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Introduction

Michael Bossetta

2021 was no ordinary year. Mired in the midst of a global pandemic, students and researchers alike were challenged to continue their work while adapting to practices of social distancing and video conferencing. If anything, the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the vital role of media and communication for the functioning of everyday life.

In this sixth edition of the *Excellent MSc Dissertation* series, eight students present condensed versions of their Master's theses, completed for the MSc degree in Media and Communication Studies at Lund University. These students presented their dissertations in May 2021 and earned the highest mark. During the Fall of 2021, the dissertations were revised to a shorter length of 14,000 words for publication in the series *Förtjänstfulla examensarbeten i medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap* (FEA). The series was launched by Media and Communication Studies at Lund University in 2008 to increase the visibility and reward high quality student research. Viewed together, the eight dissertations comprising this book illustrate three key themes of media and communication scholarship.

The first is the central role of media and communication in contemporary society. While media and communication is a field of research in itself, the contributions herein show how a core focus on media and communication can also be relevant to other scientific disciplines. While some contributions take an explicit focus on 'the media', others illustrate how media and communication can serve as a lens to interpret broader societal phenomena, such as migration, religion, or human psychology. As the media landscape becomes more saturated and diversified, multimodal approaches are needed to capture the relationship between various forms of media and broader societal phenomena. The contributions in this volume answer this call by covering a wide array of media formats: traditional

journalistic news, social media, podcasts, streaming platforms, government press conferences, and street graffiti.

Second, the included contributions reveal how the ordinary, upon closer investigation, is far from mundane. Rigorous expositions into everyday media practices or localized spaces can unearth complex webs of meaning that are both contextually situated and actively reproduced through seemingly ordinary interactions. In one way or another, all contributions in this volume point to a reconceptualization of space and place, and the importance of media experiences in shaping how we perceive the world we live in.

Third, these contributions showcase media not only as an object of study but also a means of study. In adapting to the circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic, several authors developed innovative ways of using media as a method. While nearly all interviews in this volume were conducting via the video conferencing platform Zoom, this can provide certain advantages in some research designs. For example, inviting an interviewee to participate from their home may recreate the environment where they usually listen to podcasts, as evidenced by Anna Jaakonaho's design (Chapter 4). Other authors, in the absence of physical travel, leveraged technologies like Baidu Street View to explore physical spaces digitally, like Maizu Hua (Chapter 8). While the specific methodologies in this volume are diverse, each chapter demonstrates a high level of critical thinking, methodological design, and analytical rigor.

The book opens with a focus on the production side of media. In Chapter 1, Andreas Magnusson Qassim explores how Swedish public service television (SVT) attempts to maintain its relevance with a youth audience. As 'tweens' come of age in a saturated media environment, their attention is pulled towards a myriad of content offerings intimately linked to commercial interests: posts by peers on social media, bingeworthy series on Netflix, and increasingly interactive gaming worlds. Through interviews with the producers and executives behind SVT's *Kär* (In Love), a low-budget and experimental series targeting preadolescents, Qassim investigates how public service broadcasters are reinventing themselves to appeal to youth in a digital world. The study reveals how production teams harness data and engage in intergenerational dialogue to approach a target audience often pictured as different and hard to reach. More broadly, Qassim's thesis highlights how digital transformations such as streaming platforms and smartphone cultures are shifting the operating logics and content offerings of legacy media providers.

In Chapter 2, continuing with a supply-side analysis, Joseph Thwaites compares the framing strategies of Australian legacy media and government authorities in their health communication around the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a mixed-methods approach combining a qualitative framing analysis and hierarchical clustering, Thwaites identifies four frames deployed in government press conferences and online news reporting about them: medical, social, economic, and political. While these overarching frames are shared by both actors, Thwaites' investigation reveals how journalistic mediation of government communication can alter frames in ways that reflect journalistic norms. Moreover, by comparing different media outlets' coverage of government press conferences, Thwaites shows how the framing strategies of the two actors can also conflict, with media engaging in political blame frames against the government. In finding that blame frames were more likely to be exhibited by tabloid press, Thwaites highlights how the media's watchdog function can also interact with commercial logics, even in the midst of a global pandemic.

Chapters 3 and 4 cast a theoretical and empirical gaze on podcasts, an underexplored media genre relative to their increasing global popularity. In Chapter 3, Marcus Enochsson showcases how podcasts can be deconstructed to reveal how alternative religious narratives are reconstructed. Set against the backdrop of the contemporary 'post-truth' era, Enochsson argues that notions of truth are constructed and reconstructed through communication. Viewing religion as an arena for discussions of truth, the thesis offers a case study of the *Another Name for Every Thing* podcast, where religious individuals advocate an alternative biblical interpretation of Christ: as any instance of spirit incarnated rather than a single person. By exploring the dialogic interactions of the hosts (as well as audience through submitted questions), Enochsson reveals how pastors can sow doubt in established doctrine, provide alternative truth claims, and build community in the process. From a media industries perspective, the thesis highlights how the digital broadcasting of intimate conversations via podcasting can effectively subvert rigid beliefs, including those that have been fixated over centuries of ritualized practice.

In Chapter 4, Anna Jaakonaho highlights the agency of podcast listeners through their experiences with the podcast Ångestpodden (The Anxiety Podcast). Through conducting qualitative interviews, Jaakonaho skillfully demonstrates that listeners of the podcast, which aims to normalize anxiety and mental illness, are not only

passive receivers of media. Rather, Jaakonaho argues that listeners actively construct an intimate experience with the podcast through their listening habits, such as reflecting on their own emotional well-being, listening to the podcast during routine tasks, or strategically listening in difficult times. Thus, Jaakonaho finds that while listeners tune into Ångestpodden to learn about anxiety and mental illness, the subtle contexts they construct while doing so can work as a normalization and coping mechanism for dealing with these issues in their personal lives. Moreover, the thesis reveals how the open expression of such individualized, personal experiences can have implications for building shared norms around mental health, illustrating a mutually enforcing dynamic between individual and collective experience.

Similarly, the following three chapters engage with questions of individual and collective experience through a focus on migrants, the cities in which they live, the importance of media in connecting the two. In Chapter 5, Thanh Nga Nguyen investigates how media practices simultaneously shape and reflect the identities of second-generation Vietnamese migrants in the Czech Republic. Through interviews and an ethnographic field trip to Prague, Nguyen's thesis explores how second-generation migrants negotiate their dual national identities through mainstream and social media engagement. Nguyen finds that second-generation Vietnamese migrants are primarily exposed to Vietnamese television when living with their parents. While this helps bind the family unit, second-generation migrants have difficulty in identifying with Vietnamese current affairs; instead, they prefer to keep abreast of Czech news through social media. Yet, Nguyen argues that social media are important sites for second-generation migrants to connect to Vietnam through lifestyle content, which fosters a sense of cultural identification with their ethnic homeland. The thesis reveals how traditional and social media can serve different functions for second-generation migrants, who cultivate a bicultural identity through their various media practices across these channels.

In Chapter 6, Adrian Blazquez Lindblad drills down into the social media practices of transnational migrants in London. Lindblad explores how migrants leverage social media to integrate into London communities, as well as how they navigate communicating between audiences in their home country and the United Kingdom. Through semi-structured interviews with labor and education migrants, Lindblad's analysis points to the multifaceted and complex character of

migrants' social media engagement. Lindblad finds that while social media can be helpful for migrants in adapting to London life, keeping up with online sources from both home and host country can lead to some migrants being overwhelmed and disengaging from platforms altogether. Furthermore, Lindblad's thesis shows how migrants' penchant for political self-expression through social media is contingent upon individualized factors such as self-identity and interpersonal relationships, which social media help connect and maintain. Taken together, Lindblad's findings support his overarching argument that migrants are multidimensional, and their online engagement practices reflect the idiosyncrasies of each migrant's personal story.

In Chapter 7, Niloufar Hajirahimikalhroudi echoes this notion by exploring how the media and communication practices of recently settled Turkish migrants in Berlin shape their experiences of the city. Using a multi-method ethnographic approach involving autoethnography, walking diaries, and interviews, Hajirahimikalhroudi illustrates how migrants' everyday practices – both online and offline – work to establish their connection to Berlin. Hajirahimikalhroudi shows how Turkish migrants experience structural challenges in their mundane everyday experiences, which they actively remediate through their decisions to post certain content to their Instagram channels. Facebook and Telegram, meanwhile, serve as key sites to connect with other migrants in assisting their acculturation to Berlin, while subtle Turkish symbols in storefronts and restaurants reify an analog typography of such connections. At its core, Hajirahimikalhroudi's research highlights how the movement of physical and digital artifacts, both perceived by migrants and actively reproduced by them, challenges the notion of cities as static. Rather, Hajirahimikalhroudi argues that cities are sites of intersecting mobilities that make up the everyday lives of migrants.

In the final chapter, Chapter 8, Maizi Hua approaches cities from another angle: as sites of resistance. Hua's research investigates the symbolic meaning behind the graffiti writings on Rehe Road, a run-down street in Nanjing made popular through a song of a censored Chinese musician. Gaining insights from pictures of the graffiti on social media, digital urban walks through Rehe Road, and interviews with graffiti writers, Hua skillfully argues that graffiti art and social media share many of the same affordances, such as interactivity, anonymity, and deleteability. As the graffiti on Rehe Road is continually scrubbed by municipal

authorities but reappearing through the graffiti writers' work, Hua documents how the physical Rehe Road and the graffiti there are constantly remediated online, through visual materials of the graffiti on WeChat, QQ, and Weibo. Interestingly, however, Hua argues that the resistance exhibited by graffiti writers is not one motivated by politics. Rather, the resistance that Hua uncovers is much more 'poetic', with poetic resistance developed in the chapter as a way to conceptualize the undirected, collaborative, and spontaneous forms of art creation that Hua observes on Rehe Road. As a form of Impressionism marked by practice rather than artistic style, the graffiti writing on Rehe Road similarly illustrates how instantaneous portrayals of spaces can redefine how we interpret them while subverting existing power structures.

Together, the eight contributions in this book exemplify what staff at the Department of Communication and Media consider to comprise an excellent dissertation at the Master's level. By publishing this book, we hope to inspire future students to follow the lead of these authors in being inquisitive, innovative, and rigorous in their research projects. For readers, we trust that engaging with these texts will provoke new insights into how media reflects, reifies, and reinterprets the world around us.

Lund, December 2021

Striving for relevance: SVT Barn online and the production of tween drama *Kär*

Andreas Magnusson Qassim

Introduction

In an online media environment dominated by a handful of global tech-giants, and in a world often described as polarized and fragmented, it has been suggested that national public service media (PSM) with its non-commercial values 'to inform, educate and entertain' have never been more important. According to the Swedish government, children and youth 9-19 years old spent less than 10% of their total viewing time in 2018 on Swedish public service television (SVT), including broadcast and the online service Play (Prop. 2018/19:136:15). How do you reach someone who might not even know that you exist?

Public service challenges

In Sweden, the youngest watch YouTube the most, the middle-aged Netflix, and the elderly SVT Play (MPRT 2020:18). 'Generation Z'[1] does not have the same 'depth of relationship' with PSM as older generations (Jigsaw/Ofcom 2020:9). Youngsters do not attach much significance to whether content is public service or not, they just look for 'good' content (Ofcom 2014:3). The fear is that public

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[1] People born in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.)

service might not be sustainable in the long run, if the young keep 'tuning out.' PSM must find new ways of making contact or risk losing 'a generation of potential license-fee payers' (Ofcom 2019). It has been suggested that reaching the young is a matter of survival for PSM (Lowe & Maijanen 2019:9).

However, the 'youth challenge' also offers opportunities for 'new storytelling techniques, production cultures, and publishing models' (Andersen & Sundet 2019:2). The Norwegian teen drama *SKAM* (NRK 2015-2017) has been hailed as an example of 'the Scandinavian approach to public service', allowing for creativity, innovation, and the creation of world-class drama for modest budgets (Sundet 2020:71; Duggan 2020:1005). SVT's *Kär* (2020) could be situated within this category, with its microscopic budget of SEK 2.8 million and experimental format: 122 episodes, 2-5 minutes, 5 hours in total, and published daily for an entire semester.

The series

Kär[2] was created by a minimal cast and crew, right in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and became quite popular in spite of not receiving the same promotional push as SVT's regular shows. The average online rating per episode was 72,000. For comparison, 'Klassen', SVT Barn's flagship teen drama has 160,000-170,000 ratings per episode, and 'Kokobäng', their most popular humor show, around 600,000 (SVT Barn interviews).

Kär is about Adam and Bianca, two musically gifted soon to be teenagers, who became friends during a music summer camp after sixth grade. They go to different schools, and after the summer they keep in touch mainly through their smartphones. In addition to everyday 'snapchatting' and 'facetiming', they record songs and send to each other. Sometimes they meet 'irl',[3] record together and publish their music videos online, looking for likes and followers, dreaming of making it big. It is obvious from the start that they like each other. Are they just good friends, or is there something more?

For musical prodigies Eva Jumatate and Oscar Stembridge known from Swedish talent shows, YouTube, and various TV performances, *Kär* was their first

[2] Translates 'in love.' The Swedish title will be used throughout.
[3] In Real Life

assignment as actors in TV drama. Their characters Adam and Bianca turn thirteen in the story, as did the actors themselves during the production. *Kär* also marked the debut for SVT Malmö producers Hanna Lagerberg and Anna Bylund as writers and directors of an original drama series. In February 2021, a repackaged version of the series was published called *Kär: Långa avsnitt,*[4] with the intent of making it more attractive for catch-up viewing.

The target group and mobile media

In *Kär*, the evergreen themes of love, friendship, and growing up are dealt with in a contemporary world of smartphones, social media, and digital communication. Preadolescence is a special age, a transitional phase when parents do not seem to understand anymore, when peers become more important, when one might have a romantic awakening or not (Adler & Adler 1998). It is also towards the end of 'tweenhood' that PSM start losing viewers. After 11, there is a sharp drop in reach (SVT Barn interviews). Relevance is not only about content, but also formats, devices, and consumption patterns, which further shape policies for PSM production and distribution.

One's first own smartphone appears increasingly as a 'rite of passage' in contemporary childhood. Reports show how this has gone down considerably in ages (see e.g. the Swedish Internet Foundation). It has been said that children and teens today have their own social networks, that they live in their own media world that is alien to older people, and that they are always connected and together online (MPRT 2020:3). Reaching these young mobile media users, then, could be seen as crucial for the future of PSM, since they are supposed to serve the entire population of a country, not only the older segments (Sundet 2020:72).

Kär is clearly related to Nordic PSM siblings such as *SKAM* and *Anton 90* (DR), 'short-form, small-budget online fiction series in which social media function as a central part of the narrative with the aim of accommodating a digital native youth audience that was otherwise turning its back on the institutions' (Andersen & Sundet 2019:2). However, those series were made for 16-18-year-olds. *Kär*, with its 'mobile first' policy, was aimed at 9-12 and was likely seen by even younger audiences. PSM promoting smartphone culture for young children might

[4] 'Long episodes' ca 15 min. each.

not be entirely uncontroversial in a country where discourses around children and 'screen time' are often negative.

Aims and research questions

Using *Kär* as case study, this qualitative production study explores SVT Barn's ongoing digital transformation and quest for relevance. The study is set within a Media Industry Studies methodological framework, with the 'youth challenge' of Nordic PSM as the main context. Semi-structured production interviews were conducted with the creatives and executives behind the series. The focus is less on official strategy and policy and more on 'the goals of producers in their own words' (Banks et al. 2016). The study is guided by the following research questions:

- How and why is SVT Barn striving for relevance as an online platform?
- How does SVT Barn produce online content 'close to the audience'?
- What are the key values in SVT Barn's digital engagement with young citizens?

Literature Review

The literature review spans media policy, cultural studies, media and communication studies, and sociology. The first part will be situated within the field of Media Industry Studies (MIS), followed by a discussion of dialogues as sites for articulating and performing values (Hill 2019). It then focuses on the 'media welfare states' of the Nordic region (Syvertsen et al. 2014). More specifically it looks at the digital transformation of PSM in this region and the evolution towards a 'fully datafied' PSM 3.0 (Jackson 2020).

The second part begins with digital communication and shifting meanings of intimacy and distance in the age of social media (Chambers 2013), followed by a discussion on smartphone culture and young people. It closes in on 'tweenhood', a liminal state of being 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1967), relating a fluid sense of identity (Frosh 1991; Hall 1996) and interactionist identity construction (Goffman 1959; Adler & Adler 1998) to tweens as well as PSM for the young.

Media Industry Studies

Media Industry scholars tend to be interested in 'understanding and examining media industries due to their role in the production and circulation of culture' (Herbert et al. 2020:14). MIS is a rather new label that can be tracked back to 2009, when Holt and Perren published their book *Media Industries* that tried to define a coherent discipline (Freeman 2016:4-5). This was also the year when Havens, Lots, and Tinic (2009:236) wanted to bring a range of subfields under a common umbrella name: 'critical production studies', 'creative industry studies', 'cultural economy', 'the circuit of cultural production', and 'middle-range theory.' They situated their *Critical Media Industry Studies* at the intersection of cultural studies and media studies. MIS appears to have grown into an established field, with a peer-reviewed journal, interest groups such as the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), and international conferences and university courses held under its banner (Herbert et al. 2020:13).

So, what *is* Media Industry Studies? Herbert et al. (2020:17-18) define it as 'the critical analysis of how individuals, institutions, and industries produce and circulate cultural forms in historically and geographically contextualized ways.' Key in MIS is *level* or vantage point. The surface of the earth will look different from space, from a jet plane, a helicopter, a tall building, and from when one is standing on the ground. This metaphor was used by Havens et al. (2009:239) when they advocated for a mid-level approach (the helicopter view) to media industry studies as opposed to the jet plane view of political economy. Another key element is *contextualization*, as MIS 'aims to trace connections between the micro and the macro, between production and culture, so as to better understand *how* and *why* the media industries ultimately work the way that they do' (Freeman 2016:12). Media production is not about policy *or* economy *or* artistry, it is all of these to various degrees. MIS represents a multidisciplinary, multi-perspectival approach (ibid.:6-7) in which context is crucial.

Production studies and the value of dialogue

According to Banks et al. (2016:x-xi), production studies should provide 'grounded analyses of media makers' experiences, observations, conversations, and interactions.' Researchers within this field might look at official strategy and policy documents but will likely be more interested in 'the goals of producers, in

their own words.' Hill's 'analytic dialogue' (2019:16) was originally developed for assessing the dialogue between producers and audiences, in which the researcher takes part in the conversation as a 'bridge across the industry-audience divide.' This concept can be extended to encompass dialogues *within* media companies, e.g. the exchange of ideas among creatives, or discussions between creatives and executives (Hill 2021:6-7). An analytic dialogue allows us to look at how multidirectional dialogues shape media production.

Scholars have emphasized the importance of having a people-focused methodology in production research, as 'it is people that remain the unchanging anchor of the media industries, even amidst the substantial changes to industry brought about by technology and digital platforms' (Ashton 2015, in Freeman 2016:118). It is about 'relationships amidst the corporate context' and 'seeing people as the agents of power that construct the media industries as an "interaction" via the practices of production.' Production cultures are not fixed, static worlds determined by master policy documents. Rather, they are organic, living things under constant negotiation, reinterpretation, and reconstruction, born and reborn in dialogue.

Dialogues are sites where values are articulated and performed (Hill 2021). For practitioners, 'value' is often something clearly defined and of strategic importance, 'not a subject for abstract debate' (Corner & Roscoe 2016:157). Academics, on the other hand, are usually more interested in cultural, social and political values, and often fail to recognize the central role that money plays in 'the kind of television that gets made and the kind that doesn't' (ibid.:161). The slogan for Swedish public service 2020-2025 is 'a modern public service close to the audience' (Swedish government 2019). Such values require that producers and audiences are in dialogue with each other.

Nordic public service media

When profit is taken out of media production, other values take precedence. Northern Europe has been called the 'heartland' of public service (Lowe & Steemers 2012:9). Indeed, the motto 'to inform, educate and entertain', coined by the BBC's first Director-General John Reith in the early 1920s, has become the leading star for public service organizations worldwide (Bolin 2016:111). Independence from commercial and political interests is often mentioned as *the*

public service ethos. PSM have been considered as a 'public good', of value to society in the same way as roads, railroads, sewage, hospitals, schools, and other infrastructural systems (Bolin 2016:112-113). From such a perspective, a citizen needs public service to function in society, more than the other way around.

Being public service comes with certain expectations, such as carrying the torch of Enlightenment, being socially responsible, and promoting democratic values and diversity. Scholars have put high hopes in PSM to 'actively, effectively, and rapidly respond to threats posed by the proliferation of false information, siloed information habits, and growing distrust in the media' (Savage et al. 2020:21). Meeting these expectations is easier said than done for Nordic and European PSM, often struggling with budget cuts, staff reductions, and slimmed down organizations (Donders 2019:1023).

The countries of the Nordic region – Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland – are characterized by 'a welfare state system that aims at universal rights within societies with comparatively small class, income, and gender differences' (Syvertsen et al. 2014:1). These states are referred to as *Media Welfare States*, a concept resting on four pillars: 1) universally available communication systems, 2) institutionalized editorial freedom, 3) extensive cultural policy for the media, and 4) consensual policy-making and compromises between key stakeholders (ibid.:17-20). While the Nordic markets are small, they are also 'technologically mature' and have served as strategic test markets for streaming services and social media (Andersen & Sundet 2019:2). In this highly digitalized region of the world, the online transition of PSM has been called 'resourceful, resilient, and adaptive to changing circumstances' (Syvertsen et al. 2014:92). Scholars have pointed out that digital platforms can be particularly important for PSM in small nations with small languages, and for preserving minority cultures (McElroy & Noonan 2018).

Digital inequalities and concerns

Digital technologies have been celebrated for their democratic potential due to increased consumer choice and accessibility. However, there is a sharp contrast 'between PSM as a nationally-regulated service with socio-cultural aims geared to enhancing civil society, and the more laissez-faire philosophy of profit-driven, consolidated global internet corporations that frequently escape national regulatory frameworks' (McElroy & Noonan 2018:164). Small, local producers

now find themselves locked in a David-versus-Goliath battle against a few but extremely powerful online players with global reach such as YouTube, Netflix, and Disney+. Google-owned YouTube in particular is popular among children. PSM and YouTube are essentially competitors on the same market, but on very different terms. Steemers (2019:183-184) mentions 'vlogging' and 'unboxing videos' as examples of how companies exploit seemingly personal content, thereby commercializing children as influencers and consumers. For McElroy and Noonan (2018:171), with their focus on PSM in small language territories, creative and up-to-date policies and regulations are absolutely necessary for supporting pluralism in the current online environment.

Audiences in general have become increasingly 'platform agnostic, accessing content on demand and on the move on mobile devices' (Potter & Steemers 2017:7). There is a worry that children and youth are losing interest in longer storytelling formats altogether. Academia-industry collaborative projects have been set up to research this problem. *Reaching Young Audiences: Serial Fiction and Cross-Media Storyworlds for Children and Young Audiences (RYA),* currently running at Copenhagen University, states that:

> The media use of Danish children and young people has changed dramatically in the past few years. Fictional content and 'media snacks' on Netflix and YouTube are now a major part of their media diet while their encounters with national film, TV and online fiction are declining. (RYA website, n.d.)

Hill (2019:3) talks about 'roaming audiences' who roam in and around storytelling. According to her, storytelling is alive and well, it is just that 'roamers' choose new paths and leave new types of trails while looking for it.

PSM 3.0

There is prestige in the term 'digital', by which media companies strive to be perceived as innovative players within media industries. McElroy and Noonan point out a tendency for 'futurology and technophilia' in discourses around digitalization that can obscure the social world (2018:159). According to Jackson (2020:207-208), the success or failure of digital public service comes down to the level of datafication. This requires 'creatives, technologists, audience analysts, and data scientists to work collaboratively – an approach not widely found in

contemporary PSM.' Commercial streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime have been able to 'exploit datafication' e.g. by introducing 'recombinatory file formats', enabling automatic reassembly of content for various platforms and devices. Further, registration systems and user profiles can increase the personalization of contents on display.

For PSM to be successful in the digital realm, they need to be able to 'operate with sufficient fluidity, to understand data flows and data management, and lastly, to adopt an increased audience-centric orientation' (2020:218). Failing to achieve a level of advanced datafication will result in:

> [R]educed ability to nuance content for delivery to increasingly diverse publics via constantly changing receiving devices. This in turn reduces public access, hence also universal appeal. These deficiencies have very serious implications when considering universal access for – and appeal to – young audiences who preference mobile phones. (ibid.)

'Data' has become another prestige word in media. Van Dijck warned already in 2014 about 'dataism', a widespread over-reliance on objective quantification that risks leading to alienation (Couldry & Hepp 2017:251-252).

Digital intimacy and distance

According to Chambers (2013:1), 'one of the most striking changes in personal life during late modernity is the use of social media for conducting personal relationships.' Digital intimacy is not so different from its offline counterpart. Chambers refers to studies showing that we tend to communicate online with quite a small number of people, most of whom we already know well, such as close friends and family. She argues that online selves are usually constructed to reflect offline selves, although these are expected to be highly managed (ibid.:62). However, personal relationships online are often performed under a public gaze that can be scrutinizing and judgmental as well as convivial and reciprocal (ibid.:86).

Chambers refers to Giddens (1991, 1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) when saying that 'youth embody the late modern emphasis on choice and diversity in intimate relationships' (2013: 84). She writes that 'friendship' has become 'both a potent exemplar of individuality and personal choice and a global marketing

tool to influence our personal tastes and patterns of consumption' (ibid.:163). She associates increased agency and selectivity with neoliberalism and the neo-liberal subject 'who constantly needs to reinvent him- or herself', a subject supposed to choose his or her way to happiness.

Digital media technologies have 'presented children and teenagers with a focused yet pervasive 'private sphere' in which they can communicate mainly with age-related friends and wider contacts beyond the scrutiny of parents or teachers' (ibid.:86). One side-effect of the newly won autonomy is a cemented disconnect between generations, as personalized technologies amplify social and cultural segregation from the adult world (ibid.:101). Digital communication, then, seems to be able to bring people closer in some instances (e.g. peers), whereas in others, it can increase distance (e.g. between generations).

Smartphone cultures

Regarding the smartphone it has been said that 'never before has *anytime, anywhere, always on* connectivity been more apposite for describing the opportunities for staying in touch, finding information, enjoying media and having instant connectivity' (Vincent & Haddon 2018:5). Smartphones can speed up young people's emancipation from the family sphere 'by fostering autonomous and continuous access to the peer group' (Mascheroni, in Vincent & Haddon 2018:122-123). Children tend to develop an emotional attachment to the device and the relationships it mediates, which can be associated with positive feelings such as intimacy, proximity and belonging, but also negative ones such as anxiety and addiction. The smartphone and the practices and meanings developed around it, have become such an integral part of the young generation that it has been called a 'mobile youth culture' (ibid.).

