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Damian Trilling and Klaus Schoenbach

Investigating people's news diets: How online users use offline news

Abstract: The question how offline media use is related to online media use has been heavily debated in the last decades. If they are functionally equivalent, then advantages like low costs, rapid publication cycles, and easy access to online news could lead to them displacing offline news. Data from a large-scale survey with detailed questions about media use in the Netherlands show that, interestingly, the functions that online and offline media are used for are often the same: Those who use online media to gain a broad overview of the news, for fast updates, or for background information use offline media for the same purpose. There are some differences, though: For many citizens, the need of a broad overview of the news seems to be fulfilled by repertoires consisting of several outlets of different types, while they seem to have favorite specific outlets for news updates or background information, respectively. This suggests that outlets can especially focus on the latter two functions to distinguish themselves.

Keywords: news use, online news, complementarity, substitution, functions of news, news diets

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1 Introduction

For more than ten years, a lively debate has addressed the question as to what extent online news media supplement or substitute offline media (De Waal and Schoenbach, 2010; De Waal, Schoenbach, and Lauf, 2005; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Gaskins and Jerit, 2012; Gentzkow, 2007; Lin, Salwen, Garisson, and Driscoll, 2005). One of the drivers of that debate has been the fear that offline news outlets might disappear because of online outlets. This would have serious

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consequences for the functioning of democracy, because traditional media with their professional gatekeepers have been 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 and Dunwoody, 2002; Schoenbach, De Waal, and Lauf, 2005; Tewksbury, 2003; Tewksbury and Althaus, 2000). This common core of knowledge is considered a major prerequisite for public discourse in a democracy (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, and Rucht, 2002; Habermas, 1962). The internet, instead, would encourage selectivity, allow people to focus on pet subjects only and ignore the bulk of other news not tailored to their interest which they would encounter in a mainstream newspaper.

The fear that using online media influences offline media use is rooted in a *medium-centric approach* (Lee and Leung, 2008; Nguyen and Western, 2006). Proponents of this approach often base their reasoning on the idea of a fixed time budget for media use that has to be distributed among different media (Nie and Erbring, 2002). Others on the theory of the niche include Dimmick, Chen, and Li, 2004. According to these theories, media with similar characteristics compete with each other. A *user-centric approach*, in contrast, argues on the basis of users' needs and rather assumes a the-more-the-more effect (the more- is- more effect perhaps) (i.e., the audience cannot get enough: It adds new media offerings to its diet just because they fulfill the same expectations as the older ones) instead of a the-more-the-less effect (the-more-is-less effect) (i.e., new media offerings lead to less exposure to older ones – because the more media that are available, the smaller the share of the pie for each) (Lee and Leung, 2008).

Empirical evidence about whether online news consumption harms the use of offline media (e.g., Gaskins and Jerit, 2012; Lin et al., 2005), or if online media rather supplement offline media (e.g., Ahlers, 2006; Dutta-Bergman, 2004), is conflicting. Most US citizens who use online news still use at least some offline news as well (PEW Internet & American Life Project, 2010; Stempel and Hargrove, 2004), and in Germany, a longitudinal study found that the increasing use of political online media had no negative effect on the use of political offline media (Emmer, Wolling, and Vowe, 2012). Somewhat in line with this, research in eleven countries suggests that despite the increasing availability of online news, television news often remains the main news source for most people (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the consumption of television news in general has slightly decreased in Europe (Aalberg, Blekesaune, and Elvestad, 2013), with the Netherlands as an exception (Wonneberger, Schoenbach, and Van Meurs, 2012). Online news use, thus, does not displace all offline outlets equally, but rather newspapers in particular (Lin et

al., 2005) – a process that mainly occurs among poorly educated (Gaskins and Jerit, 2012) and young people (De Waal and Schoenbach, 2010).

Going beyond these rather general observations of substitution and complementarity, few studies have investigated the use of *specific* online outlets compared to the use of specific offline outlets (e.g., Mögerle, 2009; Westlund and Färdigh, 2011), but have shown inconclusive results (see also the review by Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2010). As little is known about how people combine different media outlets exactly, our understanding of the complex patterns of news exposure in today's high-choice media environment remains limited. Therefore, this study analyses news exposure at the outlet level and examines which function they are used for, respectively. In our study, 'outlet' refers to a *specific* newspaper, website, or television show.

