Audience Research Methodologies
Between Innovation and Consolidation

Edited by Geoffroy Patriarche, Helena Bilandzic, Jakob Linaa Jensen and Jelena Jurišić
Audience Research Methodologies

The transformations of people’s relations to media content, technologies and institutions raise new methodological challenges and opportunities for audience research. This edited volume aims at contributing to the development of the repertoire of methods and methodologies for audience research by reviewing and exemplifying approaches that have been stimulated by the changing conditions and practices of audiences. The contributions address a range of issues and approaches related to the diversification, integration and triangulation of methods for audience research, to the gap between the researched and the researchers, to the study of online social networks, and to the opportunities brought about by Web 2.0 technologies as research tools.

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Introduction

Geoffroy Patriarche, Helena Bilandzic, Jakob Linnaa Jensen and Jelena Jurišić

With the rise and rapid spread of the Internet and other digital communication technologies, mass media have been supplemented and to a certain amount substituted by interactive and often personalized media. The Internet itself—approached here not only as a technological platform but also as a set of socially and culturally defined practices—has undergone a transformation from a medium primarily focused on Web-based storage and delivery of information to a medium allowing user-generated content (Drotner and Schrøder 2010) and integrating mass (one-to-many), interpersonal (one-to-one) and network (many-to-many) communication (Jensen 2010). O’Reilly (2005) has termed this a shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. Similarly, Jenkins (2006) has noticed a shift toward media convergence and participatory culture: Technologies are integrated even more smoothly, and services are accessed by even wider populations in order to create and share content (see also Delwiche and Henderson 2013). Bruns (2008) has suggested the term “produsage” to address the fusion of production and consumption in the different types of user-generated content. Although these statements mostly address Internet transformations, it should be noted that it is the whole media and communication ecology that is under change, including the “traditional” media and their audiences (e.g., Evans 2011; Krotz and Hepp 2012; Lundby 2009; Rudin 2011). In light of the ongoing socio-technological developments that create (and are created by) changing audience practices, new challenges emerge for audience research, and they are most notably apparent in the need for appropriate research methodologies.

In order to address these methodological challenges, the European COST Action IS0906 Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies (2010–2014) organized an international conference on the theme “New Challenges and Methodological Innovations in European Media Audience Research”, in partnership with the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) and the International Communication Association (ICA). The conference was held at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, on April 7–9, 2011. One hundred thirty-three scholars attended the conference, which featured seventy-three peer-reviewed scientific
presentations. This edited volume compiles selected conference papers that collectively reflect the methodological agenda of today’s audience research.

In the concluding section of their book *Researching Audiences*, Schrøder, Drotner, Kline and Murray (2003) identified a “dual challenge of convergence” that audience research faces today. The first challenge concerns the changing media practices: Interactivity has “intensified”, and different media have converged into single platforms. The second (and related) challenge is of a methodological nature: Multimethod research designs are needed in order to capture the range of people’s practices and meanings in relation to media and communication technologies. These concluding words of *Researching Audiences* provide the general frame for this edited volume: This book aims at contributing to the development of the repertoire of methods and methodologies for audience research by reviewing and exemplifying approaches that have been stimulated by the changing conditions and practices of audiences. The contributions in this book reflect the need for creativity in today’s audience research and illustrate the increasing dialogue between research traditions.

**METHODOLOGY, INNOVATION AND CONSOLIDATION**

More than ever, communication research needs to reflect methods in the light of their methodologies and theoretical implications. The terms “method” and “methodology” are often used interchangeably; however, there is a difference, and it is important to be aware of it. Methods are generally considered “technical rules, which lay down the procedures for how reliable and objective knowledge can be obtained” (Brewer 2000, 2; see also Crotty 1998). Conversely, methods become the object of study in methodology, as Abraham Kaplan (1964, 23) pointed out almost five decades ago:

> The aim of methodology, then, is to describe and analyze these methods, throwing light on their limitations and resources, clarifying their presuppositions and consequences, relating their potentialities to the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge. It is to venture generalizations from the success of particular techniques, suggesting new applications, and to unfold the specific bearings of logical and metaphysical principles on concrete problems, suggesting new formulations.

Methodology has another connotation of importance to the goals of this book: It is often considered the *justification* for using particular methods, or the theoretical and philosophical basis for gaining empirical insight (Brewer 2000; Crotty 1998). In this book, the discussion of research methods will go beyond techniques or instruments; it also implies the consideration of their theoretical underpinnings, even their assumed models of humans. For example, participatory research (see the chapter by Wijnen and Trültzsch in
this volume) integrates the target group under study into the development and application of the research. In theoretical terms, this means that the perspective of the researched is completely and radically appropriated. For the underlying model of humans, it means that the researched are as informed and knowledgeable as the (professional) researcher.

Kaplan (1964, 24) claims that methodology is neither necessary nor sufficient for gaining scientific insight but that it helps to “unblock the roads to inquiry”. We agree that it is neither necessary nor sufficient, and we argue that reflection and development of methodical practices is crucial for understanding the scope, meaning and limitations of the methods used. After all, the results of empirical research are created and shaped by the method. Surveys will tell us about a person’s views, but will not uncover structural inequities the person him- or herself does not perceive. Observations will give insight about behavior, but not of their meanings. Methods constitute their subjects—what is not addressed by the method is lost to the insight. This is true for both qualitative and quantitative methods, but is certainly even more of an issue in quantitative research that lacks the flexibility and recursive loops of qualitative procedures. This is where methodology enters the picture and provides guidance—and if not guidance, it certainly trains the sensitivity and creativity of the researcher. As Seale (1999, ix) puts it, “Reading methodology, then, is a sort of intellectual muscle-building exercise, time out in the brain gymnasium, before returning to the task at hand, hopefully a little stronger and more alert”. This book discusses methods and methodologies for changing media environments and changing audience practices, with the goal to keep reflection of research strategies alive and creative.

We see methods and methodology evolving on a continuum between innovation and consolidation. Our distinction between innovation and consolidation is rooted in the cognitive development theory of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget. Central to his theorizing is the concept of schema, which is “an organized system of actions or a mental representation that people use to understand the world and interact with it” (Nevid 2008, 353). Thus, knowledge construction, or “intelligent adaptation” in Piaget’s word, is all about creating and changing schemata through the interaction with the environment. This interaction consists in a cycle of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation describes how new information is integrated into existing schemata, while accommodation specifies that new information that does not fit into existing schemata stimulates a modification of existing schemata or the creation of new ones. Adaptation requires an equilibrium between assimilation and accommodation, at the difference of imitation, which is accommodation-driven, and play, which is assimilation-driven (Piaget 1953; see also Nevid 2008).

The distinction between innovation and consolidation parallels the one between accommodation and assimilation. Obviously, innovating in the context of this book means developing new methodological and methodical
schemata—strategies, approaches, procedures or tools—in response to changing media and communication practices. Yet accommodation cannot be separated from assimilation. By definition, one can only accommodate preexisting schemata to the new demands from the environment. This means that assimilation is to some extent constitutive of methodological innovation. In other words, methodological innovation always presupposes some degree of methodological consolidation, as the “old” schema is partly reproduced—and hence reinvigorated—through the “new” schema. It is the cycle of innovation and consolidation that creates methodological adaptation—an adaptation that manifests itself in the manifold variations and combinations of methodological and methodical strategies, approaches, procedures or tools.

This volume is not intended to be a practical guide to audience research methods (e.g., Schröder et al. 2003), but rather an up-to-date account of how the tension between methodological and methodical innovation and consolidation is at play in audience research. Throughout this book, the contributing authors will examine how audience research methodologies and methods can be used for researching different aspects of contemporary audience practices (consolidation). These range from mainstream methodologies such as cross-sectional survey research to less conventional methodologies such as action research. At the same time, the contributions will evaluate whether and in what way the changes in the object of study affect established audience research methodologies and methods, put into question some of their principles, and require new adjustments or combinations (innovation).

OVERVIEW OF AUDIENCE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The book is composed of four parts and a concluding chapter, each addressing the innovation-consolidation tension in a specific way, drawing upon an empirical case study in order to illustrate the methodological issue or approach and discussing its strengths, weaknesses, limitations and/or implications for further methodological development. The four parts of the book and their constituting chapters are briefly introduced below, while some noteworthy general trends will be pointed out in the end of this introduction.

Part I: Audience Research Methods Between Diversification and Integration

Historically, audience research has developed along two traditions: on the one hand, a quantitative tradition, which draws primarily upon standardized methods such as surveys, audience ratings analysis and experiments, and, on the other hand, a qualitative tradition, which relies on individual and group interviews, as well as on (participant) observation at media
Introduction

consumption places. As Schröder et al. (2003, 26–28) point out, these two traditions do not only differ in terms of methods and tools, but also in terms of epistemological and political standpoints. For a long time, it was the epistemological differences that prevented cross-fertilization—the notions of how insight can be achieved and, more generally, the underlying model of humans, were too different to generate a fruitful dialogue. Today, the methodological discussion is more pragmatic and less ideological, and researchers have started to think about how to use the respective strengths of the approaches to further insight (e.g., Baumann and Scherer 2012; Schröder et al. 2003; Teddlie and Tashakkori 1998). Not only cross-paradigm combinations have received attention but other multimethod designs (Eid and Diener 2006; Loosen and Scholl 2012; Schröder et al. 2012) have as well. Related to multimethod designs, triangulation has also become popular. Triangulation is a research strategy that seeks to validate findings through the application of several methods; more facets of the object under study gained through several methodical lenses procure a deeper understanding (Bilandzic 2008; Denzin 1989).

The first part of this book describes different developments and strategies for diversification, integration and triangulation of methods for audience research in an increasingly complex media environment. The first chapter by Igor Vobič approaches this question through the lens of “audience conceiving” (i.e., how journalists observe, imagine and describe their audience, and how this shapes news making). Vobič provides a critical review of the relevant research literature, distinguishing between two distinct research approaches that both use observations and interviews but rest upon different analytical frameworks: the socio-organizational approach versus the cultural analysis perspective. The author points out the need to integrate these into an ethnographic approach that would allow reconciling structure and agency—the macro, meso and micro levels. On the basis of an ethnographic study in two print media organizations in Slovenia, Vobič discusses the respective strengths and weaknesses of observation, document analysis and in-depth interviews, and demonstrates the benefits of triangulation for generating meaningful findings.

In the second chapter, Miguel Vicente-Mariño moves closer to audience research proper and provides an overview of research methods and new developments in the field. He pursues a pragmatic path in dealing with the methodological paradigms and argues for an intelligent use and combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. In light of the transformations that media, as well social practice, have seen in the past two decades, it is necessary to reevaluate and reflect consequences for audience research. Vicente-Mariño concludes by calling for more openness, both with regard to multimethod designs and with regard to bridging the gap between media scholars and practitioners.

The third chapter by Olle Findahl, Christina Lagerstedt and Andreas Aurelius provides a sophisticated example of triangulation. In a case study,
several quantitative methods are used to reconstruct the Internet usage of a single person, a seventeen-year-old girl. A traditional survey questionnaire documented the girl’s views on the Internet as well as her subjective image of her own Internet usage. In a time and activity diary, the girl logged her exact activities in a twenty-four-hour diary that provided slots of fifteen-minute intervals. At the same time, the Internet traffic (all incoming and outgoing connections) was recorded. The authors conclude that the insight gained from the different sources do not contradict, but complement, each other and provide a more complete picture of the girl’s Internet use. Today, with Internet use leaving digital traces that only wait to be harvested with some technical expertise, observational data are more available than ever. This chapter gives us a first insight into the relative significance of such data and its meaning related to self-report sources.

Part II: Bridging the Gap between the Researched and the Researchers

The second part of the book will bring the focus on the evaluation of methodological developments that seek to further reconcile the perspectives of the researched and those of the researchers. The common ground of the chapters constituting part II is that data production and analysis are approached as communication and collaboration processes between the researched and the researchers. Different strategies for improving mutual understanding are explored and critically discussed—also in terms of limitations and risks—from culturally sensitive approaches to insider approaches where the researched and the researchers belong to the same group. The idea behind these strategies is as simple as it is compelling: Researchers may achieve a better understanding of the field under study when they make an explicit effort to assume the perspective of the researched persons.

Van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen (2005) have summarized the key characteristics of participatory approaches in a programmatic way (related to the method of group analysis, but in its generality applicable to the full range of participatory approaches). The point of departure is that social reality is interactively constructed by reflexive and knowledgeable individuals (who may have different backgrounds and may occupy unequal power positions). This premise has three methodological implications: (1) Knowledge production should take the form of a bottom-up process, starting from the people’s narratives of lived experiences and situations rather than seeking to confirm the researcher’s a priori hypotheses; (2) the researched people should not only be involved as “informants” but also as “co-analysts”, as they do have a valuable knowledge to contribute provided that the research design empowers them to do so; and (3) the analysis should be a collective process, reflecting (and addressing) the role played by social relations and interactions in defining social situations.
As will be clear throughout this part of the book, these methodological principles indeed characterize important aspects of methodological innovation in audience research. A key issue in all three chapters in part II is therefore the role of the researcher in terms of supporting the participants’ communication and participation (among them and with the researchers) through a well-structured procedure designed for the co-construction of knowledge.

In chapter 4, Christine Wijnen and Sascha Trültzsch present the principles of participatory action research and discuss its usefulness in audience research. In their two example studies, young people are integrated into the research team and help design and conduct research about how children and youth use media and make sense of the content and their practices—model casting shows in the first study and social network sites in the second study. In essence, the young researchers have given access to the life-worlds of young people, and helped to design the study in an adequate way for an age group that is usually quite distant from the professional researcher. Wijnen and Trültzsch also report their experiences with adapting the approach to the specific requirements of audience research and aligning the participatory action research approach with social science standards of intersubjective verifiability. They present compelling arguments for using this methodology in audience contexts, and encourage experimenting and adapting the strategy to fit one’s specific goals.

In chapter 5, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Taavi Tatsi, Pille Runnel and Agnes Aljas present and reflect on a methodological approach for researching audience participation in museums in a context where museum communication is increasingly seen as dialogic, participatory and multisited (i.e., onsite and online). Borrowing insights from media audience studies, ethnography and action research, the authors critically elaborate an “insider action research” methodology, which implies that the researchers, who are also members of the organization under study, initiate and observe interventions that aim at transforming the organization, and disseminate the research findings through multiple channels of interaction with the other employees. A research project (involving multiple case studies) carried out at the Estonian National Museum serves as a background for discussing the peculiarities of insider action research and how it allows integrating multiple data collection methods, thereby granting access to various understandings of participation in a cultural, economic and political sense.

Chapter 6 by Marta Cola and Manuel Mauri Brusa contributes to the consolidation of the interview as a research method for studying social and cultural identities among audiences. The authors argue that the research on so-called ethnic minority groups as audiences often assumes that identities are fixed or clear-cut, which translates into methodological designs that tend to essentialize identities instead of approaching them as multiple contextual performances that cut across minority and majority groups. Drawing on a case study on the social and cultural role of media use for
the Albanian-speaking community of Kosovo living in Switzerland, Cola and Mauri Brusa reflect on how interviewing can be made more “culturally appropriate” to the research participants. The implementation of this “cosmopolitan” perspective into the actual research design is discussed in regard to the definition of the unit of analysis, the sampling and recruitment strategies, and the biases provoked by the interview technique itself if the challenge of cultural appropriateness is underestimated.

Part III: Studying Online Social Networks

The third part of the book addresses particular methodological issues related to the study of the very popular phenomenon of social network sites (SNS). SNS fall within the even wider field of social media. Some social media are object-oriented, dedicated to content creation and sharing. Examples of this type are the video sharing site YouTube, the image-sharing site Flickr and the link-sharing sites Digg and del.icio.us. Conversely, other SNS are oriented toward self-disclosure, socializing and networking (for a definition, see boyd and Ellison 2007, 221). Examples of this type are Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, which have all been enormously successful. The core offer of most SNS is simply to enable users to build a network of “friends” and to reach and stay updated with them where and when they want. In a contingent world where more and more people live as singles or have friends and families far away—or just are too busy to meet them face-to-face as often as they would like, SNS afford means for enhancing social relations. boyd and Ellison (2007) and Jensen (2009) distinguish social media in general and SNS in particular from online communities, which originated in the 1990s from gaming services such as the so-called multiuser dimensions (MUD), due to the way SNS are organized around personal profiles and networks.

SNS pose certain research challenges as the researcher, by default, can only view his or her network. Expanding this view (and thereby the field of analysis) most often demands access to the Application Programming Interface (API), a technical component of Web 2.0 that gives access to the databases behind social media platforms (see the contribution by Courtois and Mechant in this volume). In some cases—for instance, Twitter—this is straightforward, as the architecture of the software is open. For other sites, like the ever more popular Facebook, the access to the API is quite limited. Moreover, the API only gives access to certain kinds of data, which means that other methods are needed in order to study the multifaceted aspects of SNS. The aim of this part of the book is to critically examine how audience research methodologies—ranging from surveys and focus groups to ethnographic and creative approaches—can be adapted and/or triangulated in the specific context of SNS studies.

Chapter 7 by Andra Siibak and Maria Murumaa-Mengel reflects on the potential of creative methods (Gauntlett 2007) for researching users’ “imagined audiences” on SNS. After introducing the main ideas behind
creative approaches, the authors present a case study of Estonian young people’s perceptions of the audience on Facebook and evaluate the benefits and limitations of creative methods—in this case making drawings of imagined audiences on Facebook. They conclude that much is to be gained from using creative approaches—for instance, in terms of gaining deeper insights into young people’s perspectives—but that the role of the researcher/moderator is key in order to keep the limitations of the approach to a minimum. They also highlight the need for appropriate analytical tools in order to interpret the participants’ artifacts in conjunction with their own understandings.

Jakob Linaa Jensen and Anne Scott Sørensen in chapter 8 look at the use of and attitudes toward SNS from different methodological perspectives. They apply established research methods but combine them in one sequential design, which enables them to draw valuable insight from the consistencies and inconsistencies in a triangulation strategy. In an online survey, users’ subjective (and individual) perceptions of social media (including SNS) were collected; offline focus groups with participants from the same survey provided a socially negotiated view on the same issue; and finally, the focus group participants additionally granted access to their Facebook profiles so that observable behavior on their Facebook profiles could be analyzed and compared to their individual and socially negotiated perceptions. Linaa Jensen and Scott Sørensen discuss the potentials and additional value of this procedure.

In chapter 9, Nicoletta Vittadini and Francesca Pasquali concentrate on online ethnography as a methodological framework for studying SNS. They address the key questions and challenges that networked communication poses to ethnographic research and present an overview of existing debates within online ethnography, emphasizing their implications for the definition of the ethnographic field. They argue that the dominant approaches of online ethnography must be supplemented by what they call “virtual shadowing”, a multimethod framework that takes as a point of departure the individual user’s activities online and offline. In addition to established ethnographic methods, virtual shadowing uses diaries and field blogs, allowing for in-depth analyses of the relationship between individuals and technologies. The authors evaluate the potential of virtual shadowing by discussing two research projects on the everyday mediated communication practices of fifty Italian persons (aged fourteen to twenty-five), highlighting the strengths of the methodology and some problems that still need to be investigated.

Part IV: Web 2.0 Technologies as Research Tools

The opportunities, challenges and drawbacks of using the Internet as a research tool have been the subject of much debate in both quantitative and qualitative research traditions (e.g., Jones 1999). For instance, the Internet can help in studying global issues (such as the worldwide reception of
globalized media materials) and identity performances (as reflected by users’ online productions and interactions). Yet it also raises important methodological and ethical concerns regarding, for instance, sampling procedures, the medium’s influence on data quality and issues of confidentiality and anonymity (e.g., Das, Ester and Kaczmirek 2010; Frippiat and Marquis, 2010; Hunsinger, Klastrup and Allen 2010).

The emergence of Web 2.0 technologies and social media has added a further layer to this debate: the co-evolution of media technologies and social practices create new practical/material possibilities for audience research but also new risks and challenges that need to be further explored and critically discussed—in terms of access to and communication with research participants, and in terms of data production and collection (cf. for instance the notion of “big data”, which at once encapsulates ideas of new possibilities, new difficulties, and hence new challenges; see boyd and Crawford 2012). Thus, while Web 2.0 technologies are mainly perceived as challenging objects of study, this volume’s fourth and final part will approach them as new instruments that can help audience researchers to capture and understand audience and user practices in today’s media and communication environment.

Certainly, the other parts of this volume offer some glimpse into these issues—think of how Web 2.0 technologies can be used to bridge the gap between the researcher and the researched, or to trace and analyze online social networks. This final part will distinctly provide either a broader overview of these new practical/material opportunities or a closer look at some of their possible applications. In both cases, the methodological and ethical concerns that surround Web 2.0 technologies will be addressed, with a view to consolidate the repertoire of Internet-based audience research methodologies.

In chapter 10, Matthias Hastall and Freya Sukalla discuss how the rise of Web 2.0 technologies has indeed changed the toolbox of audience research. They provide an overview of the advantages (e.g., unobtrusive observation) and risks (for instance, in terms of generalizability and reproducibility of findings) brought about by the use of free Web 2.0 tools in a research context. Ethical implications are addressed as well. A special focus is given to Web-based data collection tools relevant to methodologies based on self-reports (surveys, interviews and focus groups), behavior observation, experimental designs, and textual analysis. The authors illustrate their point through a case study in textual analysis of German news stories and blog posts about the Fukushima disaster on March 11, 2011. They conclude that standards and best practices regarding the research use of Web 2.0 tools are still lacking.

Chapter 11 by Klaus Bredl, Christine Ketzer, Julia Hünniger and Jane Fleischer explores the research field of media convergence, relations and interactions between “new” and “old” media in daily user practices. Specifically, they discuss how microblogging, as carried out through Twitter,
is a useful point of departure for studying relations between, for instance, television content and perceptions occurring among audiences. However, there has been very little research about the Twitter activities of television audiences. The authors examine communication on Twitter in relation to fictional TV content and propose a methodological framework for the study of Twitter usage in order to gain new insights into TV audience perception.

In chapter 12, Cédric Courtois and Peter Mechant discuss the research use of APIs. The authors explain what an API is and how it can support audience research purposes, especially in terms of sampling and information retrieval. Yet they warn against technology-driven research and the danger of using uncontrolled tools, and express their concern about the representativeness of API-based samples. Here again, ethical concerns related to the ambiguous status of online data in terms of a public-private distinction are expressed. These issues and others are explored in the light of a multi-method case study of the YouTube uploaders’ perceptions of their videos’ viewership. The authors conclude that there is a need for complementing self-reported data with behavioral data accessed through social media’s API.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES: HOLISTIC, RELATIONAL, PARTICIPATORY

In the concluding chapter, Klaus Bruhn Jensen delineates an agenda for further methodological development in audience research along three core ideas: “communicating media”, “communicating audiences” and “communicating researchers”. He emphasizes that media—understood as anyone or any organization involved in some kind of public communication—nowadays communicate across platforms through multiple and interconnected modes of communication. He also argues that there is much to gain from relying further on audiences’ reflexivity and communication abilities for research purposes—for instance, for providing various kinds of research materials, as in creative approaches, or for co-researching and co-creating societal change, as in action research. According to Jensen, digital media have renewed the researcher’s interest for “imagined audiences”—how audiences imagine themselves, how people imagine their audience, how stakeholders (e.g., journalists) imagine their audiences, and ultimately how researchers imagine “the audience”.

If we engage in the exercise of choosing three keywords that would capture the main directions taken by today’s audience research methodologies as reflected in this volume, we would put forward “holistic”, “relational” and “participatory”. By “holistic”, we mean (as in the chapter by Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al.) that it is increasingly difficult to look at the “use”, “reception” or “effects” of a single media product—be it a technology, a genre or a singular text—without considering the range of mediated and unmediated environments where people interact and participate—as audiences, publics,
communities, social networks, etc. (Livingstone 2005). Media use is always contextualized in larger “media repertoires” (Hasebrink and Popp 2006) in which the different media interact with each other and are significant as a whole. Thus the new premise for methodological innovation and consolidation in audience research is that people’s practices take shape in a multifaceted and interconnected media and communication environment. The way ahead for audience research is toward the development of methodologies—more exactly multimethod research designs—that allow capturing and understanding practices that cut across media and transcend the online/offline division.

The second route taken by audience research methodologies can be referred to as “relational”. The relation between the researched and the researcher is the focus of much consideration throughout this volume (and not only in part II). Establishing a trusted and collaborative relation with the participants is not only a precondition to doing research, but it is also a challenge in itself. Moreover, social networking—which is all about building, sustaining and disrupting social relations—has become a central issue in the research agenda, thereby adding a new component to audience research, which is used to studying collectives in terms of audiences, publics and communities (Patriarche and Dufrasne, in press). A network perspective implies the idea of “dedifferentiation” (Van Campenhoudt 2010); as illustrated in this volume, there is indeed a growing interest (including from a methodological perspective) for communication and participation processes that cut across boundaries of, for instance, communication roles (e.g., producer versus receiver) and professional identities (e.g., professionals versus amateurs). This brings us to the next and final point that we would like to emphasize in this introduction.

A third and final trait of current methodological developments as reflected in this volume is their participatory ambition. Research methodologies are marked by the society that has created them (Van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen 2005). The aspirations toward a participatory culture (Delwiche and Henderson 2013) in social, cultural and political areas have infused into social science as well, which, at the same time, has acknowledged people’s (contextually grounded) reflexive and critical abilities. Participatory methodological designs support the researched people’s involvement in the different stages of the research process, from the definition of the object of study to the “dissemination” of the “findings”1. In some cases, “participation” refers to shared power or co-decision, not to mere interaction (Carpentier 2011a), which has always been a constituting part of any research method (albeit to different extents—think of the difference between surveys and in-depth interviews). Participatory methodologies (broadly understood) offer a methodological translation of the “paradigm of participation” that Livingstone (2012) is advocating (see also Carpentier 2011b), and which indeed gains increased relevance in the contemporary media and communication environment.
NOTE

1. Obviously, “dissemination” and “findings” are problematic terms here, as they connote a somewhat linear, top-down research process, contrary to what participatory research is promoting.

REFERENCES


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Part I

Audience Research Methods between Diversification and Integration
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1 Audience Conceiving among Journalists
Integrating Social-Organizational Analysis and Cultural Analysis through Ethnography

Igor Vobič

INTRODUCTION

As the news becomes digital, journalists of traditional media struggle with their authoritative role as news providers (Boczkowski 2010; Dahlgren 2009; Deuze 2007; Lee-Wright, Philips and Witschge 2012; Robinson 2010). In recent years much has been written on transforming news making (Domingo and Paterson 2011; Meikele and Redden 2011; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2009; Paterson and Domingo 2008) and on transforming audiences’ news consumption (Allan and Thorsen 2009; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2010; Rosenberry and St. John III 2010), which sits at the intersection between continuity and change. Only recently has attention (again) been put to the journalist–audience relationship regarding how contemporary journalists conceive their presumably empowered audience and how the conceived audience from generative and quantifiable sources is echoed in news making (Anderson 2011; Hujanen 2008; MacGregor 2007). The way newsrooms search for, imagine and describe their audiences not only shapes the news delivered in an important way but also brings implications for societal life. However, it appears that the “audience as an abstraction” (Min 2004, 452) has rarely been of primary scholarly concern, as it has been mostly in the background of inquiries into journalists’ attitudes, market pressures on journalism and news values (MacGregor 2007, 280). This leaves many analytical and methodological questions open: How are the audiences conceived in transforming the news making of traditional media? How should scholars investigate contemporary journalists’ relations to the “people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen 2006)? What has journalism scholarship learned from previous studies that can be reused or revisited? How should scholars reappropriate their analytical and methodological frames to counter contemporary contingencies in the journalist–audience relationship?

Recent research on the “perceptions of the audience” (Min 2004), the “constructed audience” (Hujanen 2008) or the “visions of the audience” (Anderson 2011) in newsrooms have revisited conventional wisdom about
the journalist–audience relationship derived from newsroom studies conducted between the 1960s and 1980s suggesting that “audience images” seem to have “minor influence on journalistic performance relative to other potential influence sources” (Ettema, Whitney and Wackman 1997, 40). Namely, contemporary theoretical and empirical explorations of audience conceiving in newsrooms (Anderson 2011; Boczkowski 2004, 2010; Cassidy 2008; Hujanen 2008; Lowrey 2009; MacGregor 2007; Outing 2005; Robinson 2010) signify far more extensive and complex relations among and between journalists, information sources and audience members, and emphasize their implications on “deciding what’s news” (Gans 1979). These studies argue that organizational structures shape particular forms of technological adoption, which are further negotiated through institutional visions of that technology, ideal-typical principles and practices of journalism, and visions of the audience. However, besides common profound acknowledgements of the rising complexity of journalist–audience relations, these studies—with rare exceptions (Anderson 2011; Boczkowski 2010)—only partially reflect on their methodological frameworks and hardly provide an integrative analytical basis for research of audience conceiving in journalism. Therefore, this chapter attempts to fill this gap by reconsidering the analytical stances and methodological frameworks of existing research on how contemporary journalists conceive their audience and how the conceived audience is echoed in news making. The chapter attempts to develop further the methodological approaches to audience conceiving in journalism by integrating social-organizational analysis and cultural analysis through ethnography.

In this sense, this chapter critically argues that ethnographic investigations of newsroom processes, relations and perceptions might help in exploring the role of the audience in contemporary news making more thoroughly. Namely, by overviewing the existing empirical works, the first part of the chapter addresses methodological developments in the transition from early “newsroom-centric sociological studies”, as Zelizer (2004) labels them, to recent ethnographic studies into audience conceiving performed in journalists’ working environments, as exemplified in Anderson (2011). The second part discusses profits and perils of newsroom investigations in studying audience conceiving among journalists and implications for news making. The third part draws upon a large ethnographic study conducted in the online departments of two Slovenian traditional print media organizations, Delo and Dnevnik, in late 2010 and early 2011, in order to continue the discussion on the need for integrative methodological and analytical stances in journalism research. By elaborating on case studies, the conclusion expands on further methodological implications and sketches new paths of scholarly audience conceiving research.
ANALYZING AUDIENCE CONCEIVING IN NEWS MAKING: LITERATURE REVIEW

Research into structure–agency dynamics analyzing how journalists conceive the audience and how the conceived audience is echoed in news making sits at the intersection of three themes (MacGregor 2007, 280): studies of journalists’ attitudes towards their audiences (Gans 1979; Schlesinger 1978/1987; Tunstall 1971); investigations into market pressures in journalism and industrial construction of audience perspective (Ang 1991; Ettema and Whitney 1994; McManus 1994; Napoli 2010; Turow 2005) and explorations dealing with news values among journalists (Fowler 1991; Fuller 1996; Outing 2005). Works of these three lines of inquiry have often analyzed audience conceiving among journalists as a secondary matter and have used a variety of methods—quantitative surveys, text analysis, in-depth interviews, observation—which are not integrated for a purpose of making a comprehensive study but are rather limited in scope. Moreover, only some of these studies dealt with the conceived audience in regards to the processes of news making. Thus, this part of the chapter only reviews the methodology used in studies that aimed at analyzing news making processes in context in order to gain knowledge of audience conceiving in news making.

The relation between how journalists conceive their audience and how this in turn shapes their news making has not yielded a vast amount of literature, but it is indeed an issue that has been investigated over the past few decades. Two waves of inquiries into research of audience conceiving among journalists can be identified. The first wave goes back to newsroom-centric studies taking socio-organizational approaches to news making from a few decades ago. The second wave of more recent newsroom investigations adopts an ethnographic approach and comes closer to the cultural analysis of news making.

The first wave of research (e.g., Atkin, Burgoon and Burgoon 1983; Burgoon, Burgoon and Atkin 1982; Flegel and Chaffee 1971; Gans 1979; McQuail 1969; Schlesinger 1978/1987), falling within “the golden age” of newsroom studies (Zelizer 2004), argues that journalists do not really know their audiences and see the journalist–audience relationship “as an understanding grounded in ignorance and filtered through a lens of professional judgment” (Anderson 2011, 553). In this sense, on the basis of his observations, Schlesinger (1978/1987) stresses that there is a “missing link” between journalists and the audience, implying that “journalists write for other journalists, their bosses, their sources or highly interested audiences” (Schlesinger 1978/1987, 107), whereas “the total audience remains an abstraction” (Schlesinger 1978/1987, 109). Furthermore, in their observational study, Flegel and Chaffee (1971, 649) note that journalists “feel that their own opinions guide their reporting more than do those of their editors; readers’ opinions are even less important”. Similarly, Atkin, Burgoon and
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Burgoon (1983, 60) acknowledge that newsroom staffs have a “patronizing and unflattering view” of the audience that appears distant and anonymous. In a similar context, in order to cope with the “uncertainty” of news making (McQuail 1969), journalists self-construct their audiences, while having little idea of the respective entity and taking “the congruence of their own and the audience’s feelings for granted” (Gans 1979, 237).

These works are valuable also from a methodological perspective, serving as role-model newsroom studies in several respects: They take observation and interviews as research methods and develop analytical frameworks for studying what has later been labeled as “social construction” (Tuchman 2002) or “social organization” (Schudson 2005) in journalism. Indeed, despite the fact that they only provide few methodological considerations, the works of the first wave use newsroom observation to get what Altmeppen (2008, 135) calls an “unfiltered view on the social reality”, and they employ in-depth interviews to generate knowledge on audience conceiving among journalists. By adopting a social-organizational approach to the phenomena in question, the authors analyze the data through the lenses of “organization”, “structure”, “routines” and “roles”. What decisively defines gathering, assembling and analyzing data in these studies is, first, the emphasis on constraints imposed by organizations despite journalists’ individual intentions; second, the inevitability of social construction of reality in any system; and third, the attempt to empirically bridge societal, organizational and individual levels of inquiry (Altmeppen 2008; Schudson 2005; Tuchman 2002). Yet, as in other sociological newsroom studies from the 1960s to 1980s, these works favored the study of “dominant” practices over “deviant” ones, thereby “freezing moments within the news making process for analysis rather than considering the whole phenomenon” (Zelizer 2008, 256).

A review of recent studies indicates a substantial shift from inquiries of the first wave, suggesting that audience conceiving in news making has changed not only as a social phenomenon but also as an object of research. The studies of the second wave from the mid-2000s onward (Anderson 2011; Boczkowski 2004, 2010; Hujanen 2008; Lowrey and Latta 2008; MacGregor 2007; Robinson 2010) show that audience conceiving among journalists and its consequences for news making have become much more complex as interactive online technologies enable closer, even participatory, journalist–audience relationships and as contemporary metrics used additionally shape journalists’ constructions of audiences. For instance, Boczkowski (2004) and Robinson (2010) reveal that audience conceiving plays a diverse range of roles in news making. Boczkowski (2004, 175) shows that on the one side, the more journalists describe online users as technologically unsavvy, the more they rely on one-way communication; on the other side, the more they see audience members as technologically savvy, the more they use interactive capabilities. Robinson (2010, 125) writes about “significant internal conflict” among journalists, dividing them into “traditionalists”, 


who want to maintain a hierarchal journalist–audience relationship, and “convergers”, who would like to see audience members closer to the newsroom. Additionally, Anderson (2011) points out a tension between the “vision of audience empowerment” in terms of a productive and generative entity, on the one hand, and the “growth in audience quantification” in the sense of a quantifiable, rationalizable and largely consumptive aggregate, on the other hand. This is unlike some other inquiries into the relationship between audience metrics, conceived audience and news making that suggest persistence of ideal-typical principles among journalists (Boczkowski 2010; Hujanen 2008; MacGregor 2007). Anderson’s findings indicate progressive quantification of audience understandings.

The second-wave studies also bring a new dimension in developing further methodological issues that were underexplored in the first-wave studies. Namely, despite the fact that these studies range from variously standardized interviews (Hujanen 2008; Min 2004; Robinson 2010) to more or less unstructured observations (Anderson 2011; Boczkowski 2004) to highly systemized exercises of data collection and analysis (Boczkowski 2010), they have taken an ethnographic approach to studying audience conceiving among journalists, thereby strengthening the “cultural analysis” tradition in the field (Zelizer 2008). Beyond the diversity of analytical stances, such as grounded theory (Anderson 2011; Robinson 2010), discourse analysis (Hujanen 2008), or “rule of a thumb” (MacGregor 2007, 285), it is apparent that the cultural perspective is strengthened in the second wave. Indeed, these ethnographies imply the notion of culture that refers to the domain of ideas as well as to social practices. This enables the authors to look beyond the structure of the newsroom organization and gives them an opportunity to investigate sets of unwritten rules, tacit norms and shared values by appreciating symbolic determinants of technology. Another asset of this approach is that it stretches the boundaries of inclusion regarding who counts as a journalist and what counts as news making; for instance, Min (2004) investigates “alternative press producers”, and Lowrey and Latta (2008) examine bloggers in this regard.

The two waves of inquiries put forward in this chapter are both grounded on the methods of observation and interviewing, but they adopt rather different analytical standpoints—one social-organizational and the other cultural. Despite this transition in scholarship, contemporary ethnographies dealing with the research issue in question provide diverse agendas but do not develop toward an integrative stance. The latter would be important for renewing intellectual pathways (Boczkowski 2011; Löffelholz and Weaver 2008; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2009), as it would enable researchers to link macro or structural, medium or organizational, and micro or individual levels in studying how contemporary journalists conceive their presumably empowered audience and how the conceived audience is echoed in their news making. The next part of the chapter is an attempt to further develop such an integrative ethnographic approach by drawing on a large
ethnographic study conducted in the online departments of two Slovenian traditional print media organizations in late 2010 and early 2011.

TOWARD AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO AUDIENCE CONCEIVING IN JOURNALISM: LEARNING FROM STUDIES AT DELO AND DNEVNIK

This section calls for integrative newsroom ethnography as a methodological strategy for investigating audience conceiving among journalists and its implications for news making. This section builds its arguments on ethnographic studies of the news making processes, newsroom relations and staffers’ perceptions at the online departments of two Slovenian traditional media organizations: Delo and Dnevnik. The studies combined observation, in-depth interviews and document analysis, and extrapolated a social-organizational approach with cultural analysis. In this way, the author observed newsroom activities in late 2010 for 194 hours and consequently developed 130 pages of typed observational notes. During observation, the author also collected and assembled dozens of documents—from internal documents dealing with the project of newsroom integration and lists of most-clicked news items published on Delo.si and Dnevnik.si, to strategic material focused on the “target groups” of printed and online editions. Additionally, in early 2011, the author conducted twenty-four in-depth interviews with online journalists, redactors and editors lasting more than forty-six hours. Drawing upon the case studies at Delo and Dnevnik, this section elaborates on analytical and methodological decisions and ultimately aims at building an integrative methodological approach to audience conceiving in journalism.

In the studies, audience conceiving was approached as “a complex and multidimensional lattice of meanings” (Zelizer 2008, 260). Thus, by combining a social-organizational approach and cultural analysis, the author conceptualized and explored news making as processes of gathering, assembling and providing information negotiated between the constraints imposed by the media organizations and the journalists’ sense making. In order to conduct a consistent study of the social organization of online news making and its cultural appropriation through audience conceiving, the author moves from theorizing to data analysis and back to theorizing. The study rests on the analysis of ethnographic data collected and assembled through three different methods, enabling the researcher to approach the social phenomenon in question at organizational, newsroom and individual levels.

Observation

Observation, which has been regularly used in the second wave of newsroom inquiries focused on audience conceiving (e.g. Anderson 2011;
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Boczkowski 2004, 2010; Hujanen 2008), appeared to be useful for studying how conceived audience shapes news making and how news making in turn reshaped the conceived audience. Newsroom observation allowed the author “direct witnessing” (Domingo 2003) of “a place of employment, an environment of work, and a site of a struggle over conditions of labor and ideas of freedom” (Hardt and Brennen 1995, viii).

Additionally, by observing news making, the author identified a tension between the visions of the audience as a “generative entity” (Anderson 2011, 550) on the one hand, and as “figures” (Bourdon and Méadel 2011, 791), on the other. What appeared to be the main denominator of news making processes was raw audience data reproducing the “culture of the click” (Anderson 2011, 555). Yet, before the author had the opportunity to analyze the data, he had to face similar problems as newsroom ethnographers before him (e.g. Boczkowski 2010; Domingo and Paterson 2011; Paterson and Domingo 2008)—for instance, gaining access to the field, forming relationships with the observed journalists, and routinizing note taking.

To enter the newsrooms the author went through “diplomacy of access” (García 2004). Due to the fact that Delo and Dnevnik are traditionally structured media organizations with an emphasized “security culture” (Paterson 2008, 8), it was not easy to identify the “gatekeepers” (Puijk 2008, 32), particularly when one plans to observe processes, relations and perceptions in online departments which are in many regards separate units. The author talked to his contacts at the respective print media organizations, both online executive editors, whom he had known from previous research (Vobic 2010; 2011a). After receiving a formal research request from the author, the editors negotiated permission from both print editors-in-chief to observe online news making for a month. During observation, the author adopted two master roles and switched between them (Gold 1958): As a participant-as-observer, he had an intimate vantage point on routines, but at the same time this constrained him as a researcher by having to carry out some work; as an observer-as-participant he probably lost some of the insider’s look but got more autonomy in accomplishing the research goals. At first, the online journalists were mostly reserved, and some of them started to name the author a “spy” (Delo Online Journalist A) and a “mole” (Dnevnik Online Journalist A), but later he gained what Hansen, Cottle, Negrine and Newbold (1998) call “honorary insider status” as some of the observed began calling the researcher a “confidante” (Delo Online Journalist B). Gaining formal access to newsrooms and forming a relationship with the observed was crucial to cope with the field where there is “too much to see, hear and understand” (Domingo 2003). Therefore, the author conducted his observation in three stages with different observational tactics.

In the first three days, the author descriptively observed processes of online departments in order to become oriented and to grasp complexities by collecting nonspecific descriptions. At this stage, he captured the formal structure of both online departments and became acquainted with Delo.si’s
and Dnevnik.si’s content management systems (CMSs) and the basics of online news making routines. Already at that point it was becoming obvious that audience metrics are one of the main criteria of up-to-the-second rearranging of the first page of both news websites and that generalizations built on statistical data retrieved from CMSs importantly shape decision making in both departments. The first days of observation also signaled that any kinds of online interactions between journalists and audience members are not part of news making routines. In this sense, some of the first goals of the author after entering both newsrooms were to become familiar with CMSs, particularly what kind of audience metrics and analytics they deliver to editors and journalists, and to superficially examine journalists’ usage of interactive possibilities of online communication in order to frame the collection and analysis of observational data in the following stages of the research.

Then, in the next three weeks or so, the author conducted focused observation, narrowing the perspective on those processes and problems that are the most essential for the research focus—in this case, how audience is conceived and how the conceived audience shapes news making. Observation showed that in the news-making rush, where productivity and efficiency dictated the news cycle without deadlines, the audience appeared to be conceived primarily as “figures” within CMSs and its members as “clicks”. Namely, online redactors and daily editors of Delo.si and Dnevnik.si constantly checked audience metrics delivered by CMSs and used other measurement tools, such as Google Analytics, to justify their decisions—for instance, “keeping” or “dropping” certain news items from the first page. The author started steering short conversations with the observed by using nondirective questions to explore the processes, relations and perceptions, and asking contrast questions to focus on differences and similarities between certain elements. For instance, such short conversations revealed that the Delo online redactor understands audience metrics as an “indicator of audience’s interests” and that the Dnevnik’s online executive editor assistant uses statistics to “classify the items”, but, he said, audience analytics “should not be the main factor of decision making, but it surely is an important one”. At the same time, the observation confirmed the descriptive findings of the first stage, indicating that there is a lack of interactivity in online news making at Delo.si and Dnevnik.si. Not only are journalists completely missing out on the options for participatory journalism, but also interactions via email or in the users’ comments sections are left to the interests of individual staffers.

In the last stage, the ethnographer observed selectively for approximately a week and focused on finding evidence of the patterns of the processes and problems identified in the second stage. The author used short interviews to further discuss a paradox of audience conceiving among staffers of Delo.si and Dnevnik.si, which is that they were almost obsessively checking the audience metrics, yet they were neglecting interactive online capabilities. The journalists’ responses were different: Some were fierce and defensive, while
some were calm and critical, but in any case, all were valuable for getting to
know the heterogeneous news-making dynamics. For example, Delo Online
Journalist A characterized the conversation as “plain stupid” and said that
she “ignores” users’ comment sections because “they are there just for the
clicks and nobody has the balls to shut them down”. Dnevnik Online Jour-
nalist C said that she tries to follow audience members’ comments because
she is “interested in what they have to say”, yet “audience metrics” are
“the most important thing”. These are only two of many responses signal-
ing that dynamics within the “we” community in the journalist–audience
relationship are neither uniformly organized nor culturally homogeneous,
indicating that Delo and Dnevnik online departments appear as disorga-
nized separate units with rather chaotic decision making occupied by news
workers with manifold identification problems (Vobič 2011b).

Such “semi-standardized observation” (Quandt 2008, 140) allowed the
author to extend the observation personally, theoretically and empirically,
bringing flexibility in the processes of gathering, comparing and analyzing
data, and enabling him to assess how he made sense of what he had ob-
served. Yet one of the major drawbacks of newsroom observation is that
findings are based on conceptual and reflexive simplification of the messy
field, which calls for additional data gathered by other methodological tools
in order to cope with the social and cultural complexity of the object of
study.

Document Analysis

Document analysis, which has been mostly neglected in the second-wave
studies (Anderson 2011; Hujanen 2008; MacGregor 2007; Robinson
2010), appeared as a useful method for investigating “certain kinds of or-
ganizational rationality at work” (Lindlof and Taylor 2002, 117) in the two
online departments under scrutiny. During observation, the author tried to
access two kinds of documents: current working protocols and past strategic
memos. Within these two kinds fall documents that embody social rules but
not necessarily the reasoning behind them, indicating how the journalistic
collective should imagine members of the audience, perceive the journalist–
audience relationship, and in turn conduct news making. Yet as experienced
by other authors for some different reasons (Castello and Domingo 2004;
Domingo 2003; Puijk 2008), these efforts were only partly successful.