Smartphones are also associated with discourses of 'the child at risk' (Drotner 1999, cited in Mascheroni 2018). Negative representations emphasize the threats that smartphones pose to the young, such as poor quality of sleep, attention deficit, sight and other physical problems, addiction and breach of face-to-face sociality. Further, there is the 'fear of missing out', i.e. the urge to always check for likes, posts and messages, which can cause discomfort, annoyance and even anxiety connected to expectations of constant reciprocity. Waiting for a reply can be particularly stressful in the context of romantic relationships (2018:127-128;

Chambers 2013:125). 'Fear of smartphones' could be put into historical context with other parentally driven 'media panics', e.g. around gaming, video violence and comics.

Tweens, identities and interaction

For Stuart Hall, 'identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being' (1996:4). Tweens could be seen as the quintessence of 'becoming', busy as they are in their identity construction process. 'Tweenhood' or preadolescence is a rather new social category. Growing up used to be thought of as going through infancy, toddlerhood, childhood, adolescence, and then arriving at the final destination adulthood, whereas now, the 9-12 age period:

> … corresponds to the increasing specialization of society, where members need to acquire ever more sophisticated knowledge and skills, at ever younger ages, to function successfully. Preadolescence represents an important learning period, and its peer culture contains members' distillations of society's expectations. (Adler & Adler 1998:5)

Tweens could also be said to exist in-between categories (childhood and adolescence), a state of being 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1967). This is defined as 'the state and process of mid-transition in a rite of passage', and a 'moment in and out of time' (Cody et al. 2012:422). Those existing in liminality tend to 'elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space' (ibid.).

Frosh wrote about a 'crisis of identity' in late modern, or post-modern society. He described the late modern state of mind as 'a condition in which the struggle to be a self is nearly impossible' (1991:5). In a fluid and contradictory reality, 'there is no absolute stability, no still point from which bearings can be taken' (ibid.:187). In such a crisis:

> [M]odern individuals are subjects within a culture which is in part constituted by its ability and tendency to produce precisely that experience. It is in the nature of modernity to provoke crises of identity: that is what modernity is about, that is what supplies its immense energy and productiveness. (ibid.:191)

Unlike Turner's 'liminality' which is a temporary state, Hall's 'becoming' and Frosh's 'crisis' are permanent processes, always ongoing, never completed. Further, identity and identification can only be constructed 'through the relation to the Other' (Hall 1996:4). In interactionist accounts, there is no stable identity or true self, only an array of 'masks' for various social situations:

> For Mead and Goffman, the self is not viewed as a bounded, fixed entity. It is a reflexive construction which is constantly being renegotiated through interaction within the social world... (Chambers 2013:66)

Selves and identities cannot exist in a vacuum. Only in relation to others can identities be 'found', maintained and developed. Digitally transforming PSM as well as tweens could be said to exist in liminality. However, tweens are there temporarily. They will eventually complete the transition and become teenagers, whereas PSM must stay 'in process' (Hall 1996:2) and interaction, to remain relevant to contemporary tweens.

Positioning the research

Concluding the review, this study aims to contribute to Media Industry Studies as well as to Nordic PSM research. It uses a cross-disciplinary body of literature and a multi-perspectival approach to explore SVT Barn's ongoing digital transformation and quest for relevance, through the case of *Kär*. It is a small production, but part of a larger struggle in which the relationship between PSM and young citizens cannot be taken for granted.

Methods

The main method of the study was interviewing. Semi-structured production interviews were designed, conducted, and analyzed in an abductive, recursive and non-linear process. The process is explained below.

Production interviews

To start with, two exploratory audience interviews were conducted with tween viewers. Learning to see *Kär* from their perspective rather than from an adult researcher's perspective was helpful. Six production interviews then took place between 19 January to 18 March 2021, involving five participants:

> Efva Henrysson – Project leader for *Kär* and MAXA Barnplay
>
> Hanna Lagerberg – Producer/Editor, Writer and director of *Kär*
>
> Anna Bylund – Producer/Editor, Writer and director of *Kär*
>
> Petter Bragée – Head of children's, comedy & entertainment programming at SVT Malmö
>
> Safa Safiyari – Commissioner of children's and youth content at SVT, Head of SVT Barn

Four of these interviews were digital video meetings, and two were conducted over the phone. No face-to-face interviews were possible, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each interview lasted between forty-five minutes to one and a half hours. These media professionals are all 'above the line workers' at SVT, whose names can easily be found in e.g. end credits and news articles. Therefore, they have not been anonymized.

Freeman describes production research as 'sustained dialogues between mutual partners' (2016:110). The point of such research is not simply to scrutinize and criticize from one's academic ivory tower, but to approach an insider perspective, identifying problems and looking for solutions in joint efforts. The production interview could in a best-case scenario be regarded as 'a meeting between professionals' (Bruun, in Patersen et al. 2016:142). Such an ambition requires from the researcher a good deal of professionalism, patience, and trust-building.

Media professionals who participate in production research could be thought of as 'elites' or 'exclusive informants', since they possess in-depth knowledge on the topic that only they can provide (ibid.:131). Semi-structured production interviews can therefore be composed in a less strict way, in which the participant can be allowed to steer the conversation more than in audience interviews, e.g. if

the researcher is dependent on the person for further access to other exclusive informants. This shifts power dynamics, from being weighted towards the researcher in audience studies to being weighted towards the media professional in a production interview (Ralph, in Freeman 2016:125). Moreover, creative professionals can be surprisingly willing to share information, welcoming university-industry collaborations, as well as 'the rare chance to discuss their work in a reflexive way' (ibid.:121-122).

Indeed, these SVT personnel welcomed collaboration and generously reflected on everything from work practices and strategies to values and personal beliefs. My contact with SVT originated in discussions about an internship at SVT Barn Malmö that failed to materialize due to the pandemic. Nonetheless, I want to emphasize that SVT did not commission the study or finance it. SVT did not interfere in its design, and they did not offer me a job upon completing it.

Critical reflection

Here, I should establish my view of PSM, for transparency. Basically, I am a friend of public service. Growing up in the 'media scarcity' environment of Sweden in the 1980s, I have fond memories of family get-togethers in front of Christmas TV series, Eurovision song contests, British humor, US soap operas, action series, sitcoms, and puppet shows. These programs constituted common topics of conversation in school, as everybody watched the same shows on the two state-owned public service channels available. Further, I have a professional background working for a Swedish comics and film brand for children, very much in line with the 'inform, educate and entertain' ethos. However, the current study will not be uncritical, nor nostalgic. To put it bluntly, I *wish* that public service would continue to be important in the lives of children and youth, but I am uncertain if it can. What if the train already left? But these are speculations. John Corner has taught us to 'assume less and investigate more' (2011:87). That is what this work is about.

Abductive approach and thematic content analysis

The study was approached through an 'abductive logic', which according to Bazeley (2013:336) is 'closely connected with pragmatist philosophy, involves an

iterative or dialectical interplay between existing theoretical understanding and empirical data, so that the theory is recontextualised, leading to fresh interpretation and potentially to a modified theoretical framework.' Such research 'more often starts with an idea or a general question than with the goal of testing details of an existing theory' (ibid.:28). In the current study, it was not the case that all interviews were conducted in one sweep, using the same interview guide for everyone, then analyzed and coded en masse as a clean-cut step number two. Instead, these overlapped in a rather messy 'zig zag' process in which early analysis would 'inform further data gathering so that gaps in the data are filled or new and unexpected themes unpacked' (Rivas, in Seale 2018:880).

There was no blueprint being followed from start to finish. A recursive process developed organically, involving a 'two-steps-forward, one-step-backward' way of progressing methodically towards 'the goal of insightful understanding' (Bazeley 2013:13). The process looked something like this:

interview -> listening/analyzing/discussing/reading/writing -> interview (refined)

An abductive approach, further, requires 'immersion in data as a primary source of understanding' (ibid.:28). All interviews were transcribed manually, as the careful listening required was seen as the first step of immersion. The interviews, all of them in Swedish, were then summarized in English, for discussion with the English-speaking supervisor. Summarizing and translating necessitates interpretation to some extent. While interpretation of meaning is at the heart of qualitative research (Kuckartz 2014:31), efforts were made to be as accurate as possible, without distorting or adding things that were not there.

Discussions between researcher and supervisor involved phone calls as well as written comments that were sent back and forth. Through this process, a number of themes started to emerge. The summaries with comments and notes scribbled all over them essentially functioned as coding sheets. 'Zig zag thematic coding' ideally ends when no new themes emerge, when 'saturation' has been achieved (Rivas, in Seale 2018:880). With five participants and six interviews, it is uncertain if saturation was indeed reached. Perhaps new themes would have emerged with twice as many interviews. However, a 'master summary' of the individual summaries indicated some clear main themes. These became chapters in the analysis. By using the individual summaries as guides, quotes could be pulled from the Swedish transcripts, translated into English, then brought into

the analysis. The next chapter, then, will present and analyze the key themes of these production interviews.

Analysis

In accordance with the MIS framework, the analysis will shift back and forth between a 'helicopter view' of policies and strategies, and a ground level view of the 'nuts and bolts' of production. It shows how SVT Barn strives for relevance through platforms, formats and target group thinking. Further, how data-driven creativity, trust and glancing at others shaped the production of *Kär*. The chapter looks at how the creatives worked to be 'close to the audience', and it outlines the main production layers of the series. It reflects upon similarities and differences between the target group and SVT Barn regarding identity construction and interaction. Finally, it presents a summary of the key values articulated by these media professionals, in SVT Barn's engagement with young citizens.

Platforms, formats, and target groups

Today, SVT Barn (previously 'Barnkanalen') is the name of both broadcast channel and online platform. However, all participants spoke of broadcasting as a bygone era. 'Back in broadcast times' and 'when we were still broadcast heavy' were common phrases. According to the *Kär* project leader, it was quite obvious already three years ago that broadcast was not the future, whereas now, it is just an 'ad window' for their online service Play (Efva interview). All new ideas and strategies are focused on Play, she said. The programs produced in Malmö represent slightly less than half of SVT Barn's total inhouse production (Petter interview). SVT Malmö visualizes their children's repertoire as constituting four worlds, representing four needs (Figure 1):

Figure 1. The four worlds and MAXA © SVT Barn Malmö

1) THE SVT BARN WORLD – suspense and imagination for the 7-year-old

2) THE CREATIVE WORLD – creativity, DIY and participation for the 9-year-old

3) THE ALEX & CARRO WORLD – fun, pranks and your friends for the 9-year-old

4) DRAMA TWEENIE – relations, identification and genuine for the 11-year-old

The worlds were conceptualized by the SVT Malmö Head of children's programming and do not represent SVT Barn as a whole (Petter interview). *Kär* eventually ended up in world four, but the road getting there was not straight.

The Malmö creative team – Hanna, Anna and Efva – were at the time of interviewing all part of MAXA, an ongoing project aiming to 'maximize' SVT Barn as an attractive online platform. MAXA content, 'small, hopefully cheap and effective productions', is supposed to 'strengthen profiles and add value to the regular shows' (Efva interview). MAXA is pictured as a fifth world, wedged in-between the four regular ones. According to the Malmö Head of programming, MAXA has two main purposes, 'one is to be a development hub and come up with the new stuff that can become big formats, and the second is to kind of keep an eye on the audience' (Petter interview).

The starting point for *Kär* was a commission circa two years ago, in which SVT Barn HQ in Stockholm wanted Malmö to come up with concepts for 'lots of TV for little money' (Hanna interview). The Commissioner called it an 'exploratory commission.' It did not necessarily have to be short-form, it could just as well be longer than regular formats, e.g. live transmissions. Format was more about certain characteristics that make content better suited for online engagement than broadcast. Genre was less important, the main 'tentpoles' were volume, frequency, stretch over time, and a small budget:

> Both in broadcast and also in VOD[5] services, there's always an ambition to build loyalty… and the easiest way to build loyalty… or one of them… is that the program has lots of episodes. (Safa interview)

SVT Barn was looking for a more continuous presence in the lives of young viewers. Hill refers to this as 'embedded engagement' (2019:121). If her concept of 'roaming audiences' highlights a more fleeting form of engagement, then embedded engagement is about how 'people form relationships with entertainment over time, in the context of their everyday lives' (ibid.). Indeed, ratings showed that *Kär* was mainly watched mornings before school, afternoons/evenings after school and then peaked during the weekends (Efva interview). *Kär* had become a ritual, embedded in the everyday lives of these viewers.

According to the Commissioner, who is also Head of channel, SVT Barn online has become a more 'YouTube-ish' platform than SVT Play and is therefore a more natural home for short-form content like *Kär* (Safa interview). This was echoed by the Malmö Head of children's programming, who said that SVT Barn might become SVT's YouTube, while SVT Play will be SVT's Netflix (Petter interview). The differentiation of their two online platforms is not only about age groups, then, but also about formats and viewing habits, with SVT Barn increasingly pictured as 'my TV' for solo viewing, and SVT Play as 'our TV' for social viewing. Even though SVT Barn were quick to point out that they on paper have 'no competitors' (Safa interview), since they are commercially independent, comparisons with YouTube and SVOD[6] services like Netflix were frequently being made in these interviews, a testimony to how positioning oneself in a

[5] Video On Demand
[6] Subscription Video On Demand

platform society ruled by the Big Five[7] (Van Dijck et al. 2018) necessitates playing by those rules to some extent, even for publicly funded, non-commercial PSM.

Kär was mostly watched on mobile screens (Efva interview). Indeed, a 'mobile first' policy was part of the series from its inception, with visuals and graphics being crafted to look good on the mobile phone (Anna interview). According to the Malmö Head of programming, 'mobile' and 'large screen' are becoming the preferred viewing choices, while computers and tablets ('the hybrids') are decreasing. Further, he said that the SVT Barn site was developed for five-year-olds, but that it is now mostly used by nine-year-olds. 'Adult' SVT Play has become the main home for toddlers (parents are often unaware that there is a separate application called SVT Barn), while SVT Barn is mainly used by children who are too old for it. 'It is not super clear', he said. One way of coming to terms with this problem could be if SVT Play was equipped with user profiles. Titles are already suggested based on previous viewings, so that 'you get a young SVT Play simply by watching in a young way', but there is plenty of room for improvement. Regarding 'Barnplay', he would have preferred if it was more 'needs based', like the four worlds, worlds that you could enter, 'not just lists like Netflix.'

We recognize the thinking from Jackson's PSM 3.0 (2020), e.g. how registration systems and user profiles can increase personalization, thereby potentially increasing universal appeal. The worlds are an interesting addition. If the Malmö branch had its way, then, SVT Barn would be a platform that pulls roaming audiences (Hill 2019) into the public service portal, away from the 'non-competitors', enabling further roaming and exploring while in public service land.

According to the Commissioner, digitalization has led to 'an increased niche focus on specific target groups, in more genres, and in more contexts.' For their digital transition they chose to focus on the youngest and the oldest children, he said. That is when they started to churn out drama series such as 'Klassen', 'Jobbigt', 'Vi 4ever', 'Snart 13' and now *Kär*. After that age group, or towards the end of it, there is a sharp drop. Among 9-11-year-olds they have a reach around 70-80%, while for 12-14 it is 40% (Safa interview).

The Malmö Head of programming for children (and also entertainment and comedy) expressed frustration with the lack of interest in funding teen content. Other Nordic PSM have specialized youth departments, he said, often with roots

[7] Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft

in youth radio channel P3, ‘with expertise on how the target group works’ (see Andersen & Sundet 2019), whereas SVT does not. After the successes of ‘Festen’ and ‘Eagles’ for the 16-18 segment, both pitched by the Malmö Head of programming, he thought they would be making five to six such drama series a year, but that has not happened. ‘SVT basically has problems reaching people from 12-50’, he said. The current policy is to focus on the upper half of that problem, hoping that engagement will ‘spill down’ onto younger audiences. In his view, it should be the other way around. The current attitude is that:

> ‘They will come back after they’ve been out playing.’ I don’t understand that thinking. If I’d been CEO, I’d have prioritized differently. (Petter interview)

The Project leader suggests that there might have been a lack of confidence in SVT, that youth have simply been deemed too difficult (Efva interview). Indeed, children’s TV has traditionally been considered a ‘market failure’ sector, unless global audiences are targeted and revenue from licensed merchandise can be reeled in, and the youth market has traditionally been considered ‘too small’ to be interesting to investors (Steemers 2017:42). For the Commissioner, it is not a question of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ anymore, if the young can be reached by public service. The big question to him is instead:

> How can we get that job done outside drama as genre? Because we know now that we can reach this group through drama. […] However, outside that genre, few things work. (Safa interview)

Variation and genre breadth are also part of SVT’s remit: ‘We can’t spend all our money on drama’ (Safa interview). *Kär* is situated right at the end of the age range where SVT Barn still considers themselves relevant. The Malmö Head of programming notes matter-of-factly, but with a hint of frustration, that their mission currently extends only to the *Kär* target group. On paper, they are not expected to serve 13-15-year-olds. How well they manage to be relevant to that group, then, is ‘exactly as well as we invest: nothing’ (Petter interview).

There seems to be a blind spot in SVT policy for viewers above the age of *Kär*. New shows are in the pipeline. Hanna Lagerberg’s next project, for example, is a drama aimed at teenage boys (Hanna interview), a project that will not be ‘held back by the restrictions of the SVT Barn platform’ (Efva interview). However,

there is still no specialized youth TV department in sight, as in Danish and Norwegian PSM.

Data-driven creativity, trust, and glancing at others

The Malmö Head of children's programming said that TV by tradition is a 'gut feeling business', meaning that producers and commissioners base their ideas on what they like, or used to like themselves (Petter interview). That is how he himself started out 28 years ago. 'I don't believe in that anymore, at all', he said. Today, he is instead 'obsessed with online statistics.' Public service is not when they make programs, 'it happens when people watch public service.' If nobody watches, there is no public service. 'Consumption equals relevance… if we disregard all other values', said the Commissioner (Safa interview). Audiences will simply not choose content they do not want to watch. Aside from the market language, indicated here is that SVT Barn has chosen a trends-led or audience-led approach. It is not up to SVT to moralize about what children should or should not watch. Audiences decide themselves what is relevant for them.

The Malmö Head of programming praised the *Kär* creative team for being 'data-driven', meaning that they base ideas and creative decisions on 'audience data.' He particularly commended Hanna Lagerberg, who came to SVT from a digital media background, 'without the pre-conceptions of how it should be in TV production', who took a genuine interest in target group behavior, partly by studying the numbers and graphs:

> To be data literate in online statistics, you need to have been doing it for a while, so that it's in your spine how every show looks and how the curves for those shows look. And she understands how to do that… few producers do. (Petter interview)

'Data' appears to be the prestige word here, used perhaps to demonstrate that they are a player in platform society, who understands the rules of the game, signaling the desire to be perceived as an up-and-coming PSM 3.0. Being 'data-driven', according to Jackson, was partly about basing decisions on data, partly about a fluid, agile way of working, an 'approach that is alien to most producers accustomed to working in a linear way within television and radio' (2020:210). 'Data-driven' to SVT Barn seems to be more about being audience orientated.

In the executives-creatives dialogues, trust was key. The Commissioner said that his job is not to dictate in detail what people do, but to 'frame creativity':

> I want to use *their* creativity and *their* knowledge about the target group… It is often a bad idea asking someone to produce something that you came up with yourself… because TV is a lot about ownership and the amount of soul you put into it. (Safa interview)

Trust between colleagues and believing that productions will benefit from producers being entrusted with responsibility and 'ownership' (market language again) were put forth as key values in SVT Barn production cultures.

Kär was not made in isolation. SVT Barn often spoke about repertoire, rather than single shows in isolation. References were frequently made to their other drama series, 'Klassen' most prominent among them, but also 'Jobbigt' which is similar in format to *Kär* (short clips, published almost daily). New programs are partly planned to differ from, or complement, existing programs. It is the repertoire as a whole that is supposed to have universal appeal:

> … we don't make everything for everyone. We make this for you, and this for you, and this for you, and in total we hope that there will be something for everyone. (Efva interview)

To stay relevant, PSM must keep an eye on what goes on in other parts of the industry. It has been noted that TV is getting increasingly cheap *and* increasingly expensive, as 'budgets are gravitating towards either massively high value and production or YouTube do it yourself (DIY)' (Sørensen 2018:509-510). The Commissioner compared influencer Therese Lindgren with Netflix hit series 'The Crown', the former super cheap to produce, the latter astronomically expensive, both with a huge reach in Sweden. For a publicly funded company in a small country who could never afford making The Crown, 'the cheap production' is where they must explore (Safa interview). 'Malins vlog' and 'Alex & Carro' are examples of cheap 'public service vlogs' meeting the MAXA criteria. *Kär* ended up outside the MAXA domain but was characterized by the same kind of 'YouTube-ish' thinking (volume, frequency, cheap, online only etc.).

Julie Andem's *SKAM* (NRK 2015-2017) came up frequently, referred to as *the* 'game changer' in teen drama. *SKAM* proved that public service still can be relevant to teens, and that relevance can be achieved through relatively small

budgets (Andersen & Sundet 2019:2). Further, it demonstrated how an intergenerational audience could be reached through transmedia storytelling and recombinatory formats (Duggan 2020:1005-1006). Hanna and Anna also mentioned Lina Mannheimer's *Parning* (2019) as a source of inspiration, a documentary about two people in their early twenties in an off-and-on romantic relationship over distance:

> I became totally inspired by it, because I think it portrays something I haven't seen portrayed in that way, and that's digital communication. I think that was done in such a cool way. (Hanna interview)

A large part of *Parning* consists of chatting, facetiming, checking each other out on social media ('stalking') etc. That way of performing personal relationships online was something Hanna and Anna wanted to explore between a younger couple, as young as they come (Hanna interview).

Crafting *Kär* close to the audience

According to the SVT Malmö Head of children's programming, the young:

> … are difficult to reach *if* we assume that they are like we were when we were kids. […] That's the simple trick we came up with at SVT Barn, to not think that they are like us. Because they're not. (Petter interview)

He continued by saying that the gap between children and adults today is bigger than it has been since the 1950s, a time 'when adults wore hats and spoke in a nasal way and did not understand what the youngsters were up to.' This seems in line with Chambers idea about personalized mobile technologies amplifying generational segregation (2013:101). In a slide from a media habits investigation conducted a few years ago, we see two kinds of lives represented in graphics (Figure 2).

For the parental generation, 'media' floats in a bubble next to 'family', 'friends', 'job', 'hobby' and 'exercise.' For the 12-15-year-old, 'media' *is* the bubble in which all other areas (family, friends, school, hobby, exercise) are embedded. 'They swim in it, you see, it's like the bloodstream' (Petter interview). This seems to echo Deuze's 'media life' (2012), of people living *in*, rather than *with* media, or the

‘deep mediatization’ of Couldry and Hepp (2017) in which social life and mediated social life are so intertwined that they can no longer be separated.

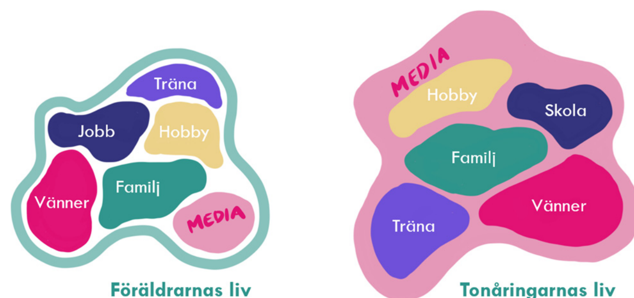

Figure 2. ‘Media is the glue’, by Augur: The Human Experience Agency © SVT Barn Malmö

How did SVT try to bridge this generational gap (between producers and audiences), in the case of *Kär*? Step one was audience research, starting with casual chats with children in schools and libraries, and by ‘hanging out where kids hang out’ in social media (Efva interview). Anna and Hanna found that love and smartphones were themes that engaged. ‘There was this twelve-year-old boy asking “What if we could peek inside a girl’s Snapchat?”, and then the idea grew from there’ (Anna interview).

Chats were followed by in-depth interviews, conducted by Anna with ca fifteen people between the age of 12-14 who claimed they had been in a relationship. The children were asked the same questions that the writer-director duo asked their fictional characters, Adam and Bianca, when crafting them. The questions were inspired by Laurie Hutzler’s ‘Character Map’, a character-driven dramaturgical model that Julie Andem used for *SKAM*, and that Maria Karlsson Thörnqvist used for ‘Festen’:

> I asked them questions about who they are, what they are afraid of, what they hope for in their lives, this thing about being in a relationship, I asked them to describe it… how it ended… how much you share with your parents, and how much you share with friends. (Anna interview)

One of the questions was: 'What would you say is the greatest misconception about you?' (Hanna interview). The answer is that character's mask, 'which might not be the true you, but it is the first thing that meets the outside world and, you know, how people see you.' As an example, Bianca's mask is 'Little Ms Perfect.' That is what people in her surroundings seem to think about her, and perhaps someone she pretends to be at times, but we as viewers learn that there is more to her than that.

This is classic Erving Goffman territory, juggling front stage and backstage selves (1959). Goffman used the metaphor of theatre to explain human social interaction, such as putting on various masks for various social situations. Indeed, the Swedish translation of his book is called *Jaget och maskerna: en studie i vardagslivets dramatik*[8] (Bergström 1974). The theory is about performance, impression management and life as social drama, also referred to as dramaturgical sociology or dramaturgical analysis.

Hutzler's Character Map was used again when child stars Eva Jumatate and Oscar Stembridge had been cast, asking them the same questions about fears, desires and misconceptions. The characters were then crafted not too far from the actors. 'When you're that young and inexperienced, it's easier to play a character who is close to oneself' (Hanna interview). In preproduction, then, the writer-director duo approached the younger generation through dialogue and interaction, setting the stage for relevance.

From their target group investigation, Anna and Hanna picked three talkative girls and formed a reference group that they would consult throughout the production:

> [Hanna] would send stuff to them all the time, like 'OK, if a guy asks if you want to be his girlfriend, how would he write it?' […] or when it ends, can you write like this? 'No, you can't, that would be really weird.' (Anna interview)

[8] 'The I and the masks. A study of the drama of everyday life'

They enjoyed being ‘nerdy’ with details, asking the reference group about everything from abbreviations used in chats, to names of contacts in their phonebooks, which were often not their real names (Anna interview). ‘Such things are fun, and they contribute to the feeling of authenticity’ (Hanna interview). In a RYA article, using reference groups is referred to as working with junior editors, ‘a way to give the audience agency and get important input on the current lives of children’ (Christensen & Redvall 2019). The concept could be extended to the actual editor of *Kär*, a young person ‘not too far away from that reality’ (Efva interview). Even though most of the design of the digital communication came from Hanna, the junior editor would insist on keeping misspellings and such things in the Snapchat graphics, to make it look more authentic. Details matter when striving to be ‘close to the audience.’

