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AT YOUR (PUBLIC) SERVICE: A CROSS-MEDIA NEW CONSUMPTION STUDY OF THE 50-65 AGE GROUP

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At your (public) service: A cross-media new consumption study of the 50-65 age group

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Abstract:
To cope with the overload in news outlets, audiences compose personalized news media repertoires. This study explicitly focuses on 50-65 year olds, as they developed news consumption habits in a much less diversified media landscape in Western-European countries that are or were traditionally dominated by public service broadcasters (PSB). This study investigates the news selection process among the 50-65 age group: how 50-65 year olds' news repertoires are composed and what role is assigned to the PSBs. It draws upon a mixed-method approach, which involves a Q-sorting task, embedded in in-depth interviews (N = 43). The analysis indicates seven archetypical repertoires, based on three dimensions: (1) PSB vs. commercially oriented, (2) consumption on traditional and/or digital platforms and (3) news content preferences. These patterns serve as analytical tools in a subsequent phase of qualitative analysis of the interviews. These qualitative data offer insight into the Informants' position towards public service media, and how these media are incorporated into their news routines.

Keywords: News media repertoires; PSB; 50-65 age group; News use; News consumption; Audience research.

Introduction

As a consequence of digitization and media convergence, news content is available at anytime, anywhere and on any media device. Information has become so ubiquitous that news media audiences are constantly challenged to compose a complex pallet of choices, referred to as a personalized media diet or news media repertoire. Hasebrink and Popp (2006) defined the latter as the result of the accumulated selective exposure to specific media outlets. They point out the necessity to question how audiences combine different media outlets and how they integrate the increasing number of options into their everyday lives. Of course, audiences have always been confronted with multiple options, yet by now the number of possibilities has become virtually unlimited. As such, media scholars are increasingly facing what is referred to as 'the cross-media challenge in audience research' (Schrøder, 2011). The mere idea of a news media repertoire is looking at the broader picture, rather than just focussing on one specific news outlet. Researchers thus have to come up with means to capture this cross-media news diet. News especially is a challenging subject for cross-media research, as it is one of the content forms most widely re-versioned for cross-platform delivery (Debrett, 2010).

The practice of actively blending various forms of traditional and new media is commonly associated with younger generations. The present study, however, explicitly focuses on the 50-65 age group, popularly labelled as digital immigrants (Lee & Caprini, 2010). The study aims to answer the question which variety exists among the news media repertoires of the 50-65 year olds. We follow Westlund and Weibull's (2013) assumption that the specific culture and geographical context in which people grow up (ref. the formative years, Mannheim, 1952) are reflected in news media routines, but that at the same time these news accessing behaviours change over time and they are embedded in the current media system. In news audience research, the 50-65 age group is thus deemed interesting for two reasons. On the one hand, 50-65 year olds are likely to consume more traditional news outlets, compared to younger audiences. They have had more time to develop news habits, are more familiar with legacy media and heavily rely on public service broadcasting (PSB). However, at the same time, older age groups are developing digital skills, which might be reflected in their news media repertoires. These arguments are addressed in the following paragraphs.

Familiarity as a basis for trusted news brands

Older generations grew up and formed habits in a time characterized by a much less diverse media landscape, in most cases dominated by public service broadcasters (PSBs). As media habits are often deep-rooted (LaRose, 2010), elderly people still tend to rely on newspapers and television as a primary news source (Lee & Caprini, 2010; Chan, 2015), the latter often provided by the public service broadcasters' trusted brands. The context in which the 50-65 age group consumes news has certainly changed radically, yet news use patterns remain relatively stable. Traditional media outlets are still mainly consumed in the routinized and

accustomed setting. For example, no radically new patterns on watching television have been established so far (Gentikow, 2010). Past studies show that older age cohorts use fewer media outlets, compared to the younger cohorts who exhibit greater cross-media use patterns (Westlund & Färdigh, 2011). Chan (2015, p. 8) found that almost 60% of the 55-70+ cohort were dual-platform users, 'unsurprisingly' relying on newspaper and television to keep updated. The Digital News Report 2014, which surveyed news habits of ten countries worldwide, shows that over-55s are the largest group of TV news viewers; 59% sees TV news as their weekly main source of news (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2014). This continuity in use can be explained by what Gentikow (2010) calls 'the embodiment of media use', which can work against the adoption or domestication of innovation. As a result, older news audiences seemingly feel less overloaded with the news available today when compared with younger people (Goyanes, 2014).

By composing a news media repertoire, news audiences entrust certain news suppliers above others. Trust is a useful coping mechanism, since it helps to add structure in a world of increasing numerous options, currently a defining characterization of the media environment (Pavlickova, Nyre & Jurisic, 2013). Historically, trust was placed hegemonically in state monopolies and public/private duopolies. With diversity and fragmentation it is now expected to be placed in the strongest, most visible media brands (Starkey, 2013). Yet, Luhmann (2000) apoints the notion of familarity as a neccesary pre-condition of trust. As a result, existing news brands from offline platforms tend to dominate online news consumption as well (Dekavalla, 2015). Even with the multiplied amount of news sources, the traditional news organizations remain the dominant brands for many people (Gans, 2010). News audiences seek updates of well-known news organizations (Mitchell, Rosenstiel & Christian, 2012), the ones they trust. Wolf and Schnauberb (2014) too are convinced that users will turn to traditional news suppliers as trusted, reliable sources of news and information.