First, while Dnevnik had material (more or less) defining news making
(Dnevnik 2006) and the author was able to examine it, Delo did not have
such a document, as most of the rules were continuously negotiated. The
retrieved Dnevnik document was, however, foremost a CMS manual for the
newcomers revealing very little about the structure of newsroom or news-
making routines, let alone about the journalist–audience relationship. At the
same time, Delo had strategic documents dealing with “newsroom integra-
tion” (Delo 2008), which provide some details about spatial rearrangement
and department relations, whereas in regards to the audience, the document material only stressed the newsroom integration ideal of “reaching people across various platforms”.

Second, the researcher got documents overviewing the past annual year and describing the future strategy of Delo, also in regards to the audience (Delo 2010a; Delo 2011), whereas at Dnevnik no such documents were available to the researcher as they were regarded as “too sensitive” and “secret” (Dnevnik Online Executive Editor). On the one hand, accessed Delo documents provide insights into the principle organizational understanding of the journalist–audience relationship, mostly based on broad normative predispositions of journalistic conduct. For instance, the annual overview of Delo’s print editor-in-chief (Delo 2010a, 5) stated that “Delo should provide to their readers the knowledge about all important aspects of societal life” and that “Delo should fulfill readers’ expectations by realizing autonomy, credibility and quality in its news”. On the other hand, collected documents also gave some details on how media institutions strategically define their audience (i.e., what Ettema and Whitney [1994] call “audiencemaking”), since they sketch “target groups” such as “young families”, “modern matures” and “managers” with relatively high income, but without providing a methodology behind these assessments (Delo 2011). At the same time, both news websites were also enrolled in Measurement of Website Visiting, a monthly study conducted by Slovenian Advertising Chamber delivering statistical data about unique visits, website reach and demographical details about online users.

Third, the author obtained access to the CMSs and the email exchange system, which enabled him to move closer to the dynamics of internal communication—“a central element of organizations” (Puijk 2008, 34), and consequently to online audience metrics and analytics (Delo 2010b; Dnevnik 2010). These documents indicate that the “audience as figures” (Bourdon and Méadel 2011) was structurally embedded in the processes of news making at Delo and Dnevnik. Indeed, the CMSs of Delo.si and Dnevnik.si enable journalists to follow up-to-the-second audience metrics, where the list of most-read articles is available with the accompanying number of unique readers and share of audience members in a certain period. Assessing print and online readers as a quantifiable, rationalizable and largely consumptive aggregate has become an integral part of the work routines of many different actors within media organizations—for editors and journalists, among others, and consequently, for the coordination of different journalistic and organizational processes such as online news making.

The author approached the collected documents as “the means of constructing a specific version of a process” (Flick 2006, 252) and of developing a “reflection of communication” (Yin 2003, 87) within the respective print media organizations. By taking into account who produced these documents, for what purpose they were produced and what was the organizational context of their production, the analysis of these materials gave
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a specific, and at the same time, limited approach to journalistic practices and sense making. The document analysis positively provided an indication of how the audience is strategically conceived on the organizational level at Delo and Dnevnik but gave few details about how the respective print media organizations coordinate their activities and resources in order to achieve their business and societal goals. This lack of coordination is obvious, for instance, in the annual overview of the Delo print editor-in-chief, where she explicates “the gap between editorial policies adopted, and expectations of the readers” (Delo 2010a). Nevertheless, the major problem in analyzing these documents was to understand (and conceptualize) the relations between their explicit content, their implicit meaning and the context of their functions and usages. Therefore, the author regarded the documents as evidence that reflects communication patterns among/between certain parties within the respective print media organizations. By constantly trying to identify the objectives behind the documents, one is less likely to be “misled” by documentary evidence and more likely to be “correctly critical” in interpreting the contents of such evidences (Yin 2003, 87–88).

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews, which have been used by second-wave scholars (Anderson 2011; Boczkowski 2004; Hujanen 2008; MacGregor 2007; Min 2004; Robinson 2010), also appeared to be useful in the Slovenian ethnographic study, especially in regard how the abstraction of the audience shapes journalists’ decision making. In-depth interviews enabled exposing paradoxes and differences in audience conceiving among Delo.si and Dnevnik.si journalists by combining “dialectical interviewing” (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003, 140), which is focused on contradictions in the social and material world and on the potential for action and change, and “heuristic interviewing” (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003, 140), which emphasizes the personal approach of the interviewer and sees the process of interviewing as a collaboration between the researcher and the participant, where both partners share reflection and information. Such an approach enabled the author to reveal not only groups of online journalists at Delo.si and Dnevnik.si as internally distinct but also that tensions between generative constructs of the audience and quantifiable ones importantly define audience conceiving within the online departments of the print media organizations under study.

The study departed from “focused” or “structured” interviews, in which the interviewer strictly follows the interview guide, and adopted what is known as a “semi-structured” or “semi-standardized” type of interview. Indeed, the interview guide was organized, though it was not applied rigidly but adopted as a flexible tool for theoretically informed and contextually grounded conversation. The interview conversations appeared as “an evolving drama” (Hermanns 2004, 212), where the interviewer’s task was to facilitate this drama to occur. Namely, the conversations were steered by a
rather flexible application of the guide and an active involvement of the interviewer in the conversations. To be more specific, he combined three types of questions, each of which being a distinct stimulus used for a particular purpose in a certain stage of the conversation.

First, “open” (Flick 2006, 156), “content-mapping” (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003, 148) or “non-directive” questions (Lindlof and Taylor 2002, 195) were used in order to get the conversation on the topic started, and they were answered on the basis of the knowledge the interviewee had at hand (e.g., “How do you see your readers?”, “How would you characterize the relations between online journalists and online readers?”, “Do you check audience statistics in the CMS and why?”). Already at this point in the interview, it became clear that the interviewees made a distinction between the audience as “people who post mostly disastrous comments” (Delo Online Journalist E) and the audience as “clicks” (Delo Online Redactor). Additionally, interviewed online staffers more or less agreed that due to the requirements of constantly making timely news and the lack of institutional guidelines, the journalist–audience relationship was mostly characterized as “alienated” (Delo Online Journalist E) or perceived as “it does not even exist” (Dnevnik Online Executive Editor Assistant), since the online executive editor “cares about the clicks and that’s all” (Delo Online Journalist E). In this sense, answers to nondirective questions helped the author to get this part of the interview on its way by giving an interviewee enough space to present their own views, explanations and experience.

Then, the author asked “theory-driven” (Flick 2006, 156) questions based on the literature review and the theoretical framework of the study (e.g., “Do you use the word ‘interactivity’, and if so how do you understand it?”, “Do you have recently adopted interactive features on your news website, and have they reshaped your news making?”, “How do you relate audience interests and audience metrics?”). Later in the analysis, these types of questions helped the author to identify two groups of online staffers in terms of the journalist–audience relationship and news making: conservative skeptics and technological enthusiasts. The former equate “readers” and “clicks”, as they emphasized business logics in their answers suggesting speed, timeliness and productivity as “natural” elements of online news making (Delo Online Executive Editor). The latter emphasize the social dimensions of news making, which are seen as plural and contradictory phenomena. In short, these questions enabled the author to uncover the complexity of audience conceiving and journalist–audience relationships, and to use these insights as groundwork for additional “compare-contrast” questions (Lindlof and Taylor 2002, 203) still to follow.

Finally, the third type of questions—“confrontational” questions (Flick 2006, 157) or “content-mining” questions (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003, 150)—responded to the notions that the interviewee had presented up to that point in order to critically reexamine them in light of competing alternatives or even contradictions identified, for instance, during the observation phase.
(e.g., “It seems that audience metrics are the most important criteria for rearranging news items published. How do you relate them to other factors in decision making?”). Despite differences between journalists in terms of audience conceiving and the implications for news making, confrontational questions revealed a common paradox in perceiving the journalist–audience relationship on the societal level. On the one hand, the interviewees say that they provide “fast news” (*Delo* Online Journalist C), “credible information” (*Delo* Online Journalist B) and “news as concentrate” (*Dnevnik* Online Journalist C), indicating that they help people to grasp the accounts of the day, form their opinions and in turn participate in societal life. “With the news we provide, people can act not only like a flock of sheep”, stresses *Delo* Online Journalist D, implying a “classical” paradigm of journalism (Dahlgren 2009) when reasoning about the journalist–audience relationship and news making. On the other hand, the interviewees say that they do not see themselves as “real journalists”, since online staffers use the metaphor of the factory to imply monotony, the determinism of established routines and the detachment from the people for whom they are responsible. In this context, some said that they feel “alienated” from the story they write (*Delo* Journalist A) and “distanced” from the people (*Dnevnik* Journalist C), since they are stuck by the “assembly line” (*Dnevnik* Online Journalist A). These questions led the author to the conclusion that audience conceiving does not play a central role in news making—at least at *Delo.si* and *Dnevnik.si*—but, nevertheless, the analysis of the interviews revealed the embeddedness of audience conceiving in the larger social-organizational and cultural web of the newsroom within a particular media organization.

**CONCLUSION**

Newsroom studies have been used to investigate audience conceiving in journalism for decades, but as methodological packages they have been more or less neglected in audience research. Ethnographic investigations of newsroom processes and relations may be used as an important add-on in contemporary audience research; in particular, insights into audience conceiving in newsrooms might help contemporary researchers to explore the role of the audience in growing interactive and participatory practices of news making more thoroughly. Additionally, integrating a social-organizational approach and a cultural analysis of news making enables researchers to elaborate on audience conceiving by studying the processes of gathering, assembling and providing news, taking into account the constraints imposed by media organizations and the journalists’ sense making.

Yet, it seems that exploring audience conceiving in late modern journalism, where heterogeneity, fragmentation and individualization appear to be characterizing concepts (Dahlgren 2009), might welcome even more robust and integrative framework to move forward (Boczkowski 2011;
Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2009; Quandt 2008). As regards methodology, by undertaking quantitative analyses of data gathered through ethnographic methods, researchers would be able to reach an additional level of precision and to make differences or commonalities more salient. Or, by conducting complementary research through quantitative methods—for instance, a survey among (online) journalists—scholars would be able to enhance findings by gathering and analyzing data that could not be collected and assembled through ethnographic examination.

At the same time, the tensions between continuity and change embedded in audience conceiving among journalists and in online news making also appear to be a fruitful area of research for examining journalism’s larger contingencies in the future. Journalism scholarship should continue to innovate and strive for even more integrative approaches—for instance, for approaches that would break down the long-standing boundaries between the processes of news making, the resulting news, and people’s engagement in it. The task of grasping “the media lifecycle” (Boczkowski 2011, 165) might actually open up an intellectual renewal not only in journalism research and audience research but also in the entire field of communication and media studies.

In any case, social, cultural and technological changes in communication and journalism have reshaped the journalist–audience relations developed in the world of mass media by intensifying audience involvement in the news. This trend calls for the development of new methodologies to study news making as a complex process involving many different relations among/between journalists, information sources and audience members. In this regard, by conducting and combining semi-standardized observation, critical document analysis and active interviewing, researchers are able not only to move swiftly between the organizational, newsroom and individual levels of news making but also to integrate findings on audience conceiving on each of these levels and to elaborate on the complexities of the empirical insights more comprehensively than in previous studies.

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Audience Conceiving among Journalists


INTRODUCTION

Audience is a central part of any mediated communication process, as it is “hard to imagine any form of media studies that is not, on some level, about audiences” (Webster 1998, 190). This centrality is one of the best reasons to explain why most people hold an intuitive understanding about the meaning of this concept. Traditionally, one can present the audience as a group of people with common practices related to the media devices and products offered by any kind of individual or collective sender. But do these simple definitions reflect the transformations encountered during the last two decades?

Nowadays there are evident problems in talking about the audience, as media uses and consumption are completing a shift toward diversification and individualization. It seems more accurate to talk about audiences in plural and to admit that the sociological construction of this concept cannot follow the same lines as it did in the 1980s.

Interested researchers and students can find a good sample of publications scrutinizing the audience studies field. These are helpful to understand the main topics analyzed by scholars worldwide, according to different criteria of organization in terms of topics, methods and approaches within audience studies (e.g., Jensen and Rosengren 1990; Nightingale 1996; Potter 2009; Schröder 1987; Webster 1998). Comprehensive readers presenting the more salient contributions during the last decades are also available (e.g., Brooker and Jermyn 2003). However, most of these studies have been more focused on contextualizing findings than on comparing and assessing methods.

As in other communication research fields, audience studies exhibit differences between the academic community and the media industry sector in terms of their objects of study, research methods and research purposes. While the latter has traditionally been more focused on quantifying audiences and finding better ways to measure them, the former has pursued the understanding of the reception processes performed by those receiving the media messages. Trends toward methods integration can be found on both sides, but this distinction can serve as a starting point to understand alternative research purposes.
These different objectives and perspectives have led to divergent lines of research along time, ranging from the technologically based development of audience measurement devices coming from the telecommunications area (Álvarez et al. 2009) to the mainly humanistic and critical approaches to the social and commercial uses of the audience concept dominant in current media studies (Callejo 2001; Orozco 1996; Wicks 2001). From one extreme position—the one devoted to the production of valid equipment for quantification—to the other—centered in exposing the negative consequences of these approaches—one can find that the scarce room for common confluence is based on the analysis of what and how the subjects are consuming (and producing) media products.

This chapter is composed of three parts. The first one presents the more remarkable characteristics of the two dominant approaches to audience research in terms of methodology. Quantitative and qualitative methods are brought into this text as two different—but most of the time compatible—approaches to studying media consumption among spectators and users. The second part presents the transformations encountered during the last two decades in the media sector, always seen from a methodological point of view (i.e., in terms of their implications for the methods and tools applied to the study of audiences). These two general parts discussing methodology and transformations lead us to a third one developing a specific analysis of the main research techniques for investigating audiences nowadays (their characteristics, their level of application, their potentialities and limits), with a focus on how they are adapting to the changing media and communication environment.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO AUDIENCE RESEARCH

Learning about the scope of a mediated message and discovering the main characteristics of the collectives touched by these messages has been a priority since the very first launching of mass media: Audience measurement studies are therefore something inherent to the media industry itself.

Mass societies were built up during the first third of the twentieth century, mainly standing on the shoulders of a new way of producing and consuming goods and services. This model established the goal of reaching a wide mass of individuals, in order to persuade them to spend part of their time and/or monetary resources in owning and enjoying them. So mass media are partly the answer to what companies needed in order to spread their products in this new landscape. Thus, the pressure to develop trustworthy ways to quantify the reach of any commercial message lies behind the rapid development of statistical and automatic resources to chart audiences.

But the investigation can go beyond the identification of the size and the main social and demographic features of the spectators’ group, which is obviously interesting from both a commercial and a sociological perspective.
Beyond mere media use, audience interpretations behind behavioral data stimulate other research itineraries.

Audience studies have traditionally been divided between researchers interested in quantifying the amount of people receiving a media message and those committed to achieving a deeper knowledge about the meaning attributed by individuals to those messages spread by conventional mass media. The first group is focused on measuring, while the second group is trying to capture the singularities of human interpretation. This divergence points to some of the core debates in the social science field, as one can find different combinations of the two approaches in almost any single discipline, like sociology, human geography or political science.

Roughly, one can consider quantitative studies focused on audience measurement as a domain mostly in hands of commercial enterprises looking for more general information about who is consuming any media product among a large amount of people. On the other hand, qualitative approaches explicitly refuse generalization of their findings by gaining a comprehensive depth in order to understand how media content is both consumed and interpreted by users. It is obviously true that we are presenting here two ideal types with no direct reproduction in current research trends: Companies measuring audiences are perfectly capable of developing qualitative studies, and scholars often combine their qualitative approaches with surveys reaching a large sample of media consumers. However, these two approaches are still valid to explain the differences between them, both in terms of their objectives and their resources.

As Table 2.1 synthesizes, there are other disparities concerning the depth and the reach of these two approaches. Although one can consider some of the mentioned features partially stereotypical, they are trying to depict the main lines of some predominant research practices and traditions.

Although these differences still remain in the way communication scholars are approaching their subjects of study, there is a growing presence of

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*Source: Author’s own elaboration*
mixed-method approaches to the audience analysis. A quantitative measurement limited to the size and profile of the audience is poor if it is not completed by some other indicators explaining the reasons why users choose one option instead of any other in a highly crowded media environment. It could be true that this knowledge is enough to keep the business running, but even commercial research needs to go beyond these ratings to achieve a better understanding of the population they are addressing.

Nevertheless, mixed-method approaches are not as familiar to the commercial industry as they are to academia. Although some complementary qualitative methods, such as focus groups or in-depth interviews, are performed in order to validate and deepen the information gathered via ratings, the core set of data are still coming from quantitative methods. Qualitative inputs remain more in hands of academic researchers traditionally away from the companies’ data exploitation strategies. Consequently, it is easy to find good examples of studies mixing methods in scientific journals and in PhD dissertations, but it is not that common to find similar efforts in dominant market research, at least not in all European countries.

NEW MEDIA, NEW CONTEXT FOR RESEARCH

Most of the devices employed to measure audiences during the last decades are providing useful information, but it seems that it is not enough for media practitioners and for market researchers who are willing to receive deeper information about media reach and consumption. From a commercial perspective, “without reliable audience data, many businesses will be reluctant to participate in the new delivery platforms”, like the ones distributed online, as Álvarez et al. (2009, 502) points out. Hence, online worlds are opening new doors for all research methods and challenging the researchers’ imaginations: The traditional research procedures need to be revisited as a consequence of the centrality achieved by online spaces and interactions.

Although applied to the study of online communities, Vicente-Mariño and Zeller (2012) identified three main reasons to demand new methodological approaches to the analysis of virtual worlds: quantity, diversity and ubiquitousness. First, the amount of media spaces, both online and offline, have increased during the last two decades. Second, as a consequence of this growth, the consumption strategies have experienced an intensive diversification, making it even more difficult to establish common trends at a large scale. And third, media devices are now accessible to a wider part of the global population, decisively contributing to the creation of a social demand to be part of the media flow of information.

These motivations are also present when the analytical focus is placed on audience research, both offline and online. As a consequence, there are some
challenges that audience research has to face in the upcoming years. Some, but not all, of them are the following:

(1) Transnational audiences. A big portion of media production is designed to be distributed all over the world, so the traditional system of measuring audiences needs to be redefined to capture the true dimensions of transnational audiences. This necessity, however, does not mean that the classical understanding of national audiences is not valid anymore, as the transformation is still in course: It must be conceived as an additional item to be analyzed, bearing in mind that it can only be applied to those media products that have this wider scope as part of their social and commercial diffusion strategies.

(2) Cross media production and reception. Media consumption is not restricted to a single media source anymore, so audience research needs to take multiple-source uses into account. Even though there has always been a media strategy behind any commercial distribution of messages, nowadays the close relation between traditional and new media leads to exploitation models crossing platforms and devices. Individuals are potentially receiving news and entertainment at all times and everywhere via either conventional resources (e.g., television, radio, newspapers, magazines) or newer devices (e.g., computers, mobile phones). Consequently, media companies need to prepare their content to be distributed through a wider array of technologies. And at the next level of this chain, audience researchers need to take into consideration this cross-media landscape and evaluate its reach and social consequences.

(3) The changing role of individuals, from audience members to users. Although there is an ongoing transformation, certain mediated communication practices can still be described as a unidirectional relation from companies spreading messages to a mostly unknown and massive audience, as one can still experience while watching a newscast or reading a newspaper. This model could be valid within a mass media landscape with scarce space for distributing messages, but the current situation is different. The field for individuals’ interaction and participation in media arenas (Carpentier 2011) is growing, as online worlds offer nearly unlimited space to distribute messages without facing the traditional access problems established by mass media editors. In the new digital scenario, mediated participation plays an increasing role in the process of building social and media realities, challenging researchers worldwide to find new ways to approach an audience with a more active role in the communication process.

(4) New tools for audience research. Online spaces like social networking sites and microblogging services are offering their users a lot of interesting tools to follow and to visualize some of the processes they enable. Similar to people meters, it does not matter whether users are conscious of their online consumption, as new tools are collecting data of all the sites visited or the time spent on each webpage automatically. This is a clear signal that the fast technological evolution is opening new windows with potential uses that need to be explored by an awakened community of researchers to check whether they can be fruitful for audience research: Most of them, like
statistics and graphs provided by companies like Facebook or Twitter, are presented as an entertainment tool to make visible everything that happens in an online arena, but they can also become a good way to counterbalance the traditional way of presenting quantitative audience data. Nevertheless, it must also be mentioned that there is a pending issue in terms of ethics, as these resources are mainly provided by the same companies that offer these online services, so more attention should be paid to their implications.

Some of these challenges have obviously led to an adaptation process in most of the research techniques available. Online technologies are opening up new windows for cheaper and easier access to information, which can bring a positive and stimulating energy to the entire field of social sciences, but the question about their limits and their weaknesses in terms of research quality and result validity are still open. Some of them have already been assessed during the last decade in the areas related to Internet studies (Howard and Jones 2004), although it is also true that most of these contributions are not addressing media audiences as their main priority.

CRITICAL UPDATE OF THE AUDIENCE RESEARCH METHODS’ REPERTOIRE

The purpose of this section is to review some of the most common research methods applied in audience and reception studies in light of how they are adapting to the current context described above. Taking the audience measurement technologies as our starting point, we will briefly develop some quantitative resources like surveys before presenting other qualitative strategies (individual interviews, focus groups and ethnographies). Throughout this section, we will examine how the transition from a mass media context to a more diverse scenario has affected the way scholars and practitioners use research methods and tools.

Audience Measurement Devices

People meters are technological devices that measure the consumption of certain media products within a wide population. Although their evolution has traditionally been close to TV industry, they are also used in radio consumption and new media with some new technological developments. All of these devices are based on applications that monitor most of the operations performed with a TV apparatus by individuals; channel changes and the duration of viewing are automatically registered.

Since their initial developments back in the 1950s and their consolidation in the 1970s, people meters have established a silent dictatorship over TV stations during the last decades, as their results are permanently used to make crucial decisions about programming. All the information can be gathered on a real-time basis, although it is more common to receive all of
the detailed audience results during the early morning; as the information is sent to the measurement company from the people meter, it is statistically processed and distributed very quickly. All of these devices are trying to get an automatic answer to some common questions, as Vaca (2009) has summarized, applied to the TV audience:

- Did you watch TV yesterday?
- For how long did you watch it?
- At what times of the day did you watch TV?
- Which TV programs and stations did you watch?
- By means of which technology did you receive the TV messages?

Although these are five easy-to-answer questions, they turned out to be some of the key questions to define the TV market during the previous century, and they are still valid in measuring conventional TV consumption. Their analytical power lies in the wide population represented by the resultant statistics: Mass audiences are the best way to present TV as an appealing business for advertisers.

The main argument in support of people meter measurements is the reduction of the human influence in the data collection process. The role assumed by the researcher is out of doubt, as an electronic device collects all the information in real time, so the intrusion of the observer is close to zero. And what is the role played by the investigated subjects? It can be argued that individuals can play a strategic role, modifying their own TV usage habits, but this behavior cannot be kept under a long-term horizon: One can present a fake behavior during a limited time, but it is hardly possible to make this attitude a permanent lifestyle. In fact, intense work is performed to validate samples by comparing results with other quantitative methods like surveys. So the intervention of both the researcher and the researched people remain low, giving credit and a sense of objectivity that has helped to spread these methods worldwide, as they have proved to be the best—or at least the most effective—solution to measure what happens in front of TV screens. However, other problems, like the registration procedure leading to the right attribution about who is consuming TV at any given time, still need to be solved.

Taking the four abovementioned challenges, audience measurement systems need to face new consumption styles where national-scale spectatorship is not the only key to understanding the evolution of media products anymore. Transnational consumption of films, series or news is a reality not covered yet by samples developed under a nationally based structure. Adding up audience ratings coming from diverse countries exposed to a certain product could be one short-term solution, but a better integration to avoid territorial differences needs to be developed in order to capture occurring global media processes.

Sampling strategies are also facing the challenge of a growingly fragmented scenario. The amount of channels reaching houses worldwide is so
high that ratings are showing an increasing audience fragmentation. Webster (2005) has proved this phenomenon in the United States, leading to a situation where loyalty is a key to understanding audiences within a highly polarized system. Napoli (2011) has also pointed out fragmentation as one of the two main phenomena arising from contemporary audience uses, together with the increasing autonomy of audiences.

Audience behavior is also rapidly changing from a passive attitude to an active relation toward media. This is not valid for all audiences and programs, but the growing presence of online communities following, discussing and re-elaborating media content has been shown as a signal about new directions for audience research (Costello and Moore 2007). How this transition from an established audience measurement technology focused on a single medium to a cross-media landscape where users jump from one media outlet to another is a salient challenge for companies devoted to providing their customers with an accurate picture of who is receiving their messages.

Besides all these methodological open questions, there is also a pragmatic reason to keep on using these devices: The whole industry has unanimously accepted them as the governing bodies (despite the frequent complaints about the fact that minorities are underrepresented). The demand of data accuracy and speed has fostered the creation of an influential line of industrial developers (e.g., TNS, Arbitron) competing to achieve the best device to electronically measure TV audiences.1

Online Tracking Systems

The rise of the Internet and new media is forcing the media industry to rethink the offering of their research methods in order to meet the growing demands of reaching concrete targets coming from the advertising business. Private companies like Alexa or ComScore are only two of the diverse enterprises placing the measurement of the Internet audience as the core part of their businesses, enjoying a growing demand from all over the world to get a better and deeper knowledge about who accesses Web content and services, how, and when.

People meters aim at measuring the size of the group following a message in a certain time and space. This objective is also valid when media researchers focus on online objects of study: Online tracking systems are providing similar information about media behavior. However, the difference points to two main factors: the amount of information that can be gathered and the diversification of practices when someone is online.

As Manovich (2012) points out, the main challenge for current media research is to handle big data produced by users who create and spread content. Traditional approaches to Internet audience measurement are devoted to tracking the Web traffic and the time spent on websites, partly reproducing the mass media rationale. However, new developments in this field prove that it is not enough to rank the sites in terms of visits and time. The amount
of available data is calling for a more accurate analysis about what people do when they are online.

Most of the challenges faced at the turn of the century are still valid, although the solutions have evolved and the quality of research has significantly grown. More than a decade ago, Coffey (2001, 11) identified three main reasons why measuring the Internet audience had become a key topic: self-promotion for organizations in a competitive environment, support for all of the activities related to the commercial goals of an organization, and the possibility of strategic planning after a good data collection about users’ behavior is completed. Three main types of audience measurement were established in order to support these objectives: electronic measurement with online tracking systems, measurement of recalled behavior in surveys, and analysis of server log files. All of these are included in this overview, serving to point out that the approaches remain partially the same, although the technological devices have evolved to help researchers in their daily tasks.

The digital revolution has also brought to the light a partially unforeseen situation, as online enterprises are sometimes developing their own measurement devices. While conventional media rely on external companies, Web-based companies incorporate audience measurement into their progress and commercial strategy. For instance, social media platforms like Twitter provide their users with statistical information about what is going on in this microblogging arena. Data integration is growing in an environment where statistical processing is at the backbone of the current transformations.

Online tracking systems are appealing options for the cross-media challenge in audience studies. Current media consumption has migrated to a wide diversity of screens and platforms, bringing new spaces to be covered by developers. At the same time, this fragmented access to media content is also challenging the current sampling strategies, mainly based either on individuals or on households. Server data are becoming a relevant source of data for private companies in charge of measuring audiences at national systems, and they are forcing the redimensioning of samples in order to significantly increase the number of Internet users to be considered.

Dealing with big data is another challenge to current social science, and in the audience measurement field one can find a good example of this. The amount of information gathered by measurement systems is growing more rapidly than our capability to process the collected data, to understand them and to make them understandable. Additionally, new ethical issues related to Internet consumption and the changing relations between public and private must be kept in consideration (Lotz and Ross 2004).

It should also be mentioned before closing these sections devoted to automatic audience measurement that the encountered evolution is the result of efforts and interests mainly coming from commercial initiatives. The attention paid by scholars to the audience results coming from these outlets have remained at a secondary level, while the private sector is built upon them. The distance between practitioners and scholars in these concerns is still large.
Surveys

Surveys are one of the most common research methods applied in social sciences and media studies. Their proved effectiveness to capture public opinion trends and to represent the wide distribution of social positions on any salient topic has also been used to justify their permanent application in these fields of research.

Survey companies are also among the most developed organizations within the research field worldwide, as the requirements to complete the quantitative fieldwork are especially demanding. On both a national and a global scale, one can find solid organizations within the public and private sectors using a quite common methodological strategy. This could be the result of having replicated similar studies every year, allowing comparisons across time and space and strengthening their position. Some of the collected data are replicated in polls almost worldwide, and this is opening the door to interesting and inspiring comparisons. Another strong point in favor of surveys is the possibility of data presentation, as figures can support the understanding of the true dimensions and scope of the presented findings.

Most media surveys rely on the memory of the interviewed individuals, while people meters look for instantaneous information to get their results. The adaptation of the answers to the role played by the surveyor can become a problem, as social desirability can influence the respondents. Among many other scholars, Bourdieu (2000) reported some of the weaknesses of public opinion polls, and most of them are still relevant nowadays.

One solid example of how surveys can be applied to the analysis of media audiences can be found in the project EU Kids Online (Livingstone et al. 2011). Although the main purpose of this European project was not exclusively focused on audiences as a whole but on how the kids act and interact when they are online, this example is valid to help understand the transition from offline to online audiences. Some of the publications produced as outputs of this longitudinal and transversal study are devoted to methodological issues, providing a framework for similar studies (e.g., Lobe, Livingstone and Haddon 2007).

Another common use of surveys in terms of mass audience analysis is their completion by diverse national organizations (often supported by survey companies) to measure the diffusion of conventional media like radio, newspapers or magazines on a periodical basis.

Surveys share with other quantitative approaches to audience studies some strengths and weaknesses, while they face some of the new challenges in this field. To some extent, dealing with transnational audiences should be made easier by the quality standards for surveys established worldwide and shared by most nationally based industries. However, international surveys face problems related to the way topics and issues are framed within
questionnaires, as well as problems in accessing a valid sample covering a wide diversity of territories, cultures and social practices.

New challenges for this research method lie in the ways it is performed in online spaces and whether the transition from traditional application strategies (face-to-face, telephone or mail) to Internet resources is solved with the same reliability. Online surveys are useful tools for social science nowadays, but their uses must be carefully supervised in order to provide the same guarantee as the classical procedures. While they are appealing to active Internet users willing to take part in research processes, they demand those users to spend time on answering questions, which limits our chances of getting a good rate of valid responses to questionnaires.

**In-Depth Interviews and Focus Groups: Conversational Methods**

All the quantitative approaches already presented here share the goal of providing the market with an accurate distribution of the amount of people receiving a certain media message. Although surveys can also be conducted in a way that allows achieving a deeper understanding of the attitudes and motivations among audiences, this qualitative approach is usually limited, since questionnaires are mainly constructed with closed question-and-answer schemes. When the goal of the researchers is instead devoted to understanding and explaining what lies behind the manifest behavior, qualitative ways to collect information and to analyze data are required.

In doing so, in-depth or unstructured interviews are the best solution to access the individual level, while focus groups have always been considered a strong tool to capture the collective attitude toward a topic. Conversation is a better way to naturally reach deeper than is observing external behaviors. The application of conversational methods to social sciences has been increasingly frequent during the last century, mainly in a new media context where individualization is growing and massive consumption is decreasing. All of these techniques aim to reproduce normal interactions between human beings, and talk has proved to be the best way to accomplish this task.

One of the weaknesses traditionally associated with these research methods is the lack of representativeness of their findings. As a consequence of their reluctance toward statistical sampling, the selection criteria to become part of the sample stays at a core position in this debate. However, the kind of representativeness lying behind qualitative methods refers to the social position within the diverse discourses circulating within the social structure. A solid theoretical sampling respecting social structural positions is required during the research planning phase, while its final composition will remain open during the data collection periods, as unexpected discourses can rise when subjects expose their positions on any topic related to their role as audience members.
For these conversational methods, the transition from offline environments and contexts of co-presence to online situations where both space and time conditions can be different is still an open question. While other conventional research methods like surveys do not necessarily have to face a deep transformation of their operational basis, oral approaches to research need to be reframed. To some extent the rapid implementation of technologies like Voice IP systems makes it easier to access significant interviewees and to complete the conversation. But an important part of the interaction, mostly related to nonverbal communication, will still be missing. Problems are even more difficult to avoid when the purpose is to create a focus group or any other group interaction: Creating a natural dialogue between participants not even sharing the same location is extremely complicated, leading to the recommendation against doing so unless an experimental approach to online qualitative research justifies that decision.

However, conversational methods are especially valid in capturing the active role of the audience in mediated processes, as they are focused on those concerns and turn the participants into the main actors of the research process. Even considering that behind TV ratings one can find interesting patterns of individualization to be qualitatively explored (Bjur 2009), conversational approaches offer the participants the unique opportunity to freely discourse about their media experience (Kalviknes Bore 2012). If we are heading toward a scenario where audience fragmentation and individualized consumption are important trends, then research methods must be open to capturing these features. In doing so, qualitative methods are more likely to provide options to explore complex and emerging realities better and more deeply.

**Offline and Online Ethnography**

Ethnographical observation provides substantive information about how people consume media in their real lives. Refusing the quantitative approaches focused on establishing the relation between media content and users under a login or logout basis, ethnographers have tried to build up the meaning conferred by individuals and groups to the act of mediated communication (Murphy and Kraidy 2003).

Actually, most of the work usually labeled as ethnography is built upon a triangulation of qualitative methods, as part of the observational strategy is completed with oral interactions with individuals and/or groups. Offline ethnography has provided some of the most insightful examples of media audience research. For instance, Morley (1980, 1981) analyzed the BBC program *Nationwide* giving a good example of what he called “ethnography of reading”.

In the same way as it is possible to reconstruct, to understand and to explain the way people establish their personal relation with media, it has also been proven that this process can be reproduced in the online world. Digital
ethnography is a research method that departs from the background of traditional ethnography and applies all this accumulated knowledge to a new reality where most of the social and media interactions do not follow the same structure as under the mass media contexts (Dicks et al. 2005; Kozinets 2010). Online forums and social networking sites are only the most prominent spots where audiences are being investigated nowadays, but the whole range of Internet practices can become part of further analysis for the upcoming generation of digital ethnographers.

As pointed out by Murphy and Kraidy (2003), globalization is challenging ethnography as a research method, forcing scholars to take into consideration the relation between local and international forces and processes. These authors consider media ethnography a fruitful resource to link meaning and structure in the context of international communication. And this is a context where the notion of transnational audiences is a key element to frame global media processes.

**Diaries**

Until now, we have presented diverse research methods where the role of the researcher is crucial for producing the data, either as the one directly applying the techniques or designing the research instruments. However, one can also use methods where the main protagonist is the analyzed subject—even taking into consideration the fact that researchers must follow the full process as closely as they can. Diaries are records where people explain their experiences following a chronological structure. Nevertheless, diaries are not only personal documents; they can also become a useful tool to collect data during a research project. Actually, they are one of the most frequent methods for recording information and have been used since the 1930s (Jauzet 2000). The uprising of the online sphere has led to a relaunching of this traditionally handwritten resource.

The ambitious research goal of collecting a large set of data about the media experience of any individual can be approached by this kind of tool, as long as the participant respects thoroughly the researchers’ recommendation. One should look for objective information about the amount and type of media consumption performed by the diary’s author, but this cannot be the main purpose for choosing this tool, as it is also designed for collecting the experiences and the evaluations of the subject while consuming media content and technologies.

On the other hand, diaries are usually prone to mistakes, as they depend on both the responsibility and constancy of the individuals in terms of fulfilling their tasks, and they are not immune to human forgetfulness and, sometimes, biases.

Online diaries made their appearance in 1994. One can find research papers and publications in which an assessment of how diaries can help social research is performed (e.g., Chenail 2011; Findahl, Lagerstedt and
Aurelius 2011; de Laat 2008). In a context where the presence of mobile devices is growing and access to the Web is not only getting easier but also widely spread throughout the population, the chances to develop a network of potential diarists are growing. But Web technologies are also providing new solutions to some of the problems faced by this research technique, as the chances to double check what people register in their diaries, and what their true online media activity is, are higher. This should not only be framed as a researchers’ control but also as a source for interesting questions about media use. As Findahl, Lagerstedt and Aurelius (2011; see also this volume) highlight, there might be some contradictions between what users write in their diaries and what they are consuming, as sometimes they consider they are watching TV while what they are really doing is watching TV on their computer or mobile device. This kind of crossed understanding has become a necessity as a result of the consolidation of multimedia platforms and practices.

CONCLUSION

Measuring the audience has become the main objective for most commercial companies working with media industries. However, the processes of transnationalization, the cross-media landscape and changing individual media behavior have called into question the hegemony of ratings. The amount of people consuming media is no longer less relevant than getting information about how they are using content and technologies. So new questions about research methods are arising and still remain partially unanswered. The fast and still ongoing technological evolution leads to a constant renewal and improvement of the resources available for researchers, but it is also leading to a growing uncertainty about both the validity and the reliability of these methods and tools.

New resources to process and to present data are being developed, and there is an urgent need to frame them properly and to assess to what extent they can become useful for the audience research field. This chapter presented some of the current alternatives, but the growth path is evident, so this overview is far from exhaustive.

Two main examples of advice can be highlighted as future direction for audience research. First, complex media realities and social relations among media users cannot continue to be explained with monomethod strategies. There is an urgent need to integrate diverse research methods with comprehensive methodological designs in order to capture substantive data. So a better knowledge about how these methods can be used and about their singularities when they are applied to offline or online contexts must be achieved. Second, the gap between media scholars and practitioners should be reduced in order to find the strong points coming from these two often isolated research traditions: Measuring the audience is something extremely
important in understanding how media systems and individuals behave, but reaching beyond those figures should also be a common goal for any audience researcher. Bridges between academic and commercial research must be built in order to establish a dialogue between two communities sharing a thrilling and constantly transforming object of study.

NOTE

1. TV has always been in a leading position when it comes to innovation in the audience measurement area, while other mass media like radio have not enjoyed the same funding to develop a comparable system. Although technological options are available, the size of the commercial radio market has never been as big as the TV one, so the demand of precision in terms of measurement was not enough to force the industry to develop a similar system. However, companies are working hard to present a professional device to precisely measure radio audience.

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INTRODUCTION

For many, the Internet is a part of the daily life today. The Internet is used for information, entertainment and communication, and sometimes in every possible way at the same time. There are texts, pictures and music, but also videos and television. Many members of the younger generation are online constantly, updating their status on their social network sites and communicating with their friends through instant messaging. The question is whether this complex way of using the Internet must have consequences for Internet research. Are the conventional methods used in media research also suitable in studying the daily use of the Internet?

Surveys, administered to a sample of the population, are the most common method to get information about Internet behavior (Cardoso, Cheong and Cole 2009; Eurostat 2012; Livingstone et al. 2011). The questionnaire can be administered by phone, face-to-face, through the mail, or placed online for self-administration. The scope of surveys may include attitudes, beliefs and past behavior.

Another way to get to know how people use the Internet is to let them fill in a diary, where they make notes about what they are doing during the twenty-four hours of the day. This method has a long tradition in social sciences and is normally used in field studies where data is collected in situ, that is, of real persons in real situations (Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli 2003; Sieber 1973). The method has been used to measure different aspects of Internet behavior like time displacement (Robinson 2002) or usage patterns (Ishii 2004).

Both diary studies and surveys are prone to human error in answering the questions and filling in the diaries. We know that answers gathered from
these types of surveys have systematic errors due to memory problems, the difficulty of estimating time and unwillingness to answer questions regarding certain areas of Internet usage: illegal (such as file sharing), or personal (such as sites with adult content) (Selg and Findahl 2008).

A third method, without these limitations, is electronic tracking. It consists of an automatic recording of the traffic, addresses and volumes that are going in and out through an Internet connection, an IP number.

We have had the opportunity to use actual Internet traffic measurements at a household level with diaries and questionnaires answered by those who are living in these households. This gives us the possibility of triangulation (Denzin 1978), comparing the results from the three different methods. Since much social research, as well as Internet research, is founded on the use of a single research method and as such may suffer from limitations associated with that method or from the specific application of it, triangulation offers a more well-founded outcome, and the possibility to discuss the arguments for and against the different methods.

TRIANGULATION

In trigonometry and geometry, triangulation is the process of determining the location of a point by measuring angles to it from known points at either end of a fixed baseline. The point can then be fixed as the third point of a triangle with one known side and two known angles. This concept of triangulation, originating from ancient Greek mathematics, has been applied in a wide range of spheres. In navigation it is used to find the exact position of the ship, but in social sciences like in this study, triangulation is more of an “attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint” (Cohen and Manion 2000, 254).

The methodological triangulation applied in the present case is what Denzin (1978) called a “between-methods approach”, which compares three quite different methods, not three versions of the same method. The hope is to take advantage of the benefits of each method while also compensating for their weaknesses. Each method uncovers different aspects of what takes place, but neither can reveal all of it. The purpose here is to evaluate the argument for and against the different methods and to find out if it is useful to combine them. Traffic measurements, for example, are developed to measure traffic volumes in the network of the Internet, but can the method also be used to register the activities of individual Internet users? The challenge is to find the right combination of methods and then bring together the findings, weighing their cumulative evidence.

Little is found in the literature regarding triangulation combining diaries and questionnaires with measurements of actual network traffic.
There are studies where diary research has been combined with online surveys and focus groups (Vermaas 2007), and traffic measurements in combination with surveys and panel studies have been discussed (Kivi 2007). However, few studies have used triangulation, even if that is a general recommendation mentioned in the literature, when studying a behavior as complex as the use of the Internet. Greenberg et al. (2005) compared a survey with diaries and found a high correlation between the methods but also some differences, and recommended a triangulation with a third method of data collection, electronic tracking. They concluded that this has yet to be accomplished and remains a challenge to the research community.

In the following, we will first discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the three different methods. Then in the next section The Methodological Framework of the ANT Study, we will analyze the outcome of our own research in which all individuals have answered a questionnaire and filled in a diary, while at the same time their Internet traffic has been measured. We will summarize the general results and focus on the individual case of a seventeen-year-old girl. This close reading will make it easier to compare, on a very concrete and detailed level, what the different methods can tell us about the Internet use of an individual.

Survey

A questionnaire is an efficient means of collecting information from a large number of respondents in a standardized way. It can be administered by phone or at home, by mail or online. The sample can be representative of the population. Questions can be asked about daily behavior and more rare activities. Frequency and duration of media use can be measured.

A weakness of this method is that the outcome is strongly dependent on the ability and the willingness of the respondents to answer the questions— their ability to remember and estimate, for example, how often they perform different activities on the Internet and how much time they spend online during a day or an average week, and their willingness to answer sensitive questions in a truthful way. Another limitation of the survey is that all the questions are formulated beforehand by the researchers, which gives no room for exploration, flexibility and openness.

Diary

While a survey measures past behavior, a diary focuses on the present. It is about real people in their everyday lives, at a specific time, in a specific place. This is a strength of the diary. Another strength of this method is the unexpected discoveries that can be found in diaries. The researcher determines the structure of the diary and which aspects of daily life to focus on,
but the respondents fill in the content. Diaries have an exploring quality that surveys lack.

There are both time and activity diaries. The most detailed time diaries cover twenty-four hours focusing on basic activities, in some cases also including the use of the Internet; they can be given to a large sample of the population (Ishii 2004; Robinson et al. 2002; SCB 2012). But more often the sample is smaller, the time period longer and many different media activities are included (Fu, Wang and Qiu 2002; Gershuny 2002). It is a question of balance between how much the researcher wants to know and the commitment the participants are willing to give. In any case, diary studies can be designed in many different ways and conducted to investigate life in an e-society (Joey 2006).

To keep a diary over the course of a few days requires a high level of commitment from participants. There is therefore a need for detailed instructions and frequent administrative contacts (Crosbie 2006). Usually it is advisable to keep the diary simple and very focused. A problem with diaries is the respondents’ tendency to only give an answer in accordance with what is required to form a minimally satisfying answer (Sudman, Bradburn and Schwarz 1996).

**Electronic Measuring of Online Behavior**

Traffic measurements record actual network traffic, capturing all user activity without bias or human error. Depending on the equipment and methods used, a deep level of detail can be achieved. It is also possible to measure activities that are not induced by active end users such as automatic updates, or applications that are left running with no user present such as file sharing applications. Normally, traffic measurements are used for testing the usage of new technology and equipment (Kihl et al. 2010).

There are also other ways of electronic tracking that use a downloadable utility that tracks computer use, URLs visited and video consumption—for example, Nielsen’s NetSight meter. This is a system comparable to the television people meter system, with a meter connected to the TV set that measures who is watching what television channel. There are also different kinds of software running on a Web server that can be used to collect participants’ real Web use (Menchen-Trevino and Karr 2011).

One problem with traffic measurements is the enormous amount of data generated. It requires a large storage space and efficient analysis tools. The alternative is to only record special applications like video consumption and specific Web addresses. The important question here is whether the analysis and classification of traffic data can make these comparable with data from the questionnaires and diaries. Traffic measurements, used as a method to analyze and compare data, are still a method in development.
THE METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE ANT STUDY

The measurements in our study, as well as the questionnaire and the diary, were performed by Acreo National Testbed (ANT) (Acreo 2011), the goal of which is to provide an environment for testing new technology and equipment as well as a way to interact with end users. Contrary to many other experimental lab-based testbeds, ANT actually performs field studies with “real” end users. The end users are ordinary households who have agreed to act as test pilots over a year or longer. In return they are given access to services like Internet and IPTV. At the time of this study (2009), there were approximately forty active households participating. They were assured that their answers and Internet activities would be treated anonymously.

