networking sites have also allowed people to circumvent the front page by providing direct links to content across different websites (ibid.). Instead of being a part of a larger "bundle" of news stories and advertisements, each article or video has had to stand on its own "economic merits" (ibid.).

Furthermore, platforms have unravelled the "content-audience-advertising" configuration of news organizations, so that advertisers no longer have to go through them to reach their audience (Carr, in van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 53). Indeed, digital and mobile advertising may have expanded, but much of that growth has been on platforms such as *Facebook*, *Google* and increasingly *Amazon* (Westlund 2019, p. 83). Classified advertisement sites have also drawn a traditional source of revenue away from such news organizations (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 52).

News organizations were drawn to the promise of massive platform audiences, and this contributed to the scaling of content (Columbia Journalism Review, 2019). Given that articles and videos have had to stand on their own, organizations have relied on quantified user demand as a means to track its circulation online (Carr, in van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 53). What made it into the news increasingly depended on what the numbers said people wanted rather than what journalists thought they needed to know (ibid., p. 56). As such, news organizations have pushed articles and videos that follow the platform logic of "stimulating, capturing and monetizing user sentiments," such that more and more articles and videos had to be produced with the hope that one of them would go viral (ibid., pp. 54, 67).

This has contributed toward the characteristic information glut of the "digital, multi-channel era," which has made it difficult to stay fully informed (Andrejevic, 2013, pp. 12 - 13). It has also led people to think they are being overloaded with information and are unable to work through it all (Andrejevic, 2013, pp. 18, 27; Song et al., 2016, p. 1173). As a consequence, they

either limit or completely stop their engagement with news, stating that they experienced fatigue and/or analysis paralysis (Park, 2019; Woodstock, 2014).

Despite this, audiences have certainly not lost interest in what is going on around them (Swart, Peters and Broersma, 2017, p. 914). In 2019, sixty-one percent of Swedes said that news kept them up to date on what was going on and 40 percent said it helped them understand current events and issues; though 27 percent said it did not have any topics that were relevant to them (Reuters Institute, 2019).

Appendix 3

Recruitment invitation example

Good morning, [Participant's name]

My name is Jian Chung. Lee, a Master's student in the Media and Communication Studies program at Lund University.

I am researching the conditions for how Swedes check and follow news. I'd like to interview Swedes who check the news either frequently or occasionally. They have to be between 20 and 40 years old. These interviews will include questions about daily practices and opinions involving news. They will last about an hour.

My master's thesis will analyze the contents of these interviews. It will also be available to the public later. The thesis will not include your legal name, but it will include other general information. This includes your age, nationality, city of residence, gender and occupation.

You can give me a call at +46 070 --- ---- or email me at -----@-----mail.com.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,
Jian Chung Lee

Appendix 4

Consent form presented to participants ahead of in-person interviews

Consent form

Lund University

Researcher: Jian Chung Lee

This research will interview Swedes, between 20 and 40 years of age, about how they engage with news. It will include questions about their daily media practices and opinions about the news industry. These interviews will be between 30 minutes to an hour.

The data will be used in a Master's thesis for the Media and Communication Studies program at Lund University, which will be made available to the public later. The research will not use your legal name but will include general information, such as age, nationality, city of residence, gender and occupation.

The researcher would like your written consent to record the interview and use it to present their findings. You are welcome to say as much or as little as you want. You can also choose to not answer any of the questions or stop the interview at any time.

Please sign your name below if you agree to join this research.

Signature

_____

Full name

_____

Date (Day / Month / Year)

_____

Appendix 5

Consent form as dictated to participants ahead of remote interviews

My name is Jian Chung Lee, a Master's student in the Media and Communication Studies program at Lund University. Today's date is [Date of interview].

I am conducting research about the conditions behind how Swedes check and follow the news. Specifically, my research subjects are between 20 and 40 years of age. As such, I would like to interview you about your opinions, emotions and practices related to news. This interview will take about an hour.

The content of this interview will be included in my Master's thesis, which will be made publicly available. It will not publish your legal name. However, it will include other general information about you, including your age, nationality, city of residence, gender and occupation.

I would like your verbal consent to record the interview and use it to present my findings. You are welcome to say as much or as little as you want. You can also choose to not answer any of the questions or stop the interview at any time.

For the record, please state your name; today's date; and that you consent to the terms of this research.

Appendix 6

Interview guide

Interview guide

Lund University

News forms and modalities

Show me where you get your news and tell me what makes it look like news?

Style (Fonts / Color / Layout)

Content (Language / Sources quoted / Agenda)

Visuals (Photographs / Videos / Graphics)

How would you compare your news sources?

Commercial vs. public

Domestic vs. international

Print vs. broadcast vs. digital

Websites vs. mobile applications vs. social networking sites

What feelings do you associate with news?

Different genres (Politics, crime, etc.)

Different mediums (Print, broadcast, digital)

Different platforms (Websites, mobile applications, social networking sites, etc.)

Different subscription services (Streaming services, etc. vs. paid news services)

Has there been a time when you engaged with news more than you usually do?

News in context

What are your reasons for checking the news on these mediums?

Trustworthiness

Sharing

Convenience

Mobility

What are your earliest memories of engaging with news?

News intensities and consequences

What else do you do in addition to keeping up with the news?

Checking other sources

Reading comments section

Sharing and discussing

How would you feel if you could not keep up with your news practices?

News motivations

What do you use the news for?

To socialize

To be entertained

To be politically / civically active

What is the function of news?

Other

What else would you like to add before we conclude our conversation?

Can you recommend anyone else for this study?

Appendix 7

Methods diary sample following second pilot interview with "Jean" conducted Feb. 21, 2020, in Malmö

I need to rephrase the second question ("How do you know where to go for news?") as Jean had to clarify what I meant. Even then, she had difficulty answering my question. This question is meant to address what informed her decision to read one news source over another. In earlier exploratory interviews, where participants got their news (for example, *Reddit* and *Facebook*) informed how much they trusted it and whether they felt the need to find more articles or videos.

I could also rephrase the question as, "what are your reasons for using these mediums to check the news?" The prompts could then be *trustworthiness, convenience, sharing* and *mobility*. Furthermore, I could start with the section *News forms and modalities* before *News in context*, as participants would have something tangible in front of them to describe. Furthermore, the second question in this section would establish participants' subjective experiences with different types of news sources (For instance, print / broadcast / digital or websites / mobile applications / social networking sites). At least, this would allow me to contextualize the question.

The prompt *Visuals* for the first question in *News forms and modalities* ("Could you show me where you get the news and describe what makes it news to you?") also caused some confusion, as Jean gave a similar answer as the prompt *Style*. It might be more constructive here to not use the word *Visuals* and to simply ask whether there was something about the photographs, videos and graphics that indicated it is news to them.