The layers of *Kär*

The Commissioner said that ‘the digital layer’ strengthens suspense, and that ‘text as a layer on top of video has long been underestimated’ (Safa interview). The Malmö Head of programming was very enthusiastic about how Hanna and Anna handled the digital layer of *Kär*. He gave the example of the first ‘scrolling episode’ when all we see is Bianca scrolling on her phone, how we read drama into the pace of her scrolling, what images she stops at, the way she scrolls back up, and so on. ‘It is like being inside her brain’ (Petter interview).

Marshall McLuhan claimed already in the 1960s that ‘all technologies are extensions of our physical and nervous systems’ (cited in Moores 2014). *Kär* indeed portrays its main characters as living in symbiosis with their smartphones. We see Adam and Bianca ‘snapping’, ‘facetiming’, ‘stalking’, posting updates, recording, self-publishing, checking likes, sending images and videos to each other constantly. Their digital communication is represented as a prime example of ‘*anytime, anywhere, always on* connectivity’ (Vincent & Haddon 2018). By comparing poses and expressions with mobile screen action, we are invited as spectators of front and backstage management of selves (Goffman 1959). Being strictly realistic in ‘scrolling’ and ‘snapping’ episodes would have entailed showing little or hardly any facial expressions. That simply did not work on screen. The directors had to exaggerate reactions, and ‘it would still feel right’ (Hanna interview).

According to the Project leader, tweens are super-fast on their smartphones but inexperienced emotionally (Efva interview). This is one reason 'the music layer' was given such a prominent position. Twelve-year-old expressions of love might not be so advanced, therefore music was used to 'maximize the drama.' Adam and Bianca 'could be much more dramatic both when they are angry and when they are in love, with the help of music' (Anna interview). Songs were selected partly based on popularity within the target group, but mostly to illustrate story points. It was important that the majority of songs were in Swedish, so that young viewers could follow the story (Hanna interview). SVT Barn needs to always keep in mind that many viewers are younger than the target group (Efva interview). Another criterium for the music was that it should feel 'here and now' (Anna interview).

Kär is an interesting mix of everyday life and 'larger than life', a bit like a musical will switch between spoken parts and musical performance, or backstage and 'on stage.' Anna and Hanna talked about wanting to make their series 'goalsy', something elevated, something to strive for and dream about. Anna reflects on their main characters:

> Well, they're kind of 'A Kids', aren't they? Super talented singers, really cute, they're like… in that way, maybe we are showing an ideal… It's a balance act, to strengthen kids in various ways without becoming moralistic, or giving them too unattainable ideals… How many twelve-year-old boys would make an 'I'm your biggest fan' [music] video to their girlfriends? In a way, that is raising the bar a lot… (Anna interview)

Ratings showed that episodes featuring full music videos had more unfinished views than other episodes (Efva interview). Music, stardom and glossiness did not seem to constitute the main appeal of *Kär*.

Looking for the *i* in digital interaction

The smartphone culture of *Kär* can be situated within that celebratory, perhaps even idealized representation of digitalized youth (Mascheroni 2018). There is no trace of 'the child at risk' discourse, such as addiction or anti-social behavior. Adam and Bianca are *more* social through their smartphones, not less. The Commissioner and Head of SVT Barn says that it has partly to do with striving

for relevance, but also with ‘an anti-authoritarian model of thinking’ and ‘a core democratic idea’:

> A large part of Scandinavian TV culture for kids… is built on a philosophy of not pointing the finger [...] One should not patronize kids, not be on a mission to raise kids… what is bad for them and what is… you know, but instead having a more affirmative attitude towards life. (Safa interview)

In the world of *Kär*, smartphones are unproblematic devices, even when Adam and Bianca lie sleepless in bed because the other did not reply. Difficulty sleeping was otherwise one of the risks outlined, as were expectations of constant availability and reciprocity (Mascheroni 2018; Chambers 2013). Instead, this was put forth as a main appeal:

> I think that one of them is recognition… and intimacy… That you’re allowed into someone’s bedroom when that person can’t sleep, because he or she didn’t get a reply on a snap. I don’t think we’ve seen that being portrayed a lot for this target group in Sweden. (Hanna interview)

Intimacy is key here. Interestingly, the series was going to be called ‘Distance Relationship’ at first, then ‘You and Me’ for quite a while, before eventually becoming *Kär* (Efva interview). Already in the evolution of the title, we see a movement from distance to closeness. Originally, the characters were to live far apart, but the writer-director duo realized that the drama would become more interesting ‘if they could see each other at least once a week, and we get to see when they are close to each other, and there is tension in the air, and “will they kiss or not?” you know…’ (Hanna interview). SVT’s ratings showed that episodes featuring additional characters, or when Adam and Bianca meet physically, were more popular than ‘snapchat episodes’ (Efva interview). The core appeal of a series about a distance relationship and digital communication, then, turned out to be ‘old-fashioned’ human contact and interaction.

In interactionist theory, social worlds are constructed by the people inhabiting them and interacting in them (Adler & Adler 1998:10). Adam and Bianca’s co-created world is quite autonomous, however:

> Bianca has got one foot in family life and one foot in a world of friends that is starting to exert more pressure, and all the time… even in the relationship with

> Adam, all the time she gets… exposed to have to make choices about who she is, to kind of try to find that voice, what you want yourself and who you are. (Anna interview)

Chambers saw an increased focus on agency and selectivity in personal relationships as a sign of the time and culture we live in (2013:169). In Goffman's interactionism, the self is not fixed but fluctuates according to who one is interacting with (1959). Bianca puts on different masks for different others. Who does she want to be? The mask she wears when she is with Adam (the outsider), or the mask she wears for Oliver (the popular guy)?

Seen through Frosh's 'identity crisis' (1991) and Hall's 'becoming' (1996), such a search would potentially go on forever. Luckily for Bianca, she exists in a TV drama with a clear beginning, middle and end. At the end of *Kär*, Bianca finally confronts her Mum, portrayed as a strict, demanding, and unforgiving parent throughout the series. Bianca, who had been forced to give up love for being 'a good girl', follows her heart and chooses Adam, the only person who ever asked her what *she* wants. As it turns out, they both want to be the selves they are in *their* co-constructed world. They are able to maintain these identities only in relation to, and in interaction with each other.

Likewise, SVT Barn can only be the public service they want to be when they are in touch with their audiences, when there is contact. And there was contact this time. 72 000 online ratings per episode are decent numbers for a cheap, 'experimental' online drama. *Kär* is a small piece in the larger puzzle of SVT Barn's identity search in the contemporary digital media environment. Unlike the tween characters of *Kär* and its audiences, however, who will eventually complete the transition, SVT Barn must stay in perpetual transition and always be 'in process' (Hall 1996), based on dialogue and interaction, if they want to remain relevant.

SVT Barn values

What values are most important for SVT Barn in their digital engagement with the young? The Commissioner said that they are basically identical to the ones in their public service remit, highlighting the democratic and egalitarian values (Safa interview). He adds the slogan for SVT as a company, to make audiences more inquisitive and involved, 'especially important in pandemic times.' McElroy and Noonan (2018) mentioned the importance of digital PSM for small nations and

small languages. Indeed, the Commissioner (and Head of SVT Barn) emphasized the Swedish language. That is the one value that nobody else in the world cares about, he said, speaking of it as culture, a common set of references, a necessity for social and national cohesion in a fragmented society. 'Everything that's in Swedish is close to the Swedish audience.' Further, *Kär* is an inhouse production, homegrown and small-scale:

> I'm of the opinion that… in this big SVT hat… my role is to advance the medium, through small things and not just buy big formats… others can do that. (Safa interview)

For the creative team, being perceived as being on the children's side was important, as was taking the things they care about seriously, trying to keep a 'tween perspective' throughout the drama:

> One might say that we portrayed Adam's Dad as so nice and Bianca's Mum as so mean… when in fact, the things she says also make sense. It's not complete rubbish… but I think that in that age, that's how you would experience it… I think we've been faithful to that. (Hanna interview)

> What do children's lives look like in the digital? To take that very seriously, and let it be a part, a big part of the story, not just an extra layer. (Anna interview)

Here we see the affirmative values come into play of not patronizing kids, as well as being audience-oriented, making programs for 'them' and not for 'us', in line with the SVT Malmö Head of children's programming and his emphasis on the media life of this generation.

There were reflections on reality versus idealism. Adam and Bianca are well-behaved tweens (most of the time). Their digital communication contains hardly any swear words, no 'inappropriate' pictures, they do not talk behind people's backs. When asked about the sweetness, the Malmö Head of programming said that:

> …there is so much talk about children's roughness and bullying… but the majority of what goes on online isn't like that. And that's important. If we were to portray everything that goes on online as we usually do in the adult world… that it's hard and raw and problematic, then they wouldn't recognize themselves. (Petter interview)

In retrospect, the writer-director duo might have preferred some more 'edge':

> We felt, both me and Hanna, that we would've liked to turn up the drama some more, that is, in situations when they're angry at each other, we would've enjoyed if they were a bit more challenging in the language, and more like… you know, getting revenge, getting back at each other, do things they know will hurt, that kind of thing. (Anna interview)

There were discussions between creatives and executives regarding 'bad things' in *Kär*. For example, Adam and Bianca have a go at smoking, they break into a restricted area, Bianca drinks wine, and Adam is a shoplifter. As the editor-in-chief,[9] the Malmö Head of programming must weigh every such inclusion against the risk of being reported by the Swedish Broadcasting Commission.[10] The paragraph called 'the special impact of the medium' in their license agreement states that they cannot encourage or inspire dangerous or criminal activities (MPRT 2020b:7). Wine drinking, for example, can be included, but 'we're not allowed to portray it as being all pleasant' (Petter interview). Bianca tries wine (ep. 25, 12 Sept 2020) but says that she does not like it. When asked if she wants more, she says 'no thank you', whereas her friend Clara has another sip.

While the creatives might have preferred less disclaimers, they expressed an appreciation of these discussions, as they keep them 'on their toes', having to continuously reflect on what it means to be public service:

> It's a really interesting balance act. If we get too scared, we'll lose in relevance. But if we're too… if we don't take our public service role seriously, at the other end of the spectrum, then maybe we'll lose in trust, so in a way, that's where we work all the time. (Anna interview)

Here we see how dialogues become sites for articulating, performing and negotiating values of credibility, relevance and trust (Hill 2021). These are not just words in a policy document, they must be constantly re-articulated and re-invented in living, breathing production cultures.

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[9] 'Ansvarig utgivare' in Swedish.
[10] 'Granskningsnämnden', part of MPRT since 2010.

SVT Barn apparently takes their social responsibility seriously. They want children to watch their shows because they think they are good for them. Youth drama 'Klassen' is a point in case:

> … a super important program, because it provides kids with tools to handle everything from… you know, if you watch all episodes of 'Klassen' you will have learned everything from handling bullying, unrequited love, a mother who drinks, a friend who has suicidal thoughts, *everything* is there. (Petter interview)

This is public service as a 'public good' (Bolin 2016), almost as a public health institution, aiming to provide some sense of what a good life can be. The 'goalsy' approach chosen for *Kär* is somewhat different, but still not intended as complete escapism, more about helping, and showing that things can get better after adversity (Anna interview). In addition to these values of empowering and comforting, SVT Barn hopes to inspire children to find a passion. If children are allowed to develop their interests, discovering something they love to do outside school, 'it will be a great protection against all sorts of things' (Anna interview).

John Corner points out that TV by tradition is a social medium. If film is more associated with aesthetic values, then the social values of television are 'expected to show across all the genres' (Corner & Roscoe 2016:158). Indeed, social values appear to represent a strong motivational force for SVT Barn personnel. The small-budget documentary series 'Astrid becomes a big sister' (SVT 2015) was mentioned as an example:

> All it's about is a girl who's going to get a sibling, but that's kind of… it has such an important role to play. Families can watch it prior to having another child and prepare. What other company would do that? (Anna interview)

To the producer, that is the essence of being public service, staying close to the audience through research, being relevant. Further, there is 'some kind of spine too, standing up for the small person… trying to mirror all of Sweden…' (Anna interview). Such altruistic ambitions require that people actually watch public service, something these professionals are very aware they cannot take for granted:

> I would love to see more youth content… but honestly, I think that some of them, we lose much earlier… like those watching nothing but Netflix from an early age or so… it probably goes for the whole age span… How do we attract people for

> whom SVT isn't a natural place to search for 'What should I watch today?' … it's a job that needs to be done for everyone. (Anna interview)

An increased focus on interaction and dialogue could help SVT Barn in their quest for relevance. Interaction as a value in itself comes out clearly in the interviews, as well as in other areas of the SVT repertoire, e.g. in initiatives such as 'Sverige möts' in which people with opposing views meet 'irl' to counteract increased polarization, or 'fikamedsvt.se' in which audiences are invited to 'digital coffee sessions' to discuss how SVT can improve. In short, SVT Barn and the young need to keep talking to each other. Today, PSM need the citizens of a nation to function in society, more than the other way around.

Conclusion

How and why is SVT Barn striving for relevance as an online platform?

SVT Barn is searching for ways to define and strengthen its identity as PSM in digitalized society, aiming to regain ground it lost or never had, in emerging media landscapes where young audiences roam and decide for themselves what is relevant for them. Informing, educating and entertaining the young in a saturated media environment has never been more complex, due to heavy competition from YouTube, Netflix, gaming and social media. SVT Barn is doing better in the tween segment after transitioning online. However, towards the end of that age range, there is a sharp drop in engagement.

Generational difference was emphasized, and that this difference needs to be understood in order to reach the young. The parental generation was seen as living *with* media, and the young as living *in* media (Deuze 2012; Couldry & Hepp 2017). Indeed, Adam and Bianca are pictured as 'swimming' in their mediatized world, with smartphones as natural extensions of themselves (McLuhan 1964), as they 'snap', 'facetime' and 'instagram' their way through the series, as naturally as eating or sleeping.

'Broadcast is dead' was essentially the message from SVT Barn, at least regarding Generation Z. Like many other European PSM divisions for children and youth, an 'online first' policy was seen as a basic survival feature. If PSM were to remain

invisible to children and youth as they mature into adult consumers, it could threaten the very existence of PSM. As the SVT Malmö Head of children's programming said, 'if nobody watches there is no public service', and the raison d'être disappears. SVT Barn is only 'somebody' when there is contact.

SVT Barn online is striving for relevance through specific online formats, and niche content for more well-defined target groups. In addition to 'online first', SVT Barn used a 'mobile first' strategy for *Kär*, with the smartphone perceived as the preferred viewing device of the target group. The series was crafted to look good and work well on mobile screens and fit an 'embedded engagement' (Hill 2019) mode of consumption, encouraging daily engagement with a 'media snacks' format, stretched out over time.

That PSM are competing (for attention) in a platform society (Van Dijck et al. 2018) was evident, e.g. when the SVT Barn website was envisioned as 'SVT's YouTube' for solo viewing, and SVT Play as 'SVT's Netflix' for social viewing. Further personalization of 'adult' SVT Play through user profiles and logins could possibly result in more nuanced content and increased universality of services, as suggested by Jackson (2020). The question is, however, with such limited budgets, how Nordic PSM could ever be able to produce diverse enough content to meet increasingly diverse publics and taste preferences? Glancing too much at Netflix and YouTube seems to be a bit of a dead end in that regard.

How does SVT Barn produce online content 'close to the audience'?

The *Kär* creative team was commended for being 'data-driven', i.e. that they base their creative thinking on target group trends and behavior. 'Data-literacy' was put forth as a highly valued capacity, to be able to understand the numbers, and to see the people in graphs and statistics. As noted by McElroy and Noonan (2018), there is prestige in the term 'digital', with media companies striving to be perceived as innovative players within the media industries. 'Data' appears as *the* prestige word of the day for SVT Barn. However, it seemed to be more about audience-orientation than fluid and agile production methods.

Audience research for *Kär* included 'hanging out where kids hang out' in social media, casual chats with children in libraries and schools, and in-depth interviews with some 12-14-year-olds. The core idea for *Kär*, 'love and mobile phones', came out of this research, indicating that they were indeed dealing with a 'mobile youth

culture' (Mascheroni, in Vincent & Haddon 2018). The dramaturgical model for *SKAM* and 'Festen' was used, asking youngsters about fears, hopes and perceived misconceptions about themselves – their 'masks' – reminiscent of Goffman's impression management and front and backstage selves (1959). The same questions were asked of the tween actors, when crafting the fictional characters. Using 'junior editors' (Christensen & Redvall 2019) was another method for approaching the 'tweenie world', forming a small reference group to consult on target group behavior. Further, the editor of *Kär* was young and contributed to making the digital communication feel authentic. In such ways, the producers were working 'closeness' into the series, step by step.

Music was given a prominent position to 'maximize' the drama, to make up for the inexperience and inability of the target group to express deeper meanings of love, to paint a picture of a 'goalsy' world, something to strive for. Dreaming about becoming famous, through self-promotion online and self-publishing could be assumed to be 'close' to a tween world of YouTubers and influencers. However, 'the music layer' does not seem to have been the main attraction of the series, as seen in the higher ratings for episodes featuring additional characters and more 'irl' scenes. It was rather that audiences seemed hungry for 'offline intimacy' and real social interaction, perhaps reflecting pandemic times.

The smartphone culture of *Kär* is positive and pro-social, celebrating increased independence from parental influence, emphasizing opportunities for performing selves and conducting personal relationships (Chambers 2013). The *anytime, anywhere, always on* connectivity (Vincent & Haddon 2018) was put forth as recognizable and appealing, not as something problematic. It was said that it is not up to SVT Barn to moralize about what is good or bad for children, instead they want to communicate an affirmative attitude towards life. This in turn was said to be based on an anti-authoritarian, democratic core idea, a tradition of Scandinavian children's TV. SVT Barn is certainly part of a Nordic 'media welfare state' (Syvertsen et al. 2014), a concept that strongly emphasized the democratic values and functions of PSM. The celebratory representation of screen culture can also be seen as a strategic decision, as the smartphone was perceived as the preferred media device of the target group.

What are the key values in SVT Barn's digital engagement with young citizens?

Key values were identified as identical with the classic public service values: to inform, educate and entertain, as well as independence from commercial and political interests. The slogan of SVT as a company, to make more inquisitive and involved, was said to be even more important in pandemic times. 'Swedishness' was singled out as the only value that nobody else in the world cares about, meaning that any program containing the Swedish language, contemporary Swedish youth culture and actors should be considered 'close to the audience.' The importance of small-scale, local and homegrown was highlighted, in line with McElroy and Noonan's emphasis on the importance of digital platforms for PSM in small nations with small languages (2018), and PSM as an intervention, acting as a bulwark against foreign, commercial competition (Potter & Steemers 2017).

Being on the children's side, keeping a 'tween perspective', was seen as crucial. Ambitions of helping, supporting and encouraging children were articulated, saying that e.g., the development of a hobby outside school and the family sphere could offer protection in an age group exposed to increasing pressure. These values can be summarized as empowerment, encouragement and hope.

Slightly different views were put forth regarding 'bad things' in an SVT Barn drama. The creatives might have preferred some more 'edge', whereas the editor-in-chief needs to keep an eye on 'the special impact of the medium' paragraph in their license agreement to avoid being reported by the Swedish Broadcasting Commission. However, these discussions were appreciated by the SVT personnel, as they force them to continuously reflect on what credibility, relevance and trust mean in a public service context. Healthy debates and the ability to openly express opposing views emerged as other key values in SVT Barn production cultures, situated in a Swedish tradition of public sector transparency.

The view of PSM as a 'public good' (Syvertsen 1999; Bolin 2016) was evident, in particular regarding their flagship youth drama 'Klassen', which was said to provide children with tools to handle all sorts of difficult social situations. Commercial independence was also valued in the sense that it can actually offer more creative freedom, especially when crafting small shows intended to help, empower and prepare young citizens for various life events and social challenges. SVT Barn covered basically all the PSM expectations, such as carrying the torch

of Enlightenment, being socially responsible, and promoting democratic values and diversity. These expectations rest on the assumption that people actually watch public service TV, something SVT Barn personnel know cannot be taken for granted. Budget cuts, staff reductions, and slimmed down organizations (Donders 2019) further complicate these challenges.

Looking ahead

The original idea for this project was to listen to *Kär* producers *and* tween audiences and to be that 'bridge across the industry-audience divide' (Hill 2019:16). A natural way forward, then, would be to complement the study with a thorough audience investigation in the shape of semi-structured focus group interviews, listening to how tweens view mediated representations of their generation. SVT Barn said so themselves, 'current online measuring tools are not sharp enough.' They need to talk to audiences to continue to grow within the digital ecology, with the goal of being able to deliver nuanced, relevant content. As the dialogue between PSM and young people cannot be taken for granted, it needs to be actively sought and budgeted for.

Because what is the alternative? Positions would return to 'when adults wore hats and spoke in a nasal way and did not understand what the youngsters were up to' (Petter interview). *Kär* proves once again that PSM *can* reach the young. When there is 'good' content for them, they come. Being 'data driven' for SVT Barn is really about being 'audience driven', one of their most clearly articulated values. Communicating with audiences through the SVT Barn Instagram account is not enough. More 'old-school' interaction is needed to provide the data required for an up-to-date SVT Barn 3.0 and an improved intergenerational dialogue. Maybe it is time to update that classic trio of public service values with a fourth one? Inform and *interact*, educate and entertain.

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Public interest in the pandemic: A comparative framing analysis of Australian COVID-19 public health interventions

Joseph Thwaites

Introduction

Alongside the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, the World Health Organisation (WHO 2020) declared an 'infodemic', defined as 'an overabundance of information, both online and offline.' The use of this term represents the significant shift in how health information, particularly during times of crisis, is circulated, interpreted, discussed, and produced.

For years, scholars have emphasised the central role the news media play in the construction of reality and setting of agendas for citizen-consumers. Numerous framing effects and agenda-setting studies have demonstrated a robust correlation between types of news content consumed and audiences' priorities and understandings of events, phenomena, and individuals (Nelson, Clawson & Oxley 1997). Such research suggests two key suppositions, on which this thesis rests: the news media play a key role in the social construction of reality, and thus, news matters (Monahan 2010:4-5). The WHO's concurrent declaration of pandemic and infodemic is illustrative of these two points: COVID-19 is not only a biological reality, it's become a mediated construct—one which produces a real impact on how citizen-consumers think, feel, and behave.

Hall et al (1978:58) describe how the news media can be seen as a secondary definer of important social issues, mediating messages produced by primary definers, such as governments and expert arbiters, into a product for public consumption. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the news media have played precisely this role, disseminating policy updates and acting as a key conduit for expert medical information and advice. Beyond this, the news media have also challenged these primary definers, playing the democratic role of amplifying the voices of those concerned with government (in)action, as well as individuals affected by COVID-19 and public health measures such as border closures, mandatory quarantines, and lockdowns. This mediating role—of acting as a mouthpiece for both government experts and the broader public—creates a tension in the news between official and unofficial narratives and frames. In line with framing research, this tension likely impacts and influences the ways in which the public interpret and understand the health crisis (Wise & Brewer 2010).

This thesis aims to explore this phenomenon through a case study focusing on the second wave of COVID-19 in Victoria, Australia, which occurred in the second half of 2020. It pursues a dialectical understanding of how Australian digital news outlets negotiated competing discourses of public health (in its top-down imposition, utilitarianism, and privileging of science and data) and journalism (in its tendency towards an open flow of information and an egalitarian representation of public matters). This is investigated through a comparative analysis of the framing of public health interventions by the Victorian State Government in their daily press conferences, and Australian digital news outlets in their reporting on these press conferences and the interventions announced therein. The thesis adopts a mixed methods approach to framing, including both an in-depth qualitative framing analysis and a quantitative content analysis hierarchically clustered in SPSS. Methodologically, the research is both constructionist and critical, looking not only at the mediated construction of events and restrictions, but also the discursive elements and dynamics of power implicated in the case study. It aims to consider matters of media diversity, disciplinary autonomy, definitional struggle over what constitutes the public interest, and political partisanship as it relates to COVID-19 reporting.

Case study: Victoria's second wave of COVID-19

Like many of the world's island countries, Australia, early in the COVID-19 pandemic, adopted a COVID-19 suppression approach. However, in June 2020, there were significant breaches in the hotel quarantine system in Victoria. These breaches led to Victoria's second wave of COVID-19, which was combatted by months of strict lockdowns and restrictions in the state.

During this period, the Victorian Labor Government, led by Premier Daniel Andrews, held daily press conferences updating the public on case numbers, deaths, and changing public health policies. These conferences provided a daily stream of information from the State Government to the public, and were widely reported on, with the Australian news media acting as a key conduit for circulating the fast-changing situation in the state.

This is a rich case study for the exploration of the dialectic between public health and journalism, as decisions were made in the interests of public health but were widely contested for infringements on individual freedoms and economic and social impacts. It is particularly interesting as reporting on the crisis was subject to much public and political invective, and Victoria has a Labor State Government amongst the Liberal Federal Government and a highly concentrated Liberal-leaning media landscape (McKnight 2012).

Research Questions

1. In what ways are the public health interventions imposed in response to Victoria's second wave of COVID-19 framed by:
    a. The Victorian State Government, in daily press conferences?
    b. Australian digital news outlets?
2. Do significant differences exist between the framing of public health interventions by the two sources, and if so, to what extent are these differences characterised by the distinct ethics, norms, and practices of the disciplines of public health and journalism?
3. Does the framing of public health interventions differ between news outlets, and if so, to what extent are these differences characterised by the commercial trends towards dramatization, sensationalism, and political partisanship in the news media?

Literature Review

This paper adopts a dialectical approach, looking particularly at the knowledge and value systems of public health and journalism, both of which are considered 'autonomous practices which serve the public interest' (Briggs & Hallin 2016:263). Between the two fields, there is definitional struggle regarding what constitutes the service of the 'public interest', as well as the ethics and norms that underscore the pursuit of that service (Bowen & Li 2018:232). The dialectical approach is therefore appropriate, as it investigates 'variables or forces that clash with each other and must be reconciled for health communication to succeed to some degree' (Thompson, Cussella & Southwell 2014:6). Approaching the problem by first understanding the ethics, norms, and practices which characterise the two fields of knowledge, the framing analysis can then be interpreted with a clearer understanding of how these discursive elements manifest in the press conferences and news reporting on COVID-19 public health interventions.