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

Of course, the flow of news is changing: Bruns, in as early as 2005, argued that the traditional model, in which news organizations serve as a gatekeeper, is gradually being replaced by a model of gatewatching, in which people can determine themselves what is newsworthy. Accordingly, recent research has addressed the role of social media as a news source (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela, 2012). However, although on the rise, the use of social media for keeping up with the news still seems to be rather limited in the Netherlands (Bakker, 2013). This is certainly something to keep in mind when we interpret our results. But an analysis of news content which people encounter because their friends post it on social media, while undoubtedly gaining importance, would require a different methodological approach beyond the scope of this study, which focuses on specific news outlets (like news websites) people use on a regular basis.

2 How people combine news media

According to the *medium-centric approach*, media with similar characteristics and content are usually not used by the same people: As some media are better

suited to fulfilling a certain need than others, the better ones will ultimately displace those that perform worse (an overview provide Westlund and 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 that all media have to find their own niches to avoid displacement effects (Dimmick et al., 2004). There is conflicting evidence, though, of how far people select media based on functional equivalence: For example, Van der Wurff (2011) found functional overlap was only a very weak predictor of media substitution among Dutch students. *User-centric approaches* offer an explanation: They assume that the reasons why a medium is used do not depend on its content. Even if two media outlets seemingly feature similar content, people still may have very different motivations to use them (e.g., Yuan, 2011). People may not stick to just one of them but may turn to both, for example, depending on the time of day and their circumstances or habits (see also Diddi and LaRose, 2006; Flavián and Gurrea, 2009). For instance, someone might check her or his newspaper's website in the office for a quick news update, but read the same paper's print edition on the sofa after returning home to get more in-depth information.

Only few studies have tried to substantiate these perspectives 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 and Van Eijck, 2003), most attempts to establish a news user typology (e.g., Hasebrink and Popp, 2006; Hasebrink and Schmidt, 2012; Meyen, 2007; Van Cauwenberge, Beentjes, and d'Haenens, 2011; Yuan, 2011) measure exposure to channels differentiated only by the way their information is coded (e.g., TV vs. newspapers) or distributed (e.g., printed papers vs. "the internet") instead of fine-grained measures done on the genre or even title level. Such a specific level is necessary to distinguish between outlets as different as weblogs, newspaper websites, and automated content aggregators. Assuming that news exposure is crucial for public discourse, we need a thorough understanding of how people use the news. We investigate:

RQ1 Which combinations of outlets are typically used?

2.1 Functions of news outlets

When people combine different news outlets, the question why they do so arises. 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 offering specific gratifications (Dimmick et al., 2004). The audience might reduce its use of older media *for those purposes* that the newer media can fulfill better (e.g., Ha and 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 analyzed in this study, all of them related to the domain of news and politics: (1) to obtain updates of breaking news, (2) to obtain a broad overview of the news, and (3) to obtain background information on the news. This is an approach similar to the one by Flavián and Gurrea (2009). They distinguish five “key motivations for reading a newspaper”: the three dimensions we focus on plus entertainment and habit, which were not measured in our questionnaire. The use of specialized outlets for niche topics goes beyond the scope of this paper as well.

First, a frequently voiced idea is 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. Thus, online media might take over the function of *getting updates* of breaking news and important events, serving as an “alarm medium” (De Waal, Schoenbach, and 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). One might also think of other media for frequent updates, like radio news or teletext.

Secondly, we do not know yet how online and offline media outlets are used when the so-called ‘surveillance’ function is sought after. While the notion of surveillance has been used in a different meaning in recent debates on privacy issues, we understand surveillance as one basic function of communication, “disclosing threats and opportunities” (Lasswell, 1948, p. 51) to the media audience – an important requirement for rational choices in democratic societies (Lasswell, 1948). Put more simply, we understand Lasswell’s function of a disclosure of threats and opportunities as being fulfilled by surveying current affairs and events in one’s society. To avoid misunderstandings, we will refer to this function as *getting a news overview*.

A third function lies in providing the users with background, context, and in-depth information on current issues (Schrøder and 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. Weekly magazines could be used for this function as well.

But to which extent is the use of online media for a specific function really related to not using offline media for the same functions, as a medium-centric perspective would assume? We 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.

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

3 Method

3.1 Sample

Our study is based on a secondary analysis of data collected by Trilling and Schoenbach (2013). The web-based survey draws on a large sample of the Dutch population, conducted in December 2009. As the Netherlands had an internet penetration of 90 percent in 2009 (Löf and Seybert, 2009), an internet survey can reach a virtually representative sample of the population – and indeed, comparing our sample with data from Statistic Netherlands (CBS), it closely matches the sociodemographic characteristics 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 potential participants offline, too. Since a response rate of 73% was achieved,¹ the final sample size was 2,130. Forty-nine cases were removed from the sample because of invalid answers, and 127 respondents were removed because they were younger than the legal voting age of 18 years. Thus, 1954 cases were included in the analysis.

