

Article

Conceptualising Liveness and Visibility in the News Repertoires of Adolescents in a Polymedia Environment

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Abstract

Based on the assumptions that digital media are used as integrated structures or “polymedia repertoires” and that media practices cannot be treated as unrelated practices performed on distinct platforms, the present study examined the digital sociability of young people and their media prosumption in a polymedia environment. Data were collected from group interviews of 67 12- to 19-year-olds and 59 personal visualised media sketches. The study focused on teenage engagement with news as part of their media repertoires and their understanding of what news is in the context of general platform sociability conditions, including a state of permanent connectedness and constant anticipation of something new. Their sociability based on permanent activity and affective engagement was enabled and framed by the algorithmically produced regime of visibility and the promise of liveness. The findings indicated that an important consequence of the increased fragmentation of activities is the naturalisation of the performance of multiple media practices at the same time. Although the complexity of such performance, even among teenagers, revealed socially distinctive categories, clear hierarchies between types of practices—such as watching news or pop culture, online shopping and doing homework—and the cultural differentiation of the dominant contexts for these practices—such as school and leisure—were eroded. The contexts of school, home, and leisure thus collapse, and the definition of important news journalism becomes highly unstable, with the distinction between pop and politics generally disintegrating.

Keywords

adolescents; social media; digital visibility; liveness; news repertoires; media engagement; media repertoires; polymedia; permanently online

Issue

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1. Introduction

The concept of media repertoires—specifically, news repertoires—has been at the forefront of research on the choices of audiences in complex media environments in the last 15 years (Edgerly et al., 2018; Edgerly & Vraga, 2020; Peters et al., 2022; Wimmer & Wurm, 2021). Cross-sectional media research has gained new momentum also due to Couldry and Hepp’s (2017) thesis on deep mediatization, and this research has further popularised media repertoires, which highlight the impor-

tance of the interconnected configuration of media (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012). The situation for young audiences is complicated by the “colonization of media contexts” (Naderer et al., 2021, p. iii) by advertisers who rapidly find their way into emerging media environments that are popular among children and adolescents. More importantly, resisting permanent social media engagement, which has become an important factor in news consumption of this age group, represents a practice of distinction and an ideological statement. However, Bucher (2020) argued that this choice is no longer a

viable option because our ontological condition implies a techno-social existence, and even absence provides platform algorithms with important information about the person abstaining. Moreover, since the logics of datafication and predictive analytics make it difficult to opt out of digital platforms and services, “refusing to connect or temporarily opt[ing] out is a form of connection too” (Bucher, 2020, pp. 610–611).

Following the media repertoire approach, the present study built upon the assumptions that media practices cannot be treated as distinct or unrelated and that digital media are used as integrated structures or polymedia repertoires (Tagg & Lyons, 2021). However, the media repertoires approach is often limited by its descriptiveness (e.g., Frey & Friemel, 2023) and lack of conceptual breakthroughs, which would engage closely with the temporal economy in adolescents’ daily lives, which have been colonised by platforms, and the ubiquitous nature and consequences of digital sociality. This study argued that, nowadays, teenagers’ news consumption is framed by the regime of visibility and the feeling of liveness that govern social media platforms.

In the present study, news was defined in terms of the products of journalism based on journalistic news values. Genres produced by the news industry are treated as distinct compared to the novelty of the world of popular culture, lifestyle, and consumer topics. One of the long-established distinctions of journalism practices and genres is between soft news and personalised human-interest stories, which have very limited or no public significance and are valued based on interestingness, and hard news, which has high degrees of newsworthiness and public significance. This distinction is closely related to class differences and hierarchical cultural distinctions between elite and popular/folk culture and between informed citizenship and apolitical consumerism. To highlight the audience’s agency in defining news, Edgerly and Vraga (2020, p. 420) introduced the concept of news-ness, which they defined as “the extent to which audiences characterize a specific piece of media as news.”

The study addressed the following questions:

RQ1: What types of news genres and media repertoires constitute teenagers’ diverse configurations of media choices?

RQ2: How the regime of visibility, which encourages instability and feelings of eventfulness and ephemerality, dominates teenage media cultures?

RQ3: What cultural distinctions exist in the generational culture and cut across the generalised platform sociability of teenagers?

To answer these questions, data were analysed from online group interviews of 67 Slovene teenagers, which were conducted during the final phase of the Covid-19

lockdown, and personal visualised media sketches produced by the interviewees after the interviews.

