Audiences are inherently cross-media: 
Audience studies and the cross-media challenge

Kim Christian Schrøder
Department of Communication, Business and Information Technologies
Roskilde University, Denmark

Summary: "Cross-media" is an epithet that has attained buzzword status across media and communication studies in recent years, while also frequently appearing as a panacea for the challenges that beset media producers from journalism to multimedia storytelling in the digital age. While cross-media challenges also face analysts and practitioners of media production, as well as scholars scrutinizing the meanings of convergence-age media content, this article concentrates on a discussion of the cross-media challenges encountered by audience researchers. It argues that a genuine audience perspective on the contemporary media culture must adopt a cross-media lens, because people in everyday life, as individuals and groups, form their identities and found their practices through being the inevitable sense-making hubs of the mediatized culture. Audiences are inherently cross-media. The article also presents the methodological reflections and preliminary results from an ongoing study of cross-media news consumption, and briefly discusses the prospects for cross-cultural comparative audience research.

Key words: audiences, cross-media, research methodology, comparative research, news consumption

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2 Contact with author: kimsc@ruc.dk.
Cross-mediality as a *sine qua non* for audience research

At a first glance, cross-mediality may appear to be about a phenomenon which is an interesting possibility for audience researchers – an appealing optional that some of us might consider or even pursue if we feel so inclined.

However, more systematic thinking about the issue leads me to propose that for a true audience researcher today the cross-media perspective is a necessity. That is, there is an inescapable property of audiencehood, which is ‘cross-media’ – even if one may still choose, legitimately, to focus on the audience of a single medium, or genre, or program. I shall therefore claim that a genuine audience perspective on the contemporary media culture must adopt a cross-media lens, because people in everyday life, as individuals and groups, form their identities and found their practices through being the inevitable sense-making hubs of the spokes of the mediatized culture. Audiences are inherently cross-media.

In the context of this article the term ‘audience’ includes all kinds of contemporary user engagement with media, be they sense-making as in reception research, or participatory in the sense of Web 2.0. Audience practices and audience experiences are always relational, from the media selection phase to the sense-making phase, and (if applicable) onwards to the participation phase, because the media that were available to users in a given situation, but not chosen, maintain a shadow presence in the mind of audience members, due to their previous experience of these other media. At any given point in time, our sense-making of a newscast, or a sitcom, or a blog, is indebted to the intertextual web of meanings which we have previously harvested from those media forms, and from the whole mediatized world we live in.

One need only think, as a familiar illustration, of the audience of a reality show like Big Brother, whose sense-making while watching an episode of that program is kaleidoscopically and multiply interwoven with previous episodes of this program, experiences of other reality programs, information harvested from tabloid newspapers and youth gossip magazines, from social net media, and from personal conversations etc. (Ytreberg, 2009). This is the process which John Fiske, in his studies of the ‘polysemic’ media text, structured for content and textual analysis by requiring analysts to include in their analysis both the primary, the secondary and the tertiary texts (Fiske, 1987) – the primary texts being those media products which are analytically in focus (a sitcom, an advertising campaign, an internet news site); the secondary texts being the other media whose discourses *talk about* the primary medium; and the tertiary texts
being those that audiences produce about the primary and secondary texts, in spontaneous everyday dialogues or in research interviews.

Thus the cross-media dimension is not just a necessary property of audience studies, but also of textual studies. And in recent years it has also become a necessary property of media production studies, as producers of entertainment content apply strategies of cross-media multi-platform story-telling (Bolin, 2010) and cross-media promotion campaigns for blockbuster films (for instance, the case of The Batman movie *The Dark Knight*, 2008). In news production, cross-media journalism is shifting its meaning from being about one journalist producing *the same content* on different platforms (radio, TV, internet) to one journalist producing *different content* on different platforms, so that news consumers get a pay-off from consulting different journalistic outlets (Erdal, 2009).

The rest of this article concentrates on developing the cross-media perspective in audience studies. My argument should not be taken to mean that it has now become an obligation for all audience researchers to go out and do cross-media audience research. Some will play the game of cross-media research on the front stage of their research theatre; for others the cross-media perspective will and should remain a backstage thing.

**Cross-media research past and present**

To explore audience practices in a cross-media perspective is not new. Early work on the influence of the media on people’s decision processes looked at the role played by different media (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), and it was a favourite focus of uses-and-gratifications research to explore, in studies of media exposure, what different media were ‘best for’ (Katz, Gurevitch and Haas, 1973; Greenberg & Hnilo, 1996) and how audiences use different media for mood and emotion management (Zillman & Bryant, 1985).

