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Following the news: Patterns of online and offline news consumption

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Chapter 3

Investigating people's news diets:

How online users use offline news

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Introduction

For more than ten years, a lively debate has addressed the question to what extent online news media supplement or substitute offline media (De Waal & Schoenbach, 2010; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Gaskins & Jerit, 2012; Lin, Salwen, Garisson, & Driscoll, 2005). One of the drivers of that debate was the fear that offline news outlets might disappear because of online outlets. This should have serious consequences for the functioning of democracy, because traditional media with their professional gatekeepers were praised for providing everyone with a very similar overview of public affairs (Prior, 2007; Sunstein, 2001, 2007; Tewksbury, 2005), common current-affairs knowledge shared by all citizens (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002; Prior, 2005; Schoenbach, De Waal, & Lauf, 2005; Tewksbury, 2003; Tewksbury & Althaus, 2000;). This common core of knowledge is considered a major prerequisite for public discourse in a democracy (e.g., ; Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002; Habermas, 1962). The Internet, instead, would encourage selectivity, allow people to focus on pet subjects only and ignore general-interest news.

The fear that using online media influences offline media use is rooted in a *medium-centric approach* (Lee and Leung, 2006; Nguyen and Western, 2006). Proponents of this approach often base their argumentation on the principle of relative constancy, assuming that the time spent on media use remains constant (McCombs, 1972), or on the theory of the niche (Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004). According to this theory, media with similar characteristics compete with each other. A *user-centric approach*, in contrast, argues based on users' needs and rather assumes a the-more-the-more effect with regard to the use of different media instead of a the-more-the-less effect (Lee & Leung, 2006).

Empirical evidence if online news consumption harms the use of offline media (e.g., Lin et al., 2005; Gaskins & Jerit, 2012) or if online media rather supplement offline media (e.g., Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Ahlers, 2006) is conflicting, though. At least, total substitution does not seem to take place: Most people who use online news still use at least some offline news as well (PEW Inter-

net & American Life Project, 2010b; Stempel & Hargrove, 2004). Only rarely, analyses have been more specific. Some of these studies suggest that online news use actually does not displace all offline outlets equally, but most of all newspapers (Lin et al., 2005). But even then, mainly poorly educated (Gaskins & Jerit, 2012) and young people (De Waal & Schoenbach, 2010) seem to read printed papers less in favor of online news. However, very few studies have moved beyond analyzing exposure to different media types and instead looked at outlets more specifically. Little is known about how people combine different media outlets exactly and thus our understanding of the complex patterns of news exposure in today's high-choice media environment remains limited. Therefore, this study analyses news exposure on the outlet level and examines which function they are used for, respectively.

To achieve this aim, the study is based on a large-scale survey in the Netherlands. The Netherlands are compared to other countries characterized by a high overall news usage (Tenscher, 2008). Compared to the size of the country, people have the choice between a rather high number of different newspapers, magazines, teletext, news and current affairs broadcasts on both public service and commercial television, and news sites (Bakker & Scholten, 2011). This provides citizens with a large variety of outlets that they can combine in various ways to compose their personal news diets.

How people combine news media

According to the medium-centric approach, especially media with similar characteristics and content are not used by the same people: As some media are better suitable to fulfill a certain need than others, the better ones will ultimately displace those who perform worse (a recent overview provide, e.g., Westlund & Färdigh, 2011). Following this logic, news consumers displace newspapers by online media if they think it is an important criterion for news to be as up-to-date as possible. Therefore, the theory of the niche argues, all media have to find their own niches to avoid displacement effects (e.g., Dimmick et al., 2011). User-centric approaches, in contrast, object that people can have very different motivations to use specific media and therefore might chose to use more than one medium that at first sight offers similar gratifications. For example, although a given newspaper and its website both offer very similar news content, people may still use both together because of very personal reasons that differ per person.

To substantiate these perspectives, studies have been conducted that relate the use of different media types to each other or investigate the number of news sources people use. But only few studies actually have addressed the relationship between online and offline media use by investigating how people combine specific news media outlets exactly. While one study tried to identify patterns of news exposure using title level measures at least for offline media (Van Rees & Van Eijck, 2003), most attempts to establish a news user typology (e.g., Hasebrink & Popp, 2006; Meyen, 2007; Van Cauwenberge, d'Haenens, & Beentjes, 2010) measure exposure to types of channels (e.g., TV vs. newspapers vs. 'the' Internet) instead of fine-grained measures on the genre or even title level.

However, measuring on such a specific level is more than necessary: Measuring the use of 'the Internet' makes it impossible to distinguish between outlets as different as partisan weblogs, newspaper websites, and automated content aggregators. And measuring "TV news exposure" lumps hard and soft news together, which are used by different types of people (Baum, 2002). Assuming that news exposure is crucial for public discourse in a democracy, we need a thorough understanding of how people use the news. So, as typologies based on more fine-grained exposure measures on title level have not been constructed yet, we investigate:

RQ1: How do media users combine different outlets?