We aimed to identify the news repertoires of young audiences and the meaning of news in the context of the generalised colonisation of their sociability by digital platforms and their regime of visibility. The participants were asked about their news consumption and intention to expose themselves to news, which was understood in terms of newsworthiness and the social significance applied in news journalism. We are aware that news journalism is not a static category and that the news values and boundaries of journalism have long been challenged and never been unproblematic. In particular, we recognise the recent “dislocation of news journalism” (Ekström & Westlund, 2019), i.e., the notion that journalistic news values and formats have changed due to online platforms and their algorithmic curatorial logic. As Wunderlich et al. (2022) have shown, in today’s hybrid information environment, the boundaries between what constitutes journalism and what does not are blurred, yet demarcations emerge along the lines of how (young) people use and understand journalistic and non-journalistic sources and the functions associated with them.

In our study, the group interviews and personal visualised media sketches were analysed to explore the participants’ conceptualisation of news and their news repertoires derived from intentional news content searches as well as unintended, unplanned exposure to news or news programmes during habitual digital media navigation or content that was accidentally seen and/or heard on a television in a family living room or somewhere else. The study participants, who were between 12 and 19 years old, were considered part of a specific generational cultural group. According to Corsten (1999), life periods are marked by age-based cultural definitions, conventions, and expectations. In the context of an institutionalised, standardised modern life course, adolescence—as a socially constructed period—represents an important phase for the crystallisation of self-thematization. In addition, adolescents can represent niche markets for cultural production and, as such, it is not just an age cohort with a specific generational habitus or subjectivity. It is also commercially defined, labelled, and narratively constructed, implying a distinctive global lifestyle group that surpasses class differences, e.g., the sixties generation, Generation Z.

A general assumption of generational analysis within media studies (cf. Fortunati et al., 2019) is that media experience produces media gaps that divide people. Technical and symbolic media products are part of the collective memory of generations as well as personal memories of experiences from childhood and adolescence. Bolin (2017) argued that media technologies and the relationship between the social and technological framed by these media, which are encountered during formative years, shape all future media experiences and the cultural memory of a generation. A key aspect of the

formation of generational cultural experience is “fresh contact” with a novelty in the form of a new medium and way of using media that involves new grammar that must be learned, embodied, and naturalised. Nowadays, adolescence is influenced by fresh contact with digital social platforms, which significantly contribute to the formation of the generation as a cultural group with a specific technological habitus, as the digital literacy acquired later in life cannot replace the primary contact and habituation of childhood and adolescence. Other aspects of differentiation, such as class and gender distinctions, cut across habitus and generationally defined media repertoires and significantly diminish the effect of generational distinctions as a culturally distinct grouping beyond gender, class, or other markers of differentiation.

2. Visibility and Liveness in Platform Sociability

To understand young audiences, the technological specificity and uses of a medium are not as important as the conceptualisation of digital media as an integrated communicative environment. A polymedia environment is formed when certain conditions, such as accessibility, affordability, and digital literacy, are met. We drew upon the concept of polymedia (Madianou & Miller, 2013), which represents an attempt to name an integrated media structure in which each medium is defined and has meaning only in relation to other media and in which media selection is a social act that involves normativity, definitions of the situation, and social conventions. In this context, media encourage certain genre-based practices of use and production in relation to each other. Polymedia, as an integrated structure of capabilities, is therefore not only the naming of a media environment but also the use of these capabilities to manage relationships and emotions.

The regime of visibility refers to the technological affordances of platform software and the business model of social media, which encourages constant work to retain visibility and avoid marginality in the world of online sociality. To be visible and avoid digital death requires constant presence on platforms and permanent performance and self-presentation with the highly standardised phatic communication tools offered by the platform, such as likes, dislikes, comments, and sharing (Bucher, 2021). Users are encouraged to be constantly active in this form of programmed sociality and are therefore always in a state of distracted attention. One aspect of the regime of visibility of social media and media acceleration in general is a state characterised by a continuous automated stream of updates, constant connectedness, restlessness, and anticipation of something new integrated into habitual digital media navigation. In her thematization of sociability, Bucher (2012, 2020) explained the algorithmically produced regime of visibility that is characteristic of social media. The regime of self-presentation and interaction is highly standardised, and platform software never leaves users alone and

serves as an active actor by encouraging the constant staging of friendship. Constant activity is necessary for visibility due to the nature of the algorithm. Users are constantly encouraged to be active in this programmed society and, therefore, constantly online.

