

I trust what's written, but I don't think it's good

Old-age pensioners' persistence in the practice of obtaining information from traditional news media

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Abstract

In spite of the fact that we are living in a digital era the position of traditional news media as the first chosen source of information has not been altered. This is especially true when it comes to older persons. What are the reasons for this persistency? This article gives an account of how older persons reflect on whether and why they believe in, and trust, news press reporting and their reasons for acquiring news from traditional news media. Using a discourse theoretical logics approach we found that whether or not the informants believed in and trusted the news they all referred to an overarching fantasy stating that it is a right and an obligation of an ideal citizen to update oneself of the surrounding world via the news media. We also found social habits to be crucial for the informants' practice of obtaining information from the news media.

Introduction

The creation and dissemination of the Internet have created an abundance of possibilities for acquiring information in many more ways than through traditional news media alone. Apart from being seen as a possible promoter of democracy (cf. Graber, 2003; Livingstone & Markham, 2008), the Internet has also led to changes in overall media and information acquisition habits, especially among young persons who engage less with

traditional media (Findahl, 2012; Facht, 2012). These changes have not, however, altered the position of traditional news media (TV, newspapers and radio), as the main source of information, especially among older people. According to Facht (2016), 83% of people living in Sweden aged 65–79 read a daily newspaper compared to only 41% of people aged 15–24. Traditional news media are still the first choice for information about the surrounding world (European commission: Standard Eurobarometer 76, 2011; Livingstone, 2008; Carlsson, 2012; Weibull, 2011), and this is true in all Western democracies (Kaye & Johnson, 2003; Färdigh & Sternvik, 2009) although the Nordic countries all score the highest for the news press as an information source (Elvestad & Blekesaune, 2008) compared to the EU average (European commission: Standard Eurobarometer 76, 2011). This raises the interesting question of why traditional news media have persisted as a means for acquiring information about the world in spite of the fact that, in recent decades, we have witnessed a huge transformation not only of the news media landscape, but of the information landscape as a whole.

In this article, we analyse the narratives of older people about their news media consumption and their reasons for getting news about the surrounding world from the news press. We do so by following the theoretical elaboration of discourse theory often referred to as the logics approach (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). The aim of this work was to analyse and to explain critically how older people describe the persistence of the social practice of obtaining information about the surrounding world through traditional news press media even though we are living in a society with an abundance of new possibilities for getting information.

Although the empirical material is drawn from a Swedish context, the news consumption patterns in Sweden are similar to those in most Western democracies, and one contribution of this study is that it follows the reader's line of reasoning through in-depth interviews. Our argument is that, in order to explain media practices without falling back on stereotypical and possibly ageist explanations, we need to take into account the discursive construction of desires and considerations that comprise much more than the medium itself (Lundgren & Ljuslinder, 2011a, 2011b). In this sense, this study also contributes to the growing field of discourse theory.

The significance of needs, habit, and trust

Most of what is known about this field comes from studies undertaken by media and communication scholars and political scientists. Within the media and communication tradition, these kinds of studies are carried out from a uses and gratification perspective (Blumler & Katz, 1974), a news habit perspective (Silverstone, 1994), a media functions perspective (Morley, 1988), or a media trust and credibility perspective (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). The point of departure in all of these studies is that the acquisition of information is articulated as carried out with news media, thereby leaving no opening for

reflection about alternative ways of acquiring information about public matters in the surrounding environment.

The classical uses and gratification approach to studying the effects of media (Blumler & Katz, 1974) focuses on what needs a particular medium satisfies. Studies within this tradition have, among other things, shown that the print media has been said to satisfy the need for information, whereas TV has been said to satisfy the needs for entertainment and escapism (Diddi & LaRose, 2006). The uses and gratification approach has also been extended to the use of the Internet (Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000), and LaRose and Eastin (2004) have found that active media selection decisions on the basis of need were only made by new Internet users. Experienced users lapsed into habitual media behaviour especially when there were many media choices.