Functions of news outlets

When people combine different news outlets, the question arises why they do so. Which gratifications does each news outlet provide them with? A medium-centric approach based on the theory of the niche would argue that some media are more suitable to offer specific gratifications (Dimmick et al., 2004). Therefore, if a new media outlet enters the scene, it competes with the older media on the so-called gratification-opportunities dimension. People will use the outlet that offers the best opportunities to fulfill the gratifications they seek. So, the audience might reduce its use of older media for those purposes the newer media can fulfill better (for a recent study following this approach, see Ha & Fang, 2012). This would mean that people are rather unlikely to use *both* online and offline media for the same purpose.

Three of these purposes will be analysed in this study, all of them related to information, as using media for entertaining or socializing purposes goes beyond the scope of this paper. We look at how people are coping with the

abundance of outlets they can use to keep up with the news, and are less interested in other functions media obviously can serve as well. A frequently voiced idea is, for example, that online media – due to their real-time character – are very suitable for regular news updates during the day, while background information might still be sought in the slower offline media, both because of their reputation as reliable interpreters and the specific format that makes it possible to read a newspaper in many different settings. So, online media might take over the function of *getting updates* of breaking news and important events (Brandtweiner, Donat, & Kerschbaum, 2010), serving as an “alarm medium” (De Waal, Schoenbach, & Lauf, 2005). Indeed, readers of *both* newspapers and their websites in Germany seem to use the print edition for background information and the website for updates (Mögerle, 2009). However, one might also think of other media that are very suitable for their frequent updates like radio news or teletext.

We do not know, however, how online and offline media outlets are used when the so-called “surveillance” function is sought after (Lasswell, 1948; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948; Rosengren & Windahl, 1972), i.e., an overview of current affairs and events in one’s society and the world. In our analysis, we will refer to this function as *getting a news overview*.

A third function of media information is background, context, and in-depth information on current issues (Schröder & Steeg Larsen, 2010). Again, not only offline media can be used to acquire this. The Internet is an outstanding “research medium,” too (Schoenbach, 2007). It allows people to access a huge amount of *background information* on almost any topic they are interested in. Maybe also weekly magazines are increasingly used for this function.

But to which extent is using online media for a specific function really related to not using offline media for the same functions, as a medium-centric perspective would assume? As we have seen, evidence on the outlet level hardly exists. We therefore examine:

RQ2a: What are the combinations of news outlets to get a broad overview of the news?

RQ2b: What are the combinations of news outlets to get fast news updates?

RQ2c: What are the combinations of news outlets to get background information?

After identifying possible patterns of media use, we will briefly characterize typical users in terms of sociodemographics. By doing so, we want to pro-

vide a first insight into who uses which combinations of information outlets. Two audience characteristics seem to be particularly important in our context: Young people who have grown up with online offers and are used to them extensively should abandon traditional patterns of media consumption more than anybody else (e.g., De Waal & Schoenbach, 2010). The same might apply to the poorly educated for whom the Internet could provide easier ways of finding and processing information than offline media (e.g., Gaskins & Jerit, 2012). We therefore investigate:

RQ3: How do the users of different news media combinations differ in terms of sociodemographics?

Method

Sample

Our web-based survey draws on a large sample of the Dutch population, conducted in December 2009. As the Netherlands have an Internet penetration of 90 percent (Lööf & Seybert, 2009), an Internet survey reaches virtually a representative sample of the population. From a panel with 233,467 members in total, a sample of 2,900 participants was drawn. For recruitment, research bureau TNS Nipo approached possible participants offline, too. Since a response rate (AAPOR-RR1) of 73 per cent was achieved, the final sample size was 2,130. Because of invalid answers, 49 cases were removed from the sample, as were 127 respondents aged younger than the legal voting age of 18 years. Thus, 1954 cases were included in the analysis. Completion of the questionnaire took 20 minutes on average. Prior to the fieldwork, we conducted a pretest with 74 participants filling in an earlier version of the questionnaire. Based on an analysis of these responses and extensive feedback by the participants, we further improved the questionnaire.

Measurement

News exposure. Our questionnaire gauged news use separately for 53 possible outlets, where 'outlet' refers to a *specific* newspaper, website, or television show. We included all newspapers in the Netherlands, all news and current-affairs programs on Dutch television channels, and the websites of all of these offline outlets. In addition, we compiled an extensive list of websites that are not linked to any offline outlet, but offer at least some general-interest news. Based on traffic statistics provided by the web tracking company Alexa, we

subsequently excluded those outlets that we are used by less than 0.5 percent of the population. Furthermore, we included radio news, news on teletext and the four Dutch weeklies dealing with news and current-affairs. For each outlet, we measured exposure by the number of days it is used in a regular week.

Functions of use. For each outlet that a respondent claimed to use at least once a week, he or she was asked to indicate the functions the outlet serves. The following five alternatives could be marked: "because it gives an overview of what is going on in the world," "because it gives background information or opinions," "because it is fast and up to date," "because it is pleasant to use" or for "other [unspecified] functions." Multiple responses were possible. In this paper, only the first three functions will be analyzed – which are the ones concerning *information*. To limit the length of the questionnaire and to avoid drop-out, functions of use were asked for up to 15 randomly selected outlets. Missing values were substituted by the mean.