Journalism

One of the central ideas in liberal journalistic discourse is the role of the news media as society's public sphere, through which journalists pursue truth, diversity of opinion, and independence to serve the public interest (Hallin & Mancini 2004). Allowing government or private control over the freedom of information is seen as giving corruption room to flourish, and ultimately injurious to processes of democracy (Herman & Chomsky 1988:66; Lawrence 2010:280). In this sense, 'Good journalism matters because it is a bulwark against both industry and state influence over media content and agendas' (Jordens, Lipworth & Kerridge 2013:448).

This public sphere/public interest ethos is rooted in a set of ethical guidelines for journalists, referred to as 'journalistic professionalism' (Hallin & Mancini 2004:37). These include objectivity, accuracy, balanced reporting, and autonomy (ibid.). These values are foundational to the democratic value of journalism in liberal systems and are deeply embedded in journalistic practice (Lawrence 2010:279). Journalistic professionalism, in this way, acts as a guiding force for maintaining the ideal of journalism as a public service (ibid.).

The contemporary Australian media landscape

Before addressing how these journalistic norms and values can come into conflict with public health discourses, it is prudent to recognise that many scholars contend that trends in recent decades have undermined this ideal of news media as a public service (Monahan 2010; Altheide 2004:294).

In Australia, as in other liberal media systems, the neoliberal trends of deregulation of media, private media expansion, and reduced funding for public service news has led to high concentration of media ownership, which grants a select few media conglomerates private control over the majority of news content (Jones & Pusey 2010). At the forefront of this phenomenon is the media giant News Corporation (News Corp). News Corp media ownership in Australia is among the most concentrated in democratic nations worldwide, with the conglomerate owning over 50% of newspapers, the only national newspaper, and two of the top five news websites (Nielsen 2020; Brevini & Ward 2021). While the authority of the news media is traditionally rooted in journalistic professionalism, scholars claim that Australian News Corp outlets typically lean towards pro-industry conservatism and neoliberalism, often unabashedly advocating for Liberal Party leadership (McKnight 2012:58). In Australia, this media domination has drawn much academic, political, and public invective (ibid.; Meade 2020).

Concurrent with its impact on political processes, many agree that the privatisation of the news media impacts the quality of journalism, and in turn the legitimacy of the discipline's claim of serving the public interest (Hallin & Mancini 2004:247; Altheide 2004:295). Through privatisation, the public service orientation of the news media may be replaced 'with a bottom-line ethos of profitability' (Monahan 2010:32). Monahan (ibid) argues this produces a phenomenon called public drama news, which is increasingly simplified and dramatized news designed to attract and engage audiences. These trends create a 'tension between the ethics of journalistic professionalism and the pressures of commercialism.' (Hallin & Mancini 2004:247).

The short-term imperatives of for-profit news outlets can be particularly problematic in the reporting on public health matters (King & Street 2005). Several studies have found health reporting by news outlets to be fickle, under-researched, and over-dramatized, leading researchers to criticise the ability of

populist print media to provide balanced information on health and risk (ibid.; Rossman, Meyer & Schulz 2018:370).

In a political sense, the Australian media landscape is problematic because of the high concentration of private media ownership, and the agenda-setting potential it represents (Jones & Pusey 2010; Altheide 2004). In a public health sense, this represents not only a potential threat to democracy, but also to health (Jordens, Lipworth & Kerridge 2013:449).

Public health

While journalism aims to provide an informative democratic space through which to increase political agency, public health typically entails interventions that involve restrictions on choice (Bayer 2007:1102). The 'public interest', as defined in public health discourse, is characterised by preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health through the organised efforts of society (Acheson 1988 in Guest et al 2013). In this way, public health action, particularly during pandemics, is rooted in a utilitarian ethic in which ethicality is determined according to consequences and a health-based public service orientation (Bowen & Li 2018:236; Lupton 2003:35). Public health interventions seek to improve health for all citizens, and infringements on individual freedoms are seen as permissible if they protect the health of the population.

This utilitarian ethic, however, can be problematic, as it pits 'the freedom of individuals to behave as they wish [...] against the rights of society to control individuals' bodies in the name of health' (Lupton 2003:5). This is one of the central challenges in the imposition of public health interventions: 'how to empower self-governance to protect health and autonomy without undermining either.' (Parmet & Smith 2017:905).

Resistance to public health interventions often target the tension between individual freedoms and governmental control, adopting a deontological principle-based ethic and focusing on threats to deep-rooted liberal values of individual freedom and agency, rather than the potential for positive health outcomes (Bowen & Li, 2018:237; Chaua et al 2019:1). The far-reaching impacts of public health action, the utilitarian ethic that underscores it, and the top-down nature of its imposition almost invariably results in some level of resistance from the public (ibid.; Foucault 1978:95). And the news media's role as 'bulwark

against both industry and state influence,' (Jordens, Lipworth & Kerridge 2013:448) often results in the amplification of these perspectives by journalists, who 'in general, have a bias toward an open flow of information, including disagreements and uncertainty' (Briggs & Hallin, 2016:71).

This is the key difference between the two disciplines' definition of 'public interest'. While journalism, in its ideal, offers political agency for public good, public health exerts political control for public good.

A dialectical understanding

The dialectic between the disciplines of public health and journalism, rather than being destructive, can be seen to produce a productive tension. Public health practitioners and state intervention are fundamental to the organisation and improved health outcomes of society. And journalism is fundamental to the exercise and practice of democracy, giving both information and a voice to the public, and representing the potential to expose and thwart abuses of political power (Foucault: 1978; Lupton 2003:121). Further, political interventions and public health policy are held to a higher standard by investigative journalists and news outlets; and journalists are held to a higher standard by laws concerning libel, privacy, and hate-speech (Hallin and Mancini, 2004:43). The disciplines conflict, but are also mutually beneficial and symbiotic, as public health policy changes create stories for news outlets to report on, and the news media serves as a platform through which public health professionals can amplify messaging and inform the public about health recommendations and policy changes (Foley, McNaughton & Ward 2019:4).

Biomediatization

Briggs and Hallin (2016:13) argue the discourses of public health and journalism are intimately and inextricably linked to one another. Their research indicates that news reporting on health involves a complex interplay between journalism and medicine (among other disciplines), between expert and non-expert actors, and medical research and media logics. They call this biomediatization, contending that it is precisely this interplay through which biomedical knowledge is co-produced for the public (ibid:12).

Briggs and Hallin identify three frameworks through which health information is represented in the news, which they call biocommunicable models. The first of these, the biomedical authority model, is functionalist, in that it presents medical experts as 'authoritative sources of information [while] laypersons are urged to attend to and follow their advice and are warned of the consequences of failing to play that role' (ibid.:41). The second, the public sphere model, is more egalitarian. It involves journalists, politicians, and the broader public in the discussion of health, and represents the 'increased interpenetration of the field of health with other social fields, and particularly with the market and state' (ibid.:40). The third model, the active patient consumer model, is excluded from this study, as it describes the neoliberal representation of patients as consumers of health products and information (ibid.:34).

This biocommunicable framework, like Monahan's (2010:14) public drama framework and the frame analysis literature, holds a central unifying supposition: 'the form of news—how it is packaged and presented—plays a crucial role in what people take from their encounters with news content'.

Framing

Framing theory is one of the foremost methods for analysing public matters and how they manifest in both the media and the minds of citizen-consumers. Framing research posits that the ways in which public matters are represented impacts their interpretation, thereby setting the public agenda and influencing public opinion (Entman 2010). The effects of framing impact individual behavioural intentions, risk assessments, and opinion on public policy and governance (Bowen & Li 2018; Chaua et al 2019). Thus, although frame analysis is concerned with the representation of reality, the implications of framing research are profound, and framing practices have real-world impacts on the construction of the social world and organisation of societies.

Framing theory advances the insight that the representation and interpretation of issues is filtered through 'organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world' (Reese 2010:11). Although the nature of world events, public figures, and issues shift and change throughout history, scholars contend the frames used to represent these matters remain consistent (ibid. 24; Van Gorp 2010). For

example, commonly identified frames include human impact, political game, economic, and conflict frames (ibid.; Briggs & Hallin 2016; Lawrence 2010). Van Gorp (2010:87-8) calls these 'culturally embedded frames', explaining that they are 'universally understood codes that implicitly influence the receiver's message interpretation, which lends meaning, coherence, and ready explanations for complex issues.'

Framing, health, and the news

There is a significant and burgeoning body of inter-disciplinary research on the framing of health issues in the news media. Researchers in this area are concerned with the flow of medical information from experts to the public through the news media as mediator. One of the foremost issues with this mediation is the filtering of health information through culturally embedded frames and journalistic norms (King & Street 2005). As frames offer mental short-cuts and ready explanations for complex issues, they can be problematic in the presentation of science and health information. Framing can obscure the complexity of an issue, favour political and emotional interpretations of biomedical science, or represent stories through 'balanced' reporting, giving alternative, unscientific frames more weight than they merit (Ratcliff et al 2018).

This is significant for public health because audiences make risk assessments through the media as their primary source of information about such risk (Bowen & Li 2018). Particularly in the context of increasingly privatised, sensationalist, and quickly produced news, 'the media may contribute to unintended adverse effects and impede the communications plans of the public health community' (ibid.:232). As King and Street (2005:128) write, the reporting of health information 'has become problematic […] especially in the relationship between the short-term priorities of the print media and long-term nature of public health issues.'

Positioning this research in the literature

This thesis both builds off previous research and fills a gap in the literature. It is unique from previous studies in three ways. First, there are very few comparative framing analyses of press conferences and news articles (for exceptions, see: Ting

Lee & Basnyat 2013; Rossman, Meyer & Schulz 2018). Second, there are few public health framing analyses performed in the Australian context (for exceptions see: Abeysinghe & White 2010; Chaua et al 2019). And third, most medical framing analyses look at the framing of a particular disease, risk, or health outcome, with few studies looking specifically at the framing of public health interventions on a disease. This research aims to fill these gaps by looking at the framing of public health interventions in the Australian context, with a focus on the flow of information from official sources to the news media. This dual focus additionally serves as an exploration of the dialectic between public health and journalism. With reference to the above literature, it will address both the nature of the identified frames, as well as reflect on how framing is influenced by the norms, ethics, and practices of the two disciplines.

Methodology

As stated in the introduction, this thesis rests on two core methodological assumptions: that news is a social construction, and that news matters (Monahan 2010:4). Complementary to these two core assumptions, the dialectical approach to the research problem seeks to understand, recognise, and compare the discourses of public health and journalism, and the ethics, practices, and norms which characterise these disciplines. Here, a stance of empathic neutrality is adopted, in which a 'middle ground' position is assumed, with the two disciplines, along with their aims and conceptions of the public interest, recognised on equal terms for their value and legitimacy (Foley, McNaughton & Ward 2019). As per the work of Briggs and Hallin (2016:163), this research explores the key differences between the two knowledge systems, but with the acknowledgement that the separate characterisation of them as 'two cultures' is misguided. In this way, the fields of public health and journalism are considered inextricably linked—simultaneously symbiotic and antagonistic (Ting Lee & Basnyat 2013:122).

In line with the bulk of science-related framing research, a 'weak social constructionist' approach was adopted for this research (Lupton 2013:45). This methodological approach recognises the insights of social constructionism, while

maintaining that social constructions are rooted in biological and empirical realities (ibid.; Briggs & Hallin 2016:13).

This research reflects on the discursive elements of power through addressing the unique media landscape of Australia, the global trends of privatisation of media, and the ideological underpinnings and potential motivations of news outlets. It pursues an understanding of systemic patterns in the application of frames in the news.

This thesis is therefore constructionist in that it rests on the notion that health and public health information is co-constructed by medical actors, politicians, journalists, and the public through the media; and critical in that it considers this co-construction an expression and outcome of the discursive elements of power (Reese 2010:19; Blakely 2003). The mixed method approach supports these two methodological aims, with the qualitative method seeking to identify framing devices and alternative frames, and the quantitative approach giving an indication of the patterns behind these frames, how they differ between outlets, and the potential influence frame packages may exert over public opinion.

Sampling

The sample includes two content types: Victorian State Government press conferences, and news media coverage of these press conferences published on the same day. This allows for a comparative analysis of the various frames used to characterise the COVID-19 public health interventions; frames operationalised by both the primary and secondary definers of public issues (Hall et al 1978).

After evaluating online timelines of the Victorian second wave, nine significant dates from 2020 were selected for the sample (Lupton 2020). The selection was guided by prioritising days where significant public health interventions were announced, with the assumption that these press conferences would be longer, receive more news coverage, and garner more public attention. The press conferences held on each of these nine dates (Table 1) were downloaded and transcribed.

Table 1: Key Dates

Date (2020)	Announcement(s)
20/06	First restrictions announced, hotel inquiry launched
30/06	Ten suburbs placed under stage three lockdown, international flights into Victoria suspended
05/07	Over 100 new cases, nine public housing towers placed under full lockdown
07/07	Whole of Melbourne and Mitchell Shire placed under stage three lockdown
19/07	State of Emergency declared, masks become mandatory in Melbourne
02/08	Melbourne placed under stage four lockdown, State of Disaster declared
06/09	Roadmap out of lockdowns announced
25/10	First day in several months with no new cases, restrictions announced to ease within the week
30/10	The last of Andrews' 112 consecutive days of press conferences, low cases, Victoria open

During the pandemic, the internet had overtaken television and newspapers as the main source of news for Australians (Morgan 2020). Therefore, articles from digital news outlets were selected for the news sample. To gather a sample representative of the news Australians were consuming, the sample includes the three most-accessed Australian digital news producers during the period of this case study: ABC News, News.com.au, and Daily Mail Australia, respectively (Nielsen 2020). Additionally, to include a regional news perspective, articles from the largest regional news outlet in Victoria, the Bendigo Advertiser, were included in the sample.

ABC News Australia is a publicly funded bipartisan news outlet; The Bendigo Advertiser is a regional news outlet with a paywall, smaller circulation, and a digital and physical publication; and The Daily Mail Australia and News.com.au are national digital news producers which are owned by News Corp and are funded by advertising revenue. The sample thus includes one public service outlet (ABC), one regional outlet (The Bendigo Advertiser), and two tabloids (Daily Mail and News.com.au).

All relevant articles from these outlets published on the nine dates were downloaded from Factiva using the Boolean search criterion: '[coronavirus or COVID-19 or pandemic or restrictions] same Andrews'. With 'Andrews' indicating the Victorian Premier who ran each press conference over the period. If there were no articles published by a particular outlet on one of the dates, the next available article filling the search criteria was selected. Duplicate articles and articles which only mentioned the press conference or COVID-19 in passing were excluded from the analysis. This resulted in a total news sample of 128 articles.

The nine press conferences and all 128 articles were included in the content analysis and clustering process described below. The qualitative text analysis involved a smaller sample of the nine press conferences, and one randomly selected article—using a random number generator—from each of the four outlets on each of the nine dates (n=36). Randomisation was used to avoid selection bias in the gathering of data.

Methods

A mixed method framing approach adapted from Van Gorp (2010) and Matthes and Kohring (2008) was used to analyse this data in two phases. First, an initial phase of inductive-deductive qualitative framing analysis was conducted. This first stage allowed for thick description of the framing devices and identification of metaphors, reasoning devices, lexical choices, narratives, values, and stereotypes (Van Gorp 2010). In the second stage, a codification of the frame elements and a binary content analysis of the data was performed. This data was then hierarchically clustered to determine how the frames and frame elements are employed and grouped together by producers into frame packages. This second stage operationalises and organises these frame elements, blinding the researcher to their grouping and allowing frame packages to be empirically—rather than heuristically—determined (Matthes and Kohring 2008).

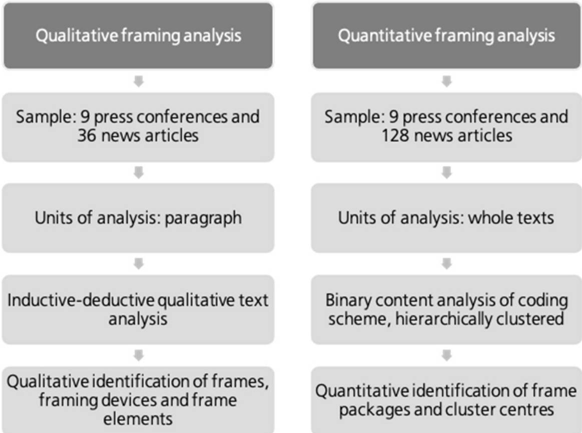

Figure 1: Methods outline

Qualitative framing analysis

Van Gorp's (2010) approach to framing analysis involves an initial review of the data before an open and inductive coding process which seeks to identify frames and framing devices through descriptive and analytical coding. In this stage, the texts were coded in NVIVO with paragraphs as units of analysis, so that separate and competing frames and framing devices contained within the same text could be identified. Following this initial stage, the developed frames were assessed and compared with reference to previous literature to look for patterns, similarities, and differences (Ting Lee & Basnyat 2013; Matthes & Kohring 2008; Thomas et al 2020). This process revealed four overarching frames through which the COVID-19 public health interventions were represented in units from the data: medical, political, social, and economic. Each of these frames were divided into Entman's (2007) four elements of a frame: problem definition, moral evaluation, causal attribution, and treatment recommendation. This axial stage produced 16 categories into which the initial inductive codes were organised. The units of analysis, isolated from the broader context of the full texts, were then checked for the appropriateness of their allocation, with minor changes made. The results are presented as descriptive qualitative analysis (Van Gorp 2010).

Quantitative binary content analysis

Matthes and Kohring's (2008) method seeks to improve reliability and validity through a binary content analysis designed to counteract the hermeneutic aspects of frame analysis. This approach entails the understanding of Entman's (2007) four frame elements as variables which can be operationalised in a content analysis. Through this process, the researcher identifies the presence or absence of individual frame elements, rather than heuristically attributing frame elements to holistic and abstract frame packages.

Matthes and Kohring (2008) organised their data according to the inductive and comparative identification of topics and actors. In this thesis, usefully, the qualitative stage of the analysis involved the identification of key frame elements and frames used in the texts. The four overarching frames identified in the qualitative text analysis (medical, social, economic, and political) thus serve as an appropriate summary of the main topics of the articles. In addition, 19 categories of actors identified in the original dataset were recoded into four overarching

characterisations: medical experts, politicians, business actors, and public opinion. As in Matthes and Kohring's analysis, these four central topics and four actor types constitute the problem definition variables in the coding scheme.

These eight categories (topics and actors) were then extrapolated to the additional three dimensions of Entman's (2007) elements of a frame: moral evaluation, causal attribution, and treatment recommendation. For example, positive moral evaluations which represent public health interventions as saving lives and protecting health were coded as 'Moral evaluation' and then under the sub-code 'Benefit: Health'. Codes were binary, so if this health benefit was attributed to politicians, it would be additionally coded under 'Causal attribution' with the sub-code 'Benefit attribution: Politicians'. Codes were omitted if they did not occur across all articles—for example, business actors in the sample were never attributed the benefits or risks to health, so this code is absent from the schema. Positive, negative, and neutral judgements were used as proxies for the treatment recommendation (Matthes & Kohring 2008). Two additional variables were added to include the biocommunicable model of Briggs and Hallin (2016): public sphere and biomedical authority. This choice was made as the two biocommunicable models are easily identifiable, and their inclusion in the coding scheme allows an additional dimension through which to understand the frame elements which constitute the final frame packages.

This process produced 25 codes which were coded according to binary variables (1=present, 0=absent) with full articles as the unit of analysis. The 9 press conferences and 128 news articles in the sample were coded according to this schema. Once coded, the data was input into SPSS and hierarchically clustered using the Ward method (Matthes & Kohring 2008; Yim & Ramdeen 2015).

Cluster analyses are useful for finding patterns and grouping together heterogenous data. For the news article sample, the method produced a clear three-cluster solution that offered unique insights into the framing of public health interventions in the news. The press conferences were coded, and tests of cluster solutions were trialled, however the data was too homogenous and no clusters with significant in-group linkages or distances between them could be formed. This homogeneity mirrored the findings of the qualitative analysis, and thus was taken as an indication of a single overarching frame package of its own.

The content analysis of the press conference sample is therefore excluded from this thesis.

The first stage of the analysis allowed for the identification of frames, frame elements, and framing devices through the data, and the second stage demonstrated the patterns through which these frame elements were presented in the data. The mixed method approach, in this way, improves the clarity, reliability, and validity of this study. The limitations of this approach will be addressed at the end of this thesis.

Analysis

The analysis consists of two sections, separated according to method. In the qualitative section, quotes are presented according to their assignment to the identified frame and frame element as well as the source, order, and date of publication (e.g., 'PC12006 Medical: treatment recommendation' indicates the quote is a treatment recommendation from the medical frame in press conference #1 from the 20th of June[1]).

The quantitative analysis includes the results of the content analysis and hierarchical clustering. The significance of the clusters is explained, along with the ways in which patterns of frame elements constitute identifiable frame packages.

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[1] 'DM' indicates the Daily Mail Australia, 'NEWS' indicates News.com.au, 'ABC' indicates ABC News Australia, and 'BA' indicates The Bendigo Advertiser.

Table 2: Coding Scheme

Frame element	Variables	Description
Problem definition	Topic: Medical	Restrictions and regulations, public health response, COVID-19 data, risk, research on virus and spread, recommendations, medical advice
	Topic: Political	Political commentary, critique, collaboration, controversy
	Topic: Economic	Economic impacts, economic support, economic recovery
	Topic: Social	Social impacts, education, protests, entertainment
	Actor: Medical experts	Government health experts, as well as experts from universities and hospitals
	Actor: Politicians	Numerous political actors, at a federal, state, opposition, and district level
	Actor: Business	Numerous business actors, from tourism to industry
	Actor: Public opinion	News media (editorial journalists), members of the public and public opinion
Causal attribution	Benefit attribution: Medical experts	Medical experts are responsible for benefits
	Benefit attribution: Politicians	Political actors are responsible for benefits
	Benefit attribution: Public	The public is responsible for benefits
	Risk attribution: Medical experts	Medical experts are responsible for risks
	Risk attribution: Politicians	Political actors are responsible for risks
	Risk attribution: Public	The public is responsible for risks
Moral Evaluation	Benefits: Health	Public health response as a benefit for health
	Benefits: Economy	Public health response as a benefit for the economy (mostly long-term)
	Benefits: Moral	Health of public as primary good, restrictions are morally beneficial
	Risks: Moral	Public health response as imposing on freedoms, unfair, unbalanced, posing moral risk
	Risks: Health	Public health response as risk to public health, mental health
	Risks: Economy	Public health response as risk to economy
Treatment recommendation	Judgement: Positive	Public health response is necessary and working
	Judgement: Negative	Public health response is poor/could be better
	Judgement: Neutral	No stance/neutral stance on public health response
Biocommunicable model	Public sphere	Arbiters include the public, business actors, or politicians not involved in the public health response—interventions are up for debate
	Biomedical authority	Arbiters include only medical experts and political actors involved in the public health response—interventions are scientifically determined and authoritative

Qualitative Analysis

Medical frame

Consistent with previous research, medical framing of the public health interventions was dominant in both the press conferences and the news articles (Getchel et al 2018; Briggs & Hallin 2016:112). The medical framing in press conferences involved an emphasis on expertise, data, and science; a framing of COVID-19 as a collective threat to be fought against by all; and a framing of public health interventions as morally justified under a health-based expert assessment of risk. As the indexing hypothesis suggests, these medical frames were mostly reproduced in news articles, largely through quotes and paraphrasing (Lawrence 2010:277). In these cases, the role of journalists is reduced to the selection of key announcements and reproduction of the dominant medical frame presented by official sources in the press conferences (ibid.). The authoritative and erudite framing of the public health interventions was reflected in that journalists did not question them in a medical sense, and instead only challenged interventions through social, economic, and political frames (Briggs & Hallin 2016:23).

Medical: 'Driven by data/science/medical advice'

Throughout the press conferences, addresses of social, economic, and political topics were often counteracted by emphasising that all decisions were based on expert medical advice, epidemiology, mathematical modelling, and scientific knowledge of the virus. The constant reference to medical advice, science, and data, frame the government decisions through a biomedical authority biocommunicable model (ibid.).

Through this framing, the science/data/advice constitute elite and expert forms of knowledge, which work to distinguish the health crisis from other public issues, in which 'more populist, relativist, or democratic communication ideologies prevail' (ibid.). Consistent with previous studies, science is represented as the solution to the health crisis (Blakely 2003; Getchel et al 2018; Abeysinghe & White 2010), for example:

> 'More than a thousand different scenarios have been put into this supercomputer. […] You can't argue with this sort of data. Can't argue with science. You can't do

> anything but follow the best health advice.' (PC70609 Medical: treatment recommendation)

This biomedical authority framing is largely technocratic, and the benchmark for risk assessments is scientific and determined according to risk to health (Lupton 2003:35; Bowen & Li 2018). Subjective risk assessments and public opinion, in this way, are framed as invalid: 'This is not about popularity—it's a pandemic.' (PC82510).

Medical 'Public health bushfire'

The medical problem definition was frequently characterised though the metaphor of the spread of COVID-19 as a 'public health bushfire'. This metaphor creates a link between the virus and a phenomenon that is well known and negatively regarded across political and cultural lines.

> 'These are simple things, but they make a massive difference to the fight against this virus. They make a massive difference to us putting out this public health bushfire' (PC23006 Medical: treatment recommendation)

Several studies on medical news framing have identified the use of war frames by politicians and journalists alike (Benziman 2020; Blakely 2003). This framing engenders a 'rally around the flag' effect, encouraging political divisiveness and tensions to be set aside for the greater good of the nation (Briggs & Hallin 2016:94). Andrews employs the war frame throughout the conferences, describing action to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as a 'war' against a 'wicked enemy'. However, in Australia bushfires are a more potent collective memory, and Andrews employs the bushfire analogy to similar effect (Lupton 2013:150). It's a compelling framing device, providing Victorians with a sense of agency and purpose, and representing public health interventions and advice as essential tools for putting out the fire and/or winning the war.

Medical: 'Do the right thing'

Much of the causal attribution of the spread of COVID-19 and subsequent restrictions was behavioural and attributed to the public: workplace transmission, family-to-family transmission, people not following advice. Returning to the idea of risk, in these scenarios individuals have made subjective risk assessments and neglected the expert definition of risk purported in the press conferences. The

speakers reinforce the biomedical authority expert definition of risk through framing these transgressions as immoral, labelling them as 'selfish' and 'irresponsible' (Lupton 2013:10):

> 'You cannot make your own decision because it is not your decision to make. You are putting the rest of Victoria at risk. That is not right.' (PC12006 Medical: moral evaluation)

In this way, the press conferences framed public health interventions as scientifically determined and non-negotiable tools that allow the Government and public to do the morally just thing and stave off a common enemy.