Ellison and Boyd (2018) noted that social media is not an entity or fact but an action and practice in which every click, like, share, and post creates a relationship. Its regime of visibility is based on the ever-looming threat of invisibility. According to Bucher (2012, p. 1175), “participatory subjectivity” in digital culture is not constituted through the all-controlling device of visibility, as Foucault assumed, but through the constant danger of disappearance, invisibility, marginalisation, and expulsion from the world of online sociality. Visibility and the recognition of others depend on the attention of the audience, which is why there is extreme overproduction and constant updating of cultural formats by a huge number of users. Visibility leads to social recognition, while invisibility means digital death.

The perception of things happening “live” creates feelings of eventfulness and ephemerality and a “constant search for the next affective hit” (Markham, 2020, p. 15). Liveness should be understood as an assertion of the media as well as the experience of the audience. Scannell (2014) is the protagonist of the ontological and phenomenological analysis of liveness as an important televisual formal tool for claiming authenticity and truthfulness. The experience of liveness “instils the sense that live media are where real things happen” (Markham, 2020, p. 94) and provides a feeling of access to reality and participation. Regarding the liveness of social media and liveness as the predominant pattern of engagement with digital media, the imperative of visibility has become the decisive factor guiding adolescents’ news consumption.

Algorithmic architecture organises social practices around the tendency to be visible and noticed, which requires constant work, leaves little room for practices beyond social platforms and influences news consumption practices and, more importantly, the perception of news. Social media streams tend to be organised in reverse chronological order and constantly updated, which creates a spatio-temporality of immediacy and privileges real-time engagement (Lupinacci, 2021, p. 277). There might be important happenings within this steady, ongoing flow, and the lack of anticipation of exactly when they will take place is unsettling. The promise of liveness underlies social media’s claims and functionalities more generally. Notably, social platforms promote a sense of instantaneity, co-presence, ephemerality, and authenticity to obtain the data necessary for their operation (Lupinacci, 2021, p. 278). However, the following question remains: How do the new circumstances of visibility and liveness in a polymedia environment and platform sociability affect the news repertoires of young audiences who primarily have fresh contact with news distribution patterns through the norms of social media culture?

3. Methodology and Sample

Media repertoires do not espouse an a priori dimension of media uses as the only truth. On the contrary, a range of information from behavioural interactions to episodic monitoring of media can serve as indicators of users' media engagement. Examples include the frequency and timing of use, preferences regarding a particular type of media, or the degree to which media are integrated into everyday routines. Media repertoires are usually identified in two steps: the analysis of in-depth interviews; and the qualitative or quantitative analysis of media diaries, sketches, or similar variations of methods (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012; Vozab, 2019). In a Danish study, Schrøder (2017) identified six news repertoire categories—ranging from online quality omnivores to print addicts—that adhered to the relevance of the types of “market viability” of news providers. Edgerly (2015) identified six news repertoires among American audiences: news avoiders, internet users, television and press audiences, liberal online audiences, conservative audiences, and news omnivores. Oblak Črnič and Luthar (2017) showed that media consumption in Slovenia is structured into typical media repertoires, such as integrators, digital natives, television viewers, and newspaper readers, which represent socio-cultural formations and class-differentiated discursive cultures.

Although most of the aforementioned studies focused on adult audiences, some recent studies have empirically examined the media consumption of youth (Boczkowski et al., 2017; Diehl et al., 2018; Edgerly & Vraga, 2020; Peters et al., 2022; Wimmer & Wurm, 2021). In Oblak Črnič et al.'s (2022) methodological review of such studies, the predominant data collection methods were semi-structured individual and group interviews. Some studies used participant workshops in which group discussions also took place. At the individual level, mapping media repertoires and egocentric mapping were the most frequently used methods. Digital media use was sometimes observed, and media diaries complemented other data and served as a starting point for interviews.

The combination of constant attention, participatory design, and changing personal media devices in the present study context required the use of innovative methodological approaches to examine the news repertoires of youth. Due to the scarcity of research on Slovene adolescents' media practices, an in-depth qualitative study was conducted to obtain information on the diverse practices and patterns of use that would suggest stable media repertoires within the social figurations that foster or condition these permanencies. The research design included two complementary methods: group interviews and personal visualised media sketches.