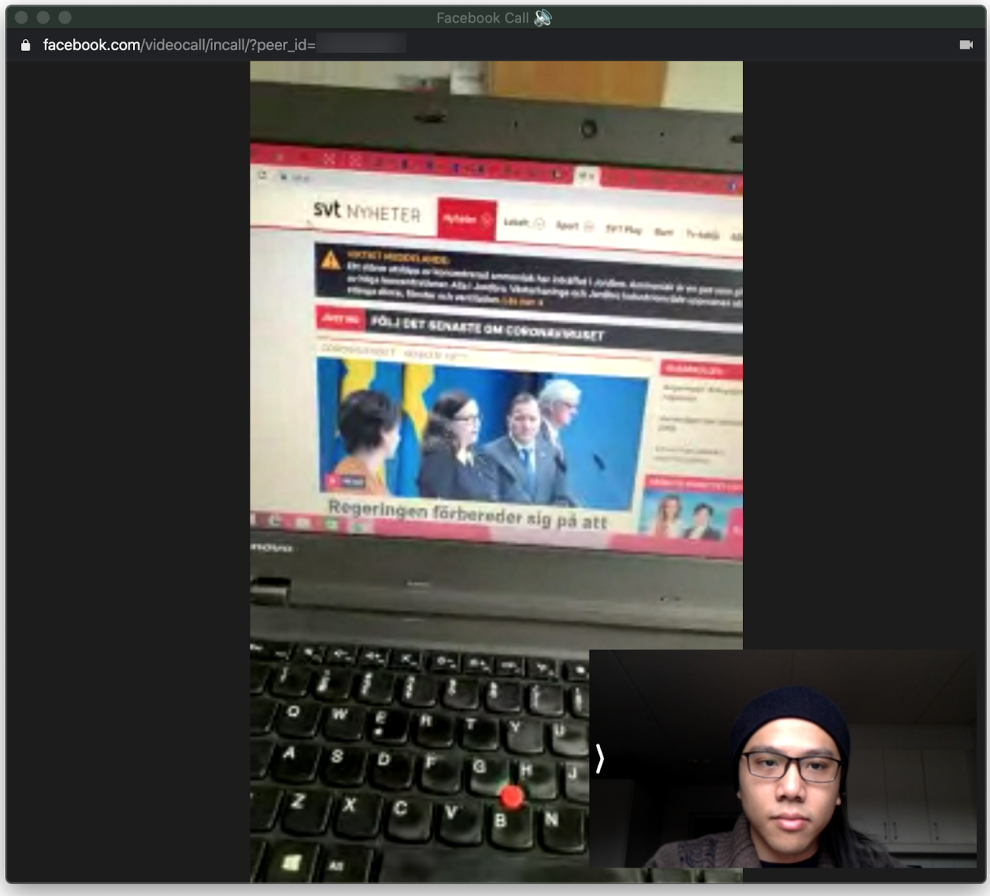
Appendix 8

Further reflections on the use of video calls for remote interviews

This thesis adopted video calls to conduct remote interviews to ensure the safety of both participants and researcher during the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). One of the benefits of this method is that there were no longer geographical limitations to sampling, such that interviews could be conducted that would otherwise be impractical because of time and distance (Nehls et al., 2014, p. 146).

That being said, there were shortcomings with this method. It limited what the researcher was able to observe, as participants may not have the required technology to show what they were doing on their computer screens. For instance, Ron (26, Malmö technician) could not use his computer because it had been malfunctioning and was not able to share what he was doing on his mobile phone during the video call. Furthermore, the quality of video calls was not always consistent, such that it was not always clear what participants wanted to show using the cameras on their computers or mobile phones.

Video calls also limited what was observable about participants. The researcher was able to see both participants and what they were doing on their mobile phones or computers at the same time during in-person interviews. However, participants who took part in the video call using their computers were not able to show what they were doing on their mobile phones, only where they had navigated. Those who use their mobile phone had control of where it was pointed and when to switch between its front- and back-facing cameras. In the screenshot below, the researcher is seen conducting an interview with Ben (25, Kalmar political clerk; off-screen) on March 17, 2020, using Facebook Messenger. He joined the call using his mobile phone; and had used the back-facing camera of his phone to show the *SVT Nyheter* website and talk through what he considered to be the characteristics of news. However, this meant that the researcher was not able to observe Ben at the same time.



Screenshot of video call conducted with "Ben" on March 17, 2020, using Facebook Messenger. Part of the URL is obscured to maintain the privacy of the participant.

Appendix 9

Transcript of interview with "Tom" March 4, 2020, in Malmö

Researcher (R): I'm going to put this right here. The first thing I wanted to ask is if you could show me where you get your news on your phone?

Tom (T): Yeah, sure. I'd say, first and foremost, on the *SR* (*Sveriges Radio*) that plays audio. Their own app, and they have, like, new here but they also have… I usually listen to *P1* because that's the talk radio so, during the mornings to throughout the day, they have a lot of news, newscasts. And I think… I mean, it's state-owned so I trust them. It's, like… yeah, and they are pretty non-biased. And then I follow *ETC* which is a leftist paper and, because I agree with most what they say or their values, I read it. And they, like, I don't… I don't want to say it's very angled but, I mean, they take up stuff that they think are important and in their own way, I guess, so it's like activists in Uganda, Jewish authors and, of course, they focus on *Sverigedemokraterna,* the racist party, so, I mean, it's stuff that I'm interested about but they are also pretty, like, open.

R: I thought, maybe, if you can maybe bring up *SVT* there and then we can go to *ETC* in a moment. If you can talk me through what is it about the layout, the color, the style of it that tells you that it's news?

T: I mean, everything is article-based and it's, like… this one says "direct" and it's live and it's, like, all these factual headlines. Headlines, I guess, and also no, like, flashy or fun styles or design. Just, like, pretty basic and pretty straightforward, I guess.

R: And when you say factual headlines, could you maybe elaborate on what you mean when you say factual?

T: Well, I mean, they pretty much go straight to the point and, I guess, like, papers that are worse than this have kind of… they kind of screw around to get more readers, like, clickbait stuff; and, this state-owned news, they don't really do that. I don't think they can. I don't think they need to. But factual, I mean, there's no feelings, no opinions or, I mean, there's sometimes opinions but then that's, like, specified: "This is an opinion article." But, yeah, keeping it non-biased, I guess.

R: Could you maybe bring up an example of a news site that you think doesn't follow that factual criteria that you have?

T: I haven't been to… been to *Nyheter 24* but I think they're pretty… yeah, 'cause, I mean, this is way different because it's, like, there's ads, there's sensational stuff. There's, like, more about celebrities and stuff that I'm really not into. It's more, like, yeah, they got "hottest" right now, like, headline and stuff and I mean that's the kind of, like, sensational news that I'm not really interested in.

R: Can you bring up an example?

T: Sure. Let's see… like something about Bianca Ingrosso so a Swedish influencer and, like, vlogging and someone said something about something. It's just, like, for me, that's not news. That's like… it may be like celebrity news, but I'm really not into it and it's just made to be these, like, flashy headlines to get people to click on it.