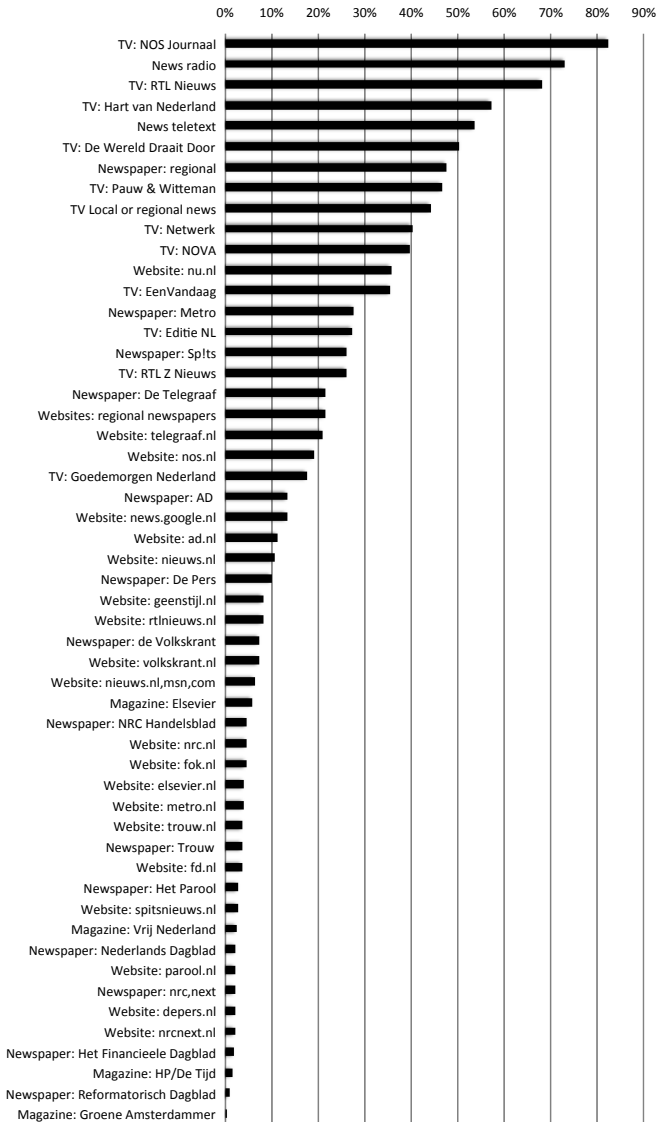
Sociodemographics. To give a first characterization of those who use specific news diets, we measured gender, age (on a continuous scale), and formal education (on a seven point scale).

Analysis

After examining frequencies and distribution of the data, we analysed our data using a set of Ward's linkage cluster analyses to identify patterns how news outlets are combined. In contrast to a factor analysis, which aims at finding *variables* that measure the same concept, a cluster analysis identifies groups of *cases* (the media users in our study) based on their similarity. First, we investigated general patterns; in a second step, we clustered the outlets separately that are used for a specific function. The best-fitting number of clusters was determined using the Duda-Hart $Je(2)/Je(1)$ -criterion. When in doubt, the solution that could be interpreted most consistently was chosen.

Our approach to include as many news outlets on the outlet level as possible bears the problem that we have to deal with a number of variables that are used by very small parts of the sample only and therefore cannot be entered into cluster analyses separately (Figure 3-1).

Figure 3-1
Most widely used news outlets



Note. Percentage of the population using specific news outlets at least once a week (for magazines: once a month).

Instead of excluding these outlets, we pooled the outlets that were used by less than 10% of the sample and classified them in four straightforward categories: newspapers, weekly magazines, websites of offline outlets, and online-only outlets. If we had excluded these outlets completely, for example, all of the national quality newspapers would have been excluded. These papers, together with a few smaller papers, however, reach a significant part of the population and therefore should be included in the analysis.

Results

Combining news outlets

As a first step to analyze how online and offline news outlets are combined, we examine the overlap between the users of different online outlets and the most popular news outlets in general. We start with which media are used at all, before we turn to a more elaborated analysis that includes the frequency of exposure as well.

The users of online news media seem to use the same variety of offline media as the rest of the population (Table 3-1). Strikingly, if we take the users of any website, we find that they use roughly the same other widely used news outlets as the average citizen. People who use online news media thus rather seem to combine different types of outlets than to use some of them exclusively.

As examples, we will examine how the users of three typical sorts of outlets deal with offline outlets. These outlets most different from each other: websites of an offline medium, online-only news sites, and non-journalistic current-affairs sites like blogs.