Habit, accordingly, explains a great deal about news consumption. Furthermore, habit grows stronger over time, and media consumption ceases to be an active choice but, instead, becomes a repetitive pattern (Diddi & LaRose, 2006).

In most studies of news media functions as well as in official documents such as Swedish official reports [SOU], the unproblematized point of departure is that news media are said to have a democratic so-called assignment. Ever since the middle of the 19th century, the news media's strong articulation with democracy has been at the forefront of political, research, and news media discussions about Western democracies (SOU, 1995:37; SOU, 1975:78; Livingstone & Markham, 2008; Carey, 1999). The so-called democratic assignment is said to entail certain taken-for-granted functions that are assumed to be well known and generally shared. The functions vary widely among different studies and reports depending on how the concept of democracy, which is very open to interpretation, is defined and described. Assessments are then made of whether or not the news media fulfil the specific functions described in a certain study or report, i.e., whether or not the media work in the name of democracy (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2011; Althaus et al., 2009; Holbert, 2005; Graber, 2003; Liedman, 2000; SOU, 2000:1). This means that the description of this democratic assignment may be different from one study to another.

In many studies, a connection is also made between what is said to be an existing democratic assignment and an obligation for citizens to keep themselves informed about the surrounding world through the news media. Citizen participation in political and social life is said to be indispensable to a Swedish democracy (SOU, 2000, p. 1), and this civic duty is often stated as a taken-for-granted reason for acquiring information from news media without any further explanation. André Jansson (1998, p. 299), for example, says:

Being a 'good citizen' means contributing to the deepening and improvement of the democratic order. This is first and foremost realized through active participation in general elections [...] and a continual obtaining of information via mass media.

In Sweden, there is no official governance of the news press, which is and has always been free from government demands and regarded as a competitive, market-driven business. Despite this, it was the government that first described the news media functions that have ever since been referred to as the news media's democratic assignment (SOU, 1975 p. 78, 1995 p. 37). Not only is this democratic assignment described differently in different documents, but a governmental formulated democratic assignment for news media is also an anomaly because the news press is, as said, free from government demands. This paradox has never been contested. Rather, the notion of a democratic assignment has only become stronger because all of the actors involved, including the media business, journalist unions, and journalists, have positively welcomed what might be described as a social contract in the Lockean sense (cf. Leth, 1996; Lindblom-Hulthén, 2000; Strömbäck: 2005).

Trust and credibility in the news media have mainly been approached within audience studies that have their theoretical basis in classical media effect theories. Numerous such studies have been carried out since the 1960s, and informants have, for the most part, been asked questions about variables that describe the researcher's preconceived notions of what news credibility is and not about what factors the informants themselves think are important for their trust in news. For example, in one of the very first studies in this field, Hovland et al. (1963) claimed – without asking any informants about their own opinion – that media credibility consists of the audience's perception of two factors: expertness and trustworthiness.

The quantitative approach in these studies gives neither a theoretical nor a methodological clarification about what trust in news consists of, and this lack of theoretical foundation is the major criticism of media credibility studies (Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Metzger et al., 2003). The few studies that have an explicit theoretical basis have mostly used cognitive psychology theory, such as the work of Major and Atwood (1997) or the social theory notion of trust, such as the work of Kohring and Matthes (2007).

While studies about needs, habits, and trust have shown how a taken-for-granted link between the consumption of news media and becoming an informed citizen underlies both common sense and research (cf. Liedman, 2000; Jansson, 1998), such studies have not been able to explain or problematize this link further. Some researchers have also pointed to the paradoxical fact that people often have an unquestioned trust in what the news media does. At the same time, there are numerous studies showing the distorted views of news media, their dramatized descriptions, and their increasing commercialization (Asp, 2007; Djerf-Pierre et al., 2013). In this article, we will delve into the ways that people themselves describe the relation among certain forms of news consumption, notions of journalism, and thoughts on ideal citizenship.

Theoretical and methodological framework

The theoretical point of departure for this study is discourse theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985); and, more specifically, the logics approach (Glynos and Howarth, 2007). This approach is an attempt to provide an answer to the critique of discourse theory that it does not sufficiently deal with the what, how, and why questions of social practices (Carpentier, 2007).