R: When you say flashy headlines, could you maybe elaborate upon what specifically about it makes it look flashy?

T: There's always quotes and there's always, like, here's like… they use words like "hate" and there's always, like, opinions and, yeah, like this… like, "Wow." They're, like, really throwing it in your face, like, "Oh, you got to read this." Pictures of people that are, like, really surprised or

facial expressions. A lot of imagery that are explicit and stuff. They are just trying to clickbait you, I guess.

R: You talked a little bit about how *SVT* is not as flashy —

T: Yeah.

R: — in style, could you maybe talk about, you know, what is it about that flashiness doesn't feel like...

T: It's all about who they're targeting, I guess, 'cause if we're going to use that word, a more flashy website would kind of draw attention, I guess. It's easier to take it the other way that, I think, state-owned *SVT* and stuff like that, *Dagens ETC*, they're pretty, like… I don't think they think they need that because they're not out for that target group that are just like click baiting into stuff. There are other groups that search for their page or go to their page to find the news that they want to read. They trust them, basically, and if you have that trust, then you don't really need to be flashy or make people go into it. I guess it's kind of a matter of trust, that they trust their readers, that they know what they want or at least that it's a mutual trust, I guess.

R: Talk a little bit about that. How would you compare your news sources? You brought up *SVT, SR* and *ETC*.

T: Both *SR* and *SVT* are state-owned so they're not allowed to have opinions, really. I mean they're supposed to be 100 percent unbiased; and then they can have articles but then they really specify, like, this is a person's opinion and then people are aware. But a paper or home site, like *ETC*, is very much biased because they're like "we're left, and we bring you these news that we think are important" but kind of through, I guess, their values. And they also have opinionated articles and stuff like that, which they mark, but, I mean, the whole paper is kind of based on a worldview that you can't see in *SVT* or *SR* because they're not admitted to doing it but,

otherwise... I don't know. *SVT* and *SR* are way bigger, of course. *ETC* is pretty small, so I guess they — *SVT* — report from everything. They have like the biggest things always, and *ETC* is smaller but more opinionated so, I guess for me, that's a pretty good balance of getting what I want from news sites.

R: What exactly is it that you want, going to a public service site like *SVT* and going to an opinionated source like *ETC*?

T: Well, I mean, if we look at *ETC*, they bring up stuff that maybe state-owned media don't because they would get super criticized by people and because people already say the media is leftist in this country. And I think you're pretty careful not to bring up stuff that is biased in any way. And *ETC* is not, so that's what I search for. To get a little bit of both but also, like, it's kind of important for me to have a source like *ETC* because I think, if I didn't, I would kind of miss some pretty important things that are happening but are not getting reported in the national media.

R: Can we bring up *ETC* and maybe show me an example of that?

T: Let's see what they got. Trying to find something that's like… because I could bring up some stuff but I'm thinking I want something that's really… that really wouldn't be in anything else. O.K. so here we got the… Greece is acting against the political refugees, basically, and it's, like, I don't think *SVT* would angle it this way. *ETC*, they're saying it's hurting children and that Sweden must act. I mean, *SVT* would never say that. They could report about this thing, but they would never say it like that, so they have a strong socialist standpoint that we need to do this whilst the national… the public news sources would maybe just report from it and say, "This is happening" so that's kind of… and then they interview people that I think are more relevant, maybe, and stuff like that. They angle it in a way that I like, and I mean I think that because, of course, lots of sites both on the left and the right side are angling it too hard or kind of faking stuff and all that stuff's going on. But I think with this thing, they've gotten so much credibility.

They have a physical paper, they're pretty established and there's pretty heavy names behind it, so I still feel like I can trust the source.

R: Could you talk a little bit about that credibility with *ETC* and also *SVT*? What about these sites make it credible to you?

T: Well, *SVT* and *SR* I know because… well, I don't know. I can't know it but, I mean, I'm pretty sure because they've probably done… their whole framework is built on credibility and they're checked all the time. And if they say something that's untrue, they'll go through so much scrutiny that maybe a smaller paper wouldn't and they would just say like, "Oh, there's fake news" or whatever. But, when it's the public news outlet, they really have to watch themselves so I think that's, like, what I figure it's like their whole idea so, yeah, that's my interest. And, I mean, they haven't really been exposed as lying or something for a very long time, as far as I can remember. So that's also a big thing. And, of course, *ETC* is harder because I know they're biased and then there's more room for, like, O.K., maybe they skewed that a bit or something like that. But, if I'm to look at their site, I just think it's pretty clear and they have... well, they have ads. That's kind of annoying but, still, there's no sensational politics, news or sensational anything. No celebrity stuff. It's just they're serious and they have like this… cultural-like type of series you could watch.

R: What makes *SVT* and *SR* accountable to you?

T: In some ways, the people, but there are also… there are also organizations. I don't know, really, which are controlling that, but we have... I think it's called *Gränskning Nyheter*. That's like… they check things. I mean, that's their function and I'm thinking that media is a big part of what they need to check so no misinformation goes out and, yeah, I just think they also know what kind of shape they would get in if they would be exposed if they are lying or be skewed in some way as they already are by right people, people that are far right, and think that the media is controlled by leftists.

R: You mentioned how even though *ETC* is biased, there might be some things that, because they are skewed to the left, they are likely to report on things that *SVT* might miss because they're trying to be neutral.

T: Yeah, right.

R: So could you talk a little bit about that? Why is it important to you to go to this site?

T: I think they report from places and from situations that other news outlets can report from, but they don't take a stand either way. And maybe if you see how they report on, like, Bolsonaro in Brazil, state media would be like, "Here's the news president. He likes this and this; and he's going to do this and this; and la-dee-la-dee-da. And *ETC* would be, like, kind of they would bring up everything like the stuff he said in the past and what he's trying to do and why this is bad for everyone and, I mean, I guess I could have found that if I really searched for it and if I took that from SVT and just, like, did my own research or whatever, but I appreciate having someone being, like, O.K. but let's take a deeper look at what he's actually doing and it turns out he's a horrible politician that shouldn't run anything and, like, the stuff he said… he's very anti-HBTQ. He's burning down the rainforest, all that stuff. And *ETC* is kind of like, "O.K. look at this crazy person who's running this country. This is dangerous," whilst national news would say, "This guy's running the country. Here's what he believes," which is like… yeah, it's just an angle that I like to see the world in and I also… I see the dangers in that but, I mean, that's also why I don't surf around that much on different sites. I keep to the sites that I actually trust.

R: So talk a little bit about the dangers if you go to a site that's skewed left.

T: Yeah, I mean, that's kind of up to the individual reporter and journalists that if they… if they take it too far or if they, like, if they skew the reality, if they really skew the news to a way that it becomes untrue or partly untrue, that's dangerous. As dangerous as when right-wing people do

it. Maybe not as dangerous, but it's as wrong, I guess, at least. And, yeah, I guess there's a lot of… because of free media and, like, how easy it is to put something on the internet, there's a lot of fake news but I'm still trying to be wary when I visit these sites because you never know, I mean. Stuff could be written and people on that newspaper could let it slide or whatever, so yeah.