As the aim of the study was to compare and develop the three methods used in the triangulation in a very detailed and exhaustive way, the number of participants was limited to five households and fifteen individuals including men and women, younger and older people. Thus two single households and three family households were chosen from the forty households. They had all been part of the testbed for about a year and knew that sometimes their Internet activities were going to be measured and that they would have to answer some questions about their use of the Internet. Apart from that, they lived their lives as usual, and no technical installations were made in their homes, as all the measurements were made in the Internet network outside their homes (for more information about the testbed and the test pilots, see Lagerstedt et al. 2012; Larsen et al. 2007).

In addition to traffic measurements, the methodological framework of the ANT study included a Web questionnaire and a diary. The details of each method are given below.

Web Questionnaire

All test pilots were asked to answer a Web questionnaire regarding their long-term media and Internet activity/behavior in general during the last weeks and months. The questionnaire used was basically the same as the one that has been used by the World Internet Institute in their yearly study of the Internet behavior of 2,500 Swedes (Findahl 2009). There were basic questions concerning family situation, education and occupation, as well as questions about attitudes, use of traditional media, computer knowledge and Internet activity. The Internet activity questions included questions about the frequency of use of different Internet applications and how often different types of websites such as banks or newspapers are visited. Finally, the respondents were asked to estimate the total time they usually spend online at home, at work, at school and in other places.

As the questionnaire had been used earlier in several other large surveys (Findahl 2007; 2008; 2009), it was possible to compare the participants in this small study with a representative sample and establish the type of
Internet user each was. Four basic patterns have been discernable: “advanced enthusiasts”, “traditionalists”, “modernists” and the “restricted” (Findahl 2007). The modernists can be divided in “enthusiastic” modernists and just modernists (Findahl 2008).

Diary

The members of each household were asked to complete a twenty-four-hour diary logging their activities during two consecutive days, a predetermined Sunday and Monday. Each day was divided into fifteen-minute intervals. The necessary daily activities—like sleeping, working, eating—that structure the day were to be filled in in the first column, and the use of traditional media in the second column. As the focus of the study lies on the use of the Internet, the most detailed information should be about the daily Internet activities. In the diary the test pilots were asked to fill out these four columns (Figure 3.1):

1. daily activity (sleep, work/school, leisure time activities, meals, etc.);
2. media usage (TV, newspaper, radio, book, etc.);
3. Internet activity when at home (Web browsing, playing games online, visiting communities, downloading material from the Internet, etc.);
4. Web address or service/application used.

Traffic Measurements

The traffic measurements were performed using Packet Logic (PL), a commercial traffic management device used in many commercial broadband access networks all over the world (see http://proceranetworks.com). Traffic is identified based on packet content (deep packet inspection and deep flow inspection) instead of port definitions. The device can identify more than 1,000 Internet application protocols, and the signature database is continuously updated.

The identification process is connection-oriented, which means that each established connection between two hosts is matched to a certain application protocol. When a new connection is established, the identification of this connection begins. The identification algorithm searches for specific patterns, called “signatures”, in the connection. The patterns are found in the IP header and application payload. PL uses the traffic in both directions in the identification process.

PL can track and identify several hundred thousand simultaneous connections, storing statistics in a database. It records the short-time average amount of traffic in the inbound and outbound directions as well as the total traffic for all nodes in the network. The data is averaged over five-minute periods.
The Internet traffic of each household was measured during both days (Sunday and Monday) when the household completed their diaries and for a full month to get enough statistics to compare with the Web questionnaire. Statistics on visited websites were monitored for two weeks.

Although giving detailed data, the measurement setup has certain constraints. The major problem is that the traffic is per household (per IP) and not per person. As we wanted to look closer at the latter, the three family households were given two IP connections, one for the parents and one for the teenagers.

RESULTS OF THE ANT STUDY

In an earlier article (Lagerstedt et al. 2012) we have analyzed the results from all the households and compared the methods pair-wise: questionnaire-diary,
questionnaire-traffic measurements, and diary-traffic measurements. There is a high agreement between the methods on the aggregate level. People who are active users of the Internet according to the traffic measurements are also active users according to the questionnaire and the diary. And those who say in the questionnaire that they use the Internet rarely also show low Internet activity in the diary and in the traffic measurements.

There is also an agreement on a more specific level. The different activities that the respondents say that they usually do when going online can be found in the technical measurements of the Internet activities, and these activities also show up in the diaries. In most cases there is also a rather good fit between the time of Internet use measured from the traffic measurements and the users’ own estimate of the hours and minutes online.

This high level of agreement applies to the use of http websites. There seem to be more problems when it comes to streaming audio and video applications. The reason for this can be that the more passive use of streaming media as a second hand activity is more difficult to estimate but also that the questions were not formulated in a comprehensive way. Not everyone knows what streaming audio is. Supporting this conclusion is the very good fit between the traffic measurements and the estimates of those Internet users who listen to the music service Spotify. When the question is specific and tied to a single activity (e.g., listening to Spotify), it is easier to give a good estimate.

However, the questionnaire and especially the diary do not give a full picture of Internet usage. In many cases, a lot of different activities are going on at the same time. This is typical of Internet usage by teenagers and younger people. They visit social websites, communicate through instant messaging, at the same time as they listen to music and watch TV. All these activities do not show up in the diary. Behind the term “surfing”, a lot of activities can be hidden. Only traffic measurements can uncover this more complicated interplay between different activities. But the diary form can also be further elaborated to cover these more complex situations.

The traffic measurements also show that the sessions using the Internet, in several cases, seem to continue for longer time periods than marked in the diaries. This is especially true for the evening hours when perhaps other non-Internet activities are going on at the same time.

Finally, there is a more general problem. A direct comparison between traffic measurements and answers from a questionnaire and a diary can be problematic, as they do not measure exactly the same things. This lack of comparability between methods has been put forward as a critique toward the use of triangulation (Blaikie 1991). The total traffic volume that is measured exceeds the active use. There is lot of traffic going in and out of the network that is not directly induced by the user, like automatic updates and file-sharing activities that happen in the background. For the most part, this is something that the users are unaware of. It is therefore necessary to develop analysis methods that synchronize traffic measurements to diaries and questionnaires before a fair comparison can be made.
INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY: EVA

With the help of our three methods, we will look more closely at the Internet use of a seventeen-year-old girl who we will call Eva. She is in school and lives in a family with a brother (fifteen years old) and a sister (fifteen years old). Everyone in the family has his or her own computer, and all computers are connected to a wireless network with two Internet connections (IP numbers): one for the parents and one for the children. This close reading will make it easier to compare, on a very concrete and detailed level, what the different methods can tell us about the Internet use of an individual.

What Does the Questionnaire Tell Us?

Eva has her own laptop, and she is online for about twenty hours a week, which is three hours a day. Communication and entertainment dominates her use pattern. She belongs to the “enthusiastic modernists” like 25 percent of the younger generation (ages sixteen to thirty-five). This group consists of mostly young people, both men and women, very interested in the Internet and the cell phone. They are avid users, especially in the areas of communication and entertainment, but they also use the Internet’s potential to get information and check facts (Findahl 2007).

Looking more closely at the answers in the questionnaire, we can see that Eva’s use pattern is dominated by going online daily to visit her social networks, read blogs, use instant messaging, listen to music, surf the Web and send/receive emails. She estimates the time she spends emailing to fifteen minutes a day compared to 180 minutes daily devoted to instant messaging. She is a member of three online communities, among them the Swedish community Bilddagboken (the Picture Diary) and Facebook.

Eva is listening to music of her choice from Spotify every day. Spotify is a Swedish service for streaming music with a very large archive (10 million tracks). Listeners can choose the music they like and pay a small monthly fee or listen for free if they are prepared to listen to commercials.

Eva uses the Internet for other activities also, even if not so frequently. Weekly or a few days a week, she goes online to find information related to her schoolwork, hobby and special interests. Weekly she watches TV and videos online and listens to the radio. She reads online newspapers several days a week and searches for timetables and street addresses. She also looks for jokes and humoristic stories. Several times a week she shares files with others and downloads music and videos. She uses Pirate Bay or DC++, two hours per week, one to three times weekly.

A few times monthly she is checking facts, looking for information about products, looking for information about travels and making travel bookings. A few times monthly she is gaming online, reading local news and looking for jobs and for health information. She is also using the Internet to find maps and road directions.
In conclusion, from all the answers in the questionnaire it is possible to get an in-depth picture of Eva’s use pattern—not only of the everyday activities that take up most of her time online, but also a lot of other less frequent activities. As there are several thousands of other people who have also answered the questionnaire, it is possible to compare her usage pattern with others and discover that her way of using the Internet is not unique but shared by 28 percent of other young people (Findahl 2007). That means that 72 percent of people use the Internet in another way.

However, using questionnaires also raises some problems. Not all questions can be asked, as there are questions that the respondents do not want to answer (too private) or cannot answer (hard to understand, too complicated to remember or too technical). A completely different problem is the basic limitation of the questionnaire as a method—that is, that you can only get the answers that you asked for. Confirmation is more common than new discoveries and surprises, even if there is a possibility to ask open questions. This will turn up when the other methods are used.

The next method to be examined is the diary. Are the notations in the diary in agreement with the retrospective reports from the questionnaire, and what new insights can the diary method give?

What Does the Diary Tell Us?

Eva was asked, as all members of the household, to complete a twenty-four-hour diary logging her activities over two consecutive days, a Sunday and the following Monday. The results are presented below.

Sunday: After midnight Saturday night Eva is at home but still awake. She watches television. She goes to sleep at 1:00 and wakes up at 10:30 on Sunday morning. It is time for breakfast and reading the traditional printed newspaper. At the same time, she goes online and uses instant messaging to connect to her friends and visit her online social networks. Spotify is also turned on, and the music of her taste starts playing, continuously for three hours. From 12:00 to 1:00, she is surfing the Web doing a lot of different things at a time. Then she starts to clean up and tidy her room (1:00 to 3:00). During the last fifteen minutes of that period, she is visiting Facebook. She continues cleaning and listening to Spotify until dinner begins at 6:00. At 10:00 she is at home turning on her computer using instant messaging, visiting Facebook and turning on Spotify. She works on her computer until 11:00, listening to music from Spotify. Before going to bed she plays the guitar for thirty minutes. In bed she reads a book before she goes to sleep at 11:45.

Monday: Eva wakes up at 8:00. She has breakfast and reads the traditional morning newspaper; she goes to school and returns home at 12:30. After that, she visits a friend and listens to the radio all afternoon. She opens the computer at home at 4:00 for one hour, does some instant messaging, visits her community Bilddagboken and turns on the music of her choice
from Spotify. At 5:30, she leaves home to go to the city. She is home again at 9:30 and opens up her computer. She visits Facebook and starts instant messaging. She chats for one hour and at the same time listens to music from Spotify. She goes to sleep at 11:15.

We may conclude that the diary validates the questionnaire in many ways. Communication with friends through instant messaging and visiting social networks dominate the online activities of Eva. When she comes home from school and before sleeping, she goes online to update her status and interact with friends. Late Sunday morning she also has the time to do this. The fact that the diary only covers two days limits the range of online activities that can be discovered. Only the most frequent activities show up. This is also an effect of the design of the diary. The instruction could have emphasized more the importance to give more specific information about Internet activities and websites, and more space could have been given in the formula to this kind of information. Internet activities, however, are not so easy to register in a diary. Sometimes they represent the main activity, and sometimes they are in the background of some more important activity (SCB 2012).

The diary also shows the importance of the music service Spotify in the life of Eva. As soon as she opens the computer she turns on the music from Spotify, and she uses it like a music player in the setting when she is cleaning and not using the computer. Traditional media still have a role in the life of a seventeen-year-old girl. She reads the traditional morning newspaper at breakfast, listens to the radio and sometimes watches the television.

Both the questionnaire and the diary are totally dependent on the truthfulness and ability of the individual who is answering the questions. The traffic measurements, which are independent of human memory and human ability to answer questions, can serve to validate and illuminate the self-report findings.

What Do the Traffic Measurements Tell Us?

The Internet traffic of each household was measured both during a full month (May 2009) and during the days when the household completed their diaries. In the case of Eva, we are looking at the IP connection that the teenagers in the family were using. During the diary days, she was the only child at home using this IP connection.

The traffic measurements show that Eva is active online during the Saturday/Sunday night, in the middle of the Sunday around noon and then later in the afternoon at 5:00 and in the evening around 9:00. At these times, especially at night, there is a lot of traffic going in, which means streaming or downloading material from the Internet (Figure 3.2). What is measured as outgoing traffic are the girl’s own activities like sending messages, uploading a photo or updating her Facebook status.

If we compare these results with what Eva wrote down in her diary (Figure 3.2), there are some small differences—for example, concerning the time when one session started and ended. But on the whole there is a close
correspondence between the traffic measurements and the diary except for two occasions. One has to do with Sunday afternoon and the use of Spotify. Spotify can give rise to measured traffic, although the person does not need to be actively using the application. It is also sometimes unclear from the diary what platform is used when Spotify is listened to. A mismatch between the methods can here have technical reasons.

More interesting is what happened during late Saturday/Sunday night. Here the different methods give different results. In the diary Eva has written down that she is watching TV before she went to sleep around 1:00. But the traffic measurements show that she is active online. To solve this puzzle we have to look more closely at what the traffic measurements say about what was going on during the night.

The traffic measurements show that Eva is very active during the night. And as she has written in her diary, she watches television—not in the traditional way from the ordinary TV set, but online TV. Perhaps, in her perception, it is the service that matters and not the technical platform.

Also, she does not watch a program from the ordinary TV schedule. She goes to SVTPlay, the public service TV archive, and their streaming service. Between 12:10 and 1:20, she watches the television program of her choice. Before and after she visits Bilddagboken, a social network site where she has her own page.

She is evidently not alone watching television, as she is communicating with her friends. There are activities not only at her social network but also many messages to her friends during the program and especially after the program at 1:23. She is also visiting a picture archive (teliabg) and another community (live.com).
With the exception of this nightly watching of television, there are no major differences between the diary and the traffic measurements. The two methods give a similar overall picture of the seventeen-year-old girl’s use of the Internet, even if the traffic measurements reveal a more complex picture and have the ability to register simultaneous activities.

Overall, traffic measurements can give new insights into the way Internet is used. They can complement the more traditional methods when it comes to monitoring complex behavior like the simultaneous use of several applications at the same time. When Eva was watching TV in the night, she also visited a social network site and was instant messaging with friends. Traffic measurements can also show the limitations of the human ability to remember what has happened and when, not only a long time ago but also rather recently. Eva used the Internet longer, according to the traffic measurements, than she noted in the diary.

There are, however, some problems with traffic measurements. The measured traffic volume, in and out, is influenced by other factors than the users’ own activities. Automatic updating, ads, tracking visitors and collecting visitor information are going on all the time in the background. Peer-to-peer applications like BitTorrent (file sharing) and Spotify (streaming of music) give rise to traffic even if no one actively uses the application. The total traffic volume that is measured, then, sometimes exceeds the active use. It is more fruitful to look at when and for how long different applications, like Facebook or instant messaging, are used.

**CONCLUSION**

With the help of three methods, we have analyzed the way a seventeen-year-old girl uses the Internet. She has answered our questions in a questionnaire and filled in a time and activity diary, at the same time as her Internet traffic has been measured. The outcome is that the results of the different methods do not contradict but complement each other. The questionnaire can tell us Eva’s overall use of the Internet, her thoughts and attitudes about the Internet, as well as facts about her family and school life. The diary tells us how she uses the Internet in her daily life, inserted among all other daily activities. With the help of the traffic measurements, we can now conclude that these two traditional research methods do not give an incorrect, but rather an incomplete, picture of the girl’s user behavior. In this way triangulation has compensated the weakness of each single method by counterbalancing the strength of another (Denzin 1978; Rohner 1977).

There are limitations of the human memory in estimating time in a survey. But these limitations are not so severe. It does not change the overall picture. A problem with the questionnaire is that the method will produce only the answers asked for. There can be important aspects not thought of by the researcher. This can be problematic if the aim is to understand an activity that is changing all the time, such as the use of the Internet.
A strength of the survey is the possibility to gather information from a representative sample of the population. A highly standardized diary can also be administered to a large sample, but the more qualitative diary method, as used in our study, is more suitable for a smaller number of people. That can make the representativeness of the findings questionable. The history of Internet research shows that hasty conclusions have been drawn about Internet users in general from small samples of students (Kraut et al. 1998). Therefore it is advisable to try to classify the Internet usage patterns of the test persons according to typical usage patterns. In this case Eva is not representative of all young Internet users but she belongs to the “enthusiastic modernists” as 28 percent of the younger generation (ages sixteen to thirty-five) do—which means that 72 percent of the Internet users do it in other ways.

The diary is more suited than the survey to capture changing activities. Indeed, the diary shows how the Internet activities are interwoven in the daily life of people and how different activities are performed in sequences or sometimes at the same time. But the limitation is the willingness to spend a lot of time filling in the diary. The instructions have to be detailed and specific; otherwise the tendency to only give an answer in accordance with what is required to form a minimally satisfying answer will take over (Sudman, Bradburn and Schwarz 1996). And when a lot of different Internet activities proceed at the same time, the respondents may write down only the one that they consider most important.

There is thus a need to sometimes complement the traditional research methods with electronic tracking (Greenberg et al. 2005), in this case in the form of traffic measurements. This is especially true as the use of the Internet is changing, takes up more and more time, and is interwoven in the daily life of many more people. Traffic measurements, here performed with Packet Logic as a management device, are developed to monitor traffic volumes but can also, as shown above, be used to track the use of different applications. However, there is still a need of a lot of manual work to make a true comparison between the data produced through traditional research methods and those collected through traffic measurements. This shows that triangulation of three different methods is not always without problems. Triangulation demands creativity from its user, ingenuity in collecting data and insightful interpretation of data (Phillips 1971). Triangulation is not an end in itself and is not simply a fine-tuning of our research instruments (Jick 1979). Rather, it can stimulate us to better define and analyze problems in Internet research.

REFERENCES


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Part II

Bridging the Gap between the Researched and the Researcher
Participatory Design as an Innovative Approach to Research on Young Audiences

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INTRODUCTION

Media are a crucial part of everybody’s life-world. People develop individual ways of dealing with media, including interpreting media messages in the context of their daily lives and earlier experience. Traditional agents of socialization, such as family, neighborhood, school and work, are becoming less important in contemporary society. Individuals have more options available to them, and are also more self-dependent in dealing with their social environments (Fromme 2006, 8–9). Media are assuming increasing importance for young people dealing with developmental tasks (Havighurst 1981; Wegener 2007; 2008; Weiß 2001) and have become another important agent of socialization. This means that the analysis of media use must consider day-to-day life contexts related to the social environments and socio-ecological backgrounds of young people.

The ways that young people use and interpret media differ very much from “traditional” reading or viewing (Wijnen 2012). Productive and creative participation are indeed central elements in the current media environment, thereby casting doubt on traditional audience research; other approaches might afford deeper insights into the media worlds of young people. This chapter discusses the possibilities offered by implementing elements of participatory research into audience research in order to add young people’s perspective on their life-worlds to the typical outside perspective of academics, thereby learning more about how young people integrate media in their daily lives. In traditional qualitative audience research, the research instruments are designed by the researchers; interviews and observations in most cases are conducted by the researchers or their students, and their interpretation is made by scientists and is exclusive to academic discourse. A participatory research design affords the people under study the possibility to participate as co-researchers during the research process. Participatory studies are conducted as teamwork that respects the—perhaps contrasting—perspectives of the researched target group.

The chapter starts by introducing participatory research and discussing how it can be usefully integrated into empirical audience studies. Then, two
research projects with young people will be used as examples of participatory audience research. These will allow discussing some of the positive effects and the problems and difficulties implied by the direct integration of young people into the research design.

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

Lewin’s Circular Research Design: 1940s

Participatory research designs originated in Lewin’s (2010) action research approach, which he introduced in the 1940s as a reaction to the dominant methodological paradigm of experimental social psychology. Lewin argued for a new conception of research with a stronger orientation toward societal problems. In his view, research should not be conducted merely to satisfy the researcher’s interests and the current academic discourse but should focus on solving the everyday problems of the people being studied. Lewin promoted a stronger connection between research and social practice, as well as a direct integration of the research subjects—often members of societal fringe groups—into the research process.

He suggested a circular research design (see Lewin 2009, 76–88) similar to the constant comparative grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 1). In this design, the researcher starts (to use Lewin’s 2009, 79–81 terms) by “unfreezing” the specific (problematic) situation of the social group that is the object of investigation. This means that the situation, the relations, the goals and the desired changes are discussed with the target group. In this first step of integration, those people directly affected by the (social) problem being researched are supported to achieve a more distanced view of their situation. This reduces the barriers to their reflections on the situation, allowing them to analyze their personal behaviors and life-worlds, to formulate appropriate (research) questions and set specific objectives. As the second phase, this reflection leads to a learning process (named “cognitive redefinition” by Lewin) that induces a certain kind of “change” based on this deeper process of reflection. Then the main research begins with those involved in the project collecting data (mainly from interviews between peers, or participant observation in the social environment—Lewin calls this “scanning for information”). This leads to further reflection and an implicit evaluation of the research process because it forces continuous discussion and reflection related to planning the next steps in the project. As the third phase, the data are analyzed by the team, composed of both researchers and researched. This allows the identification of changes to their situations, behaviors, etc. (“stabilizing and integrating changes” and “refreezing” in Lewin’s terms). These new situations are then analyzed, and new objectives are formulated. This circular process is repeated (taking the form of an evaluation study focused on solving certain problems faced by
the target group) until those involved feel that their situation has improved and their biggest problems have been resolved.

Participatory Research from the 1970s until Today

The aim of participatory research is to emancipate socially disadvantaged people through participation in research aimed at solving social problems (Frank et al. 1998; Susman and Evered 1978, 582–603). In the 1970s, participatory action research became popular, especially in education, sociology and social work. It provoked methodological debates because methodological standards were missing or at best not clearly formulated. The risks related to inductive reasoning and a low level of intersubjective verifiability were criticized heavily (Unger, von Block and Wright 2007, 17).

Action research was never common in the field of media and communication. However, although few researchers explicitly refer to Lewin’s action research approach, various kinds of so-called practice research in which researchers and researched collaborate continue to figure in the fields of education and social work (e.g. Moser 2008). In the United States, Latin America and Africa, action research is popular and is described as participative action research (PAR) or community-based research (CBR) (Borda 2002; Reason and Bradbury 2002).

A closer look at participatory research projects might suggest that, in some cases, they are overly focused on practical and social benefits and lose sight of the projects’ theoretical foundations. Nevertheless, we would argue that research that adapts Lewin’s principles is useful for the study of the integration and acceptance of young people’s perspectives (Brown and Rodriguez 2009). Several participatory research projects with (mostly socially disadvantaged) young people (e.g., Cammarota and Romero 2009; Payne, Starks and Gibson 2009; Stovall and Delgado 2009; Yang 2009) show indeed that the integration of the target group in the research design can lead to deeper insights into the daily lives of young people, and this on three levels. First, a participatory research design means that the research questions are developed in collaboration with the target group. Thus, the first phase in Lewin’s approach (“unfreezing”) involves specification of the research question through discussions and exchanges with the young people involved—discussions that focus the research on the issues that are of real consequence in the context of the participants’ social environment. Second, a participatory research design is characterized by the active involvement of the researched people in data collection. If participants are trained in certain research methods, then, in the case of participant observation, they are able to perceive social situations from the perspective of their particular age group and to record them for further analysis. Similarly, they are enabled to conduct interviews with people of their age, who may trust them more than they would adult researchers. Third, a participatory research design includes discussion of the research results with the participants. This can
lead to new insights or explanations that affect the interpretation of the data, which is particularly important in the context of young people, since adult researchers may unconsciously be affected by the perspectives of their own generation.

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH DESIGNS AND AUDIENCE RESEARCH

Against this background, and in the context of current media developments and young people’s individual ways of using and interpreting media, we are interested in whether (a) it is possible and (b) it is useful to integrate elements of participatory research design into studies of young audiences whose media use may be very different from that displayed by older adults using the same media. While audience research can gain many benefits from implementing a participatory design, it is necessary to be cognizant of the criticisms and methodological problems related to participatory approaches and to develop ways of managing them.

A first issue concerns the societal role of audience research: Although policy recommendations and suggestions for individual target groups (especially regarding media literacy) should be based on the results of audience research, it does not (and cannot) solve societal problems. This is a major difference from traditional participatory research as explained above.

A second issue with participatory designs is the difficulty of avoiding deviations from the project objectives. The close involvement of the target group can indeed open up many different perspectives, and the challenge for the researcher is to focus them around the project objectives. Therefore, for the case studies presented below, a linear research design was chosen instead of a circular one as used in conventional participatory studies, since the former allows a stronger focus on the object of interest.

However, integrating the target group (in this case young people) means that not every step in the research process should be fixed and hierarchically determined by the researcher because this would negate the added value of integrating participatory elements into audience studies of young people. At various stages in the research process, their feedback will be essential for the research. First, as already described, at an early stage in the formulation of the study, discussions with young people will help to sharpen the focus on the research question(s), on the particular meaning of certain media products in the context of the social environment, and on the problems encountered by the individuals in the target group. Second, young people can also act as advisors during the development of the research instruments (e.g., ensuring that the questions and statements are understandable and suitable for the age group being targeted). They will focus on what really matters to them and their peer group, in relation to ways of dealing with media and media content and especially with respect to cultures of oppositional reading and usage.
We assume that this approach is superior to pretesting, which normally is based less on real feedback from the target group and more on the evaluation of the research instrument by the research team. Third, if young people are carefully prepared and receive appropriate training, they will be able to participate in the data collection through interviews with people of their own age (peer research) and in the analysis of media content. Fourth, there are benefits to be gained from discussing the researcher’s interpretation of the data and obtaining young people’s opinions and (perhaps) different views on research findings. Fifth and finally, the integration of young people during the research process means that the researchers are forced to explain every step in the project to the young people being researched, which leads to constant reflection and evaluation of the research process. Ongoing discussions with the research participants allow more comprehensive insights into their lifeworlds and media worlds and a more precise focus on the topics that matter to them than conventional audience research would have permitted.

The integration of young people into audience research can be successful only if they are well prepared for their role as “assistant researchers”. They must be valued as experts on their age group and will need to be taught the principles and methods of (audience) research. They must be fully aware of the researcher’s interests and taught how to provide feedback in order for them to become equal research team members. A participatory research design requires a detailed documentation of the research process to ensure intersubjective verifiability and thereby avoid critiques leveled at classical action research designs (see above).

EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPATORY AUDIENCE RESEARCH

In order to examine how participatory research can be integrated into audience research, we conducted two pilot studies, in Germany and Austria. The Austrian study focused on the relevance of model casting shows to the lives of young people (Wijnen 2011); the German study focused on the concept of privacy in relation to young people’s publishing of photos on social network sites (Pscheida and Trültzsch 2009). The following elements of participatory research were transferred into these two pilot research projects:

- the integration of young people as co-researchers during the whole research process;
- the specification of the research question through discussion with young people;
- the development of research instruments in collaboration with young people;
- the preparation of young people to conduct independent data collection (focus group discussion and content analysis);
- the discussion and interpretation of the results with young people.
In what follows, we describe the design and the research process of these studies in order to show how young people participated.

**Model Casting Shows**

In the Austrian study on model casting shows, young people aged fifteen to nineteen years were selected for focus group discussions and focused semi-structured interviews, by means of a screening questionnaire \((n = 276)\) that was distributed in a selection of schools (Figure 4.1). Eight focus group discussions were conducted, with a total of fifty-one participants, and ten girls and seven boys were interviewed face-to-face.

The study was designed as participatory peer research in collaboration with a class of fifteen students, aged between seventeen and eighteen years, who acted as co-researchers. Peer research means here researching people of the same age group with the same social background, who share the same challenges of everyday life and the same experiences with media. The fifteen young people were integrated into the whole research process and were trained to conduct group discussions with girls and boys of the same ages. Several workshops were held to provide them with some training in becoming co-researchers. In the first workshop they were sensitized to general questions about media socialization and audience research, through reflection on their own media use and their childhood media heroes. The second workshop focused on gender stereotypes and representations of gender in the media. The third one required the girls and boys to conduct a product analysis of the model casting show *Austria's Next Topmodel* and its website. This preparation took about one month and was incorporated in their regular school timetable.

![Figure 4.1 Design of the Study on Model Casting Shows](image-url)
The actual audience research project started with a brainstorming session to elicit questions from the young people. They were asked what they found exciting about research on young people’s use of model casting shows. All the questions raised were discussed and recorded. The discussion showed that there were two main topics of interest; the young people themselves formulated the final research questions with reference to these topics: (1) What do young people think about the ideals of beauty that are presented in model casting shows? How important is beauty in their daily lives? (2) What do young people think about the juries and the way that candidates have to fight to achieve their goals and cope with critique?

The results of the brainstorming discussions that took place among the young people (with no researcher present) coincided with the researcher’s interests and the project that had been defined originally—that is, the ideals of beauty and (neoliberal) values that are presented in model casting shows. Thus the brainstorming session served to evaluate this original focus. Central at this stage was whether and how much the topics of “beauty” and “value” mattered to young people, that is, whether such questions emerged, and whether they considered it worthwhile to research these questions. In the course of the research process the young people had input into the interview guide for the focus group discussions as well as the semi-structured face-to-face interviews, suggesting topics and questions related to ways of dealing with media content and especially model casting shows.

The focus groups were designed to enable peer group discussions because it was assumed that the young people would be more open toward people of their own age than toward adult researchers. The focus group discussions were led by pairs of young researchers who had received thorough training in interviewing techniques. An experienced researcher sat in on the focus groups to assess the quality of the resulting data. The experienced researcher documented the discussion but did not intervene. The semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted by experienced researchers. It was felt that it might be much more difficult for the young people to conduct interviews on their own than to lead a group discussion together with a schoolmate. The data analysis was done by experienced researchers, but the coding system, which was generated by induction and deduction, was discussed with the young people and modified according to their input. The results were interpreted and discussed together with the young people.

Designing this study as a participatory project was certainly more laborious and time-consuming than working with a traditional linear research design, but the important question is whether the additional value of integrating participatory elements that had been expected has turned out or not. In retrospect, integrating the young people into the research process had very positive effects but also introduced several limitations. Their feedback on the interview guide and the interpretation of the results was informative, especially regarding the adolescents’ perception of the behavior of the jury and its selection criteria of candidates. The young people made several suggestions to
include additional topics in the interview guide—for example, comparisons between model casting shows, or the similarities with the marking system in school. It seems that the school system, which is focused on performance, was a central reference for young people’s judgments of the candidates’ behavior and the situations that they have to deal with in model casting shows.

The outcome of the design of the focus groups was positive: The young people were open in their discussion and quickly forgot about the presence of the adult researcher. The topics in the interview guide that really affected or mattered to the group members (e.g., the authenticity of the candidates, performance and staying power at school, presumed expectations of society, beauty in daily life) were debated in depth as intended by the researchers. This allowed the collection of detailed information and a thorough understanding of the meaning of model casting shows for young people. Other topics (e.g., the jury’s decisions, the importance of model casting shows compared to other media content) that interested them less were discussed rather cursorily, although the researchers would have appreciated more information. However, the advantages of the more detailed information on other issues outweighed this disadvantage.

The fact that young people collaborated in the whole research process forced the researchers to explain every step of it (e.g., the sampling strategy, the development of the research instruments, the definition of the categories in the coding system) and justify their various decisions; this led to constant reflection and evaluation of the whole project.

Despite these positive experiences, this participatory project proved to be very time-consuming because of the need for training sessions and a continuous supervision of the young research partners. Also, the researcher was not in complete control and, by definition, could not intervene. This was especially problematic for the focus group discussions. While some discussions delivered a lot of interesting material, others did not because some of the young researchers were “working through” the interview guide too quickly and not giving the participants sufficient time for a proper discussion.

The fact that the young people were interviewing other participants of the same age, growing up in a similar environment in some cases led to a “going native” effect (i.e., researchers biasing the research by adopting the attitudes of the researched people). It is difficult to judge the extent of this effect. In some cases it was positive when the young people forgot their role as interviewers and “went off” the interview guide and engaged in a fruitful discussion. These discussions were not controlled from a research perspective, but they delivered much deeper insights into specific topics than would have been possible had the young people followed the interview guide to the letter. In other cases, the heavy involvement of the young interviewers had a negative effect—especially when it led to suggestive questions. The transcript of discussions provided by the researcher observing the focus group was very important, since it enabled the research team to judge the data and the way they were generated. The passages where suggestive questions were posed were excluded from further analysis.
Finally, the research project can be judged positively from the perspective of the researchers as well as the young people. The boys and girls gained insights into audience research; they also learned to reflect critically on the production of scripted reality TV formats as well as on their own media use. Thus, a side effect of the project was also a positive impact on the young people involved (here in terms of increased media literacy) as intended by classical participatory designs. The integration of young people into the research process was very successful—especially with regard to the significance of certain neoliberal values in young people's lives, such as “everybody can thrive if he or she works hard enough”, or their perceived importance of persistence, discipline and conformance, which are all promoted in model casting shows. The young people did draw connections between model casting shows and their own competitive school experiences and pointed out that they were confronted with similar values in their own lives and have even internalized them. Thus reality TV only confirms existing values and experiences. This conclusion goes against the typical critique of casting shows according to which they promote certain values that are then adopted by the young viewers.

Privacy and Social Network Sites

Another participatory research project was conducted in central Germany. Pscheida and Trützsch (2009) studied young people’s use of social network sites (SNS) and the sense of privacy in both mediated environments and real life. In order to better understand the life-worlds and subjective theories of young people and to encourage them to rethink their SNS use, a participatory model was chosen over traditional qualitative methods. Since privacy is a fluid concept, it can be assumed that it changes under different circumstances of socialization and also with regard to special media habits. A participatory design was chosen to avoid prejudices that researchers as members of an older generation might have toward young people’s privacy concepts. Participation allowed young peoples’ practical concepts of privacy to be examined by themselves and not according to concepts of changing privacy that one can find in academic discourses.

A group of twenty-six young people, aged seventeen to nineteen years, was chosen for the research to act as researchers and research subjects. The group included sixteen users of SNS and ten nonusers; most of them were female (twenty-one out of twenty-six). The young people did not know each other, but all did voluntary work in various branches of the Red Cross in Central Germany. It was through this organization that the researchers obtained contacts for building the sample, and allowed the research project to be included in the participants’ Red Cross service courses. The aim of the project was to define and discuss the subjective (individual) meaning of privacy as a cultural concept with regard to posting photos on SNS. Existing studies argue that self-presentation and communicating with friends (networking) are the central motivations for using SNS—and that both are
connected (e.g., Schmidt, Paus-Hasebrink and Hasebrink 2009). In order to benefit from the network (which is primarily to establish and maintain contacts via the network), it is necessary to provide personal information. Several studies examined the presentation of personal or private information on SNS, including self-disclosure of young users (e.g., Trepte and Reinecke 2001), but not the underlying cultural concept of privacy in its specific individual meaning. To do so, we employed semantic differentials as a central element of the participatory study. Semantic differentials are generally used to identify connotative meanings of abstract concepts (see Hofstätter 1974; Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum 1957), which makes them ideal for this project.

The first project session was a workshop on the social Web—particularly SNS—in order to expand the knowledge on these topics. This proved important because of the relatively high proportion of nonusers in the group. At the same time, the young people were introduced to the semantic differentials method, where a given photograph is evaluated gradually between two terms (oppositional pairs), such as good and bad. In order to avoid the young people using the oppositional pairs suggested by the researchers, the examples they were presented with were from other research projects on other topics/subjects that were not relevant to this study.

After training to be researchers, the young people had to create oppositional pairs to evaluate photographs—in terms of privacy management—that other young users had uploaded on SNS. The young men and women created ten oppositional pairs by themselves. In the next step these pairs were discussed together with the other participants. As a result of this group discussion, the pairs were ranked starting with the most important (from the perspective of the young people), and were consensually reduced to twenty. The most important pairs for the young people, and also the ones that provoked most discussion were as follows: intimate versus public, would show versus would not show, and interesting versus boring. It should be noted that the issue of privacy was raised immediately and connected to the question of posting intimate (e.g., beach shots) or embarrassing (e.g., drunken) photos online. Most of the oppositional pairs were discussed in relation to one’s own SNS use (uploading photographs); only “interesting” and “boring” were used to refer to others’ profiles and photos. According to the participatory design, these polar pairs were the result of young people’s own work and not introduced by the researchers, which can be seen as a benefit of the project. It can be assumed that these dimensions were important to them and may not have been ranked in the same way by researchers without similar familiarity with SNS use.

In the next phase the young people used the semantic differentials they had identified to rate nine pictures from the German SNS StudiVZ (the eyes of the subjects were blurred to maintain anonymity). These pictures were chosen by the research team in order to compose a set of pictures that were typical for the SNS profiles of young users according to the results of a prior
content analysis of 421 profiles (Pscheida and Trültzsch 2010). The members of the group filled in differentials for each of the nine photographs, and then the pictures and ratings were discussed until a consensus was reached. This revealed the arguments made in the evaluation of the photographs and the young people’s positions regarding privacy and presenting pictures online. The semantic differentials were later analyzed by the research team. No correlations emerged between the evaluations of the young people and gender, age, place of residence or education level, but surprisingly, the classifications of users and nonusers did vary a lot, as shown below. The group discussion on the semantic differentials was valuable because it revealed disagreements. The discussion of each photo started with an initial disagreement between users and nonusers but led to a compromise for the majority of the photographs.

Two examples illustrate the process and give an indication about the overall results. The first photograph showed two young women holding beer bottles, cheering in front of the photographer. While both users and nonusers rated the picture as “one can show” (in the passive meaning), but at the same time as “I would not show” (a picture like that of me), the discussion in the focus group came to the conclusion that one can show the picture (in the sense that it is appropriate to do so), since the real event took place in a public setting, which refers to a pragmatic concept of privacy. It could be argued that in the actual public setting the two women were somewhat anonymous in the crowd, and also they would not have acted in that way had they known they would be viewed by parents or teachers. Perhaps it is for this reason that the group of the nonusers emphasized the possible negative effects of the picture when applying for a job, for example.

The second example—a somewhat erotic photo of a young woman in bed, smiling—was much more controversial. Both groups and genders rated it as a “good-looking” picture, but none of them could reach an agreement on whether or not it was “possible to show” such a picture. While all nonusers and some female users expressed the opinion that the picture should not be posted, the users argued that it was appropriate and part of the woman’s image, despite its erotic connotations.

The researchers, as well as the young people, benefited from this participatory research project in several respects. On the one hand, the project gave insights into the meaning of privacy for young people in the context of their SNS usage (more than would have been allowed by traditional qualitative methods such as interviews). Since the participating young people were willing to reach a solid scientific judgment, the group discussions were indeed very productive. It transpired that young people have a distinct sense (and concept) of privacy that is not so very different from the traditional view: They manage their online presentation in order to receive gratifications from SNS use while maintaining a certain degree of privacy. This totally differs from the media coverage that often emphasizes online exhibitionism. Thanks to the fact that we used the respondents’ own criteria for semantic
differentials and organized group discussions on these, we were able to generate results that relate closely to the life-worlds of young people. Moreover, the at times controversial and emotional discussion between users and non-users were most valuable for showing similarities and differences between the privacy concepts of the two groups. An interesting outcome of the project is that privacy concerns seem to be fairly similar across the two groups (while the researchers had expected more differences).

On the other hand, the project did not only benefit to the researchers, but it also had positive impact on social practice. Through their participation in the project, the young people went into a process of rethinking of their personal concepts of privacy, their policy of uploading photos and their privacy settings on SNS. In this sense the project did also support the media literacy of the young people.

CONCLUSION

We have shown in this chapter that participatory action research designs can be fruitfully integrated into audience research. The research projects discussed above demonstrate the value of the insider views of the young people’s life-worlds for studying individual concepts, reception habits and the meaning of specific media products for children and adolescents.

Our research approach built on the strengths of participatory action research but also tried to limit its drawbacks to the least. In order to avoid the negative effects of inductivism and missing intersubjective verifiability, which have been criticized as weaknesses of traditional participatory action research, the circular design of the original approach was changed into a linear research design according to the principles of social sciences. Both the detailed documentation of the research process and the use of established qualitative methods by an experienced researcher contributed to ensure intersubjective verifiability. At the same time, the principles of participatory research—especially here the construction of the research questions and items by the young people—reduced the bias due to the fact that the researchers are members of an older generation. As cultural patterns related to media usage (such as the values and attitudes toward privacy) change over the course of time, generational differences occur. Therefore, putting children and young people in the role of researchers can help in avoiding prejudices or misinterpretation of the researchers of the older generation. Another strength of participatory audience research is that the young people’s participation in the research team leads to constant evaluation throughout the whole process, which is crucial to guarantee the standards of empirical research. In order to ensure and judge the quality of the data in participatory projects, the work of the researchers and in particular of the young people has to be documented much more precisely than in standardized projects—which again is useful to maintain intersubjective verifiability.
One of the major negative aspects of participatory projects, however, is that they are time-consuming compared to traditional research designs. For this reason, the decision to undertake participatory research must not be taken lightly, especially when the study is dependent on third-party funding. As in any qualitative research, the findings are limited in terms of their range and explanatory power, but their depth and the chance to get unbiased data from an inside perspective are a plus.

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5 Researching Audience Participation in Museums
A Multimethod and Multisite Interventionist Approach

Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Taavi Tatsi, Pille Runnel and Agnes Aljas

INTRODUCTION

On many occasions, museums are considered mediums for public messages. Although the history of the museum dates back to as early as 530 BCE (MacDonald 2006), the contemporary understanding of the museum comes from the period of the Enlightenment, during which museums became public institutions and acquired several different roles, including aspects relating to socialization and education as well as collecting, preserving and displaying collections. This changed again in the second half of the twentieth century when contemporary museums developed an increased coherence in relation to their various functionalities, represented by everyday cooperation at the organizational level and by the overlapping and co-occurring of various processes (e.g., digitalization, democratization and commercialization).

This was not the only change, for museum theorists have been investigating the notions of “ecomuseum”, “community museum” (de Varine 1998) and “dialogic museum” (Tchen 1992), and have paid attention to the changing relations between museums and communities (Karp, Kreamer and Lavine 1992) for over forty years (McLean and Pollock 2007). The increasingly social understanding of museums has shifted attention to the audiences and their relationship with the museum. To summarize, increasing attention is paid to the communicative and social aspects of museums. As the novelty of new museums (Message 2006) and new museology (Marstine 2005) has been challenged and debated, we think that instead of novelty it is more relevant to stress the emerging social and communicative aspects of museums.

Public knowledge institutions, such as museums, increasingly strive to become what van Mensch (2005) calls laboratories and meeting points for discussions and new initiatives. In other words the “sanctum-museum” needs to become a “laboratory-museum” (Mairesse 2003), respectful of the expertise of the museum staff and its experts, while at the same time open to a continuous dialogue with the outside worlds that sometimes come to visit it. However, analyzing museum audiences in this dialogical context proposes new methodological challenges. In order to work within such a
changing context, we need to reconsider and, when necessary, to develop and apply the methodology for capturing the emerging social aspects in museum communication and take into account a more dialogical context—a task, we argue, that can benefit from recent developments in media audience studies.

Increasingly, media audience studies turn their attention toward cross-media consumption (e.g., Schröder 2011), stressing that in order to understand contemporary media audiences, we should not focus on any specific media consumption but rather take a holistic and ethnographic approach to understanding audiences in their social context. At the same time, with the emergence of new technologies, participatory culture (Jenkins 2006) and audience participations (Carpentier 2011) are increasingly discussed and analyzed in media studies. Similarly, museum studies need to understand audiences beyond the classical site-visit situation and acknowledge that museum experience starts well before the visitor steps through the museum door. Equally important, the holistic approach also demands an understanding of the museum as a nonlinear communicator in a participatory situation. In many cases, museums find it difficult to venture beyond very traditional communication situations with their audiences.

Early museum audience research aimed at perfecting exhibition techniques to ensure the best possible message transfer to audiences. Similarly to media and communication studies, which have generated an extensive body of knowledge on audiences and reception, and gone beyond simplified models of communication, audience research in the museum context eventually led to the acknowledgment that ensuring the ultimate effect of the medium and an automatic transfer to a mass population is insufficient for understanding audiences. Gradually, the social context, prior experiences, group characteristics, perceptions, emotions, and visitor personal entry points have become important in researching the museum as a medium of communication (Hooper-Greenhill 1995, 4–7).

Stylianou-Lambert (2010) sums up the developments in the field of visitor studies since the 1990s, showing how this knowledge and these approaches have been taken into account in museums and museum studies and have led to a paradigm that presents the museum as an “open work that is completed by the visitor” (Stylianou-Lambert 2010, 137). However, there is also a tendency to “underestimate power issues, while romanticizing the power of audience activity, thereby ignoring issues of responsibility” (Stylianou-Lambert 2010, 141).

The aim of this chapter is to present a multimethod and multisite interventionist approach to initiate and study audience participation in museums. The chapter is inspired by a four-year research project investigating museum participation, where instead of only observing the status quo and comparing that to the theoretical possibilities on participation, we undertook initiatives to change the participatory conditions in the Estonian National Museum (ENM).
We will first review the conceptualizations of audiences and participation in the cultural, economic and political domains—three distinct but intersecting fields from the perspectives of which museums tend to consider their audiences. These conceptualizations indicate the necessity of multiple cases and multiple data collection points in order to fully understand the complex nature of participation in museums.