Many of the news articles from the sample reproduced this medical framing of the restrictions. However, this framing was sometimes stripped of its moral sentiment, with the information merely presented as lists of facts, rules, and testing sites. This may be attributable to the journalistic norm of objectivity, requirements as to the length of articles, or the reluctance of journalists to take a stance on public issues (Lawrence 2010; 265; Hallin & Mancini 2004:246). The public service role of journalists, in these cases, is not to encourage compliance, but simply to update the public on the new rules under which they now live.

Social frame

The social impacts of public health interventions were regularly recognised and addressed in the press conferences. However, they were typically framed according to the utilitarian public health ethic and presented as necessary collective sacrifices to overcome the health crisis (Bowen & Li 2018:236; Lupton 2003:35). In contrast, the news sample included articles which repositioned public health interventions as infringing on freedoms, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities, and catalysing fear, sadness, frustration, and anger among Victorian citizens.

Social: 'Sacrifice'

During announcements, speakers at the press conferences regularly recognised that restrictions and rules were 'difficult', 'challenging', 'a struggle', and 'frustrating'. These social impacts, however, were framed as necessary sacrifices to overcoming the health crisis, and contributions to a collective effort:

> 'But your sacrifice and the contribution that you are making is central to the safety and wellbeing of every Victorian family. You have our gratitude.' (PC30507 Social: moral evaluation)

Using the framing device in which compliance with public health interventions is represented as sacrifice—like war framing devices—encourages individual wellbeing to be side-lined for the good of the nation (Benziman 2020:248). In this framing, the utilitarian public health ethic and expert definition of risk predominates, and social risks are represented as not only permissible, but moral.

Social: 'All in this together'

A sense of social collectivism and responsibility was frequently engendered along with the framing device of sacrifice. With the understanding of health as the primary good deeply embedded in the press conferences, individual sacrifices were rendered as contributions towards a collective effort which benefits not merely oneself, but the broader populace. Social issues like home schooling, working from home, loneliness, fatigue, and panic were mentioned as important, but rarely entailed treatment recommendations that addressed the issues. Instead, treatment recommendations focused on the necessity of such social sacrifices and the insistence that the only way to overcome them is through a collective effort to combat the health crisis:

> 'If we all work together over these next six weeks, as painful and frustrating and difficult as that will be, we will be able to get to the other side of this stay-at-home period.' (PC40707 Social: treatment recommendation)

Social: 'Melbourne's most vulnerable'

Where the Government represented social impacts as honourable sacrifices and cultivated a sense of unity, several news articles focused on the involuntary nature of these sacrifices, particularly regarding vulnerable communities and the ways in which Government action overlooked or threatened them. This framing was particularly salient during the lockdowns of the public housing towers in July, during which several articles adopted a critical framing of the government's hard-line approach:

> 'Residents of the nine locked-down towers said they feel let down by a lack of communication, food and supplies. Some have complained they have had to go hungry because officials have not brought them enough to eat.' (DM40707 Social: moral evaluation; Moore 2020)

Here, the ideal of the news media as public sphere is foregrounded, with the individuals most affected by the restrictions given a platform through which to communicate what they feel are injustices forced upon them (Briggs & Hallin 2016). The notion of the media as a 'watchdog' for the government is evident, with the public housing tower lockdowns incorporated into a framing in which the government is failing to support or act on behalf of vulnerable communities, immigrants, and already struggling citizens (Lawrence, 2010: 280). The affected parties are represented in terms of their vulnerabilities, with some tenants described as having 'fled war or family violence', 'dealing with mental health challenges', and working 'casual or insecure jobs' (Zaczek & Piotrowski 2020). With police 'swarming' the buildings and potentially 'horrific' consequences (ibid.), the restrictions imposed by the government are framed as extreme—'worse than prison' (Moore 2020). This critical social framing is rooted in a deontological ethic, which sees the lockdowns of the public housing towers as transgressions of moral principle and representative of broader societal issues related to state control, inequality, and vulnerable communities (Bowen & Li 2018; Chaua et al 2019). In this framing, sacrifices are not made voluntarily; they are forced upon citizens by an overreaching Government. The interventions are represented as posing moral risks, both in their infringements on civil liberties, and their disproportionate impact on disadvantaged groups (ibid.).

Social: 'Vic seethes with anger'

Social framing devices which were critical of the public health interventions extended beyond the public housing tower lockdown. Sensational and critical language regarding the public health interventions—such as 'angry', 'frustrated', 'furious', 'disappointed'—were often vaguely attributed to 'locals', 'families', and 'Victorians':

> 'But a growing number of locked down residents are growing increasingly frustrated with the Premier's tough restrictions.' (DM70609 Social: moral evaluation; Parsons & McPhee 2020)

Statements such as these frame public health interventions in terms of their social impact on Victorians. They indicate a 'definitional struggle over risk', in which the public health framing defines risk according to health outcomes, and the social framing defines risk according to social impacts (Lupton 2013:87; Abeysinghe & White 2010:371). This 'conflict' framing device has been identified in many previous studies. It draws a contrast between the desires of the public and the actions of the government (Bowen & Li 2018; Rossman, Meyer & Schulz 2018:370).

These social framing devices in the news sample represent a key departure from the official government framing and a central aspect of the journalistic ideal (Briggs & Hallin 2016). While such framing devices may be considered risk amplifying, they highlight how socioeconomic factors are implicated in public health decision making, giving voice to the affected parties, and focusing on the human impact of the restrictions (Rossman, Meyer & Schulz 2018; King & Street 2005). In the case of the public housing towers, a fundraiser was launched to support affected residents, raising over 250 thousand dollars in 24 hours (Coë, 2020). If their plight was suppressed from the media in the interests of improving sentiment towards public health interventions, this may never have been possible.

Economic frame

Throughout the press conferences, the State Government's addresses of the economic situation in the state mirrored the social framing. Economic impacts were framed as important, but not more so than the health of the public. Further, these impacts were positioned as necessary to overcoming the crisis and restoring the economic balance. The economic framing of public health interventions was more salient in news articles than press conferences, however, notably, it was not as common or negative in tone as one may have expected based on previous research (King & Street 2005:120; Thomas et al 2020). News articles typically shared the framing of the State Government, in which economic risk was large, but ultimately secondary to health risk. The key departure from this was in cases where business actors argued that the economic risk was disproportionate to the health risk, and that businesses should reopen to restimulate the economy.

Economic: 'Sacrifice'

As explored in the social framing, the 'official' definition of risk according to expertise and health outcomes was given precedence over subjective risk

judgements in the press conferences, including those to do with financial wellbeing. The following quote addresses the rise in workplace transmission of COVID-19, and individuals who continued to work despite them having symptoms or waiting for a COVID test result:

> ‘People are sadly making the choice that public health is less important than the welfare and the survival in a financial sense of their family. They're wrong to make that judgement’ (PC12006 Economic: moral evaluation)

Here, the State Government is quite explicit in stating that the collective good of public health is more important than any form of individual economic benefit. Decisions which perhaps prioritise the financial wellbeing of one’s family—and in doing so diverge from the expert definition of risk—are ‘wrong’. In the same way as in the social frame, following the rules is represented as a sacrifice every individual must make for the greater good.

Economic: ‘Repairing the damage’

In some cases throughout the press conferences, economic framing was used to motivate public health interventions and incentivise compliance with them. The greater good, in the economic frame, was represented as restoring and repairing the economy and returning to normalcy. As the public health interventions were framed as ‘not a choice’ but a necessity, the path out of the restrictions and into economic normalcy was represented as dependent on public compliance with them:

> ‘We must take steady and safe steps to find COVID normal and make sure that in opening up, we can stay open; not have a situation where we are unable to begin the task of economic repair, unable to begin the enormous task of repairing the damage that this global pandemic has done to communities, to our economy, to businesses, to workers.’ (PC70609 Economic: treatment recommendation)

In this framing, the health crisis is a precursor to the economic crisis, and thus the only way to address the economic crisis is to first address the health crisis. The public health interventions are repositioned as not the catalyst of the economic crisis, but the solution to it. Public health interventions and the subsequent economic impacts are in this way justified through an economic framing, as they

are represented as the only path towards the restoration of the economy and creation of jobs—the only way to 'repair the damage'.

Economic: 'Communities and local economies'

The key exception to the economic framing present in the press conferences was found in several articles by the Bendigo Advertiser which focused on the differences between regional and metropolitan Victoria, and the government's failure to adequately address the distinction between the two. These articles focused on small business owners and the struggles they faced due to restrictions. In many ways, this mirrored the previously identified social framing device of 'vulnerable communities', in that public health interventions were represented as unbalanced in their impact upon regional communities:

> 'Our communities and local economies have already been smashed by Victoria's COVID-19 shutdowns.' [Mr. Walsh said] 'We are all prepared to do our bit to flatten the curve and save lives, but for us to be dragged into Melbourne's mess is a bitter blow to regional Victorians.' (BA40707 Economic: moral evaluation; Nakos 2020)

Here, a contrast is drawn between the elitism of politicians and health experts, and the economic struggles of regional communities and economies. This framing involved a public sphere biocommunicable model, using business and political actors as sources to comment on the public health interventions (Briggs & Hallin 2016):

> 'IT IS time to consider easing social distancing restrictions in regional Victoria, a Bendigo business leader says.' (BA23006 Economic: treatment recommendation; O'Callaghan 2020).

Political frame

Before addressing the findings related to political framing devices, it is important to clarify what is meant by political frames in this research. Political frames were only considered activated when addressing external political actors, political controversies, interstate comparisons, and critique of political actors and actions. In this way, political framing is considered in terms of the 'political game' or 'political strategy' frame, in that the substance of policies is relegated, with a focus

instead on frames which address the successes, failures, and popularity of political actors (Briggs & Hallin 2016:91).

With this understanding of political frames in mind, the political frame was where news articles saw the largest departure from the press conferences. This was reflected in the lines of questioning during the press conferences, during which political issues were often raised by journalists, and were just as often dismissed by speakers as irrelevant to the purpose of the conferences and public health interventions.

Political: 'All in this together'

In the press conferences, political relationships were described by Andrews as amicable, supportive, and collaborative. While questions were regularly asked about border closures and the statements by and decisions of the Federal Government and other state premiers, Andrews would often emphasise that he was in regular contact with the political actor(s) in question and he was working alongside them and grateful to them:

> 'I've spoken with the premiers of New South Wales, South Australia, and Queensland over overnight. And I thank them very much on behalf of all Victorians. Just like fires and floods, we're all working together because we all know this to be not just a Northern Melbourne issue, this is a Victorian, and a national issue.' (PC23006 Political: moral evaluation)

Here, Andrews actively counters the potential framing of the issue in terms of partisanship or as a problem that only effects a certain populace of Australians. Expressing that the other states are supportive of Victoria and that the Prime Minister thinks the public health interventions are 'the appropriate response' provides an additional level of credibility to the actions of the State Government. As in the medical 'public health bushfire' and the social 'all in this together' framing devices, solidarity and bipartisanship are used to emphasise the collective nature of the threat, and the necessarily collective nature of the steps to combat it (Briggs & Hallin 2016:130).

Political: 'Irrelevant'

The main critique of Victorian State Government throughout the second wave was their failure to prevent it from occurring. This was largely attributed to

missteps in the management of the Victorian hotel quarantine system, which was a topic on the agenda for many journalists, as well as the Victorian Opposition.

When critical questions were levied at Andrews regarding hotel quarantine, he dismissed the questions as irrelevant to the public health task at hand:

> 'Accountability is always with me—after all, I'm the captain of the team—but let's be focused on what's most important. And that is: right now, and for the foreseeable future, containing these cases, slowing the spread of the virus, bringing consistency, driving down the numbers, and resuming our process of cautious, easing of the restrictions.' (PC30507 Political: treatment recommendation)

The consequence-based utilitarian ethic is very explicit here. Andrews stresses that what happened cannot be changed, but its impact can still be mitigated.

Similarly, when asked about Liberal Opposition leader for Victoria (Michael O'Brien), Andrews essentially dismissed the questions, saying he wouldn't play 'silly political games' (PC40707), and that:

> 'Those individuals and that criticism is completely irrelevant to the work that I'm doing, and the work that the public health team is doing.' (PC12006 Political: moral evaluation)

As in the economic and social frames, politics is represented as secondary to the health crisis and necessity of public health intervention. In this way, the press conferences were characterised by an active negation of 'political game' frames and an emphasis on bipartisan solidarity, technocratic decision making, and public health utilitarianism.

Political: 'Blame'

In contrast, the issues with hotel quarantine were mentioned in seven of the articles in the sample, and were regularly used to counter the 'official' narrative, in which the public was attributed with the risk, with a framing in which the government is responsible for the risk (Getchel et al 2018):

> 'Mr Andrews was critical of Victorians who've been 'pretending this is over' and said people ignoring social distancing advice were 'part of the problem'. But the start of this second wave has been linked to a failure in hotel quarantine practices' (NEWS40707 Political: causal attribution; News.com.au 2020)

Here, the conjunction 'but' directly contrasts the advice related to restrictions with the missteps in the management of hotel quarantine. In quotes such as this, the utilitarian consequence-based ethic of the press conferences—which emphasises compliance with public health interventions—is undermined by a focus on the attribution of blame and the government's 'failure' to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It establishes a framing in which the news media is acting in defence of the public by emphasising that the spread of COVID-19 in Victoria is not their fault or responsibility, but that of the State Government.

Political: 'Government has lost control'

The Opposition leader mentioned above, O'Brien, was one of the most frequently cited sources in the news sample (outside of speakers from the press conferences), appearing in four of the 36 articles. His public statements invariably levied blame at the Labor Government and called attention to the hotel quarantine 'bungle':

> 'The spread of the virus isn't down to bad luck – it's bad decisions by government,' Mr O'Brien said, 'These lockdowns are the catastrophic consequences of Daniel Andrews' failure on hotel quarantine, mixed messaging and from being more focused on Labor's own political issues than Victorians.' (NEWS40707 Political: causal attribution; News.com.au 2020)

Two articles from News.com.au were titled with quotes from O'Brien: ''Catastrophic': 'Vic seethes with anger'' (ibid.), ''Don't deserve this': Lockdown lashed' (Wolfe 2020). In the latter of the two articles, O'Brien's statement is reproduced in full, and he makes the claim that the 'government has lost control of COVID-19' (ibid.).

These statements mirror the findings of Getchel et al (2018:31), who attribute the inclusion of divergent narratives in the news media to the journalistic norm of balance, which encourages a 'both sides' approach to reporting, resulting in statements by the opposition being granted 'more substance than it might otherwise have warranted'. Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) claim that this notion of balance is problematic in the reporting of scientific matters, and can produce a distortion of reality, whereby science is represented as up for debate and minority oppositional views are amplified merely on the basis of their oppositional nature. Statements by O'Brien in the news articles are consistent with this claim, as the empirically determined interventions and recommendations devised by public

health experts are contrasted with statements from a sole political actor—with overt self-serving motivations—claiming the 'government has lost control'.

Ratcliff et al (2018:163) suggest that competing frames in reporting on science can impact the perceived credibility of scientific sources. A framing effects experiment by Wise and Brewer (2010) demonstrated the dangers of this in relation to public health communication. Using the issue of trans fat regulation, they found that while public health framing fostered support for the ban of trans fat, and anti-ban business framing reduced support for the ban, 'exposure to competition between these frames mitigated the effects of each' (ibid:450). In this way, although stemming from a notion of balance, inclusion of oppositional statements can be assumed to complicate the messaging present in the news articles. The ideas that the Labor Government has 'lost control', and that Victorian's 'don't deserve' restrictions, works to delegitimise the authority of the government to make decisions in the public's interest. In these articles, the journalistic norm of balance may impact the perceived credibility of the State Government and mitigate the effects of the dominant narrative in which public health intervention and compliance is represented as not only necessary, but also morally beneficial (ibid.; Getchel et al 2018).

Quantitative analysis

The qualitative analysis demonstrated that while the press conferences were uniform in their framing of public health interventions, the news sample framed public health interventions in a multitude of different ways. The quantitative analysis pursues systematic patterns in the inclusion of frame elements to identify frame packages (Matthes & Kohring 2008).

To improve the scope and reliability of the findings, all articles by the four news outlets published on the nine dates matching the search criterion were included in the quantitative analysis. This resulted in a sample of 128 articles (News.com.au [n=71], Daily Mail [n=26], ABC News [n=22], Bendigo Advertiser [n=9]), in which the more prolific outlets naturally dominated. This larger sample (n=128) was coded according to the coding scheme, with the results imported into SPSS and run through a hierarchical clustering process. The 'elbow method' was used to produce a 3-cluster solution, which was compared with alternative cluster

solutions, and found to produce the clearest results (Yim & Ramdeen 2015; Matthes & Kohring 2008).

The results of this clustering can be interpreted by looking for the variables which are the most and least salient within a cluster (ibid.). The significant results are shown in bold in Table 3 below. They indicate how different sets of news articles within the sample consistently applied similar frame elements, promoting a particular interpretation of public health interventions.

Table 3: Final cluster centres for news sample (n=128)

Variables	**Public health (n=62),** ***M (SD)***	**Political blame and moral risk (n=47),** ***M (SD)***	**Societal (n=19),** ***M (SD)***
Topic: Medical	1.00 (0.00)	.96 (0.20)	.95 (0.23)
Topic: Political	.11 (0.32)	**.49 (0.50)**	.26 (0.45)
Topic: Economic	.24 (0.43)	**.42 (0.50)**	.26 (0.45)
Topic: Social	.35 (0.49)	.43 (0.50)	**.80 (0.42)**
Actor: Medical experts	**.40 (0.50)**	.23 (0.43)	.10 (0.31)
Actor: Politicians	.98 (0.13)	.92 (0.28)	1.00 (0.00)
Actor: Business	.03 (0.13)	**.34 (0.48)**	.16 (0.38)
Actor: Media/Public opinion	.08 (0.27)	.38 (0.49)	**.74 (0.45)**
Benefit attribution: Medical experts	**.39 (0.49)**	.04 (0.20)	.10 (0.31)
Benefit attribution: Politicians	.06 (0.25)	.06 (0.25)	**.31 (0.48)**
Benefit attribution: Public	.53 (0.50)	**.19 (0.40)**	.53 (0.51)
Risk attribution: Medical experts	.02 (0.13)	**.23 (0.43)**	.05 (0.23)
Risk attribution: Politicians	.10 (0.29)	**.87 (0.34)**	.68 (0.48)
Risk attribution: Public	**.73 (0.45)**	.43 (0.50)	.58 (0.51)
Benefits: Health	**.82 (0.39)**	.51 (0.51)	.63 (0.50)
Benefits: Economy	.15 (0.35)	**0.00 (0.00)**	**.26 (0.45)**
Benefits: Moral	.73 (0.45)	**.11 (0.031)**	**.79 (0.42)**
Risks: Moral	.16 (0.37)	**.79 (0.41)**	.37 (0.50)
Risks: Health	.08 (0.37)	**.36 (0.48)**	.10 (0.31)
Risks: Economy	.16 (0.37)	**.60 (0.50)**	.10 (0.31)
Judgement: Positive	.52 (0.50)	**0.00 (0.00)**	.52 (0.50)
Judgement: Negative	.01 (0.13)	**.83 (0.40)**	.06 (0.23)
Judgement: Neutral	.47 (0.50)	.17 (0.40)	.42 (0.51)
Biomedical authority model	**.97 (0.17)**	.06 (0.25)	.05 (0.23)
Public sphere model	**.03 (0.17)**	.94 (0.25)	.95 (0.23)

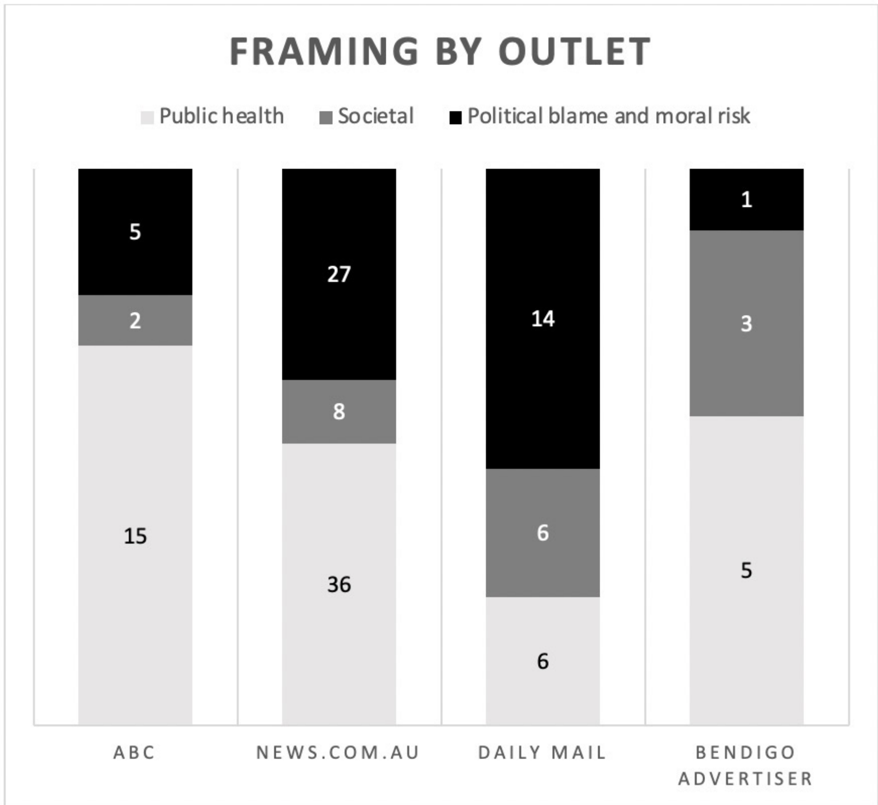

Figure 2: Allocation to clusters by news source

Results and Discussion

In the news article sample, three distinct frame packages were identified which characterised reporting on public health interventions: (1) public health; (2) societal; and (3) political blame and moral risk. Each of the three frame packages can be seen, in different ways, as reflective of the ethics, norms, and practices of journalism, as well as the Australian media system. The different framing practices between the news outlets demonstrate that journalistic norms and definitions of 'public interest' are not immutable, and 'appear to shift depending on the context in which reporters are working' (Lawrence 2010:267).

In the press conferences, the framing of public health interventions reflected the values, norms, and ethics of public health. Speakers framed the interventions, and compliance with them, as irrefutably necessary, morally just, and scientifically determined (Bowen & Li 2018; Lupton 2003:35). The utilitarian consequence-based definition of 'public interest' predominated, with the health of the public as the primary concern (ibid.). Speakers emphasised non-partisanship and the collective threat COVID-19 represented, with political games deemed irrelevant and unproductive, and impacts to the economy and social life described as necessary sacrifices (Briggs & Hallin 2016; Lupton 2013:153). This emphasis on compliance and collectivism attributed responsibility, risks, and benefits to the public, and represented the public health interventions and compliance with them as the only option to return to normalcy in both a social and economic sense. This framing involved biomedical authority biocommunicability, through which medical experts were granted authority over the definition of risk and the necessary course of action to mitigate risk (ibid.). Audiences were encouraged to accept this biomedical authority, passively listen, and comply with government action and public health advice.

The dominant frame package in the quantitative analysis, the public health frame, largely mirrored the official public health framing of the State Government. The journalists composing these articles did precisely what the government intended them to: communicating the restrictions, emphasising the health and moral benefits of adherence to them, and compelling audiences to act through attributing both risk and benefit to their behaviour (Getchel et al 2018; Ting Lee & Basnyat 2013). Several authors have observed the ways in which, during times of crisis, news reporting shifts towards 'sphere-of-consensus reporting, where officials speak for 'the nation' as debate and criticism are minimized.' (Briggs & Hallin 2016:134; Lupton 2013:138). In the public health frame package, journalists did exactly this, respecting the authority of public health expertise and governmental power, and accepting their position as conduits for the official frame package (Lawrence 2010:277). The 'public interest' orientation of journalism, in these cases, functions predominately through the news media as a platform for amplifying the public health messaging of the government and medical experts. The high presence of neutral judgement was the key departure from the press conferences and is likely a reflection of the journalistic norm of objectivity (ibid. 265; Hallin & Mancini 2004:34).

The societal frame package similarly supported the restrictions and replicated key messages about health benefits and public responsibility, however, it did so through a public sphere biocommunicable model. This entailed a higher focus on social topics, political actors, and moral and economic benefits than in the public health frame. It reflects the findings of Ratcliff et al (2018), in that the health risks are navigated by lay actors through a trust in authority and acceptance of the official narrative. Contrary to the public health framing, however, the social/societal elements of risks were foregrounded, with the interventions supported not through the expert definition of risk, but through 'political, moral and aesthetic judgements on risk' (Lupton 2013:55). This frame package reflects the more non-scientific sentiments found in the qualitative analysis of the press conferences and news articles, in which actors are 'all in this together', are compelled to 'do the right thing', and play their part in 'repairing the damage'. It mirrors the public sphere ethos of journalism and the idea that framing devices are commonly used tools for journalists in presenting complex issues to lay audiences, playing to existing values, beliefs, and cognitive schemas (Van Gorp 2010: 88; Ting Lee & Basnyat 2013).

The political blame and moral risk frame package reflected many aspects of journalistic professionalism, as well as commercial trends towards sensationalised and dramatized news media. Articles in this frame package typically adopted a public sphere biocommunicable model, amplifying the voices of those affected by public health interventions and challenging the official framing in which the public was represented as responsible for the risks (Briggs & Hallin 2016). The journalistic norm of balance drove messaging which recognised the health benefits of the public health interventions, while also attributing blame and casting negative moral assessments on the interventions and those enforcing them (Getchel et al 2018; Chaua et al 2019). Political risk attribution dominated in this framing. In the qualitative analysis, this political framing presented a narrative in which not only had the Victorian State Government catalysed the health crisis through their errors with hotel quarantine, but their insistence that the public was responsible for the risks involved represented an unjust shift of the locus of the blame. This framing adopted a deontological principle-based ethic, in which public health interventions were characterised by their 'extreme', 'draconian', and 'unprecedented' nature, and were represented as over-exertions of governmental control (Chaua et al 2019). In this frame package, the Government and medical experts were not granted full definitional control over the nature of risk, with the

moral and economic risks associated with the imposition of restrictions amplified compared with the press conferences (Ting Lee & Basnyat 2013; Rossman, Meyer & Schulz 2018).