R: Know that there is a potential where things might be taken too far, say, on *ETC*, what are your reasons for continuing to actually engage with *ETC* and even put money toward them?

T: I think they're doing… they're doing important work and, putting money to it, I want it to grow because I want them… I want the reach to be bigger. Because there's always a danger — like this is looking, hopefully, not into a future that's real — if *Sverigedemokraterna*, if they take power and they keep doing what they're doing, I mean, they're already pretty public with being against state media and stuff… or not state media. Basically, the other way around. They are for a state-controlled media, which it is not right now because they're unbiased and… I don't know how you say but, yeah, the state does own it but they're their own thing, but they're funded by the state. So, therefore, like, controlling the news, if they start doing that, then this is the kind of news we're going to need because that's going to be super skewed the other way so, I mean, there's a big danger of the national news being taken over. I don't think it's going to happen, but it could. I mean, fascists are on the rise throughout all of Europe, I guess, so that's like a big thing. But also, looking at the risks, I think they're worth taking because there's always going to be risks in journalism that are biased in any way. I guess I trust them so I feel safe that they're going to do the right thing, and I feel safe on giving them my money so that they can expand so that more people can get this kind of news to see the world in a way that I think is the right way and see the dangers.

R: Do you engage with any international news outlets?

T: I mean, I guess I do. I don't think I regularly visit sites. Maybe The Guardian or something but mostly when it gets linked on social media but I don't go… it's sporadic in any case. But I

might go to, like The Guardian and just check the headlines and stuff like that, but I mostly keep it to Swedish news.

R: What do you think — besides, obviously, the news agenda — are the differences between Swedish and international news outlets?

T: I guess it depends on what outlets we're looking at, from what country, but, I mean, if we're looking at … I don't know but I think that Swedish, even the national media, might be a tiny bit to the left because we're a social democratic country in the base and I think it should be but I don't know. That's a tough one.

R: What do you see as the difference between, say, going to a website or watching the news on television or looking it up on a news app?

T: I mean, reading is the most active way because, like, radio in the morning, I can kind of half sleep through that and, like, listen when I hear something that's like, "Oh, I care about this" and then, like, then I listen actively and it could be the same on the news. I think I'm more focused when I'm… I mean, the television news. I think I'm more engaged then, but I mean reading either online, the paper or an article. Yeah, either way then that's the active choice. Like I picked this article, I want to read it, I'm going to read the whole thing and, yeah, I think that's the most accurate way. But, then again, there's this very comfortable thing of, especially the TV news, just looking at it, they show you everything, they go through the whole agenda and you kind of get a summary, which I don't get if I go to a specific page or just read an article. I might if I look at everything, but I'm not going to do that. I'm going to nitpick the things that I find interesting. And, if I listen to the radio or see it on the TV, I can't really skip ahead of that. I'm going to watch the whole thing so I get more of a rounded newscast, I guess.

R: Why do you think it feels comfortable and all-round?

T: Because then, I mean, if I'm on a website with different articles, I'm going to pick the ones that I think are interesting for me and I might miss stuff that's actually good for me to know or that I would find interesting. I just don't really know it yet and, when I get to see all the newscast, I might, like, find stuff interesting that I wouldn't think would be that so I'm, like, I might be missing out if I'm just choosing my articles, choosing my news. If I get the all-round experience that I get and kind of check up on the world, I guess.

R: But you do have options…

T: What options?

R: You do have the option, when you talked about going to a website and you pick and choose what is relevant, it is there and you have the option.

T: Yeah, I know. That's… that's all about laziness, I guess, because I could sit and read all the top stories if I wanted to but, yeah, I guess that's also about being comfortable and it's, like, yeah, picking out what you want to read about and not really maybe what's newsworthy 100 percent for you. Yeah, so I think that's kind of… I don't see it as a service, but I clearly see it as a pro watching or listening to the news. It's mostly watching because, listening, I can zone out but, watching the news, then I'm looking at the TV, I'm not doing anything else and they tell me all the top stories.

R: Even the stories you might not otherwise find relevant.

T: Yeah.

R: And what is the difference between, say, checking the news on a website or on a mobile application or, say, on a social networking site?

T: Yeah, well, I mean social media, I'm very critical about the news that are spreading because there's so much that are either sensational journalism or just uncouth stuff. Like I wouldn't read a lot. Like if I see a headline, I have to go in and check it and see the source and stuff before I repost him or something because that, I think, is the big danger of news on social media, that people just repost stuff they don't know. They don't know if it's true. They don't know that it's just something that they agree with or something like that so I mean, that's way more critical there. But if I'm at, like, a news site that I trust then I trust it. Apps, I don't really use... there's the radio app. I mean, that's just for streaming it, so yeah.

R: And you mentioned earlier that you usually go back to *SVT*, *SR* and *ETC* but you don't really check around?

T: No, not really. I think I'm pretty comfortable with those. I mean, if it's… if there's something big happening in the world and I want, like, facts, I want to, like, know that what I'm reading is true, I go to a SVT or listen to P1 on SR.

R: And what are some of the feelings that you associate with news?

T: Feelings? I mean, there's a certain amount of responsibility, I mean, I feel responsible knowing stuff about the world and what's going on and... but it can also be, like, satisfactory and it can be scary. Generally, the way politics is moving, I'm not really happy with that so it's, like… it's mostly bad news, I guess, for me, personally, it's stuff that's happening that I really don't like. But then again, like if I see something that's positive in my way of thinking or according to my values, of course, I get happier, excited. So yeah, I guess it's a combination of feelings, like I should do this. It's my responsibility to know some stuff about what's going on and also just to be able to, like, take part and and have an opinion if somebody or if I'm talking to somebody about it. And also like, I want to be able to engage with people about the news because I think it's interesting so, yeah, it's both that I like it and that I feel that I should, I guess.

R: Why do you think that you should?

T: Because I think if I didn't, then I would miss things that are harmful to people, in general, to the country or politics and stuff. I want to be able to confront people that have, like, what I would recognize as bad ideas or bad views. I want to be able to confront these people or argue with them that my idea of, like... my values are better, that I need to know what's going on and what people have said or what people do and mostly politics, I guess.

R: Where do you think this responsibility comes from?

T: Well, I guess being politically interested and invested, like caring about what's going to happen. If I didn't care who won the election, then it wouldn't really matter that much to me, like which side I was on. But I know what side I'm on, then I feel like I need to know stuff about that. Because people... partly because like, they might do stuff that I don't like as well, the people or the people I will vote for or stand behind and, like, yeah, I've been… I've had positive opinions about someone in my kind of political camp and I've changed my opinions about them because of some news like something they said or another opinion that they brought up. And then I want to know about that so I don't support that person anymore, politically. And like the responsibility, I guess, comes from that interest that I also care about which way this country is heading and which way the world is heading. And I don't think that I have that much power in it, but I can still argue for one I think is right.