The dominance of television news in the 50-65 year olds' news repertoires is closely related to the trust they place in public service broadcasting. Two arguments lead to the assumption that PSBs still have a dominant position in the 50-65 year olds' news media repertoires. The first one relates back to the earlier argument of familiarity. The over-50s grew up in an age where PSBs still had a monopoly in most Western European countries. As a consequence, PSBs have been able to prove themselves as strong and stable news brands. Second, there is a close connection between trust and the traditional public service ideal characterized by values as impartiality, independence, quality, diversity, integrity, truth and accuracy (Biltereyst, 2004, p. 342). The characteristics of trustworthiness, as identified by Bakir and Barlow (2007), are reflected in this public service ideal: independence from vested interests, delivering news that is fair and impartial, reflecting national culture and identity, serving diversity through representing minority voices, and addressing audiences and interests not served by commercial media. This indicates what Debrett (2010, p. 206) refers to as a 'trust advantage' for PSBs which has been demonstrated by survey data from around the world showing that audiences highly trust public broadcasters (Lowe & Bardoel, 2007).

Increasing digital outlets and digital skills

So far, the arguments underline the assumption that the 50-65 year olds still rely on traditional news outlets. However, two tendencies might plead in favour of the inclusion of digital outlets in the 50-65 year olds' news media repertoires, as both the internet use among older people and the digital offer of news media have increased.

As argued before, the 50-65 age group tends to rely on traditional media, yet, older news media consumers too are gradually adopting new media technologies and at the same time they are developing the necessary supporting literacies. Western European studies indicate that being online gains popularity among older age groups. A Danish study found that a small but growing number of people watch TV on a computer on a daily basis, especially among the 55+ age group (Schrøder, 2015). In Flanders, online news has a wider audience compared with other countries, especially among the over-55s. 41.4% of the Flemish 50-65 year olds consult online news on a daily basis in Flanders (digiMeter, 2015).

Legacy news media have broadened their news offer with digital platforms such as a website, social media and mobile applications. The diversified forms in which news media are offered, triggered for example the idea to change the mere notion of public service broadcasting (PSB) into public service media (Moe, 2008). This entails content delivery through the widest possible range of distribution platforms to fulfil the PSBs' historic mission of universal service (Cola & Prario, 2012). To increase the audience reach, PSBs go with the wave of convergence: media content increasingly flows through different platforms onto more devices. PSBs entering the digital age, embracing alternative dissemination channels, have mainly sparked enthusiasm with regards to recovering so-called lost audiences that are difficult to reach, such as youngsters (Leurdijk, 2006). Unfortunately, this generally comes with the tendency to neglect older generations' interface with new public service media. As argued above, PSB is a beacon for the 50+ age group.

To address these issues, the present study investigated the current cross-media news repertoires of the 50-65 age group. Emphasis is put on the role of PSBs in their news media diet and attitude towards online news outlets. The research question of this study therefore is: are digital news outlets part of the 50-65 year olds' news repertoires, and if so, how do they relate to the more traditional or legacy media?

Method

To answer this research question, a mixed-method approach was adopted, combining an in-depth qualitative analysis (*in situ* interviews) with a guiding Q sort. This Q sorting technique groups informants performing a similar card sorting exercise via factor analysis or PCA (ref. infra). This method has proven to be useful to unravel the complex and multifaceted field of news consumption (e. g. Schrøder & Kobbernagel, 2010; Schrøder, 2012). Courtois, Schrøder and Kobbernagel (2015, p. 124) point out the added value of the Q-sort for audience research:

> Although the emphasis is on the qualitative properties, (the Q-sort) blend(s) a quantitative translation procedure into the qualitative process, in order to fortify the qualitative findings, for more reliable comparative analysis than previously seen in qualitative audience research.

An elaborate explanation of the Q-methodological approach to repertoires of news consumption can be found in the themed section of Participations News Consumption across Europe (Adoni, Peruško, Nossek & Schrøder, 2017).

Interview and Q sort procedure

Each informant was interviewed for on average one hour and a half in his or her domestic context. The interview was based upon a semi-structured topic list which addressed news use and included a Q sorting task. The interview started with a general question probing into an ordinary 'day in the life', gradually moving on to questions about how news fits into this day in the life, and to what extent and why it might be important to follow current affair updates.

Halfway through the interview, a Q sort was presented. The Q sorting technique is a 'measure-like' (Kobbernagel, 2016) technique to quantify the subjective process of articulation. It thus translates data that are qualitative (i.e. the process of giving meaning) in numeric data. It adds statistics, structure, transparency and even validity to a qualitative study (Schrøder, 2012). Therefore, informants are asked to sort a number of cards with a statement (i.e. the *Q-sample* (Watts & Stenner, 2012)), on a fixed normal distribution with a predefined number of positions, according to a specified dimension (Courtois et al., 2015). Each position of the Q cards is thus associated with a numerical value, linked to this normal distribution.

In this study, the Q-sample was composed by a set of 36 types of news media, an adaptation of Courtois, Schrøder & Kobbernagel's (2015) set, when possible distinguishing between commercial and public service media (see Appendix 1). Informants sorted the 36 Q cards following a bi-polar dimension ranging from *'does not play a role in my life'* (-4) to *'plays an important role in my life'* (+4). During this sorting task, informants were encouraged to reflect aloud, verbally considering their sorting of the 36 news media. This resulted in a dataset of 36 Q sorts (one for each informant) with a numerical (from -4 to +4) for each of the 36 news media statements (= the Q cards), together with verbal reflections of informants during the thinking-aloud.