Consistent with previous research, this focus on human impact/interest was most evident in articles by the two tabloid news outlets in the sample—News.com.au (38%) and the Daily Mail (53.8%) (ibid.; King and Street 2005). This reflects the qualitative text analysis, in which these outlets were characterised by sensationalism, political game frames, human impact frames, and the dramatization of the public health restrictions. Monahan's (2010:46) public drama news model was evident, with the public health interventions 'simplified and often linked to long-standing moral values or contemporary social concerns.' This frame package reflected the 'tension between the ethics of journalistic professionalism and the pressures of commercialism,' (Hallin & Mancini 2004:247) and the deprivileging of science and scientific voices (Christakis 2020:238; Boykoff & Boykoff 2004).

There is clearly value in this framing package, as—particularly during the public housing tower lockdowns—it exposed the short-comings of the Government and the impact of the restrictions on vulnerable communities and workers. Framing articles in this way acted in the 'public interest' by holding the Government accountable and offering a voice to those disempowered by the public health interventions (Hallin & Mancini 2004:271).

However, when the 'elite', primary definers of information are governments and public health experts trying to combat a health crisis, the focus on balance, human impact, and principle-based ethics, may sully the clarity of the important health messages being conveyed, calling into question their legitimacy and ethicality. As explored in previous research, the framing of an issue in terms of its impositions on freedom can have a significant impact on public opinion (Nelson, Clawson & Oxley 1997). Wise and Brewer's study demonstrated that competing frames in the treatment of public health issues runs the risk of mitigating the effects of each frame (2010). The risk of this frame package is that the emphasis on the risks posed by public health interventions mitigates the effects of the strategic public health framing pushed through the press conferences. It may divert attention away from the health advice, the substance of the policies, and towards the Government and man who is communicating them.

Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate significant differences between the framing of public health interventions by the Victorian State Government in press conferences and Australian digital news outlets. While frames operationalised by the Victorian State Government were consistent throughout the press conferences, the analysis of news articles revealed a more heterogenous framing of public health interventions.

The framing of public health interventions by the Victorian State Government was closely aligned with the ethics, norms, and values of public health. Science was represented as the solution to the crisis, with expert definitions of risk and biomedical authority predominating. Citizens were asked to make social and economic sacrifices and work together, with public health interventions and compliance represented as weapons to be wielded in the fight against the collective enemy—COVID-19. These interventions were framed as moral imperatives and the only path to normalcy.

In most cases, this official framing was replicated in the news articles. The dominance of the public health frame in the news articles mirrors previous research that indicates during times of crisis—particularly pandemics—journalists defer to official sources, minimizing debate and criticism (Briggs & Hallin 2016:134; Lupton 2013:138). However, both in the qualitative and quantitative analysis, neutral judgements were higher than in the press conferences—likely due to the journalistic norm of objectivity.

The societal frame package similarly supported public health interventions, but in these articles, journalists focused on the more social, political, and economic aspects of the crisis. This reflects the public sphere ethos of journalism, and the idea that framing devices are used by journalists as heuristics to simplify complex issues for audiences.

The political blame and moral risk frame package involved the biggest departure from the official framing presented by the State Government in the press conferences. The content analysis aligned largely with the findings of the alternative frames explicated in the qualitative analysis. These include more focus on political games, attribution of risk and blame to politicians and medical experts, and an overall amplification of the risk produced by public health

interventions. This frame package reflected the ethics, norms, and practices of journalism, as well as trends toward privatization, sensationalism, and public drama news.

The nature of this research precluded access to additional coders, and thus an inclusion of an intercoder reliability measure. The computer-assisted hierarchical clustering method, however, bolstered the reliability of the findings somewhat, as the researcher was blinded to their grouping into frame packages, making them empirically—rather than heuristically—determined (Matthes and Kohring, 2008). Additionally, the sample is not large enough to identify systematic content bias (Entman 2010). Nonetheless, the dominance of the political blame and moral risk frame package among the News Corp tabloid news outlets may be considered indicative of the privatised nature of the outlets, the accompanying commercial imperatives, and political slant. This aligns with previous studies which found tabloid news outlets were characterised by sensationalism, risk amplification, dramatization, focus on human impact, attribution of blame, and challenges to medical authority (King & Street 2005; Rossman, Meyer & Schulz 2018). The fact that the political blame and moral risk frame package was most common among the two tabloid news outlets, and that these outlets are both owned by News Corp, is indicative of the uniformity between the outlets, as well as their slant towards conservative Liberal political ideologies. These outlets frequently attributed blame to the Labor Government and challenged state intervention. This mirrored previous research in which the neoliberal market ideologies of news outlets were at times pitted against the public health ethic of collectivism and practices of state intervention (Chaua et al 2019; Lupton 2013: 138).

This thesis is a frame analysis, rather than a framing effects study, so it is inappropriate to presuppose that the political blame and moral risk frame package necessarily precipitates negative sentiments towards, or non-compliance with, public health interventions. However, it does identify patterns in the representation of public health interventions which undermine the legitimacy of their imposition and attribute blame to the government that is imposing them. Studies from the US investigating the effects of viewership of News Corp owned Fox News—which is similarly ideologically conservative and neoliberal—found that individuals who trusted and viewed Fox News exhibited significantly less adherence to COVID-19 public health advice than CNN viewers (Zhao et al 2020). At issue in this political blame and moral risk framing, therefore, is the use

of the public sphere biocommunicable model and public drama news framework to focus neither on the public health science nor the moral imperative of health (Briggs & Hallin 2016; Monahan 2010). Rather, the focus is on the political drama, moral risks, and missteps of the State Government during a period in which solidarity and trust in government action is paramount. The denigration of the Labor Government, and the portrayal of public health interventions as posing risks to core liberal values of individualism, freedom, and agency, is indicative of political slant among the News Corp outlets and may be considered counterintuitive to the aims of public health practitioners. In articles operationalising the political blame and moral risk framing—as in the Ebola crisis in the US— 'public health responses were thrust into the middle of partisan politics' (Briggs & Hallin 2016:134).

A pandemic as widespread and impactful as COVID-19 is a rare occurrence, and the uniqueness of the crisis should be considered in extrapolating the findings to other contexts. Nonetheless, the dialectic between public health and journalism at the core of the literature review was reflected in the results of the analysis. The competing frames mirrored the age-old question of freedom vs. order; the ethical battle between deontology (principles) and utilitarianism (consequences) (Nelson, Clawson & Oxley 1997:569; Bowen & Li 2018; Chaua et al 2019; Bayer 2007). It is the position of this research that, particularly in contexts where individual behaviour impacts the health of the broader public, expert knowledge systems should be respected and abided by. However, there is undoubtedly value in the news articles in the sample which challenged governmental control. If we accept the statements of public housing residents as truth, then these individuals have been mistreated by government action. The news media challenged this, acting in the public interest by giving these vulnerable people a platform through which their voice was heard, and the broader public was motivated to support them. To increase the regulation of news content in the interests of health would mean that injustices such as these would not be aired. Further, it would set a precedent for the control of information by the political elite.

This kind of precedent—that of controlling the flow of information—is one of the key reasons COVID-19 became a global pandemic in the first place. The Chinese Government was aware of the existence of a novel coronavirus before the rest of the world, and it suppressed the voices of doctors who tried to warn people (Christakis 2020:133). One of these voices, Dr. Li, who later died of COVID-19,

told a Chinese magazine from his hospital bed, 'I think there should be more than one voice in a healthy society, and I don't approve of using public power for excessive interference' (ibid.). In Communist China, the suppression of information forestalled action to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In liberal democracies, freedom of information has allowed the amplification of voices which have impeded the efforts of public health professionals acting to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Although commenting on a vastly different situation, Li's statement can be applied to this case study. The high concentration of media ownership in Australia creates the opportunity for one voice to predominate, granting media conglomerates and their owners' huge amounts of power with which they can influence public opinion and political actors alike. The solution cannot be increased regulation of media content, as that merely shifts the balance of power from one elite group (media conglomerates) to another (the state). Perhaps, instead, the solution is regulation and funding to support media diversity and quality journalism. A more diverse media landscape means more voices and perspectives in the public sphere, more journalistic autonomy, and more consumer choice. This recommendation is not new: in 2020, two former Australian Prime Ministers came out in criticism of the lack of media diversity in Australia and one started a petition for a Royal Commission into media diversity, which garnered over 500,000 signatures—the most of any petition in Australian history (Meade 2020).

Both public health and journalism act in the public interest, albeit in different and at times oppositional ways. A more diverse Australian media landscape will not eradicate the issues of risk amplification in the news, journalistic balance in science and health reporting, or political game frames, but these issues will no longer be organised around a particular political ideology or set of commercial interests. Communication that serves the public interest is necessarily complex and unstable, and while the power of the state and expert knowledge systems are crucial in protecting the health of the public, a diverse media landscape represents a similarly crucial point of democratic resistance, granting the public the opportunity to expose and challenge this power (Jordens, Lipworth & Kerridge 2013; Foucault 1978:101).

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Doubt in postmodernity: The communicative process of fixating beliefs

Marcus Enochsson

Times of doubt

We live in times of great doubt.

Expressions of doubt could be observed, for example, in the rise of a distrust of government (Grogan 2019) or in social movements that oppose vaccination programs (Kołłątaj et al. 2020). Western society is characterized by skepticism (Fay 1996:7).

Epistemological questioning makes the idea of facts subject to revision. In our time, terms such as ‘alternative facts’ or ‘post-truth’ come to mind (Mullins 2019). Certainty is often preferable to doubt, and therefore doubt propels us to investigate and find (or create) answers that can dispel the uncomfortable state of not knowing (Peirce 2009). It thus follows that if these are times of doubt, they are also times of searches for truth.

The Internet has provided people with the ability to form global communities in which they can construct and maintain beliefs (viewed as statements of truth) together. Historically, such activity would have demanded physical and temporal co-presence, which is no longer the case in this age of global media. This thesis focuses on organized religion in order to highlight the social processes of deconstructing and reconstructing truth through the use of the podcasting

medium. Due to the increasing prevalence of 'truth-construction' in many areas of society, this research is both current and relevant. These issues do not seem to have been treated extensively in the discipline of Media and Communication Studies, and I hope that this thesis might be a welcome contribution to the field.

This is not a thesis about religion *per se*. It is rather an exploration of the concept of truth on a meta-level. By analyzing selected, theoretical literature together with equally carefully selected empirical material, I discuss ways in which we may understand the processes that go into 'making' or 're-making' truth.

The empirical material used for this research is the podcast *Another Name For Every Thing* (henceforth referred to as *ANFET*), produced by The Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC, 2021a). Processes of constructing truth are especially visible in the context of religion in general, and in this podcast in particular. It features Franciscan friar Richard Rohr from the Catholic tradition, and Brie Stoner and Paul Swanson, who come from the Protestant tradition.

The research questions I investigate in relation to this case study are:

- How can we understand *ANFET* as an expression of negotiating and generating ideas of truth and knowledge?
- What role does communication play in our understanding of truth and knowledge?
- How can we understand not only *ANFET*, but also the processes of defining our ideas of truth, in the light of postmodernity?

Characterizing the problem

What is Truth?

In short: this thesis examines how ideas of truth and knowledge are created, maintained, and negotiated within the context of a community through means of communication. This allows us to think of truth as 'warranted assertibility' instead (Dicker 1973:112), a notion that finds its roots in fallibilism, explained as such: 'Any notion we believe, even ones for which we have excellent reasons to believe, may be false' (Fay 1996:208, italics removed). This is not intended as judgement

on our methods of inquiry – it is simply the acknowledgement that 'humans are epistemologically limited' (ibid.). Please note that the fallibilist would not hold that there are no absolute truths. They would simply maintain that any potential ultimate reality lies beyond our reach as human beings.

Knowledge can be viewed as a product of inquiry, and as such, it is a statement of what is highly probable rather than of what is (Dicker 1973:112). For Dewey (1941:185), not only doubt exists in a subject's mind, but so does knowledge. We do not formulate questions in our mind and find answers outside of ourselves; rather, both question and answer are constructed in the mind of the subject through the use of language. Moreover, facts are 'phenomena under a particular description' (Fay 1996:73). If I tell someone that I saw a blue book on a table, I have relayed some facts about objects and colors. But from where did I retrieve these facts? From my mind, which interpreted visual input and processed it through language, which enables me to communicate the idea of what I saw. Thus, facts are lingually constructed within, and not retrieved from without.

Language – communication – is therefore central to questions of both truth and knowledge. I wish to argue that the search for truth is particularly prevalent in two significant, societal arenas, namely: science and religion. We might say that both of them are in the business of dispelling doubt; that which is 'scientifically proven' is also viewed as true, and that which is 'orthodox' feels trustworthy. In this thesis, I investigate religion through the lens of communication in order to explore how the processes of creating ideas of truth and knowledge work in action. The reason for choosing religion as my subject matter is that this is perhaps the oldest and most robust social phenomena that explicitly deals with issues of truth – and on a grand, cosmic scale at that.

What is Real?

The study of religion within the area of Media and Communication research seems to be somewhat of a rarity. In terms of Christianity specifically, the field becomes even more narrow. The relevance of communication research to our understanding of epistemology also seems to be somewhat overlooked. It bears repeating that what I am interested in here is not only religion or Christianity *per se*, but faith communities as a context in which ideas of truth are constructed and reconstructed through processes of communication. It should also be noted that

I am using the word 'truth' broadly to denote the state of acknowledging something as real and existent, or accurate. Statements about the structure of reality would, by this definition, be truth claims. For example, we may say that society is a 'real thing' existing in 'reality'.

Berger (1969:11) writes that 'society is a product of human activity that has attained the status of objective reality.' The creation of society is a 'dialectic phenomenon' that occurs between humanity and society (ibid.:3). We speak to society, thus creating it and manifesting it through our language and our actions. Yet society also speaks back to us, influencing how we respond. Therefore, society and humanity can be viewed as products of each other. By using symbols we get nested in a web of meaning.

Within a social reality there is a social order. Through the process of legitimation, that which we collectively propose to call 'real' becomes not merely a matter of social agreement but, rather, of fact: '[Legitimations] do not only tell people what *ought to be*. Often they merely propose what is' (Berger, 1969:29f, emphasis in original). We play by the rules because the rules have become facts of the universe – in our perception. What underlies Berger's abstraction is the immaterial's capacity to be just as 'objectively real' as the material's. That is an important concept for this thesis.

The objectivation process of converting social phenomena into objective reality performs the function of ordering and giving meaning to things. Berger (1969:32) argues that legitimation is a form of reality-maintenance, and he claims that religion is an especially effective instrument for such a task. 'Religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is by *locating* them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference' (ibid.:33, emphasis in original). Marriage can be an example of a social institution that is legitimized by religion: two people with a religious worldview (in this case Judeo-Christian) who decide to live their lives together are not doing so for mere practical reasons, but their union is given a higher (sacred) meaning as it is representative of God's will for people to not be alone[1] and because it is God's will, it is inherently good.

Berger's work allows us to see our understanding of reality on the whole as something that is constructed and maintained through acts of social interaction.

[1] Genesis 2: 18. New Revised Standard Version.

This is a segue to Horsfield's (2015:7) account of Christianity as not merely a religious institution but as a phenomena that 'has developed and been constructed in the process of being communicated.'

In order to construct a religion in the way that Berger discusses it, one needs to identify truth claims that can be objectivated. In the case of Christianity, trying to fixate Jesus as a person as well as his teaching into a clear and easily understood system is highly difficult – like turning a poem into a spreadsheet. Yet, spreadsheets are vital to organizations, such as the Church.

Horsfield (ibid.:36) notes that the many letters by Paul the Apostle enabled his particular interpretation of Jesus to be circulated into the wider culture of his time. Through the medium of letter writing, a particular understanding of Christianity's central figure was constructed and reinforced. This is but one example of how written documents – communicative events – have been the site at which the Church's teaching, practices, organizational guidelines, theology, and self-understanding has been fixated. Communication has been central to the reality-maintenance of the Church, starting with the parchments of Paul, through to the printing press of the Reformation (ibid.:192) and on to the Papal encyclicals distributed today online (Papal Encyclicals Online, 2021). One site for the construction and mediation of theology today is the medium of podcasts, and that is what I will explore in the analysis section.

Why does this matter?

The processes of mediating, communicating, and thus constructing, a social reality along with ideas that are understood as true and that pass for knowledge can be observed in many places. As mentioned before, religion is an area in which such processes are especially brought to the fore due to the nature of religion itself, which is one of the reasons that it is an apt place to start when looking for a case study for this thesis. However, the value of this research lies in the fact that the same patterns can be found in many different areas apart from faith traditions. For example, scientific communities search for and communicate ideas of knowledge, and journalism works off of assumptions of what is understood to be objective perspectives.This thesis highlights the mechanisms of defining truth and knowledge in the context of a modern media environment.

Truth as Object

Religion and Truth

This is, arguably, a thesis about the social construction of truth. I should immediately add that I am not making any metaphysical judgements about what claims about reality are ontologically true. My framing of truth as constructed, or as fixations of belief[2], does not mean that the truth claims referenced are not true in an ultimate sense. Neither does it mean that they definitely are. The *understanding or construction* of truth and *truth itself* are two entirely different topics, and I am only investigating the former. Furthermore, I am approaching religion as communities of negotiation and fixation of beliefs with the purpose of establishing what is universally, existentially and cosmically true. The act of fixing beliefs in a community is an inherently *communicative* act; thus, this thesis qualifies as research within the field of Media and Communication Studies.

As a means of moving forward, I postulate the following: 'Truth' can be understood as an abstract object which we, as human beings, believe to exist, thanks to the fact that abstract objects *are real* to the extent that we *act as if they are*. Allow me to devote the next section to backing this up.

The concrete existence of abstract objects

'All our attitudes, moral, practical, or emotional, as well as religious, are due to the "objects" of our consciousness, the things which we believe to exist, whether really or ideally, along with ourselves' (James, 1902:53). This quote highlights that whether unseen things (such as a spiritual realm) are a part of our reality or not, we behave as if they are, regardless. To make this point more clear, I would give the example of the abstract concept 'love': the sensation of being in love is not something material to which you can point and say, 'Look! Here is *a thing* you can *see* and *touch* and *therefore* it exists.' However, in fortunate cases, what you *can* see are the *effects* of the love as they materialize in the forms of, say, intimate physical touch, self-sacrificial actions, candle-lit dinners and intense

[2] This is a concept readily associated with Charles Sanders Peirce, and it will be a recurring theme in my thesis.

emotions manifest as pounding hearts. Even though we cannot see or touch love itself we act and react *as if* it truly exists. We can see the physical and material manifestations, and consequences, of it.

In the act of praying to/with/in God, God is real for that person because *their action of praying* postulates that God is real; the reality of God is *enacted* and the abstract concept or object of 'God' has *material consequences* in the form of prayerful people. Furthermore, for religious individuals, 'truth' as an abstract concept also exists since they would say that it is *true that* God exists, and, furthermore, they would make statements of truths *about* God. All such statements are *communicated* through the embodied actions of the people who adhere to them. In some sense, the truths are thus *made* real. (I will return to this notion as I discuss American Pragmatism below.)

Lest I be misleading, I must readily point out that this notion of the reality of abstract objects is applicable to the human experience as a whole and is not limited to religious contexts. My previous example of 'love' should suffice to illustrate this. The common human intuition that things of an immaterial nature are real is indeed so common that it gave rise to that which we now know as the platonic theory of ideas (James 1902:56f).

Now that we have established abstract objects as things that are socially or psychologically real, and identified 'truth' as one such real thing, it is time to investigate how 'truth' is socially constructed. As the previous adverb hints at, a key concept in this exploration is: *community*.

Engaging American Pragmatism

Peirce (2009) provides the theoretical underpinnings for viewing 'truths' as fixations of belief. On the American pragmatist view (which Peirce is associated with; cf. Gail Hamner 2003), that is true which we believe to be true and accordingly enact. Peirce (2009:42) writes:

> Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief; while the latter is a calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid, or to change to a belief in anything else.

In other words: doubt is here understood to be that which creates the incentive to investigate and establish beliefs, so as to eradicate uncertainty.

American pragmatism has been characterized as being 'anti-', for example: anti-universalist, anti-essentialist and so forth (Gail Hamner 2003:3). Pragmatists *de*-construct. Furthermore, 'they increasingly emphasize the embeddedness of human knowing in bodily action and social interaction' (ibid.:7). The question of what the nature of knowledge is and how it is reached – or produced – takes center stage. Such inquiries touch upon the metaphysical problem of ultimate reality. Concerning this, Gunn (1998:404) draws the contours of a shift in philosophical understanding: Whereas anything of an ultimate nature, such as precisely reality, or truth, or meaning, was historically understood to be *beyond* humanity, on the pragmatist view, it is instead relocated *within* it. An apt illustration of this is the relationship between sign and meaning. Someone who does not adhere to the pragmatist standpoint might state that these are two separate entities and that the former *refers to* the latter. The pragmatist philosopher, on the other hand, would postulate that meaning is not beyond the sign, or separate from the sign, but expressed *as* the sign within the boundaries of the social interactions of a community. 'Meaning arises out of the relationship between an act and those trying to understand it – it is the product of an interaction of two subjects' (Fay 1996:142). In sum, meaning can be conceptualized as *dynamic* and as *created* through the process of interpretation, which in turn is an activity present in both the production and consumption of signs. This notion gets to the heart of the anti-essentialist quality of American pragmatism. If meaning is a product of interpretation, it follows that it is not something one could extract from beyond the sign.

For the sake of clarity and continuity, let us return to the topic of the real existence of abstract objects. From the pragmatist perspective, such objects do not exist *per se* in any metaphysical sense; it is not as though these concepts are found 'out there' and we are 'down here' referring to them. No, what the pragmatists argue is, rather, that those abstract objects – or *meaning* (at this point, we can probably use these terms interchangeably) – are the products of social interaction in a community, or the result of *fixations of belief*, to speak with Peirce. In other words: That which we hold as true is the product of *communication*.

If meaning is understood as something that happens in the interaction between two or more people (ibid.:142), it can also be said that community is a necessary

element for meaning to exist; it is within a community that beliefs can be fixated, negotiated, and re-fixated. And it is as such communities that I approach religion in this thesis. Similar to scientific communities (particularly those in the realm of natural sciences), religious communities have a vested interest in settling matters of Truth with a capital T. Some (American pragmatists) might say that fixations of belief is the very bread and butter of churches and universities alike. The case study of this thesis, the podcast *ANFET* (CAC 2021a), is here taken to be an exploration of the negotiation and re-fixation of beliefs in the context of contemporary Christian theology. As such it mirrors what values and questions are currently important to the people of contemporary, Western society.

How exactly are beliefs fixated? How can we understand community as a result of communication? In the next section, I explore the history of communication theory and furthermore demonstrate how we can view the process of communication as that which creates and maintains community, rather than as simply an act of relaying information.

The Idea of Communication

Splitting word and meaning

That which Durham Peters (2000:63ff) refers to as the Spiritualist Tradition, as a foundation for our understanding of communication theory, is centered around the idea of transmission (Carey 2009:12). Durham Peters (2000:64) observes that this is often our everyday perception of communication:

> In everyday usage, "communication" rests squarely on such conceptions: Each of us has a treasure chest of thoughts and wishes uniquely our own. […] Language and signs are crude carriers for the inner life. Words are at best conventions; they refer to meanings inside people's minds and to objects in the world. When we express ourselves, we trust private self-stuff to public symbol proxies. Other people catch only the proxies, not the original fullness we had when we uttered our innards. Every utterance is thus a fall or at least a transition into a crossroads of sign traffic that is subject to collisions and bottlenecks; all communication, whether face-to-face or distant, becomes a problem of mediation. If only the

> signifying vehicles would vanish so that we could see into each other's hearts and minds, genuine communication would be possible.

As we can see in the quote above, Durham Peters circles the idea of mediation as being a central problem in communication, both theoretically and literally. Communicating is here a matter of conveying something immaterial to another and there may be several hindrances along the way in this process. Carey (2009:13) links the transmissions-based view of communication to the idea of transportation. At the core of this view of communication lies the notion of something be carried somewhere (or somewhen). Some *immaterial* content is transported from a sender to a receiver through *material* means. A word and its meaning are ontologically distinct; they belong to different categories; the former *carries* the latter.

The split between word and meaning can be illustrated by turning to the work of St. Augustine, and his view on the relationship between the body and the soul. Durham Peters (2000:70) writes:

> Augustine uses the contrast of flesh and spirit to explain signs. The sound of a word is material; the significance of a word is mental. Like human beings, the word is split into a body (sound) and spirit (meaning). To explain the word, Augustine often resorts to the Word, the logos of the Gospel of John, "the Word made flesh," the second member of the Trinity; it is remarkable how consistently discussions of the work of language accompany his discussions of the Incarnation.

Thus, in St. Augustine's framework, a sign or a word is only important to the extent that it points to its interior, immaterial content (ibid.:68f). The word is that which carries its meaning and we ought not confuse the medium for the message.

So far we have an understanding of communication as the process of carrying meaning from one place to another through some form of medium. But this is not the only way of understanding the phenomenon of communication – as we shall see in the next section.

Going to Communion

We can view communication from a ritual-based perspective (Carey 2009:15). Understanding communication as ritual makes the process of communicating a matter of *community* rather than of transporting information from one place to another while hoping that it is received according to the intentions of the sender. Carey (ibid.) writes that 'the archetypal case under a ritual view is the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality.' For the sake of example, let us turn to such a sacred ceremony: the celebration of the Eucharist.[3] I argue that receiving Holy Communion can be understood as an act of communication.

The pinnacle point of a Catholic and Orthodox Mass is the celebration of Christ's physical presence in the bread and wine which is administered among the people present. In Catholic and Orthodox theology, the Eucharistic host is literally transformed into the body of Christ; the accidents remain the same but the substance is changed. Therefore it is still perceived as bread by the finite senses, but in terms of ontology, a transformation has occurred (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2016:346ff). When someone eats a consecrated host, they are – in the Catholic and Orthodox understanding – literally eating the body of Christ, which means that it is *becoming a part of them on a cellular level*. Not merely symbolically, but also biologically. A union is established (for those who identify as Catholic or Orthodox Christians) between the person who consumes the host, and God, but also between the people participating in the Mass. The act of celebrating the Eucharist is a practice that establishes and maintains community: The people who participate in the celebration are united in their shared beliefs, and this union is expressed through the act of receiving Holy Communion.