R: And you talked a little bit about satisfaction. Could you elaborate on what is it about engaging with news that makes you feel satisfied?

T: I guess there's satisfaction in obtaining knowledge when it's just like knowing stuff and being able to speak to friends or just people you meet about this stuff that interests me, that is satisfactory. And also, if there's a news story that I feel is very positive, then, of course, that's also a very happy feeling that things are moving the way I think they should be moving in some

way. And that also, I mean, that kind of helps you stay positive, because there's so much like terrible news stories all the time, then you kind of need those small pockets of happy stories or they don't even need to be happy. They just need to be something that happened that I like, I mean, that I like the way that they happened or that this like played out. Yeah.

R: Something else I wanted to bring up because you actually put money toward subscription services. What do you see as different about subscribing to news — having a paid subscription — and having a paid subscription to, say, *Viaplay* or *Spotify*?

T: I mean, that's Viaplay and Spotify. That's for me. That's something I pay for their service because I want to enjoy it. *Dagens ETC*, I could read those news there... there are some news that are behind a *betal*... like, behind a subscription fee that I couldn't read if I didn't pay but, I mean, I could get those news either way. But I pay *ETC* because I want them to grow. I don't pay for *Spotify* or *Viaplay* because I want them to grow. They're already huge and I only pay them because I enjoy their service. I mean that's basically the difference. I want them to use my money to get bigger. Yeah, *ETC*.

R: And has there been a time when you engaged with news more than you usually do?

T: I think around elections and when there's critical situations in the world, like climate disasters or wars or stuff like that, then I think I'm definitely more... I check news more often. I think it's just more regular and maybe, I guess, that's when I check like *The Guardian* and stuff like that. If there's something big happening in the world, I want to get the international view of it as well. And, yeah, more sources and more often, I guess.

R: You mentioned that you go back to *SVT* and *SR* because you trust those news sources and usually don't actually check other sources. Why is it different, say, when there's a climate disaster or more? Why is it different in that situation?

T: I mean, for me, it's as important to still check *ETC* because they... mostly if it's political because they're a politically biased news source so, like, if there's a war going on then, of course, like the non-biased version is going to be very factual and I might want, like, an opinion or that they've dug more into what's really happening and maybe check kind of behind the scenes or however you want to put it. But yeah, I really want to get their view on it because, like, getting the factual thing, it's, like, O.K., they bombed that city, but maybe, in *ETC*, it's like, yeah, this is why and these are the people that got hurt and this is why this is, like, good or bad for this and this reason. Yeah, and getting that international story, I guess, it's just a matter of, like, seeing the worldview of the whole thing.

R: Yeah, hold on just a minute.

T: Yeah. (Recording paused)

R: So you talked about, you know… when it's something local, right, you check *SVT, SR,* you check *ETC*. But, when it's these big stories, these big news events, you check all these different sites. Why do you look for these other sources, compared to when you usually just go to your regular news sites?

T: I mean, I think if it's, like, big international news, I guess I... it's not that I distrust Swedish sources, but I think I just want a bigger source of information and, most of the time, *SVT* or *SR,* they get that news because they use bureaus and stuff. It's hard to really figure out what it is but it's not really distrust against those media but I kind of want the bigger picture. I want somebody else telling me. Yeah, telling me about it, I guess. Yeah, just a bigger source, a bigger story. I don't know. Something about that... Okay, that's Swedish media but, like, that something happened in Rojava or whatever and I want to get another... I don't know. But that's also what I mean, when it's stuff like that, I kind of look at *ETC* more than I look at bigger international stories so, if you look at the look at Rojava or anything in like Syria and stuff, I'm gonna get the the view that I'm kind of ... that I already believe in but I get more news like that and from

like-minded people that are like, “O.K. but these things in this situation is more important, like the anarchist commune in Rojava, like, what are they about and what are they actually trying to do,” stuff that I might not get from big international news stories because they're... I don't know if they're... they're scared about taking a side? But, I mean, I guess they are. Like they don't want to be seen as, like, “Oh, are you taking their side or like being biased in any way?” But believing in something makes me want to see that side, more of it.

R: So we talked a little bit about this... what are your reasons for checking the news on, say, these different mediums?

T: I don't know. I think it's mostly how I interact with technology during the day because, in the morning, it's so easy to just put on the radio. It's something that I kind of like doing because I don't like it being totally quiet when I wake up. I want something to... some activity and then that's just a good combo of getting the news update and, when I sit down to work, I might check like *ETC* or something, check the news. And when I come home, sometimes, the TV's on. I live with two friends and sometimes they are checking... they are watching TV and then you can just like “O.K. news are on it at seven or whatever at SVT1.” It's just so easy to just sit there and just, like, “O.K., I get the new news stories this night.” And yes, I think it's mostly in what situations I'm in during the day, and what technology I'm using during that time.

R: So we talked a little bit about situation and checking those sites when you're at work. When do you usually check those sites?

T: Mostly when I get to work, I think, and that's very sporadic. As I said, I'm a freelancer so it's when I get to the studio, when I sit down to do some work, I usually check it so, yeah, during the day when I want to get to it.

R: So what prompts you to check it throughout the day when you're at work?

T: It's mostly when I get there and, if I hear about something, then, of course, I'm going to check it out if it's something that interests me but, yeah, otherwise, it's just like, when I sit down, maybe when I leave or if I'm waiting for something. Mostly when I get there and when I... because it's also kind of routine, I don't always do it but when I sit down, I open up... like I start the computer, I open up the browser while my film editing software is booting up or something and I just, like, okay, I kind of clicked on Messenger, I get *ETC* and maybe *SVT* or something and I just put those apps out and check it out. Yeah.

R: And is there something about it that feels trustworthy, that feels sort of credible when you use these sites, when you use these mediums?

T: Like if something feels more credible, or just like...

R: Yeah.

T: Like state TV or statewide TV, I guess... it feels credible because. as I said before, I mean, that's kind of their baseline, being non-biased and giving you the news and they're giving everyone the news and the whole country, everyone that has a computer or a TV, they're just throwing it out there and, I mean, that's... I certainly trust *SVT* more than I trust *ETC*. I still trust *ETC* but I mean they're more credible because they're, that's kind of their... their basic standpoint or their baseline. I don't know.

R: And can you tell me what are some of your earliest memories of news?

T: Earliest memories? I don't know. I mean, I can remember 9/11, of course. I was 11 at the time and, yeah, I remember my sister didn't think it was a big deal. For some weird reason, it was just... like it was right when it was — not that it was not a big deal — but like it was on the TV and she was like, “Yeah, yeah, something about America. A plane crashed.” I was like, “No, wait, this is something else. But so I was 11 and I didn't really understand it then but that's...

that's my earliest big news, I think. Or memory of big news but, otherwise, it's just like radio in the car when I was riding around with my parents or, yeah, I guess it goes back to my childhood. It was *SVT News* and it was the radio and we didn't listen to a lot of other stations. We listen to state radio basically because they have... they're pretty broad. They have like *P1*, which is a talk radio. They have P2, which is classical. P3, which is more new stuff so, yeah, that was always on in the car or at home or when you were cooking or whatever and the TV at night you would watch the news. I guess That's always been in my life even when I didn't choose to do it myself. Yeah.