After conducting the Q sort, the interviewees were questioned about their general stance towards Flemish public broadcaster VRT, its news outlets and its advances towards digital extensions.

Data analysis

As explained above, two types of data were collected from each participant: in-depth qualitative narrative data and quantitative Q sort data with the positions' numerical values per informant. The interview data were gathered and transcribed in Dutch and the qualitative software NVivo was used to analyse them. English translations of informant quotes were performed by the authors, following the analysis.

This interview data were analysed with the factor solution resulting from the Q sort as guidance. The Q dataset contains the informants (variables) and their ranking of each news media (cases). Hence, the correlation matrix derived from this dataset represents relations between informants, taking into account how important they find each of the 36 news media. A principal component analysis was used to reduce the informant correlation matrix to a simple structure. This implies that informants sharing a similar stance towards news media were grouped (Schrøder, 2012), or in other words, informants with similar news repertoires were identified. These components or groups of informants with similar repertoires were used to guide the qualitative analysis, which is the focal point in this study.

In this study, we use Flanders (the northern and Dutch speaking part of Belgium) as a test case. The Belgian mediascape is characterized by social responsibility of the media (e.g. PBS); historically strong party press, which has shifted to neutrality over the last year; external press pluralism in print; strong professionalization and internal press regulation (Raeymaeckers, 2015). As a result, Belgium (including Flanders) serves as an example for the Democratic Corporatist Model as described by Hallin and Mancini (2004) or the European Mainstream Model of Peruško, Vozab and Čuvalo (2013).

The Flemish (news) media market is highly concentrated (VRM, 2015), with a duopoly in both the print (*De Persgroep* and *Mediahuis*) and audio-visual market (*Medialaan* and publish broadcaster *VRT*). Moreover, De Persgroep and Medialaan are entangled due to cross-ownership, which results in a complex regional news media ecosystem. Looking at the print market, both dominant news publishers own popular and quality newspapers (Raeymaeckers, 2015). Looking at the broadcasting market, public broadcaster *VRT* has the favour of the newscast viewers. When commercial broadcaster *VTM* entered the Flemish market in 1989, the Flemish PSB struggled to regain an attractive image. However, in recent years the VRT managed to rebuild its audience, with on average 900,000+ daily viewers (of 6 million inhabitants) for the seven o'clock evening newscast (compared to 650,000+ for VTM) (CIM, 2015). Regarding the radio media landscape, the PSB is the most prominent with a total market share of about 60% (CIM, 2015).

The traditional dichotomy of print and audio-visual media companies is no longer sufficient to describe the news outlets (VRM, 2015). Driven by the age of convergence all of these news outlets have become news brands that offer news on multiple platforms, including brand websites, mobile applications and their traditional outlet. Next to the well-known news brands, news market players are trying to retain and potentially gain the audiences' attention. In Flanders, the audience which consults born-online news outlets is

limited, but alternative news platforms have built a small but loyal audience (Van Damme, Evens & Verdegem, 2014).

Sampling procedure

A sample of 43 informants was recruited, using a Fisherian sampling design based on news use to compose a diverse sample. We found in an earlier survey study among 385 50-65 year olds that three types of news users can be found when clustering on news use: the Cross-media news user (53.1%), Traditional news user (25.3%) and Serendipitous news user (20.6%). These types resulted from a K-means cluster analysis on the question 'How often do you get news through the following news channels?'. The respondents answered on a five-point scale, ranging from never (1) to daily (5).

These three groups served as a tool to create a participant sample of 43 informants, following a similar distribution (see **Table 1**).

Table 1: Sample composition of the presented research

News cluster	Gender		Number of informants
	Male	Female	
Cross-media news user	12	9	21
Traditional news user	6	7	13
Serendipitous news user	5	4	9
Total	**23**	**20**	**43**

Results

In order to find patterns in the 43 informant sorts, a two-phased analysis was performed. In first instance, a principal component analysis was run, using the common eigenvalue over one-criterion. This rendered a ten-component solution; hence ten different news repertoires were distinguished, explaining 83% of the variance in participant sorting variance. However, the last component contained only one participant. Single-item factors indicate instability, which implies a new analysis with fewer factors is advisable.

In order to find patterns in the 36 informant sorts, a two-phased analysis was performed. In first instance, a principal component analysis was run, using the common eigen-value over one criterion. This rendered a ten-component solution; hence ten different news repertoires were distinguished, explaining 81.1% of the variance in participant sorting variance. However, two components contained only one informant and one informant did not fit into the solution. A second analysis, constraining the number of components to a more parsimonious set of seven leads to an explained variance of 72.6%. This solution meets several criteria: personal value > 1; as few components as possible that explain as much variance as possible; as few informants as possible who load on multiple components; as few informants as possible who score negatively on a component as they have the opposite characteristics of the detected component; at least two informants in every

component and a maximum of informants belongs to a components. Hence, this component structure was deemed most suitable and was therefore retained to guide the study's focal qualitative analysis.

Table 2 contains the rotated component matrix, summarizing the significant component loadings. These range from -1 to 1 and reflect the extent to which a single informant 'fits' a certain news media repertoire. Per component – or 'repertoire' – factor scores were calculated. The higher a factor scores for a specific news medium, the more prominent is its role in that specific repertoire. For each repertoire (ref infra), a table with the top-5 news media types is included, as these types characterize the repertoires. However, all 36 media types are ranked for each repertoire and taken into account when analysing the repertoires.