Table 3-1

Overlap of users of online outlets and the most widely used news outlets in general
(continued on next page)

	n=	NOS Journaal	Radio news	RTL Nieuws	Hart van Nederland	Teletext	De Wereld Draait Door	Regional paper	Pauw & Witteman	Regional TV news	Netwerk
<i>Outlets of offline media</i>											
ad.nl	219	85	79	80	63	71	60	42	55	54	44
depers.nl	42	88	79	79	62	69	71	48	71	55	64
elsevier.nl	81	89	75	80	56	68	67	49	62	59	59
fd.nl	73	93	85	74	44	77	70	47	77	53	63
metro.nl	79	80	77	87	76	67	61	48	58	63	49
nos.nl	374	91	78	70	51	78	65	49	62	50	56
nrc.nl	59	92	79	69	37	71	67	52	78	49	65
nrcnext.nl	42	83	76	71	40	69	81	48	81	52	71
parool.nl	43	86	86	63	44	77	67	37	70	70	70
spitnieuws.nl	52	83	73	81	69	81	69	52	58	65	54
telegraaf.nl	407	85	80	77	65	70	59	48	52	51	43
trouw.nl	74	92	76	64	46	74	68	45	73	62	66
volkskrant.nl	142	91	83	66	36	67	77	45	73	46	65
Website	417	86	81	74	66	71	49	64	54	63	49
regional paper											
rtlnieuws.nl	158	85	78	95	75	80	65	54	58	61	52
<i>Online-only outlets</i>											
GoogleNews	259	83	80	73	64	70	61	58	58	57	52
nieuws.nl	205	88	77	80	65	73	60	56	57	59	55
MSN News	126	84	78	77	72	67	59	56	51	55	50
NU.nl	698	85	76	73	51	62	58	44	44	38	38
fok.nl	88	76	68	74	47	70	53	47	39	49	31
geenstijl.nl	161	89	73	78	53	66	66	48	55	52	47
Population	1954	82	73	68	57	54	50	48	47	44	40

Table 3-1 (continued)

	NOVA	NU.nl	Eén Vandaag	Metro	EditieNL	Spits	RTL Z Nieuws	De Telegraaf	Regional paper site	telegraaf.nl
<i>Outlets of offline media</i>										
ad.nl	49	58	46	38	37	37	37	26	35	58
depers.nl	67	55	64	52	48	45	45	31	48	60
elsevier.nl	63	53	60	36	35	35	51	28	46	51
fd.nl	75	55	63	32	32	32	62	40	40	66
metro.nl	52	59	52	70	49	58	39	33	44	52
nos.nl	57	58	54	34	30	31	34	24	39	35
nrc.nl	67	58	56	36	22	29	39	24	39	52
nrcnext.nl	81	76	60	43	29	36	36	26	62	67
parool.nl	67	67	60	49	35	49	44	23	42	67
spitsnieuws	58	71	54	44	46	48	44	40	58	69
telegraaf.nl	45	57	41	31	37	32	37	45	41	100
trouw.nl	73	59	64	36	26	32	34	19	46	58
volkskrant.nl	65	56	59	35	23	34	37	20	44	49
<i>Website</i>										
regional										
paper	48	47	47	28	34	31	33	26	100	40
rtlnieuws.nl	49	56	48	39	56	39	52	35	58	54
<i>Online-only outlets</i>										
<i>Google</i>										
News	54	48	51	43	32	39	34	28	38	34
nieuws.nl	55	56	47	45	37	41	33	29	40	38
MSN News	48	43	44	44	44	44	34	22	33	31
NU.nl	38	100	36	33	29	31	27	22	28	33
fok.nl	33	75	34	43	36	36	28	23	35	38
geenstijl.nl	52	67	42	40	37	40	37	33	42	48
<i>Population</i>	40	36	35	28	27	26	26	21	21	21

Note. Percentagewise overlap of audiences. Rows contain all online outlets in the dataset, columns the most widely used outlets (>20). Reading example: Out of the 219 users of ad.nl, 85% also watch the NOS Journaal at least once per week.

Looking at the websites of offline outlets, we see a considerable overlap between online and offline outlets of exactly the same medium: For example, 44% of the readers of *telegraaf.nl* read the print edition of the popular daily *De Telegraaf* as well. This is even more pronounced among the users of the websites of TV news programs: Virtually all users of the *nos.nl* and *rtnnieuws.nl* also watch the corresponding program on television.

Interestingly, also the users of online-only news sites do not seem to differ much from average news users. The site *NU.nl*, although employing some editorial staff, mainly publishes copy from press agencies and does not have an offline equivalent. Given the high popularity of *NU.nl*, it is interesting to note that its users do not show deviant patterns of offline media use. Instead, users of *NU.nl* mostly use the same media as the population as a whole. Although two-sided t-tests show that they use radio news, RTL news, teletext, and *EditieNL*, regional newspaper websites, and *telegraaf.nl* significantly more often and regional TV news less often than non-users (all p 's < .05), Table 3-1 clearly indicates that the size of these differences is limited. Also users of the similar, but less popular site *nieuws.nl* seem to use a slightly above-average number of conventional outlets. The same is true for the users of the community site *fok.nl* and the blog *geenstijl.nl* – the latter claims to not follow journalistic principles and advertises itself as “biased, unfounded, and unnecessarily offensive”: The readers of both sites use more or less the same offline media as others do, but slightly more of them. This is also what users of automatic news aggregators do that do not employ any journalistic staff, like *nieuws.nl.msn.com* and Google News.