A comprehensive semi-structured questionnaire was used to obtain detailed information about how, where, and what kind of media participants consumed, how they accessed media technologies, and what media

practices prevailed. We chose the group interviews to capture the individual specificities of adolescents and possible collective outliers within a distinctive group of generational media culture. While the group interviews allowed for in-depth conversations within carefully selected sub-groups, personal visualised media sketches served to capture immediate, subjective choices about media preferences. Media sketches were used as a replacement for media diaries, which are less effective and less reliable for children and young people (Kirsh, 2010). As the data collection took place in the last phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, the immediate recall of media preferences was more relevant than media diary data over a longer period. As part of the interview, a short online survey was administered at the very end to gather key demographic data. Each method was tested on a small pilot sample to eliminate errors such as repetition of questions, unclear instructions, and survey length.

The sampling was carried out according to the type of school. The diversity of the sample was ensured by sampling from different primary and secondary school programmes, followed by the variety of school locations. Between March and June 2021, we conducted 27 group interviews with 67 participants aged 12–19 years. In addition to 14 participants (50% from primary and 50% from secondary school) from pilot group interviews, the group interviews included 21 primary and 32 secondary school pupils. A total of 59 personal visualised media sketches submitted by 24 primary, 15 secondary, and 20 grammar school pupils were collected.

Special consideration was given to the selection of a remote conversation tool. Zoom was chosen because it was already familiar to the participants and did not require additional equipment to be installed on their devices. Most participants took part in the conversations from home, and almost all of them utilised video connections. The group interviews were carefully structured, and the moderators explained the confidentiality and purpose of the research. Interviews were conducted in pairs or groups of three or four; in very rare cases, only one person was interviewed. On average, the interviews were 1.5 hours long; the shortest was 44 minutes, while the longest was more than two hours. In accordance with qualitative research principles, interviews were conducted until saturation, i.e., when patterns of choice or media practices began to repeat themselves.

To deeply assess practices and perceptions related to approaching the news, the group interviews were qualitatively analysed, enabling the evaluation of the formation of separate media cultures in terms of concrete news experiences among the youth. The personal visualised media sketches complemented the group-level interview data with individual-level information. This technique was inspired by Hasebrink and Hepp (2017) and Schrøder's (2017) discussions of new approaches for studying media use in mediated everyday life. Hasebrink and Domeyer (2012) distributed cards on which the interviewees wrote down the most frequently mentioned

media in the interview so that they could be ranked in order of importance; this method was not possible for our remote group interviews. Instead, in accordance with Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016), at the end of each interview, the participants followed pre-prepared instructions and drew a thought pattern in which they wrote down, in order, the main media, devices or platforms they: (a) valued most, (b) used to stay informed, (c) used to stay in touch, (d) used to relax and have fun, and (e) used for creativity or to prove themselves. Individual photographs of the sketches were shared via Zoom or email. On average, the personal media sketches took five to eight minutes to complete, and the accompanying online survey for collecting demographic data took six to eight minutes.

Two approaches are usually used to explore preferences in media sketches. Hasebrink and Domeyer (2012) recommended quantification, in which all mentions and rankings within a category are converted into numerical values. For example, concrete references in qualitative records, e.g., telephone, Instagram, and local TV, are numbered and translated into quantitative data. In the second step, different analysis techniques, including ranking devices in combination with other variables and qualitatively assessing the common characteristics of typologies, are possible.

In the present study, all responses from the personal visualised media sketches in the form of words (e.g., phone, Snapchat, Google, Zoom, etc.) were converted into numerical values, creating a database that allowed for the identification of (a) the number of frequencies for each media/device within the five categories, and (b) the ranking of the individual media/devices within each category. A frequency table was created to provide a generalised list of participants' media preferences for all five categories. The top preferences in each category were selected using a simple criterion: a device, medium, or app that appeared at least five times. More sophisticated data analysis was conducted to see how certain devices and applications were grouped into broader categories of news media repertoires. In this step, a hierarchical classification method provided a framework for identifying the cross-sectional regime of news media repertoires across a larger list of separated media.

4. Results

4.1. Almost No News Beyond Platforms: The Personal Visualised Media Sketches Perspective

In the category of preferred media for news, information, and schoolwork, participants mentioned 29 labels in their personal visualised media sketches. The preferred and more common imaginary of popular media news choices within their repertoire consisted of a diverse combination of distance learning tools, social media platforms, online portals, and local and national TV. Some labels were single choices, such as Viber, Twitter, Spotify, and radio. Others were mentioned more often, including Instagram (29%), Google (29%), Snapchat (24%), phone (22%), and Discord (19%). Less common choices were computer (17%), YouTube (15%), MS Teams (12%), TV and TV news (12%), Zoom (10%), and the 24ur.com online news portal (8%).