More recently, probably as a consequence of the advent of the ‘mediatized’ society characterized by media digitization and convergence, there has been a host of studies, which are not yet a tsunami, which explore cross-media audience practices. Applying a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives, different scholars use half a dozen different keywords to pinpoint the cross-media focus of their investigations, as they talk about constellations of media, matrix of media, media choice, mediascape, media repertoires; transmedial patterns of use, mediatized (life)worlds, and consumer portfolios.
A non-exhaustive list of significant work on cross-media audiences includes the research listed below. I deliberately cite the titles in order to confront readers here with the ‘ex pluribus unum’ character of recent and ongoing cross-media research:

- Niels O. Finnemann (2008). *The Internet and the Emergence of a New Matrix of Media.*
- Olle Findahl (2009). *Is the Internet a competitor or a complement to the traditional media. An international comparison.*
- Ester de Waal & Klaus Schoenbach (2010). *News sites’ position in the mediascape: uses, evaluations and media displacement effects over time.*
• Heikki Heikkilä, Risto Kunelius and Laura Ahva (2010). *From Credibility to Relevance. Towards a Sociology of Journalism’s ‘Added Value’.*

• Friedrich Krotz (2010). *From the analysis of single media use and its meaning to the analysis of mediatized life worlds.*


• Andreas Hepp (in press), *Researching ‘mediatized worlds’: Non-media-centric media and communication research as a challenge.*

These publications bear witness to the widespread interest in cross-media use in the contemporary academic community. This interest is paralleled in media research carried out in the media industry, whose research departments are increasingly aware of the need to measure the consumers’ exposure during the day to different media, driven by the imperative to achieve greater efficiency in exposing consumers to advertising when they are most receptive, or most vulnerable, to the commercial messages. As a presentation of the British cross-media measurement tool *Touchpoints* describes it, the industry’s cross-media analytical tools aim, for instance, “to penetrate the cocoon of the car” of the motorist commuter (Institute of Advertising Practitioners, 2009). Similar targeting tools are being developed in other countries to serve the interests of advertisers as well as broadcasting companies (e.g. in Denmark: TNS Gallup (2009)).

I deliberately mention these examples of non-academic, professional cross-media research endeavours in order to highlight the need for academic audience scholars to liaise with non-academic audience researchers and, in spite of our partially different objectives as respectively ‘administrative’ and ‘critical researchers (Lazarsfeld, 1941), to exchange information not least about research methodologies. We should also cross-fertilize our research with that carried out by, or on behalf of, the regulatory bodies in the European countries (such as *Ofcom* in the UK).

Returning to the field of academic cross-media audience research, it seems possible to discern in the work listed above, at least as a first impression, two salient perspectives for theorizing and analyzing cross-media audience practices. They are rooted in different research traditions and I here label them the ‘media choice’ perspective and the ‘mediatized worlds’ perspective.
Table 1. Two perspectives on cross-media audiences.

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<th>Disciplinary frame</th>
<th>‘Media choice’</th>
<th>‘Mediatized worlds’</th>
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<td>Exposure -&gt; effects</td>
<td>Exposure -&gt; sense-making</td>
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<td>Mapping /understanding audience behaviour</td>
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<td>Methodology</td>
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Table 1 distinguishes between the two perspectives in terms of their different disciplinary frameworks, their different foci (or knowledge interests), the scope of their empirical work on different kinds of audience practice, their objectives, and their preferred methodologies. The table also mentions key exponents of each perspective. It should be emphasized that in spite of the continued existence of historically inherited methodological preferences among the adherents of each perspective, neither is dogmatic about prescribing certain methods and outlawing others.

When analyzing cross-media news consumption, which is the analytical example presented below, there is often in both perspectives a concern with citizenship and democracy, and in both there is an inclination to make inferences from findings about patterns of news usage to the alleged implications for democracy. Unfortunately, in many cases the conclusions drawn about the detrimental or encouraging implications for democracy are quite unsubstantiated and amount to little more than wishful thinking. One frequent concern has to
do with the possibility we have today of completely individualizing one’s news content on digital platforms. Some studies explore how prone news users have become to customize their news diet, so that they only succeed in building and consolidating a myopic “Daily Me”, instead of engaging in more “serendipitous” and versatile kinds of news discovery which may bring them into contact with a broad range of civic information. The only study which really provides a platform for concluding on this question based on empirical analysis is the 2010 Pew Study, which finds that online news users do both (Pew, 2010: 41).