So far, the evidence on the aggregate level clearly suggests that the most common way of using online outlets is combining them with – actually often very similar – offline outlets. But we may overlook patterns underneath this general impression: While some of the users of specific online outlets might combine different outlets extensively, others might not do so. These differences could cancel each other out and then could not be detected on the aggregate level, the so-called ecological fallacy. Maybe even more important, our analysis thus far only looked at whether people used specific outlets at all and neglected the frequency of exposure. Therefore, a cluster analysis of the frequency of exposure to specific news outlets (Table 3-2) was conducted both account for individual behaviours and for more information on how frequently specific outlets are used.

We identified five typical news diets. About a quarter of the population ($n=510$) can be described as *occasional users* with a rather low frequency of exposure to different outlets, mostly on television. Newspapers and online outlets are not a part of this news diet. The cluster of the *regionally orientated* ($n=571$) watch a quite a lot of different programs on television but are distinguished from the other groups by their use of regional newspapers and regional television news. Regional newspapers' websites, however, do not belong to their repertoire. *Moderate moderns* ($n=582$) do watch television news broadcasts well, but combine them with news on teletext and some online outlets, especially the online-only website NU.nl. A considerably smaller group is characterized by their clear preference for national newspapers and public-service television (*traditionalists*, $n=199$). Sometimes, however, they also use the corresponding websites of these media. Finally, $n=88$ people can be described as *heavy users* who basically use a wide range of different media very frequently, of which a lot are online outlets and especially websites of offline media.

Table 3-2
Cluster analysis of all news outlets

Title (Type)	Occ- asional users	Region- ally oriented users	Moderate moderns	Tra- ditiona- lists	Heavy users
NOS Journaal (TV: public service news)	2.4*	5.5*	3.6*	5.4*	5.3*
Radio news	2.8*	4.0*	3.3*	4.1*	3.3*
RTL Nieuws (TV: commercial news)	2.8*	3.2*	2.9*	1.5	4.3*
Hart van Nederland (TV: commercial news)	2.2*	2.7*	1.8	0.6	2.1*
News on Teletext	0.8	2.4*	3.5*	2.5*	3.2*
De Wereld Draait Door (TV: public service CA)	0.9	2.2*	1.3	1.9	2.6*
Regional newspapers (Paid newspaper)	0.6	3.6*	1.4	1.5	2.0*
Pauw & Witteman (TV: public service CA)	0.5	2.5*	0.9	2.4*	2.3*
Local or regional TV news	0.7	2.8*	1.1	1.1	2.3*

Netwerk (TV: public service CA)	0.4	1.6	0.6	1.7	1.4
NOVA (TV: public service CA)	0.2	1.9	0.6	2.2*	1.7
NU.nl (Website, online-only)	0.6	0.5	3.5*	1.2	3.2*
EénVandaag (TV: public service CA)	0.2	1.8	0.6	1.4	1.6
Metro (Free newspaper)	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.5	1.5
Editie NL (TV: commercial CA)	0.9	1.1	0.7	0.3	1.5
Sp!ts (Free newspaper)	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.4	1.4
RTL Z Nieuws (TV: commercial news)	0.4	1.3	0.7	0.7	1.8
De Telegraaf (Paid newspaper)	0.2	1.4	0.8	0.4	1.7
Regional newspaper website (Website, newspaper)	0.3	0.8	1.1	0.3	2.8*
telegraaf.nl (Website, newspaper)	0.2	0.6	1.6	0.6	3.2*
nos.nl (Website, public broad- caster)	0.1	0.3	0.8	0.8	2.1*
Goedemorgen Neder- land (TV: public service CA)	0.3	0.9	0.4	0.5	1.0
AD (Paid newspaper)	0.8	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.6
Google News (News search engine)	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.4	1.0
ad.nl (Website, newspaper)	0.3	0.2	0.7	0.1	1.3
nieuws.nl (Website, online-only)	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.2	1.2
De Pers (Free newspaper)	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.9
Other paper	0.1	0.4	0.4	6.4*	1.4
Other weekly	0	0	0	0.2	0.2
Other website of offline outlet	0.3	0.5	0.8	2.2*	12.7*

Other online-only outlet	0.3	0.3	1.2	0.3	1.9
Total exposure online	2.4	4.2	10.7	6.2	29.4
Total exposure offline	19.1	41.4	26.7	36.6	44.4
Age	40.4	57.5	42.1	57.0	52.1
Education	4.2	3.9	4.6	5.5	4.6
Percent males	40.6	47.8	50.3	55.8	58.0
N =	510	571	582	199	88

Note. A tiny sixth cluster, consisting of $n=3$ outliers, is not listed for reasons of clarity. Numbers indicate the average number of days per week the outlet is used. "Other"-categories can have values >7 because several outlets are combined. Outlets used on at least 2 days per week are marked with an asterisk. CA=Current affairs.

Thus, summing up the evidence, RQ1 can be answered: Using online news media generally seems to be combined with using offline media as well. This is especially true for television, but some groups also combine their online exposure with newspaper reading as well. No distinct group could be identified that uses an online-only news diet.