The Church is a community that is structured and maintained through communication, much like society at large. Berger (1969:19) discusses how society is continually established and maintained as an entity within a social reality when humans impose a 'meaningful order, or nomos […] upon the discrete experiences and meanings of individuals'. Language – broadly read: communication – structures our experience of reality and thus simultaneously

[3] This is one of the most central rituals in the Christian religion, especially for the Catholic and Orthodox believers. It traces its origins to Jesus's last supper with his disciples (Matthew 26: 17-29; Mark 14: 12-25; Luke 22: 7-38).

constitutes the foundations of our social world by providing meaning to it. Any social order needs to be approved by a community through the use of legitimation, if we are to once more speak with Berger. '[Legitimations] do not only tell people *what ought to be*. Often they merely propose what *is*' (ibid.:29f, emphasis in original). When the Catholic or Orthodox priest holds up the consecrated host at the altar and proclaims that *this is* the body of Christ, and the members of the congregation offer up their 'amen' to this when they receive it, the reality of the Church and of the mystical body of Christ – as *community* – is affirmed and given the status of objective facticity. One might, from a pragmatist perspective, read the entire celebration of Mass as a communicative act functioning as the affirmation of certain fixed beliefs. The *truthfulness* of the fixed beliefs, the community, and the theology that is produced and reproduced at any given Mass is deemed as truthful precisely because it is legitimated – perceived as being coherent with objective and ultimate reality.

Berger (ibid.:31) adds that 'legitimating formulas must be repeated' lest the reality which they are upholding starts to fade away. Repeatedly communicating the body of Christ through the celebration of Holy Mass can therefore be read as an act of 'reality maintenance' building the community of church, not just in space, but also in time.

Quick recap

So far we have covered the following: understanding religion as communities of negotiation and fixation of beliefs; understanding 'truth' as such fixations; understanding abstract concepts (such as 'truth', or meaning, or community) as 'things' that are 'real' in a social reality yet not metaphysically separate from humanly experienced reality (according to the American pragmatists). I have also discussed the centrality of embodiment, or enactment, and of material consequences, to the concept of meaning, and finally, I have framed communication as that which creates and maintains communities.

In the remaining sections I will make some methodological remarks pertaining to my case study, and then proceed by demonstrating how the theological conversations in the *ANFET* podcast (CAC 2021a) can be understood as a communicative act of negotiating and re-fixating beliefs. Furthermore, I make

some suggestions as to how one might situate this analysis in a postmodernity discourse.

A Believable Approach

Learning by example

This research is a case study of truth-construction through acts of communication. But what is the value of a case study? How do we apprehend knowledge produced within the bounds of a particular case?

Flyvbjerg (2001) makes a distinction between context-independent and context-dependent knowledge respectively. The former pertains to universal principles, while the latter is concerned with case-by-case matters. '[W]henever [Socrates] asked for universals he got cases' (ibid.:69). Flyvbjerg uses this as an illustration of the impossibility of finding anything equivalent to laws of nature within the world of human behavior. He further uses Socrates, as well as Aristotle, to elevate the significance of individual cases. Flyvbjerg (ibid.:70) writes:

> Aristotle, who may be seen as the founder of empirical science, asserted that in the study of human activity we cannot be satisfied with focusing on universals. The study of human activity, according to Aristotle, demands that one practice phronesis, that is, that one occupy oneself with values as a point of departure for praxis. And Aristotle considered that values and human behavior must be seen in relation to the particular.

We can take 'in relation to the particular' to mean: on a case-by-case basis. For the purposes of this thesis, Flyvbjerg's approach means that I need to find a particular case where the processes of truth-construction through acts of communication can not only be observed but also better understood. Cases of this kind could be found in many different places. I argue that the *ANFET* podcast fits Flyvbjerg's (ibid.:77) criteria for critical cases. Such cases are characterized by their richness in information, in contradistinction to merely representative cases. Critical cases 'can be defined as having strategic importance in relation to the general problem' and 'activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied' (ibid.:78).

Human beings have been understood as fundamentally religious in nature (Gustafsson 1997:15). This is arguably why we have terms such as homo religiosus, 'the religious human' (Sky 2005:23). In other words: questions about the meaning of life, about why anything (and any thing) exists at all, and questions about Truth with a capital T could be said to be as old as humanity itself. In a religious context, these exact issues, which also are those I wish to research (truth, knowledge, how we know what we know about existence, and so forth), are given center stage. A podcast about religion and how one can live a contemplative life is thus a good place to start when looking for a suitable case study. But there is more – what is it that makes *ANFET* a critical case and not just a representative one? I would argue that the answer to this question lies in the ecumenical[4] approach that the hosts of *ANFET* take and the openness to other faith traditions that they exhibit. Because they are not situated within one single tradition but several, the act of defining truth (in this case, shaping a theology that is relevant to people of postmodernity) is not a means for something else but an end in itself. In *ANFET*, ideas both clash and connect. More actors and more basic mechanisms are activated, to speak with Flyvbjerg (2001:78). In sum: the *ANFET* podcast is an apt and critical case for the purposes of this thesis.

The Case: Another Name For Every Thing

The *ANFET* podcast (CAC, 2021a) is a conversational audio podcast based on Franciscan friar Richard Rohr's book *The Universal Christ* (2019). It has a total of five seasons. The show's hosts, Brie Stoner and Paul Swanson, talk to Fr. Rohr about the core themes of his book and its theological underpinnings. A recurring theme in Rohr's work – and thus in the podcast – is the differentiation between Jesus (as a person) and Christ (as a notion of spirit taking material form). The podcast is produced by The Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. When analyzing the podcast I take closer looks at some of the conversations that are had on *ANFET* and view them through the lens of different theory-based texts.

[4] Richard Rohr is a Franciscan friar, and he thus represents the Catholic tradition. Brie Stoner grew up in the Baptist tradition, and Paul Swanson comes from an Evangelical background.

Down to brass tacks

I have been listening to the entirety of the *ANFET* podcast. The various episodes have accompanied me on a personal level since the show was first launched in early 2019 (CAC 2021b) and I have listened to many of the episodes more than once, sometimes two or three times. Thus, when it was time to start working on this thesis, I came in with a high degree of familiarity with what was to become my empirical material. A second step was to create a spreadsheet that charted all the episodes as well as keywords for each one. I generated these keywords through a combination of listening to the episodes or reading through their respective transcripts, as well as pulling information from the descriptions assigned to each episode by CAC. This process can be described as a qualitative content analysis. I identified 'themes that [helped me] […] tell the story of the data' (Boyle & Schmierbach 2020:338). In other words, what emerged through this process were the key concepts and topics that are discussed on the *ANFET* podcast, as well as the main ideas that the hosts wish to offer their listeners.

The analysis section in this thesis is not only, or even primarily, an analysis of the *ANFET* podcast. It is an analysis of certain *ideas*, namely our notions about communication and about our conceptions of truth. A consequence of this is that theoretical literature on this topic plays a heavy part in the analysis itself. That is also why this thesis does not contain a separate or dedicated literature review section as one might otherwise expect. The analysis *is* the literature review, or vice versa.

This also means that the analysis, as it relates to *ANFET*, is not structured so as to provide analytical points about every episode. My sampling criteria for episodes to include in the analysis has been meta-thematic in nature. In many cases, the same theoretical point could have been made by analyzing passages from several podcast episodes, which I have not done for the sake of avoiding redundancy. Thus, as far as sampling goes, I have selected quotes from some episodes that – together with the selected literature – adequately illustrate the main philosophical problem that I tackle. Other episodes might have been selected instead, but the point is not the content of the episodes. The point is the processes which can be observed in all episodes and which can be better understood and clarified in certain ones.

Quick note

The CAC provides transcripts to the majority of the *ANFET* podcast episodes. These are the transcripts I have used for the analysis. When I reference a certain episode, I follow a formula in which I first list the season and then the episode, and finally the page number(s) of the transcripts. For example, S1E1 (2) means Season 1, Episode 1, page 2.

Contemplative Conversations

Christ is not Jesus's last name

Rohr (2019: 5) understands 'Christ' as referring to 'the transcendent within of every "thing" in the universe,' or in other words: as a material manifestation of a spiritual reality. On this view, Christ becomes 'another name for every thing' – not for every concept or idea, but for every thing. The theological implications of such a christology are significant. Rohr often points out that 'Christ is not Jesus's last name.'

At first glance, Rohr's interpretation of Christ might seem quite different from the literal definition of the word, which becomes evident when we examine the etymology (OED Online, 2021): 'Christ' refers traditionally to the title of an individual person, namely Jesus of Nazareth, and the word stems from the greek translation of the Hebrew word 'Messiah' which situates the word in a specifically Jewish context. The Messiah is known as a ruler anointed by God in the Hebrew scriptures. Furthermore, theologically speaking, 'in various later apocalyptic traditions [Christ / Messiah is] interpreted as the future redeemer of the human race' (ibid.). In sum: the meaning of the word 'Christ' is commonly understood as a single person to whom the entire world is subject by virtue of this individual's authority, which is granted by God. Christ is 'the chosen one.'

If we are to follow the lead of the pragmatists, we would not assert the definition above as neither true nor false, but simply as a fixed belief that has been established by a community of (Christian) theologians over time and through space, and this fixed belief has then been disseminated – mediated through word and symbol – to the wider public. Through social interaction, an agreement has been struck,

which stipulates that 'Christ' as symbol and word means Jesus of Nazareth, as the redeemer of the world, offering eternal salvation to those who place their faith in him. As more and more people have used and continue to use 'Christ' in communication to indicate the concept outlined above, the definition I have sketched becomes understood as true by virtue of it being fixated as a belief – that is: not merely held or suggested, but specifically fixated (cf. Peirce, 2009). To speak with Berger (1969: 11) one could say that 'Christ' has been objectivated which means that what 'Christ' as a particular symbol stands for 'has attained the status of objective reality.' Furthermore, through communication – such as liturgy[5] – the theological understanding of 'Christ' as meaning 'Jesus, the personal savior' with all that this entails has been legitimated; as a symbol, it has been used consistently in a particular way so as to establish that this is not only how 'Christ' ought to be understood but simply that this is what 'Christ' inherently, naturally, and obviously means.

Rohr's definition of Christ is discussed in a passage from S1E1 (2-3). The word 'Christ' is here given a definition which associates it primarily with the concepts of presence and relationship. In other words, it is defined as something immaterial that can manifest as material. Rather than having 'Christ' mean one specific person, *ANFET* suggests that it can instead encapsulate 'love' and 'caring presence':

> *Paul Swanson:* As we talk about the themes of The Universal Christ, how do you explain the Christ to a child?
>
> *Richard Rohr:* Wow […] [C]ertainly the most simple language of love, caring for you, protecting you, always, everywhere, all the time, they don't have trouble believing that kind of language. To us, it almost sounds sentimental and like a sales job. I don't think it's heard by a small child as a sales job, but [as] a wonderful unfolding presence that they can rely upon. So, any language that communicates presence, availability, caring, protection […].
>
> It's all presence, presence, however you can communicate presence, and caring presence.

[5] Worship service. From a ritual perspective (Carey 2009:15) it is easy to see how this can be understood as communication in action.

Through the lens of semiotics we can see that the symbol of 'Christ' (such as the word itself, but equally a crucifix, or an icon of Jesus, and so forth) has now been expanded immensely to not exclusively refer to a person (Jesus) but instead to include manifestations of 'love' or 'loving presence' as well. The nature of the love referenced is arguably universal and inclusive, as Rohr frames it in terms of 'caring for you, protecting you, always, everywhere, all the time'. However, it is not only the *meaning* of 'Christ' that has been broadened, but the *embodiment* of that meaning has reached greater proportions as well. The concept of universal love that Rohr, Stoner, and Swanson are discussing is no longer exclusively linked to symbols such as the word 'Christ' or the image of Jesus; it can just as well be incarnated – or *signified* – in the embodied relationships between people, as evidenced by this passage, again from S1E1 (2-3):

> *Brie Stoner:* You mentioned relationships as being part of how we build that sense of presence with children, and I wonder, what relationships in your life have been part of the significant expansion into a more cosmic Christ? You know, I think for myself, many of the greatest recognitions haven't been theoretical. They've been through—
>
> *Richard Rohr:* Concrete, yeah.
>
> *Brie Stoner:* —relationships, so I wonder if you could share any of the relationships that come to mind for you, that helped you experience the Universal Christ.

The acts that manifest such relationships are added as symbols to the web of meaning that communicates Christ.

'Locke's notion of communication rests on his understandings of mind and language,' and 'language makes the inner life of ideas […] publicly accessible' (Durham Peters 2000:82f). The point being made here, which I wish to underline, is the definite, conceptual split between meaning and sign, or inner and outer life, or body and soul. Dichotomy is the keyword that separates content from container on this particular view. Here, communication becomes a problem of assigning our inner life – the meaning within – to those public symbols which are best suited to carry our interior ideas across time and space to a receiver, hopefully without distorting the meaning in the process. 'The link of word and idea, for Locke, is a social contract held up by the collective agreement of individuals' (ibid.:85). To return to our 'Christ' analysis, we might suggest that

the word 'Christ' has been linked to the identity of a specific Jewish man born in Bethlehem, and to the idea of personal salvation, and these links have been socially agreed upon by a very large collective of individuals.

The discussions on *ANFET* propose new semiotic structures. Let me share another passage from S1E1 (3):

> *Paul Swanson:* Richard, you used a phrase just a moment ago that is one of my favorite of yours, which is "Christ-soaked world." What does that phrase mean to you, and what can we learn from that imagery?
>
> *Richard Rohr:* What I believe, and I believe the scriptures say, but we just weren't told to look for it, is that reality was christened, if I can use that word, from the very beginning, from the moment of its inception. Now it's interesting that we use the metaphor of anointed, pouring oil over something to reveal its sacredness, starting with the stone of Jacob; Beth-el. This is the house of God. This is the gate of heaven.
>
> So we see this mounting recognition in the Bible, of presence, of presence. So I'm so glad that phrase struck you, that reality is already soaked with the presence, and we sought a metaphor like anointing, to remind us of what was already there, to say, "This is sacred." The oil doesn't make it sacred. The anointing of something makes you […] aware, "This person, this rock, is sacred" […]
>
> And of course, that's the meaning of the word Christ. Christ is simply the Greek word for Messiah, the anointed one. And the trouble is that we limited that anointing to the unique body of Jesus, and then didn't convince many people that was true, because once you go on the limiting course, "It's only here. It's not there," then you create argumentative Christianity, deciding what is anointed and what is not.

Rohr acknowledges that the symbol 'Christ' has been linked to the idea of the 'unique body of Jesus' and this word also functions to ascribe certain divine qualities to Jesus's identity by virtue of the link between the symbols 'Christ' and 'anointed', via the Greek verbal language. However, Rohr also introduces a third symbol – 'presence' – to suggest a redrawing of these previously socially established connections between symbols and meaning. The symbol 'presence' becomes that third mechanism which enables the symbols of 'Christ' and 'anointed' to refer to the individual named Jesus and to ascribe divine 'choseness'

to him while at the same time connoting the divine anointing of everything material – whether that be people, or objects, or buildings, or plain rocks.

In the brief analysis above we have been operating from what is essentially a transmissions-based view of communication (Carey 2009:12) or what Durham Peters (2000:63ff) names the Spiritualist Tradition. On this view, signs are mediums that carry or contain meaning – these are separate entities. However: How can we view *ANFET*'s explication about Christ from a ritual perspective (Carey 2009:15) or through the lens of American pragmatism?

'Like the spiritualist tradition, G. W. F. Hegel puts Spirit at the center of communication; unlike it, Spirit (*Geist*) is always embodied and tragically conflicted' (Durham Peters 2000:109). On the view we reviewed earlier, spirit and body can be used as metaphors for meaning and sign – something immaterial (spirit/meaning) is mediated through something material (body/sign). These two elements are separate; a body *has* a spirit. In contrast, while Hegel finds the notion of Spirit useful, he does not view it as separate from Body. Meaning is not an abstract 'thing' of its own, but rather, the sign and its meaning are the same; 'there is no content separate from form […]. [Hegel's] philosophical method is a kind of incarnational analysis' (ibid.:111). There is no message without a medium, no 'spirit without a body' (ibid.).

American pragmatists would also reject the idea that meaning and sign are two distinct entities.[6] In Hegel's philosophy, there is no distinct 'self' within the interiority of a person that can or should be manifested externally (ibid.:113). The 'self' – much like meaning – is created in relation to other people. The social and collective work of *making* meaning is emphasized (as opposed to pointing to it, as were it pre-existent), much like in the work of Berger (1969).

For the pragmatist, the important thing as far as communication goes is not whether 'Christ' exists as a metaphysical reality; it is not a matter of whether the word 'Christ' *points to* an actual *thing* that exists, and where the trouble is that of assigning the right symbols to the correct corresponding meaning items – on the pragmatist view, that very premise is denied altogether. No, rather: the point of communication is the social and concrete consequences of *our understanding* of meaning rather than *meaning itself*. 'The problem of communication for Hegel is

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[6] See Petrilli 2014:7 for a parallel discussion of the self as made of language.

not so much to make contact between individuals as it is to establish a vibrant set of social relations in which common worlds can be made' (Durham Peters 2000:118). From this philosophical standpoint, the goal and criteria for 'good' communication is not the effective and non-destructive transfer of information from one place to another. Rather, I would venture to say: it is to create an inclusive community in which people have ideas and understandings in common.

The *ANFET* podcast could be viewed as an expression of the social act of making meaning so as to create common understandings among people, which in turn makes possible a sense of unity among the members of that community. It is mediated social interaction that one might argue endeavors to 'establish a vibrant set of social relations in which common worlds can be made' (ibid.). On a small scale, this is happening between the podcast hosts, but thanks to the medium of podcasting, it can happen on a global scale among all those who listen to the show and interact with it through listener questions, for example. In S1E2 (2), Rohr is asked to reflect on his 'greatest mentors' that played a part of 'the unfolding manifestation of this insight of the Universal Christ,' and Rohr responds by naming Karl Rahner, S.J.,[7] St. Francis of Assisi, and Henri Nouwen. This further emphasizes the social and communal aspect of making meaning, in this case regarding the understanding of Christ as reality; it is clearly not something that Rohr as an individual is doing himself, which his reference to the thoughts of other people indicates. The *ANFET* podcast illustrates the *dynamic* and *ongoing* nature of meaning-making from the pragmatist perspective since the conversation does not end with the individual Richard Rohr – by virtue of it being precisely a conversation, which inherently includes more than one person. We can see an example of this in S1E2 (4):

> *Paul Swanson:* With that, how do we develop the capacity to have a practice of love of Jesus and love of the Christ?
>
> *Richard Rohr:* How do we love both? Is that what you're saying?
>
> *Paul Swanson:* Yeah, yeah, because we've so much focused on, or may just particularly modern traditions, focused on the personal Jesus.

[7] Society of Jesus; the Catholic order commonly known as the Jesuits.

> *Brie Stoner:* Yeah. How do we move beyond Jesus is my boyfriend?
>
> *Paul Swanson:* Yeah, without losing Jesus.
>
> *Brie Stoner:* Reclaim it, yeah, without losing the connection to that personal.
>
> *Richard Rohr:* Well, the point I try to make in the book[8] […] is how do you let the personal lead you to the universal […]. That's almost a question of maturity. A more mature person needs bigger seeing as they move into bigger worlds.
>
> Now, if you never move into bigger worlds, you never experience that need. Why is it that I can't love handicapped people? Why is it I can't love people of a different religion? Well, you've never had a friend there at the personal level. […]
>
> So, I think Teilhard de Chardin said, "The most personal is the most universal." That's excellent.

Questions are here asked and responded to; an inquisitive conversation is on display. In S1E1 (2-3) the meaning of 'Christ' is broadened to be something cosmic and universal, and in the quoted passage above, Swanson poses the question of how one can hold the tension between the particularity connoted by the symbol 'Jesus' and the universality which *ANFET* ascribes to the symbol 'Christ'. The expanded meaning of 'Christ' is further reinforced by means of contrast when Stoner introduces the idea of 'Jesus as boyfriend'; terms related to romantic relationships often connote exclusivity and focus on an individual, such as the lover or the beloved. Stoner wonders how to move beyond this metaphor, and by extent, how to move past the understanding that a Christian is someone who thinks in terms of exclusivity rather than inclusivity.

Finally, we also see intertextuality at work when Rohr refers to a statement about the personal and the universal made by Teilhard de Chardin, which means that the conversation happening here is influenced by a fourth non-present person. This further underlines the communal and social aspects of this communication.

Let us add another quote from S1E2 (5) to the mix:

[8] See Rohr 2019.

Brie Stoner: Right. There's a certain safety that the small Jesus world provides, and that I can live my nice life, have my nice things, give those nice things to my nice kids, and on and on we go, but then—

Richard Rohr: It's so true.

Brie Stoner: —but then I can ignore what's actually happening in our world right now—

Richard Rohr: What's actually happening, yes.

Brie Stoner: —or the needs that are right there.

Richard Rohr: That appears to be the majority of Christianity in every culture, not just ours. I just toured Europe much of the summer, yeah, same thing there. Christianity is a country club of select people. It self-identifies as such, but it isn't known for building bridges to other groups.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. That's such a telltale, right? It's like what you're saying, Jesus is the gateway or the door to the universal. When a group that calls itself Christians hunkers down and draws a clear distinction, there's no gateway to the universal.

Richard Rohr: I'm glad you used that word "gate." "I am the gate." We made Him into a wall, into a hardened silo more than a gate.

Again, we see a discussion of the observed phenomenon of pulling the symbol 'Christ' – which *ANFET* suggest connotes universality – into the semantic realm of 'Jesus', which signifies an idea of the individual, the personal, or of the discrete rather than the connected. Furthermore, and importantly, there is, in the conversation, a reaction against the aforementioned tendency which serves to deepen and increasingly shape the new meaning of 'Christ' – once more: by means of contrast. By conjuring images of Christians 'hunkering down and drawing distinctions' or as being 'a country club of select people' the hosts of the podcast indicate how they do not understand the symbol 'Christ'.

I shall continue by including a passage from S2E1 (2-3):

Brie Stoner: Yeah. So, as we continue this dialogue on The Universal Christ through these questions, we wanted to begin with an episode that serves somewhat

as a review to […] this concept, as an overview between the relationship of Jesus and Christ, and the distinction, because it's so challenging to absorb the first time through, right?

Richard Rohr: It is. It is. I do understand that. I had years to work with it, so it isn't shocking to me anymore. But if you never heard this, it sounds unorthodox. The irony is it's supremely orthodox. Of course, that's my opinion. But I think it's true. […]

Brie Stoner: To kick us off, here's a question from [listener]. We love this question because it's sort of the ultimate overview of the whole enchilada. He says:

Yes, Jesus and Christ are not the same thing. I get that. Christ existed from the moment God created matter. Christ is the logos, the blueprint for everything. Christ is the eternal union of spirit and matter. […]

Richard Rohr: He got a lot.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, right?

Richard Rohr: That's good.

Brie Stoner: He goes:

[Listener question:] I get that, but is/was the Christ in Jesus? Did the Christ reside there in Jesus while he walked on earth as the Christ resides in us? Jesus was fully God and fully man. Am I fully God and fully man, or only a tiny little bit of God and fully man? […] So, do Christ and Jesus meet if they are separate? I'm sorry if this is a little confusing to this aging Catholic, former Catholic, former fundamentalist, Jewish sympathizer, sinner, healing human.

Richard Rohr: Wow. There are a lot of questions in there, but they're very basic. […] So, yes, Jesus was objectively Christ from his birth in Bethlehem, his conception in Nazareth, just like you and I are objectively Christ. Now, his human journey, again, just like us, was the slow coming to that realization. […]

I think we're saying, he is fully God and yet only by reason of his unity with the Father and the Spirit. […] You and I are fully human, which gives us all kinds of permission and freedom to be imperfect, to make mistakes […].

We're implanted divinity, we're participatory in divinity. The language I've been using, […] he is the includer; we are the included. He is the universal savior; we are the saved, but we are a part of that union and that salvation. That's it, that we've been drawn into, this mystery of the Divine and the human coexisting. But for us, it's a gift; for him, it's an identity […].

Here is a passage from a later part of the same conversation (S2E1: 4-5):

Paul Swanson: This ties in well with our next question […]

[Listener question:] Richard, how would you explain the difference between pantheism and this theology of the Universal Christ?

Richard Rohr: That's real good to get that clarified right at the beginning. […] Pantheism, "pan" means everything, "theism" refers to God. So, pantheism is, a simplified way of saying it, is everything is God. Everything is divine. The Orthodox tradition insisted on making a necessary distinction that we can't live up to being the agent. We just can't […] So, by inserting an "en" right in the middle, panentheism, God in all things, that was deemed to be acceptable. In fact, not just acceptable, but the message itself that God is in all things.

So, I'm sure I'm being criticized for being a pantheist, but that's really lazy thinking. […] I am a panentheist. Now, our word for that is incarnationalism […]

Paul Swanson: I think of that phrase, "a Christ-soaked world"—

Richard Rohr: You've always liked that phrase.

Paul Swanson: I cant' keep it off my lips, but just the way, if the world is soaked with Christ, that is a much different way of explaining panentheism versus pantheism, which I think is a helpful reframing for folks trying to wrap their mind around this.

Richard Rohr: Then you have the incarnation of Jesus coming out of the world instead of coming into the world. I know it's going to change your perception of Christmas. […] Well, the Christ was here all the time, but the personification came out of the world that was already Christ-soaked from the beginning, as Ephesians say, three times, in the first chapter, "From the beginning." But, who of us can think in those big terms? We can't, so you can't blame anybody. As I keep saying, I just think the mind was not ready to imagine such magnitude, such infinity.

The two passages from *ANFET* that I have just shared are examples of how interaction with questions submitted by listeners broadens the community of interpreters (Durham Peters 2000:116) and increases the scope of the meaning-making potential. Through questions, responses, reflections, and comments, 'Christ' starts to mean something special in this particular context that it does not necessarily mean in other situations. This does not suggest that this community – comprised of producers and consumers of *ANFET* – have 'found' a new meaning; no, a new meaning is *incarnating* among them, if we are to believe the pragmatist thinkers and use their terminology. It is manifesting materially through the recorded voices of the podcast hosts and is then distributed to a world-wide audience thanks to the Internet.

All the points I have made thus far suggest that this podcast expresses meaning-making through social interaction. Durham Peters (2000:115) writes that 'Hegel's conception of *Geist* locates meaning as public rather than private.' This idea applies here: the meaning of 'Christ' sits not within any of the individual podcast hosts, yearning to be formulated and expressed correctly; nor is the meaning to be found 'out there somewhere' settling the conversation participants with the task of finding the signs that most accurately correspond to a preexistent meaning of the word 'Christ'. Instead, the meaning is public – it is *incarnated* in the community of Rohr, Stoner, and Swanson, and through the podcast medium, this community gets even bigger and can include people from all around the world. The show hosts produce symbols, such as words that are mediated through the podcast, and listeners interpret those symbols and produce signs of their own when they send listener questions to the headquarters of *ANFET* or when they talk about the podcast to people they know. The circulation of symbols both manifests and constitutes the dynamic nature of meaning-making.