**Into the field: studying cross-media news audiences**

In the area of cross-media consumption of news, what is it we want to investigate, and what kinds of findings are we likely to come up with? This quotation from the American study carried out by the Pew Research Center may serve to outline the generalized findings about cross-media news consumption so far:

In the digital era, news has become omnipresent. Americans access it in multiple formats on multiple platforms on myriad devices. The days of loyalty to a particular news organization on a particular piece of technology in a particular form are gone. The overwhelming majority of Americans (92%) use multiple platforms to get news on a typical day, including national TV, local TV, the internet, local newspapers, radio, and national newspapers. Some 46% of Americans say they get their news from four to six media platforms on a typical day. Just 7% get their news from a single media platform on a typical day (Pew, 2010: 3).

In what follows I shall present the recent explorations of these kinds of issue in a Danish context, focusing on methodological issues (for details, see Schröder & Kobbernagel, 2010).

Theoretically, the study is indebted to recent work in cultural and political studies of democracy and citizenship, in which there is a growing awareness of the need to relocate the focus of political communication research towards “the microdynamics of democracy” (Dahlgren, 2006: 282). Contrary to Jürgen Habermas’s theory of the public sphere (Habermas, 1962; 2006), the recent theories of cultural citizenship see a close relationship between civic agency as a traditionally conceived activity in the public sphere and the culture of the everyday: people in daily life may “self-create themselves into citizens” in the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2006: 272). The practices of daily life are seen as the site of identities and passions from which people can sometimes – if the occa-
sion arises, so to speak – be “launched” into the public sphere (Wahl-Jørgensen, 2006).

The study is also inspired by the work of Kevin Barnhurst on mediated citizenship, which develops a new ideal of citizenship as a yardstick for evaluating ordinary people’s political activity. Barnhurst argues that the Habermassian ideal of citizenship “sets up an unreachable ideal that devalues how people enact citizenship in daily life” (Barnhurst, 2003: 134), and “requires levels of commitment to political activity that amount to more than full-time work” (ibid. 137). Based on a qualitative life-story approach to citizenship, he finds that there is a “conflict between citizenship-as-idealized and examples of citizenship-as-lived” (164), the latter being equally based on emotional and rational impulses. Therefore, rather than denigrating people’s actual political impulses in everyday life as unworthy of the label ‘politics’, political communication research should perceive politics as something that – echoing Wahl-Jörgensen (above) “becomes intentional only in sporadic flashes” (ibid. 133). This is succinctly summarized by Dahlgren:

The looseness, open-endedness of everyday talk, its creativity, potential for empathy and affective elements are indispensable for the vitality of democratic politics. (...) all forms of talk are of potential relevance for civic discussion, politics can materialize even in unexpected contexts of daily conversation. (...) Formal deliberative democracy is too restrictive as an ideal; it banishes by definition that speech which may be on its way towards politics, speech which originates in the disjointed settings of everyday life and yet manages to join together experience and information, wisdom and reflection in ways that may lead to question, contestation, political conflict (Dahlgren, 2006: 279).

On this theoretical platform the study has a dual knowledge interest in sense-making, which locates it in the ‘mediatized worlds’ perspective of cross-media audience research discussed above, i.e. it is the socio-cultural sense-making processes of news-consuming citizens which are in focus, rather than the psychological consequences and political effects. Methodologically, the study subscribes to the rationale of triangulation, i.e. the successive use of different, complementary quantitative and qualitative methods, whose findings are combined to provide a fuller picture of the analyzed audience practices, with greater explanatory power.

The first knowledge interests consisted of undertaking a large-scale mapping, from a high altitude as it were, of the citizens’ consumption practices in
the national news media landscape. This study illuminated the relative ‘market’
strength and weakness in 2008 of sixteen different news media and formats
through an online survey of more than a thousand respondents over eighteen,
as we registered through a battery of different elicitations which news sources
they had used during the past week.