Functions of news outlets

People seem to use different news outlets for the three functions we examined (Table 3-3). The main outlets for *news overviews* still are the television news broadcasts NOS Journaal, followed by radio, the commercial news broadcast RTL Nieuws, and teletext. Smaller parts of the population rely on newspapers or the online-only website NU.nl. Interestingly, the same outlets are also used to get *fast updates*, although in a slightly different order: Radio and teletext have the widest reach for this function. NU.nl is used by only slightly fewer people than the classic television broadcasts because of its fast updates. In contrast, *background information* seems to be the domain of current-affairs shows on television: Pauw en Witteman, NOVA, Netwerk, and EénVandaag – all of which are aired on an (almost) daily basis on the public-service channels – are the most popular for this purpose. In general, people use on average 3.8 ($SD = 3.0$) different outlets for overviews, 3.8 ($SD = 2.9$) different outlets for updates, and 3.1 ($SD = 2.8$) different outlets for background information.

To find out how these outlets are combined for each function, we again conducted cluster analyses, now separately for the frequency of exposure to those outlets which serve that function for each participant. We again identified five different types of *overview users*, which differ considerably in size (Table 3-4).

Table 3-3

Main outlets used for broad overviews, fast updates, and background information

Overview	%	Update	%	Background	%
NOS Journaal	59	Radio	49	Pauw en Witteman	29
Radio	43	Teletext	39	NOVA	28
RTL Nieuws	41	NOS Journaal	34	Netwerk	25
Teletext	31	RTL Nieuws	33	Radio	23
Regional papers	19	NU.nl	26	Regional papers	22
NU.nl	19	Hart van Nederland	21	EénVandaag	22
De Telegraaf	12	Regional TV news	17	NOS Journaal	21
NOVA	12	DWDD	14	Regional TV news	18
Metro	11	Regional papers	13	RTL Nieuws	16
Netwerk	11	Pauw en Witteman	13	Hart van Nederland	12
EénVandaag	11	Metro	12	DWDD	12
Hart van Nederland	11	Spits	12	Teletext	11
Spits	10	RTL Z Nieuws	12	RTL Z Nieuws	10
RTL Z Nieuws	10	rtlnieuws.nl	11		
Regional TV news	10	EénVandaag	10		
nos.nl	10	telegraaf.nl	10		
telegraaf.nl	10				

Note. N=1,954. Percentages indicate the share of the population using the outlet for the given purpose. Only outlets >10% are listed. DWDD=De Wereld Draait Door.

A large group ($n=670$) can be considered as *occasional overview users* who seem to use no outlet on a regular basis to get a broad news overview. The second-largest group, the *minimalist overview users* ($n=555$), limit themselves to watching the public-service news broadcasts (which, admittedly, they do on an almost-daily basis) and radio news to get a news overview. *Moderate modern overview users* ($n=313$) watch these news broadcasts as well (although less frequently), but combine them with teletext and the online-only newssite NU.nl. *Traditionalists* ($n=187$), again, deem national newspapers the most suitable for this purpose, while *heavy overview users* ($n=229$) combine a wide range of different outlets, mainly broadcast and online media.

Table 3-4

Cluster analysis of outlets used to get a broad overview of the news

Outlets	Occ- asional overview users	Mini- malist overview users	Mode- rate modern overview users	Tradi- tionalist overview users	Heavy overview users
NOS Journaal	0.6	4.9*	2.7*	4.5*	3.4*
News on the radio	1.3	2.5*	1.6	2.4*	2.3*
RTL Nieuws	1.4	1.9	1.7	1.4	2.9*
News on Teletext	0.3	1.0	3.5*	1.2	2.6*
Regional newspapers	0.1	1.9	0.3	0.1	0.9
NU.nl	0.3	0.3	2.9*	0.2	1.2
De Telegraaf	0.2	1.1	0.1	0.1	0.8
NOVA	0.1	0.5	0.2	0.4	0.7
Metro	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.5
Netwerk	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.5
EénVandaag	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.3	0.8
Hart van Nederland	0.4	0.5	0.1	0.2	1.0
Spits	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.5
RTL Z Nieuws	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.5
Regional TV news	0.1	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.9
nos.nl	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.9
telegraaf.nl	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.1	1.3
Other paper	0.2	0.3	0.4	5.9*	1.6
Other TV	0.2	0.5	0.5	0.4	3.6*
Other weekly	0	0.1	0	0.1	0.2
Other website of offline outlet	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.7	5.5*
Other online-only outlet	0.3	0.1	0.3	0	1.7
Age	42.6	55.0	40.9	56.4	50.7
Education [scale 1–7]	4.1	4.2	4.8	5.0	4.3
Percent males	44.9	47.9	51.8	50.8	49.3
N=	670	555	313	187	229

Note. Numbers indicate the average number of days per week the outlet is used. "Other"-categories can have values >7 because several outlets are combined. Outlets used on at least 2 days per week are marked with an asterisk. CA = current affairs.