Answering this critique, Glynos and Howarth (2007) have suggested a focus on the logics that characterize, explain, challenge, and change social practices. The logics approach is based on three explanatory logics that may be seen as three steps in an analysis or three aspects of a social practice: social logics, political logics, and fantasmatic logics. All three logics may be present in a practice. Consequently, all three need to be considered in order to obtain a complete critical explanation of a practice. The benefit of using a logics approach when analysing a practice is that it:

provides us with the theoretical resources to characterize practices and regimes, to account for their dialectical relationship and to explain how and why they change or resist change. (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 106)

Social logics consist of the norms or rules of a practice and answer the what question regarding a social practice. What is this social practice? What characterizes this social practice in its everyday manifestation?

Political logics are the explanations of how a social practice has been established, contested, or challenged, and they also show the social construction of the social practice. In other words, political logics unmask the contingency in the social practice.

Fantasmatic logics explain why a social practice is maintained or what initiates its change. Desire-driven fantasy is by far the most important ingredient in this logic, which builds on the Lacanian axiom of an inherent lack, or incompleteness, in any subject, social practice, or discourse. Fantasies offer explanations that organize the desire for their fulfilment and, thereby, serve to cover up the ontological lack, i.e., that the desire can never be fulfilled (West, 2013). In this sense, fantasies about the good life, the perfected democracy, and the good citizen provide an image of fullness and, thereby, place into the background the inability ever to fulfil the fantasies (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 145). Total fulfilment of a fantasy, accordingly, is never possible; and, at the same time, the fantasy gives the explanation for why its fulfilment is not possible in the present moment.

Like discourse theory generally, the logics approach implies an ontological view that the only reality we can come in contact with is social reality, which, in turn, is constituted through language. This makes the concept of discourse vitally important. A discourse is a comprehensive view of something – for example, journalism or the news press audience – and discourses are seen as constantly negotiated and constructed and limited by power orders (Laclau, 1988). The structure of a discourse is ordered through specific articulations

of signs, which are meaning-making practices that link elements together into temporarily fixed moments. A discourse on journalism as a promoter of democracy might articulate journalism with audience needs and important information, while a discourse on journalism as commercialism might articulate journalism with sensationalism and scoops.

The method used to analyze the social practice that was regularly mentioned in the interviews – the persistence of acquiring information about the surrounding world from traditional news media – has been to identify the three explanatory logics of this social practice and to follow the line of reasoning given by the theoretical framework discourse theory. In our analysis, we read the transcribed interviews, noting signs (words and sentences) that were used to make meaning around news consumption, i.e., we mapped how the respondents' news consumption was articulated. In this mapping, we also noted what seemed to be taken-for-granted and what was related as a subtle critique of something. We then continued to focus on the wider webs of meaning that structured these articulations by asking how the participants made sense of their own stories by including them in different overarching narratives of their life, journalism, or society in general. In this way, we studied how the participants constructed their answers as to why they invested in the social practice of reading a newspaper daily.

In identifying logics, it is important to keep in mind that the researcher's naming of any logic is also part of the social construction of a contingent social reality. A logics approach implies that every utterance from a participant is seen as an indication of what the social practice signifies. This means that we have studied the conditions of possibility for talking about the social practice of acquiring information about the surrounding world through news media: in this case, the daily practice of reading newspapers. Throughout the analysis, we focused on what the participants said about their perceptions, convictions, habits, and reasons. Thus, it is the meaning-making that took place orally within the realm of the interviews that constituted the material in our analysis.

Material

This article is based on interviews with 15 older persons, 62–84 years of age, including 7 men and 8 women. All participants lived in the hinterlands of northern Sweden. Some of them had migrated to the area as adults, and some had lived their whole lives there. Four had held white-collar jobs; five had been self-employed; four had been employed as care workers; and two had been seasonal workers. The interviews were carried out as part of a larger study concerning cultural notions of population ageing in northern Sweden (Lundgren & Ljuslinder, 2011a, 2011b). We wanted the participants to talk about their thoughts on demographic ageing and how knowledge about this demographic process affected them in their everyday life and to talk about their thoughts on what was reported on the matter in the news media. As will be clear from some of the quotations

in the article, we used examples of current newspaper articles as the basis for some of the discussions. All interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word.