The second knowledge interest consisted of the ground-level mapping, in
a qualitative interview study with thirty-five citizen-consumers, of the sense-
making processes underlying people’s news consumption practices. Moreover,
because we believe that the cultural landscape is fundamentally patterned
according to tastes and lifestyles (Bourdieu, 1984), albeit in complex ways,
we had the ambition of finding such patterns in people’s news consumption
behaviour through a bottom-up generalizing procedure. For this purpose the
study was innovative in devising an integrated qualitative/quantitative research
design that transcends the usual procedures for generating typologies through
qualitative inquiry (Halkier, 2003).

The audience-theoretical framework of the study builds on the heuristic
concept of ‘perceived worthwhileness’ (Schrøder & Kobbernagel, 2010). This
concept is designed to radically anchor the investigation in a user perspective,
as it implies that people will only use the news media that they deem to be
worthwhile. That is, if people are to ‘invest’ their money, time, and energies in
a given news medium, they only do so if they know, or expect, that they will
harvest a reasonable ‘return’ on that investment. This metaphor should not be
taken to imply that people perform continuous rational calculations around the
news media they habitually use in daily life. Clearly, a lot of cultural behaviour
is so routinized as to be close to subconscious. However, any routinized practice
to do with news media is always subject to revision, as more technologically or
culturally appealing alternatives emerge.

‘Perceived worthwhileness’ is a concept which is defined as the point of
confluence of seven underlying dimensions, which should all be considered
when exploring people’s news media preferences. Here they are merely listed in
keyword form (for details, see Schrøder & Kobbernagel, 2010): 1. Temporality
(people must situationally have the necessary time for the news medium). 2. Situationality (everyday situations have inherent situational affordances that
make the use of some news media more likely than others). 3. Materiality (has
to do with the material and technological appeal of different news media). 4. Network connection (the use of a news medium must provide the basis for con-
necting the user to significant others, for political and/or mundane everyday

**Mapping consumption levels in the national news media landscape**

In the online survey we asked respondents to select from a list of sixteen news media and formats which they had used during the last week (inferring from their answers which of those news media they deemed ‘worthwhile’). While primetime TV news is deemed almost universally worthwhile (88% of the respondents), internet news sites are a close second (78%), while radio news (70%) and text-TV news (60%) are close runners-up, with national newspapers as low as seventh place (49%). The prominent role of text-TV news was one of the surprises, because this is a news medium which is often overlooked. On another question, 5% found text-TV to be the most indispensable (most worthwhile) news medium. While this was trailing long behind TV news (37%) and internet news (19%), from a democratic perspective it was quite thought-provoking that 5% grant such importance to the condensed format of text-TV.

Another question asked respondents to rank the news media in terms of two functionalities: overview and background. Here we found a clear division of labour between the different news media, with the exception of TV news which came out in first place on both functionalities (55% and 45% respectively), and possibly internet news (50% and 24%), also strong on both. Mono-functionally strong on ‘overview’ were radio news (41%), text-TV (36%) and free newspapers (13%), while national newspapers (36%), TV current affairs (35%) and professional magazines (13%) came out as mono-functional background media.

Traditionally a considerable interest has been devoted to the question of ‘trustworthiness’ of various news media. Recently, with the discussion of tabloidization, there has also been a focus on the possible dumbing down consequences of more ‘entertainment’ oriented news media (Hill, 2007). We asked respondents to evaluate the news media in these two respects, finding that they appear to go hand in hand: the news media deemed to be most trustworthy are

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3 For detailed findings, please see Schrøder & Larsen, 2010.
those whose balance between information and entertainment leans towards the former. Public-service TV-news, radio news and morning dailies are in a league of their own: high credibility and informativity scores, both close to 80%. A second group of news media are deemed to mix entertainment and information, with information in a clear leading role: internet news, TV and Radio current affairs, local dailies, and international TV news have credibility and informativity scores around 70%. Tabloid newspapers are isolated at the bottom of the ranking with credibility and informativity scores under 40%.

On the subject of the interactive affordances of internet news sites it was still a minority (24%) who reported any kind of interactivity; 76% had not engaged in any interactive exchange. Those who were active reported mostly reactive interventions (sent email to a journalist, participated in a debate, commented on a blog, etc.), rather than being the initiators of interaction.

While the survey explored in a factual sense which media people find worthwhile, the second type of (qualitative) fieldwork aimed to investigate why people find these news media worthwhile, and whether it is possible to build a typology of news consumers on the basis of qualitative data. Before presenting the methodological design and our findings, we shall here discuss our motivation for looking in new directions for the reliable performance of qualitative generalization, by discussing the methodological aspects of the seminal cross-media audience study of Couldry, Livingstone and Markham (2007).