Table 2: Rotated component matrix, summarizing the significant component loadings (p<0.01)

Informant[1]	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7
T 1962 M	0.82						
T 1961 F	0.69						
S 1956 M	0.68						
T 1960 F	0.67	0.48					
M 1959 F	0.67						
T 1962 F	0.65						
T 1956 M	0.63						
S 1960 F	0.59						
M 1959 M	0.58		0.57				
T 1962 M	0.58	0.44					
S 1958 M		0.88					
M 1962 M		0.81					
M 1952 M		0.70	0.49				
S 1958 M		0.65					
T 1956 F		0.64					
M 1958 M		0.64					
M 1955 F		0.63					
M 1955 M	0.45	0.62					
S 1954 M		0.52				0.49	
M 1954 M		0.48	0.47				
T 1959 M		0.45	0.36				
M 1957 M		0.45	0.71				
M 1958 M			0.70				
M 1959 M			0.67				
M 1955 M			0.62				
T 1952 F	0.46		0.57				

Informant[1]	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7
T 1956 M				0.77			
M 1949 F				0.76			
S 1960 F				0.62			
S 1960 F	0.44			0.62			
M 1962 F				0.62			
T 1959 F				0.46			
T 1950 M					0.72		
S 1956 M					0.71		
M 1961 F					0.63		
M 1958 F					0.55		
M 1953 F		0.43				0.73	
M 1959 F						0.62	
T 1959 F	0.48					0.59	
M 1961 F						0.58	
M 1953 M						0.50	
M 1959 M							0.74
S 1958 F	0.46						0.54

[1] The informant IDs are structured as: cluster of previous study (see **Table 1**) – data of birth – gender.

Defining dimensions of 50-65 year olds' news media repertoires: broadcaster, platform and content

When analysing the data, the 50-65 age group's news media repertoires seem to be defined by three dimensions. **Table 3** shows these dimensions and their sub-categories, as well as how often they are presented in the seven news media repertoires. The sub-categories are reflected in the names of the repertoires below.

Table 3: Defining dimensions or the seven news media repertoires among the 50-65 year olds

Dimension	Name label	# of occurrences
Orientation of broadcaster	PSB-oriented	2
	Commercially-oriented	1
	Mixed	4
Nature of news platform	Traditional	4
	Hybrid (combination traditional and online)	3
	Digital	0
News content preference	General	2
	Background	3
	Light news	1
	Sports news	1

The first dimension is the orientation of the broadcaster; either oriented towards public service broadcasting or a commercial broadcaster. The first repertoires are labelled as PSB-oriented, the latter as commercially-oriented. When news content of both PSB and commercial broadcasters is combined, the news media repertoire is referred to as a mixed repertoire.

A second defining dimension is the news platform: traditional and/or online media. News repertoires can be solely based on traditional news platforms or can incorporate both traditional and online news platforms (ie, the hybrid repertoires). Digital-only News media repertoires with only digital outlets do not occur.

The third and last defining dimension of the 50-65 year olds' news media repertoire is the news content preference, being general, background, light or sports news. The 50-65 aged with a general news content preference are interested in keeping up-to-date with the latest developments in current affairs. They prefer a general overview of what is going on, transcending the traditional dichotomy of hard or soft news (Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010). The ones adopting a background repertoire, however, expect news to be put in context. Next to the news updates, they seek interpretation of these updates. A third content preference is the tendency to consult light news. This includes quick and easy updates (such as news presented on radio and social media) and softer news items such as health or human interest. The last category in this news content dimension is the sports repertoire. As the name indicates, this repertoire includes news outlets with an outspoken interest in sports news.

The largest components are PSB-oriented. However, PSB content is supplemented with newscasts from commercial TV or radio broadcasters for four of seven the repertoires (i.e. the mixed repertoires). Only the smallest repertoire is solely commercially-oriented. A second defining dimension is the news platform (traditional and/or online media). Results show that the 50-65 year olds compose a cross-media news repertoire. While most profiles are dominated by traditional media outlets only, three out of seven repertoires include a digital news platform (i.e., the hybrid repertoires). In what follows, we will give an overview of the seven news consumption repertoires that were identified by this study.

Traditional PSB-oriented general news repertoire

Informants of the first repertoire consider news to be very important in their lives. The repertoire consists of five male and five female informants. They seek news mostly by traditional sources, as reflected in their top five news outlets. They feel the need to know what is happening, both in their environment and in the world. Informants stay updated for both personal and professional reasons (for example as a useful source of small talk).

Informants from the first repertoire put their trust in public service broadcasting. The three most important news media for this group are provided by the Flemish broadcaster VRT. The quality of the news is considered to be higher, since the news items are less sensational. Catherine (54, F): 'it gives you an objective news reading with extra information. You get a clear image of what happens every day'. They do not see working

points when it comes to news provided by PSB. Hilda (57, F) cannot think of useful advice to the PSB, 'because they are doing really well. Looking at information little improvement is possible'.

Throughout the day, the informants come in contact with news. Especially the newscast at 7 o'clock plays an important role in this news media repertoire. Radio news is consumed mostly on the road, while driving the car. The radio news is considered the best means to get a quick update. However, for some informants radio news is their main source of information.

> *Interviewer: Do you think new technologies will be important as news provider?*
> Christel: No, I don't think so. I am able to listen to the radio all day. What can be more up-to-date than radio news?

Sport programmes offered by VRT too are seen as more professional, of a higher level than commercial counterparts. Informants claim to only choose sport emissions of a commercial broadcaster when the PSB does not have the broadcasting rights.