One part of the interviews dealt specifically with how the participants acquired information about the surrounding world and their thoughts on the media generally – for example, their notions of the news media's assignment, trust, and credibility. These questions and the narratives to which they gave rise constitute the data for the present article. We chose to conduct the interviews as group interviews because we were interested in how the participants (P1-P15) discussed the matters among each other. We conducted three group interviews. Group A consisted of two men and one woman, group B of four men and four women, and group C of three women and one man. Each interview lasted one and a half hours and was moderated by us, the authors, together (M).

What instantly became clear in the interviews was the significance attributed to newspapers and newspaper reading. All participants claimed to read at least one paper edition of a daily newspaper on a daily basis. The persistence with which they emphasized the significance of newspaper reading while simultaneously exhibiting the ability to question critically some of its content caught our interest.

While the participants showed the highest trust in the printed news press, they also belonged to a social group that was explicitly and problematically represented within the news press' discourse on population ageing, namely older people. We are aware that the specific themes of the articles that we brought to the interviews as examples might have affected the participants' narratives about trust in journalists' representations. However, the participants reacted somewhat differently with respect to each other to the articles. While some of them were very critical of the images of older people, others were much more prone to agree with the way their age category was represented. We, therefore, do not believe that there was any immediate risk that the topic of population ageing itself led to any particular bias in the participants' narratives.

Routines and norms in daily reading

As mentioned, all of the participants claimed to read the paper version of one or more newspapers on a daily basis. This was a routinized social practice, and many expressed feelings of irritation if this daily practice was disrupted. Some even claimed that their whole day was ruined if, for some reason, the newspaper did not appear in time for breakfast.

The newspaper was, thus, ascribed great significance in the participants' daily morning routines and was talked about in the same way as coffee or bread. When asked about their specific reasons for this daily social practice, some participants simply stated that "it is information, and information is interesting" – firmly positioning themselves as eager

learners. Others gave answers containing a rights dimension. For example, one participant claimed:

As a citizen, you have the right to know what is going on. (P2 Group A).

This type of claim positioned the participants as citizens with certain rights and that the news press, along with the postal service whose task it was to deliver the newspaper, was obliged to provide citizens with what they needed. Under the surface of this rights claim was also the notion of civic duty. It was clear that, by claiming to read the newspaper, the participants also presented themselves as good citizens. Reading the morning paper was not once articulated as being in any way embarrassing or unnecessary but always as important, necessary, and self-evident.

Interestingly, however, the need to keep informed was not only related to information on a national level. Because the interviews primarily focused on the ongoing demographic process of population ageing, the participants often related the news representations to their local context, and it was obvious that media representations of their own community were used as fuel, as it were, in discussions between neighbours. In this sense, keeping up with what was in the news was also important because it constituted an established topic of conversation.

This can be said to illustrate the substance of the norm guiding the daily practice and can be said to constitute a social logic of reading a daily paper that goes like this:

As a Swedish citizen, I am entitled to be informed about what is going on in the world and that information must be given to me by newspapers or the news media. (P1 Group A)

When the routinized social practice is carried out as a habit in everyday life, it is not reflected upon as a practice ruled by any socially-constructed norms. This might not sound surprising, but what is interesting is that this state of not considering that social norms might be the reason for the daily practice may explain – at least, partly – the maintenance of the practice, preserving it as non-questionable even in the face of an increasing number of alternative news sources and practices. But what about the content of what was read about in the newspapers? Did the taken-for-granted character of the social practice of reading the morning newspaper also include what was in the paper?

In daily news, we trust...