**The opacity of qualitative generalization in cross-media audience research**

Couldry, Livingstone and Markham (2007) applied an impressive multi-method, triangulating research design, and among the many findings coming out of their study they also produced a qualitative typology of cross-media news consumption. The Danish typology presented below extended their insights, through the use of an innovative methodology which did not simply combine, as they did, quantitative and qualitative methods in the sequential manner of triangulation, but which integrated quantitative and qualitative procedures into one synthesized research design.

Couldry, Livingstone and Markham (2007) explored the role played by the news media for people’s sense of ‘public connection’, because “as citizens we share an orientation to a public world where matters of shared concern are, or
at least should be, addressed” (Couldry et al., 2007: 3). The study bears witness to an impressive empirical effort, as it encompasses weighty qualitative and quantitative investigations in the form of, first, a month-long diary study with 37 informants, all of whom were interviewed individually before and after the diary stage, and some of whom took part in focus group discussions after completing the diaries; secondly a 1000-person nationwide survey to supplement the data generated in the diary phase. Both sets of data were thoroughly interpreted, and resulted in elaborate typologies, as well as numerous additional insights into the nature of mediated public connection. Here we shall concentrate on the qualitative dimensions.

Couldry and his colleagues are candid about the staggering complexity of their qualitative data and the enormous challenge posed by the interpretive process. They initiate their readers into the time-consuming effort of the painstaking intersubjective qualitative coding process, leaving the impression of unusual qualitative craftsmanship. Here they reflect on the process of discerning patterns and constructing a typology on the basis of the multiple qualitative data of the 37 diarists:

No diarist could be reduced to a static type of [public connection]; the complexity of their accounts suggested dynamic trajectories depending on changing circumstances and constraints (...). One way of seeing patterns was to isolate two diarists demonstrably similar in one way or another, and try to explain the detailed ways in which they varied, not in a definitive way, but simply to open up areas of analysis that otherwise might not have emerged. This close reading of the data generated a set of analytical terms which we then sought to apply more broadly, first by generating individual diagrams of diarists’ social contexts and media use, and then by constructing overall diagrams and maps which sought to locate the diarists relative to each other” (op.cit. 54–55).

In the most ambitious of these diagrams they try to show the whole landscape of mediated public connection, balancing reductionism (in the interest of clarity) and complexity (in the interest of validity):
In this diagram, which displays a typology of ten categories of public connection, they show on the horizontal level how diarists may be placed on a continuum depending on whether their public connection originates in their media consumption, or in public life independently of the media. On the vertical level there is a continuum from strong through weak to no public connection.

In spite of the scrupulous transparency-enhancing descriptions of Couldry et al., their typology does not manage to escape from what has always been the Achilles’ heel of qualitative data analysis: the opacity of its interpretive procedures of analytical generalization. While granting that they do better than most, a trace remains of the criticism levelled by Bergman (1998) against qualitative analysts that the way they show their results corresponds to a magician’s pulling a rabbit out of a hat: nobody really knows exactly how the trick works.

This is a problem often aggravated by the ambition of the qualitative researcher, haunted by an inferiority complex towards the quantitative researcher’s hundreds of respondents, to maximize the number of informants and applying different forms of qualitative data collection. Due to the limited computational capacity of the human brain, this is a problem that can only partially
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be offset by eminent qualitative craftsmanship. In short: Qualitative fieldwork remains challenged to reliably and validly generalize analytically on the basis of large amounts of data.

**Exploring cross-media news consumption: an integrated qualitative/quantitative design**

In the present study of cross-media news consumption we met this challenge by bringing a quantitative generalization device into a predominantly qualitative research design with thirty-five informants. Each interview invited the informant, first, to tell us in their own words their personal story of “a day in the life” with the news media, through the vehicle of an entirely qualitative speech event (Spradley, 1979). To this we added a playful card-sorting exercise in which each informant placed 25 elicitation cards in the 25 squares on a nine-column pyramidal grid (Figure 2).

*Figure 2. Pyramidal grid with the card placements of one informant.*

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Does not play a role in my life  
Plays a role in my life

On each, numbered card we had written a news medium or news format, with illustrative examples, and while the informant reflected on where a card should be placed in order to represent the worthwhileness of that news medium in the informant's life-world, we asked them to think aloud so that we could get access to the inner monologue about contextualized news media usage. By producing the card mosaic, the informant produces a visible and calculable version of his or her universe of worthwhile news media, which we can subject
to a computerized factor analysis⁴. A few participants found the card-sorting game slightly constraining, but most thought it was good fun, after the more traditional talk-phase of the research interview.