The methodological decision to choose an insider action research approach was grounded in the idea that at the end of the research-interventions, the staff at the museum should ideally be able to understand different aspects of museum participation. We will thus continue this chapter to discuss some of the founding methodological principles of this project—namely, the ideas borrowed from (insider) action research and the introduction of real-life experiments or interventions to investigate and change museum participation. After that, we will look at the multimethod and multisite components of these intervention projects, and at the related notions of ethnographic research, data triangulation and team-based reflection.

CONCEPTUALIZING PARTICIPATION

The recent debates on maximizing democracy and the attempts to understand participatory activities in the museum context have added another layer to the discussions on responsible, empowering and inclusive institutions (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011). These debates have also raised a set of questions about what participation is and to what extent it differs from interaction and inclusion (Carpentier 2011). As methodological innovation in this chapter is closely tied with the concept of audience participation, we consider it appropriate to briefly introduce the theoretical notion. In the context of this chapter, museum participation is seen through the lenses of museum functions and skills. This section looks at how participation is defined in the three intersecting fields of culture, economics and politics in the context of museums (this field analysis is inspired by Bourdieu 1984). Museums operate at the intersections of these three fields, which develop their own conceptualizations of the audience and hence bring to the fore different understandings of participation.

The Cultural Field

First and foremost we tend to perceive museums as cultural institutions. In this case the museum’s relationship with its audiences can be manifold, starting from the most basic function: the museum visit (i.e., attending the museum in order to receive some kind of cultural content). It is important to take increasingly into account the possibilities of a more dialogical context that museums could provide in their communication with audiences. In the context of the museum as a cultural institution, Morrone (2006, 6–7) in
UNESCO’s *Guidelines for Cultural Participation* claims that the attempt to reduce cultural participation to an active to passive scale is both difficult and unwise. Instead, he proposes a distinction between three levels of cultural participation: attending/receiving, performing/producing by amateurs, and interaction, which is considered to be a process defined by continuous feedback of flow communication between an external source and a receiving subject [...] and includes a higher level of possibility for the receiving subject to change the forms and the contents of the material received from the source. (Morrone 2006, 7)

However, Morrone’s distinction of the professional and amateur aspects of culture is limiting the understanding of cultural participation to the amateur, excluding any sorts of professional production and, more importantly, co-production between amateurs and professionals. This distinction is problematic on many levels, as it generates a number of unnecessary “grey areas” and limits the understanding within the institutions rather than on the societal level. This blinds the analysis and leaves out the dimensions of control and power exercised by the professionals over the amateurs. The field of cultural participation is by this definition exempted from the power struggles of participatory activities. This implies that in the cultural field, Morrone takes the stance that even being part of attendance and reception processes with cultural institutions means that you are a participant.

**The Economic Field**

Nevertheless, the interaction between the audience and the museum institution is not always a cultural participation *per se*. Indeed, museums are facing a continuous demand to be more interactive in several ways. In many cases, interaction is achieved through extended technological solutions seemingly supporting cultural participation, such as adding buttons, screens and multimedia to the exhibitions. In this context, participation, which in principle involves shared control between two parties, is continuously minimized (Carpentier 2011)—adding technical facilities can easily lead to deceptive interactivity, in which a person is given the sense that he or she has control over the process, whereas the control is in fact predetermined by others (by technological tools and the intentions behind them). This kind of interaction often represents the economic discourse, in which, rather than participation, the term “involvement” is used. Thus, participation in the economic field is more about attracting the public to be involved in the activities offered by the institution. Interaction here is an economic decision.

Analytically, the economic role of audience participation in the museum is still rather vague. Systematic classification of audience participation in the economic field does not exist, although the ideas of Web 2.0 have made players in the economic field to take note of the participatory possibilities.
There are definitely ongoing debates on audience participation in organizational communication and marketing, where within twenty years it has moved from product placement to customer relations and dialogue (e.g., Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne 1991).

There are a number of potential economic relations between the museum institution and its audience, although all of them are based on the understanding that the former does not care for the latter for reasons other than its purchasing power. On one end of the continuum, the relationship consists in specifying some target groups and carrying out production for them. In this scenario, the relationship with people is based on paying careful attention to customer or client needs, understanding the selected target groups carefully. On the other end of the continuum, audience involvement means co-producing through mutual cooperation and partnership. There are an increasing number of companies putting the principle of customization in practice by allowing their customers to design the products (e.g., toys, guitars, furniture, etc.), seemingly giving the decision-making power to their consumers. However, it is characteristic of participation in the economic field that giving up control is not an option for the institutions: Their ultimate aim is to maintain economic dominance and gain profits through a better understanding of the customer and through mutually beneficial partnerships.

The Political Field

Analytically, museum participation can also be positioned in the democratizing democracy framework (Giddens 1998), in which the museum is seen as a public sphere institution and participation as a political-democratically motivated participation.

As part of their role in democratizing democracy, museums as public institutions have a responsibility to not only communicate museum contents but also to facilitate participation as such. Although informing audiences is not necessarily a participatory action, museums can and often do see civic education as part of their public role. Participation, in the context of the political, can be seen as providing or sustaining information, consultations, involvement, collaboration and empowerment (IAP2 2007). According to these propositions of the International Association of Public Participation (2007), these levels have a clear hierarchical structure. While each level is perceived as valuable, fulfilling specific goals with its own specific instruments, public impact is seen to increase with each subsequent stage. The first level, informing, can be considered as the key role of museums, and thus this entry level of participation comes most naturally for the museums. Traditionally, there is also the expectation that the museum is a public institution, with the role to serve the public. Consequently, recipients alone bear responsibility for benefiting from this public service, leaving the museum with very little need to consider whether their information is accessible. The
consecutive participatory layers (e.g., consultations and involvement) are so far being mostly ignored in museums.

In this chapter it is argued that the shift to social and communicative museology demands new approaches to museum audiences. Our interventions at ENM were designed in order to understand and cope with the contradictions and synergies vested in the three aforementioned fields. This meant that the participatory initiatives designed in the framework of this study were intended to take into account the multitude of the concepts of participation in the museum field. Hence, audience participation was not only considered from the political perspective, but also economic (also marketing-related) and cultural (content-related) aspects of participation were considered. In the next section we will discuss the underlying principles of designing the interventions, and the challenges raised by such a methodological approach.

INTERVENTIONS AS METHODS TO INVESTIGATE PARTICIPATION

As previously discussed, museums in recent times have increasingly been faced with social and communicative challenges. In order to both meet and study these challenges, a research group consisting of people from the University of Tartu and from the Estonian National Museum (ENM) was set up, and most of the members were simultaneously connected to both organizations as researchers and/or PhD students, adding additional challenges in terms of finding insider/outsider balance for the interventions. The project set out to investigate museum communication in the twenty-first century information environment but also to initiate some communicative action to support the participatory potential of museum communication. Our research group has been particularly interested in considering an interventionist research project in which some of the proposed or considered changes are at the same time investigated through the research project and enacted as interventions in real-life situations. Altogether six interventions were carried out in the period of 2009–2011, with a mix of museum key questions such as the targeted museum functions and processes, the different techniques and technologies used, and the variety of audience groups targeted (see Table 5.1). The interventions ranged from storytelling to exhibition proposals, from item recommendations to replicating the actual museum items by handicraft communities. The interventions included activities like active visitors commenting museum objects, stakeholder online community representatives reinterpreting museum objects, or active audiences contributing content about their everyday life (description of one’s ordinary day). In a more structural intervention, the audiences were invited to propose and decide on ideas for a do-it-yourself exhibition. Table 5.1 provides an overview of all six intervention cases. The table only shows a small sample
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<tr>
<td>Overall aim</td>
<td>Collect stories of everyday life of Estonians on ENM 100th Anniversary.</td>
<td>Receive comments and clarifications on photo collection displayed on exhibition.</td>
<td>Receive stories and comments on permanent exhibition.</td>
<td>Hosted exhibitions invitation to general public to display their own collections or cooperation with museum collections.</td>
<td>Host museum collections proposals, voting, holding exhibitions, giving collections to museum.</td>
<td>Invite handicraft community to remake museum items either as authentic copies or inspiration items.</td>
<td>Collect stories of 2010 for future preservation.</td>
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<td>Access point: Online</td>
<td>Advertisement online, e-mail address and online form as submission sites.</td>
<td>Advertisement of exhibition, no participation possible.</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>Online submission of exhibition proposals.</td>
<td>Online submission of exhibition proposals by public vote.</td>
<td>Online submission of exhibition proposals by public vote.</td>
<td>Online submission of exhibition proposals by public vote.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access point: On site</td>
<td>Postal and hand-delivered stories.</td>
<td>Post-it notes stuck to favorite pictures worth commenting.</td>
<td>A5 papers on washing line and pegs for commenting specific aspects of the exhibition.</td>
<td>Offline submission of exhibition proposals. Offline display and evaluation of proposals. Two winning exhibitions displayed at the main museum building.</td>
<td>Onsite submission of finished works.</td>
<td>Onsite proposals of the time capsule will be sent by regular mail and inventory will be made by end of September.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statistics (example)</td>
<td>No of comments: Online</td>
<td>23 online submissions.</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>28 online proposals, 509 online votes.</td>
<td>47 people registered, 37 people completed work. Viewers of online exhibition.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No of comments: On site</td>
<td>402 on site or postal submissions.</td>
<td>80.</td>
<td>17.</td>
<td>5 onsite proposals, 55 onsite votes.</td>
<td>~10 people brought in their work and only registered later online. Viewers of selected items in museum.</td>
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<td>Commenting option not available.</td>
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<td>Impressions (example) Challenges</td>
<td>How to give feedback to participants that creates sense of relevance? Do these kinds of collection activities have to have concrete output – exhibition, publication?</td>
<td>How to sustain the comments and foster interaction? How to invite people to revisit their comments and create dialogue?</td>
<td>How to sustain the comments beyond the actual event?</td>
<td>Balancing different interests, “populist” voting, how to realize the potential of engaging new types of audiences?</td>
<td>What impact would parallel public voting had to the process? The access to the actual collections and items within the collections can be a bottleneck, as people need guidance and only a limited number of people can actually access the collections at a time.</td>
<td>Access to museum space is affected. Collections are open-access and increasingly available online. The access to the museum “prestige” and expertise of</td>
<td>How to communicate to and reach wider audiences in storytelling events if they are not with any specific output or celebratory function?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical (example) Access</td>
<td>Increased sense of relevance – your story matters, you should be “preserved” at the museum.</td>
<td>Visitor has potential access to the captions of the photos in the collections, can edit and suggest changes. However, it was not made</td>
<td>Provides only temporary access – the one-off chance to comment and tell stories. Access to other comments was there, but</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Interaction with new groups, new communities who saw the museum’s relevance.</td>
<td>Visitors could interact with the curated content as well as with each other’s capitation.</td>
<td>Visitors could interact with the curated content as well as with each other’s capitation.</td>
<td>Interaction between audiences, participants, research team and museum workers.</td>
<td>People participate gladly in interpretations of national heritage and are prepared to work for the museum in copying. Innovative engagement in openness of the interpretation process.</td>
<td>Shared decision making on heritage.</td>
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Explicit whether and how the collections would use that data. No promise was made.
of the case-study analysis framework employed to investigate the different interventions, yet it provides some flavor of the interventions inventory.

An Insider Action Research

The methodological conceptualization consists of three layers, each adding an analytical dimension to both data collection and interpretation process. The first layer is connected to the concept of action research or conducting interventions, while the second layer brings the focus to the inside of the organization. The third layer, adding mostly interpretational and analytical depth, is ethnographic research.

On the first layer, the ENM project can be considered an action research project, although the research team engaged in running the interventions was only a small group compared to the whole organization. The aim of the research project was strongly connected to generating actions that would change the nature of the participatory relationship between the museum and its audiences. Action research should be collaborative—it should involve working with the people whom you study and aim at improving the system within which your participants work. Action research means that the researcher works with practitioners rather than for them, with the aim of effecting change rather that just studying it (Bradbury-Huang 2010).

From the different branches of action research, the second layer to our approach focuses on the insider action research and means that the research and actions are initiated, carried out and analyzed by members of the organization (Coghlan and Brannick 2001). Insider action research does come from a management perspective with the clear aim to transform the organization and study the processes using multimethod data collection in order to do so. In our case, the insider element becomes the second layer of the actions carried out at ENM, as we had some outside assistance and analysis from the University of Tartu, but the core research team was also employed at the museum. The research team and the people responsible for the actions were a largely overlapping and relatively small group of people. At the same time, true to action research ideas, a series of seminars was run to introduce the ideas to other museum workers and many aspects of the interventions were debated rigorously. In combining the insider-initiated interventions with the outsider influences of university researchers, we included the elements of participatory action research. Participatory action research stresses participation even more than the original thoughts of action research (Brydon-Miller, Maguire and McIntyre 2004; McTaggart 1997). Specifically, our approach to the insider action research is characterized with the three key concepts of “pre-understanding”, “role duality” and “organizational politics”, and the possibility that the researcher is also an employee of the organization where the research takes place (Coghlan 2001). We considered it appropriate and relevant to investigate participatory interventions through this type of real-life experimentation.
As such, the insider approach, where the research team is at the same time running the experiments and investigating the results and implications for the museum, provides both advantages and disadvantages. In terms of participation, the researcher is relatively free and can shift from the position of participant to observer and vice versa. However, this shift of position can also prove to be an obstacle to role balance when the staff members are caught in “loyalty tugs, behavioural claims and identification dilemmas” (Coghlan 2003). Researchers might also run into an organization’s “undiscussables” as well as become the target of accusations of spying and self-promotion (Coghlan 2003). Coghlan argues that these difficulties are more likely to arise in the more “organistic” action research process, which values a process of inquiry that also addresses “underlying assumptions and defensive routines” (Coghlan 2003). Therefore, we decided to bring the academic output back to the museum by discussing the research, which allowed the museum professionals to challenge and also to learn from it. This is also where the series of research interventions run by our research group differs from simpler, more pragmatic, more “mechanistic” participatory action research projects. Our project not only focused on the pragmatic outcomes of clear benefit to the organization but also on “enacting a transformation of being” (Coghlan 2003), which is related to the agenda of social and communicative museology, and promotes participation within the three fields mentioned above.

As a third methodological layer of the research project, the concepts found within ethnographic research share common ground with those found within insider action research. From the principles of ethnographic studies, our research team saw the interventions as one way of creating situations that would increase the museum’s reflexivity about participatory communicative situations, as well as reflexivity over the research agenda and research processes—for example, the issues of ethics, use of technologies and role of the researchers. Moreover, members of the research team have participated in these action-led processes in double roles: as museum professionals and, from a certain point onward, as ethnographers conducting participant observation “at home”, looking closely at the impact of the interventions and taking advantage of being immersed in the culture. The project was introduced and discussed within a broader group of ENM professionals (open museum board meeting, research department internal seminars), as well as at actual implementations, during related exhibitions, and in Web-based interactions—all this in order to carry out the principles of the insider action research and foster knowledge dissemination within the organization. On top of that, roundtable debriefings were held among the involved and interested museum staff after the first data collection pilot for the storytelling intervention Give the Museum a Day in 2009 and when the interventions dealing with exhibition production through the open curatorship project Create Your Own Exhibition had finished.
These interventions could also be considered one-shot case studies (Campbell and Stanley 1973) or natural experiments (Babbie 2010). This means that the experiments were run in real-life situations where no control group or laboratory environment to control the conditions of the experiment were possible (Babbie 2010). The key concept of the experiment—i.e., providing a stimulus and exploring the consequences—remains the same; however, the effects are more difficult to evaluate in the natural experiment conditions, as it is harder to understand the causality of the event. The only possible comparison afforded by this kind of research situation is through comparing a set of related and to some extent similar repeated cases. The aim of repetitions and modifications is to provide possibilities to examine the different affordances in each experiment situation. In the context of our research, a total of six case studies were conducted with additional spinoffs that also provide to some extent comparable data.

The concepts of action research as such are primarily focused on the organization in which these actions are carried out. Our research interventions do carry a multitude of aims, and indeed, audience research is just a significant section of it. The above-mentioned three fields of participation were partially our targets, as we wanted to raise awareness of participation and its multitude of faces. On the one hand, the interventions were designed to challenge the museum, to inspire museum professionals to notice the social and communicative aspects of their institution. On the other hand, these activities have given a multitude of opportunities to study audiences, their understanding of the roles of museums in society and their conceptualizations of museum participation.

While on many occasions the research focus was on the inside (i.e., toward understanding the museum professionals’ identity processes and changing their perception of participatory and communicative museum [Tatsi 2011]), the aim still was opening the museum to the audiences and understanding them better through participatory processes. The staff members were fully aware of the fact that about a thousand visitors were “reached” by the different participatory initiatives, providing their input, joining the activities, voting for exhibitions or crafting their own version of heritage items, and that many more have been in contact with the results of these experiments by viewing, reading and interpreting the materials produced by the participants.

While insider action research is not something radically new, it is not very often applied in the context of audience studies. The benefit of this interventions initiating approach, however, is in forcing the course of the institution’s relations to its audiences in order to study these relations. The method is also very resource-consuming from the organization side, as it assumes not only willingness to open itself for research but also to take audience participation seriously to be willing to change with the course of the project.
Multimethod Approach in Data Collection

Following the principles of ethnographic research, we considered it very important to have multiple points of data collection, from the meetings setting up and designing the interventions, from the meetings discussing the interventions among the museum staff and from the actual interventions themselves. The participatory interventions conducted at ENM were different in nature—in terms of the museum functions they addressed, their reach and their influence on the participants and museum staff. To fulfill the aim of the project for each intervention, the research team has mapped the interaction design, implementation, process and outcomes. The team has also estimated the impact of the action on the museum and on participants. In order to evaluate the different elements of collected data, each category was analyzed as seen in the examples provided in Table 5.1.

Multiple data collection methods were used to collect feedback from participants, depending on the character and features of the participatory intervention. In the case of online participation, we used online questionnaires, email interviews and public polling. The researchers also investigated public fora in order to understand specific target groups’ opinions about the museum and its activities. For onsite participation, paper questionnaires, storytelling, paper-based polling, interviews with participants and observation were used. The aim of the multimethod approach was twofold. On the one hand, we were interested in collecting data on the participants’ experience with, and expectations of, museums. On the other hand, the data collection methods were aimed at collecting the participants’ impressions about the participation processes, and their motivations to participate. At the same time, the participants’ social data and background were collected in order to map the different profiles of participants.

The diverse and to a certain extent ad hoc nature of the project meant that for each intervention, the choices of which data and how to collect data were made together with the intervention design. If the particular action needed greater contributions from participants (as in the case of My Favorite Item in ENM’s Collections), interviews with participants were used in the end of the action, whereas when participation was a side effect of a visit and more aimed at interaction in the economic field (as in the case of exhibition commenting projects), observations or surveys were used. In all cases of working with the intervention data, both participants’ contributions and the reflections from the museum professionals were analyzed.

Simon (2010, 301) has stated that a lack of good evaluation of participatory projects is probably the greatest contributing factor to their slow acceptance and use in the museum field. Constant evaluation of the participatory interventions at ENM was set as one important goal of the research project. In order to systematize the data collected for each intervention, store the information and analyze it later, a single framework was used. The framework was composed of four sections: (1) a description of the intervention,
(2) statistical information, (3) the organizers’ and participants’ impressions of the project, and (4) an impact analysis (see Table 5.1). These four framework elements are presented below.

The description of each intervention included the following items: (1) the different goals of the intervention project, distinguishing between research goals, participation goals and museum goals; (2) the target group and the promotion plan; (3) the possibilities of access (online and onsite) to the intervention; and (4) the description of the intervention process itself. The description has provided important background information for later analysis in order to determine possible success or failure factors. Data was based on project leader materials and on museum staff meetings. The aim here was to store as much of the intervention-related data as possible for future repetitions but also to be able to distinguish the elements leading to success or failure.

The statistical section of the framework included information on (1) the costs of the intervention, (2) the project duration, (3) the number of participants, (4) the preparation time and staff, (5) the proposed incentives to participate, and (6) the outcomes of the participatory intervention in the form of actual products (e.g., the number of stories collected, the number of items replicated). Statistical information has provided factual data that enabled cost-benefit analyses—i.e., it has offered possibilities for the interested parties to estimate whether the cost/effort and outcome balance might be desirable. Collected data was based on project leader materials. While this data could also be seen as part of the design and implementation question, then, the first section was more impression-based and later tried to gather all statistical information possible.

When it came to analyzing the impressions of the project, we focused on (1) usability, in the sense of ease and comfort of use of the participation facilities (Nielsen 2006); (2) the participants’ behavior; (3) the participation process and the evaluation of how the participants cooperated; (4) the successes and failures of the participation management; and (5) the benefits of the intervention for the museum and for the participants. Especially important here were the constraints, focuses and obstacles imposed on participants, as well as the practical failures of the participatory process. The impression section has supported team reflexivity and internal communication. Collected data was based mostly on project leader materials, museum staff meeting materials, and interviews or other collected feedback from participants. Here the multiple data allowed the gathering of diverse viewpoints.

The impact analysis of the intervention addressed several questions: (1) Who was empowered or limited in terms of access, interaction and participation (Carpentier 2011)? (2) Who was affected—the participants, the museum professionals or the intervention facilitators? (3) What was affected—the interactions between the participants, the objects (collections, exhibitions), the processes (i.e., the working practices), or the museum
institution? Thus the analysis has attempted to pinpoint the affected aspects of the museum. For instance, the collections were affected when the outputs of the participatory interventions were actually included in the museum’s collections, and the working processes were affected when such inclusion required rethinking of the established collection practices. The impact analysis was strongly framed by the participation-theoretical context outlined above, as we attempted to be constantly aware of the different aspects of participation from the political, cultural and economic fields.

**Online and Onsite**

Different interventions added online and onsite components to the investigation. The online space was used to broaden the horizons—to include groups otherwise left out of museum activities. The interventions were advertised through online channels with the visibility of these activities being high in the museum space as well. None of the activities conducted within the framework of this project remained only online. The aim was to engage the different spaces as extensions of each other, providing information and incentive as well as the possibility of online participation, while in addition functioning as an invitation to the onsite museum space. Thus, the online space combined this invitation with inclusion in museum activities. For example, in the *Curate Your Own Exhibition* intervention, people were invited to submit their proposals both online and onsite, and the possibility of voting for the exhibition was also provided both online and onsite. Both submission and voting processes also worked as incentives to come and visit the actual museum site when the exhibition was held in the temporary exhibition room.

Although Nielsen’s (2006) framework for understanding and analyzing the usability of websites was initially designed to support people attempting to build online communities, it also supports the analysis of participatory initiatives, as practitioners can then look at the strengths and weaknesses of their activities. While Nielsen focuses mainly on issues of online engagement and usability in general, the ideas proposed, and the support provided, also suit onsite activity. Addressing issues of usability supports participation through simplifying the process for the participants. Nielsen argues that there are five key possibilities for increasing user participation in content creation: (1) making participation easier, (2) providing the possibility to edit rather than create, (3) promoting quality contributors, (4) making participation a side-effect of visiting the site, and (5) rewarding—but not over-rewarding—participants.

The participatory interventions at ENM have not always followed these recommendations, although we have managed to implement many of them, especially using online initiatives. However, in hindsight there were measures that could have been implemented better. The quality of the contributions is one of these usability aspects that could have been promoted to
greater effect, as well as the technical aspects of online voting and the editing possibilities in the *Time Capsule* intervention. Another lesson learned from contrasting the different interventions was that in some of the cases, the advertising of the participation projects could have been more effective—supposedly that would have increased the number of participants.

The ways museums use technical measures to support or ease participation have to be linked with what the museum has set as an aim for that particular participatory action. When participant numbers are sought, easing participation is very important, although at the same time this ease can become a barrier to more complex or diverse contributions. Sometimes audiences see the barriers as adding value to participatory initiatives, while at other times an expert jury or real-life exhibition may become hindrances to participation. Our multimethod data analysis of different experiments has highlighted both such occasions.

No matter if the participation is high-tech or low-tech, technology should not become a barrier in itself. In today’s world, this means replicating participatory initiatives online and onsite because some technologies are more accessible to some groups, and other technologies to other groups. In our experience, intertwining works best when engaging a diversity of groups.

**CONCLUSION**

Overall, although museum audiences are hard to capture, experiments that engage audiences in participatory activities within the museum space provide an important way in which to research audiences. The use of insider action research in museums thus enables researchers to understand the multiple faces and possibilities of participation, and also to understand the museum audiences in participatory situations. Moreover, the experiment situation, initiated in the museum through theoretical analysis and focused on the interaction between the organization and its audiences, provides grounds for participatory communication, enabling innovative approaches to audiences and bringing them closer to the museum.

The rise of social media has brought forward public expectations of increased dialogue. The different possibilities of dialogue are articulated in the cultural, political and economic domains. Online media supposedly bring audiences and institutions closer to each other by providing more (more or less controlled) opportunities and spaces for interaction. However, as the ENM project demonstrates, these expectations are also applicable to on-site communicative situations, meaning that people are not only content to participate or contribute online, but they also have aspirations to impact on the museum’s space and collections.

Our case studies were based on multiple data collections and aimed to summarize the relevant information gathered during each particular intervention. The analysis for each of the interventions, based on the single
analytical framework outlined above, enabled the comparison of otherwise fairly different actions. The same framework was used by other organizations for analyzing their participatory activities, which has given many comparison opportunities beyond the ENM project.

The interdisciplinary background of the researchers involved in this study has enabled the merger of different methodological approaches and conceptualizations of the audience. Another strength of this project is that it brings together participants with diverse interests located in the different fields discussed above. Thus, a participatory intervention can enable the targeting of specific audience groups who are willing to become engaged and support the museum in its activities. The interventions have provided the museum with feedback opportunities and possibilities to engage in dialogue. The different angles from which the museum and its audiences were interrogated provided a multitude of insights. Methodologically, the novelty of this approach is mainly down to using an insider interventionist approach in order to initiate and investigate transformations of both the audience and the institution.

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NOTE


REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION

Many countries worldwide are currently experiencing an increase in migration, which leads to a reconfiguration of societies in terms of cultural and social identities. People within nation-states are renegotiating their identities between continuity and change, between similarity and difference, with references to both the new place and to what has been left behind (de Leeuw and Rydin 2007).

The changes occurring in societies require media researchers to turn their attention to ethnic minority groups as audiences. Thus, audiences should be considered as composed of individuals with substantial cultural differences, without just dividing them along majority and minority lines. Individuals are all part of multiple (and fluid) social and cultural groups, and audiences should not be differentiated in an essentialist way. Despite the considerable research already conducted in the area of media and diasporas, which focuses in particular on the role of culture and media in the experience of diasporic lives (including of course matters of identities and belongings), several obstacles still remain to be overcome. Researchers should adopt further the idea of Beck and Sznaider (2010, 383) of “methodological cosmopolitanism”, where “dualities of the global and the local, the national and the international, us and them, have dissolved and merged together in new forms that require conceptual and empirical analysis”. Research on media and diasporas needs “to surpass old assumptions and habits that reproduce [. . .] the national as a conceptual and methodological framework” (Georgiou 2007, 26). In other words, we, as researchers, should consider ourselves as cosmopolitan. Studying audiences without considering national frameworks and without categorizing according to fixed categories such as nationality or the “us” and “them” is nonetheless a complicated task. Many challenges still exist in abandoning our national framework and in overcoming the idea of looking at ethnic minority groups in a separate way. In fact, the importance of national frameworks can hardly be ignored. Politics are still mainly a national matter, both regarding migration and media: We
are not ready yet to overcome this perspective, but we can still try to be innovative when doing research on ethnic minority audiences.

This chapter intends to contribute to this process of transition from a national majoritarian perspective to a cosmopolitan perspective, in which existing methodologies are refined and elaborated in order to adequately address the growing complexity of the object of analysis, due not only to the fragmentation of audiences in relation to different media but also to the emerging cultural specificities. The focus of this chapter is the cultural appropriateness of audience research methods. In other words, what is at stake here is the importance of elaborating a methodological design culturally adjusted to, and culturally accepted by, the ethnic minority audiences who are the object of study. Our starting point then is the nonessentialization of ethnicity. We take into account the complexity and hybridity of contemporary social categorizations and identifications, instead of considering them as given and fixed. While the nonessentialization of ethnicity has raised substantial theoretical debates (Ross and Playdon 2001), its methodological implications for audience have only been sporadically examined. Our contribution then is to reflect on how to practically implement the cosmopolitan perspective in the methodological research design itself, using an approach based on the notion of cultural appropriateness.

In order to discuss methodological challenges and innovations in qualitative research on ethnic groups as audiences, this chapter draws on actual examples from a research project on the role of media (TV, radio, press and Internet) in the construction of cultural and social identities of Kosovar immigrants in Switzerland. The research context is briefly presented in the first part of this chapter. The second part is dedicated to the definition of the unit of analysis with the related issues of variables designation and labeling. Third, the chapter reflects on sampling strategies and recruitment sources. Fourth, it considers issues of bias in data collection methods (in particular focus groups and interviews) and suggests strategies to develop the actual methodological design.

**RESEARCH CONTEXT**

The considered research project has been carried out between 2010 and 2012 in Switzerland, a diverse country in the middle of Europe, with 7.87 million permanent residents (FSO 2011). Switzerland’s peculiarity lies in its multilingualism: 63.7 percent of the population speaks German as a first language, 20.4 percent French, 6.5 percent Italian, and 0.5 percent Romansh (the first three are official languages), and 8.9 percent of the Swiss population has “another” first language (FSO 2011). This multilingualism lends itself to cultural fragmentation as well. With respect to the three main languages, Switzerland is divided in linguistic and cultural regions: the German speaking part, the French speaking part and the Italian speaking part,
as well as certain valleys in the German region in which Romansh is spoken. Switzerland is a particular case in which four different ethno-linguistic groups coexist in a single state forming a multiethnic nation.

The proportion of noncitizens in the permanent population is continuously increasing: They reached 22.4 percent of the total population in 2010. Beside two prominent groups from neighboring countries (Italians and Germans), there are considerable numbers of immigrants from Portugal, the countries of the former Yugoslavia and the Balkans, France, Turkey and Spain. The reasons for migration are varied, but a prominent role is played by work. Moreover, over the last decade, more than 40,000 people per year have become Swiss citizens through naturalization and now appear in statistics as Swiss. Therefore, people with a migratory background living in Switzerland constitute more than 22.4 percent of the permanent residents. Other data help us to see the context: 26.4 percent of permanent residents in Switzerland were born elsewhere and later migrated to Switzerland; two thirds of them hold a passport from another country. Among those born in Switzerland (73.6 percent of the permanent residents), 6.4 percent hold a passport from another country, which means they are second- or third-generation noncitizens (FSO 2011).

The internal partitioning and multilingualism of Switzerland are reflected in its media system, which is strongly linked to the languages and hence highly fragmented. This fragmentation occurs, for instance, in the public service radio and television company SRG SSR, divided into regional Enterprise Units, which work separately in the four different languages and produce different content. Similarly, private broadcasters and print media operate in reference to their local and regional contexts, in one of the Swiss national languages.

Within this context, our research project focused on the Albanian-speaking community from Kosovo and on the role of media in the construction of cultural and social identities. Using a qualitative approach (individual interviews and focus groups), the project analyzed the characteristics and specificities of media consumption by Kosovars in Switzerland, as well as the role of the media diet in the construction of social and cultural identities. In this respect, we were interested in studying, on the one hand, how immigrants’ media use influences identification processes, that is, a sense of belonging to one or more social groups, and, on the other hand, how exposure to different cultural media products affects the cultural identities of individuals. The experience gained from this research project allows us to reflect on the methodological challenges that we have encountered, and to discuss the virtues and drawbacks of qualitative research strategies and designs to study ethnic minority audiences. Even if the future of media and diaspora studies seems to be cosmopolitan and embracing cross-national perspectives, our experience allows us to state that a national research perspective on ethnic minority groups as audiences is still relevant and feasible, as long as proper methodologies and research strategies are adopted.
Defining the Unit of Analysis

Interest in minorities in general and in migrant groups in particular is rising throughout the social sciences. As is usually the case when different scientific disciplines address the same object of study, the terminology becomes unstable, and polysemy grows, creating ambiguity even in the very definition of basic concepts (Fenton 1999; Jenkins 1997). In addition to that, more often than not, the relevant disciplines or approaches do not connect to each other, as they tend to advance in parallel instead of dialoguing. To cite just one example, May (1999) notes that the debates on ethnicity and nationality are often conducted in isolation from one another.

It is important to acknowledge the plethora of different discourses that populate the social sciences and thus recognize the need to clarify the underlying ideas concerning our object of study. In audience studies concerned with ethnic groups, the definition of “ethnicity” is a central matter (e.g., Edwards 2001; Lind 2004), which carries important consequences at both epistemological and methodological levels. Relying on the classic distinction—which characterized much of the social sciences—between national majority and migrant ethnic minority implies some preconceptions about ethnicity, which is seen as a stable, externally given social bound that has continuity with the past. Even outside of the essentialist or perennialist approaches, ethnic groups are too often considered as consistent groups with a unique culture and a shared identity. Harindranath (2005), for example, argues that in recent years, audience research carries a conception of ethnicity that is extremely problematic both on epistemological and political grounds. Moreover, much of the recent studies tend to assume an essentialist explanatory framework by reducing audience members to their ethnic identity only and employing a reductionist definition of cultural differences (Harindranath 2003). To be more specific, some of the more common problems that can be observed in the research on ethnic groups concern:

- the tendency to focus on processes at the group level, without paying proper attention to the individual level, thus reifying ethnic groups, seeing them as stable and homogeneous entities, and overemphasizing structure over agency;
- the confusion between the ontological and deontological levels, by putting a prominent emphasis on the normative dimension, which is often indistinct from the analytical one;
- the propensity to assume the givenness of ethnic categorizations without questioning them and confronting possible discrepancies between self-identifications to a category and categorizations done by others; and, finally,
- the tendency to aggregate culture and identity along ethnic lines.
These debates reflect the need to find out new ways to study ethnicity and other sources of minority identification without essentializing them as given and fixed, but conversely taking into account the complexity and hybridity of contemporary social categorizations and identifications. Although the theoretical discussions over the need to avoid an essentialist definition of ethnicity have received attention from several scholars (Ross and Playdon 2001), their methodological translation into empirical research remains problematic.

In our own research, we acknowledged that ethnicity is a subjective sense of belonging which, as Weber (1978) notes, is expressed in the idea (and not necessarily the fact) of a shared culture, history or phenotypical similarity, whose social relevance depends on the context that defines its salience. Moreover, in accordance with Wimmer (2009), among others, the definition of ethnicity employed in our study considered ethnic groups as the result of a reversible process of definition of boundaries, instead of a given and fixed identification. The social actors themselves defined the elements that were salient and relevant in order to outline those boundaries, which therefore resulted from the actions of the actors both from the in-group and the out-group. As a consequence, a central aspect of our observation was constituted by interactions, both face-to-face and mediated. The ethnic groups were not defined statically; instead, the belongings were open for negotiation and transformation. In practical terms, we did not choose an ethnic group as our unit of analysis and decided to study individuals with origins from a particular country (i.e., Kosovo), living on a defined territory, namely Switzerland.¹

The need to avoid using a reified definition of ethnicity (or even nationality) as a category for the definition of the unit of analysis is illustrated by the fact that the category “Kosovar”, which we assumed as being the central one in our research, was not considered prominent by the social actors. They challenged the labeling imposed by the majority group, and preferred a definition of ethnicity larger than their national borders. Indeed, the label “Kosovar”, which is widely used by media institutions, politicians and the Swiss population as a label for an ethnic community, was strongly rejected by the members of the community themselves. They did not recognize themselves under this label, but rather considered themselves ethnically to be united under ethno-linguistic lines instead of nationality. They referred to themselves as Albanians, an identification they share with all Albanian speakers regardless of their passport. In our research, we used the term “Kosovar” based on nationality, but the ambiguity in the use of the term was strongly contested. For example, questions about the “Kosovar community” made little sense for many interviewees, who argued that they never think of themselves as members of such a community, but instead of a larger, supranational Albanian community.
Qualitative research on audiences tends to work with small-size but varied samples. Yet the boundaries of our sample were hard to define a priori. For this reason, we have elected to proceed with a purposive sampling (see e.g., Flick 2005) in order to get a sample as varied as possible, considering a small set of variables. “Many qualitative researchers employ [...] purposive, and not random, sampling methods. They seek out groups, settings, and individuals where (and for whom) the processes being studied are most likely to occur” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, 202). The variables that are not included in the purposive sampling are used as confounding variables. Their weight and influence is accounted for in the analysis through stratification.

Once the characteristics of the sample have been defined but before the actual sampling can be carried out, a recruitment phase is necessary. The snowball method usually offers a valuable solution to the researcher who needs to have access to potential interviewees: A person gives you the contact of another one, who puts you in contact with another, and so on. This technique “allows you to tap into kinship and friendship networks, which may be part of what you are studying” (Bertrand and Hughes 2005, 68), and more importantly, it helps in creating a list of people among whom to select persons matching the criteria defined for the purposive sampling. The main limit of this process, however, is the risk of homogeneity in the respondents contacted through the snowball procedure.

In order to avoid this problem and to create a varied and relevant sample based on selected variables, we initially contacted a number of informants with Kosovar origins or linked to the Kosovar community in Switzerland, using different channels: schools and universities (where we searched for both Albanian-speaking students and their relatives), ethnic associations, cultural centers, religious associations and word of mouth. Each informant provided a number of contacts with persons permanently living in Switzerland with a residence permit or Swiss citizenship. From the list of people with Kosovar origins thus obtained, a selection was made according to the variables defined for the purposive sampling: gender (half female and half male); generation (half first generation and half second generation; among the first generation, people belonging to different waves of migration); skilled and less skilled workers. These variables are relevant in relation to this specific community. Concerning the generation variable, it must be noted that the Albanian-speaking Kosovar community is a considerably heterogeneous group, consisting of different categories of immigrants resulting from different inflows over the past thirty to forty years.²

The heterogeneity sustained by the various migratory flows is interesting because people have different levels of attachment to the community and to their country of origin, as they have arrived at different times and have undergone different phases of acculturation. As such, this heterogeneous sample offered the possibility to compare the patterns of media use among
Kosovar immigrants and their potential impact on identity development, identifying different behaviors and their defining factors. In this respect, age, education and linguistic skills, migration motives, socio-economic status, legal status, and religion, were considered as confounding variables, therefore supporting the data analysis. Moreover, apart from the quantitatively important presence of Albanian-speaking Kosovars in Switzerland as a whole, they are also present in the three main Swiss linguistic regions, which allowed analyzing differences in media use by Kosovars living in the German, French and Italian speaking areas.

**DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND ISSUES OF BIAS**

When researching ethnic minority groups as audiences, choosing and designing the data collection methods necessitate the consideration of several aspects usually not prominent when studying audiences from a majority group. The researchers are confronted with several problems, both on the organizational level and as regards more practical issues such as translation and cross-cultural comparisons (Egan and Barker 2006), as discussed in detail in the next paragraphs.

Arguing in favor of the qualitative approach to deepen our understanding of media-related practices, as well as of the impact of the media (Gunter 2000), we focus on the uses of individual in-depth interviews as a tool for researching ethnic minority audiences. Interviews allow collecting narrative information by directly talking with the persons to be studied and also allow the researcher to better adapt the methodological tool to the interviewees. The interviews can cover quite a broad variety of interrelated topics, and they give a depth of information not only on the topic selected by the researcher but also on new and unanticipated topics that emerge during the interview. Using in-depth interviews in audience research does not represent a novelty in itself, but interviews require heightened consideration and planning when dealing with ethnic minority groups.

**Cultural Sensitivity**

A first challenge in doing research on ethnic minority groups is that of cultural sensitivity (Dhoest et al. 2012). The members of a majority group often tend to see their in-group as heterogeneous and complex but focus on similarities and ignore differences when it comes to “the others”. To avoid misunderstanding and distortion of the results, the research planning and sensitivity on the part of the researcher are essential, in particular if he or she is studying a migrant community without being part of it. In the case of the Kosovars project, originally planned by non-Kosovar researchers, it was therefore necessary to consider the diversity within the migrant community itself, and not only the differences with the researchers’ own Swiss
community. Taking into account this diversity in the research design itself was quite a challenge. In addition to the deep preparatory work necessary to get a high degree of knowledge about this community, a double strategy was adopted. On the one hand, the research team was enlarged to include a Kosovar researcher. On the other hand, we introduced a preliminary research phase. Aware of a multitude of elements that could negatively affect the relation between the interviewer and the interviewee, we organized preliminary focus groups—i.e., before proceeding with the main data collection—with Kosovar key informants in order to acquire additional knowledge on the matters and questions that could be considered sensitive by the Kosovar community. These focus groups were conducted with Kosovars who had lived in Switzerland for a considerable amount of time, with deep insider knowledge of both the Kosovar and Swiss communities. We discussed the main topics we wished to investigate, the tools we planned to use, and the “sensitive” issues we needed to address.

The focus groups proved to be a positive choice, since they provided essential information with regard to how to conduct the interviews. In particular, they indicated that the issues of gender and language should be considered very carefully. With regard to older people, two key lessons learned from the focus groups are indeed that the interviewer and the interviewee should preferably be of the same gender so as to achieve a high degree of confidence, and that it would be better for the interview to be conducted in Albanian, not only because the older individuals are not always fluent in one of the Swiss languages but also in order to increase trust. Moreover, the focus groups highlighted some of the cultural traits of the Kosovar community, such as the tendency to not respond directly to questions—which of course is fundamental to know before conducting interviews.

Language of the Interview

Language is one of those practical challenges raised by minority audience research, since understanding, speaking and sharing the language of respondents are preconditions to conducting and interpreting interviews. Language is a crucial tool not only for the communication between the interviewer and the interviewee but also for the analysis and the presentation of research results.

Which language is it better to use when conducting interviews with people being part of an ethnic minority group? There are several possible scenarios: Is the researcher part of the group? Does he or she know the language of the minority? Or is he or she part of the majority and not able to speak the language of the studied group? Is the research team mixed? Do people in the ethnic minority group have a sufficient grasp of the researcher’s language? These are only some of the questions that arise when planning interviews with ethnic minority groups. In the context of Switzerland, a multilingual country, the matter of language acquires a great complexity, especially in the
As Ogan (2007) points out, it is important to speak the native language of the interviewees. At the same time, when dealing with ethnic minority groups as audiences, it also is equally important to consider the level of knowledge of the host country’s language(s), since people can be part of the audience of national and regional media. We thus argue in favor of a mixed use of languages, as in the case of the Kosovar project where four languages were used: German, French, Italian and Albanian. Depending on the interviewees’ place of residence in Switzerland, we conducted the interviews in one of the Swiss national languages if the interviewees were sufficiently fluent—this was the case for most of the second-generation migrants. For those with difficulties in expressing themselves fluently, as was the case for almost all of the migrants of the first generation, the interviews were conducted in Albanian.

The use of four languages implied considerable problems in managing the research work in terms of: (1) translating all the preparatory materials into four languages; (2) contacting people and conducting interviews in four languages; and (3) translating the interview transcripts into the language(s) understandable by all the members of the research team. Therefore, we were confronted with practical issues, such as the recruitment of researchers fluent in both Albanian and (at least) one Swiss national language, and with conceptual issues, such as the risk of losing the meaning of the interviews because of their translation in another language. In order to keep this risk to a minimum, only the interviews in Albanian were translated. This task was carried out by professionals with a deep knowledge of both the languages and the salient cultural elements. The translation was later reviewed by the Albanian member of the research team in order to cross-check appropriateness and avoid inaccuracies.

**Location of the Interview**

Another important element to consider when researching ethnic minority audiences is location—specifically where the interview takes place. Many of the studies on media and migrants conducted in the recent decades have the shape of media ethnography (i.e., consist in visiting homes, looking at the domestic uses of media and interviewing people in their houses). Accessing the home and the “domestic life” of the interviewees grants the researcher the opportunity of seeing what the home looks like and to what extent it presents the traits of a community. In relation to media, the researcher can also have the chance to see which media are “appropriated”, how they are displayed (“objectification”), and—even if it is a single short visit—which media are “incorporated” (cf. the domestication approach, e.g., Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1992). Research conducted in the area of media consumption among diasporic groups was built upon the qualitative tradition of audience studies, which considers ethnographic research as “still probably the most successful
methodology for studying and understanding what people actually do with the media, how they actually live their lives, what interaction (or refusal to interact) with others actually consists of” (Georgiou 2007, 27).

Even though our research on Kosovar migrants did not aim at analyzing domestic viewing practices, such as in ethnographic research on television audiences (e.g., Lull 1990; Morley 1986; Morley and Silverstone 1990), we did count on the contributions of this approach, and more generally of qualitative audience research, to the studies of migrants’ use of media in relation to identity and belonging (e.g., Elias and Lemish 2008; Georgiou 2005, 2006; Gilliespie 1995; Ogan 2001).

But there is another side of the coin. In some cases, moving away from the sphere of the home may give more space for frank and confidential discussions, especially on themes that are potentially sensitive in relation to relatives and family (Banaji 2005). This has been observed with regard to young teenagers (Nikunen 2008, 153), and was also relevant to our research project, especially to second-generation females and women in general.

Which option would be best? We argue that preferably both options should be offered to the interviewee, that he or she should be given the choice. In our research project on Kosovar immigrants, each interviewee was proposed to be visited at home or to suggest a place where he or she wished to meet. For those living in the area, we proposed a university room as an option. The strategy was successful. We accommodated the needs and desires of the interviewees; we were able to collect relevant data about domestic spaces and available media; and, at the same time, we avoided many “controlled” interviews such as in the following two examples.