When we slightly challenged the taken-for-granted acceptance of the social practice of reading the newspaper, the participants argued in terms of trust and credibility. Most of them neither questioned the credibility of the news nor whether they were getting the information that they needed. No proactive signs were shown, only a silent acceptance of

Article: I trust what's written, but I don't think it's good

what they were given by the news. Very often the participants articulated the news with the truth, illustrating the belief that news mirrors reality. Therefore, it was a non-question whether or not they trusted the news.

Even when the participants displayed some kind of hesitation and expressed an ever-so-vague idea that there might be alternative ways of being informed on a certain topic – for example, Internet platforms or through word of mouth, they always ended up with affirming that the newspaper's way of telling a story was the most credible. One woman, who was otherwise quite critical of the news media, said the following when describing her perception of an article from our sample that was illustrated with a dramatic drawing of a ticking "age" bomb.

Moderator (M): So you think that this threat is real?

Participant 1 (P1): Yes.

M: A bomb will explode?

P1: Yes. Well, that's true; you should, of course, read this kind of article with a grain of salt, but it isn't difficult to understand that this is going to happen because the inland municipalities are getting smaller and smaller. (Group C).

The participant held a dialogue with herself for a second about the credibility of the story; but, when she compared it with her prior knowledge about the migration out of inland communities, she concluded that the article was credible.

... but, in journalists, we don't

There was, however, one aspect of overall trust in the news that was questioned by the participants. They did not believe that the journalists' motives for selecting and writing news were always for the benefit of the readers, i.e., the citizens. Instead, the motives of individual journalists were often thought of as being egoistic or commercial. The participants often explained that journalists only wanted to create headlines, get a scoop, or sell newspapers. Implicit in such expressions is a political logic of the act of reading the daily newspaper and an acknowledgment of the existence of alternative ways of perceiving the news than those previously mentioned by the participants. This political logic offered alternative articulations in which the news media were more connected to ideas such as careerism, commercialism, and arbitrariness than with the truth. Here, the given natural order of reading and trusting the news is slightly – at least, potentially – disrupted. Still, this distrust in the journalists' motives for selecting their topics and writing their articles obviously did not alter the participants' practice of reading and trusting the morning newspaper.

Maintaining the naturalness of reading the daily newspaper

The negatively-charged narratives about journalists' motives and the disclosure of the possibility of alternative kinds of motives for writing news, never challenged the naturalness of reading the daily newspaper. So, how did the informants make sense of the fact that they took for granted trust in daily news and, at the same time, question the journalists' reasons for writing? This was partly accomplished by the way the fantasy of news journalism was structured by an ingenious how-it-should-be logic that questioned journalism but maintained the self-evident daily practice of reading the newspaper and the inherent trust in its content.

Hopes of a social pathos

The sense-making of the participants around news media, journalism, and news reading contained a simultaneous belief in a system of quality control. When we delved deeper into what this system of quality control consisted of, the answers showed a vague idea of an altruistic quality in the journalists or an assignment for the public good – a feeling that news journalism was in the service of the public, which existed in parallel with the participants' more critical understandings. It was clear, however, that they now talked about notions of an ideal that they wished for and wanted to believe in. They did express some insecurity about how things actually worked, as one participant said:

I want to believe that they have [a special assignment]. Something that is good for everybody. But I don't know (P2, Group B).

This statement was instantly followed by nods around the table, and another participant in the same group interview clarified the argument by filling in: "Yes, a social pathos" (P4, Group B).

Some participants thought of this wished-for and possibly existing assignment as coming from the government, while others suggested that it would ideally also be grounded in the journalists themselves. However, nobody had any idea of how such an assignment should be formulated or whether such an assignment already exists.

"It would be ok, if only..."

Many articles about population ageing depict older people in northern Sweden as a problem of some kind (Lundgren & Ljuslinder, 2011a). The participants were familiar with these kinds of descriptions, and they often expressed the critical notion that this is not "how it should be" (P3, Group B) or "that's not how it is!" (P7, Group B). One participant stated:

I trust what's written, but I don't think it's good. It should be better (P8, Group B).

Article: I trust what's written, but I don't think it's good

"Better" in this context turned out to mean a wish for more encouraging and optimistic news that depicts events in a happier and more positive way.