¹ Calculated following the AAPOR-RR1 standard: the number of complete interviews divided by the number of interviews plus the number of non-interviews (refusal and break-off plus non-contacts plus others) plus all cases of unknown eligibility.

Completion of the questionnaire took 20 minutes on average. Prior to the field-work, we conducted a pretest with 74 participants.

3.2 Measurement

News exposure. Our questionnaire gauged news use separately for 53 possible outlets, including 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 were 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. 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 establish 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).

3.3 Analysis

After examining frequencies and distribution of the data, we analyzed our data using a set of Ward's linkage cluster analyses to identify patterns of news consumption. 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. 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. Outlets used by less than 10% of the sample (Figure 1) were pooled in four

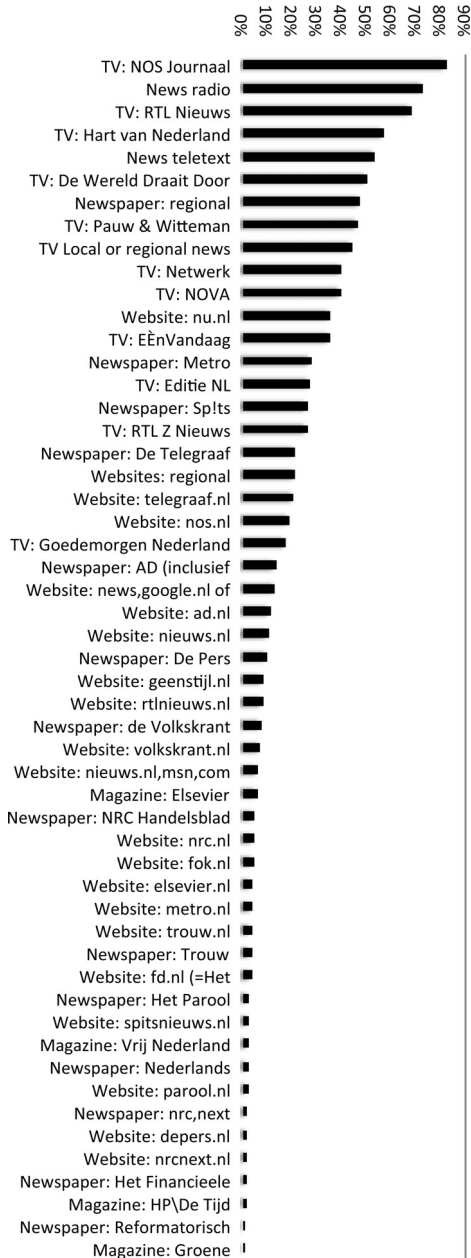


Figure 1: Most widely used news outlets.

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

straightforward categories: newspapers, weekly magazines, websites of offline outlets, and online-only outlets. This was necessary to avoid violating the assumptions of cluster analyses. If we had excluded these outlets completely, all of the national quality newspapers would have been excluded, which, taken together, still reach a significant part of the population.

4 Results

4.1 Combining news outlets

Examining the overlap of audiences, we see that the users of online news media use the same variety of offline media as the rest of the population (Table 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. Thus, people who use online news media rather seem to combine different types of outlets than to use some of them exclusively.

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 public broadcasting news site *nos.nl* and the commercial broadcasting news site *rtlnieuws.nl* also watch the corresponding program on television. But what about online-only news sites? The news site *NU.nl*, although employing some editorial staff, mainly publishes copy from press agencies and does not have an offline equivalent. Given the high level of 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, the commercial TV broadcasts RTL news and *EditieNL*, teletext, regional newspaper websites, and the website of the tabloid paper *telegraaf.nl* significantly more often and regional TV news less often than non-users (all p 's < .05), Table 1 clearly indicates that the size of these differences is limited. The users of the similar, but less popular site *nieuws.nl* seem to use a slightly above-average number of conventional outlets as well. The same is true for the users of the community site *fok.nl* and the blog *geenstijl.nl* – the latter claims not to 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 pattern is also prevalent

Table 1: Overlap of users of online outlets and the most widely used news outlets in general.