R: How about the evening news?

T: Yeah, we had channel one, two and four. So we had SVT 1 and 2 and then we had four and four was the commercial channel. They had ads, they had all these, like, exciting new shows. They're kind of the Nyheter 24 of TV entertainment and so, I mean, most of the time you were watching SVT 1 or 2, like, state television because you didn't have that much other stuff. I had friends that had, like, cable packages that are like 24 channels, and they, I guess, they spend way less time on state television than I did, but I also kind of… I'm kind of happy that I did because as I said, I trust them and I think I got more credible news out of having done that.

R: Why do you think it makes you happy to actually have grown up with these news sources?

T: I think it's kind of a safe environment. It's all about, like, if you... I mean I'm socialist and I think it's the state that should supply — not control — media, of course. But they should supply an organization that works only with bringing non-biased news, facts to the people because if, as with everything, if you privatized it, it becomes all about getting money, like capitalizing off it and then it gets skewed. I mean, that's what's happening to everything like when they release the... some of the health care, when they stopped state-owned railways, like all that stuff. It became about earning money and then people get there in second place after money, like, you don't... That's why it's really important for me that we keep at least media controlled, like, in a

controlled state. And it isn't in many ways now because you can get your news from anywhere. But that there's always this credible source that is still there, you can go to that source if you like, "O.K., I want the facts about this." I think that's important.

R: And we talked a little bit about how, if there's a big event, you'll read up on news to be able to discuss it with your friends. But do you do anything else in addition to that? Do you do anything else to complement your engagement with news?

T: I don't think so. I mean, it's more about like, discussing it with friends, maybe like getting other people's takes on stuff. People that I trust for different reasons and people that I might be, like. interested in their opinions about it. I have people that are like — not far to the right, but at least they're not socialist and they are for privatization and stuff — that I can really enjoy like getting their opinion about it and maybe like arguing my opinion. But also, on the other hand, I have people that are way, far more far left than me that are, like, almost anarchist about stuff. I don't think that's as interesting just to get their view of it. Of course, I agree more with them than people to the right. We're in the same camp but, yeah, I think that's basically it. Just like talking to people that I trust or that I think have intelligent or interesting opinions about stuff.

R: And what are your reasons for doing that?

T: Just like curiosity and getting that take on it because, like, I don't often get convinced to change my opinion. But I mean, it happens. And like, if I hear... if somebody has some information about something that I don't know and I have an opinion about that, of course, I want that, that information so that I can have my own opinion about it. And, like, have faith in what I actually think about. Yeah, so I think it's curiosity and like getting perspective and getting more facts.

R: And, on that note, do you go to the... do you ever visit the comment section, say, on social networking sites?

T: Yeah, but then it's more like... I mostly get annoyed by it but I guess it's... what do you call it? Guilty pleasure. Basically, I don't do it very often, but it can be funny to see people that either agree or disagree strongly with what I believe. It can be encouraging when you see people that agree with you, that are supportive if it's something, like, if it's a person that they're talking about, a politician or whatever. Then it can be empowering to see that, "O.K., people are with this person that I also have faith in." But yeah, I think, most of the time, it's the other way around. Just people hating on people I like which is... It can be funny if they're stupid, but mostly it's sad. But yeah, it's not very often but I... sure, I visit the comments section.

R: So how would you feel if you weren't able to keep up with your news practices?

T: I've kind of been in, like, a rough patch lately these two months. And I realize, like, workwise I've kind of had a down period and I realized I don't check the news often. I don't care, really, that much. But when I'm more active in my own life, I kind of... I have more energy and I think it's not more or less important to me. It's just more about how much activity and drive I have to be engaged in that stuff. Yeah, and how much I have to, like, focus on myself or not.

R: Could you elaborate upon that? Why do you think that you don't have to have that same drive to check news during this down period?

T: I think mostly it's about when I need to focus on myself. I kind of prioritize that. And I don't care as much about what's happening around the world or around, like, Sweden or whatever. Yeah, I think it's more of a prioritization issue that I tend to, like, if I need to focus on something else. And, of course, the news gets prioritized down so I don't I don't read as much, I guess.

R: Is there something about checking the news that — to use your own words — impacts your sense of self-care in this time?

T: Yeah, I guess. I mean, I feel we talked a little bit about responsibility so I think I see that as doing a good thing, like keeping up with the news. I think it's important but I feel I have more pressing things that I need to do. I don't feel bad for not taking notice, really. And maybe if somebody is, like, saying something and I feel like, "Oh, I really missed this," like, "I should have known that this was going on," then I might feel like, I really need to get on this thing again. But yeah, I think it's more like if I have to focus on something else, I'll do that. I don't really feel bad about not keeping up with it. But the other way around when I do it, I feel like I'm doing something good for me, or just like, keeping check on something.

R: What do you use the news for?

T: I think we've kind of gone through it already but it's, like, being able to discuss it with friends, keeping up with stuff and just, like, I'm interested in knowing what goes on around me. I think that's important. And what was the question?

R: What do you think... What do you use the news for?

T: What I use it for? I think I... also like, right now it's pretty special with the coronavirus spreading because I travel a lot in my work. It's pretty important to me, like, I'm going to Paris in three weeks. That's kind of... I'm kind of checking the news pretty often to see what's happening in France with all that so, yeah, that doesn't happen pretty often. That doesn't happen very often. But when I get in these situations that I need to find out what's happening in a place that I will go into, I try and keep up with it and meet up with it so I actually know what I'm getting into. Yeah, and I went to Cameroon, like, two years ago or something and that's not very much news but, I mean, I checked what's going on in that region right now, what kind of stuff that I might need or stuff like that. And there was, like, they said, "O.K., don't be outside after six if you're in the countryside because there's, like, bandits and stuff going after people, especially white people, and just trying to steal your stuff." I guess I would have gotten that information if I went there even if I didn't check it, but it's definitely something that I'm happy I read up on that before going

there, like knowing that kind of stuff. So yeah, it's useful for me when I'm traveling, basically, like when I'm going somewhere else I want to be able to see, "O.K., so what's going on there right now?" If I know, like, there might be a risk of something happening.

R: What do you think is the function of news?

T: Just keeping people posted, information so that people know... I mean, there's a lot of politics in news. So I think it's, like, because we have in democratic countries, we have public elections. People, like, they need to know what they're voting for because an uninformed vote is a crappy vote. I mean, they need to know stuff and I think that's a big thing, like educating people on what's going on. And also, I mean, entertainment. If you look at cultural news, if you look at celebrity news, a lot of people like getting a kick out of reading what's happening to people they are interested in and stuff like that. Yeah. So information and entertainment, I guess.