I think they [newspapers] could be somewhat more positive because there are many old people who are still useful and helpful (P5, Group B).

In a sense, the desire for positive depictions could actually be seen as a problematization of the otherwise taken-for-granted articulation of news with the truth. While they maintained a reflective approach to media representations in which the news media should and could mirror reality, their desire for more positive perspectives revealed that the participants thought that newspapers were not reflecting reality truthfully after all. Even when population ageing was discussed in relation to depopulation and general concerns, the participants expressed a desire for the bright side of things to be shown. This was particularly so when it came to representations of place. In one interview, the participants were critical of a TV report about the effects of population ageing in their community.

P1: They could have shown the VindelN River.

P2: Yes, but instead they showed this old, boarded-up house.

M: What was the purpose of that, do you think?

P1: Well, there was something about the impoverishment of this village and unemployment and that there aren't many people living there anymore.

M: How did you react to the depiction?

P2: I got annoyed, because, I mean, they could have shown something else.

P1: We do actually have many beautiful houses. (Group B).

The participants questioned the way journalists wrote about occurrences that became news, and they also suggested alternatives. They sometimes even talked about "bad journalists" – journalists who were driven by the populist desire for scoops or who failed to represent reality in a positive way. This critique may be said to illustrate a political logic in the sense that the social construction in the production of news is made visible. By extension, this questioning might very well challenge daily newspaper reading as a source of information, but it did not – at least, not for these participants.

It seemed that the critique was not enough to challenge the ideological formation, the disguised social construction, of the social practice of reading and trusting a daily newspaper, and this social practice remained solidly established. The expressed wish for and belief in a social pathos could be seen here as a fantasmatic logic that captured the participants and helped to maintain their habit of daily newspaper reading. The wish and belief in a social pathos of journalists – even in cases where the participants agreed that there was certainly room for improvement – seemed to mask the contingency brought about by the critical political logic of, among other things, bad journalists. The potential

threat that the political logic posed to the social practice of reading and trusting the daily newspaper was, thus, made insignificant.

Discussion: Understanding the social practice of acquiring information from news media

The fantasy of the ideal citizen

According to the way the logics approach has been theorized, fantasmatic logics explain why a fantasy enthralls, grips, or mesmerises an individual or a collective as if it were given by nature. In the case of the social practice of reading and trusting a daily newspaper, we detected a fantasy of the ideal citizen to which the participants repeatedly alluded and related their own news-reading practices. As with all ideological fantasies, ideology works in this case by obscuring the contingency of the fantasy and by covering over the ontological impossibility of ever fulfilling it, i.e., the basic, axiomatic presumption that social reality can never be fixed, closed, or predestined but is always contingent and open to new meanings. But what was it that made the ideological grip of this fantasy possible? Why would the participants not only persist in their news reading practices but also argue in favour of them when asked to reflect on them?

The fantasy of the ideal citizen was constructed in relation to notions of Swedish democracy, and the participants talked about reading the news in terms of both a right and an obligation. Although researchers often claim that there is consensus in Sweden on some values and norms connected to democracy – for example, the principles of public elections and freedom of speech and opinion (Strömbäck, 2005; Liedman, 2000; Hadenius, 2001) – the hegemonic agreement of what 'democracy' means beyond these two principles dissolves into a number of normative notions of what democracy signifies. This was also what we found. When talked about in the interviews, the various meanings of "democracy" were often used without any further clarification and were presumed to be common and well-known (Liedman, 2000).

In this sense, democracy was clearly present as an empty signifier. According to Laclau (1996), an empty signifier is a word, concept, or phrase not totally without meaning but empty in the sense that it is open to various and even contradictory articulations. Empty signifiers thereby make social reality appear fulfilled and work to cover over the impossibility of fulfilling a fantasy (ibid.)

The fantasy of the ideal citizen in a democracy unites contrary discourses, most of which emphasize the meaning of participation. Some models of democracy articulate participation with a political demand to take an active part in political and civil society organisations. Other models articulate participation with a demand to take part actively in every general election but, during the periods between elections, to leave all of the political discussions and decisions to the popularly-elected politicians (SOU, 2000:1).