Example 1: F., first generation, female, thirty-three years old. The interview was conducted at home, where F. lives with her husband and their children. The husband requested to join the interview, and he could not resist the urge to interfere by suggesting answers.

\begin{verbatim}
INTERVIEWER: Is there something you would like to improve in your life? You know. . . . A wish you would have? Compared to your present life?
INTERVIEWEE: Ummm . . . I do not know what. . . .
HUSBAND: Work. . . . You wanted to work.
INTERVIEWEE: Yes, work. . . . I wanted to work.
HUSBAND: Yes, but on the other hand, it complicates things a lot with the kids. . . .
\end{verbatim}

Example 2: M., first generation, female, thirty-two years old. The interview was conducted in M.’s husband’s office, where M. occasionally goes to help her husband. She proposed the place as a good location for the interview. The husband was there but in another room. He occasionally entered the room where we were interviewing his wife, sometimes offering something to drink, sometimes looking for something. It was interesting to observe that
at each time her husband entered the room, M. stopped talking and waited until he was out of the room before continuing.

These two examples show that the context of the interview itself represents an element of substantive content and not just a formal issue. In other words, the context of the interview allows identity performances that are not the same as in other circumstances. This kind of data is hard to interpret. In the case of F., it appeared that she did not want to say in front of her husband that she wanted to work. This may be because he wanted her to take care of their children. Or it may be that the husband wanted the wife to find a job, and she did not want to do so because of the children. Or perhaps, if the husband had not intervened, the interviewee would have mentioned something else as a desire for change. And why did M. stopped talking when her husband appeared? Was she afraid of something? Of course it is hard to answer these questions except through other interviews. Yet these examples confirm that it is wise to conduct interviews in various locations, thereby offering a variety of contexts and encouraging diverse discourses and identity performances. Conducting part of the interviews within the home and part of them outside limits the risk of “controlled interviews” and at the same time provides the chance for gaining insights from visiting homes.

The Role of the Interviewer

A fourth challenge encountered in doing research on ethnic minority audiences, and in particular in using qualitative interviews as a research tool, concerns the role of the interviewer (Corbetta 1999, 425–427). We argue that ethnic belonging is subjectively constructed by the actors themselves in context. In this sense, we relate the issue of bias to the influence of the interviewer, since we do believe that by imposing his or her conception of the interviewee’s ethnicity, the researcher can distort the results.

It is difficult to decide whether the interview should be conducted with an interviewer of the same origin, with the required language skills, or not. As discussed by Rubin and Rubin (2005, 86–87), some scholars consider the outsider position as a way to produce better results, while other scholars favor the opposing approach. As d’Haenens, Gezduci and Koeman (2008: 139) point out, however, both methods have advantages and disadvantages, and it is hard to draw a best practice from the literature.

It is known that in in-depth interviews the interviewer and the interviewee tend to consider themselves as “peers” or “companions” (Reason and Rowan 1981, 205). Yet in establishing a relation with the interviewees, the interviewer has to consider the boundary between being an outsider or an insider. This represents a decision to be taken a priori, with both positive and negative implications. Rubin and Rubin (2005, 87–88) argue that “being viewed as an outsider is not necessarily bad for the research because interviewing across class, gender, or ethnic barriers produces better results in some areas than when the backgrounds of interviewer and interviewee...
are matched”. In the Kosovar project, where interviews were conducted both by insider and outsider interviewers, some respondents established an opposition between “you” (as members of the majority) and “us” (as members of the minority) when addressed by a Swiss national-language speaker. In some cases, this situation allowed greater freedom of expression by the interviewees. This was the case for V., first generation, female, thirty years old, married to an Italian citizen, who clearly expressed her “distance” from the Kosovar community and her indifference to having a Kosovar network. She explained: “I don’t like them [the Kosovars]. Personally, I don’t like them because they lie a lot. . . . I know them! They seem nice but then . . . they are not!” Throughout the interview, V. repeatedly expressed her hostility to the Kosovar community and emphasized that she had cut off all ties apart from those to close relatives living in Switzerland. The Swiss interviewer noted that V.’s openness in criticizing the Kosovar community was made possible by the interviewer’s outsider status. At the same time, there might also be the risk that, when interviewed by members of the majority, the interviewees, since coming from the stigmatized group of “Kosovar immigrants”, would seek to give answers that were politically correct and would shed a positive light on their community.

By contrast, “locating yourself in the social space that the interviewees know and can control may be helpful” (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 87) and allows the interviewer to avoid misunderstanding the performance element of culture. In the Kosovar project, the respondents often considered Albanian-speaking interviewers as members of their own group and expected them to have shared similar experiences. In doing so, they sometimes had a tendency to take things for granted without making them explicit. Thus, to avoid a loss of information, the interviewer must be careful to ask the interviewee for clarification and details. Yet the insider approach offered several advantages:

- Thanks to linguistic proficiency, the interviewees of first generation were more comfortable in participating in an interview in Albanian.
- Thanks to a high degree of confidence between the interviewer and the interviewee, the latter expressed their feelings more freely and narrated experiences in a richest way.
- The cultural common ground allowed for avoiding critical incidents and misunderstandings—for example, on the level of nonverbal communication.

To handle the insider-outsider matter and to face the advantages and the disadvantages discussed above, we adopted a mixed position, building a research team that combined researchers and interviewers who were part of different groups (Albanian Kosovars and Swiss). Therefore, in order to balance the risk, the first half of the interviews were conducted together by a Kosovar and a Swiss researcher. The remaining interviews were conducted either by a Kosovar researcher (insider) or by a Swiss researcher (outsider).
At a later time, the mixed research team conjunctly analyzed the data and discussed different interpretations. This process allowed reducing the risk of a monodimensional point of view conditioned by the preconceptions of the researcher.

The Interview’s Structure

In-depth interviews are used to reach an in-depth, rather than a broad, understanding, and they are characterized by a flexible design that allows the researcher to acquire as much information as possible from all respondents. When dealing with interviewees who are part of an ethnic minority group, the researcher must maintain the flexibility but also structure and organize the questions without being suggestive. The wording and the order of the questions have an influence in the conduct of the interview (Fontana and Frey 2005). In particular, the interviewer must avoid defining the interviewee from the outset as a “member of an ethnic group” and thus enclosing him or her within this category, precluding possibilities for alternative self-categorizations. The researcher should give the interviewee the possibility to determine a self-definition of his or her own identity, without being suggestive. In our particular case, we took as a point of departure a self-definition of each interviewee’s perceived identity, free from any categorization or suggestion—for example, by starting with a general question (e.g., “Could you introduce yourself, telling us the first thing that comes to mind?”) and continuing with the “twenty statements test”, where the interviewee is asked to complete the sentence “I am . . .” twenty times. This is a simple technique commonly used to assess an individual’s sense of self. This test is based on the assumption that each individual has multiple selves that can be elicited by self-reporting. We then questioned other forms of identification, by asking the interviewees how they felt in relation to the different social groups they are part of, whether professional, national, ethnic or otherwise, always by situating those senses of belonging within specific contexts (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Tajfel 1982). This way, the researcher can understand the role of ethnic belonging, as well as of other forms of identification, in the interviewees’ definition of the self in context. It is the combination of several interviewing techniques, such as the free introduction in the form a brief life-history, the twenty statements test and additional prearranged questions pertaining to the sense of belonging to specific groups that defines the peculiarity and efficiency of this interview structure.

CONCLUSION

Researching ethnic minority groups as audiences implies the consideration of several methodological challenges not present in research on “traditional” national audiences, as well as the development of appropriate strategies. Besides the strengths and weaknesses of methodology, the most
important thing to consider in doing research on ethnic minority groups as audiences is reflecting on the definition of the concept of ethnicity and the dichotomy of majority and minority. As discussed in the chapter, many of the challenges encountered in this kind of research are related to the fact that “we” as a majority tend to focus our attention on the researched as being part of a minority group, and only consider them as members of this group. In a perspective similar to the traditional distinction, common in anthropological research, between emic and etic approaches (see Harris 1976), research in the field of ethnic audiences in general and minority audiences in particular is confronted with problems concerning the position of the researcher as well as the use of analytical categories and labels. As the examples from our research project have shown, this is not an insurmountable difficulty, but it is fundamental to be aware of, and come to terms with, the issues it presents not only theoretically but also in regard to the methodological design itself.

This chapter has discussed several issues (e.g., from sampling strategies to recruitment, from the role of the interviewer to the interview’s structure). The overarching topic that encompasses all these issues is the methodological principle of cultural appropriateness, which means elaborating a methodological design that is culturally adjusted and culturally accepted by the ethnic minority members under study. When researching ethnic minority groups, it is necessary to develop sensitivity to other cultures, which consists in being aware of the specificities of the other ethnic groups as well as of the multiple senses of belongings upon which an individual can draw. This allows researchers to avoid imposing roles and interpretations upon the groups under study, instead negotiating them and recognizing the agency of the object of study, which is after all composed of individuals.

In this chapter we have set forth our research experience with Kosovars in Switzerland with the aim of reflecting on methodological issues encountered in doing audience research on ethnic minority groups. We understand this work as being in parallel with what has been carried out by Ogan (2007) in a research article on Turkish migrants in Amsterdam, where she shares her personal experience in tackling particular methodological problems in the field and invites other researchers to do the same. We strongly agree with Ogan’s thoughts and with her paper’s final statement: “[T]alking more about the issues we face with the research methodologies we select would help us do better field work and contribute more significantly to the knowledge we have about ethnic minorities” (Ogan, 2007, 271).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

1. However, it must be noted that, for practical reasons of linguistic understanding and translation, the sample was limited to people who could speak Albanian. About 92 percent of the Kosovar population speaks Albanian, which is the main official language; in addition, Serbian, Turkish, Gorani and other Serbo-Croatian language speakers can be found. However, their presence in Switzerland is extremely limited.

2. Based on the time of arrival in Switzerland and migration motives, four categories of Albanian speaking Kosovar immigrants in Switzerland can be distinguished (labor migrants, family members for family reunification, political refugees and war refugees); for further details and extended discussions, see e.g., Aarburg (2002), Burri-Sharani et al. (2010), Gross (2006), and Leuenberger and Maillard (1999). A fifth type of Kosovars living in Switzerland must be added to the list: the second generation Kosovars, mainly sons and daughters of Kosovars who migrated to Switzerland in the past.

REFERENCES


Part III

Studying Online Social Networks
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7 Exploring the Potential of Creative Research for the Study of Imagined Audiences
A Case Study of Estonian Students’ Sketches on Typical Facebook Users

Andra Siibak and Maria Murumaa-Mengel

INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, researchers have shown growing interest in making use of new creative methods (Gauntlett 2007) in social research. According to Buckingham (2009, 633) such an interest in creative approaches and hence, “a broader move towards ‘participatory’ research methods” has been apparent across a wide range of disciplines (e.g., sociology, psychology, social policy, education and health), and is especially popular while doing research involving children and young people. Creative approaches have also been actively used in media studies, as numerous researchers have asked children and young people to engage in some creative projects either by making drawings (Lealand and Zanker 2006), shooting videos (Gauntlett 1997), making scrapbooks that combine images and texts (Bragg and Buckingham 2008) or creating collages (Awan 2007) so as to “generate insights which would most likely not have emerged through directed conversation” (Gauntlett 2011, 4). Several researchers (e.g., Perkel and Yardi 2006) have also made use of photo or video elicitation in which creative (visual) material produced either by the participants or the researcher has been used as a basis for carrying out interviews.

Creative research approaches have been deployed to study a wide array of issues. For example, young people’s understandings of computers and related technologies have been studied through children’s drawings (Denham 1993; Levin and Barry 1997), photo-elicitation has been incorporated to analyze online photo sharing practices (Ames and Naaman 2007; van House 2009), etc. To our knowledge, however, creative research methods have not yet been used for studying young people’s perceptions about imagined audiences in social media.

In the context where many researchers have been noted to feel the challenge in applying empirical methods in trying to map the new media audiences (Livingstone 1999), we decided to explore the potential of new
creative research methods for studying such a phenomenon. Furthermore, we aimed at studying the imagined audiences as the issue of the “audience as presumed, imagined or mythologized” has been suggested to play a key, although often unacknowledged, role in the discourses surrounding new media (Livingstone 1999, 63). The debate about “new audiences” has been particularly heated in the context of various social media environments where the users often lack information about their audience and thus “it is often difficult to determine how to behave, let alone to make adjustments based on assessing reactions” (boyd 2008, 36). To complicate things even more, the boundaries between the sender and the receiver are blurred (Napoli 2008), and changes in author–text–audience relationship are evident, as people, previously mere passive observers, have transformed in these environments into creative and active participants (Livingstone 2003). In the absence of clear understanding of one’s audience, participants imagine their audience based on cues they get from the environment (Marwick and boyd 2011). However, these cues could be misread, missed, forgotten or exaggerated, and often the sender perceives only a certain small part of the audience as a receiver of the message, or “imagined audience” (boyd 2010; Murumaa and Siibak 2012).

Taking the above-mentioned context into consideration, the aim of the present chapter is to explore the potential of creative research methods for studying imagined audiences in social media. In the first part of the chapter, we will give a short general overview of the approach known as creative methods. The chapter then moves on to describe a case study where creative methods were used to study Estonian high school students’ reflections about the imagined audience on Facebook. Students’ drawings of typical Facebook users, and their own interpretations of these sketches, are used as an example for reflecting upon the advantages and possible limitations involved when making use of creative research methods for studying the imagined audiences in new media. The chapter ends with concluding thoughts.

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF CREATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

Creative methods are located within a broader framework of approaches that are usually referred to as visual research methods, which comprise a multitude of approaches and data (Prosser and Loxely 2008). In comparison to the other action-oriented and visual approaches, the uniqueness of creative methods lies in the fact that research participants are asked “to spend time applying their playful or creative attention to the act of making something symbolic or metaphorical, and then reflecting on it” (Gauntlett 2007, 3, italics in original). In other words, the participants of studies where creative research methods are used are asked to take time to make a visual (drawing, photo, video, collage) or three-dimensional artifact (out of clay,
Lego blocks, etc.) so as to provide new information and insight into different aspects of social life that might not be accessible with more traditional qualitative research methods—e.g., focus groups and interviews (Gauntlett 2007, 182).

The advocates of visual and creative research methods argue that the act of creating something is not only elemental to the human condition but has also “spanned the evolution of humankind” (Prosser 1998, 32). In this context it is important to note that Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006, 2, italics in original) regard creative methods as “an enabling methodology”, referring to the fact that the main idea of the method is based on the assumption that people have something interesting to communicate and that they can do it in a creative manner. Furthermore, creative methods cannot be seen only as a “good new way of building sociological knowledge but also offer a positive challenge to the taken-for-granted idea that you can explore the social world just by asking people questions, in language” (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006, 1). In comparison to traditional research methods where research participants are asked to orally reflect upon a variety of topics and hence to provide instant answers on complicated and sometimes also very personal matters, creative processes take more time and thus also demand greater reflection on the part of the participant.

One of the intentions of creative methods is to actively engage the participants in the study on three different levels. In the first phase of the study, the participants are usually asked to produce something with their hands (i.e., to be bodily engaged in the research). Secondly, as the process of physically creating something—taking photos, making a drawing or forming something out of clay—cannot be separated from the mental processes surrounding such a production, participants also need to be mentally engrossed in the study so as to exercise their agency to the fullest. Hence, Gauntlett (2007) has claimed that creative research methods are built upon the unity of body and mind. The need for the physical and mental harmony in the process is probably most apparent in the third and final phase of such research when all the participants are asked to orally interpret and comment upon their own work.

In comparison to the visual research methods where the visual assignments undertaken by research participants are usually interpreted and “read” by the researchers themselves, the intention of creative research approaches is to give “voice” to the participants of the study. In fact, according to Gauntlett (2007, 125), researchers should not intend to impose their own meaning on the photos, drawings, videos, Lego constructions, etc., made by the participants, as they would be unable to underpin the real meaning behind those works. However, considering the fact that “a picture is a statement” (Arnheim 1969, 137), only the maker of the statement is able to explain and describe the intentions and meanings behind the work. When doing so, the power balance between the participant and the researcher is shifting into a more collaborative model (see Pink 2003; Toon 2008). In
this respect, as suggested by Harper (1998, 35), “the researcher becomes a
listener” whose intention should be to keep “the consequent interest in and
acknowledgment of the co-construction of knowledge between participant
and researcher” (Toon 2008, 22). Such mutually acknowledged cooperation
between the researcher and the participant in producing new knowledge
would “help sociologists understand how participants see their worlds”
(Gauntlett 2007, 107). Furthermore, several authors believe that by giving
the research participants an opportunity to take active part in the study,
they are also able to communicate different kinds of information (Gauntlett
2007, 182) through which the researchers can examine and probe “visible
but unseen” everyday behaviors (Prosser 2007, 16).

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that such an ideology behind creative
research methods has not been universally accepted. Buckingham (2009,
635), for instance, has criticized the “naïve empiricism” and “naïve politi-
cal arguments” that have been put forward when listing the strengths of the
approach. Furthermore, he has reminded researchers about the fact that the
empirical material received through such an approach cannot be taken as
objective documentation of reality but rather a tool for uncovering previ-
ously hidden thoughts and feelings (Unsworth 2009). In fact, as admitted by
several scholars (Bragg 2011; Piper and Frankham 2007), creative research
methods raise a number of unique challenges.

Taking the above-mentioned context into consideration, we decided to
employ creative research methods for studying Estonian young people’s per-
ceptions about the imagined audience on Facebook. In the following sec-
tions we will give an overview of our case study and use our experiences
to elaborate upon the strengths and limitations of such an approach when
studying imagined audiences.

CASE STUDY

Background

The present case study was carried out with the aim to study Estonian high
school students’ perceptions about the imagined audience of Facebook. The
sample of our study consisted of sixteen- to twenty-year-old high school stu-
dents \( n = 15 \), the majority of whom attended the tenth grade \( n = 11 \) and
some of whom \( n = 4 \) were from the twelfth grade. All in all six girls and
nine boys (identified here accordingly as F and M) were divided into two
mixed-gender groups, which attended a workshop on two separate dates in
the beginning of June 2010.

All participants in the study had been regular computer and Internet
users for seven to thirteen years. All of them also had previous experiences
with using different social networking sites (e.g., Orkut, MySpace, Rate),
although their Facebook usage experience varied from three months to three
years. On average the students in our sample had been using Facebook approximately for a year and two months (1.18 years).

The homogenous sample, based on demographical and age-specific characteristics, was intentionally selected for the study in order to avoid social pressure and to allow the interaction to occur in an environment that was as “natural” as possible (Krueger 1988). Participation in the workshops was voluntary, but all the participating students received one additional grade in media studies for taking part of the study.

Data Collection

Both workshops were organized in three different phases. In the first phase, the young people were engaged in a group discussion that mainly involved questions about their overall Internet usage practices and preferences. Then the discussion moved on to the topic of social media, namely, the use of Facebook. For example, the students were asked to describe the people belonging to their online friends’ lists and to classify these persons in accordance to the frequency of their user practices.

The next phase of the workshop was built upon the ideas around creative research methods. The students were given A4-sized papers and pencils and were asked to draw sketches of the user types they considered to be most prominent on Facebook. The aim of this exercise was to give the students an opportunity to address issues discussed in the previous phase of the workshop from a different perspective and to allow them to express their thoughts creatively.

We asked the young people to make the drawings in pairs so as to give them an opportunity to share their experiences with each other and to discuss on the topic before progressing with the drawings. Thus these drawings produced by the participants could be regarded as the product of a consensus. Furthermore, according to Gauntlett (2007, 96), group engagement in creative processes has “parallels with how we come to form understandings in everyday life, through interactions with peers”. This was also one of the reasons why we decided against asking the students to make individual drawings.

Instead of asking the students to draw just one image per pair, we suggested that each pair produce approximately five images that would portray their perceptions of the dominant user types in Facebook. Asking the participants to produce more than one image has been considered to be a good idea as people “often have a range of thoughts about any particular topic” (Gauntlett 2005, 26, italics in original). So as to illustrate the latter claim, our participants produced thirty-nine sketches of various Facebook user types.

Still, even though Gauntlett (2005, 26) has claimed that participants should be allowed to produce as many images as they like, we believe limiting the number of images is actually reasonable in cases where the
researchers need to operate under certain time limits. Making a drawing or some other creative artifact is usually considerably more time-consuming than giving oral answers to interviewers’ questions, and therefore researchers sometimes need to make harsh decisions regarding their study procedure. For instance, as our workshop lasted a few hours and we also wanted to cover additional topics in a form of a group discussion, we were unable to prolong the drawing process indefinitely. The moderator was monitoring the drawing process, and when it was clear that all of the pairs had finished their drawings, the next phase of the study was reached. Furthermore, it has to be noted that none of the pairs claimed to need more time for finishing their sketches.

Data Analysis

As the relative trustworthiness of image-based research is “best achieved via multiple images in conjunction with words” (Prosser 1998, 106), in the final phase of the workshop each group was asked to present and comment upon their sketches to the others. These short presentations, however, were followed by a more general discussion on the topic of Facebook users. During these discussions all participants of the study were able to ask additional questions, reflect upon their own experiences and comment upon the drawings of others. We asked each group to interpret their own work so as not to instantly impose our own (adult researchers’) interpretations and meanings (see Gauntlett 2007, 125) on the drawings of the teens. Furthermore, participant involvement has been noted to be especially beneficial for research with teenagers, as it can also challenge asymmetrical power relations (Weller 2012).

As “the design rests on the possibility of choice” (Kress 2010, 28), the students in our workshops could delete, add and modify whatever content they wished while making their sketches. And thus, the young people were allowed to depict a multitude of personas in a variety of ways on their sketches. The interpretations of the makers of the drawings followed by the group discussion gives us a reason to believe that students’ creative and playful explorations of Facebook user types illustrate their own perceptions, assumptions and beliefs about the users of Facebook. The analysis of the drawings showed that six dominant types and some subtypes of Facebook users—the Eager Beaver (subtype: the Geek), the Show-Off (subtype: Via-iPhone-Dude), the Businessman, the Perv, the Meanie (subtypes: the Hater and the Oldster), and the Habitual User—emerged (see Murumaa and Siibak 2012 for more detailed analyses of the user types).

Gauntlett (2007, 103, italics in original) has argued that one can learn a lot “from the stories that are told and the way they are told” through such creative processes. For example, through combining the drawing assignment with an oral reflection of the drawing, we gained a much more
detailed understanding of the Facebook user type classified as the Show-Off (Figure 7.1).

In fact, the drawing helped us to emphasize some aspects that the young people associated with the Facebook users belonging to the Show-Off user type. First of all, an activity that the participants considered to be most characteristic of this user type—photographing—was depicted on the drawing. It appeared from students’ comments that the members of the Show-Off user type are very active in uploading photos on Facebook. Furthermore, students’ interpretations of the drawing also referred to the fact that the members of the Show-Off user type were accustomed to taking photos of themselves, mostly through a mirror reflection.

M6: This is a user type who takes photos of themselves.
M5: They go home and constantly photograph themselves and upload at least three new photos daily. . . .
M7: Ten.
M5: Yeah, at least ten.
M7: All the time. . . .
M6: Mostly the photos are taken in front of a mirror.

Figure 7.1 An Example of the Students’ Sketch Representing the Show-Off User Type (on the Sketch Labeled as the “Poser”)
The mocking tone and ridiculing manner of the students’ comments gave us reason to believe that the young people did not consider themselves to be the representatives of the Show-Off user type. Rather, they were active in voicing their contempt in the above-mentioned actions and Facebook behaviors that they believed to be distasteful. Hence, although creative methods that use visuals have been criticized for sometimes objectifying “others” (Buckingham 2009), we would rather argue that due to employing such an approach, we had an opportunity to witness how participants relate to these “others” and position themselves.

For instance, in contrast to the above-mentioned user type, the young participants gave much more positive interpretations of the users belonging to the group of Habitual Users (Figure 7.2). The drawings depicting this Facebook user type differed quite extensively from all the other drawings, as they represented either an androgynous persons or inanimate objects (e.g., flowers and hearts, a cocktail glass with a straw and a lemon slice in it).

In their comments about their sketches, the students claimed to have wanted to represent the fact that the Habitual Users do not release much personal information on their Facebook profiles, and their overall Facebook usage activities do not stand out in any way. Furthermore, even though the Habitual Users were also characterized as active and versatile users of the site, the young people wanted to emphasize the fact that such users still had a life outside of the Internet.

M4: Playing games, and . . .
M5: Looks around, likes a couple of things and . . .
Exploring the Potential of Creative Research for the Study

M2: Does not really stand out over there.
F1: Yes, just is, but isn’t really on the background . . . and uses Facebook usually like, how to say, from time to time. Not sitting there to fight off boredom.

The above-mentioned description, together with the students’ self-reports of their Facebook usage indicates that the participants of our study tended to view themselves as the Habitual Users of Facebook. In other words, the creative assignment also served as a mental map for the young people in order to reflect upon their own Facebook usage practices and behaviors and thus to position themselves in accordance with the practices of all the others (i.e., the imaginary audiences on Facebook).

REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE METHOD

Advantages of the Method

Researchers who are interested in the lives and experiences of children and youth have quite a long tradition in making use of projective techniques that often combine oral discussions with creative practical assignments involving visual materials (Catterall and Ibbotson 2000).

One of the main reasons for deploying such approaches is the fact that young people and children are themselves not only sincerely interested in images but they also seem to take pleasure in the process (Thomson 2008, 11). In addition, according to Freund and Holling (2008), creativity usually helps individuals to maintain their interest in what they are doing. Hence, we argue that, similar to the projective techniques (Catterall and Ibbotson 2000), creative research methods actually help to generate respondent curiosity because they differ and thus seem more unusual than the more traditional research methods (e.g., surveys, interviews). The latter was also evident during our study, as all the students were actively reflecting upon each others’ Facebook experiences, making jokes and posing questions to each other while exchanging ideas for the sketches. In other words, the students participating in our study really seemed to be enjoying themselves during the whole process. All of the above helped us to create a relaxed and carefree, but at the same time task-oriented, atmosphere for the workshop.

Furthermore, we believe that by allowing young people to have control over their self-expression, we were able to establish a more equitable partnership between the youth and the researcher–moderator. For instance, in comparison to the interview situations where one’s answers are more immediate, creative research methods give youth “greater ‘editorial control’ over the material disclosed” (Holliday 2004, 1603). As the students could easily modify and erase their drawings, they might have also felt more in control of their own process of expression and more at ease with the need to comment upon their own experiences and perceptions.
Our experience also helped to confirm the claims of others (e.g., Gauntlett 2007; Toon 2008) who have stated that the equal partnership between the participants and the researcher is built upon the “fundamental belief in the co-constructed and situated nature of knowledge” (Toon 2008, 25). As the children’s and young people’s drawings often contain a mixture of stereotypes and drawing conventions (see Punch 2002; Whetton and McWhirter 1998), they might seem self-explanatory on the first sight, and hence, some authors have confessed that sometimes they have felt it “to be insulting to ask the children what they had drawn” (Punch 2002, 15). Such an attitude, however, is in serious conflict with the main ideas behind the visual research according to which “images are, by their nature, ambiguous and do not in themselves convey meanings which are supplied serendipitally by those who perceive them” (Prosser 1998, 98). Furthermore, Thomson (2008) has argued that the analysis of images in general, and the ones made by children and young people in particular, needs to be a highly conscious activity as young people’s images “may not be amendable to straightforward adult readings” (Thomson 2008, 10). Our experience with the two workshops suggests that researchers need not feel intimidated and uneasy when asking the participants to provide interpretations of their own works. On the contrary, it is only the “picture and words together” (Gauntlett 2007, 107) that would form a meaningful package, which could then be analyzed further by social scientists. However, our experience also gives us a reason to believe that rather than focusing on what the youth have drawn, researchers should be more focused on finding out why they have decided to make such a drawing and what the drawing meant for the maker (Punch 2002, 16).

When starting the group discussion about the drawings students had made, we did not intend to take a role of an “expert” analyst “who can come in and tell you what something ‘really’ means” (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006, 5). On the contrary, each pair was first asked to describe their drawings, and these short presentations were then followed by questions and comments from all others. In our everyday social lives, other individuals take active part in constructing our realities. In fact, according to Giddens (1976), we are constantly trying to understand the meaning that others give to our actions. The most important experiences, however, are obtained by communicating face to face, as the other’s subjective reality is available, and the present is shared by the participants at the moment of communication (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 44). The following example illustrates how the participants in our study used each other’s drawings as an aid when orally constructing their perception of reality.

Moderator: Do you accept strangers’ friend requests?
M5: When an especially beautiful girl adds me, then.
M7: Well yes, but when I see that a dude like that [points at the Perv user-type sketch, Figure 7.3] adds me, then I don’t want it that much.
In this way, we argue, the group discussion helped us to establish a “community within which meaning was negotiated and constructed” (Toon 2008, 25). It also allowed us as researchers to observe not only how young people give meaning to social experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 1998) but also to witness how participants were encouraging each other to collaborate and to interpret the drawings made by others. It also gave us a possibility to observe the interaction—from whose position the opinions were vocalized, what words were used to express one’s attitudes, and how the other members of the group reacted to what was being said. Combining the analysis of drawings with the analysis of interview transcripts also allowed us to trace how the participants of our study “move unconsciously between positions, writing and re-writing themselves” (Piper and Frankham 2007, 385) as they voiced their opinions. Hence, we argue that while specifying each other’s answers and questioning each other’s replies, the young were constructing their shared reality.

Furthermore, we agree with others who have made use of action-oriented research methods in order to study some phenomenon in the life-worlds
of children or young people that getting children actively engaged in the research process itself allows the youth to “communicate what was important to them” (Gauntlett 2007, 115) and also to “bring into surface” impressions and feelings of a subject matter that more conventional research methods may not access (Gauntlett 2007, 126).

Limitations of the Method

At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that the sketches made by the teens not only reflect their interests but focus also on “the assumed interest of the recipient of the sign” (Kress 2010, 78). In other words, the narratives produced through the sketches reflect not only the personal feelings and attitudes of the youth but can also be regarded as expressing “the group values that are prevalent within their specific cultural environment” (Weber and Mitchell 1996, 304). In this context, it is important to take into account that the main audience for these creative assignments were the other participants in the study (i.e., peers and the moderator). As group affiliation is generally very important for this age group, it was evident that occasionally individual behaviors and attitudes were sacrificed for group mentality, norms and values imagined to be shared with others. Hence, despite the fact that carefree and joking research environments is believed to help the participants to “overcome the self-censoring of responses” (Catterall and Ibbotson 2000, 249), the students’ (un)conscious need to earn the approval of peers might still have an effect on their joint discussions.

In the light of the above, it is also important to note that individuals do not only have different levels of artistic skills but also different levels of confidence (Gauntlett 2005, 25). In fact, authors (e.g., Punch 2002) have noted that some of the young people may first feel a bit uneasy and more inhibited when asked to produce a creative artifact. This issue was also raised by some of the youth involved in our study who at first seemed a bit uncomfortable when the drawing assignment was introduced, which is why the moderator needed to encourage the participants to explore the matter through drawings.

Moderator: So try to draw them. . . .
F5: But I don’t know how to!
Moderator: No, it certainly doesn’t have to be a beautiful detailed painting, just think, what are the basics that are visible in these types, how do they stand out on Facebook?
F6: I’d rather write. . . .
Moderator: You can write a little bit as well, but try to scribble down some image too.

Based on this experience, we acknowledge that when introducing creative methods, researchers need to lay special emphasis on the fact that the artistic
skills of an individual are of secondary value when taking up this creative task. Furthermore, we also agree with Gauntlett (2005, 26), who has suggested that future studies should try not to limit the participants’ choice by preselecting the materials and forms for their self-expression. In other words, researchers should at least try to offer a variety of choices that allow the participants to exercise their agency and creativity to the fullest.

Our experience in making use of creative methods also suggests that the role of a moderator in such occasions is somewhat different from the moderator’s role in the case of more traditional qualitative methods (e.g., focus groups). In the latter case, the moderator’s role is mostly to stay in the background and to intervene at times when the discussion goes too far from the main focus, when interesting and relevant new subtopics emerge, or when the discussions are dominated by only a few people (Dawson, Manderson and Tallo 1993). When using creative methods, we argue, it is important for a researcher to “go with the flow” sometimes, and to consider the possible deviations from original research questions in strategic planning of such studies.

Furthermore, we agree with Buckingham (2009), who has argued that when analyzing creative artifacts like drawings, researchers should not focus only on the oral (or written) interpretations of the makers and the group; this would dismiss the visual dimension of their study. Although it might appear very tempting to rely only on the explanations and descriptions made by the participants, Buckingham (2009) warns the researchers not to take everything the participants say at face value. In our study we also found the theory of reading images by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) helpful when interpreting the visual data gathered. However, as there is no “‘one size fits all’ approach” (Buckingham 2009, 648) when analyzing visuals, we encourage researchers to search for additional theories and ways for understanding the data produced through creative methods.

CONCLUSION

Authors have claimed that action-oriented research using visual or creative methods can be seen as a “natural extension of ideas of agency, action, collaboration and joint action” (Toon 2008, 19). Considering the fact that new media has changed, on a more general level, the way author, text and audience relate to each other, creative research methods, which are built upon the agency and creativity of a participant, offer an interesting alternative to the traditional research methods for studying imagined audiences of the Internet.

The present case study aimed to study Estonian high school students’ perceptions of the imagined audience on Facebook by implementing creative research methods. Due to the relative invisibility and heterogeneity of the social media audience who is engaged in “continuous mutual surveillance”
Andra Siibak and Maria Murumaa-Mengel (Linaa Jensen 2010), such a topic poses a challenging task for a researcher. Although researchers can ask the participants to describe their online friends or talk about Internet users abstractly during interviews, previous studies have indicated that social media users are mainly aware of the ideal audience of their posts “which is often the mirror-image of the user” (Marwick and boyd 2011, 7). In the verbal group discussions, the young participants of the present study also named friends, family and acquaintances as the main contacts belonging to their friends lists. However, all of their intriguing characterizations of the Facebook user types became visible when expressing their thoughts and perceptions through sketches. Hence, with the help of creative methods, we got a fresh perspective and unique view into teens’ minds on the theme of the imagined online audience—including the nightmare readers and ideal audience members (Marwick and boyd 2011)—as well as a look into how young people position themselves. In this context, we believe that the oral descriptions the students gave to the drawings and the group discussion that followed both helped to serve as “translations” that provided us with additional detailed information about the imaginary audience of Facebook. We would not have gained such information in any other way. In other words, we argue that the oral reflections about one’s creative project do carry a “metacognitive function” (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994, 160), thus serving as a crucial element in the overall analysis procedure.

Nevertheless, as the personal meanings and perceptions communicated are often ambiguous, obscure and ever changing, the researcher cannot take the role of omniscient expert. Rather, the researcher has to be creative, much like the method. Giving participants plenty of options in the process of creation and accepting deviations from the original plan to follow interesting subtopics are just a few aspects that can benefit researchers.

According to Gauntlett (2007), creative research methods are based on the idea of interchangeable body and mind. In studies where subjects are asked to work in pairs or small groups, however, the need for harmony goes beyond an individual: Sharing experiences, values and attitudes, and negotiating shared reality result in images that are ideally an outcome of consensus.

Based on our experience, we thus propose that similar creative approaches could be used to study a variety of imagined audiences—of, for instance, television shows, marketing messages, political movements and subcultures. Even when potentially threatened by group dynamics, stereotypes, poor skills of oral self-expression, or lack of confidence in one’s own artistic ability, etc., the results of an “enabling methodology” (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006) are, indeed, interesting and worth exploration.

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Andra Siibak and Maria Murumaa-Mengel

Exploring the Potential of Creative Research for the Study


8 Analyzing Online Social Networks from a User Perspective
A Quantitative-Qualitative Framework

Jakob Linaa Jensen
and Anne Scott Sørensen

INTRODUCTION

Online social networks or social network sites (often simply termed SNS) have attracted widespread attention among users, journalists and researchers in recent years. Successful platforms like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn have contributed to an expectation that the full potential of Web 2.0, the interactive, user-generated Internet is finally coming true. The success of social network sites indicates that Internet users integrate the technology in their daily lives but also prefer to interact online with those they already know, rather than forming new acquaintances online (see for instance, Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield 2006).

From a researcher’s point of view, the rise of social network sites adds new aspects to the already challenging domain of Internet research. The Internet in general has no center; the information is fluid, dynamic and ever changing; and users are extremely heterogeneous. Online social networks amplify such trends. In this case it is even harder to retrieve information and interactions, since the relational structure between participants is truly rhizomatic, to borrow a term from Deleuze and Guattari (2004). Furthermore, accessing data outside his or her network often implies great technical and legal challenges for the researcher. On top of that, since it is difficult to define the research universe (the totality of a given network), well-known problems in terms of delimitation versus extension are magnified; it becomes much more difficult to define what is a representative sample, and there is an increased risk of concluding based on random coincidences, adding to issues of reliability.

This chapter discusses online social network sites as a field of research. The purpose is threefold: We discuss how online social networks pose new challenges to researchers, with regard to research design and methods; we identify principal methodological aspects worth researching; and we suggest and discuss a framework combining quantitative and qualitative methods in terms of analyzing online social networks from a user perspective. Other chapters in this volume discuss social network sites from a more
technical or morphological perspective, identifying new technical tools for groundbreaking analyses. Here, instead, we apply well-known research techniques, but we combine them in a dynamic framework centered on a user’s perspective. The proposed methods aim at analyzing the users’ experiences, perceptions and norms as exhaustively as possible. Therefore, we argue for the necessity of combining quantitative and qualitative methods (triangulation).

ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK SITES IN CONTEXT

Before moving on, it is necessary to define the phenomenon of online social networks. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter and MySpace are part of what has been called “Web 2.0”, “participatory culture”, “produsage” or just “social media”.

The concept of Web 2.0, first defined by O’Reilly (2005), denotes the technological shift in terms of the changing interface of websites and other Internet services, allowing a greater degree of interaction and user involvement. Jenkins (2006; see also Jenkins et al. 2009) has identified a shift toward media convergence and participatory culture, allowing users much more power and room for democratic participation. Bruns (2008) has suggested the term “produsage” to address the fact that users are no longer mere consumers but also (at least in principle) producers. Potentially, anyone can upload their own website or blog, create YouTube videos, or post images, thoughts and comments. The old media hierarchies have been leveled out, and the field of media production “democratized”.

Perhaps “social media” is by now the most widespread concept denoting this development. The term has been used to describe how viewers or listeners are now potentially participants, that websites facilitate interaction rather than one-way communication and that the age of passive media reception might be definitely over.

Social media encompass a variety of phenomena. By using the classification scheme of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) and the definition of boyd and Ellison (2007), we shall argue that online social networks are only a small part of the range of phenomena that can be defined as social media.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), there are six different types of social media: collaborative projects (for instance, Wikipedia), blogs and micro blogs (like Live Journal and Twitter), communities organized around content (for instance, Flickr and YouTube), virtual game worlds (like World of Warcraft and EverQuest), metaverses or virtual social worlds (for instance, Second Life) and finally, social network sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace. This typology is based upon the purpose of use, rather than technology or genre. Thus, the distinction is useful for us in taking a user’s perspective.
By their definition, Kaplan and Haenlein distinguish social network sites from social media in general, claiming that social network sites are a particular kind of social media. In a now widespread definition, boyd and Ellison (2007, 211) present an even narrower concept of social network sites and define them as sites where users:

(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system,
(2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and
(3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.

Here the central features are the personal profile and the purpose of networking. From this definition, we can identify Facebook as SNS but not YouTube, Flickr, Digg or del.icio.us (the latter two are sites for sharing links and news stories). Even though YouTube and Flickr allow users to create a personal profile and a network of friends, the original central feature is sharing (videos and images respectively). However, the phenomena now mix: Facebook is widely used for sharing videos, images and links, and users create and maintain personal networks on YouTube and Flickr.

The first social network sites according to boyd and Ellison’s definition were Swedish Lunarstorm (1996) and American Six Degrees (1997). Peaking at about one million users, they remained small compared to Facebook and Twitter of today. Other early examples were Friendster (2001) and Orkut (2004). MySpace (2003) was the first network to gain widespread public attention and to reach millions of users across the world.

Facebook is not only the biggest social network site in terms of users, page views and activity. It has also become a main focus among researchers. Even though the task of this chapter is to identify general aspects and challenges of analyzing social networks, we take the point of departure in the architecture and features of Facebook, since the site encompasses all the aspects inherent in similar social network sites.

FOUR ANALYTICALLY RELEVANT ASPECTS OF SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

Social network sites pose interesting research questions. Whereas psychologists might be particularly interested in the identity construction and personal development performed through profile building, sociologists might be more focused on the network-building features and the possible changes of the concept of friendship. Media scholars might be interested in the way users perform their lives through online media, or in the effects they have on daily life. And anthropologists might want to investigate social networks as communities and fora for cultural exchanges and behavioral changes. In this...
section, we will address four features of particular relevance for researchers within the social sciences in general: the personal profile, the interpersonal relations, evolving social norms (especially in respect to the boundaries between public and private) and the emerging phenomenon of online sharing. Although this list is not exhaustive, it summarizes some of the aspects that have been, and will continue to be, discussed among researchers.

**Personal Profiles**

According to the definition of boyd and Ellison (2007), the decisive feature of social network sites is the personal profile. Without an active profile, users have no or very limited access to participants in the network and activities going on. In their personal profiles users have to identify themselves by name, address and most often a picture, which might be personal or generic. On some sites only a minimum of personal information is required (or allowed). This is true for Twitter or del.icio.us, where users identify themselves mainly by their links or personal connections. On other sites, like Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn, the personal profile plays a much larger role for showing “who you are”. The possibly most comprehensive profile is found on Facebook, where a central element of the personal profile is the “wall”. Here we find the users’ status updates, plus comments, links and other things shared with friends. In particular, the status update is the personal marker of identity where users might (by a term borrowed from Sundén 2003) “write themselves into being”.

By selecting which stories to tell and which not to tell, users often maintain what can be defined as a front stage (Goffman 1959), despite the public debate of intimate disclosures. According to Baron (2008), it is a place to perform one’s good life or “the best day”. Through the feature of the status update, Facebook resembles personal blogs. But it proves much more successful, due to the ease of use and the limited length of the posts. One can make short comments or outcries compared to the longer postings normally associated with blogging in the traditional sense (Sørensen 2009). Thus DeVoe (2009) and Hermida (2010) have suggested the term “micro-blogging”.

**Interpersonal Relations**

Interpersonal relations are of course features of every social network, online as well as offline. In recent years, classical social network theory has been applied to online interactions—for instance, by Pescosolido and Rubin (2000) and Haythornthwaite (2002, 2005). The rise of online social network sites has sparked a renewed theoretical interest in friendship and circles of relationship, and Facebook, for example, has used the term “friend” to denote the interpersonal connections. One might question whether this terminology in itself devalues established definitions of friendship. For some
users, a large network of friends is a marker of status or position within the social network. boyd and Ellison (2007) note that social network sites promote “friendship performance” and “impression management”—that online friendship is also about boosting the ego. The ease by which one can connect and relate to an indefinite number of people radically expands the field of potential social interaction, but it also highlights the need to be able to distinguish among different groups of relations. Facebook friends, for instance, are composed of what Granovetter (1973) defined as strong and weak ties. Some are strong ties (friends, family and close work colleagues), whereas others are weak ties (distant colleagues, old schoolmates or random acquaintances). Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield (2006) and Ellison, Lampe and Steinfield (2007, 2008) have documented that online social network sites are more suitable for maintaining a circle of weak ties rather than upholding strong ties. They also find that most users tend to connect to people they already know from offline contexts rather than connecting to people they meet online. If this is true, online social network sites consolidate existing social networks rather than establish new ones (Papacharissi 2011).

Evolving Social Norms

By allowing their users to navigate a large number of connections, some of them being close friends and some distant acquaintances, social network sites often become a kind of laboratory for developing social norms. Stutzman and Kramer-Duffield (2010) have used the term “boundary turbulence” to define how the uncertain audience situation might challenge existing social boundaries—for instance, the borders between public and private spheres—and thereby their inscribed schemes of behavior. Barnes (2006) has pointed out the paradox that while information published online might be fundamentally public, for instance, teenagers still perceive social network sites and other forums as private, due to the intimacy of the communication. However, while users might be able to seal off their information from strangers, Jensen and Sørensen (in press) have demonstrated that Danish users generally consider information on Facebook as a least semi-public and act accordingly. Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield (2006) claim that while users find social network sites suitable for communication with colleagues and more distant relations, they prefer the more intimate communication with friends and family to take place through other media. Nissenbaum (2009) and boyd (2011, 52) claim that privacy is not dead but that it is in a state of transition, implying an ongoing renegotiation of the borders between private and public and their normative coding.

Related to Networking Is the Process of Online Sharing

Today, Facebook is the world’s leading service for sharing (by 20 percent of all online sharing), followed by other sites like MySpace, Twitter,
del.icio.us and Digg (Soshitech 2012). A central feature behind this trend is the Newsfeed, originally introduced in 2006, which is an interface allowing users to see all activities of “friends”. That includes not only the status updates but also video, images and news stories. The Newsfeed becomes a filter mechanism for information; you see what your trusted friends choose you to see.

The above-mentioned four aspects illustrate some of the core issues in recent research on online social networking. Whereas profiles, networking and sharing are possible to observe directly, changing social norms can be investigated only indirectly. In the next section, we sketch a framework to examine each of the four aspects as well as how they intersect.

A SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK—ITS ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The aim of this section is to demonstrate how an innovative combination of various methods might be necessary in order to grasp how users experience a social network site like Facebook in an everyday setting. We will argue that grasping aspects of profiles, networking and sharing requires analyzing objective contents as well as subjective interpretations: Users might be interviewed about their habits and perceptions, but we also need to study their actual behavior, since there might be a discrepancy between perceived (and ideal) actions and the actual lived practices.