		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>	<i>n =</i>	<i>ln</i>	<i>%</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 reg. paper	417	86	81	74	66	71	49	64	54	63	49
rtlnieuws.nl	158	85	78	95	75	80	65	54	58	61	52
<i>Online-only outlets</i>											
nieuws.google.nl	259	83	80	73	64	70	61	58	58	57	52
nieuws.nl	205	88	77	80	65	73	60	56	57	59	55
nieuws.nl.msn.com	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
<i>Population</i>	1954	82	73	68	57	54	50	48	47	44	40

Note: 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.

		NOVA	NU.nl	Eén Vandaag	Metro	EditieNL	Spits	RTL Z Nieuws	De Telegraaf	Regional paper site	telegraaf.nl
<i>Outlets of offline media</i>	<i>n =</i>	<i>In %</i>									
ad.nl	219	49	58	46	38	37	37	37	26	35	58
depers.nl	42	67	55	64	52	48	45	45	31	48	60
elsevier.nl	81	63	53	60	36	35	35	51	28	46	51
fd.nl	73	75	55	63	32	32	32	62	40	40	66
metro.nl	79	52	59	52	70	49	58	39	33	44	52
nos.nl	374	57	58	54	34	30	31	34	24	39	35
nrc.nl	59	67	58	56	36	22	29	39	24	39	52
nrcnext.nl	42	81	76	60	43	29	36	36	26	62	67
parool.nl	43	67	67	60	49	35	49	44	23	42	67
spitnieuws.nl	52	58	71	54	44	46	48	44	40	58	69
telegraaf.nl	407	45	57	41	31	37	32	37	45	41	100
trouw.nl	74	73	59	64	36	26	32	34	19	46	58
volkskrant.nl	142	65	56	59	35	23	34	37	20	44	49
Website reg. paper	417	48	47	47	28	34	31	33	26	100	40
rtlnieuws.nl	158	49	56	48	39	56	39	52	35	58	54
<i>Online-only outlets</i>											
nieuws.google.nl	259	54	48	51	43	32	39	34	28	38	34
nieuws.nl	205	55	56	47	45	37	41	33	29	40	38
nieuws.nl.msn.com	126	48	43	44	44	44	44	34	22	33	31
NU.nl	698	38	100	36	33	29	31	27	22	28	33
fok.nl	88	33	75	34	43	36	36	28	23	35	38
geenstijl.nl	161	52	67	42	40	37	40	37	33	42	48
<i>Population</i>	1954	40	36	35	28	27	26	26	21	21	21

Table 2: Cluster analysis of all news outlets.

Title	Type	Occasion- al users	Regionally oriented users	Moderate moderns	Tradition- alists	Heavy users
NOS Journaal	TV: public service news	2.4*	5.5*	3.6*	5.4*	5.3*
Radio news	Radio	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	Teletext	0.8	2.4*	3.5*	2.5*	3.2*
De Wereld Draait Door	TV: public service current affairs	0.9	2.2*	1.3	1.9	2.6*
Regional newspapers	Paid newspaper	0.6	3.6*	1.4	1.5	2.0*
Paauw & Witteman	TV: public service current affairs	0.5	2.5*	0.9	2.4*	2.3*
Local or regional TV news	TV	0.7	2.8*	1.1	1.1	2.3*
Netwerk	TV: public service current affairs	0.4	1.6	0.6	1.7	1.4
NOVA	TV: public service current affairs	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 current affairs	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 current affairs	0.9	1.1	0.7	0.3	1.5
Splits	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 broadcaster)	0.1	0.3	0.8	0.8	2.1*
Goedemorgen Nederland	TV: public service current affairs	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	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.2	1.2
De Pers	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 to online outlets	2.4	4.2	10.7	6.2	29.4
Total exposure to offline outlets	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
<i>N</i> =	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.

among users of automatic news aggregators that do not employ any journalistic staff, like *nieuws.nl.msn.com*, operated by Microsoft, 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 – often very similar – offline outlets. This is confirmed by a cluster analysis (Table 2), which 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 part of this news diet. The cluster of the *regionally orientated* ($n = 571$) watch 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 as 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.

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

4.2 Functions of news outlets

People seem to use different news outlets for the three functions we examined (Table 3). The main outlets for *news overviews* are still the public service television news broadcasts NOS Journaal, followed by radio, the commercial news broadcast RTL Nieuws, and teletext. Smaller sections of the population rely on newspapers or the online-only website *NU.nl*. Interestingly, the same outlets are also used to get *updates*, although in a 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 ones 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 4).

A large group ($n = 670$) can be considered *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 news site 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.