The factor analysis generated a typology of seven types of news consumers, which encompassed thirty of the 35 participants. Each type is defined by the calculated rank-order of the 25 news media, which its members share. In the Appendix we show the Top-Five list of news media for each type, which is sufficient to form an impression of their differences and similarities, although obviously the respective ranking of all 25 news media is necessary to provide the whole picture that defines each group.

Notably, while the seven groups – based on their Top-Five rankings – have clearly distinguishable news consumption profiles, as their news packages are defined in some cases by traditional print media and in other cases by digital news sources or by round-the-clock TV news, it is striking that the Top-Five of all seven groups includes both the traditional news medium of primetime TV news and the digital medium of internet news. In spite of clearly different news taste patterns, the Danish population as represented by the 35 informants is thus characterized by a certain homogeneity in their preferential packages of news media in everyday life. Below we shall address the question of how to compare different national news consumption landscapes.

Here we shall reflect briefly on the media/democracy nexus, in light of the potential democratic prerequisites likely to be obtained by Danish citizens of the seven news user types. Naturally a closer interpretation of the qualitative accounts delivered by the participants during the interviews, still to be undertaken, is necessary in order to provide a fuller picture.

Some observers may find cause for concern in the fact that only three groups include the daily newspaper in their Top-Five, as the printed quality newspaper has traditionally been seen as the lifeblood of a well-functioning democracy. However, they may find comfort in the fact that public-service TV news figures prominently in the news packages of all seven groups, as other studies have shown that the citizens of countries with a strong public-service media tradition have higher levels of civic knowledge than people in countries dominated by commercial TV system (Curran et al., 2009). Pulling towards a similar reassurance on behalf of democracy is the circumstance that all seven

⁴ The factor analytical procedure is sometimes known as Q-methodology, or Q-sorts. For further details, see Stephenson, 1953 and 1978; Brown, 1993, and Rogers, 1995. In the news study, we constructed a tailor-made variety of Q-methodology, which reinforced the integration of the qualitative and quantitative components (Schrøder & Kobbernagel, 2010).
groups give high priority to internet news, because in Denmark the key providers of internet news are precisely those publishing and broadcasting houses known for the quality of their news provision. Finally, the degree of enthusiasm with which one greets the emergence of social media, whose position in the typology bears witness to a certain level of digital literacy in the news packages of several groups, depends on one’s expectation of the centrality of social media for civic agency in the future.

**Changing cross-media news environments:**
**Comparative perspectives**

In his keynote lecture at the 2010 ECREA conference in Hamburg (October 2010), Paolo Mancini reminded his audience that “to think without comparison is unthinkable”! In this light, the best way to put the preliminary findings about the Danish news consumption landscape into perspective is to compare them with studies of news consumption in other countries. However, this is easier said than done.

We have elsewhere (Schrøder & Kobbernagel, 2010) compared the Danish findings with the 2008 study of cross-media use in the US, the Pew Research Center’s *News consumption and believability study 2008* (Pew, 2008), which is a large-scale, demographically sensitive study of news consumption and news perceptions among the US public 2008. From a comparative perspective, the most interesting part of the Pew study is its typology of four news audience segments, defined in terms of people’s interest in and time spent on news, their primary news source, and how often they use the internet to get news.

One group, called *Traditionalists*, encompasses 46% of the population, they use traditional news media (TV, newspapers, radio) almost exclusively, and rarely go online for news. The second group, called *Integrators* comprises 23% of the population and use a mixture of traditional and online news media. The third group, *Net-Newsers*, with a 13% share of the population, uses the internet as their key news source. Finally, the *Disengaged* group (14%) is all but disconnected from the news on a daily basis.

Certain resemblances can be discerned between the Pew study’s news consumption landscape and that found in our study (see the Appendix). Heuristically, one could suggest that the Traditionalist group corresponds to “The heavy newspaper reader” and “The regional omnivore”, the Integrators resemble “The...
traditional, versatile news user”, “The light newspaper reader”, and “The news update addict”, and the Net-Newsers correspond to “The ‘popular’ digital news user” and “The depth digital news user”, while the Disengaged have no equivalent in the Danish sample.