Table 3-5

Cluster analysis of outlets used to get fast news updates

Outlet	Occ- asional update users	Tradi- tional up- daters	Web-sites of offline media updaters	Tele-text up- daters	NU.nl up- daters
Radio news	2.0*	2.6*	2.8*	1.8	3.1*
News on Teletext	0.5	1.5	3.1*	4.9*	0.8
NOS Journaal	0.4	4.4*	2.8*	1.4	1.4
RTL Nieuws	0.9	1.8	2.2*	1.1	1.7
NU.nl	0.4	0.4	1.6	1.5	6.0*
Hart van Nederland	0.9	1.0	0.6	0.3	0.5
Regional TV News	0.4	1.2	1.2	0.4	0.1
De Wereld Draait Door	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.2	0.4
Regional newspaper	0.2	1.6	0.6	0.1	0.3
Pauw en Witteman	0.3	0.9	0.6	0.2	0.3
Metro	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.1
Spits	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.1
RTL Z Nieuws	0.2	0.6	0.6	0.3	0.2
rtlnieuws.nl	0	0.1	0.9	0.1	0.1
EénVandaag	0.1	0.7	0.5	0.2	0.1
telegraaf.nl	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.5	0.2
Other paper	0.2	2.1*	1.4	0.2	0.4
Other TV	0.5	2.0*	1.2	0.4	0.7
Other weekly	0	0	0	0	0
Other website of offline outlet	0.4	0.8	8.3*	0.9	1.3
Other online-only outlet	0.1	0.4	1.6	1.6	0.3
Age	47.4	55.8	50.1	46.3	37.6
Education [scale 1–7]	4.1	4.3	4.8	4.5	5.3
Percent males	43.4	49.0	61.1	51.9	53.6
N=	959	345	131	366	153

Note. Numbers indicate the average number of days per week the outlet is used. “Other”-categories can have values >7 because several outlets are combined. Outlets used on at least 2 days per week are marked with an asterisk.

We also identified five patterns for obtaining *fast updates* (Table 3-5). A large part of the population is only little in need for updates, uses no outlets on a regular basis for this purpose except radio news ($n=959$). The other groups combine offline media ($n=345$), prefer websites of offline outlets ($n=131$), teletext ($n=366$), or the online-only news site NU.nl ($n=153$).

Similarly, we find six patterns of background-information consumption (Table 6), with a large group of *occasional background users*, which basically abstain from consuming this type of information ($n=1,089$) and five smaller groups, all of which have a clear main outlet for background information: TV news broadcasts ($n=226$), radio news ($n=222$), national quality newspapers – of which the “other newspapers”-category mainly consists – ($n=154$), regional newspapers ($n=125$), and websites of offline outlets ($n=138$). In contrast to patterns for overviews and fast updates, there does not seem to be a pattern that is characterized by the use of online-only outlets.

We can conclude that large parts of the population still mainly use offline media for broad overviews, fast updates, and background information. While one group is using news overviews only very infrequently, most people combine a wide range of different outlets to get an *overview* (RQ2a). Still, an important role in all of these groups is played by television news. Especially online outlets are actually never used exclusively. For fast updates, people either combine different television and newspapers outlets, or they largely rely on either teletext, NU.nl, or the websites of offline outlets (RQ2b). Here, combining many different outlets is much less typical than in the case of overviews. Similar to the patterns we find for retrieving fast updates, we can group those who want background information according to their preference for television news, national quality newspapers, regional newspapers, radio news or online outlets – while a large part of the population is not particularly interested in background information (RQ2c). Also here, combining is less prominent.

Table 3-6

Cluster analysis of outlets used for background information

Outlet	Occ- asional back- ground users	TV news back- ground users	Radio back- ground users	Nat- ional news- paper back- ground users	Reg- ional news- paper back- ground users	Web- sites of offline media back- ground users
Pauw en Witteman	0.5	1.6	1.2	0.9	1.1	1.5
NOVA	0.3	1.7	1.2	0.9	0.9	1.3
Netwerk	0.3	1.4	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.9
Radio news	0.2	0.8	4.7*	0.4	0.2	1.1
Regional papers	0.2	1.2	1.1	0.3	5.9*	1.0
EénVandaag	0.2	2.1*	0.6	0.4	0.6	1.0
NOS Journaal	0.2	4.6*	0.9	0.5	0.2	1.0
Regional TV news	0.4	0.9	0.5	0.9	1.1	0.8
RTL Nieuws	0.3	1.9	0.6	0.2	0.2	1.1
Hart van Nederland	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.4
De Wereld Draait Door	0.2	1.0	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.6
Teletext	0.1	0.2	1.8	0.4	0.2	0.6
RTL Z Nieuws	0.2	0.7	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.6
Other paper	0.3	1.7	1.3	7.3*	0.6	1.9
Other TV	0.4	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.2	0.7
Other weekly	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.3
Other website of offline outlet	0.2	0.8	0.5	1.0	0.4	9.5*
Other online-only outlet	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.1	1.9
Age	43.8	53.2	53.2	52.4	55.7	53.9
Education [scale 1–7]	4.2	4.6	4.3	4.9	4.1	4.7
Percent males	44.4	54.0	44.6	52.6	50.4	64.5
N=	1089	226	222	154	125	138