We also identified five patterns for obtaining *fast updates* (Table 5). A large part of the population is only in little need of updates and uses no outlets on

Table 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	De Wereld Draait Door	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	De Wereld Draait Door	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.

Table 4: Cluster analysis of outlets used to get a broad overview of the news.

Outlets	Occasional overview users	Minimalist overview users	Moderate modern overview users	Traditional- ist 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
<i>N</i> =	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.

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

Table 5: Cluster analysis of outlets used to get fast news updates.

Outlet	Occasional update users	Traditional updaters	Websites of offline media updaters	Teletext updaters	NU.nl updaters
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
<i>N</i> =	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.

groups, all of which have a clear main outlet for background information: TV news broadcasts ($n = 226$), radio news ($n = 222$), national quality newspapers (which the “other newspapers”-category mainly consists of, $n = 154$), 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.

Table 6: Cluster analysis of outlets used for background information.

Outlet	Occa- sional back- ground users	TV news back- ground users	Radio back- ground users	National newspa- per back- ground users	Regional newspa- per 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
<i>N</i> =	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.

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 uses 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 tele-

text, 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.

4.3 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 the other groups ($p < .001$) except the *moderate moderns*. *Heavy users*, who use many more online outlets, are considerably older than occasional users and *moderate moderns* ($p < .001$), but younger than regionally oriented users ($p < .001$). *Traditionalists* are more highly educated than any other group ($p < .001$), while regionally oriented users are less educated than all the others ($p < .001$).

Similar observations can be made with regard to the specific diets (Tables 4, 5, 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 young people 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).

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 level of education choose a media combination that relies for a considerable part on online media. Older people with higher 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, who are consistently overrepresented among, for example, *occasional users* ($z = 3.87, p < .001$, two-tailed).

5 Conclusions and discussion

Our analysis showed that for most people, all three media functions under investigation – a broad overview of what is going on in the world, news updates, and background information – are fulfilled by very different types of outlets, both online and offline. The combination of these information channels for each purpose can be seen as an indicator of media convergence among their users, a development toward “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2). First, people who use online outlets for news overviews use also many offline outlets for the same purpose. But secondly, this wide range of combined media is less apparent for updates and background information. Here, we can identify distinct groups with a clear preference for specific outlets that they mostly use for one of these functions. For the future, one could therefore suspect a scenario in which some channels specialize in either providing fast news updates (e.g., like what push messages on smartphones are already used for), or concentrate on background information. Consumption behavior may be different, though, for getting a news overview: With numerous sources not only available singly to people, but also often used in combination, one specific outlet might become less necessary for the individual to get to know what is going on in the world.

But what are the reasons for specific combinations of 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 are now some online offers serving similar functions. Relying on this pattern might not be a sustainable strategy for media, though: Once users do not see an added value of the old outlets that are still part of their news diets any more, they might abandon them.

This study enhanced our understanding of what patterns of news exposure look like in a high-choice media environment. But our data, of course, have some shortcomings. They suggest that the wide availability of online news sources has led to less fundamental changes than some had expected. Yet while we interpret our results as a sign that online media widen the media repertoire of citizens rather than radically change it, we are not able to prove causality using our cross-sectional data. Also, we had to rely on self-reported measures – and people tend to overestimate news exposure in surveys (LaCour, 2012; Prior, 2009). But that does not have to affect the specific *combinations* of media outlets that people reported.

Another caveat: Our study – like many others that are rooted in a uses-and-gratifications approach – may overestimate the rationality and consciousness of users' decisions: For example, Wonneberger, Schoenbach, and Van Meurs (2012) have convincingly shown that situational factors of TV viewing ultimately determine TV consumption more strongly than the personal motivations people use to explain it. Similarly, building on Social Cognitive Theory, LaRose and Eastin (2004) point out the role of habits as a “failure of self-monitoring” (p. 363) and show that habits are a strong predictor of media use. To further investigate the development of media convergence, the user-centric approach we advocate is therefore more than necessary: It is not inherent to the media what functions they are used for (and consequently, in how far they are subject to substitution), but it depends on how people use them. The question to which extent this is a consequence of rational decisions, habits, or structural factors, needs further investigation.

Since our data were collected, new practices in the distribution of news have emerged. Information from traditional media organizations is often shared by the users of social media (e.g. Morgan, Shafiq, and Lampe, 2013). But should we expect that people will stop consulting their favorite news outlets directly? A combination of both sorts of channels could lead to an even more extensive exposure to a diverse range of news items. In light of the argument that exposure to a broad variety of news is crucial for a democratic society, this might not be the worst development.

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