Empirically, we take the point of departure in methodological issues raised in a research project by which we wanted to investigate the use of social media in everyday political and cultural practices. We argue that it was useful to combine users’ subjective perceptions (through an online survey), their in-depth considerations about everyday life practices and evolving norms (through offline focus groups with participants from the survey) and their actual observable behavior (through an analysis of the Facebook profiles of the focus group members).

To measure users’ subjective perceptions of use and attitudes toward online social networks, a survey was conducted with 970 respondents. Here, we asked about media habits, social media use and norms and attitudes related to social network sites. Based on the survey answers, twenty respondents were selected for four focus group meetings dealing with the subject of social media in everyday life—in particular, how they are used in families and other social settings and how social networking sites such as Facebook are addressed and maintained. Participants were also presented with ethical dilemmas in social networking, which were to be negotiated in the focus groups, revealing evolving norms and perceptions of appropriate participation. Through the focus groups, we obtained a socially negotiated view on the role of social media in general and social network sites in particular in everyday life, and the involved political and cultural practices.
Next, we turned to observational measures. It turned out that all the participants in the focus groups were or had been Facebook users, and we gained access to sixteen focus group members’ Facebook profiles, which gave us a unique opportunity to compare the imagined practices described anonymously in the survey and the staged contributions in the social context of the focus group with the actual, lived practice “out there”.

In the following, we present and discuss the various methods and discuss advantages and problems in combining them.

**Quantitative Survey among Danish Internet Users**

The backbone of our research project was a large quantitative survey among 1,710 Danish Internet users on media use and citizenship practices, of which the questions on online social networking formed a smaller part and were answered by 970 respondents. We wanted to add qualitative methods in a top-down movement from quantitative to qualitative in order to deepen the understanding of online social networks and to include more topics, among them social norms and actual behavior. The opposite choice was taken by the British “public connection” project (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham 2007), which used a grounded bottom-up approach, basing the survey questions on findings from qualitative interviews among strategically selected media users. By starting with the survey, we were able to form questions based on theoretical expectations rather than grounded empirical evidence, thus testing initial hypotheses, while the subsequent focus groups enabled a grounded perspective to ensure that we had not overlooked important issues (as we shall see later, our focus group facilitation was quite open-ended).

We decided to include questions on social media and social network sites use in the general survey, as it seemed to be the most comprehensive way of recruiting a substantial number of random online social network users. Obviously, by using the so-called snowball method, one can only get access to limited networks, which almost certainly implies some kind of demographic bias. Here, we recruited a randomly selected sampled based on demography, thereby including users from various social networks.

The idea of the survey was inspired by the overall research questions of the project and was intended to address the following issues: media use in general, the use of new media, attitudes toward media, sense of citizenship and belonging, political participation and cultural activities (offline and online), patterns of lifestyle and consumption and attitudes toward food and health-related issues.

Especially relevant here, there was a specific section addressing use of social media and social network sites specifically, applied to only the users who initially had indicated that they use such services. Here, we asked about overall usage patterns, but also posed a range of questions on norms and attitudes, based on a Likert scale where respondents could reply to what extent they agreed or disagreed with various statements.
After considering several possibilities, we decided on a Web-based survey where respondents were invited via email. Apart from obvious economic reasons (the cost per respondent is less than if using a mail- or phone-based survey), we intended to focus on Internet users rather than the population in general from the beginning. There are certain challenges attached to an Internet-based survey, however. One problem is the generally low response rates, often between 20 and 40 percent. Another is that it might be problematic to generalize from Internet users to the population in general. While the first problem is general for Web surveys and might affect the reliability of Internet-based investigations, the second problem has been taken into considerations through weighting the respondents, thereby enhancing representativeness. Further, we have been careful to make conclusions on other aspects than media use and daily life.

The survey administration took place between June 8 and July 8, 2009, among a permanent panel of Danish Internet users. Altogether, the survey link was sent to 4,969 persons, of which 1,710 participated and answered the full survey. The response rate was 34.4 percent, which is within the normal range of similar surveys.

If we look at the demographic composition of the participating respondents compared to what we know about the Internet population, all strata are relatively well represented. Despite this, there is a certain bias regarding the level of education. The group with nine years of education or less is underrepresented by 3.5 percentage points. Similarly, respondents having a long further education (university degrees or similar) are overrepresented by 3 percentage points. Regarding age, the youngest age category (eighteen to twenty-four years) is underrepresented by 7.3 percentage points. There is a similar overrepresentation for the age category between twenty-five and fifty-four years. Finally, there is a minor gender bias, as women are overrepresented by 2.4 percentage points. Such tendencies are not outstanding for this survey but reflect a general survey-technical problem of recruiting the youngest and the lowest educated.

Focus Group Meetings: On Social Media and Facebook

From the start, it was planned to do a qualitative follow-up of the survey in terms of the daily use of social media among Danish Internet users, in particular Facebook, as it was initially supposed, and also confirmed by the survey, that Facebook is the dominant social network site in Denmark. Inspired by Markham and Baym (2009), this follow-up was planned to combine offline and online methods by organizing focus group meetings and accessing the participants’ online activities, in particular their Facebook profiles. This combination was chosen because we wanted to call upon the discussions among the users of social media in order to get access to their perceptions of, engagement in, and reasoning about Facebook (Halkier 2008), as well as their practice and actual participation on the platform.
The respondents of the survey who had answered positively as to their engagement in social media in general and Facebook in particular \((n = 970)\) were asked if they would participate in focus group meetings on the issue. The interest was relatively high and approximately fifty participants \((n = 50)\) were selected (by a computer program) based on gender, age, education/vocation and region. In the end, due to logistic challenges as well as late cancellations or simply failure to appear, we ended up with twenty participants. They were still fairly distributed along the chosen criteria, if only unevenly so in the final group settings: ten males and ten females, aged twenty-three to seventy, and vocationally spanning from academics to unskilled, and people on pension.

What we learned from the process is that the ambition to recruit participants for qualitative research from a survey is methodologically ideal and also possible, but that there is a time-leak and also a substantial gap between the initial involvement in the survey and the engagement in the qualitative part that needs to be taken into account in a much more detailed manner than we did. In hindsight, a better approach would have been to recruit a larger starting sample and also have a detailed plan for a continued and personal contact with each participant throughout the process. Luckily, the actual participants, who still held active profiles on Facebook, generously gave us free access afterward—except for one who did not wish to deviate from his general privacy policies.

During the spring of 2010, we held four focus group meetings in the three major cities: one in Copenhagen (No. 1: \(n = 9\)), one in Aarhus (No. 2: \(n = 5\)) and two in Odense (No. 3: \(n = 3\) + No. 4: \(n = 3\)). Following the generally accepted “best practice” (Halkier 2008), the focus group meetings were held at the local universities but were made less formal by a round table set up with coffee, fruit and cakes, with a sandwich break in the middle. In the introduction, we made an effort to highlight the importance of having the unfiltered experiences of the participants and emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers. Also, following Greenbaum (2000), Halkier (2008) and Fern (2011), we used an open discussion guide including a set of themes that we wanted to address. These themes were introduced to the participants through small citations and visuals from the media and also from Facebook itself, which addressed specific issues, such as particular funny or witty status updates or the opposite (e.g., in terms of the “Facebook scandals” that had taken place in Denmark during the winter and spring 2010). We moderated the groups in pairs, having one primary moderator and an observer in each. Often, it was the observer who identified the need for breaks and introduced the small exercises.

The process turned out very differently in the four groups, an outcome we attributed to differences in the number of participants and the constellation as to age, gender and work situation. In the larger groups in particular, some of the participants were dominating and set the agenda, while others were almost silent and withdrawn. Again, the observer had a key role to
play. While the moderator took great caution in facilitating the debate, the observer was able to keep the overall track and ensure that all predefined topics were addressed.

As to the design of the interview guide, we considered it important to have partly a set of theoretically generated hypotheses and partly the relevant research literature in mind (Drotner and Schröder 2010). We had an overall interest in public versus private spheres and accordingly drew on theories of mediatization and domestication in order to investigate how borders of public and private were negotiated in everyday contexts and uses (Lundby 2009). Further, we were guided by the relevant research literature to establish the hypothesis of a basic paradox involved in participating on Facebook. Due to the “semi-public” nature of the network and the derived lack of “borders of meaning” known from more offline contexts (Jensen 2009; Taekke 2010), we focused on the looser, casual and yet also denser and emotionally invested “networked sociability” and “phatic communication” (Miller 2008). On this ground we established four sets of questions as to the perception, practice and involvement of the participants, and concerned with the policies of friending, privacy and self-disclosure: (1) What kind of medium is Facebook, and for what and how can it be used? How is the list of “friends” constructed, and how are privacy issues addressed? (2) How do you contribute, with what kind of materials, and to what degree/how do you disclose yourself on different parts of Facebook? (3) How do you use Facebook and other social media in daily life (where, when, how often, with whom)? (4) Do you have a codex as to public versus private and as to your own/others’ performance and participation?

The focus group meetings were recorded as digital files and transcribed by student assistants. In the end, a content analysis was applied according to the basic set of questions, with special attention paid to themes and questions that were introduced by the participants during the group sessions. In practice, the interviews were coded twice (manually): at first from a top-down approach with reference to the theoretical questions and the interview guide, and secondly, from a bottom-up approach focused on the discussions that came up more spontaneously. Thanks to the bottom-up approach, we were, for instance, able to identify norms of proper and non-proper talk and the negotiated limits of appropriate participation on Facebook. As it turned out, this theme in fact became a key to our own initial hypotheses and questions, since it addressed the basic paradox of self-disclosing in the mixed social context of Facebook as an individual and subjective dilemma to be interpreted by means of, in particular, the philosopher Judith Butler (1997; 2005) and her theory of the self-account as a speech act. In the analysis, we have further focused on content as well as form, the latter in terms of the interaction in the groups. As mentioned, in handling the focus group meetings, we tried to be aware of and act upon the group dynamics by conducting them as a research pair—one being the key moderator, the other being an observer who would be able to also redirect the attention of
the moderator if, for instance, some of the participants were not being able to take the floor. After the interviews we received positive feedback on the atmosphere—however, one participant in one of the bigger groups wrote us a letter afterward saying she had felt that she was overruled. Learning from this, we would suggest that focus group meetings are wrapped up with a quick evaluation. However, we have also reasoned that the participant in question had expected something else from the meeting. Thus, struggling for constructive alignment between researchers and participants remains a very important aspect of focus group methodology.

Observing Behavior on Facebook Profiles

After the focus group meetings, we were given access to the sixteen profiles throughout 2010–2011, and this was exceptionally valuable to the whole research agenda. The profiles were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Considering the amount of friends and the continuity and variety in use of the different features of the Facebook platform (status updates, comments, likes, etc.), our respondents were initially distributed along three distinctive types of users: the steady user (more than 100 friends, regular and extended use), the casual user (between approximately 50 and 100 friends, random and rather limited use), and the visiting user (less than approximately 50 friends, rare and laid-back use in the sense that the profiles were primarily used to follow “friends”)—with one third in each category, as there was also one player almost exclusively using his profile for gaming activities. Besides the fact that there were no super-users in our group (early adapting or forerunning with advanced use), this is a pattern that corresponds to a range of studies on social media in which it has been pointed out that in some cases only 20 to 25 percent are really active users whereas the majority is less “active” or “passive” (Baym 2010; Hargittai and Hsieh 2011). However, having had access to the profiles during more than a year, we have also seen that different types of use can vary over time, and that typologies such as the above-mentioned do not really grasp the many combinatorial practices. For instance, some of the respondents with the most friends and highest activity in total rarely used the core affordance of Facebook (i.e., the status update). Rather, they answered when others posted on their wall, commented on the updates of their friends, used the “like” function, and also used the possibility to comment on the pages of institutions or organizations, or join events or groups raised by them. In this way, they broke the typology: They had high scores on frequency and to some extent also on consistency and variety, except that they did not use the core affordance much. In our analysis, we therefore do not talk about types of users but rather about types of use and what Bakardjieva (2005) has identified as “use genres”.

We pursued the notion of use genres by an understanding of Facebook as a social network site that draws on, combines and transforms former
known types of media use as well as more specific textual or oral offline or online genres. Informed by the general domestication approach, adopted by Bakardjieva, and in particular the notion of moral economies, we have, on the one hand, identified a new type of setting of the “separate together” use of social media in the nuclear mixed family setting and, on the other hand, identified a general approach of the “cautious and sensible” use in terms of privacy issues and degree of intimate disclosure. This approach was again supported by amazingly shared norms as to appropriate as well as non-appropriate participation, with people saying, for instance, that you have to keep very intimate as well as very political postings out of the personal walls (and use the private email feature or the group/event feature, respectively), and erecting a distinction between private and public inside Facebook itself. This general approach was counteracted by, on the one hand, both a more casual and more passionate, or hotter, use (surprisingly seen among a group of self-assertive men in their thirties to early fifties), and, on the other hand, a cooler use among a group of younger women, who were among those who did not use the status update much (when they did it was mostly in terms of “checking in” at different locations via their smartphones).

The content analysis of the status updates has in a combined top-down and bottom-up process further led to an identification of proper as well as non-proper ways of using this particular (sub)genre as well as looked-for performances and digital literacies. For instance, it turned out that most status updates could be understood as belonging to four generic types of use in terms of short statements as to (1) what is just done (2) or going to be done, (3) a self-disclaimer (e.g., a thought or feeling) or (4) an address or question. Small talk was downgraded but was also what most of the postings and variations of items 1 to 4 could reasonably be counted as. This dilemma was to some degree acknowledged in terms of an upgrading of irony and humor (if not satire), even if it is admittedly difficult to perform successfully due to the lack of contextual clues. The looked-for literacy seemed to be a kind of smart small talk that gives a skewed snapshot of the everyday that at one and the same time expresses and transgresses the mundane and ordinary.

The analysis was taken a bit further through an analysis of the use of commentaries, likes and links in order to reach a deepened understanding of the Facebook use genres. Although such an overall analysis still remains to be done, the most interesting result so far is that users do in fact at one and the same time erect the borders of public and private within Facebook, in terms of distributing their activities on the different parts of Facebook and performing accordingly—the more private or inner parts being bio-information and walls; the more public or outer parts being groups, pages and events—AND subvert and transgress the very same borders by the smooth movement between, and small transgressions of, private and public that Facebook facilitates by allowing for making events private and bio-information public.
We could identify the dual process of making and breaking boundaries as well as crossovers to other media, not least mobile media, in everyday life as the basic persuasiveness of Facebook. The full analysis is to be found in Jensen and Sørensen (in press) and in Sørensen (2012).

CONCLUSION

We argue that by using the applied design described above, we have been able to build a robust overall knowledge on the use of, and attitudes toward, social media, and especially social network sites. We have investigated attitudes and evolving norms by addressing respondents individually in the survey as well as placing them in a social game of negotiation during the focus group meetings, and we were further able to combine the private and socially negotiated statements by observing the actual behavior on Facebook. When participating in focus groups, many respondents will tend to produce socially acceptable statements, possibly not being aware of distorting their actual behavior. Thus we find our multimethod framework highly useful, as the observed discrepancies, as well as coherence, between the imagined and the lived habits of online participants can emerge out of the analysis.

We do claim to have sketched a usable framework for accessing users’ everyday lives related to social network sites in general and Facebook in particular. Much more research is needed, also by applying other methods and approaches than those presented here. Our effort is a first step on the road but not the last.

One might point out that our research design lacked more overall quantitative measures—for instance, through social network analysis. Thorough analyses of social relations from a quantitative perspective would have required a separate graphical network analysis of the social networks of each of the respondents. That could be a further component of an innovative approach to analyzing the totality of online social network sites.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary media landscape challenges social researchers in many ways. The changes in media production and consumption practices call for a critical discussion of our research agenda, methodologies and tools. At the same time, our disciplinary status is put to test as the relevance of both qualitative and quantitative social research methodologies for studying online settings and interactions is revolutionized by social data mining and data visualization–based analysis. In this context, social researchers are caught in the tension between innovation and consolidation. On the one hand, we are urged to constantly update our frameworks and tools in order to gain new knowledge on evolving research objects. On the other hand, we need to go back to some basic methodological issues. For ethnographers, this means, for example, addressing some fundamental questions such as what the ethnographic field is and what the nature and status of the texts generated by media consumption performances and interactions are.

Since the early 1990s, the diffusion of the Internet and computer-mediated communication has raised a methodological debate largely devoted to online ethnography. Drawing on our own empirical work, this chapter intends to feed into this debate by going through some of its most relevant articulations, highlighting their respective strengths and weaknesses. In the first section of this chapter, we will question how networked communication challenges ethnographic research. Then we will discuss the research literature on the new territories for ethnographic research brought about by websites, forums, chat rooms, multiuser online environments and social media (blogs, social network sites, etc.). Finally, we will present and reflect on an example of what we have named “virtual shadowing”, an ethnographic approach that we have developed for studying young people’s communication and media practices. We believe that useful methodological insights can be gained from virtual shadowing in order to tackle the new difficulties, and benefit from the new opportunities, raised by media convergence and the online–offline continuum in which we increasingly live.
The media system is changing: People, especially young people, increasingly “communicate with each other [. . .] establishing nodes using various communication and information technologies such as the telephone, the radio, the printed press, etc.” (Cardoso 2008, 591). At the same time, mass media are losing their momentum, facing socio-technical practices that increasingly bridge media and everyday life both online and offline (Castells et al. 2007). Cardoso (2008, 558) calls this new form of mediation “networked communication”, arguing that three main features characterize it: “1) communicational globalization processes; 2) networking of mass and interpersonal media; 3) different degrees of interactivity usage”. This new form of mediation implies changes at both technological and institutional levels, as well as in the way people relate to media and to each other through the media (Silverstone 2005).

In networked communication, digitalization plays a central role, providing the infrastructure for communication practices and giving some distinguished features to both digital texts and social interactions performed through social media. As boyd (2008) says, networked publics are embedded in communicative infrastructures where identities, activities and relations are literally staged and “typed into being” (Sundén 2003, 3), becoming an important part of that never-ending spectacle/performance game (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998) where everyday life performances are, in the words of Kershaw (1996, 133), “immediately confronted by a performative world of representational styles” offered by the media (Sfardini 2009). Moreover, networked publics are everywhere, crossing time, bridging public and private spaces, and collapsing different physical and relational contexts (Pasquali 2012).

What are the challenges posed by these contemporary media and communication practices to social researchers and, particularly, to ethnographers? First of all, highly personalized and multilayered media practices require giving up some very common (although debated and criticized) media studies shortcuts. In the networked communication era it is no longer possible to hypostatize people into television viewers, moviegoers, music or radio listeners, Internet users, etc. Of course that does not mean that media scholars have to leave their peculiar interests and perspectives of analysis behind, nor does it mean that there are no differences among media-specific uses, or between being part of a public, an audience, etc. Rather, it means that in the contemporary media landscape, people are engaged in multiple media “audiences” while at the same time acting also as “users”, “consumers”, etc. (Livingstone 2007).

In the second place, networked communication and the reticular nature of media consumption practices (as a matter of discourse, of course, but also in terms of sharing and collaborative content production and editing) call
for a situated analysis of media practices, localizing them within the people’s social and technological networks. This is certainly nothing new. Media ethnographies have long been emphasizing the crucial role played by physical and emotional contexts of consumption, and by people’s social networks in influencing the relationship between people and the media. However, there are some differences from contemporary media consumption: The latter is often physically mobile and articulating different physical and virtual places, and the traditional fields of ethnographic work, such as domestic spaces, are put into question—consider, for instance, how media content sharing through the Internet, mobile communication through portable devices, or Facebook and Twitter conversations performed while watching TV, redefine the fields of ethnographic work.

Thirdly, it is important to take into account the performative dimension of technologically mediated communication. The representational styles (Kershaw 1996) are challenged by today’s need for self-description and self-representation online (consisting of texts, images, photographs and videos) in order to acquire a status of existence within computer-mediated social networks. Furthermore, we need to consider the affordances of the textual nature of online social performances. Following boyd (2008), we can describe these properties in terms of “persistence”, “replicability”, “scalability”, and “searchability”. This means that online actions and interactions are automatically recorded and archived, that they can easily be duplicated and searched, and that they can reach a great visibility because of their circulation across time and space without any reconfiguration.

A fourth and final methodological issue that we would like to address is related to what Manovich (2001; 2008) calls “software culture”. This concept describes a culture where sociability and media consumption (but also power, creativity, participation, technology and aesthetics) are woven with and through software (both the software used by consumers and the software that run all systems and processes in contemporary society). In the software culture, software is the precondition to and the interface of our interactions with digital media and cultural texts. This reminds us that digital texts are first of all computer texts: They are entangled in a computer system that shapes them, and they become visible only thanks to software operations that make them searchable and collectable. Online content is thus always standardized and shaped by technological platforms’ layout and software architecture, and it has some features that are totally invisible to the user (and the social researcher), although they are crucial in the process of “typing” (Sundén 2003) identities and interactions into being.

These characteristics of digital texts and textualized online interactions certainly increase the opportunities for social research, but they also raise new questions (and radicalize some old ones) on the methodological side, especially when online texts and interactions are approached as the products of individual and collective performances and reflexivity. Thanks to the properties we have already mentioned, following boyd (2008), textualized
online interactions provide wealthy repertoires of analysis that are self-produced by the audience with no action by the researcher. However they are not completely immediate and spontaneous (Boccia Artieri 2011; 2012): online content, indeed, undergoes endless processes of circulation and can be contextualized in very different interpretative frames that prove to be very hard to reconstruct by social researchers. Moreover, online contents and performances are always managed and styled for an audience (whether the audience is visible and known to the “performer” or not). From the methodological point of view, then, this implies that the ethnographic work needs to take into account (even more thoroughly than in the past) people’s reflexivity. At the same time it needs to consider that what we define as “user-generated data” are personal and relational performances as well as pieces of cultural software.

These are just some of the challenges posed by networked communication to social research. In light of this, where should one begin an ethnographic analysis of cross-media practices? What is the field for networked communication ethnographies? How should we consider online audience performances? In order to address these questions, it is necessary, more than ever, both to strengthen our methodological frameworks by going back to the scholarly literature on online ethnographies and to develop new research paths and tools by exploring the new opportunities that networked communication through social and mobile media open up for ethnographic research.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND ONLINE COMMUNICATION: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Social research on networked communication has a long tradition. The methodological debate in the field has co-evolved with the changes in computer-mediated communication and its increasing relevance in users’ everyday life. Starting with the “internet mainstreaming” in the mid-1990s (Lievrouw 2004), computer-mediated communication studies have since then achieved relevance in international research, as expressed by the foundation of the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication in 1996. As the Internet was descending “from the firmament and becoming embedded in everyday life” (Wellman and Haythornthwaite 2002, 4), the research moved from the “optimistic celebration of the transformative potential of the internet […] to a more serious engagement with evidence, seeking to document users and uses of the internet” (Livingstone 2005, 4) and to the formalization of precise and contextualized research questions, which take into account the internal differentiations among uses, platforms, and users. This formalization was accompanied by the definition of the Internet as both a technological artifact and a cultural product able to generate social practices, interactions and specific beliefs.
The development of computer-mediated communication studies confirmed the relevance of qualitative research for tracing users’ practices, analyzing the cultural production of specific groups and investigating the experience of the users. Yet online ethnography—starting from its first theoretical formulations and early applications to forums, chat rooms and virtual communities—had to deal with the critical methodological issues of defining the ethnographic field and object.

The definition of the field is indeed crucial in ethnographic approaches and has important implications on the construction of the ethnographic object and on the choice of the methodological tools (Hine 2000). The offline ethnographic field (Clifford and Marcus 1986) has often been defined in spatial terms, as a “manageable unit” carved out on grounds of self-evident units (Hine 2000, 58) and often based on common sense understanding of the spaces where activities take place, as well as on the idea that culture is physically space-based (Hine 2000). Similarly, early virtual ethnography defined the ethnographic field in a traditional way, as characterized by precise boundaries (i.e., the platform or the community/forum) and by a distinctness from other spaces (typically the physical ones). Indeed, cyberspace studies (Silver 2000) defined cyberspace as being radically different from everyday life, as offering the opportunity to develop social relations overcoming the space/time boundaries of everyday life and to experience new modes of expression and new communicative rules (often formalized in netiquettes).

This definition of the ethnographic field was tied to the question of “how rich and socially patterned Internet-based interactions could be” (Hine 2008, 266) and to the aim of defining the typical social morphology of virtual spaces. This focus was consistent with some crucial issues in coeval sociological debates such as the co-evolution of social morphology and technological innovation as discussed in the description of the “disembedding” by Giddens (1990) or the definitions of the “network society” and the spaces of “flows” proposed by Castells (2000). With this approach to Web-based virtual communities, the ethnographic field is seen as an online place of germination of “social culture”.

The convergence and complexification of media technologies and their incorporation in everyday life questioned the traditional definition of the ethnographic field discussed above. As Lievrouw (2004, 10) stated, “a variety of media technologies, forms, and content, often lumped together under the single (and misleadingly homogenizing) rubric of ‘the Internet’, have become a commonplace part of work, education, leisure, culture, and politics”. Moreover, current computer-mediated communication is characterized by the mobility of users in and between multiple physical and virtual spaces as well as by the performativity of audiences who produce and share contents (Pasquali, Scifo and Vittadini 2010). Thus the “banalization” (Graham 2004) of digital media and mediated sociality has progressively undermined the notion of a cyberspace unrelated to the users’ everyday life and the idea of online “self-contained cultural domains” (Hine 2008, 261).
The development of methodological frameworks for studying networked communication has become a major concern in the research on mobile devices (Dietmar, Kircher and Schlote 2009; Ito and Okabe 2005) and youth cultures (Fields and Kafai 2009; Johnson and Humphry 2011; Leander and Mckim 2003; Mallan, Ashford and Singh 2010). In these areas, “connected ethnography” (Hine 2000) has become very influential. Its proposed methodological framework, which integrates observation and documentation of online and offline practices, was a response to the need to define an ethnographic field no longer anchored to a single space/platform/device. The ethnographic field is thus defined starting from the users and their social relations (Beneito-Montagut 2011), including the variety of real and virtual spaces connected by the practices of networked communication. This definition of the ethnographic field assumes that the social space is of primary importance, while the physical space is seen as playing an ancillary role (Farnsworth and Austrin 2010); in this approach, social relations are not only the background of communication, but they are also constitutive of the time-space of sociality. Thus, for field research, the question becomes how to follow and trace the flows of objects, texts and bodies that characterize networked communication (Dirksen, Huizing and Smit 2010; Murthy 2008).

In this sense one can say that connected ethnography invites a multisited approach (Marcus 1995), including among the sites physical and virtual spaces in order to follow people using the entire set of digital media as a repertoire of social tools, activated and managed according to different needs (Pasquali and Vittadini 2010). Multiple qualitative research methods must be combined: interviews, offline and virtual ethnography, and collection of documents produced and/or selected by the users (Hine 2000; Miller and Slater 2000). Moreover, in order to generate data that add multiple “layers of understanding” (Strathern 2002, 303), contemporary ethnographic researches should not only integrate data regarding the offline and online lives of users, but also study practices cutting across different contexts and combining face-to-face and digital communication (Dirksen, Huizing and Smit 2010; Leander and Mckim 2003; Mann and Stewart 2000). This approach involves a repositioning of the research focus from a certain space to the users’ activities: As it is impossible to find a single context in which social relations take place, the users and their paths have to be the focus of observation. This change in focus can take two different directions: The researcher can follow either groups or single users.

The first possibility has been called “netnography” (Kozinets 2002) and is aimed at following groups of people connected by common interests and identities, or united by a common goal. Netnography integrates “connective” and multisited virtual ethnography (Kozinets 2002, 42) with the aim of investigating the cultures of specific techno-social groups that come together around a “social glue” (e.g., a topic, a brand) across different online spaces. Netnography is closely related to the virtual ethnography
described by Hine (2000), as it focuses the analysis on the textual documents produced by group members during their conversations. The goal of this analysis—at the denotative, connotative and reflexive levels—is to describe the narrative production of identities, values and norms on which the culture of the group is based. The peculiarity of netnography, then, is the focus on social mediated groups and their delocalization in multiple virtual spaces.

The second direction for contemporary ethnography has been called “technography” (Kien 2009) when it consists of the self-description of networked communication, or “extended ethnography” (Beneito-Montagut 2010) or “virtual shadowing” (Pasquali and Vittadini 2010) when it consists of the multimethod study of users’ paths of networked communication. Besides the traditional methods of qualitative research, technography, extended ethnography and virtual shadowing use diaries (often more than one kind of diary is included in the research tools) to trace the techno-social practices of users. These diaries (or self-diaries in the case of technography) are designed to allow the collaboration between the interviewer and the interviewee for creating the data. They are often completed with the assistance of digital tools shared among participants and researchers and using multimedia languages typical of the practices being studied. All this leads to a renewal of the forms of ethnographic notes. For example, the “field blog”—i.e., a blog used as a tool for field research (Torres et al. 2010)—allows recording information, sharing content and interacting with materials and other research participants.

Another feature of technography, extended ethnography and virtual shadowing is that they pay particular attention to the relations between individuals and technologies. They aim at collecting ethnographic data relating to the “myriad of relationships, thoughts and feelings involving technology” (Kien 2009, 16), thereby accounting for the complexity of the languages of “network culture” (e.g., multimediality, performativity and reflexivity).

A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR RESEARCHING TECHNOLOGICALLY MEDIATED SOCIAL RELATIONS: VIRTUAL SHADOWING

Within the research activities of OssCom (Research Center for Media and Communication at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy) emerged (in 2008) the need to develop a methodology enabling researchers to follow single users across a range of (online and offline) spaces and contexts. Drawing on the key principles of extended ethnography, virtual shadowing is based on the premise that the ethnographic field must take the subject as the point of departure and that consequently the ethnographic object must be defined as the communication and network activities that he or she performs using multiple devices and integrating them into his or her everyday activities. Only by following people in their individual and
yet situated (both physically and relationally) consumption practices and performances, we believe, is it possible to find a somehow consistent field of inquiry where all the different possible media uses come to reality, become observable and acquire specific meanings. Thus virtual shadowing focuses on the “networked self” (Papacharissi 2010) and the “network sociability” (Castells et al. 2007), and on the multiple groups and networks with which we interact in our everyday life (Wellman and Haythornthwaite 2002).

Virtual shadowing was applied in two OssCom studies involving fifty participants in total. Both studies aimed at describing the everyday practices of mediated communication (mobile phone, instant messaging, social networks sites, etc.) performed by young Italian people (aged fourteen to twenty-five), highlighting how these practices are carried out through different devices and in relation with offline social activities (Pasquali, Scifo and Vittadini 2010). Since then, virtual shadowing has been used in other research projects, among which the national research project (PRIN 2009) entitled *Online Social Relations and Identity: The Italians’ Experience of Social Network Sites* and involving five Italian universities.

The methodological framework of the OssCom studies (Figure 9.1) was designed as a multilevel approach in order to offer multiple “layers of understanding” (Strathern 2002). To be more specific, it was aimed at:

- following users’ practices across different spaces and places as well as along time;
- “digging” qualitative data in order to acquire knowledge about these offline and online practices;
- activating content production processes and collecting reflexive accounts of the users’ practices as well as descriptions of their value in users’ everyday life; and
- sharing research findings and discussing them with the respondents in order to maintain a high level of involvement throughout the research process.

Our approach to virtual shadowing combined semi-structured and in-depth interviews, online observation, diaries, and the production of video, photo or multimedia materials by the participants. During the initial phase, semi-structured interviews were aimed at gathering preliminary information about the participants and their offline life as well as at establishing a collaborative relationship between them and the interviewer. In addition to this, the methodological tools were explained to the participants. In the final phase, in-depth interviews were used to share and discuss with the participants the data and documents collected during the fieldwork. In the cases in which peer networks appeared to be a relevant unit of analysis, the in-depth interviews were replaced by focus group discussions.

The diary was used throughout the survey period (one week). It provided daily descriptions of the communication activities carried out by the
participants using multiple devices and applications. Depending on the participants’ level of media and technological literacy, they were asked to write either a paper diary including images provided by the researchers (for example, a smiley or a picture of a heart) in order to comment on their practices, or a virtual diary hosted on a personal blog accessible only to the researchers and the other participants. In addition, the young people were solicited to produce reflexive materials (in visual or textual forms) that expressed their self-perception of their technology-mediated practices. The users’ reflexive images and audio-visual contents were available on their field blog, as well as the photos and videos that they had shared with the other young people.

The completion of the diary was supported by daily contacts between the researchers and the participants using the digital tools under study, especially instant messaging systems. Thanks to instant messaging, the contacts between the researchers and the participants took place in a context that was syntonic with the practices being investigated, which allowed the researchers, for instance, to experience the languages and interaction rules of the participants’ everyday communication practices.

These methodological tools proved to be productive for several reasons. First, the diary and the field blog were useful for collecting narratives of the young people’s practices and perceived experience. In this respect, the video, photo and multimedia materials produced by the participants did provide a
lot of information on the practices and meanings of social media: Some of these iconic representations served as comments on the everyday practices (e.g., the mobile phone as a personal medium accompanying everyday life represented through a photo of a girl sleeping with a mobile phone on her pillow; or the mobile phone as an identity-medium represented by a photo of a girl using a mobile phone as a mirror); others expressed the participants’ self-perceptions as social media users (such as a self-portrait with the phone glued as a prosthesis to the ear or to the mouth); and still others described the participants’ definition of the platforms and services they use (for instance, the social network site as a collection of friends’ photos or the computer screen as a place of constant “blah blah blah”).

Another strength of the methodological framework lies in the fact that, since the diary was written during one week and was accompanied by daily contacts with the researcher, it was possible to analyze the differences between the first days’ and last days’ narratives—for instance, it appeared that through the research process the participants acquired a higher awareness of their practices and their meanings. Moreover, the daily contacts were useful for maintaining a high involvement of the participants throughout the research project. The contacts were also helpful in collecting data that are usually difficult to gather, such as participants’ recorded conversations via instant messaging, text messages sent to other young people, or videos/photos produced through mobile phones.

Overall, the combination of the diary, the video/photo production and the daily contacts with the researchers into a single, digital space (i.e., the field blog) that the participants could “personalize” by adding text, images or comments (although within the constraints imposed by the platform) has set the conditions for a successful collection and interpretation of these narrative and reflexive items.

CONCLUSION AND OPEN QUESTIONS

In regard to the methodological debate addressed in this chapter, three main features of virtual shadowing contribute to the advancement of online ethnography.

First, virtual shadowing—in line with connected ethnography (Hine 2000) and extended ethnography (Beneito-Montagut 2010)—allows collecting qualitative data about online and offline practices with the aim to not only contextualize online practices (by taking into account socio-demographic and socio-cultural variables) but also to describe how online practices are connected to offline practices (for example, how an online conversation continues offline and vice versa). In particular, virtual shadowing defines its ethnographic field on the basis of users’ activities and not as a specific device, platform or group. Accordingly, the ethnographic object of virtual shadowing is to follow and then trace individuals along their techno-social
paths (public and private spaces but also mobile devices, laptops, and other devices or platforms) and along time. A given device or platform can be a relevant ethnographic field if the aim of the study is to describe the specific communication affordances of this device or platform and the appropriation processes by the users. Alternatively, a given group can be a relevant ethnographic field if the aim of the study is to describe how a brand or a topic can aggregate communicative practices online. Virtual shadowing is yet another option: It aims at studying how users manage the whole set of digital devices and platforms available to them, and how they integrate these in their everyday life activities.

Second, the originality of virtual shadowing is that it implies the collection of data and ethnographic notes and documents at different levels: the interviews, diaries, field blogs and video/photo materials produced by users each add a specific “layer of understanding” (Strathern 2002) of the people’s meaning and perception of social media and of themselves as users. By using methodological tools that activate the participants’ reflexive production of diverse kinds of materials (e.g., a blog, a video diary), the researcher gains access to the media and communication practices while they are carried out and not only as they are narrated to him or her in an interview context.

Third, the last peculiarity of virtual shadowing is the homogeneity between the methodological tools (from blogging to instant messaging) and the participants’ everyday activities. It is a very important feature, as it raises the level of involvement of the participants in the research process, and of the researchers in the very activities under study. For example, in the OssCom studies, the devices and software used to complete the diaries and to keep the contact between the researchers and the participants, as well as the languages of the research-related production activities, were the same as those used by the participants to perform the everyday communication activities that constituted the ethnographic object.

Notwithstanding the contributions of virtual shadowing to online ethnography, it should be acknowledged that such a methodological approach also raises some important questions that need further discussion. One of these questions is related to the different statuses and characteristics of the data and documents collected through virtual shadowing (i.e., interviews, daily diaries, and videos/photos produced by the participants): These require different levels and methods of analysis. In the OssCom studies, the interviews and the daily diaries were analyzed through traditional content and discourse analysis, while the video, photo and multimedia materials produced by the participants were used mainly as a starting point for the final in-depth interviews, as stimuli for discussing the meaning of their productions and their self-perception as users. The question then is how to analyze those materials and documents in order to make the most out of them.

A related point is that the researcher should be cautious when analyzing these ethnographic documents because they can be subject to processes of hyper-coding. Indeed, the representations of self-perception and everyday
experience provided in these images, videos and blogs can be stereotyped or influenced by the context and aimed at offering a good and appropriate self-description according to the users’ imagined expectations of the interviewers and the society at large. These documents must therefore be approached as “hyper-performative” materials, which are useful for understanding the narrative models typical of a target group rather than for describing practices.

Virtual shadowing is a complex methodology, regarding not only its application but also the analysis and the management of multimedia data. However, it is a methodological framework that, thanks to the consonance between the tools and the users’ practices, increases the researcher’s empathy with his/her subjects, allows data collection and reflexive production to feed into each other and grants access to various kinds of materials and documents (textual and iconic). For these reasons, further methodological discussion is needed in order to consolidate virtual shadowing in terms of the participants’ involvement in the research process, the opportunity of (co)producing ethnographic materials and documents, and the management and analysis of various kinds of data—all this is indeed crucial for the development of ethnographic methodologies in relation to the transformation of users’ practices and cultures.

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INTRODUCTION

Audience research possibilities and techniques have considerably changed within the last decade. Today’s online world offers media scholars fast and free ways to gain a profound understanding of audiences and their motives for media use, of their actual media use habits and of the personal and social consequences of such individual media use patterns. The online environment makes it relatively simple to unobtrusively observe media use, to interview audience members, and to collect related statements on public websites or forums. Audience researchers can make use of a vast number of freely available tools and services for many research-related activities. Given the high number of existing tools and the speed of technological progress, it seems impossible not to feel overwhelmed occasionally or not to overlook tools that are perfectly suited for specific research projects. This chapter discusses promises, pitfalls and ethical implications of using Web 2.0 tools for academic audience research, with the aim of raising readers’ awareness of the array of freely available solutions and of potential positive or undesirable consequences when utilizing them in audience research inquiries.

THE PLACE OF WEB 2.0 TOOLS IN AUDIENCE RESEARCH

Defining Web 2.0 proved to be challenging and yielded “a lively global debate” (Musser 2007, 10). We subsequently use this term as a rather broad metaphor for the current Internet and its range of modern Web services that emphasizes both “content creation rather than content consumption” and “cooperation rather than control” (Brown 2012, 50). The increased availability of public domain and freeware software, the open access movement and the “open source software phenomenon” (Muffatto 2006, v), as well as their effects on audience research, deserve particular attention. The following discussion of free software tools encompasses Web-based services as well as offline software tools. These solutions can support audience researchers in virtually all phases of the research process (see Table 10.1), and
Table 10.1 Examples of Cost-Free Web 2.0 Solutions for Audience Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Examples of Tools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Inspiration and Information Gathering</td>
<td>• Databases for available data sources (e.g., Analyze.the.US¹, UK Data Archive², Council of European Social Science Data Archives³, Eurostat⁴, NetWiki⁵)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Social network sites search engines (Kurrently⁶, Google Blog Search⁷, SocialMention⁸)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Literature search tools (e.g., Academic Journals Database⁹, Google Books¹⁰, Google Scholar¹¹, Microsoft Academic Search¹², The Universal Digital Library¹³, JournalTOCs¹⁴, IngentaConnect¹⁵)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mind manager and note-making tools (Evernote¹⁶, FreeMind¹⁷, XMind¹⁸)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Research Organization and Collaboration</td>
<td>• Calendars and meeting schedulers (e.g., Doodle¹⁹, Google Calendar²⁰, NeedToMeet²¹)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Instant messaging and video conference tools (Skype²², Goober²³, VSee²⁴)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Collaboration tools (e.g., Stixy²⁵, Project 2 Manage²⁶, MediaWiki²⁷)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Participant Recruitment</td>
<td>• Recruitment websites (e.g., The Web Experiment List²⁸, WebExperiment.net²⁹, Psychological Research on the Net³⁰)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Pretest and Data Collection</td>
<td>• Text/content analysis data collection tools (Dapper³¹, Full Text RSS Feed Builder³², FiveFilters Full-Text RSS³³)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Survey tools (e.g., LimeSurvey³⁴, Google Forms³⁵, Kwik Surveys³⁶)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Tools for experimental designs (e.g., Wextor³⁷, Ztree³⁸, Affect³⁹)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Audience behaviour tracking tools (Google Analytics⁴⁰, AWStats⁴¹, ClickHeat⁴²)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Data Management</td>
<td>• Data cleaning and transformation tools (e.g., DataWrangler⁴³, Google-Refine⁴⁴, Notepad++⁴⁵)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Data Analysis</td>
<td>• Statistical software packages (e.g., R⁴⁶, PSPP⁴⁷, SOFA⁴⁸)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Qualitative data analysis tools (e.g., Coding Analysis Toolkit⁴⁹, Netlytic⁵⁰, Anvil⁵¹)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Social network analysis tools (Social Networks Visualizer⁵², NetDraw⁵³, Proximity⁵⁴)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tools for various other data analysis purposes (e.g., G*Power⁵⁵ for statistical power analyses, Yoshikoder⁵⁶ or JFreq⁵⁷ for text analyses, ReCal⁵⁸ for interrater reliability analyses)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
it seems not unreasonable to assume that many scholars frequently use such tools, yet perhaps without much reflection. Beyond the scope of this chapter, but of at least equal importance, are Web 2.0 communication channels like blogs and social network services, which are similarly used by audience researchers at various steps in the research process (e.g., for inspiration, help, data collection, discussion of findings and dissemination).

Promises and Advantages

While primary literature sources for academics were limited to books and journal articles until a few years ago, they have now “diversified to include blog posts, videos, draft publications, conference presentations and also the discussion, comment and debate surrounding each of these” (Weller 2011, 3). Using social networks, blogs or collaboration tools, it is easier than ever before to get inspiration, feedback, reflections and support from colleagues and to make one’s own research more visible. Natural online media use behavior was never easier to observe than it is today. We can record and analyze audience behavior in real time or collect its traces on servers (e.g., log files) and on local computers or mobile phones (e.g., browser history). Intercultural comparisons are simplified as well and are computed by default, for example, in many log file analysis tools. Researchers do not have to rely on audiences’ self-reports about media use anymore, but if they intend to, surveying a large number of audience members or conducting in-depth interviews with a selected few has never been easier. As smart phones become more and more popular, it becomes increasingly practicable to ask audience members questions whenever researchers desire and wherever the audience is located. The collection and analysis of geographic user data, which is already widely used for location-based services and advertisements, is also likely to become more widespread in future audience research investigations.

Today’s audience members leave their comments and opinions at various places all over the Internet (e.g., in blog posts, on social network sites, in chat and email conversations), thus making the online environment a superb resource for investigators interested in the analysis of audience statements.
Web 2.0 indeed offers countless free and sophisticated tools to find, collect, analyze, visualize, cite or share audience-related information. The characteristics and feature sets of available solutions are manifold. General discussions thus cannot cover more than a few main aspects that naturally do not apply to all tools to the same extent. Online research activities are likely to attract respondents of different cultural and social backgrounds, thus reducing the number of student samples often used in audience research, and enhancing the external validity and generalizability of findings—although it must be noted that the generalizability of online findings to the general public remains problematic (Kraut et al. 2004). Compared to traditional laboratory settings, online surveys and experiments can guarantee higher levels of anonymity for participants and furthermore decrease undesirable experimenter effects. As, depending on server capacity, hundreds or thousands of participants can participate simultaneously, there is hope that this development will reduce incorrect conclusions caused by a lack of statistical power or the dependence on local student samples and that it will also stimulate a higher number of replication studies.

The use of Web-based services or downloadable software tools does not only make audience research more time-efficient and affordable. It also permits data collections and analyses that used to be essentially impossible, impracticable or unaffordable (e.g., surveys or online experiments with thousands of respondents and advanced media use behavior tracking). The availability of such Web 2.0 solutions gives students and scholars from low-income as well as high-income countries an essentially equal opportunity to conduct state-of-the-art audience research studies. Web 2.0 services and freeware programmed in platform-independent programming languages (e.g., Java) can be used without the need for local installations. The freedom to use such software on any computer or perhaps on mobile devices without worries about licensing issues or update pricing can be very convenient. In contrast to widely used commercial software alternatives, many Web 2.0 service creators are extremely attentive to user needs and usually motivated to steadily improve existing features or to add new ones. Open-source solutions even allow researchers to inspect the source code and to modify the program’s functionality according to their needs, thus offering considerably higher levels of transparency and customization than most commercial solutions. Collaborations with international or national scholars have become more convenient than ever before, as online conferencing tools and document sharing services are freely available. Countless datasets are retrievable from databases and await further analyses. Finally, the Web 2.0 progress in combination with the open-source movement and the open-access spirit may inspire researchers to actively engage in the development and improvement of valued tools. Testing, bug-reporting, programming, donating, praising—much can be done with rather little effort in order to encourage further improvements, for
the benefit of one's own research as well as for the worldwide audience research community.