The popular newspaper too is an important news outlet for this factor. The popular newspapers offer general and easy to read news updates. Especially the extended weekend edition has gained an important role. The newspaper differs as a news source from the audio-visual news as it is possible to choose topics on which more time can be spent. While the informants value the whole news package of the TV news, they do appreciate the broad overview offered by the newspaper. Rudy (57, M) states he would not miss the PSB newscast, yet the newspaper is his most important news source since he can choose what he does or does not read.

Informants from this first repertoire have no habit of turning to digital news sources. When they actively want to check a specific news fact, they check Text TV, another traditional news medium. Moreover, these informants link media types to their original platform. In other words, TV news is per definition watched on the television. Aside from national news, regional news providers are also a common source for news. Informants use these, however, not on a daily basis.

Table 4: Repertoire 1: Traditional PSB-oriented general news repertoire

	Q-sort card	Platform	PSB vs commercial	Content type
1	TV newscast PSB	Traditional	PSB	General
2	PSB radio news before 9 am	Traditional	PSB	General
3	Sports programmes PSB	Traditional	PSB	Sports
4	Popular Flemish newspapers	Traditional	-	General
5	Regional weekly newspapers	Traditional	-	General

Traditional PSB-oriented background news repertoire

Informants from the second repertoire have a general interest in news, at a local, regional and global level. **Table 5** presents their preferred news outlets. The repertoire consists of six male and three female informants. They seek updates supplemented with extra reading. One informant, Karl (59, M) states all news should be put into a context. He consciously chooses to read newspapers two weeks late, since 'old news' can be framed into a broader context, and therefore – he argues – it carries greater importance. This preference for putting news into the larger context is also reflected in their pronounced appreciation of opinions. Opinions are considered valuable as they interpret news events, rather than just bringing updates.

When searching for audio-visual news, informants from the second cluster turn to PSB. The public broadcaster is considered to be of high quality, addressing what they perceive 'newsworthy topics' like domestic politics. The PSB is trustworthy and decent, yet the popularization of the broadcaster's content is considered a downfall.

Informants seek news online, both on news sites provided by newspapers and the PSB. Some 50-65 year olds have a digital newsletter subscription which allows them to click on a title and visit news websites. Katheline (58, F) receives newsletters with national and regional news updates: 'when I see a topic that interests me, I will open it to see what happens in town'.

The informants expect the PSB will adapt to the digital environment. The motivation of this expectation differs however. Some informants see the shift as useful for younger generations, others, like Paul (61, M), use digital services themselves: 'today, all newscasts are available on demand. On the VRT website you can even see the different news item separately. Brilliant!'. The opinions on mobile news are divers. Some claim to already check their smartphone for news updates, while others have no interest in the service. The digitalization is seen as a threat for newspapers, rather than broadcast institutions. In the future, news will continue to become more digital according to Karl (59, M): 'the clock cannot be turned back and we must not be filled with nostalgia for the days of yore. […] The one does however not exclude the other. Digital news can provoke a person to search information in another source'.

Table 5: Repertoire 2: Traditional PSB-oriented background news repertoire

	Q-sort card	Platform	PSB vs commercial	Content type
1	PSB radio news before 9 am	Traditional	PSB	General
2	Interpretation programmes on radio	Traditional	PSB	Background
3	Flemish quality newspapers	Traditional	-	General
4	PSB radio news after 9 am	Traditional	PSB	General
5	TV newscast PSB	Traditional	PSB	General

Hybrid mixed sports news repertoire

Unlike other news repertoires, this pattern displays a strong inclination to watch sports programmes, followed by news consumption via social media, newspapers and general television newscasts. The repertoire consists of six male and one female informants. Our informants generally favoured to follow the news on a day-to-day basis, in the morning and in some cases throughout the day by reading a newspaper during breakfast or lunch, and especially in the evening by watching the seven o'clock television newscast in front of the television set in the living room. It is found important to follow the news, so to feel loosely up-to-date with current events and to converse about it.

Still, most indispensable is sports coverage, which is followed on a routine basis, both through traditional news media and online services. The informants all claim active and passive engagement in sports, which appears a considerable identity attribute. For example, John (52, M) muses on his personal football career and his lifelong fandom of *Club Brugge*, a popular national team.

Besides the dedicated sections at the end of the television news, specific shows such as *Sport Weekend* (PSB), *Stadion* (commercial broadcaster) and *Extra Time* (PSB) are mentioned. The latter two shows focus on football and comprise summaries of matches and panel discussions. Although they are available through linear broadcast, we did notice that informants access them on-demand online, especially because they are broadcast late in the evening and because they can conveniently mould into other practices:

> Jacob (59, M): I watch sports programmes on my laptop … I watch it on-demand on my computer, no longer at night. Like, I now watch it while washing up. I end up having a longer bath … also, when it doesn't interest me, it happens that I fast forward a bit, for instance to the fixed sections like 'the moment of the week', that's quite varied.

There is a clear preference for commercial broadcaster VTM, evidently because they purchased the exclusive rights to air extended summaries of matches, whereas the public service broadcaster VRT is more constrained. However interestingly, VRT's dedicated sports news website Sporza.be is a regular source of information, although apparently, it is updated as much as other commercial news sites. Furthermore, social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are often mentioned as gateways for news, including (amateur) sports items.