R: You talked about celebrity news and you talked about going to Nyheter 24...

T: That's just something and that popped up in my head because I don't really... I guess there was no more better examples of that kind of news pages but I just, I kind of just knew that they were doing that stuff.

R: But correct me if I'm wrong, that it's not news to you?

T: It's news, but it's... I'm just not interested in that category of news. I think this news, I mean, there are journalists that are doing the job. They're writing articles but it's just stuff that I really don't think are newsworthy, I guess. I guess it's more, for me, it's more entertainment than it is information that people need. People don't need those news. Nobody needs those news. They can enjoy them and, like, I don't really care that they're there. But yeah, it's more of a like how I value them and I value them very low because I'm not interested, but yeah. It's more into the entertainment.

R: So we reached the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to add?

T: I think the thing here that we have state-owned but not state-controlled media is pretty interesting but because we also have, like, tons of news outlets that are not controlled in any way, that just publishes whatever; and, I mean, they're controlled by someone but they can be very spaced out. It's, like, it's kind of experiment-like and I don't know if I want it to be like only the state-controlled news. Oh, not state-controlled but state-owned news. I think it's important to have a lot of diversity in the news, but it's always a big danger in, like, the far right news. And I guess very far left as well, spreading stuff that aren't true. It's so easy for people to just like read a headline and that's in their head, and they can go vote on something that I read in a headline, and that's, like, that's really dangerous and if you look at America for example which is even more like that and they they don't really have that strong... like, if you look at *SVT* or *SR*, that's pretty big in Sweden. And people follow that and they know it's not biased. But if you look at a country like America or the USA and then you have so many different news and if you look at like, Fox News, it's huge there, but it's so biased. Like that would be pretty dangerous. That's my view on that, I guess. Well, that's all there is to it.

Appendix 10

Coding scheme

Coding of all 13 interviews yielded a total of 2,030 codes, which were then organized into 3 themes, 8 categories and 13 subcategories. The codes in the following table do not represent all of those codes.

Themes	**Categories**	**Subcategories**	**Codes**
Keeping up with news	Obligations for keeping up with news	Social	Sharing news on social media for social reasons (Anne); Feeling like an outsider if not in on current events (April); Missing issues not talked about in social and professional circles (Ben); Checking news to socialize (Leslie); Not checking the news makes him feel bad if story is relevant to social group (Tom)
		Civic	Checking news because Swedish politics is in turmoil (Chris); Checking news as an active civic duty (Leslie); Being in the know so he can discuss issues with other politically- and civically-minded people (Andy); Responsibility of keeping up with news because of own

			political investment (Tom); Democracy as needing informed votes (Ben)
		Occupational	Checking news on traffic for job (Ron); Watching news with students as part of curriculum (Leslie); Checking news more because of academic career (Gerry); Checking news to see how it affects job (Ben); Checking news to see how national event might impact job (Donna)
		Personal	Fear that something happening across the world may affect you (Leslie); Checking COVID-19 coverage out of concern for family and relatives (Ron); Checking stories if she feels a personal connection (April); News as making her aware of how to act during COVID-19 pandemic (Anne); Wanting to be seen as "somebody who keeps up with the world" (Donna)
	Strategies for keeping up with news	Fitting news into everyday life	TV and video news as being regular, available every night (Ben); News applications because of regularity of

			coverage (Chris); Notifications through news applications (Leslie); Checking news as something to do while idling (Tom); Being used to the regularity of news practices (Andy)
		Setting of news agenda	News applications putting most relevant articles up (Chris); SVT giving direction of what to follow up on (Leslie); TV news as not requiring you to "read everywhere" (Ron); Missing what is important because self is choosing (Tom); Physical newspapers as a way to catch up with stories he wouldn't otherwise look up (Perd)
		Setting boundaries to engagement	Discussing news in Telegram as a closed setting (Gerry); Taking a few hours in the evening to not check the news (Perd); Limiting news intake because of its "negative effects" (Anne); Not on Facebook to read news (Donna); Only using social media for personal things (Ben)
Being critical of news	Perception of representations in	Objectivity	Always risk of bias in engaging with news

	news		(Tom); Every place has “implied enemies” (Donna); Realizing that news “always comes from someone” (Andy); Does not want to be brainwashed by slanted reporting (April); Bad that there’s not enough critical reporting from same political orientation (Ben)
		Completeness	Checking news with understanding that it’s a partial truth (Ron); Thinking about what is left out (Donna); Online news as not being “100 percent finished” (Perd); TV and video news not as comprehensive (Ben); Trying to find a middle ground between overly complicated and overly simplified (April)
		Factuality	Can’t always be certain of credibility (Tom); Checking news with a grain of salt when it’s not the COVID-19 pandemic (Ron); Checking other sources to see if something is true (Donna); News as just "stating the facts" (Perd); Wanting to

			just get the facts in political reporting (April)
	Responses to representations in news	Scale	Checking multiple sources to make sure not to miss anything (Tom); Getting news from different sources to get at nuance (Ben); Getting a broader perspective to be able to inform opinion (April); Checking multiple news outlets to check reporting (Chris); Checking multiple news sources to not spread misinformation (Ron)
		Scrutiny	Assessing news sources by clicking on linked sources (Chris); A lack of proper sourcing may be attempt to push agenda (Ron); Trusting a news source if you can trace the source (April); Scrutinizing articles online more (Tom); News as suspicious if headline is not straight to the point (Leslie)
		Discussion	Discussing news to find reassurance in another person (Leslie); Complaining about “blatantly nonsensical” articles

			to friends (Chris); Sharing news where journalist might be coming off as mean (Andy); Comments sections as a way to see what others are thinking (Ron); Comments section for local news have better discussions (Ben)
Feeling of news	Being emotionally available when engaging with news		Feeling that the brain gets tired from news (Chris); Relaxed when disengaging because mind is not in a "million different places" when checking news (Anne); Checking news and having access to "all the bad in the world" (Leslie); Feeling exhausted at having to take part in everything that's happening (Gerry); People have emotional intent when sharing news (Donna)
	Being wary of representations in news		Assessing news as a "muscle" that needs to be practiced (Leslie); Aware of discussions about advertisements hidden as news (Donna); Being source critical as something that is

			drilled into her (April); Online news as prioritizing speed over accuracy (Ron); Ease of publishing misinformation online (Tom)
	Forming an opinion when engaging with news		Feeling the need to have an opinion as polarizing (Chris); “Debate culture” as being dramatic (Leslie); Using news to form opinions (Tom); Checking sources as a means of confirming own views (Andy); Function of news is to create opinions (Anne)
	Feeling secure when engaging with news		Feeling a sense of control when checking up on news (Gerry); Notifications as making her feel safe being in the know (Leslie); News as a means to feel secure (April); Feeling insecure without news (Ben); Getting notifications in the morning to know "world is still here" (Perd)

Appendix 11

Samples of coded transcript and categorization

Pictured below is a sample of the coded transcript of the interview with "Tom" on March 4, 2020, in Malmö. Xodo, a mobile application used to read and annotate PDF documents, was used to code the transcript.

satisfaction obtaining knowledge

T: I guess there's satisfaction in obtaining knowledge when it's just like knowing stuff and being being able to discuss current events
able to speak to friends or just people you meet about this stuff that interests me, that is satisfactory. And also, if there's a news story that I feel is very positive, then, of course, that's happy with direction of world
also a very happy feeling that things are moving the way I think they should be moving in some happy news to stay positive
way. And that also, I mean, that kind of helps you stay positive, because there's so much like terrible news stories all the time, then you kind of need those small pockets of happy stories or they don't even need to be happy. They just need to be something that happened that I like, I mean, that I like the way that they happened or that this like played out. Yeah.