Participation is generally not specified in terms of when, where, and how much to participate but in terms of what participation will have on citizens and what democracy will gain from citizen participation. The official report on democracy, for example, states that, through participation, "citizens will develop more awareness and competence" (SOU, 2000, p. 36).

The same report also asserts that accentuating the importance of citizen participation in democracy fosters good citizens with "indispensable civic virtues" (ibid., p. 36) and "large human and social capital" (ibid., p. 35). Participation is, in principle, always described as a possibility and a self-evident right of a citizen, and an obligation – a civic duty – is positioned against this right. This was regularly discernible in the interviews, and there was a clear connection between the way that the participants related to democracy and citizenship and, more generally, even to official discourses about ideal citizenship.

Partial fulfilment of the fantasy

In Swedish democracy, voting in general elections and keeping up-to-date with the news in the media are more or less the only activities officially described as an answer to how to participate as a citizen. A participating citizen is supposed to have a will and an interest in informing himself or herself, and this is expected to be done via the news media (SOU, 2001:1, p. 76). However, the news media are not only described as necessary for citizen participation in a democracy. Just as the participants wished, official reports also claim that news media have an assignment in the name of democracy to:

provide citizens with such information that allows them, unconstrainedly and independently, to form opinions about public issues. (SOU, 1995:37, p. 156)

Accordingly, reading the daily news and, thus, acquiring information theoretically helped the participants to fulfil their fantasy of being ideal citizens as it has been formulated by both the government and the news media themselves. The fulfilment was only partial, however, and the criticism that the participants directed at journalists tended to undermine the fantasy underpinning the social practice of reading the daily newspaper. Yet, the partial fulfilment constituted a promise that the whole fantasy could still be achieved. At the same time, this partial fulfilment of the fantasy also explained why the fantasy could not be fully achieved for the time being. Such explanations, for example, might go like this: If I obtain more news, I could become an ideal participating citizen; or, if journalists were not so bad, I could become an ideal participating citizen.

The fulfilment of the fantasy of being an ideal citizen, accordingly, is not possible. Yet, its partial fulfilment by keeping informed on a daily basis through the news media helps maintain the desire of the fantasy and the subject positions (i.e., ideal citizens) it offers as well as the pervasiveness of the social practice of reading a daily newspaper. Furthermore, the fantasy might be said to be strengthened by the readers' trust in the news media.

Trust becomes the glue that holds together the fantasy of the ideal citizen and the persistence in the social practice of obtaining information through the news media. In other words, citizens keep up-to-date with the news and achieve a partial fulfilment of the fantasy by trusting that the content of the news media is the information needed to be able to participate in society in an ideal way. Thereby, the practice of using traditional news media as a primary information source has become ideologically naturalized, a non-questionable issue, and trust in the news is the glue that holds the fantasy and the practice together.

Returning to the breakfast table, the local context, and the meaning of age

While all this stood out as immensely important for the participants' reasoning, there is still reason to return to the significance of habits, place, and age for supporting the desire to identify with a position as an ideal citizen. Habits exercise power in themselves (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010). Regardless of the fantasmatic reasons to read and trust the news press, the private but established sequences of morning events, the structure of the paper, and just having something to do while having breakfast also help maintain the social practice of reading the morning newspaper.

Wilk (2009) has described how routines move in two directions: naturalization, which makes social practices seem self-evident, and culturalization through which such practices become the object of reflection. This conceptual pairing resonates well with the logics approach in which social logics are recurrently challenged by political logics. The seemingly mundane habits were obviously not perceived as sufficient by the participants when answering the researchers' questions about why the practice of reading the morning newspaper was carried out. In this sense, the interviews worked as moments of potential disruption, and the questions could be seen as demands to "culturalize" a naturalized social practice. This might deepen the understanding for why the participants also emphasized notions of democratic rights and responsibilities alongside stories of morning habits.