The informants share a positive perception of how the public service broadcaster works. They pinpoint it as objective, classic, reliable, despite a single critical remark about some younger journalist's aggressive style. All Informants consider digital extensions to online platforms as positive, and think VRT should keep up with recent developments. Nevertheless, there is discordance between the informants, ranging from the belief that the shift to online should not be a priority to the opinion that VRT ought to take a leading role.

Table 6: Repertoire 3: Hybrid mixed sports news repertoire

	Q-sort card	Platform	PSB vs commercial	Content type
1	Sports programmes commercial broadcasts	Traditional	Commercial	Sports
2	Sports programmes PSB	Traditional	PSB	Sports
3	Social media	Digital	-	General
4	Flemish quality newspapers	Traditional	-	General
5	Popular Flemish newspapers	Traditional	-	General

Hybrid mixed light news repertoire

This type of news repertoire is characterized by the prominence of news consumption via social media, commercial radio news, and lighter printed and televised magazines. The repertoire consists of one male and five female informants. Furthermore, regional television and popular newspapers have a rather important role to fulfil. The general tendency is to follow the news superficially, sometimes under the impulse of a spouse or other family member, just to have the feeling of keeping up:

> Mia (53, F): I think you have to be aware of what's happening in the world, so, you browse through a newspaper or watch the television newscast. One needs to grasp the contours of current […]. I don't need too much background information; I just quickly want to hear about it.

Moreover, encountering news appears serendipitous to this repertoire: having the radio on during the day, browsing the family's newspaper, joining the family in the living room in the evening, browsing the web. This explains why social media are categorized quite highly: these informants have – all but one – accounts on multiple social media and follow what their friends are doing online. Moreover, they rely on (e-mail) alerts of online newspapers, radio and television to entice them to read specific news items.

In a similar vein, women's and family magazines are consulted: they are read because a family member buys them, they are fun browsing, and ever present. Nevertheless, strong engagement with such magazines is also present:

> *Interviewer:* *What attracts you in* Libelle *[A lifestyle magazine]?*
> Dianne (54, F): Because of the light articles. It's about family life, about creative activities. I mean like hobbies, leisure, and some articles on psychology, or that kind of thing. That too. Ordinary things from readers. It's so very diverse.

Apart from the television news, public service media are not deemed that important. When probed into the attitude towards public service broadcasters, we notice agreement on its

perceived neutrality and trustworthiness, or at least the absence of discordant experiences. Moreover, a positive feeling emerges on the digital extensions through digital interactive television (such as voting or broadcasted Twitter updates), mobile applications and social media, although it is considered irrelevant for themselves, and much more suitable for younger audiences:

> Lily (64, F): I do not have a lot of expectations of [digital extensions], because I won't often use [them]. I'm certain it has to do with age: young folks will include new stuff, while we limit ourselves to what we know. New stuff like smartphones and so on.

Table 7: Repertoire 4: Hybrid mixed light news repertoire

	Q-sort card	Platform	PSB vs commercial	Content type
1	Social media	Digital	-	General
2	Commercial radio news after 9 am	Traditional	Commercial	General
3	Family and woman magazines	Traditional	-	Light
4	TV newscast PSB	Traditional	PSB	General
5	Commercial radio news before 9 am	Traditional	Commercial	General

Hybrid mixed background news repertoire

This fifth type of news repertoire is composed by consulting news blogs, supplemented with specialized (eg, financial newspapers) and popular newspapers, and current affairs programmes of both commercial and public service broadcasters. Finally, general newscasts – again from both sources – are considered relevant. The repertoire consists of two male and two female informants. A similarity between informants representing this pattern is the dominant inclination to go deeper in news. Unlike lighter and general news repertoires, a wider frame of reference is handled and continuously fortified:

> Raymond (63, M): You need to know what is 'for sale' in the world, in all kinds of domains. How the world is developing, what is heading to use. Imagine that 50 years ago a storm like the one in the US would hit us [refers to hurricane Sandy], it would come as a total surprise you couldn't prepare for. If you don't have all these channels, then you don't know what is going on. A second reason for me to follow current affairs is pure interest in news. In my life, I got permanently educated at work, I mean … I'm automatically interested in a lot of things.

This intrinsic interest in news is manifested in various domains (i.e. politics, economics and social affairs), reflecting very specific expectations what concerns 'good news': it is detailed, offers background and even inside information, goes further than a mere summary of facts,

and contains expert opinions (e.g. with specialized academics). Evidently, this hunger for information is time-consuming, and is scattered throughout the day, starting from reading at breakfast, to a well-filled evening of watching television.

Peculiar about this repertoire is the prominence of news blogs. In fact, two of the Informants are active bloggers. Raymond befriended a journalist with his own website on cultural activities (i.e. film, music) he visits on a daily basis, while he often writes on it as well. Maria (52, F) has a blog on the advances of charity walk for a school project in a Chilean slum. From her personal interest, she traverses related blogs, while she also browses blogs from people who have a medical condition similar to hers.

In terms of attitude to public service, we noticed a shared critical voice. Despite its virtue, the informants tend to complain about increasing sensation-seeking, and a tendency to regress to the tone of commercial news broadcasters. As such, very little difference is noticed between the two, and hence they are considered equals.

> Letty (60, F): I'm a critical… viewer, or listener of the VRT. Because I had the 'privilege' of being in the middle of a situation that was reported on, of which I knew exactly what was going on, and what caused it. I systematically noticed that – and other media do that as well – that there is a tremendous lack of critical journalism, checking sources. I think VRT used to be better in that, but they glided to some kind of populism, focusing on spectacular quotes. There's nothing critical about that.