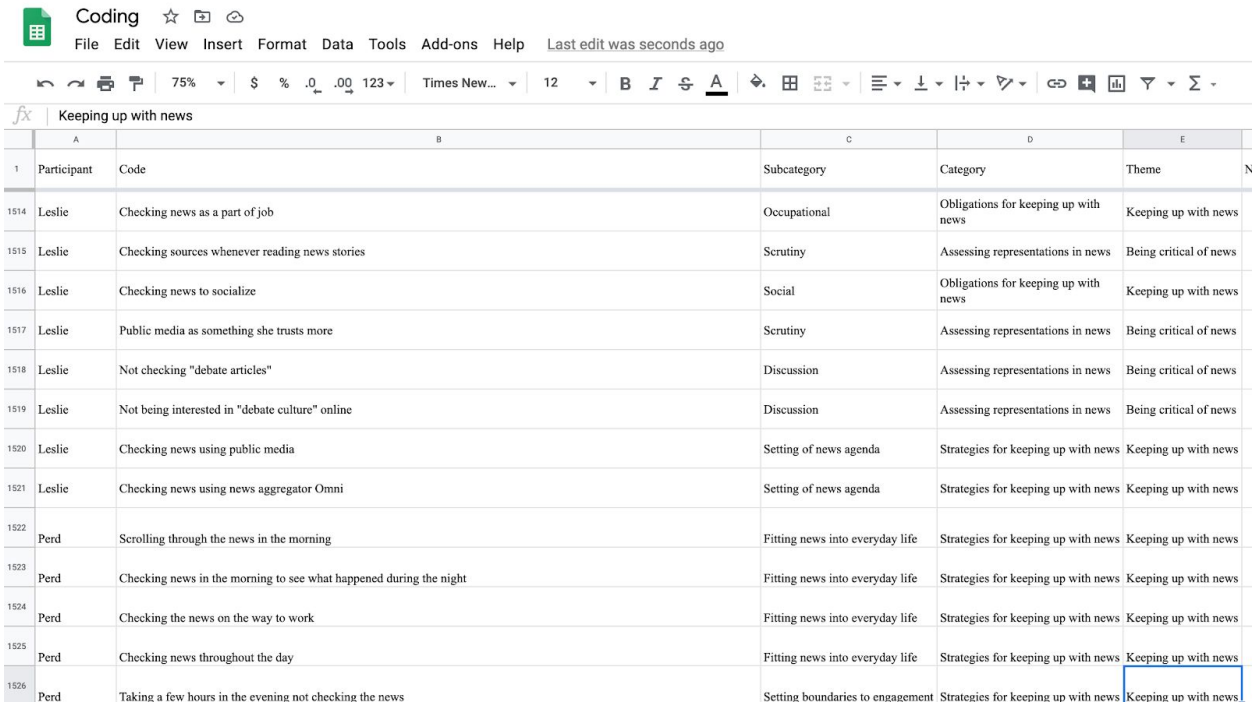
R: Something else I wanted to bring up because you actually put money toward subscription services. What do you see as different about subscribing to news — having a paid subscription — and having a paid subscription to, say, *Viaplay* or *Spotify*?

T: I mean, that's Viaplay and Spotify. That's for me. That's something I pay for their service pay for streaming because enjoy it
because I want to enjoy it. *Dagens ETC*, I could read those news there... there are some news that pay wall
are behind a *betal*... like, behind a subscription fee that I couldn't read if I didn't pay but, I mean, find sources despite paywall paying for ETC to grow
I could get those news either way. But I pay *ETC* because I want them to grow. I don't pay for *Spotify* or *Viaplay* because I want them to grow. They're already huge and I only pay them because I enjoy their service. I mean that's that's basically the difference. I want them to use my money to get bigger. Yeah, *ETC*.

R: And has there been a time when you engaged with news more than you usually do?

more intense engagement during election intense engagement during critical situations
T: I think around elections and when there's critical situations in the world, like climate disasters or wars or stuff like that, then I think I'm definitely more... I check news more often. I think it's more regular, intense engagement
just more regular and maybe, I guess, that's when I check like *The Guardian* and stuff like that. If getting the international view
there's something big happening in the world, I want to get the international view of it as well. getting more sources
And, yeah, more sources and more often, I guess.

Pictured below is part of the spreadsheet used to log and categorize all 2,030 codes. Google Sheets, an online spreadsheet software, was used to sort these codes into themes, categories and subcategories.


Coding

File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Add-ons Help Last edit was seconds ago

75% $ % .0 .00 123 Times New... 12

Keeping up with news

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Participant	Code	Subcategory	Category	Theme
1514	Leslie	Checking news as a part of job	Occupational	Obligations for keeping up with news	Keeping up with news
1515	Leslie	Checking sources whenever reading news stories	Scrutiny	Assessing representations in news	Being critical of news
1516	Leslie	Checking news to socialize	Social	Obligations for keeping up with news	Keeping up with news
1517	Leslie	Public media as something she trusts more	Scrutiny	Assessing representations in news	Being critical of news
1518	Leslie	Not checking "debate articles"	Discussion	Assessing representations in news	Being critical of news
1519	Leslie	Not being interested in "debate culture" online	Discussion	Assessing representations in news	Being critical of news
1520	Leslie	Checking news using public media	Setting of news agenda	Strategies for keeping up with news	Keeping up with news
1521	Leslie	Checking news using news aggregator Omni	Setting of news agenda	Strategies for keeping up with news	Keeping up with news
1522	Perd	Scrolling through the news in the morning	Fitting news into everyday life	Strategies for keeping up with news	Keeping up with news
1523	Perd	Checking news in the morning to see what happened during the night	Fitting news into everyday life	Strategies for keeping up with news	Keeping up with news
1524	Perd	Checking the news on the way to work	Fitting news into everyday life	Strategies for keeping up with news	Keeping up with news
1525	Perd	Checking news throughout the day	Fitting news into everyday life	Strategies for keeping up with news	Keeping up with news
1526	Perd	Taking a few hours in the evening not checking the news	Setting boundaries to engagement	Strategies for keeping up with news	Keeping up with news