It is equally important to remember what the interviews were about. We spoke about the way news articles implied that communities in inland, northern Sweden were withering away as a consequence of population ageing. Since they were very aware of the situation in their local communities, the participants were eager to emphasize what was positive about where they lived. They were very familiar with discourses that promoted the importance of "selling" the countryside (cf. Baylina & Gunneryd Berg, 2010; Halfacree, 2006) to attract new residents. They highlighted community inhabitants who were not stereotypically old and backward. In light of this, it may not be strange that the participants wanted to present themselves as active and their communities as not altogether hopeless. It also seemed that the local newspaper played a particularly important role as a local topic of conversation. Having read the news meant, perhaps, not only that one was an ideal citizen of the nation in the general sense but also that one

Article: I trust what's written, but I don't think it's good

was an ideal local community citizen. This was perceived as important, given the specific situation of many of the communities we visited. Striving to become an ideal participating citizen was something that the old-age pensioners on whom we focused in this article seemed to have specific reasons to do. As already mentioned, the news press coverage of population ageing repeatedly portrayed older people as very old, as expensive, and as passive (Lundgren & Ljuslinder, 2011b). The negative portrayals of older people sometimes provoked irritation. "What they [the news media] say about population ageing and older people is generally negative", one woman said before she proceeded with a narrative about how she felt about the negative representations of older people as being expensive:

I understand that I'm an expense for the pension funds, but, first, I cannot help that I'm alive, and, second, I've already paid for my own pension (P3, Group A).

The participants opposed these negative portrayals and emphasized that being old or retired could just as well mean that you were in your sixties, healthy, active and contributing economically to society by holding jobs or doing volunteer work. Against this background, it made all the more sense that the participants were inclined to present themselves as ideal participating citizens and not at all passive and unworldly.

Conclusion

The participants all emphasized that reading the morning newspaper was important, and they held onto this practice even though they were aware of general changes in news media habits as well as the increased availability of alternative news media. These alternatives, however, were often subordinated by the strong articulations of credibility with the news press.

However, the participants' narratives about the social practice of reading the news press were structured by conflicting logics. One held that the news media represented the truth, while the other held that journalists were driven by egoistic and populist motives and that news representations were often misleading.

This paradox of aligning with the news press while distancing from journalists may be explained theoretically by the overarching fantasy about ideal citizenship to which the participants repeatedly returned. This fantasy concluded that it was a right and an obligation of the ideal citizen to update himself or herself about the surrounding world via the news media. This fantasy is institutionalized in Sweden and can even be found in official reports (SOU, 1995, p. 78, 1995, p. 37, 2000, p. 1).

We argue that the appeal of this kind of fantasy can be found by looking in different directions. We have suggested that the empty characters of democracy and participation are immensely important for the fantasy to be attractive to people. We have also suggested that it matters for the participants that they felt that their age group was

represented in problematic and ageist ways by the news media and that they often were represented as passive and as a burden on the nation. This made the identification with the fantasy of ideal citizenship (which included trust in the news media) all the more important – in particular, in order to present themselves as active and productive within the realm of the interviews.

Lastly, we point out the meaning of habits themselves in which the physical aspects of the social and naturalized practice of reading the morning newspaper as such were crucial for the participants' desire to defend the practice. Taken together, we argue that the explanation for why older people in northern Sweden stay true to traditional news might be found in the strong discourse about what constitutes an ideal citizen, in the problematic way the participants felt that they were generally represented, and in the powers ascribed to daily habits. This also touches upon the study's major contributions: the insights that social practices as well as identities are intimately and complexly caught up in a plethora of discursive contexts and that a logics approach can prove helpful in shedding light on the fantasmatic investments that explain why people hold onto certain reading practices despite serious criticism of journalism. Being positioned within the fields of media and ageing studies, we argue that these insights are helpful because they discourage simplified and, possibly, ageist explanations of news media habits. They might also prove helpful for all those who wish to explain why people sometimes hold onto seemingly inexplicable behaviours and identify with certain practices despite their own discontent with the practice and an abundance of alternatives.

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