Table 8: Repertoire 5: Hybrid mixed background news repertoire

	Q-sort card	Platform	PSB vs commercial	Content type
1	News blogs	Digital	-	General
2	Specialized Flemish newspapers	Traditional	-	General
3	Current affairs programmes commercial broadcasters	Traditional	Commercial	General
4	Current affairs programmes PSB	Traditional	PSB	General
5	Popular Flemish newspapers	Traditional	-	General

Traditional mixed background news repertoire

Informants from the sixth repertoire seek general news updates supplemented with background information. The repertoire consists of one male and five female informants. News has to be put in context, giving a clear image of the real story. Rose (52, F) for example expects news to be objective and clarifying, rather than popular. 'It's better to have a decent programme than to reach more viewers. Quality may not get lost at the expense of quantity'.

The written press, including broadsheets and weekly newsmagazines, is the most important news source for this segment, followed by teletext. News is consulted out of

personal interest. The informants attach great importance to a well-founded worldview and share this with their family. Rose (52, F) gets worked up about people with groundless opinions. 'The other day someone told me she did not feel the crisis. Then I think: "Please! Just watch the television!"'.

One respondent, Oliver (60, M) works abroad and reads foreign newspapers, mostly on his tablet. The shift towards mobile is an evidence for him, and sees customisation of the news diet as a logic outcome of the current developments. While Oliver is actively seeking personalised news, the other cluster members are rather reluctant towards new news services. They see the digitalization – and personalization even more so – of news as necessary, but only useful to attract younger generations. One informant notes however that accelerating updates may result in erroneous information, damaging the image of trustworthy news institution.

The members of this news media repertoire seek objective and trustworthy news. They rely on PSB news, yet they condemn the broadcaster for their shift to light, often sensationalized news. Oliver (60, M) calls the commercialization of the PSB the 'erosion of objectivity'.

> The equability of journalism is lost, partly because sources are being checked less, partly because broadcasters choose the path of sensation. This results in a wrong image on what happens in the world.

News has to be formulated clearly, yet it may not be reduced to a child's level or disaster tourism. The main advice these informants give to the PSB is to profile itself as a specialised news channel that consequently checks the sources, resulting in critical, but objective journalism.

Table 9: Repertoire 6: Traditional mixed background news repertoire

	Q-sort card	Platform	PSB vs commercial	Content type
1	Flemish quality newspapers	Traditional	-	General
2	News on teletext PSB	Traditional	PSB	General
3	Weekly magazines on current affairs and culture	Traditional	-	General
4	News on teletext of commercial broadcasters	Traditional	Commercial	General
5	PSB radio news after 9 am	Traditional	PSB	General

Traditional commercially-oriented general news repertoire

Commercial traditional news media outlets such as radio news throughout the day (especially in the morning), television newscasts, popular newspapers and free dailies dominate this final news repertoire. The repertoire consists of one male and one female

informant. Similar to other general news consumption patterns, Mary's guiding sentiment is to keep in touch with what is happening around her.

> Mary (55, F): Sure it is important to know what is happening around you. But it's not like I'm constantly looking for it. If something happens, I'll hear it from my husband, or children, or on the radio.

Like most other patterns, the news follows the pace of everyday life. Angele's morning routine vastly includes putting on the radio, during breakfast, in the car while getting to work. For music, but meanwhile the hourly newscasts keep her up-to-date. After work, she gets home, cooks, watches television and goes off to bed. Similarly, Anton (54, M), who is a more dedicated general news consumer, spares time in the evening to read *Het Laatste Nieuws*, a popular newspaper. Moreover, he extends his repertoire with this newspaper's online version and the online versions of a competing popular newspaper *Het Nieuwsblad* and two quality newspapers: *De Standaard* and *De Morgen.* It often amazes and intrigues him how these newspapers offer different headlines. He attributes this to different ideological positions, while he refers to public service broadcaster VRT as politically biased. Angele is not that opinionated, but claims to like commercial news more because it often contains lighter items. This negative association is further extended in his opinion on the digital future of the public service broadcaster:

> *Interviewer: What do you expect from the VRT in the current digital landscape?*
> Anton: That they stick to television! They should make more programmes that go deeper. I mean, I think that there is too little 'social news', I mean, news about social issues.

Table 10: Repertoire 7: Traditional commercially oriented general news repertoire

	Q-sort card	Platform	PSB vs commercial	Content type
1	Commercial radio news before 9 am	Traditional	Commercial	General
2	TV newscast commercial broadcasts	Traditional	Commercial	General
3	Popular Flemish newspapers	Traditional	-	General
4	Free daily newspapers	Traditional	-	General
5	Commercial radio news after 9 am	Traditional	Commercial	General

Conclusion and Discussion

As stated in the introduction, today's converging news media environment results in a never-ending stream of media updates. To cope with the abundance of both traditional and

online media outlets, audiences are forced to compose a personalized news media repertoire. This study aimed to find out how the 50-65 year olds' news repertoires are composed and what role is being assigned to the PSBs. Three dimensions define these news repertoires; PSB vs. commercially oriented, traditional and/or online media and the news content preference (background, general, light or sports news). Seven news media repertoires have been distinguished for the 50-65 age group. This is in agreement with Webster and Ksiazek's (2012) observation that audience fragmentation is a manifest consequence of the growth in digital media. Related to this finding, this article shows that the older age group is not just one homogeneous group. Society, including academics, is often guilty of *ageism*, i.e. stereotyping and prejudice against older age groups (Nelson, 2004). Older age groups are still assumed to be holding on to traditional habits, including media consumption. Research too consistently identifies age, together with ethnicity, income and education, as significant predictors of a digital divide (Bélanger & Carter, 2009). This study, however, emphasises the importance of a more nuanced approach within research for using (age) groups.