These results are in line with the cultural position of teenagers as emerging audiences in a phase of constantly changing media choices. However, it remains unclear how these choices are combined internally and what kinds of separate configurations of media use exist among teenagers. As shown in Table 1, each news repertoire category had a similar number of participants. The first two included 13 students each (22%), the third and fifth had 11 each (19%), and the fourth had 10 (17%). One group belonged to a single "outlying participant" whose choices were narrowly specific, mostly off-topic, and primarily related to a set of niche tools for online learning, e.g., access to a dictionary, a translator, or a library. After careful consideration, this student was excluded from further interpretations of the data.

Labels were created based on the most frequent media choices in each category to demonstrate the internal combination of elements expressed in the media sketches. Initially, the main technical devices, platforms, concrete media, and news programmes and the internal logic of their potential connections were interpreted. Then, the dominant media forms within a category were analysed in relation to their distinctive cultural practices of viewing, listening, reading, or browsing. In addition, the participants' incidental and intentional ways of finding the news were compared. Figure 1 shows the most

Table 1. Overview of news media repertoire categories.

Category	Technical access	News access	<i>N</i>	%
Short video information stumblers	Converged	Incidental	13	22
Digital traditionalists	Mobile	Incidental	13	22
Commercial visual culture enthusiasts	No relevance	Incidental	11	18.6
TV viewers and readers	Mobile	Intentional	10	16.9
Multitaskers for school	No relevance	Intentional	11	18.6
Total			58	100

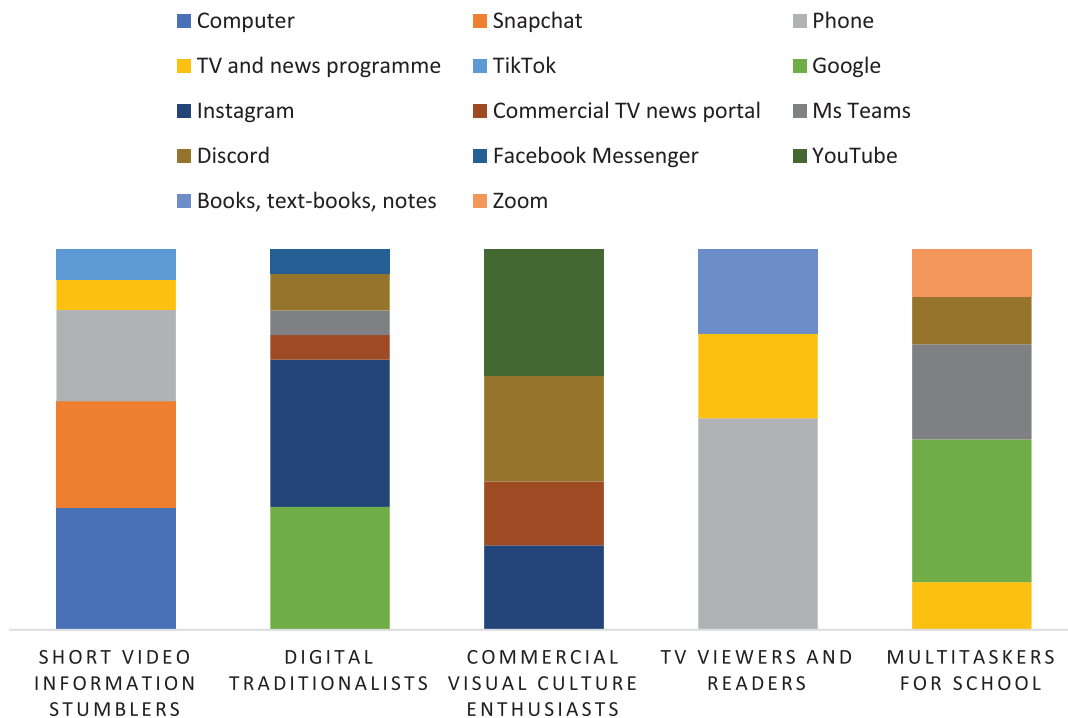


Figure 1. The most prominent devices, platforms, and content choices in each category.

prominent devices, platforms, and content choices in each news repertoire category.