On a closer look, however, there is a lack of fit between the types, due mainly to the fact that even for the Danish Traditionalists, internet news figures among the top-five news media. This is also the case for the Danish equivalents of the Integrator groups, and even social net media find their way into the Top-Five of the “The news update addict”. Conversely, the Danish Net-newser groups both rank TV news in third place, which is more rarely used by their American not-exact-counterparts. Thus, while the American study concludes that “key news audiences now blend online and traditional sources”, the blending phenomenon is so widespread in Danish society that blending is characteristic of all news users.

**Obstacles and opportunities for comparative empirical audience research**

The comparison of findings about news media consumption from the Danish Q-study and the 2008 American Pew study may have revealed interesting differences of cross-media news consumption in the two national cultures. However, it should be realized that the comparison may be flawed, because it is a risky business to “compare apples and pears”, as the saying goes. The Danish study is basically a qualitative analysis, to which a quantitative generalization device has been added, and the resulting typology is based on the theoretical frameworks of civic agency and worthwhileness of news media. The US Pew study is an exclusively statistical operation, with no explicit theoretical framework to guide the data collection and the statistical processes, and its typology is calculated on the basis of the duration and frequency of news media consumption.

For instance, the absence of the Disengaged category from the Danish study may be due to the fact that the American study is based on time use, while the Danish study is based on the participants’ perceived worthwhileness, irrespective of time spent.

Other kinds of problems are encountered when qualitative researchers try to compare data which are purely qualitative in both/all contexts/countries of collection. These problems have to do with the fact that qualitative interpreta-
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It seems tempting to end this article by suggesting that, if applied in other national contexts, the integrated qualitative-quantitative method used in the Danish study is very suitable for the purposes of comparative, cross-national research about cross-media news consumption. This suitability has to do with the fact that, while there are undoubtedly many research questions for which it is not suitable, in this case this method can deliver the best of both worlds: It is qualitative; its data are contextualized in the life worlds of the informants; the data can be translated into a standardized form, which makes it possible to perform common, standardized statistical procedures and to produce generalizations in the form of typologies that are transparent and immediately comparable.

In other words, this customized methodology offers a way to share and compare qualitative data across national contexts. The news consumption in each participating country can be analysed in its own terms, through the standardized research vehicle of the news media cards which informants place on the analytical grid as they think aloud about their news media habits. It is precisely the configurability of the card placements according to the individual subjectivities of the participants that guarantees cultural specificity and context-dependent data, manifesting itself in the interview dialogue and in the relational map that each participant constructs for him- or herself. The comparative potential of the method has been documented previously in a seven-nation study of perceptions of national identity (Robyn, 2005).

This is, then, an open invitation to reflect creatively on how, within the European research arena, we can cross-fertilize our theoretically and methodologically different research backgrounds and work collectively towards cross-media audience research with greater explanatory power.
References


Findahl, O. (2009). Is the Internet a competitor or a complement to the traditional media. An international comparison. In G. Cardoso, A. Cheong


## Appendix

**Typology of cross-media news users (based on Top-Five rankings from 25 news media)**

June-September 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The traditional, versatile news user</th>
<th>The light newspaper reader</th>
<th>The regional omnivore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 participants</td>
<td>4 participants</td>
<td>3 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Primetime Danish TV news</td>
<td>1. Prime time Danish TV news</td>
<td>1. Prime time Danish TV news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. National mainstream newspapers</td>
<td>2. Tabloid newspapers</td>
<td>2. Local/regional dailies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Radio news (before 9 am)</td>
<td>3. Free daily newspapers</td>
<td>3. ‘Serious’ current affairs TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ‘Serious’ current affairs TV</td>
<td>4. Danish internet news sites</td>
<td>4. Family and women's magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Danish internet news sites</td>
<td>5. ‘Entertaining’ current affairs TV</td>
<td>5. Danish internet news sites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ‘popular’ digital news user</th>
<th>The heavy newspaper reader</th>
<th>The news update addict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 participants</td>
<td>3 participants</td>
<td>4 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Social net media</td>
<td>1. National mainstream newspapers</td>
<td>1. 24-hour TV news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Danish internet news sites</td>
<td>2. Prime time Danish TV news</td>
<td>2. Prime time Danish TV news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Prime time Danish TV news</td>
<td>3. Text-TV</td>
<td>3. Text-TV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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