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O que são notícias? Público jovem, mídia digital e mediatização de notícias

What is News? Young audiences, digital media and the mediatisation of news

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Keywords: News; mediatisation; digital culture.

1. Introduction

This presentation presents a theoretical and methodological approach to studying news perceptions and practices among young adults in digital culture.

2. Background

Digital media transform news. Firstly we see this in changing use patterns. Young people today show a decline in interest in traditional news formats and practices, such as watching the evening news on TV or reading a daily newspaper. But digital media also transform production and distribution of news, leading to new ways to conceptualise and understand news. In light of these profound transformations in audience behaviour many have started to question the concept of news in news research.

In light of such altered production and distribution contexts which fundamentally impact on audiences' definitions and perceptions, this will paper presents an alternative way to theoretically and methodologically approach news, beyond traditional news research. In our approach to study news we have developed a

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theoretical perspective based in phenomenology, which opens up for further reconsideration of the concept as well as providing a potentially fruitful basis for research on digital news consumption. Phenomenology takes human existence as its vantage point and explores how human subjects exist and create meaning in their everyday lives in relation to basic categories such as time, space, and (sociocultural) relevance. We argue phenomenology to be particularly relevant for exploring new meanings of news as the basic dimensions of phenomenology not only coincide with the basic dimensions of news consumption, but also of those of news values; time, space, and (socio-cultural) relevance.

3. Theoretical framework

Methodologically a phenomenological perspective means 'bracketing' our already learnt understanding of the world and the phenomena in it, and to approach them in a new, clear, way. We suggest approaching news from such as blank position (as far as possible), but through the experiences of media audiences, in order to challenge the way news is generally understood within news research. 'Bracketing' our understanding of news hence means leaving the traditional understanding of news as a commodity produced and packaged within organized journalistic institutions – including a fixed understanding of its fundamental dimensions; newness, truth-claim, tone, values and actors determining what is newsworthy. In this we follow Deuze's and Witschge's (2018, 2020) approach to go 'beyond' journalism, as we also propose going 'beyond' the dominating contemporary Anglo-American understanding of what news is (Maxwell Hamilton and Tworek, 2017), an approach particularly important in our study that includes empirical work beyond the Western world.

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Alongside 'bracketing' as a central tenet, phenomenology takes human existence as its vantage point and explores how human subjects exist and create meaning in their everyday lives in relation to basic categories such as time, space, and sociocultural relevance. We have taken the basic dimensions of 'Dasein', or 'being in the world' as vantage point for our approach towards young media users' *perceptions* and *practices* of news, constructed through the temporal, spatial and sociocultural dimensions of it. As it is important to look at on the one hand news perceptions (the audiences' ideas of what news is), and on the other hand at news as part of everyday routines and practices, we suggest looking at how the audiences conceptualise news in relation to, for them, vital information (actively, as part of their intentionality), as well as the more routinized practices where news is part of a flow that we can either just walk through or actively focus upon.

4. Research design and methodology

In order to translate this initial understanding of the respondents' existence, intentionality and lifeworld, we have used two different methodological approaches, leaning on two different epistemologies: agency versus practice, intentions versus routines. This methodological approach relates to two different (but related) strands in phenomenology; firstly the existentialist phenomenological approach to meaning (c.f Heidegger, 1996) and secondly Merleau-Ponty's practice-oriented phenomenology (1962). To fully make use of the phenomenological perspective we believe it is important to relate to both these perspectives to understand the respondents' perceptions of news, and news practices. This is also a way to make use of different understandings of news as, on the one hand, a way to maintain public connection (c.f. Couldry et al. 2006, Schwart et al. 2017) and on the other, an everyday practice.

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The first methodological approach starts out in intentionality (life orientation and interest) and then directs itself to everyday practice. This approach brings up issues such as the environment, economy, the labour market, and corruption, but also friends, family, etc. addressing both individual and collective dimensions of the respondents' everyday lives. After having established this, we penetrate the more practice-oriented perspective; "how do you keep informed in relation to these topics, where do you learn about it, what kind of information do you trust?" etc. The initial focus here is on perception, what 'news' is as information and connection to the world.

The second approach goes the other way around: from everyday practices to interest (intentionality). Here we initially focus on what people do with the (digital) media, starting out in the broad 'a day in a life' question: "tell me about your media use an ordinary day (start in the morning, etc.)?". This broad introduction is followed up by questions such as "what do you do, and why, why is this important to you (content wise, topic wise, connection to a social group or the wider public, etc.). Here the initial focus is on practices; news as a daily habit.

These two epistemological approaches both aim at deeper penetrating the respondents perceptions of news and how they are practiced, and are both anchored in a broader idea of meaning. The two different starting points for our discussions with the respondents however opens up for two different ways of understanding news; both of utmost importance for our understanding of what news means to young audiences today. Using two different approaches to the audiences' perception and practice of new diminishes the risks of delimiting the way the respondents talk about news and hence to capture the varied ways they conceptualise news. These approaches to news require us to be sensitive to both conceptual constructions of news in various social contexts and situations, as well as how news practices in these contexts and situations construct what news is. The discussions also focus the temporal and spatial dimension of news (from

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the audiences' perspective), including the basic aspect of newness and the variations in understandings of this, its (various kinds of) speed and urgency, as well as slowness and repetition in digital news consumption. The spatial dimensions of news perceptions and practices include dimensions both of the location of news consumption and the "increasingly mobile spatialities of journalism" (Peters, 2012: 701), but also the opening up of the world by digital media (c.f. Moores, 2012) and how that relates to geographical as well as cultural proximity, and the construction of relevance by it. All these dimensions are used to explore the perceptions and practices of news. Our interviews have in one way or another ended up in discussions about the traditional notion of news. But how these discussions are carried out, and what they revolve around vary according to what the respondents have brought up earlier in the discussions.

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