Boczkowski et al. (2017) argued that people devote less time to news when they come across it incidentally on social media than when they find it intentionally in newspapers or on television. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2017) found that people who perceive that “news finds them” on social media are more likely to use social media than traditional news sources. Moreover, following digital and social media news may increase the diversity of news sources for youth, leading to a more omnivorous news consumption style (Geers, 2020). In our study, the repertoires category Short Video Information Stumblers primarily accessed news via computer or phone and preferred newer platforms, such as Snapchat and TikTok, which involved short video genres and constant act-react social activity. Their technical access was convergent, and their news access was mainly incidental. The diverse group of Digital Traditionalists mostly accessed news incidentally via mobile devices and primarily used Instagram, Google, and Snapchat. Commercial Visual Culture Enthusiasts strongly preferred YouTube and Instagram and mainly communicated on Discord rather than Snapchat. They were also more dependent on commercial TV news platforms, although the technical devices for access were not relevant at all. TV Viewers and Readers had a much narrower repertoire, accessing news via TV and news programmes, books, and textbooks and mainly using their mobile phones. As such, they were likely to access news deliberately and much more intentionally than the previous groups. Multitaskers for School related their news consumption

much more intentionally to traditional TV news portals and used Google and distance learning online tools, such as MS Teams, Zoom, and Discord, for school activities and tasks.

With the only exception of television, the traditional media—such as print and radio—were generally not brought up in personal media sketches. Therefore, unlike most previous studies, the repertoires were not balanced between traditional and new media (e.g., Nossek & Adoni, 2017; Sormanen et al., 2022). The repertoires, especially the first three, were strongly tied to algorithmic media and governed by the principle of algorithmic visibility. The first three news repertoires were primarily associated with media platforms that push news to audiences, such as Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat. According to their algorithmic logic, these news repertoires were not a deliberate selection but were shaped by chance. The last two repertoires combined a niche selection of media choices and news practices that required pull access to events and information. These repertoires were formed through more deliberate, conscious choices.

For this reason, we looked at who belonged to each category to assess possible social differentiation within each relatively homogeneous group of teens. The Short Video Information Stumblers and Digital Traditionalists were much more diverse in terms of age, gender, and type of schooling; however, no distinct characteristics emerged. Each group had a mixed composition of boys and girls aged 12–19 years old attending primary and secondary schools. The narrower social group was the Commercial and Visual Culture Enthusiasts, who were surprisingly all boys in primary or secondary school.

TV Viewers and Readers were mainly boys from more diverse educational backgrounds, and their intentionally chosen news channels were the narrowest of all. The Multitaskers for School were mainly older girls in grammar school with a focus on continuing to study at the university. Their ambition to succeed at school was here very distinct and reflected in their deliberate choice of niche media channels for news consumption.

5. The Imperative of Visibility, Simulating Liveness, and Changing Perception of the News

These results point to the conclusion that clear hierarchies between types of practices, such as watching news or pop culture, online shopping, and doing homework, and the cultural differentiation of the dominant contexts for these practices, such as school and leisure, were eroded. Regarding seeking news, some participants illustrated the dominant digital sociability as follows:

I'm on [the] phone the whole day. I'm just kind of evenly writing something with some friends via Instagram as well as Snapchat. Then, I also listen to a lot of music on YouTube, if that also counts as a medium. I don't even read magazines, except for [during] school, when we have to write articles in English. Actually, I don't even watch these TV channels. I read the news on the internet, on my phone and on my computer. (Female, 15, elementary school)

I spend a lot of time on...TikTok, Instagram [and] YouTube. When some people publish what is happening in the world, there is where I find out. I find out a lot from my parents. They tell me [things] if they are talking about what is going on, or I can hear [them] talking to each other. Well, I hear, I catch the conversation. I also learn more from other people than from the web because I don't use...those news websites. (Male, 12, elementary school)

Their constant (day-long) access to social media platforms was a key factor guiding the participants' news consumption. The continuous flow of asynchronous interaction helps maintain a "feeling of permanent connection, an impression that the link can be activated at any time and that one can thus experience the other's engagement in the relationship at any time" (Licoppe, 2004, p. 141). In this way, a permanent connection is integrated into everyday life to the point that it is completely normalised. More importantly, constant activity is necessary for visibility due to the nature of the algorithm and being visible means maintaining a constant presence through the various means offered by social media platform architecture. This imperative in turn becomes one of the most important factors guiding the news consumption of adolescents as it determines through which platform choices are news repertoires constructed and how internal boundaries of news repertoires are established.