**Challenges and Risks**

Not too long ago, online research techniques “received their fair share of suspicion, ranging from nebulous expressions of distrust in departmental corridors and journal reviews to published concerns about the quality of Internet data” (Gosling et al. 2004, 94). Several of these negative preconceptions could, however, be identified as myths (Gosling et al. 2004; Kraut et al. 2004). It seems widely accepted nowadays that online research procedures are not generally superior or inferior to traditional methods, but instead offer specific advantages and disadvantages that need to be weighed depending on the specific goals of the intended research project. As general discussions on issues like sample biases, limited control over subjects, drop-out rates, reduced protection of subjects and susceptibility to fake responses can be found elsewhere (Gaiser and Schreiner 2011; Kraut et al. 2004), we will focus on some perhaps not overly obvious risks associated with the use of Web 2.0 tools for audience research.

First of all, it seems almost impossible to get a complete overview of existing tools or to keep track of their development. Reading a tool’s description or manual can be insufficient in order to understand what the tool is actually capable of or to figure out if a particular tool is actually the best available solution for a specific task. Choosing the appropriate solution can be time-consuming and may require extensive tests. This may change in the future, if such tools become more frequently utilized by scholars and consequently more often described and recommended. While some Web 2.0 services are extremely user-friendly, other tools may be less intuitive or may require specific knowledge or some training to use them. An at least basic understanding of computer and network specifications is often required, as even seemingly easy and straightforward activities like a search for media use traces can produce misleading findings if the specifics of the research object are not fully understood. For example, most modern Web browser programs contain a privacy feature that is “also known as ‘porn mode’ for its suspected use” (Wills and Zeljkovic 2011, 56), which prohibits the browser from storing information of browsing sessions (e.g., URLs, images, video, history) on the computer. Analyzing server log files as an alternative approach can likewise be problematic, for example, if researchers are not aware that some browsers or browser add-ons preload webpages linked on the currently viewed site in order to increase browsing speed. The browsing history may thus omit sites that were actually visited, while log files may contain websites that were neither deliberately loaded nor seen by the audience. Luckily, many data collection and analysis tools are designed to deal with such limitations.
The utilization of Web-based services for audience research requires Internet connectivity and is therefore not always practical. The “perpetual beta” characteristic of many Web 2.0 solutions (Musser 2007, 10) may also imply frequent updates that can be neither controlled nor avoided. Web 2.0 services may be temporarily unavailable, suddenly discontinued, sold, altered or reduced regarding their functionality or changed to a commercial business model. The reproducibility of findings, a core requirement for many research approaches (MacFarlane 2009; O’Leary 2004), may thus be at risk when using such tools. However, most of these challenges are solely associated with non-open-source Web-based services and are less critical or nonexistent if the software is downloaded and installed on the researcher’s computer or webserver. Similar to commercial software solutions, there is no guarantee that data analysis procedures will always deliver correct results and that data will not get lost or damaged when using such tools. Transferring data to Web-based services or “in the cloud” for analysis or storage purposes may also be problematic with regard to data protection and privacy requirements, as other parties (e.g., service providers, server administrators, or hackers) may have access to it. Senior advisers and journal editors may occasionally be reluctant to the use of new research tools and encourage junior scholars to concentrate on established research paths. Finally, the use of some “free” software may not be entirely cost-free, as several display text advertisements or banner advertisements, or force its users to subscribe to newsletters or to permit the tracking of their own software usage.

Ethical Considerations

Having praised the potentials of Web 2.0 tools for conducting audience research, it seems obligatory to reflect on the ethical implications, as “the potentials for intentional and unintentional misuse are also broad” (Rhodes, Bowie and Hergenrather 2003, 71). Resembling the diverse character of many Web 2.0 tools, ethical implications are manifold. In line with the aim of this chapter, we will limit our focus on problematic areas that are mainly associated with data collection procedures. Ethical issues of particular concern relate to aspects like informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality (Sharf 1999). Even though these issues affect most types of research, increased attention is warranted when using Web 2.0 technologies for data collection because of the constantly evolving nature of technology and the lacking consensus regarding best practices (Sharf 1999).

A common requirement for many research projects involving human subjects is that researchers acquire the informed consent of potential participants beforehand, meaning that participants are comprehensively informed about the objectives, content, benefits and risks of the study in order to be able to make an informed decision about whether or not to
participate. The distance between the researcher and the participant in Web-based research makes this practice a challenge and raises the question of what constitutes informed consent. Does clicking a button to agree to participate suffice? How can an adequate understanding of the research project and its implications for participants be ensured (Rhodes, Bowie and Hergenrather 2003)? Closely related is the question of when informed consent is necessary at all. The easy accessibility of data on the Internet poses the temptation of data collections without respondents’ knowledge and consent. Still, whether or not online information is public or private is disputed and still unclear (Berry 2004). While a researcher may think of certain comments on specific topics as public data, the user may perceive them as private and may not be aware of the possibility of his or her comments being analyzed and published, especially in password-protected communities. Depending on the topic investigated, this can be a more or less sensitive issue (Sharf 1999). It seems common practice nowadays to perceive informed consent as not necessary when data in public forums, websites or communities is analyzed, if such data is publicly accessible without the need of membership or registration and if no policies exist that explicitly prohibit data collection without permission (Beddows 2008; Kraut et al. 2004; Sharf 1999). When informed consent is required, researchers have to take great care in clearly explaining the study and its implications, which should include answers to anticipated or frequently asked questions (Nosek, Banaji and Greenwald 2002). As there is no clear rule capturing every imaginable situation, researchers have to take into consideration the specific nature of their study, potential benefits and risks to the research subject, as well as the practical implications of ensuring informed consent (Beddows 2008). Researchers also have to make sure that participant data remain confidential and anonymous. This may include the encryption of data, the provision of alternative anonymous ways of accessing the Internet (e.g., through anonymization services), or the separate storage of identifying information and all other data (Nosek, Banaji and Greenwald 2002; Rhodes, Bowie and Hergenrather 2003). In addition and pertaining mostly to qualitative research, it is suggested to disguise pseudonyms and to alter quoted text, as search engines may permit it to link pseudonyms or seemingly anonymous fragments of texts to real identities (Kraut et al. 2004).

Overall, common methodological guidelines for ethical conduct of Internet research are still evolving. The dynamic nature of the Internet and its technologies calls for a certain flexibility of these guidelines in order to be able to adapt to those changes (Berry 2004). Researchers conducting online research are advised to update themselves regularly about ethical standards and rules in their area of study while assuming full responsibility for potential benefits and risks of their research design for the subjects (Ess and AoIR ethics working committee 2002; Whiteman 2012).
WEB-BASED DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

Web 2.0 technologies, when compared to their traditional alternatives (e.g., paper-and-pencil questionnaire, face-to-face interview, laboratory experiments), make data collections more time-efficient, less expensive and overall easier to conduct. Two general approaches can be distinguished, which are often combined in research practice. First, Web 2.0 technologies can be the subjects of research—for example, in order to explore audiences’ or scholars’ use of Web 2.0 technology and its effects. Second, researchers can employ Web 2.0 technologies at any stage in the research process (see Table 10.1) in order to make the research process more timesaving or convenient. How four classic data collection strategies (Berger 2011; Bryman 2008)—audience self-reports, behavior observation, text analysis and experimental research designs—can be supported with Web 2.0 tools is discussed in the following sections. Many of the mentioned data collection tools additionally contain sophisticated data analysis and visualization features, which are worth being investigated by audience researchers but which are beyond the scope of this chapter.

Self-Reports: Surveys, Interviews and Focus Groups

Online questionnaires were probably the first and still most often used online audience research application. Scholars benefited greatly from an increased flexibility (e.g., filtering depending on previous answers, dynamic adaptations of questions, possibilities for the presentation of audio-visual stimuli, advanced randomization techniques), reduced social desirability effects and a diversified and broader sample—all at a fraction of the cost of typical paper-and-pencil questionnaires (Wright 2005). Many tools and software packages are available for online surveys. Most of these tools are not completely free and offer only a limited set of features or responses free of charge (e.g., Eval&Go71, Web Survey Master72). A noteworthy exception is LimeSurvey34, a fully featured free open-source tool that allows the creation of simple as well as advanced online questionnaires and that can be installed and run on researchers’ own servers, if desired.

Nonetheless, the above-mentioned benefits may come at some costs regarding data quality. The biggest concerns affect the generalizability of findings, self-selection biases, higher dropout and lower response-rates (Kraut et al. 2004). If generalizability to broader groups and populations is a central aim of the research, the use of online surveys is likely problematic (Evans and Mathur 2005; van Selm and Jankowski 2006). Yet, Kraut et al. (2004) argue that having large and diverse online samples is potentially more desirable than using typical college student samples. Another concern affects the lack of control over the situation in which respondents complete the questionnaires. While the anonymity of the Internet is of advantage when it comes to sensitive research topics, it can be
a drawback when individuals participate multiple times or do not take the survey seriously. In order to deal with the resulting greater fuzziness in the data, it seems advisable to recruit larger samples and to assess data quality through exploratory data analysis before performing hypotheses tests (Kraut et al. 2004).

It is also feasible to conduct many types of interviews online, be it single or group, structured or open, video-based or written. For example, the widely used voice-over-IP software Skype can be used to conduct phone or voice calls, text chats and video conferences, which can be simultaneously recorded (Bertrand and Bourdeau 2010). Instant messaging technologies are likewise suitable for conducting written interviews (Kazmer and Xie 2008). Web 2.0 infrastructure like online forums or Facebook groups can be used to recruit participants or to conduct interviews or focus group discussions (James and Busher 2009). The flexibility of Web 2.0 technology thus facilitates a potentially greater reach of participants as well as an easier recording and management of interview data. However, Internet connectivity or speed problems can disturb the flow of the conversation or lead to data loss. Compared to face-to-face interviews, online interviews are limited with respect to the available information channels—ranging from a reduced number of nonverbal cues in online video conversations or the loss of most nonverbal signals in audio-only interviews to a complete dependency on the bare textual content of written communication in instant message interviews (Kazmer and Xie 2008).

**Audience Behavior Observation**

In view of the huge amount of information and media channels online, the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies might be regarded as perfect playing fields for researchers interested in direct observations of social behavior or its widely available online traces (Fielding, Lee and Blank 2008). The browsing history, bookmarked pages, file uploads and downloads, subscriptions to forums and related posts, radio station preferences, video preferences and so forth are valuable indicators for audiences’ media and content preferences. Several options to collect and analyze these data are available. Google Analytics is probably the best-known service and provides very detailed website metrics and reporting options (Ledford, Teixeira and Tyler 2010). While being extremely powerful and offering high levels of customization, it is primarily developed and used for website optimization, marketing, and e-commerce, and may thus not always be the first choice for specific audience research enquiries. A variety of alternative tools exists that can be used to record and analyze, either obtrusively or unobtrusively, audiences’ media use behavior. These include, among others, solutions for mouse tracking (e.g., IOGraph, ClickHeat) and screen recording software (e.g., CamStudio). Overall, Web 2.0 technologies for collecting observational data have the advantage of reducing observer errors and observer influences, thus
increasing validity and reliability by replacing the observer with automated tools. At the same time, however, scholars should be aware of ethical, legal and technical limitations. Besides, such investigations often yield enormous amounts of data, occasionally in proprietary formats, which may require complex data cleaning and analysis procedures. Even so, the Internet offers an almost endless amount of audience behavior data to study and plenty of analysis tools suitable for this purpose—and while such techniques are widely employed by commercial organizations, they undoubtedly deserve considerably more attention by audience researchers.

Experimental Research Designs

Web 2.0 technologies can also be employed to support experimental research, either online or offline. On the one hand, experimental manipulations can be easily included in surveys or behavior observation studies. On the other hand, free Internet-based Web-experiment generators like WEXTOR\textsuperscript{37} have been developed to facilitate the realization of online experiments. Generating and visualizing experimental designs and procedures, WEXTOR is currently freely available for educational and noncommercial purposes (Reips and Neuhaus 2002) and can be used online or offline, in field as well as in laboratory settings. Another software package for implementing experiments is Affect\textsuperscript{39}. Different types of stimuli can be presented in complex sequences of semi-randomized designs, for example, while participants’ latencies in responses are recorded (Spruyt et al. 2010). Web sites such as the Web Experiment List\textsuperscript{28} or WebExperiment.net\textsuperscript{29} facilitate the recruitment of participants and provide an archive of Internet-based experiments (Reips and Lengler 2005).

Implementing experiments online or with the help of software tools offers several advantages. Automatic Web experiments can be conducted around the clock, rendering them very time- and cost-efficient compared to traditional offline experiments (Reips 2002). Larger sample sizes as well as more varied populations can be achieved, thus allowing researchers to conduct even complex experiments that require several hundred or thousand participants for sufficient statistical power. External validity is usually also higher in contrast to lab experiments, as participants are often in familiar settings when they take part and as the sample usually does not solely consist of students (Reips 2002). The automation of procedures increases experimental control and reduces experimenter effects and errors. Yet experimental control is given out of hands, as the situational context of each experimental session is beyond the researcher’s control, and researchers become unable to intervene when instructions are misunderstood or when stimuli show unwanted effects on participants. Dependence on technology can also be disadvantageous when configuration errors and technical limitations are encountered.
Text Analysis Approaches

Millions of texts are published every day online. Today’s online world can be seen as a valuable and growing text database for audience researchers, ready to be utilized—but how? Real Simple Syndication (RSS) describes a widespread syndication format used by millions of websites to publish the most current news stories, comments, blog posts, videos and so forth. Using one of the many freely available RSS newsreader programs or services (e.g. Feedly\textsuperscript{75}, GreatNews\textsuperscript{76}), audience members can subscribe to RSS feeds and can thus remain up-to-date about various topics or channels that they are interested in. For example, in 2012, cnn.com offered thirty thematic RSS feeds for subscription (e.g., top stories, technology, entertainment). Most media sites and blogs offer RSS feeds, so a wealth of information is already available online. In cases where no RSS feeds are offered, services like Dapper\textsuperscript{31} or Feed43\textsuperscript{77} allow users to convert any Web content into such feeds. Google Alerts\textsuperscript{78} can be used to automatically stay informed through RSS feeds or email messages if certain words or phrases appear in online news channels, in blogs, or in video descriptions. Many media outlets offer only shortened feeds, but several free tools (e.g., Full Text RSS Feed Builder\textsuperscript{32}, FiveFilters Fulltext RSS\textsuperscript{33}) are available to convert truncated RSS feeds into full text feeds. In summary, almost any information on the Web is either already available as full text RSS feed or can be transferred into one, which can then be subscribed to and automatically collected. Did we ever before come that close to a media researcher’s dream of a self-updating full text database of virtually any online audience or media information available?

Several automatic and semi-automatic text analysis tools are available for such data (e.g., blog posts, user comments, status updates on social network sites, email messages, news items) and enable audience researchers to conduct a variety of analyses. Both traditional media content (e.g., news stories, political speeches), Web 2.0 content (e.g., forum, blog or Twitter posts) and otherwise collected audience responses can be quickly analyzed or contrasted. Two examples for qualitative text analysis tools are the open-source tools Coding Analysis Toolkit (CAT)\textsuperscript{49} and Netlytic\textsuperscript{50}. CAT enables researchers to code raw text data sets, arrange collaborative coding, assess interrater reliability, export results to different formats and to archive or share projects. Netlytic is a Web-based system for automated text analysis and for the exploration of social networks from electronic communication such as emails, forums, blogs and chats. Different types of networks can be visualized based on the number of messages exchanged between individuals. Dictionary-based analyses are possible with tools like JFreq\textsuperscript{57} and Yoshikoder\textsuperscript{56}. Tools such as ELAN\textsuperscript{79} or ANVIL\textsuperscript{51} allow the creation of complex annotations when analyzing video and audio material. Even though many tools allow a faster, cheaper, and often more reliable text analysis than manual coding approaches, there is certainly room for improvement.
of automatic systems, primarily due to the polysemy of human language (Divakaran 2009; West 2001).

A CASE STUDY

To illustrate the flexibility and usefulness of Web 2.0 tools for numerous applications in audience research, we used the text analysis strategy outlined just above as one example to analyze German news stories and blog posts about the Fukushima nuclear disaster that followed the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. The Fukushima disaster led to intense public pressure on the German government and marked a turning point in German energy policy, resulting in the decision for a long-term nuclear phase-out. As Germans were repeatedly characterized as overly anxious and very skeptical with respect to technology-related health risks (“German Angst”: Bode 2008), we wanted to (1) explore the extent to which German news stories actually include anxiety-related and death-related references and (2) compare this number to such references in blog posts. Our aim was to compare several—traditional mass media as well as Web 2.0—sources for information in order to learn about the kinds of messages that audience members may have been exposed to, in order to generate hypotheses about specific audience attitudes toward nuclear power. We are aware that this approach might not qualify as audience research in a narrow sense. It can be argued, however, that it is essential to know what information audience members were or may have been exposed to, as exposure constitutes the central precondition for virtually all media effects. The obtained information can also be valuable to become aware of potential differences between audience members of different media sources. We will describe later how a basically identical approach can be used to analyze audience members’ direct responses in the form of forum posts and article comments.

Method

All available RSS feeds of six popular German news outlets (bild.de, faz.net, sueddeutsche.de, tagesschau.de, taz.de, zeit.de) and thirty-two popular blogs were converted into full text RSS feeds using the conversion services mentioned above, and were then subscribed to using the open-source RSS reader GreatNews. All articles published between March 11 and March 31, 2011, that contained both the words “Fukushima” and “radiation” (translated) were identified using the GreatNews inbuilt search function and exported as text files. Duplicates and articles that did not primarily feature the Fukushima disaster were excluded from the sample. HTML and XML tags were removed using the advanced search-and-replace functions of the free text editor software Notepad++. The final sample consisted of 288 news articles (306,355 words) and thirty blog posts (44,345 words).
Results

Wordle\textsuperscript{80} was used (with the standard word removal configuration) to generate word clouds of the 100 most frequently used words in the analyzed news articles and blog posts. A visual comparison of both resulting word clouds suggests that news stories, compared to blog posts, contained a larger amount of potentially anxiety-inducing words (e.g., catastrophe, danger, explosion, meltdown, radioactivity, radiation). The word cloud for news articles is shown in Figure 10.1.

A dictionary-based text analysis was conducted to allow a more objective comparison of the relative frequency of references to anxiety and death in both news stories and blog posts. The freeware program JFreq\textsuperscript{57} was used to apply the “anxiety” (e.g., afraid*, anxiet*, panic*) and “death” (e.g., dead*, burial*, mourn*) categories of a German adaptation (Wolf et al. 2008) of the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) dictionary (Pennebaker, Francis and Booth 2001) to all texts. The German LIWC dictionary was obtained from the authors and converted to the Yoshikoder\textsuperscript{56} format. Even though automatic text analysis techniques are occasionally criticized as a “shallow mechanical approach”, they can function as a valuable “starting point to understand overall interaction patterns and identify segments of interaction worth for more in-depth analysis” (Tan, So and Chai 2011, 624) and may “reveal more than meets the eye” (Mehl 2006, 142).\textsuperscript{1} Figure 10.2 displays the matches for the LIWC anxiety and death categories per 100

\textbf{Figure 10.1} Word Cloud Representing the Frequency of the 100 Most Often Used Words in German News Stories about the Fukushima Disaster

\textit{Note:} \(n = 288\) news articles (306,355 words) published between March 11 and March 31, 2011, by six major German news outlets.
words for each text source. The open-source program PSPP47, “a free replacement for SPSS” (Argyrous 2011, 26), was used to determine significant differences between the seven analyzed sources of information.

Most references to anxiety and death were found in articles from the tabloid newspaper Bild. Blog posts showed the smallest amount of anxiety-related references but did not differ from news articles with respect to death-related references. Based on this empirical evidence, we can hypothesize that—depending on media users’ personality type—readers of Bild will show either the highest amount of fear of nuclear power (coupled with the most negative attitudes regarding this energy source) or the greatest amount of defensive processing (e.g., denial or suppression). The outlined approach can be easily adopted to suit a wide range of audience research questions. The just-mentioned hypotheses could be tested, for example, by analyzing forum posts or reader comments to Fukushima-related articles. The collected comments and texts could be further analyzed regarding one of the more than seventy other LIWC categories (Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010) or regarding the forty-three categories contained in the Regressive Imagery Dictionary (RID, e.g., Wilson 2011). They could also be used to examine political positions by applying the Laver and Garry (2000) dictionary or by using WordFish81 (e.g., Proksch and Slapin 2010), or for an exploration of the occurrences of certain words over time using Netlytic50—to just name a few possibilities.

OUTLOOK

The Internet provides audience researchers with fascinating data sources and powerful free tools to make use of it. In this chapter we illustrated the
potential of using Web 2.0 tools for ultimately all typical phases of audience research, but we also discussed potential drawbacks and ethical concerns. While preparing this chapter, we were repeatedly impressed and inspired by the functionality of free solutions and their fast development but also worried when we learned that some valued tools had been abandoned by their developers or became unavailable. This dynamic development, however, is an integral part of the current Web 2.0 environment. Nonetheless, the most important challenge for researchers—uncontrollable tool development—affects only Web-based services that do not offer downloadable program versions. Many of the solutions described in this chapter are available as open-source or freeware software and thus can be archived and installed by researchers as desired so that reproducibility of findings is ensured.

We want to emphasize again that we limited our focus to cost-free data collection tools that do not require users to have advanced programming skills. A whole new world of possibilities opens up if audience researchers are able to program their own tools or to extend existing open-source solutions, or are capable of combining the widely existing application programming interfaces (APIs) with other data sources to create their own service mashups (Benslimane, Dustdar and Sheth 2008; see also Courtois and Mechant, this volume).

It seems safe to assume that Web 2.0 tools will play a considerably more prominent role in future audience research projects, as well as in audience research method textbooks, and that their benefits and limits will be more thoroughly examined. Best-practice guidelines and measurement standards are still largely missing, and enthusiastic researchers may be all too easily lured into collecting vast amounts of data without being sufficiently aware of theoretical implications, technical limitations, ethical considerations and methodological restrictions. Therefore it seems overdue to not only promote the use of such tools but also to provide sufficient guidance with respect to best use and potential misuse.

NOTE

1. See also Mehl (2006); Tan, So and Chai (2011); and Tausczik and Pennebaker (2010) for in-depth discussions of the validity and limitations of computerized text analysis techniques.

REFERENCES


Appendix 10.1  Internet Addresses

1 http://analyze-the.us
2 http://www.data-archive.ac.uk
3 http://www.cessda.org
5 http://netwiki.amath.unc.edu
6 http://www.kurrently.com
7 http://www.google.com/blogsearch
8 http://socialmention.com
9 http://journaldatabase.org
10 http://books.google.com/books
11 http://scholar.google.com
12 http://academic.research.microsoft.com
13 http://www.ulib.org
14 http://www.journaltoocs.hw.ac.uk
15 http://www.ingentaconnect.com
16 http://www.evernote.com
17 http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page
18 http://www.xmind.net
19 http://www.doodle.com
20 http://www.google.com/calendar
21 http://www.needtomeet.com
22 http://www.skype.com
23 http://www.goober.com
24 http://vsee.com
25 http://www.stixy.com
26 http://www.project2manage.com
27 http://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/MediaWiki
28 http://www.wexlist.net
29 http://www.webexperiment.net
30 http://psych.hanover.edu/research/exponnet.html
31 http://open.dapper.net
32 http://fulltextrssfeed.com
33 http://fivefilters.org/content-only
34 http://www.limesurvey.org
35 http://www.google.com/google-d-s/forms
36 http://kwiksurveys.com
37 http://wextor.org/wextor/en/
38 http://www.iew.uzh.ch/ztree
39 http://fac.ppw.kuleuven.be/clep/affect4
40 http://www.google.com/intl/en/analytics
41 http://awstats.sourceforge.net
42 http://www.labsmedia.com/clickheat
43 http://vis.stanford.edu/wrangler
44 http://code.google.com/p/google-refine
45 http://notepad-plus-plus.org
46 http://www.r-project.org
47 http://www.gnu.org/software/pspp
48 http://www.sofastatistics.com
49 http://cat.ucsur.pitt.edu
50 http://netlytic.org
51 http://www.anvil-software.de
52 http://socnetv.sourceforge.net
53 https://sites.google.com/site/netdrawsoftware/home
54 http://kdl.cs.umass.edu/proximity/proximity.html
55 http://wwwpsycho.uni-duesseldorf.de/abteilungen/aap/gpower3
56 http://www.yoshikoder.org
57 http://www.williamlowe.net/software/jfreq
58 http://dfreelon.org/utils/recalfront
59 http://www.google.com/fusiontables
60 http://www.impure.com
61 http://gephi.org
62 http://prezi.com
63 http://sozi.baierouge.fr/wiki/doku.php
64 http://ahead.com
65 http://www.zotero.org
66 http://www.bibme.org
67 http://www.readcube.com
68 http://www.researchgate.net
69 http://www.academia.edu
70 http://www.mendeley.com
71 http://www.evalandgo.com
72 http://www.websurveymaster.com
73 http://iographica.com
74 http://camstudio.org
75 http://www.feedly.com
76 http://www.curiosstudio.com
77 http://feed43.com
78 http://www.google.com/alerts
79 http://tda.mpi.nl/tools/tda-tools/elan
80 http://www.wordle.net
81 http://www.wordfish.org
11 Twitter And Social TV
Microblogging as a New Approach to Audience Research

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INTRODUCTION
At first sight, microblogging and television inhabit different worlds. On the one hand, television is a form of mass communication broadcasting audiovisual programs to a widespread public in a one-directional way. Twitter as a microblogging platform, on the other hand, is a social media tool used for sending and reading short messages. It is also a networking platform through which users share, for example, thoughts, photos, opinions and news. Indeed, people use Twitter for a wide range of social purposes. The so-called “new” and “old” media should not be seen as antagonists, since a wide range of people receive mass media content via Web platforms. Reading newspapers online, watching streams of TV stations and listening to the podcasts of the favorite radio shows indicate an ongoing process of convergence.

At the beginning of the development of the social Web in general, and Twitter in particular, networking platforms have gained a lot of public attention, and there has been a certain amount of “hype” about their usage. Traditional information channels such as newspapers and TV have proclaimed “Twitter revolutions” (Burns and Eltham 2009; Leyne 2010) and have emphasized its importance in reporting catastrophes (O’Reilly, Milstein and Lang 2009) and political movements (Leyne 2010). For the users or the audience in ordinary daily situations, however, Twitter is neither revolutionary in a political way nor is it of any relevance concerning the coverage of catastrophes. To them it simply serves as a new form of communication—a tool they use in their everyday lives in different ways and for different purposes than the other forms of mediated communication.

Although the Internet is becoming increasingly important for the younger generation and people with higher educational backgrounds, TV remains the medium used most intensively for entertainment and information purposes (Ecke 2011). Moreover, as the Web provides an infrastructure for public communication, it is also used for communication about the mass media (Maletzke 1998). For example, a study of Twitter shows that the
most shared links connect to mass media websites (Maireder 2010). Considering the characteristics of computer-mediated communication, there is a new, broad field for TV audience research emerging based on the interwoven use of television and Twitter. In this chapter we discuss the opportunities for audience analysis provided by the tools connected to the microblogging platform Twitter, thereby proposing a new approach for media audience research.

THE PRACTICE OF MICROBLOGGING

Microblogging facilitates sharing messages within a social network. Twitter is the most widely known microblogging platform: “Although various microblogging services exist, Twitter has become synonymous with the concept” (Hennig-Thurau, Wiertz and Feldhaus 2012, 3; see especially the section “Media Reach and Usage” in this chapter).

Structure and Communication

Microblogging can be considered as a form of blogging (Herwig et al. 2009). Both blogging and microblogging are published in reverse chronology with the latest news first and are updated regularly. However, contrary to blog articles, a microblogging post (or “tweet”) is usually limited to 140 characters (like a text message). This brevity enables rapid sharing of information and at the same time stimulates creative ways of circumventing this limitation—for instance, through services for shortening Web addresses (URLs) or connecting images to a tweet. The shortness of the tweets makes them relevant as a status-update service and usable for mobile usage: “[M]obile has been in our DNA right from the start: [. . .] Twitter is the evolution of mobile messaging” (Lockergnome 2010).

The date and time of the posting and, of course, the name or nickname of the author can be found at the bottom of the posted message. It is the author’s own decision whether he or she declares his or her real name, or a pseudonym, or whether he or she remains completely anonymous. There are different ways to post a tweet: The user can either write directly on www.twitter.com by using his or her browser, or use a variety of programs that provide additional services (e.g., organizing the messages or the network contacts) and are often characterized by a well-designed user interface. The name of the chosen application also appears in the message. Many applications (“apps”) are programmed for mobile devices and hence facilitate mobile Twitter usage. Different tools imply different uses: For instance, tweeting via a mobile phone comes with a frequent use of data-upload services—for example, for uploading and sharing pictures (Ketzer, Bredl and Fleischer 2011).
While Twitter is a microblogging tool, it can also be considered as another kind of social networking platform, as in some respects, it fits the definition of social networking sites provided by boyd and Ellison (2007, 211):

It is a web-based service that enables individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

There is no registration needed in order to read Twitter messages. Anyone who wants to connect to others and to post messages, however, has to register at www.twitter.com. Although Twitter provides a customizable profile page, the key principle is to “follow” the messages of other Twitter users. These subscribed messages are then added to the user’s own “timeline” (a list of followed people). What is different from social networking sites proper, though, is that being followed through Twitter does not require any confirmation by the user. Reciprocal following is possible but not essential, which turns Twitter into a dynamic network. An exception is the so-called protected account, meaning that only confirmed subscribers are allowed to read the feed; this option is only used by a minority of users (Ketzer, Bredl and Fleischer 2011).

Although there is a large number of programs for using Twitter in different ways, the homepage www.twitter.com offers an uncomplicated option to enter with an ordinary Web browser. Stored messages can be read offline but for posting a comment and sharing it with the network, an online connection to the service is required. The term “real time” is often used when referring to Twitter because the messages are published and read immediately.

To provide a better understanding of how microblogging works, we define below the main typical communicative practices on Twitter:

- **Addressivity/related communication with “@username”:** Although the @username implies a bi-directional conversation, it can also be a message about (and not to) the person mentioned. One can write a message to a person (for example, “Good morning, @username, good luck for your exams!”) or about a person (for example, “Today I read the blog of @username, it’s a waste of time”).
- **Retweet as message forwarding (RT):** There are different ways to forward messages. RT @username is widely used (boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010). The practice itself establishes conversation, affords information spreading and at the same time shows the (presumptive) primary source.
- **Direct messages:** These are not visible to the public, as they are written directly to one person. This functionality is limited to the network (i.e., direct messages can only be exchanged between followers).
• Hashtags (#): These are of particular importance because they are used to mark keywords or topics in a tweet and therefore allow for content searches within the network.

• Lists: This function adds group functionality to the network. The Twitter user can organize his or her network by creating lists for special groups, for example a “friends” group, or organizing other Twitter users into groups of interest. The lists can be defined as public or private.

On top of these communicative practices, there are many more mechanisms of interaction that have been developed by active communities and afforded by ongoing technical improvements (boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010).

Facts about Twitter

Microblogging is provided by several services. Apart from stand-alone services such as Twitter, microblogging applications such as Activity Streams are also integrated into certain social networking sites. Among these, Timeline on Facebook is the most prominent one.

With regard to stand-alone microblogging, Twitter is the most widely used service in Europe and the United States. Twitter was founded in 2006 by a company based in San Francisco and has influenced media usage ever since. When talking about microblogging activities people use words such as “to tweet” or “a tweet”. In March 2012 Twitter had over 140 million active users worldwide posting 340 million tweets a day (Rios and Lin 2012).

In 2009 the number of users “exploded” (Radwanick 2009) to 10 million worldwide and at the same time the total minutes spent on the site increased by a rate of 3,712 percent (McGiboney 2009). In December 2012, Twitter celebrated 200 million active users (500 million passive) (O’Carroll 2012) and mobile usage is growing even further: Twitter doubled its mobile audience from 2010 to 2011 (ComScore 2011). This is not surprising, as adequate hardware and mobile infrastructures are available almost everywhere. Smart phones and tablets as well as high-speed mobile data packages are widespread, and the use of mobile Internet is becoming more and more common. Hence the key issue is the price structure: 95.7 percent of the microbloggers using Twitter via mobile devices choose a flat rate to control mobile Internet fees (Ketzer, Bredl and Fleischer 2011).

Despite remarkable user numbers and a near-ubiquitous awareness (Webster 2010), Twitter has a smaller reach compared to Facebook. Many people just visit Twitter once and do not return, while others are passive users who neither read nor write often (Beus 2009). There are also robot accounts that tweet the first few lines of new articles from their “home” blog or homepage in order to inform followers, tweet links that aim at influencing the page ranking by search machines, and, at worst, send around spams and dangerous content. These facts should be taken into account when analyzing Twitter statistics.

Considering the further aim of analyzing tweets about TV content, language may be more relevant than the geographic location. Although Twitter
users often publish in English, as Maireder (2010) shows for Austria, Pfeiffer (2012) nonetheless reports 595,000 accounts using the German language in March 2012.

EXISTING RESEARCH ON MICROBLOGGING

Microblogging research has dealt with different aspects including motivations and types of content, mostly through content analyses (by focusing on the Twitter platform).

Miller (2008, 396) describes Twitter as “currently the best example of ‘connected presence’ and the phatic culture”, referring to the congruence of the characteristics of Twitter and phatic communication: “nonresponsiveness”, “simplicity”, “briefness” and “high speed”.

Dann (2010) has carried out a content analysis to gain insights into the use of Twitter in daily life. “Daily chatter” about the users’ daily routines, “conversations”, “information or URL sharing” and “news reporting” were the meta-categories of content. Java et al. (2007) have examined styles of use and users’ intentions. The authors have found an interesting relation: The higher the number of the follower/following score, the higher were the numbers in the categories “information seeking/sharing” and “friendship-relationship”.

Pear Analytics (2009) has identified six content categories: The most frequent was “pointless babble” as an indicator for phatic communication (Miller 2008), then “conversation”, “pass-along” within retweets (RT), “self-promotion”, and less frequent “spam” and “news”.

Honeycutt and Herring (2009) have studied the addressivity of the @ symbol within directed conversations (91 percent) and referencing (5 percent). Above all, the aim was to get indicators for the presence of other users. The categories were: “direct conversation” (most frequent), “reports of personal experience”, “information”, and “encouragement”.

Naaman et al. (2010) have identified eight types of activities: “information sharing”, “opinions/complaints”, “self-promotion”, “me now” answers to the status update question, “anecdote (about me)” as a past event, “anecdote (about others)” as a story about other users, “question to followers”, and “presence maintenance” (referring to status messages about the user’s location and statements including undirected random thoughts and observations).

Apart from some insights into the live coverage of events (Gay et al. 2009; Helweh 2011; Twitter Developers 2011), tweeting during television broadcasting has not received sufficient attention in research to date.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH VIA MICROBLOGGING

In general one can state that audience research typically deals with media reach and the structure of audiences or media in connection with surrounding
circumstances such as interpersonal communication, everyday life or society in general.

Field studies are able to provide rich data on audiences in a natural setting because the researcher can observe media actions as well as the conversations that accompany media use. A method for gaining even deeper insight can be found in ethnographic approaches. For example, Lull (1990) explored how families use television as an interactional resource; Kepplinger and Martin (1986) found that media content is discussed in more than half of the everyday public conversations (see also Keppler 1994; Ulmer and Bergmann 1993). Thus observations are fruitful methods for researching audience conversations. For instance, Charlton and Neumann-Braun (1982) have observed children and found that they use television conversations to express their current emotional and life situations.

However, one problem with observing people watching TV is that it does not necessarily lead to correct assumptions concerning the reason for their actions and reactions. Another limitation to ethnographic field studies and observations is that they always need one or more researchers to be present in the field, and this presence may have an influence on the audience and/or their conversations.

In light of these methodological difficulties, Twitter seems to offer great opportunities for researching audience conversations about television. Using this social media platform for research is similar to observation and also offers possibilities for content analysis without influencing the conversational situation. A good example of this approach is the study of Chew and Eysenbach (2010), consisting in a content analysis of tweets during the H1N1 outbreak in 2009 to get insights into the public perceptions in time of emergency. So the idea of using a microblogging tool for observing interpersonal communication about TV makes sense: The less time has passed between watching the show and the conversation, the more probable it is that there is a correlation between the communication and the reason for it.

**TV Audience and Microblogging**

Morrison and Krugman (2001) emphasize the important role played by TV in delivering topics for conversation. As a result of their comparative study, Ducheneaut et al. (2008) have categorized five types of conversation during TV viewing: “content-based”, “context-based”, “logistical”, “non-sequitur”, and “phatic”.

Especially nowadays as joint television viewing is complicated due to different job schemes and geographic dispersion, social media might be able to create a pseudo “group viewing experience” (Wohn and Na 2011), as the individual television viewer shares his or her experience with an online community. Twitter enables impulsive expressions and communicative exchange within a virtual sphere, creating inner-audience conversations and interactions with the computer or a mobile device serving as a “second screen”. 
In an era of increasingly convergent digital media, Twitter is being used to comment on TV content (Twitter 2011).

Webster (2010) sees Twitter “as an accompaniment to live TV”, as US microbloggers regularly spend more than three hours watching TV every day. The same study shows that Twitter users often write about popular TV broadcasts such as *American Idol* and *Lost*. Furthermore, five of the ten most popular US TV shows are ranked very highly within Twitter trends (Webster 2010). The audience, therefore, uses Twitter for communication about a range of media content. Due to the increasing rate of mobile and ubiquitous usage, the audience does not only tweet before or after a show (for instance, to send critical comments) but also during the show, about what is actually being viewed on the screen. Real-time transmission of messages turns Twitter into a good source of breaking news on the one hand, and an adequate tool for live discussion on the other. So it is not astonishing that “a third of active Twitter users tweeted about TV-related content”. Therefore, one can say that “Twitter has emerged as a key driver of social TV interaction” (Nielsen 2012).

Studies of “social TV” deal with the context of watching TV and sociability: Torrez-Riley (2011) describes the social TV phenomenon and Twitter in particular as one of the new technologies to enhance television’s role as an enabler of social interaction. This is an interesting research field because it emphasizes current developments in media usage located in the interplay of online and offline media content. In their study, Wohn and Na (2011) conclude that “people are using the tool to selectively seek others who have similar interests and communicate their thoughts synchronous with television viewing”.

Some of the recent publications have a certain focus on marketing and social TV, like the contributions of Proulx and Shepatin (2012) and Hill, Benton and Peng (2012), which analyzed the impact of social media strategies on viewer engagement.

In the last presidential election campaign in the United States, Twitter served as a tool for debate in live TV transmissions (Churchill, Kennedy and Shamma 2009). But focusing only on news and politics is reductive: Twitter is an online tool for daily chat about media content in general.

**Relevance of Twitter in the Field of Audience Research**

Twitter as a social media tool contains an Application Programming Interface (API) that enables other applications to access its content, thereby creating vast possibilities for data collection and analysis. This open access means that the tweets, and the information about them, can be retrieved from analysis tools and therefore can be used as data in the research process. So on the one hand, Twitter provides an infrastructure for its users to express themselves and communicate about an issue, and, on the other hand, the data is accessible and can be used for research purposes about this issue.
Furthermore, a lot of applications known as “mashups” allow combining different data sources. Mashups are possible because of the open data access and can serve numerous purposes. One prominent application, for example, combines the location of the Twitter user (provided via the Twitter API) with Google Maps, thereby creating a map showing tweet flows in real time. An overview of the vast amount of mashup applications available can be found on Twitter Fan Wiki (2012).

The API allows easy access not only to the shared content but also to most of the users’ data (except for secure user accounts and direct messages), which can be used for analysis. As described in the section “Structure and Communication”, every message contains specific data such as the name of the author, his or her nickname, the date and time of the tweet, the client’s name (some clients designed for mobile phones only indicate mobile tweeting), and a permalink. In addition to the content, additional items can also be considered such as the location of the author (as provided by a popular mashup using a mapping program) or whether a (mobile) device is being used, and indeed which type. With all these data available, the researcher can address a wide range of questions in the following three areas (see also Table 11.1):

1. the broadcast/show: analyzing Twitter account statistics in relation to the content of the show (reach, following networks, referring tweets, referring links, lists, re-tweets);
2. the audience: analyzing the following/follower network by studying the accounts tweeting about a given issue; and
3. the broadcast-related conversations: studying the structure and content of conversations referring to a broadcast (content analysis, hashtags/trending topics).

**Instruments for Analyzing Twitter Content**

By designing an appropriate algorithm or program, researchers can analyze an immense amount of data. In addition, the social Web provides another solution. Although not typically used for research, the open data access is already used by applications called “social analysis tools”, the purpose of which is implied in the name. The (social) Web is developing rapidly, and Web applications are changing dynamically as well. This is indicated by the large number of third-party applications available, as well as the disappearance of some programs. Nonetheless, we present below some examples of currently active, social media monitoring and analysis tools (Table 11.1). In addition the social media analysis tool Bluefin (Talbot 2011; http://bluefinlabs.com/) offers the possibility of generating a “mapping of social media commentary to mass media stimuli on TV”.

Through a mixed-method approach, some of the monitoring tools enable the identification of quantitative changes in the average frequency of Twitter
Table 11.1  Twitter Tools in Relation to Research Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research topic</th>
<th>Twitter Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I)  The broadcast/show: Media reach, aberration, discordant value of media usage</td>
<td>• tweet.grader.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• twitalyzer.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• twittercounter.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• research.ly / rs.peoplebrowsr.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II)  The audience: Structure of the audience (social issues, lifestyles, consumerism, psychographics)</td>
<td>• friendorfollow.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyzing the followers (reciprocity, structure of follower/ following network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III)  The connections to interpersonal communication: Analyzing the followers and categorizing the feeds (positive/ negative connotations)</td>
<td>• twittersentiment.appspot.com</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

usage. These data can consequently be qualitatively interpreted through tweets analysis to find the corresponding reasons.

Example: Audience Research/TV Tweeting

The application potential of Twitter analysis tools is demonstrated in the following example. To show the usefulness of Twitter for audience research, the television series Gute Zeiten, Schlechte Zeiten (in translation Good Times, Bad Times, abbreviation: GZSZ) was selected. GZSZ was launched in May 1992 and is Germany’s most popular teenage soap opera. It runs daily at 7:40 p.m. with an average of 4.5 million viewers. The soap opera is about a group of young people who face problems concerning love, career choice, illness, etc. As of May 2012, 5,000 episodes have been broadcasted (GZSZ 2012).

The GZSZ team provides a lot of information through social media, including Twitter. GZSZ uses the Twitter account “GZSZ_news” to tweet relevant information, spread news and communicate with fans. The followers have the opportunity to retweet or comment on GZSZ_news posts and other users’ posts. This kind of interactivity provides the fans with a view of their favorite soap opera from the inside and the feeling of being part of the team. This may increase the connection between the fans and the show, which in turn generates higher viewer ratings.

Using the tools indicated in Table 11.1 allows identifying quantitative changes in Twitter streams. For instance, looking at the Twitter account GZSZ_news using twittercounter.com and research.ly on March 15, 2011, one can see that the amount of user tweets increased three times compared to the normal frequency (Figure 11.1).
In case of an irregular spike in the quantity of tweets, the question immediately arises as to what caused this growth. Above-average traffic can indicate that specific incidents in the episode of the series might have caused increased discussion. Hence in order to explain the quantitative changes in the Twitter stream, one must complement the quantitative analysis with a qualitative examination of the episode. Thus the next step is an interpretative
content analysis in which the tweets from the relevant days are examined in order to find an explanation for the increased activity on March 15, 2011. Looking at the content of these tweets, two possible causes became apparent. First, an actor in the soap had celebrated his birthday, and second, a spelling error in a tweet (“adopt” instead “adapt”) had caused a heated debate (Figure 11.2).

Potential of the Research Approach

Using Twitter-related social media monitoring tools makes it possible to analyze the content and structures of media-related conversations. The comments on tweets are focal points of social action and therefore a source for quantitative and qualitative oriented research. Tweets, retweets and comments are indicators for underlying individual positions concerning interpersonal communication caused by TV formats and events. This data is also a fruitful source for research on public communication and the inner monologue or the “verbal stream of consciousness” (James 1892/1997) evoked by television combined with social media.

Using microblogging and social media monitoring applications as research tools has several practical advantages for the audience researcher. First, he or she does not need to actively participate in the Twitter discussion timeline while conducting research via Twitter. One can see all the communications without the communicators noticing. Whereas reactiveness is always a problem with methods such as interviews or observation, no audience reactiveness occurs here as no classic survey tools are used. Second, it is not difficult to record the data, as it is already there, and the whole conversation is documented and available for everyone to see. Third, the researcher is able to easily contact tweeters in order to receive their permission for researching their conversations. All these possibilities afforded by microblogging and social media monitoring applications open up new research paths for the study of audiences in the age of media convergence.

Ethical Considerations

This kind of research also involves ethical challenges related to anonymity and privacy. Online researchers should critically assess to which ethical issues and discussions they have to pay attention and what types of research activities are ethical with respect to online data.