On the other hand, while the study revealed a diversity of repertoires, the authors found high levels of audience overlap among the investigated news outlets. We thus join Nimrod (2016) in her argument that older audiences in the digital media landscape are not a homogeneous group, but that they do share common practices. This research leads to the conclusion that even though seven different repertoires can be found, a clear overlap between these repertoires is noticeable. First, traditional news providers (i.e. legacy media) are still dominant within the current media environment which is characterized by digitization and convergence, since all news media repertoires include legacy media. Second, traditional media are – in line with the expectations – important to all the 50-65 year olds, as these are found in all news media repertoires. Four repertoire top 5s include traditional outlets only. However, three repertoires do include at least one digital news outlet. This shows that earlier news consuming habits remain, but can also change is a news outlet is found to be 'worthwhile' (Schrøder & Steeg Larsen, 2010). Nonetheless, the finding that none of the respondents consult digital-native news sites indicates that it is more difficult for these outlets to break into news consumption habits of older audiences. They seem to take one step at a time, exploring the world of digital news first through familiar news brands. Trust in established news organizations seems to play an important role in this process. Third, PSB remains a primary news source, since only one repertoire has a preference for news provided by the commercial broadcaster. Most repertoires combine both the PSB and commercial broadcaster, as both offer different perspectives to compose a unique news package (for example: PSB offers quality news and commercial broadcaster offers more sports). Fourth, the preferred nature of news among the 50-65 aged news audiences differs. Three repertoires prefer background news, which might be an explanation why digital media (such as news via social media) are less preferred. Digital media are often characterized by short updates, which leave out the contextualization these

repertoires are looking for. The repertoires may thus serve as a useful tool to find re-occurring patterns in the fragmented audience of the 50-65 year olds.

In terms of methodology, the use of Q methodology has shown to be valuable for news consumption studies (see for example the Themed Section of *Participations*, 'News Consumption across Europe', November 2017). This study distinguishes itself from similar studies of news repertoires by not analysing the whole population, but selecting one specific age group for deeper analysis. Also, the repertoires are analysed more systematically in terms of three dimensions: orientation of the broadcaster (PSM versus Commercial media), nature of news platform and news content preference. This results in a more transparent comparison of the news repertoires.

We must, of course, recognize that this research is based on a relatively small sample. The last news repertoires only included four or five respondents. Since the data of analysis were qualitative data gathered during the interviews, this might result in a slight bias. However, the sample size does not undermine the value of the repertoire that contains few respondents. Nevertheless, what we end up with is a set of repertoires representing informants. The technique of data reduction used in the Q-methodology results in repertoires with very similar news consumptions patterns and opinions on the PSB. With this research, we hope to have demonstrated that the repertoire approach remains a valuable means to investigate news consumption.

To gain insight on the position of the PSB, further research on news media repertoires on different age groups might be useful, especially since, for instance, the Flemish public broadcaster is confronted with decreasing audience shares among young people. Also, the role of trusted news brands, going beyond PSB brands alone, in the repertoire composition might gain valuable insights.

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Appendix 1: 36 item Q-sample of news media types with categorizations

	Q-sort card	Platform	PSB vs commercial	Content type
1	Commercial radio news after 9 am	Traditional	Commercial	General
2	Commercial radio news before 9 am	Traditional	Commercial	General
3	Current affairs programmes commercial broadcasters	Traditional	Commercial	General
4	Current affairs programmes PSB	Traditional	PSB	General
5	Family and woman magazines	Traditional		Light
6	Flemish quality newspapers	Traditional		General
7	Free daily newspapers	Traditional		General
8	Free weekly newspapers	Traditional		General
9	Interpretation programmes Flemish broadcasters	Traditional		Background
10	Interpretation programmes on radio	Traditional	PSB	Background
11	Lifestyle, health and culture programme commercial broadcasters	Traditional	Commercial	Light
12	Lifestyle, health and culture programme public broadcasters	Traditional		Light
13	News and interpretation programmes on non-Flemish broadcasters	Traditional		General
14	News blogs	Digital		General
15	News on Flemish professional news sites	Digital		General
16	News on international professional news sites	Digital		General
17	News on other Flemish websites on culture, sports, music…	Digital		General
18	News on PSB website	Digital	PSB	General
19	News on teletext of commercial broadcasters	Traditional	Commercial	General
20	News on teletext of PSB	Traditional	PSB	General
21	News via applications	Digital		General
22	News via mobile sites	Digital		General
23	News via text message	Digital		General
24	Popular Flemish newspapers	Traditional		General
25	PSB radio news after 9 am	Traditional	PSB	General
26	PSB radio news before 9 am	Traditional	PSB	General
27	Regional TV newscasts	Traditional		General
28	Regional weekly newspapers	Traditional		General
29	Social media	Digital		General
30	Specialized Flemish newspapers	Traditional		General
31	Sports programmes commercial broadcasts	Traditional	Commercial	Sports
32	Sports programmes PSB	Traditional	PSB	Sports
33	TV channels with 24/7 news updates	Traditional		General
34	TV newscast commercial broadcasts	Traditional	Commercial	General
35	TV newscast PSB	Traditional	PSB	General
36	Weekly magazines on current affairs and culture	Traditional		General