On the other hand, and in line with other studies (Edgerly et al., 2018; Hartley, 2018; Peters et al., 2022), the results indicate a central role the family plays in teens knowledgeability about public affairs and their potentially conscious news searching as the consequence of discussions and news consumption at home. Some participants also indicated that television still plays or used to play an important role as a news source for young people; however, a shift to online platforms was also evident. Although we conducted our research during the last phase of Covid-19 in Slovenia when milder restrictions were in place, it was evident from the interviews that online schooling, quarantines, and other Covid-19 restrictions in the prior two years were among the factors that shaped participants' television news consumption and online behaviour. In particular, participants frequently mentioned obtaining information on the latest number of Covid-19 cases as one reason they watched television news. Besides the imperative of visibility, Covid-19 could thus be one of the reasons for the imbalance between the traditional and new media repertoires:

I think that I somehow have periods when I am interested and look. I watched CNN one time. But I have the periods when I say, "Don't worry, things are happening even without me." Then, I learn the most from Instagram and from my friends at school. I also watched this online site from national radio and television....But now, I'm in a period where I don't watch. (Male, 17, grammar school)

I'm definitely on Instagram; everything I see from current events is on Instagram. Or if one of my friends tells me, I'd rather check that information [through], for example, some app, 24ur.com or Slovenia 1. But something like this. On the other hand, it's definitely television. Broadcast news, in principle, I don't watch regularly. But it often happens that I'm just nearby when they are on, so also from there. (Female, 16, grammar school)

Despite platform and content selection differences, all participants used smartphones as their predominant means of communicating and approaching the news. Moreover, the participants kept their smartphones nearby 24 hours a day. This naturalisation of "cultural connectivity" creates an impression that gathering on social platforms is a natural form of sociality and expressive collectivity.

Perhaps the most important insights from the interviews were indications of changing perceptions of news and what counts as news. For example, internet memes and TikTok videos were often treated not only as new forms of news but also as dominant sources. In line with Cotter and Thorson (2022), this information environment could be described as "information cacophony" which is characterized "by the jarring noise of many, discordant

voices offering up information, under conditions of low media trust and an absence of a pre-defined epistemic hierarchy of sources” (Cotter & Thorson, 2022, p. 629):

For news about Slovenia, I look at the website 24ur.com....For the world, you often know everything from these memes. (Male, 17, grammar school)

For Slovenia, I learn more from my parents than from the reports....Well, grandmothers and grandfathers also....I know more about this [the world] from these social networks. For example, you can find a lot of this on TikTok and on Instagram....Otherwise...Well, nothing else. (Female, 16, grammar school)

I haven't been watching a lot of news lately, as I've honestly gotten a little tired of it....Mostly, I hear from my classmates that if something like this is happening, it's more for Slovenia, but if it's global or on Instagram or basically I've already learned a lot about it on TikTok. But I don't know when these American elections became relevant....Black Lives Matter is mostly on TikTok. But, on Instagram, I learned more about it. (Female, 14, elementary school)

Lupinacci (2021, p. 277) emphasised a reverse chronological organisation of social media streams as the key characteristic of their spatio-temporality that creates real-time engagement. As one interviewee stated: “After checking all the notifications, I always go through all the stories from my friends because it annoys me if there are some unwatched stories. Sometimes, I unfollow some people, so I don't have to check so many stories (Female, 16, secondary school).

6. Discussion

The proposed focus on the notions of visibility and liveness in the future studies of news repertoires has several theoretical and practical implications. With the incorporation of additional conceptual layers, the descriptiveness of media repertoires approach can be avoided on the level of theory. A range of new forms aiming to simulate liveness have emerged on social media, which contributes to the perception of the social centrality of these platforms. It is precisely this liveness that defines digital media as socially central in spatial, temporal, and social terms, which contributes to the impulsivity of constant checking. Such forms of liveness are no longer primarily concerned with traditional media as the central referential event; “what's new” is becoming more interpersonal (Couldry, 2012, p. 23).

According to van Es (2017, pp. 161–162), these forms have established a range of new interactions between real-time connectivity and sociality, and they have established new meanings and values for live, which “will remain a dynamic category and will be relied upon to evaluate the quality of communications. It will continue

to be associated with a paradox and the tensions that emerge from it.” According to Beer (2013), social platforms pulse with anticipation and the expectation that something new and worthy of attention can happen at any moment, contributing to a state of constant suspense. The polymedia environment of social media thus characterises a peculiar state of the fear of missing something that might happen (see also Lupinacci, 2021, p. 281), which supports the perception that constant connection is a duty and a responsibility to others.