When using Twitter data for research, the role of the researcher and the status of the tweets as material to analyze are not clearly defined because Twitter is a new tool in online research. In terms of ethical issues in online research, there is no single answer in the field at the moment—rather, the lack of consensus concerning the ethical aspects of openness and transparency is evident (Döring 2003; Paccagnella 1997).
For this reason we suggest clarifying the ethical position based on Döring’s recommendations (2003). The approach is to link the ethically relevant aspects related to conducting research studies via Twitter to the problem of demarcation between private and public spaces in computer-mediated communication. Following that position, communications are considered to be open to the public as long as the access is not restricted by membership. In addition, one of the fundamental ethical aspects of online research is the preservation of the anonymity of the users. In practice, however, comprehensive anonymization has not gained ground among researchers yet.

CONCLUSION

With Twitter as an example of microblogging, we have indicated a research approach that allows building connections between interpersonal and media-based communications. What is new in this approach? First, as Twitter provides a platform for meta-communication about TV broadcasts (for example, GZSZ), the researcher can gain insights into the communication activities of the TV audience before, during and after the broadcast. Second, Twitter is a source of instantly updated information providing a range of specifics that can be used as data for analysis purposes. Third, the open access to data and the role of Twitter as accompanying media—the social and easy-to-use architecture of Twitter indeed promotes a ubiquitous and mobile usage—enable audience researchers to collect data from the field in an unobtrusive way. And fourth, the availability of various social media analysis tools also contributes to the feasibility of Twitter-based audience research. Yet microblogging should be used carefully, not only in regard to ethical issues. Twitter does not grant access to representative samples of TV viewers, and therefore it is essential to consider the relevancy of Twitter studies in regard to the research objectives and questions.

REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION

The rise of social network media has brought about a fundamental change in how audience members position themselves toward media. Although social network platforms are mainly used for interpersonal communication purposes, they also enable mass communication. Hence, the once rigid relation between sender/broadcaster and audience/receiver is increasingly pressured by Web platforms that allow users to position themselves as senders as well. In this chapter, we focus on the video sharing website YouTube, one of the most popular online platforms that afford such broadcaster-audience reversals. With a daily increment of over 150,000 new, mostly user-generated videos, a massive audio-visual database is now readily available for the Internet population.

Still, users of social network platforms are usually hard to approach and to engage in research when drawing on classic techniques of sampling and data collection that are situated outside a platform. In our research we experimented with employing the YouTube Application Programming Interface (API) to counter these issues, inquiring the platform population from the YouTube platform itself. An API should be seen as a back door to enter a Web platform and to communicate directly with its database structures, containing information on content, users and user interactions.

In this chapter, after discussing the concept of APIs and their potential for social research, we dive into a line of research, comprising multiple mixed-method studies, dealing with the meaning of audience on YouTube. More specifically, we studied how ordinary YouTube uploaders envision their viewership when they post a video, the feedback they use to verify the presence of this viewership and the link of these viewership expectations with actual feedback and video contents. Although in essence these studies initially drew upon commonplace methods, on various occasions we bumped into very specific issues of sampling and data collection that compelled us to employ information derived directly from the website.
APPLICATION PROGRAMMING INTERFACES

What Is an API?

In essence, Web platforms are nothing more than huge containers of digital data, which are most often user-generated (e.g., media objects, their metadata, related user interactions). In a Web 2.0 environment, Internet users are constantly involved in creating content of various kinds, ranging from traffic data such as clicks and views to uploading media materials such as texts, pictures and videos (Beer 2009). This supports and mutually maximizes collective intelligence and added value for other participants on the Web platform. On these platforms, content is created externally from Internet companies owning and operating the systems, and proprietary data sources or information are seldom used (Jakobsson and Stiernstedt 2010). Typically, there is little or no direct push from the owners, managers or designers of these sites. Hence, huge amounts of user data are caught in the structures of immense, constantly updated databases. What we see in a browser, the front end of a website, are neatly presented materials drawn from such databases. In the case of YouTube, that is, of course, an enormous number of videos (each with a unique video-ID) and their metadata but also channel information (coupled with a unique user-ID) and all kinds of feedback in terms of comments, number of views, ratings, etc.

Fortunately, this Web-based front end is not the only way to access these data. Most platforms have an alternative entry through their API. This is a set of rules and specifications for interacting with a website as if it were a data server. When used in the context of the Web, an API is a defined set of request messages, along with a definition of the structure of response messages. It comprises both the grammar and vocabulary to “talk” directly to the database, and of course get a response. In nontechnical terms, an API serves as both a gatekeeper at the back door and as a warehouse keeper who will help you get the right things if you address it in the appropriate language, stating precisely what you want. And of course, you should adhere to its rules. Many APIs have firm restrictions, such as a limited number of calls per hour, in order to avoid abuse. There are two ways of access: either with or without authentication. In the former case, it usually involves accessing private, nonpublic content or adding or modifying data. Because we wanted to post comments on YouTube video clips, we needed such an authentication, which is easily obtained by registering for a so-called developer key.

Most major platforms, such as Google, Flickr or Twitter offer detailed documentation about and examples of the technical aspects of gaining access to their APIs. One could wonder why getting through this back door is so strongly facilitated. The answer is quite simple: Online media companies provide these gateways for developers so they can create “mashups”, merge platforms and incorporate functionalities of the platform, thus attracting more traffic (which translates into more business).
In the introduction we stated that the rise of social network media has brought about a fundamental change in how audiences position themselves toward media. Likewise, the rise of social network platforms and the rate at which the Internet is diffusing and producing new technological affordances created changes and new challenges for social scholarly research. In this context, Karpf (2012, 646–647) rightly points out that social science observational techniques were not developed with such a rapidly changing information environment in mind and that a “new media environment demands new techniques” (Karpf 2012, 641).

As proper use of a platform’s API grants relatively easy access to its contents and recorded interaction data, and allows storing it in a dedicated research database, APIs are an interesting tool to engage in research at a variety of stages. As sketched in Figure 12.1, APIs can support research from the initial point of sampling to enabling the actual data collection. Most platforms furnish news feeds that list popular items, or recently added items. Moreover, specific topical search queries can be executed, even on fixed time intervals. This can be one of the possible entry points to select objects, which of course leads to the uploading user.

If a research question concentrates on media objects, the API can be used to retrieve their metadata in the broadest sense. API calls can be oriented to harvest objects’ descriptive data (e.g., tags, duration, time of upload), and user interaction with the object (e.g., number of comments, views, rates).

Figure 12.1 The Potential of APIs in Web Research
This kind of data collection has an inherent noninvasive character, as it does not require direct interaction with the platform users. For instance, researchers interested in the discourse of comments, and interactions between comments, can sample a number of videos matching specific keywords, and then collect and analyze their respective comments by means of the API. Likewise, data can be collected on subjects as well. If researchers know beforehand who to follow (i.e., by means of a user-ID), or sample users by means of their media objects (e.g., a specific picture, video, or even comment), data such as date of subscription, number of posts or comments and previous uploads can be harvested. Furthermore, a key feature of data logging through APIs is that data collection is instantaneous and can be repeated as often as required. As such, rather complex longitudinal designs become a realistic possibility.

Still, in social research, self-report data remains one of the key data sources in documenting users’ engagement in and perceptions of media practices. Again, platforms’ APIs can be of use, as they also facilitate direct interaction with users. For instance, befriended users can be sent private messages, while nearly each user is approachable through public comments if he or she has already posted an object. Through these channels, prospective respondents can be addressed and invited to take part in research—for instance, by filling out a short online questionnaire. Of course, this type of data collection is inherently intrusive, and causes issues such as nonresponse, reactivity and self-selection to emerge.

Nevertheless, we sense that exactly the combination of various types of data, from different sources ranging from users themselves, as well as extracted from the Web infrastructure, enables us to sketch a clear picture of the occurring practices. It is not one or the other: We are in need of understanding what is really happening on these platforms by relating activity to users’ perceptions and experiences. That is where, in our view, the methodological challenge and innovation lies.

Pitfalls of APIs in Social Research

A danger in the era of “big data” is that, with massive quantities of information produced by and about people readily available through APIs, research might be conducted just because the data is there, resulting in research driven by the technology rather than by the research goals. Also, this data is often of commercial or corporate nature, presenting new ethical challenges to social researchers (Lotan et al. 2011, 1405), as well as forcing scientists in a precarious space that remains outside their control (Bruns and Liang 2012) because any change in the functionality of APIs or in the data structures made available by social media platforms may jeopardize the research goals or require extra work. Reliability may also be an issue as corporate data can be subject to “Karpf’s Rule of Online Data,” which describes the inverse relationship between the reliability of an online metric and its financial or political value (Karpf 2012).
Another danger is situated on a methodological level. One serious methodological issue is the representativeness of the sample (of Web 2.0 users or Web 2.0 content) that is created using APIs. Often, there is no central “list” of users or content to draw a representative sample from. Specifically, YouTube’s API and “latest videos” RSS feed (Really Simple Syndication; a stream of updates), by nature, only afford data harvesting from public videos and public user profiles. For instance, in our case study (see below), we only sampled the YouTube population who make their videos or user profiles public because we could not capture videos that were uploaded as private. As such, it is important to reflect upon the restrictions that API-harvested datasets entail. In this respect, the Twitter datasets are often mentioned because the API of this microblogging platform provides access to a mere fraction of Twitter’s material via a “garden hose” (roughly 10 percent of public tweets) or a “spritzer” (roughly 1 percent of public tweets). Only a few companies have access to the Twitter “fire hose” containing all (public) tweets (e.g., boyd and Crawford 2012; Bruns and Liang 2012; Karpf 2012; Lotan et al. 2011). In that sense, “big data is less about data that is big than it is about a capacity to search, aggregate, and cross-reference large data sets” (boyd and Crawford 2012, 663).

Related to this is the concern that it is difficult to verify the validity and the identity of data extracted by means of the API when it concerns self-reported data. For example, YouTube users can enter a false age in their profile to circumvent the age restrictions of the website, or they can use nicknames and enter false user profile data in order to prevent identification. For that matter, using an online survey to extend the platform data harvested via the YouTube API also encompassed some limitations and disadvantages, such as potential self-selection (bias), multiple submissions, nonserious responses and dropouts.

CASE STUDY

The YouTube Case

So far, our discussion of APIs in social research has been rather generic. Nevertheless, during a project on imagined audiences on YouTube, we engaged in a concrete experimentation. First, let us take a moment to set out the theoretical framework in which we positioned our research. Adopting a social psychologist point of view, we framed uploading a video clip to YouTube as the contribution of an individual to a collective entity. As such, we drew upon the empirically supported collective effort model (Karau and Williams 1993), which states that engagement in a group effort is incited by the belief that the individual effort is distinguishable and substantial for the group to attain a favorable outcome. Moreover, this should lead to a valued individual outcome. In the case of YouTube, this would mean that uploaders see their
video as a considerable contribution to the platform (or at least a part of it) and believe that they will gain some kind of recognition from it. Yet two ambiguities emerge here. First of all, it is unclear what collective entity uploaders define, or in other words, what kind of viewership they expect. Second, we do not know how contributors verify whether this imagined entity (it might even be a plural) actually benefits from their contributions. Still, the YouTube platform is interspersed with various feedback mechanisms such as view counts, comments, ratings, etc. Moreover, a myriad of other feedback channels exist, ranging from everyday conversations to all kinds of computer-mediated communication. Hence, two specific initial research questions were put forward: (1) What kind of viewership do uploaders expect for their videos? and (2) What feedback mechanisms do they find important to verify whether the group of viewers are actually watching their videos?

To investigate this matter, a rather traditional research was set up, consisting of twenty face-to-face interviews with a diverse group of uploaders, found within the Dutch YouTube, drawing upon its search engine (Courtois et al., in press). The semi-structured interview consisted of various topics probing what kind of viewers uploaders have in mind when uploading a video and how they seek confirmation for these preconceptions. The results, derived from a deductive pattern coding, revealed a remarkably consistent picture. More specifically, we found two conceptual dimensions: (1) the offline versus online dimension, which refers to the type of acquaintance contributors share with their viewers; and (2) the identified versus unidentified dimension, pointing to the extent to which uploaders are able to envision their viewers. These two dimensions furnish three distinct subtypes of expected viewers, present in an unequal fashion in every uploader:

- **The offline-identified viewers**: people the uploader is familiar with, like family and friends. They are known in “offline life” and are therefore easy to imagine.
- **The online-identified viewers**: people the uploader is not physically acquainted with, but with whom he or she shares a specific bond like a shared activity, opinion or interest. It is an online in-group of people that resemble the uploader and are therefore quite easy to identify.
- **The online-unidentified viewers**: the remainder of the YouTube community. The uploader has no physical connection with them, nor does he or she have anything in common. Nonetheless, uploaders know they are “out there”, and acknowledge the possibility that they might end up watching their video.

During the interviews, considerable time was allocated to the importance uploaders attribute to all kinds of feedback mechanisms. A broad spectrum of feedback mechanisms was discussed, ranging from qualitative (comments, private messages) to quantitative feedback (number of views, number of ratings, average ratings). Still, a considerable proportion of
YouTube-related interaction takes place outside the platform. This implies that feedback is not exclusively limited to YouTube: Contributors receive feedback on social network sites and through email and personal conversations, either computer-mediated or face-to-face. However, different feedback types were mentioned to assure that specific networked public types are actually viewing a video. The results suggested that the offline-identified viewers are preferred to reveal themselves through conversation either offline or online. The online-identified viewers should provide online feedback on the platform (views, ratings, comments on YouTube) as well as off the platform (emails, posts on social network sites or other feedback on the Web). Finally, the uploaders suggested that they recognize the unidentified online viewers through online on-platform feedback.

Still, these results are based on a very small sample of users. Hence, we felt the need to validate these results quantitatively with a much larger sample. The first task, devising an appropriate measurement instrument of networked public subtype expectancies and feedback importance, was not too challenging, based on the previously discussed preliminary results. However, selecting and recruiting appropriate respondents proved to be much more difficult.

Entering Web Platforms’ Back Doors

At the onset of our quantitative research, we were in need of a considerable sample of several hundred recent YouTube uploaders, ideally drawn from a reliable sampling frame. We quickly figured out that the platform itself held the answer. The YouTube “latest video” RSS feed provides a regularly updated selection of recent videos, which is exactly the sampling frame we needed. Still, we had to address the issue of how to capture this information and how to use it to lead uploaders to the online questionnaire we had set up. Manual selection and recruitment would be very time-consuming and rather clumsy, so we decided to develop an automated environment that would systematically select uploaders from this available stream and send them an invitation in the comments section underneath their video asking them to participate in our research. Evidently, setting up such a system cannot be accomplished overnight, as it took a considerable amount of documentation and programming effort. In what follows, we briefly sketch out the endeavor, including encountered problems and lessons learned.

Setting up the Mechanism

First, we figured out how the API of our choice (the YouTube API) works, and we compiled a technical infrastructure for our needs (a WAMP/LAMP local host environment). Next, we programmed a protocol consisting of multiple steps (Figure 12.2) for our YouTube research. The first script wanted to capture videos listed in YouTube’s “latest videos” RSS feed. Notably, we wanted to access the Dutch videos posted on YouTube. As such,
we obtained a geographically homogenous sample of uploaders, all sharing the same native language. By means of an API call, the information was drawn in with a time interval of half an hour. A script would then write the called information (video-ID and user-ID) into a (MySQL) database, run on a local server. A second script, used to post comments underneath a video, simultaneously retrieved that information one by one and automatically sent an invitation message, telling users who we are and inviting them to take part in our research by filling out the questionnaire, focusing on their most recently uploaded video. The video-ID was of course used to direct the YouTube API to post comments underneath the relevant uploaded videos; the user-ID served as a control in order to make sure that an individual uploader did not get invited to partake in our research more than once.

During the data collection, these scripts ran constantly, posting about twenty comments per hour. When the data collection was finished, a separate script was written to gather YouTube users’ channel information of the users who provided valid answers to the online questionnaire. It should be acknowledged that all this information has a public nature: When someone accesses a specific channel through a Web browser, the information would be equally accessible. Hence, the API is a way to gain efficient access: to make use of the sampling frame, to recruit potential respondents and to gather descriptive, publicly available data. In the final stage, the data from the local database were manipulated so they could be exported to a statistical software package such as SPSS.

**Figure 12.2** Stepwise Research Protocol, Divided in Platform and Local Infrastructures
The Mechanism in Action

During the complete course of our research project, we experienced three major data gathering waves, in which we used the API to recruit respondents. Generally, there was a response rate of 10 to 15 percent. In our first effort (Courtois et al., in press), this led to 450 respondents of all ages, although the mean age was around twenty-four; respondents were predominantly male (around 70 percent), which proved to be remarkably consistent. In general, the results based on self-report measures confirmed hypotheses derived from the qualitative exploration. By means of an analysis of variance, we found that uploaders mostly expect unknown people with a similar interest (online-identified), followed by their offline acquaintances (offline-identified). The YouTube viewership (online-unidentified) as a whole is only expected in a last instance. A structural equation modeling analysis revealed that uploaders verify the online-identified viewers by means of online feedback mechanisms on and off the platform, while the offline acquaintances are verified by offline and online feedback outside the YouTube platform. Finally, it showed that uploaders expecting a broader audience, such as the YouTube community as a whole, do not seek a connection with them, as they do not value feedback from it.

In a further stage, this kind of self-report data analyses were further extended with longitudinal platform data on received feedback (Courtois, Mechant and De Marez 2011). Feedback data were collected at three stages: on average two weeks after data collection, and then after two fixed intervals of a month. By means of a longitudinal growth analysis, we found evidence suggesting expectancies are as similarly associated with perceptions of feedback importance as they are to actual feedback. Hence, a high expectancy of a specific type of viewers at the moment of upload is directly and positively linked to the amount of feedback it will receive in the months to come, if that type of feedback is deemed to be informative. This would suggest that uploaders have a fairly accurate conception of their potential viewership. It is as if they are aware of which videos will catch on and which will not.

Finally, we extended self-report of audience expectancy with a content analysis of video features (Courtois, Mechant and De Marez 2012). A subsequent data analysis revealed that videos containing self-composed materials are mainly directed to friends, family and acquaintances (offline-identified), while remix videos, containing materials from popular culture, are aimed at the online in-group of unfamiliar people with whom uploaders share a bond (online-identified). This means that videos with what would be considered “unattractive” personal content are directed toward socially embedded particles of the networked public. As such, YouTube is used as a mere carrier. However, remix content, drawing upon instances of popular culture, is intended for broader dissemination. Finally, videos with recorded artistic performances are equally directed to various types of viewership, without
showing a clear profile. As these mostly contain artistic performances (e.g., live footage of a pop concert), they are deemed interesting for a very large audience.

DISCUSSION

During the outlined line of research, various valuable insights have been gathered on the audience perception of ordinary YouTube contributors. Gaining these insights would not have been possible without combining multiple data sources and analysis techniques. What started off as a very classic study, drawing upon exploratory qualitative work, slowly evolved into a set of larger-scale confirmatory studies, albeit based on self-reports. Along the way, platform data were added to the analyses, as well as data from content analysis. This enabled us to sketch a complete picture of the phenomenon of sharing videos on YouTube. We experienced the use of the YouTube data API as a major advantage in this endeavor. Not only did it supply a tentative sampling frame, but it also enabled the extraction of valuable observational data. The various benefits of our approach, however, need to be paired with a number of disadvantages that also have to be taken into account. After all, audience research in new media environments is too often still based on cross-sectional instances, limiting research subjects’ self-reporting capabilities to surveys, focus groups or interviews. In other cases audience research is solely based on “pure” objective data captured by means of (new) measurement systems. With the former, explaining why audiences act in a specific way is very difficult; with the latter, a clear insight into the actual behavior of the audience depends on the subjective interpretation of the research subjects’ own actions. In contrast to these traditional measurements, the study of audiences in today’s multiplatform environments can easily benefit from both approaches, as most Web 2.0 platforms contain APIs that can be used to explore a host of new performance metrics and to approach and query Internet users. In this way, cross-sectional self-reported subjective data can be supplemented and confronted with objective data on audience behavior in new media environments.

Web platforms nowadays offer various entry points in the form of data APIs. There is a virtual abundance of data for the taking. This offers tremendous opportunities for audience researchers who are occupied with making sense of audience dynamics on the Web. Web users are volatile and very hard to grasp. Yet, because of their activities, they leave multiple traces and accumulate massive amounts of data that can be accessed through APIs. Although APIs can help us to gain new or better insights into media audiences, they also have some pitfalls. The lack of transparency of what is happening on the supply side remains an issue. We have little to no insight in the possible sampling and selection mechanism of the data that are made available through the API. Moreover, researchers cannot control the API. In the case
of the Dutch “latest videos” RSS feed that we used to draw videos from, its representativeness is unsure and not always easy to know. In addition to this, twice during the sampling period the RSS feed was not updated over a period of 24 hours, which made it impossible to capture videos uploaded in that period.

Finally, ethical concerns cannot be left out of the discussion. The main problem is the blurred distinction between private and public spaces on the Internet, pointing to the boundaries of what is acceptable research conduct. What is the status of online “public” data? Can it simply be used without permission? And what constitutes best ethical practices? These are questions we struggled with, especially when setting up the script to automatically post singular invitations to partake in our survey in the comment field of the targeted videos. Concerns might be raised whether the construction of a research tool in the shape of an automated multistep protocol to monitor videos and video uploaders contributes to the enforcement of an online robust infrastructure of dataveillance, making us as researchers accomplices in marketers’ and businesses’ systematic monitoring of the actions of Internet users through the application of information technology and the creation of “data doubles”. After all, while scholars and researchers have the tools and the access, social media users as a whole have not, and researchers are rarely part of a user’s imagined audience (boyd and Crawford 2012, 673). However, it could also be argued that YouTube uploaders in our sample did not restrict access to their video clip, were treated as an aggregated sample and that consequently there should be no ethical concerns whatsoever when collecting and analyzing data. Still, this ethical position bypasses the difference between “being in public” and “being public” (boyd and Marwick 2011) and ignores the fact that publicly available content is not always meant to be aggregated or consumed by anyone.

Although we could not ask consent from every YouTube user uploading a video (and hence automatically becoming part of our data sample), we would have welcomed an ethical framework with checks and balances for evaluating research ethics. Here, Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) (Schrag 2010) and networks such as the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR, http://aoir.org/) may fulfill important, yet difficult roles, in supporting researchers to develop a coherent and consistent position on the use of big data, especially in relation to concepts such as identity, privacy, ownership and reputation (see e.g., Davis and Patterson 2012). For example, the anonymous character of the data and the privacy of social media users needs to be ensured, safeguarding the identifiability of individual social media users (Hay et al. 2007) and guaranteeing informational privacy or the right to review and consult data aggregated about oneself (Kranenburg 2007). Still, privacy loss does not equate necessarily an invasion of one’s privacy (Tavani 2009).

In addition to a technological-deterministic mindset and methodological or ethical issues that might undermine the use of APIs in social research, there is also a question of skills as noted by boyd and Crawford (2011;
They point out that the skill set needed to interact with APIs is generally restricted to those with a computational background, setting up “new hierarchies around ‘who can read the numbers’, rather than recognizing that computer scientists and social scientists both have valuable perspectives to offer” (boyd and Crawford 2012, 674). In this respect we want to argue that social or audience researchers should not leave the harvesting of Web 2.0 data and the added value that APIs can provide exclusively to computer scientists or engineers. Social researchers should explore and embrace the data that is available via APIs, whether by simply bootstrapping free and open-source tools and implementing easy API calls or by joining multi-, trans- or inter-disciplinary Internet research teams.

As “big data” research into social media activities becomes a growing field in social sciences, we need to develop a more reliable foundation for such research activities. For example, existing approaches or tools need to be extended or replaced with—ideally—open-source research tools (Bruns and Liang 2012). Most importantly, scholars need to explore the methodologies and toolsets for the study of social media through an open and ongoing conversation. We hope that this book chapter can serve as an impetus for such an exploration and discussion.

REFERENCES


Part V

Conclusion
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13 Audiences, Audiences Everywhere—Measured, Interpreted and Imagined

Klaus Bruhn Jensen

INTRODUCTION

In Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s classic poem, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798), a group of sailors lost at sea complain that there is “Water, water, every where, / Nor any drop to drink” (Coleridge 2006). In the current media environment, audiences can hardly complain about the availability and accessibility of media content, at least in quantitative terms. Nor could the media complain about the size of their combined audiences. Audiences are everywhere, as recipients and increasingly as senders of information. Researchers who try to account for the relationship between media and audiences, in turn, have access to growing masses of evidence. Data are everywhere, even if research may still be struggling to make sense of them.

Taking stock of audience research methodologies, this volume appears at a time when “big data” has become a buzzword across the media and communication sector (Boyd and Crawford 2012). Associated with the traces that particularly the users of “social media” (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) leave behind, and which constitute a wealth of both scientifically and commercially interesting evidence, big data are one outcome of a wide and deep process of digitalization—a process that is affecting not just how individuals, groups and entire societies communicate but also how research may be in a position to measure and interpret the consequences of their communications at local, national, regional and global levels of social organization. Digital technologies afford (Gibson 1979) new kinds of media and new kinds of audiences, as well as new kinds of data. By way of introduction, however, it should be recognized and reemphasized that digitalization does not necessarily change certain essential characteristics of human communication, nor does it invalidate the methodological lessons from half a century of communication research (Park and Pooley 2008).

This concluding chapter seeks to put the present state of audience research methodologies in historical perspective, synthesizing insights from the other contributions to the volume and discussing some of their implications with a view to future empirical and theoretical work. Following the present introduction, the chapter is organized in three parts. The first
section—“Communicating Media”—considers some of the ways in which our traditional object of study—“the media”—can be said to “communicate” in new or additional formats in the digital media environment. Less delimited as either institutions or technologies, media in the twenty-first century send, receive and respond to information across platforms and in relation to shifting configurations of audiences. The second section—“Communicating Audiences”—addresses audiences as communicative agents in their own right. While it is easy to exaggerate the potential agency of ordinary media users, they do communicate—with each other and, in part indirectly, with media, which, in addition, are able to track their users’ messages and movements. The third and longest section—“Communicating Researchers”—elaborates on the potentials and challenges facing media and communication research under digital conditions. As researchers, we constantly communicate with respondents and informants, and we typically communicate our findings to a variety of other stakeholders, from collaborators and colleagues to funders and the general public, which raises a host of methodological and ethical, as well as political, issues. Like these other stakeholders, we also imagine audiences—what they might be and do—if only we could measure and interpret their actions and interests with the right methodologies.

In order to contextualize the following sections, I begin by noting two basic distinctions concerning audience research methodologies. First, the difference between qualitative and quantitative methodologies is part of the legacy of the field (see the overview in Vicente-Mariño, this volume). Compared to the often intense debates in earlier times regarding their relative merits, it is noteworthy that the contributions to the present volume tend to take for granted, both that qualitative and quantitative methodologies are complementary, and that multimethod approaches are needed to capture key aspects of media audiences today. The contributors measure and interpret audiences. As a point of reference for later discussions, Table 13.1 lays out six prototypical methods, characterizing each in terms of its form of data collection and the resulting type of evidence, in addition to noting its orientation toward either a qualitative or a quantitative form of inquiry (Jensen 2012b, 235). In actual empirical studies, these methods or concrete instruments of research are configured and embedded in methodologies or theoretically grounded research designs.

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<th>Table 13.1 Six Prototypical Empirical Methods</th>
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<td>Qualitative</td>
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A second methodological distinction has been less explicit in the literature but has acquired new salience in the digital media environment: Data are either found or made (Jensen 2012a). The humanities have traditionally studied texts, documents and other artifacts that could be found; the social sciences have depended on making much of their evidence through interviewing, experimenting and observing. In the case of digital communication systems, a new type and scale of data are there to be found: big data or metadata that indicate who did what, with which information, together with whom, when, for how long and in which sequences and networks. Referring back to Table 13.1, meta-data document the kinds of things that had to be observed or talked about in past research, but that now, to a degree, appear as discourses, texts or outputs in and of the operation of the system. Whereas these data can only be found through a good deal of making—programming, extracting, analyzing, etc.—which suggests that the distinction between found data and made data must be carefully differentiated in each case, it seems clear that the very nature of data calls for reconsideration, in audience studies in general and in the methodological literature in particular.

COMMUNICATING MEDIA

In one sense, media have always communicated—that is what media do. Across the centuries, books, newspapers, film, broadcasting and the Internet have communicated both fictional and factual content to their audiences. The terminology of “communication”, however, has not traditionally been applied to what centralized media do with their content. Instead, content has been said to be sent, presented, published or transmitted by media, on the assumption that relatively delimited messages or “works” would be the source of any meanings or effects that the media hold. This is one of the assumptions being challenged by digitalization. Increasingly, media organizations communicate in multiple steps and contexts, incorporating interactions with their audiences as well. Reversing the common argument that previously separate media are converging, it may be more analytically helpful to explore how media are diverging and differentiating their activities in multistep flows of communication (Jensen 2010).

From the audience perspective, it seems particularly evident that media communicate in multiple steps and across multiple technological platforms, as illustrated by several contributions to this volume addressing the media uses of, for example, different age groups (Wijnen and Trültzsch) and different ethnicities (Cola and Brusa). Compared to pre-Internet days, individual media users are ever more likely to encounter variants of the same content in several media and genres. From the perspective of senders or publishers, the philosophy has been summed up as COPE—create once, publish everywhere (Jacobson 2009). This principle highlights the distinction between content creation and content delivery in digital media: By
delivering the “same” content in different formats—with or without interactive functionalities, with or without additional sound and images—a media organization can maximize its communication to (or with) a variety of audiences across media.

If media have always been in the business of communicating, then a whole range of other organizations and institutions in society currently engage in public communication, to such an extent that they might be said to qualify as “media”. For one thing, both private and public companies, along with parties and pressure groups, try to affect general political agendas and specific policies as a matter of course. For another thing, cultural institutions, beyond “the media”, can be seen to take on a role comparable to that of media, providing a space of reflexivity or a cultural forum (Jensen and Helles 2011; Newcomb and Hirsch 1983). A case in point is museums. In this volume, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al. review the changing institutional profile of museums as a background to understanding the role of museum-goers as active audiences. Traditionally conceived of as delimited sites of experience, many museums today maintain a rich presence on the Internet. Going online can be a way of going to the museum. Even more important, museums may be perceived less as authoritative sources of knowledge than as partners in communication, as they incorporate audiences as contributors of knowledge about past and present and as essential participants in concrete exhibitions and performances. Also in the context of museums—online and onsite—audiences increasingly communicate.

COMMUNICATING AUDIENCES

The very concept of audiences has long been a matter of debate in media and communication research (McQuail 2010, 398–417). In addition to the basic idea that someone receives or attends to something, an “audience” may imply individual users who are more or less active, whether through mental activity or physical interactivity; a market in the sense of either groups of consumers for media products and services or eyeballs for commercial messages; or a public, a subculture and similar collectives. In all these respects, the general assumption is that digitalization has been redefining the position of audiences vis-à-vis media, so that audiences may speak and write back to the media, thus becoming communicating audiences.

One continuing debate revolves around questions concerning communication as a form of social action. While communication in itself continuously enacts social relations, it is, not least, the wider consequences of communication in various political, economic, and cultural domains that has pitted relative optimists (e.g., Jenkins 2006) against relative pessimists (e.g., Curran, Fenton and Freedman 2012) also in the scholarly literature. If, indeed, digitalization entails transformed audiences, to what
extent may these audiences transform the societies of which both they and the media are constitutive elements? In response to such questions, the contributors to this volume are appropriately cautious, taking the methodological route as a way of specifying how more, and more empirically grounded, answers might be generated in future research. At the same time, an empowerment perspective is manifest in several contributions taking as their premise that, rather than researchers empowering audiences, audiences could and should empower themselves, even if research may facilitate that process.

This last premise of empowerment is a common denominator for the three chapters in part II, which focus on the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Two chapters specifically refer to varieties of participatory and interventionist research (Greenwood and Levin 2007; Reason and Bradbury 2008), which conceives of scholarly activity as a collaborative enterprise, rather than, in the area of audience studies, researcher subjects examining audience objects. In one instance (Wijnen and Trültzsch, this volume), the researchers recruited young people as co-researchers in order to ground their understanding of media use among youth in their categories and outlooks. In the other instance, the study of museums (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al., this volume), as noted, sought to recognize audience interests in and perspectives on this classic institution; toward that end, the researchers examined multiple sites (online and onsite) through multiple methods, including action research. Whereas action research has been comparatively rare in media and communication studies, these studies suggest some ways in which particularly digital media, given the iterative modification of both the technologies and their social embedding, lend themselves to collaborative approaches involving scholars as well as practitioners, jointly studying media as they take shape (Hearn et al. 2009).

The third chapter focusing on the relationship between the researcher and the researched departs from the fundamental anthropological insight that, in order to grasp other people and cultures, one must communicate with them in categories that make sense to them. The topic of research was ethnic minority audiences (Cola and Brusa, this volume), specifically the Albanian-speaking community from Kosovo living in Switzerland, which made not just Albanian but also French, German, and Italian relevant working languages in the project (depending on the interviewees’ place of residence within Switzerland and, hence, their relative fluency in one or more of these languages). Beyond the concrete logistics of handling several languages in an interview-based qualitative study, the researchers faced the more general challenge of how to translate their research questions into culturally meaningful and contextually appropriate categories, so that they might actually communicate with their respondents. One practical solution, again, was to combine not just multiple languages, but multiple methods: A round of focus groups served to qualify and inform a later round of individual
interviews with people belonging to different gender, age, and other socio-demographic groups within the cultural formation in question.

Developing creative ways of getting respondents to communicate, so that we as researchers may understand them as audiences better, is a central challenge for empirical media and communication studies. Alongside multi-method and action approaches, some methods refer explicitly to themselves as “creative” (Siibak and Murumaa-Mengel, this volume). The distinctive feature of creative methods is that participants are first asked to make something—a drawing, a model, or another artifact—and next to reflect on their creation, so that new insights may be articulated, in one or more steps. In the study in question, respondents were asked to draw different types of users as encountered on and remembered from Facebook. Creative methods underscore a common characteristic of various empirical approaches: Research methodologies bring out what, perhaps, neither the researcher nor the researched knew or had realized in advance. To research is, in part, to communicate—to express and exchange our measurements and interpretations of reality in long chains of communication.

COMMUNICATING RESEARCHERS

Measuring and Interpreting Audiences

Although multimethod research has become more widely accepted in the field in recent decades, the nature of the complementarity of different methodologies has remained contentious. How to integrate survey responses and focus group interactions into one research design? How to align self-reports with evidence from log files? How to make analyses and inferences about media use that accommodate both statistical criteria and discursive categories? The digital media environment presents new opportunities for research, among other things, as a multilayered infrastructure for multimethod audience studies. Employing this infrastructure, researchers communicate both with their object of study and among themselves.

Parts III and IV bear witness to the continued relevance of “old” as well as “new” methods for the study of new, digital media. In addition, one of the contributions to part I (Findahl, Lagerstedt and Aurelius, this volume) presents an exemplary study applying several old and new methods to the same research issue, namely, Internet use. The methods in question were diaries, online traffic measurements, and (Web) questionnaires. While the study had a meta-perspective in specifically developing these methods as part of a process of triangulation (Denzin 1970), the findings further suggested that there was, in fact, a high level of agreement between the data deriving from these several methods. On the one hand, the approaches could be considered mutually confirmatory; on the other hand, they were complementary
in documenting different aspects of Internet use: the place of the Internet in everyday life, specific use patterns, and the users’ attitudes regarding the Internet as a medium of social interaction.

The chapters in part III illustrate the explanatory value of several “old” or established methods in studying social network sites, which have emerged as a focal point of recent digital media studies. One contribution joins familiar qualitative and quantitative methods—focus groups, quantitative surveys, and (online) observation—to explore the users’ perspective on these sites (Linaa Jensen and Scott Sørensen, this volume). Among other things, such a multimethod approach can bring out inconsistencies between different sources of evidence. For example, data that are produced in semi-public settings such as focus groups can be compared to privately completed diaries. Importantly, the point is not so much that one method exposes errors (or lies) in the data produced by another method but rather that each method contributes to a richer account of what it means for audiences to use and experience social network sites. In the end, all these sources of evidence—whether statements, observations, or traffic measurements—are subject to interpretation before they can be made sense of with reference to an overarching methodological and theoretical framework.

Another contribution, similarly, took the users rather than the individual media as the point of reference, combining several qualitative approaches in tracking social media use, including mobile phones and instant messaging, among adolescents (Vittadini and Pasquali, this volume). In addition to diaries and logs of messages sent, the data included audio and video recordings, performed by informants themselves, which together bore witness to the diverse uses of media in the everyday lives of young people. To secure their responses, the informants were contacted daily by a researcher as part of strategy of “virtual shadowing”. One distinctive feature of this strategy was an attempt to bridge the divide between online and offline documentation. In digital media studies so far, the interdependences between online and offline interactions has remained somewhat of a blind spot, despite recurring critiques of the vocabularies of cyberspace and virtual reality (e.g., Slater 2002).

The third and final contribution to part III relied on “creative” methods, as already discussed (Siibak and Murumaa-Mengel, this volume). Comparable in certain respects to the audio and video recordings employed by Vittadini and Pasquali, creative artifacts that inform reflections about what it means to be a media user, extend and enhance the repertoire of audience studies. Although the most prevalent methods are still the ones captured in Table 13.1, the present period of change in our object of study may also inspire change and creativity on the part of media and communication researchers as the subjects of research. In any event, change has already come to the field from the outside in the shape of new types and masses of data.
Finding and Making Audiences

The distinction between data that are found and made, respectively, has quite a long history in the literature on research methodologies. One classic intervention was the volume *Unobtrusive Measures*, published in 1966 and recently reappearing in a revised version (Webb et al. 2000). The reasoning is that if measures or descriptions of some social activity can be collected unobtrusively, without the social agents in question knowing about it, this evidence will be more reliable and valid. Among the media examples of that volume were fingerprints documenting newspaper reading and infrared recordings of cinema audiences. In the case of digital media, metaphorical fingerprints and footprints are being registered in and of their use. Far from being intentional messages from audiences, these data nevertheless communicate in ways that lend themselves to audience research.

It is this affordance of digital media that the chapters in part IV explore and reflect upon. As such, the last section of the volume shifts the focus from digital media as objects of study to digital technologies as tools of research. In the first chapter, Hastall and Sukala provide an overview of the kinds of resources that are available for documenting and processing data about digital media use, many of them of the open-source variety and widely available as Web services. These features make the software applicable at little or no cost; the authors note, among other things, that this may facilitate their uptake in low-income regions of the world. Still, the authors also caution that best-practice guidelines are still missing in the area, in part because many of the resources in question are quite recent and are also undergoing continuous modifications. Such software exemplifies the “perpetual beta”: the iterative development of applications that has been associated with the phenomenon of “Web 2.0” over the last decade (O’Reilly 2005). Compared to the typical user, who likely welcomes incremental improvements, researchers need to worry, first of all, that changes in software may shift the ground under individual empirical studies, from the planning stage to the collection and analysis of data, and, more significantly, that such changes further complicate comparative studies over time. Digital media and their audiences are already moving targets; audience studies face a new set of challenges in “internet time” (Karpf 2012) when technological developments compress and shift the perspectives that are implicit in any research methodology.

Such challenges, of course, should not discourage research from employing the data that can be found online, alone or in combination with other data types, as recognized throughout this volume. The second chapter in part IV (Bredl et al., this volume) shows how microblogging services such as Twitter can serve as instruments of audience research (for instance, in recording how television audiences communicate about the contents and uses of television—before, during, and after viewing). Beyond methodological considerations, the chapter serves as a reminder that “mass media” remain key nodes in networked media—when people communicate one to one or
many to many, they frequently communicate about one-to-many communication. In a longer historical perspective, this recalls the classic two- and multistep models of communication (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1944), which have gained new relevance in the digital, networked media environment (Jensen 2010).

The third and final chapter in part IV exemplifies the use of found data in a study of how people who upload videos to YouTube think of the audiences that they are likely to get, or may hope to get (Courtois and Mechant, this volume). Following a description of how such data can be procured through the Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) that many social media offer researchers, the authors turn the questions that uploaders will ask—“Who watches my video?” and “How will I know who they are?”—into research questions which, in a first round, were addressed to a small sample of uploaders in face-to-face interviews. As part of a multimethod approach, the findings from these interviews were taken, in a second round, as a point of departure for quantitative analyses of data from the YouTube API. Because researchers do not control these sources of data, they raise difficult issues of transparency in general and of representativeness in particular. With due diligence, however, the data provide a new resource for studying what audiences do with new media, and why (Katz 1959). In the study in question, the quantitative analyses suggested that uploaders do have a relatively good sense of their audiences—for instance, in terms of whether they know the people in question in advance or not, online or offline.

Along with several other authors, Courtois and Mechant thus begin to consider a comparatively underresearched topic, namely, imagined audiences. Established media organizations imagine the audiences they seek; social media users imagine who they interact with, actually or potentially; and researchers imagine both the audiences that they seek to measure and interpret, find or make, and the kinds of audiences that they might promote through their studies.

### Imagining Audiences

The notion of imagined collectives is probably most familiar, within media and communication research, from Benedict Anderson’s (1991) idea of “imagined communities”. With particular reference to the nation-state, Anderson’s central insight was that we never meet in person most of the people that we feel we belong with, in some form of community. Instead, we imagine each other through various media and with reference to shared symbols. While this does not make the communities any less real or consequential, it has lent new centrality to media and communication in modern societies—from the printing press, via broadcasting, to the Internet. With new media come new resources for imagining “others,” “us” and “them”. It is plausible that the rise of social and other digital media have prompted both audiences and audience researchers to reflect on and imagine, once again, who they are communicating with (Litt 2012).
For some time, there has been a small trickle of academic research on how media organizations imagine their audiences, above and beyond the innumerable and often unpublished studies in the industry that examine audiences as potential markets. In the present volume, the chapter by Vobi contributes to the recently reinvigorated tradition of news production studies by foregrounding journalists’ conceptions of audiences, including their role as participants in processes of news making. In an early classic, Gans (1957) had explored how filmmakers’ views of their audiences feed into their films. In a collection addressing a wider range of media, Ettema and Whitney (1994) considered how practitioners anticipate audiences as part of the professional and organizational routines of producing media content. In critical work debating especially commercial research as a means of controlling audiences, Ang (1991) suggested that ethnographic approaches could help to articulate not just what audiences are but also what they might become.

To the extent that audiences themselves become senders in the digital media environment, or prosumers (Toffler 1980) or producers (Bruns 2008), they gain an audience of sorts, and will want to know who that is. The chapter by Courtois and Mechant, as mentioned, documents that interest, and outlines a multimethod approach to examining it, emphasizing the data that can be found in digital media systems. In comparison, the chapter by Siibak and Murumaa-Mengel, relying on creative methods, departed from made data by asking Facebook users to draw images of the other users whom they would typically encounter online. In both cases, however, the central topic of interest is how senders—any sender in any medium—prefigure an audience in and through the act of communication.

In an even wider perspective, the idea of imagined audiences in social media recalls concepts from both classic sociology and traditional theories of mass communication. In sociology, with reference to the concept of “significant others”, Mead (1934) pointed out that social relations are not just structural or functional but also meaningful. According to one key definition of communication, a meaningful social “reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed” (Carey 1989, 23) in and by communication. In later communication theory, just before the popular breakthrough of the Internet, Thompson (1995) referred to “mediated quasi-interaction” to capture the sort of (presumably reduced) interaction that audiences could have with other social agents through mass media. In this regard, Thompson was echoing the understanding of certain kinds of television viewing as potentially problematic “para-social interaction” (Horton and Wohl 1956) with distant performers. The present moment of media history is apparently stimulating reflection on what “para” and “quasi” might mean. Like Anderson’s (1991) imagined communities, both imagined audiences and imagined interactions can be considered quite real and consequential.

In the end, researchers also imagine audiences. We find, make, measure and interpret empirical audiences in order to conceive of them theoretically and, in some instances, politically and normatively. We do so within
particular horizons of expectation (Jauss 1982) that are, in part, products of the contemporary media environment. When, at present, we refer to “social” media, we imply that these media have specifically and perhaps especially social traits even though, of course, all media are resources of social interaction. Changing media entail changing ideas of communication (Peters 1999), as well as changing conditions for empirical studies of media and communication. Recognizing both of these things has been part of the brief of media and communication research and one of the central concerns of this volume.

CONCLUSION

“Where do you want to go today?” That was the title of a 1995 Microsoft image campaign, describing the personal computer as a point of access to diverse contents and vast arenas of interaction (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VPFKnBYOSI, accessed December 5, 2012). Unlike Coleridge’s sailors, the users of personal computers were cast as travelers on a mostly benign and manageable sea of information. Ever since, audience research has been assessing the larger promise that digital media would transform both audiences and societies for the better.

This chapter has sought to highlight the changing conditions under which audience research operates in the digital media environment. Compared to an arguably media-centric era of mass communication research, it is helpful to refocus attention on the diverse communicative practices in which both media and audiences engage. Media communicate across technological platforms; audiences communicate with and through media across social contexts. In order to track these interactions, research can rely on growing masses of data, some of which can be found in and of the operation of digital communication systems. Rather than replacing traditional forms of data that are made, such “big data” represent a complement and an addition to the multimethod toolbox of media and communication research. We need all the methodologies we can devise in order to measure and interpret audiences, and to imagine—on their behalf and in collaborative and participatory studies—media from audience perspectives.

This volume leaves mostly unaddressed the status of “audiences” in face-to-face settings. As a field, we have been used to imagining audiences in front of pages, screens and other types of media interfaces. Digital media are increasingly embedded in physical materials and social settings (Greenfield 2006); so are audiences. Humans are both audiences and media in their own right, in conditions of co-presence, with or without technological props (Jensen 2010). One important step for future audience research will be to recognize humans both as media in themselves and as constituents of technological configurations. To study both these aspects, research methodologies will need to further consider the diversity of data—big and small—that can be found and made. Audiences are everywhere, offline as well as online.
REFERENCES


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