Note. Numbers indicate the average number of days per week the outlet is used. “Other”-categories can have values >7 because several outlets are combined. Outlets used on at least 2 days per week are marked with an asterisk. CA = current affairs

Typical users of news diets

To answer RQ3, we compare the sociodemographics displayed in Tables 2, 4, 5, and 6. One-way ANOVAs with post hoc Bonferroni tests reveal differences regarding age ($F(5, 1947) = 104.88, p < .001$) and education ($F(5, 1933) = 36.49, p < .001$) between typical users of the overall diets (Table 2). *Occasional users* are significantly younger than all groups ($p < .001$) except the *moderate moderns*. *Heavy users*, who use much more online outlets, are considerably older than occasional users and *moderate moderns* ($p < .001$), but younger than regionally oriented users ($p < .001$). *Traditionalists* are higher educated than any other group ($p < .001$), while regionally oriented users are lower educated than all others ($p < .001$).

Similar observations can be made with regard to the specific diets (Tables 3-4, 3-5, 3-6). First, diets that feature low or moderate exposure to whatever media outlets are usually preferred by younger people. However, it would be too simple to say that the young generally show less exposure: For example, there is a – very young – group of people that use the news site NU.nl even on a daily basis to get fast updates ($F(4, 1949) = 36.63, p < .001$; post-hoc p 's $< .001$ between NU.nl-cluster and each other cluster). Also other diets that involve for example teletext for several purposes and are characterized by medium levels of exposure are used by rather young people.

A fairly clear relationship between formal education and a media diet with more online media can be stated: In general as well as for broad overviews ($F(4, 1953) = 17.17, p < .001$), fast updates ($F(4, 1953) = 22.97, p < .001$), and background information ($F(5, 1953) = 8.73, p < .001$), those with a very high education chose a media combination that relies for a considerable part on online media. Older people with a high education, however, tend to use diets involving national newspapers instead. Regarding gender, we see a tendency that low exposure diets are more frequently chosen by women, which are consistently overrepresented among, for example, *occasional users* ($z = 3.87, p < .001$, two-tailed).

Conclusions and discussion

Our analysis showed that most people combine a wide range of news outlets rather than concentrating on a single type only. Even heavy users of online media still use offline outlets to the same extent as others. It became clear that patterns of news exposure are more complex than the dichotomy suggested by the often asked question whether online media replace offline news media.

Surprisingly, *all* three functions – getting a broad news overview, fast news updates, and background information – are fulfilled by very different types of media outlets, again both online and offline. Still, there are some media that are regarded as particularly suitable for a specific function: For example, recipients seem to agree that TV news is very suitable for a broad overview of current affairs, which still seems to be *the* outlet for news overviews in the Netherlands (see also Wonneberger, 2011). To a lesser extent, people think that newspapers and current-affairs programs on public-service TV are good in providing background information, and that both different forms of broadcast media and online news are good for getting fast updates.

Especially people who use online outlets for news overviews use also a lot of offline outlets to get an overview. This is also true, although to a lesser extent, for updates, and background information. For the last two purposes, less people combine a diverse range of outlets as we can identify distinct groups with a clear preference for one specific outlet that is mostly used for this function. Thus, while getting a broad news overview seems to be a matter of using a combination of different outlets, to get fast updates and background information, one favorite outlet seems to suffice for many people.

Using online media exclusively is not really common – not in general, and not even for specific information functions. Offline media still largely fulfill their role of providing the public with opportunities for getting an overview over the news, background information, and updates about news and current affairs. And for many people, the online outlets they use most often are websites of offline media anyway – which are often even combined with using their own offline counterpart. The fear that online news makes a common core of news disappear for most citizens therefore is not substantiated.

The study enhanced our understanding of how patterns of news exposure look like in a high-choice media environment. Although our cross-sectional data cannot tell us much about developments over time, it demonstrates that the wide availability of online news sources and their undeniable advantages for the reader, like their speed and the easy and cheap availability, have not lead to fundamental changes yet. Online media seem to enhance the media repertoire of citizens rather than to change it radically.

In sum, our results suggest that people might care less about the specific type of medium they use than media scholars, and especially those advocating a medium-centric approach to news exposure, are tempted to assume: News users basically see both offline and online outlets as suitable outlets for getting

a news overview, background information and fast updates. Which sources they combine exactly depends on users characteristics: Already basic socio-demographics like age, gender, and education can help explaining which media people are likely to use.

As a cause of this behaviour of combining online and offline outlets, routines might play a strong role: Once people decide to read a specific newspaper or to watch a certain television program, they profit from the functions these outlets serve and do not stop using them just because there now are some online offers serving similar functions. In that sense, people might not *optimize* their news exposure by scanning virtually all available offers and making up cost-benefit balances. The audience might rather strive to *satisfice* it (see March & Simon, as early as in 1958) – by efficiently sticking to a solution that seems both good and comfortable enough.

Blogs and non-journalistic outlets like automatically aggregated news sites are not used by many people for yet to keep up with the news. For those who use them, they are supplements to a wide range of other media. Public discourse in the Netherlands, thus, still is shaped to a large extent by the same players as in the last decades – and only complemented, but not substituted, by some new online competitors.