On a more theoretical level, our analysis suggested that liveness is in this respect closely connected to the notion of visibility and of the constant struggle for connectivity and being up to date. The simulation of liveness and algorithmic visibility importantly influence the selection and perception of news of adolescents, and further studies are needed to explore the operation of this process in detail. Although some recent studies (Schwaiger et al., 2022) have shown that low use of traditional media does not necessarily go hand in hand with news avoidance or that journalistic news is no longer considered relevant, the present study has argued that the definition of news becomes highly unstable among teenage media users, with the distinction between pop and politics generally disintegrating.

The recent dislocation of news journalism in digital culture also raises the question of the class and the cultural stratification of the teenage notion of news and their media and news practices. It further raises the question of the wider social and political consequences of the status of online platforms as a central place of sociability and, consequently, for the political subjectification of this generation in the context of consumerist discourse and its politics. Do a general eventfulness and specific regime of visibility, characteristic of social media, have socially stratified consequences for the teenage concept of news-ness and for their media practices? Or does it give rise to the dissolution of cultural capital? Our findings support the insight that we are not just witnessing radical changes in the structures of repertoires, but perhaps even more radical changes related to the perception of the news as well. Consequently, the results of our study have important implications also for the question of political participation, as the studies have shown a clear connection between news repertoires and political participation (Geers & Vliegthart, 2021).

In the context of our study, we argue that the competences of teenagers to differentiate between pop news and the news that can be considered socially significant, represent one of the major aspects of the cultural and class differentiation among teenagers. Therefore, such findings also bring some practical implications, especially in relation to the educational practices and the perceived importance of digital competences for the youth. The findings that online platforms do not introduce new regimes of social boundaries but enhance the existing distinctions in cultural practices should be considered also in educational policies, especially on the level of the

curriculum for digital media education. Here the significance of certain forms of cultural capital that mark recent social boundaries and digital divides within the generation should be acknowledged.

7. Conclusion

Couldry and van Dijck (2015, p. 3) noted that the business model of platforms takes advantage of the large number of online interactions that represent social life today and, through the measurement of each activity, harnesses this life to produce economic value so that the naturalised production of personal data in daily interactions. This role of platforms is not the result of technological capabilities per se but rather the joint action of technological capabilities and their commodification in the form of social platforms, i.e., the economic, social, and political use of technological capabilities. One of the by-products of social platforms that radically reorganise everyday interaction is the construction of a “myth of us all” (Couldry, 2015). This legitimises the ideology of platforms, which are offered as a natural space of sociality where we meet. Platforms took over this role from traditional media with the help of new rituals of use that actualised the supposed natural location of media in the cultural centre of society through a centralised system of cultural production. If our sociality is increasingly intertwined with the logic of social media, then the examination of the imminent temporalities of the platforms contributes to the understanding of our very conditions of existence nowadays (Lupinacci, 2022, p. 17).

This study was not without its limitations, however. First, the group interviews were conducted online because of the restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Second, because of the methodological design of our study and the size of the sample, the results cannot be generalised to young people in general. Nevertheless, Edgerly et al. (2018) have contended that basic orientations toward the news are fixed relatively early in one’s life, which raises the importance of studying these processes among children and teens, and Swart (2021) highlighted the need for understanding the algorithmic curation in the news selection processes of young people. The present study argued that not only additional empirical examinations and methodological innovations are needed, but also a theoretical reconceptualization of the main approaches.

In this respect, the study demonstrated that the notions of liveness and algorithmic visibility play an important role in the news repertoires of adolescents and should inform future studies that aim to tackle these questions further. As van Es (2017, p. 160) emphasised, analysing a constellation of liveness helps to raise important questions and insights into how and at what cost people engage with others and media institutions. More importantly, deconstructing liveness can enable a rich consideration of how symbolic forms are produced and distributed, disclosing which values are bestowed

upon specific forms of social interaction and production (van Es, 2017, p. 160). On the other hand, it also allows us to evaluate how this change is connected with the “habitus of the new” and with the class connection related to the changed rules of habitus (Papacharissi & Easton, 2013, p. 20).

Such shifts inevitably lead to further challenges that transcend the media studies research. Generational and educational studies are facing serious changes in perspective, as the complex boundaries between institutional domains have collapsed not only because of the new rules of digital platforms but also as a result of the social closure during the epidemic crisis. What is generally needed in youth or generational studies is therefore not just a revival of the “radical contextualisation” that made its wave in media studies already in the late 1980s, but a more thorough understanding of the social and cultural layers that connect (and also disconnect) the already eroded context of everyday life. This collapse of the contexts of school, home, work, and leisure influenced recent generations, and the question that remains is what social, political, and cultural implications this erosion will have in the near future.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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