'As a dialogical process, the self is a self in becoming, a continuous, open-ended process, never complete in itself' (Petrilli 2014:10). In a similar way, meaning is also *in becoming*, or continually *in process*, and it is so in community – hence the dialogical aspect. Furthermore: 'For Peirce, the self is a sign; it converges with the verbal and nonverbal language it uses. The self is made of language and is inconceivable without language' (ibid.:7). For our purposes, we can understand this as the notion that there is no meaning separable from the medium through which it is expressed. The discussions of the 'Universal Christ' on the *ANFET* podcast can be understood as the incarnation of the meaning of the 'Universal

Christ', and crucially: the meaning does not exist separately from this incarnation but *is* the very incarnation. Communication is the crucial phenomenon which makes any of this possible.

Doubt in 'Christ'

From a pragmatist perspective, one could argue that *ANFET* is a manifestation of the renegotiation of a fixed belief (Peirce 2009) represented by the symbol 'Christ' and the fixation of a new belief to which the symbol 'Universal Christ' is assigned. But how can we understand the motivation behind such renegotiation and -fixation? As mentioned previously, Peirce (2009:42) identifies *doubt* as the core impetus for the fixation of new beliefs. When a certain understanding – which we believe to be the true and correct understanding – suddenly does not seem to hold water anymore, we hurry to find a new way of approaching the subject, a new 'truth' with which to mend the ship lest it sinks. Our questions then becomes: what are the characteristics of our postmodern society that cause enough doubt in the fixed belief represented by 'Christ' so as to motivate the fixation of a new belief represented by 'The Universal Christ?'

The stories in which we live

In order to grasp postmodernity we must understand its predecessor, modernity, which Toulmin (1990) discusses in his work *Cosmopolis*. 'Old-time progressive politics rested on a long-term faith that science is the proven road to human health and welfare' (ibid.:9) – this illustrates belief in progress and prosperity; the vast possibilities, the bright future, and upward mobility. Such ideas arguably constitute the values of modern society. In the humanist school of thought, which correlates with modernity, there is a critique of tradition – especially religious ones – because adherents of the humanistic philosophical school assert that religion robs people of their moral independence (Henriksen & Vetlesen, 2013: 64). Kant also emphasizes the individual, in the context of moral reasoning (ibid.), which is but one expression of the individualism that makes up another important aspect of Western, modern society. For simplicity's sake, allow me to identify the ideas

above as a meta-narrative (de Wet, 2010) of societal progress free from tradition and permeated by secularization.[9]

However, Toulmin (1990: 9) states that ‘modern science and technology can […] be seen as the source either of blessings, or of problems, or both.’ Beck (1998:30) frames this as an issue of modernity becoming a problem for itself; new technology introduces new risks caused by that very same technology, and we are faced with questions of how to handle this in the most adequate way, be it technologically, scientifically, or politically. Artificial Intelligence could be viewed as a current hot-button issue, spanning areas of technology and politics alike, and AI introduces both perceived benefits as well as risks and highlights questions of ethics and values. Another important point that Beck (ibid.:213) makes is that the process of individualization commonly associated with modernity also constitutes, at least in part, the ambivalent nature of the modern project as a whole. While we may initially experience a sense of freedom in that we no longer are bound to traditional institutions (for example religious practices and views), we will soon experience this as equally the burden of not having any traditions or frameworks upon which we can rely. What starts to take shape here is a reduced confidence in what I have termed the meta-narrative of Modernity; we are given a less optimistic view as far as societal progress goes, despite Reason, science, technology, and the absence of ‘out-dated’ religious or traditional ideas.

This reduced confidence can also be expressed as the general ‘death of the meta-narratives,’ which is a concept often linked to the idea of postmodern society. Postmodernity ruled out any notion of transcendence. This creates problems for anyone wanting to make universal truth claims, as there is no metaphysical, non-contingent category of Truth. Questions about our free will also arise in the light of this, which Coakley (2015:21) gives voice to in her book about asceticism and sexuality. What is of great relevance for our purposes in this discussion is that the fundamental questions about reality that postmodernity raises – such as the existence or nonexistence of universal truth, or of our free will – introduces large-scale *doubt* on a societal level.

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[9] I use the common definition of this term, namely the notion that religious institutions no longer have the same impact on public life as they used to have. This does not, however, necessarily imply that people are less religious or spiritual on a private level.

Along with the Modernity meta-narrative there is the accompanying *Western* Christian meta-narrative. In S1E7 (2f) of *ANFET*, the hosts discuss the influence that the idea of transaction has had in Christian theology, and they paint a picture of a culturally (Western) specific idea of what it is to be a Christian: it is someone who views God as a judge who cares more about settling scores than love, and it is someone who believes that Jesus 'paid the price' for their sins. According to *ANFET*, Western Christianity tells the story of a god who is not love. This story does not escape the critique of postmodernity, not only on the basis of its content but simply because it is a story of reality, or a meta-narrative.

While *ANFET* joins in the deconstruction of this form of Christianity, the meta-narrative of Modernity has also been deconstructed by many and deemed not to hold water. The result is that we are left with great uncertainty about fundamental questions about reality: what is really true? What values should we uphold? And why? Much is at stake here which causes great doubt in the Peircian sense, and we wish to eradicate this doubt.

ANFET can be read as doing precisely that. For they not only deconstruct; they also *re*-construct. The fixated beliefs of the former paradigm are replaced by a new meta-narrative built up by new fixated beliefs. The *ANFET* podcast starts out with the statement that Christ is not Jesus's last name, and under that rubric an entire meta-narrative of Western Christianity is drawn out. I suggested that the symbol 'Christ' represents this paradigm, and that the symbol 'The Universal Christ' represents the new paradigm, which *ANFET* fixates in response to the doubt that postmodern society has brought upon many people who identify as Christian.

Doubt and Belief in the Postmodern World

The first research question

How can we understand ANFET as an expression of negotiating and generating ideas of truth and knowledge?

This is a thesis about the processes of communication that go into establishing that which we understand as truth, facts, or knowledge. Because religion as a social phenomena is so explicitly invested in questions of truth, a podcast which has

contemplative Christianity as its main topic has been chosen as a case study. The analysis of the *ANFET* podcast demonstrates that meaning can be understood as embodied in community. This, furthermore, makes the points that what we have access to are our *concrete expressions* of our *ideas about* truth, rather than truth itself, which is indeed a pragmatist notion.

Another thing to note which precedes the processes of 'truth-making' or 'belief-fixation' is that which incentivizes those very processes, namely some form of real and living doubt which a community (on the greater scale: a society) may experience. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, 'we live in times of great doubt.' Fay (1996:7) speaks of the skepticism that characterizes our current age; Mullins (2019) uses terms like 'alternative facts' and 'post-truth'; Grogan (2019) was referenced in the beginning for an example of research on government distrust, and Kołłątaj et al. (2020) was pointed to as an example of studies on anti-vaccination movements. Due to the apparent, current societal prevalence of skepticism, doubt, and questioning, we are likely to find many different communities of sorts that are set on dispelling such doubt and uncertainty. Faith communities are but one example. The opportunities for creating these kinds of communities are arguably greatly increased thanks to the Internet; the podcast that serves as this thesis's case study is only one example of a community, in this instance consisting of hosts and listeners.

The second research question

What role does communication play in our understanding of truth and knowledge?

At the center of this research is a case of community-dependent meaning-making through *communication*. The analysis reveals that not only is our understanding of truth shaped through language (communication as related to the sharing of ideas) but the use of language is also an inherently social act. Communication is therefore heavily linked to community. Underlining the centrality of community to meaning is of great relevance in an age where the Internet is as prevailing as it is right now. Through the World Wide Web, people are enabled to form all kinds of communities for eradicating doubt and fixating beliefs – producing knowledge. Podcasts, Internet forums, YouTube channels, social media etcetera can all be understood as various examples and expressions of this general, social process of

‘creating facts.’ The *ANFET* podcast is in other words only one of many examples of such processes in action, albeit a very illustrative and compelling one, as it fits the criteria that Flyvbjerg (2001:77f.) sets for his definition of a so-called critical case. The processes of fixating beliefs would historically have demanded physical and temporal proximity for people to create community through communication; in these days of a highly increased presence of effective communication technology, that is simply not the case. This allows for the establishing and negotiating of truth claims to be enacted to a far greater extent right now than it perhaps would be in other historical contexts, whether that be beliefs as they pertain to vaccination programs, trust in government, climate issues, or religious worldviews. What follows is all the more reason for scholars of media and communication to study such processes in the various forms they may currently take. We ought not be surprised to see a steady increase of instances in which the processes of establishing fixed beliefs in response to doubt, in the Peirceian sense, due to the presence of new media.

The third research question

How can we understand not only ANFET, but also the processes of defining our ideas of truth, in the light of postmodernity?

The *ANFET* podcast can be seen as but one expression of the need to establish new guidelines, new ‘truths,’ something to believe in again in a world where ‘God is dead’ if we are to trust Nietzsche, or where there no longer are any meta-narratives, as Lyotard would say. Again, I read this as implying the presence of a large-scale, societal, existential doubt, to speak with Peirce. Toulmin (1990:203 ff.) responds to this in his idea of either facing the future with hope or backing into it with perhaps a more cynical stance. He distinguishes between the two approaches by labeling the former as imaginative and the latter as nostalgic. In the context of the *ANFET* podcast, we can see this play out in the ways the hosts adopt a more imaginative stance, seeing new ways of understanding the person of Jesus and the Christian religion. Rather than excluding the secular world they are engaging with it in new ways as they make theology that is more inclusive and reemphasizes Jesus’s message of love, healing and restorative justice. Similar patterns can be gleaned in any organization or community that is characterized by

hope and renewal, such as people raising awareness about climate change and – importantly – suggesting a way forward in terms of concrete steps to be more caring and protective of the natural world. Organizations that do, for example, peace work of any kind could be another example (in that case political) of this general tendency to face the future rather than backing into it – again, borrowing Toulmin's wording.

With the above in mind, we might interpret the current situation as the end (or at least decrease) of deconstruction, and the dawn of reconstruction. Many scholars, such as Toulmin, have tried not only to define the boundaries of Modernity, but also that which comes after it. This thesis has not entered into that particular debate. However, the situation described above does invite an interesting question, namely: if the postmodern is associated with deconstruction, and we are currently moving into a phase of reconstruction, then what should we call this phase we are in? Have we actually moved beyond postmodernity into something new? Again, these questions are beyond the scope and purpose of this thesis, but they may be entertaining nonetheless. Some scholars have discussed the current trends of reconstruction as metamodernism (Vermeulen, T. & van den Akker, R. 2010). Without pursuing the issue further, I simply offer it as a related observation.

I will let Toulmin (1990:203) sum up the ideas above in his statement about our options as a society in times of doubt or uncertainty:

> We may welcome a prospect that offers new possibilities, but demands novel ideas and more adaptive institutions; and we may see this transition as a reason for hope, seeking only to be clearer about the novel possibilities and demands involved in a world of practical philosophy, multidisciplinary sciences, and transnational or subnational institutions. Or we may turn our backs on the promises of the new period, in trepidation, hoping that the modes of life and thought typical of the age of stability and nationhood may survive at least for our own lifetimes.

These words imply a choice between faith and fear, or perhaps cynicism. It would seem that Toulmin invites us to chose faith.

Closing remarks

Again I state: This is a thesis about the processes of communication that go into establishing truth claims or that which we understand as facts or knowledge. Whether or not what we understand to be true actually is so is food for thought in another setting, but from the point of view of social science, our understanding of truth has very real and concrete consequences – social and otherwise – as we embody the meaning we make in communities. And as stated before, these processes are more relevant now than ever. This is why this matters and should be researched.

As this is a subtle matter, a few distinctions should be made for the sake of clarity: This thesis does not argue that there are no metaphysical categories (such as truth) and that all there is are our fixated beliefs that are created in community. Such a claim would be advocating for a materialistic worldview (Stenmark 2018). Neither does this thesis argue for the reverse, that there positively are metaphysical categories beyond our bodily senses. That would likely be advocating for some form of theism (ibid.). This particular thesis neither refutes nor affirms any of the above; this research is simply not concerned with any of those questions.

It is furthermore not my errand to state that the sole function of organized religion is to create highly effective communities for fixations of belief and thus serve a 'world maintenance' function as Berger (1969) would have put it. As my analysis section hopefully has made clear, the above can be observed as *a* function of religion, but nowhere am I arguing that is the *exclusive* or *only* function that religious communities serve. Such a claim could only be made by committing logical fallacy which I try my best to avoid.

Finally, I should acknowledge and return to the fact that this is a thesis within the area of Media and Communication Studies. Hopefully I have managed to demonstrate the vastness of this academic discipline by going to the depths of the phenomenon we call 'communication.'

As a nod to Toulmin (1990), I would argue in favor of faith over fear in these times of reconstruction. Flyvbjerg (2001:39) makes the point that the social sciences do not have the capability of predicting the future; we are not studying any fixed laws of nature, as our friends in the natural sciences may be doing. Nevertheless, by observing what is happening on a societal level we may collectively and individually decide to take actions that we believe have the best

outcomes. We may allow ourselves to actively dare to hope for, and imagine, a bright future.

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Intimate listening: exploring audience's podcast experiences through the case of *Ångestpodden*

Anna Jaakonaho

Introduction

How would you imagine an introduction to a mental illness podcast? Now, examine this transcript:

> Hello everyone! A warm welcome to the 323rd episode of Ångestpoddeeen!
> Hello everybody...
> Welcome to my house [singing]
> What was that now again? [laughing]
> I don't know… good old Flo Rida!
> Ah yes, right! Welcome to my house [singing with a lowered voice]
> [laughing]
> How are you, my dear?
> Yeah, well…
> So, you don't like when I call you that?
> No, I hate it!
> How are you, my fine friend?
> You can just say 'my friend'.
> [laughing]
>
> (*Ångestpodden*, 'Att försöka sluta med antidepp!' 2021)

This introduction could be derived from any feel-good podcast; however, this podcast is specifically about *not* feeling good. This excerpt is from an episode of the Swedish podcast *Ångestpodden*, freely translated as 'The Anxiety Podcast'. Its two hosts, Ida Höckerstrand and Sofie Hallberg, want to lift the topics of anxiety and mental illness in a way that is approachable for many[1]. Ångestpodden is produced in Sweden, which is known as one of the happiest countries in the world. Why would Ida and Sofie think that there is a need for a podcast like this?

The idea of Ångestpodden arose from a casual conversation Ida and Sofie had on a train ride: 'Since we have felt this kind of anxiety, there must be many others who have felt the same. What would happen if we would talk about it?' The two friends decided to start their own podcast and now, several years and over 300 episodes later, Ångestpodden has approximately 150,000 monthly listeners[2] and it has won several awards in Sweden.

The Swedes, it appears, do have anxiety. This is because the Swedes are human beings. Although there exists a misconception that people in welfare states experience less mental suffering than those in less economically wealthy countries, anxiety in countries like Sweden is actually increasing (Paulsen 2020). In the contemporary Western world, and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the myriad uncertainties and possibilities of life may drive people to labyrinths of 'what if?' (Paulsen 2020). Anxiety can be seen as getting stuck in such labyrinth. It is about our awareness as human beings — the possibilities and limitations of our own being and the 'dizziness of freedom' in the face of the possible (Kierkegaard 2014:75).

Representations of anxiety are also increasingly present in media cultures, as demonstrated in a study of Fredrika Thelandersson (2020). This development has been intensifying since 2015 (Thelandersson 2020:ii), the same year that Ångestpodden first aired. As a part of this phenomenon, then, Ångestpodden, is an interesting case study for exploring how anxiety saturates contemporary media experiences and media cultures.

[1] See https://www.angestpodden.com/

[2] I received the number of monthly listeners via email from the podcast hosts. As a reference, *Poddindex* placed Ångestpodden as the 90th most popular, commercial Swedish podcast in its weekly rating (week 18). See https://www.poddindex.se/commercial_podcasts?page=5

Approaching Ångestpodden

This study seeks to understand Ångestpodden as a podcast experience offering its listeners affective, personal audio storytelling (see Lindgren 2016), thus, it explores the experiences of the people who listen to the podcast. Although the focus of the study could also be on media representations and performances (see Thelandersson 2020), to truly understand the affective media phenomenon of an anxiety podcast, it is crucial for one to listen to how people themselves make sense of their podcast experiences. While Thelandersson (2020) reveals mental health discourses and feeling-rules of neoliberalism, her study does not necessarily inform about how representations and performances matter in people's lives. This is where this study contributes.

Although this study acknowledges Ångetstpodden as predominantly a women's phenomenon,[3] it does not discuss feminist theory. That is simply because this study primarily considers the listeners of Ångestpodden as human beings, exploring their lived, subjective, and shared experiences with the podcast.[4]

To understand the podcast listening experience as it is lived by the listeners, the study uses a qualitative approach to analyze the audience members' own meaning-making of their experiences. These experiences are treated as engagement of media audiences, specifically examining the affective and emotional aspects of podcast listening. Of particular focus in the investigation is the intimacy of the podcast experience. The discussion of this study also seeks to provide greater general insights into the podcast genre.

The thesis asks the following three research questions:

1. How do the audiences of Ångestpodden make meaning of their engagement with the podcast?
2. How is intimacy experienced in the listeners' engagement?
3. What can this case study tell us about how podcasts matter as a media genre?

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[3] Listening demographics presented to me by the podcast hosts via email confirm this.

[4] However, the aspect of femininity is not completely ignored in this study and will be addressed at times.

Literature Review

Podcast: A genre of its own

Podcasts are a conspicuous media phenomenon. However, the cultural aspects of podcasting and podcast audiences have not yet been studied in great depths (Bottomley 2015:165). There are two specific contexts on which to focus: the digital and audio aspects of the podcast phenomenon. Podcasts demonstrate the democratizing potential of digital media, and they are often seen as an open 'platform' for broadcasting and contrasted to radio (Bottomley 2015). How can one then *hear* the difference of podcast and radio? Podcasts are often free from traditional rules of language in broadcasting, yet not free from commercial advertising and its obvious boundaries (Llinares et al. 2018:4). There is 'something fundamental about oral communication' in its tension between the subjective and objective (Llinares et al. 2018:1-2). Furthermore, while radio listeners are traditionally offered a more random and surprising selection of programs, podcast audiences tend to make more active choices about what they want to hear (Berry 2016).

However, as the podcast genre has strengthened its place in the media ecology, it can also be seen as having become less experimental, more professional, and more similar to radio (Cwynar 2015:191). Radio, moreover, is no longer excluded from the digital ecology and, much like podcast listening, has been shaped by digital affordances (Berry 2016). Thus, it is not meaningful to see podcasts as a truly new, independent format (Bottomley 2015:5). This study seeks to perform an in-depth investigation of podcast listeners' experiences using a case study and drawing from research about media audiences, as well as podcast and radio studies.

Audience engagement

This study approaches the listeners of Ångestpodden as an active audience, not as media users because the audience implies the collective experiences in media engagement (Livingstone 2003) and aligns more closely to the practice of listening. It neither views the listeners as consumers because, following the approach of Dahlgren and Hill (2020), the purpose is to investigate how and why media experiences matter to people in the socio-cultural context. This notion

understands media engagement as 'something more than attention, user interaction, or brand loyalty' (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:2).

This study strives to investigate the potential of engagement to create valuable experiences that spark audiences' agency. This approach also emphasizes affect and emotion in engagement, highlighting on one hand the subjectivity of media experiences and, on the other hand, its connective potential (Dahlgren & Hill 2020). Affect can also act as a driving force for audience agency. People's involvement is often sparked and maintained by affect and emotional investment (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:10). The 'energizing force' of media engagement (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:2) implies its potential to nurture *civic cultures* (see Dahlgren 2013) and spark *civic agency* (e.g. Dahlgren 2006; Dahlgren & Hill 2020). *Civic* refers to people's enactment as citizens: engagement with public matters and promotion of democracy (Dahlgren 2009:59). Dahlgren (2006)'s notion of civic agency denotes that citizenship is fostered by cultural and communicative practices and constructed by people themselves as they 'self-create themselves into citizens' (272). Citizenship is not something purely rational but has its origins in the private, daily lives of people in which they make sense of the world and themselves in both rational and emotional modes (Dahlgren 2006:275-276).

However, in addition to the civic potential of engagement, this study also centers its subjective importance to the audiences. The concept of *care structures* denotes how 'the care (the concern) that goes into making programmes in the production process,' which 'is there-to-be-found in the programmes themselves' (Scannell 1991:146). From different care structures — for instance, how the talk of the broadcasters generates the mood for the program — the care flows into people's daily lives. The 'dailiness' of the media experience could actually itself be seen as a care structure of broadcast media. The word 'ordinary' is crucial here, as it is largely in the ordinariness and regularity of the engagement[5] that audiences may add structure, routine, and eventfulness to their daily lives. (Scannell 1996:146-178.) Thus, as media brings meaning to the daily and the ordinary, it can also bring some ordinary to the daily. This study seeks similar meaning in the personal experiences of the podcast's listeners.

[5] Particularly with traditional broadcast media

Affective, emotional listening

To understand social and cultural phenomena, one needs to understand affective processes instead of only examining how people think and act rationally (Clough 2008). This study therefore examines podcast listening as an affective experience involving embodied sensations that spark emotion and agency. Rather than categorizing different affective and emotional states in the listening experiences, they are considered a part of the entangled process of engagement. The focus is on what the affect and emotion *do* in the podcast experience, how they make the listeners resonate and how the listeners themselves make sense of them (Jansen 2016:69-71). Affect is an appropriate basis for studying media engagement as it concerns 'links between the subjective and the cultural, individual and social, self and other, inside and outside' (Koivunen 2001). Affect is closely related to emotion but is generally seen more as its precondition (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:6). However, this study does not clearly distinguish between affect and emotion to encompass their interrelatedness in the situation (Shouse 2005).

Treating sound as affect enables one to understand it as both physical resonance of sound and as cognitive and emotional resonance with the meanings derived from it (Gallagher 2016:43-44). Instead of examining affect and emotion as the end product of engagement, the purpose of this approach is to analyze how they are a crucial part of the meaning-making processes in podcast experiences as well as how they serve as the energizing force of engagement (see Dahlgren & Hill 2020). This approach underlines how listening, sometimes neglected as a passive mode of engagement (Hilmes 2005), can be an active, powerful and connective experience.

Listening can bridge public discussions of common concern with embodied and subjective resonance (Lacey 2013:23). This socio-cultural dimension is especially evident in the context of broadcast media, which 'joins people together and reaches them when they are lonely' (Berland 2012:41). Radio brings sound messages to people at close range regardless of their original sending location and time (Berland 2012:41-42) and connects listeners to a shared social reality of being a radio listener, a *listening public* (Lacey 2013). The emotional resonance of the human voice may also enhance the connective affect of broadcast talk, for example through how listening to human talk brings text alive emotionally (Llinares 2018:132-133).

Talk can be seen as a more fundamental form of human communication than even language (Scannell 2019:2-6). When children learn to speak, they first hear, recognize, and understand something about this fundamental communication. What is apparent in this complex process is the child's attraction to that human voice, their view of talk as *the voice of the friend* (ibid. 7-8.) Broadcast talk, then, could be seen as the voice of the friend as it 'minimally presupposes a non-threatening, non-hostile disposition' (ibid. 31). Broadcast media has brought more non-institutional and repressed voices into both the public domain and the private spaces of listeners (and not as anonymous voices but as *persons*), breaking boundaries between the public and private (ibid. 43-45).

Intimate podcast experiences

Intimacy is commonly considered a central element of the podcast experience, and one expects a sense of intimacy to be present in the listener's engagement with Ångestpodden. One reason is that the topic of anxiety invites discussions of deeply emotional experiences. In addition to understanding intimacy as romantic and sexual relations, close friendships, or parent-child relationships (Register & Henley 1992:467), this paper also considers intimacy as a more individual experience of proximity to the inmost of oneself and others.

Intimacy is more traditionally considered an interpersonal connection (Register & Henley 1992). Over time, intimacy has transformed into a more individual but also a more public experience. When intimacy has traditionally been thought to belong to the domestic sphere (Andreassen et al. 2017:4), modernization has led to transformations in many traditional ties (Giddens 1991). *Intimate troubles*, such as questions of identities and personality types, can be seen as intimate ponderings particular to late modernity (Plummer 2003:5-7). Media has given space for different expressions of intimacy, and it can be seen as an arena for public intimacies (Chambers 2013). Media can thus be seen as contributing to the creation and maintenance of an *intimate public sphere,* a space for 'imagining and cobbling together alternative construals about how life has appeared' (Berlant 2011:182). Intimate public spheres also connect people, creating a sense of belonging between individuals who share 'a common lived history' (Berlant 2008:viii). Media also enables more individual ways of experiencing interpersonal intimacy, as it enables people to intimately connect with each other outside of conventional relationships (Chambers 2013).

Now, let us return to podcasts. Though podcast and radio are both essentially broadcasted talk, podcasts may often belong to a more democratic and digitally facilitated media ecology, allowing for more diversity of voices and expressions (Llinares 2018). Indeed, the audio storytelling of podcasts is well-suited for exploring lived, personal experiences (Lindgren 2016:1). Podcast as an *intimate bridging medium* delivers personal insights enhanced with emotional storytelling (Swiatek 2018) and may therefore connect people because of the affective properties of sound (Gallagher 2016) and disclosive storytelling (Meserko 2014). Moreover, the absence of the visual element along with the informality of broadcast talk may urge the listeners to create their own images (Crisell 1994). One should neither forget about the embodied resonance of sound. Sounds resonate in our bodies, and broadcast voices can even be felt 'inside the head' (Corner 2011:96). As a mobile medium, podcasts also 'move with the human body' (Spinelli & Dann 2019:23), and headphones create a personal *auditory bubble* (Bull 2006:133) that can be felt as intimate and private even when in public spaces.

This is all to elaborate the different dimensions of podcast intimacy: personal and disclosive storytelling, aural resonance and proximity, and personalized, intimate ways of listening. When exploring podcast experiences, it is important to be attuned to not only the cognitive, but also the affective and emotional, and thus embodied, aspects of engagement. Moreover, podcasts generate *hyper intimacy,* denoting that podcast listeners may deeply engage with both the process of listening and the content they listen to (Berry 2016). Thus, to understand podcast intimacy, one needs to understand podcast experiences as they are *lived* by the listeners. As has been argued above, intimacy can be experienced in a close, interpersonal exchange, but this study extends the traditional meaning of the concept to how audiences can experience intimacy through and with media (Andreassen et al. 2017:6). This study seeks to address how sound elements (Llinares, 2018), personal narratives (Lindgren 2016; Swiatek 2018) and the context of listening (Berry 2016) contribute to the intimacy of podcast experiences.

Bringing it together

The theoretical strands explored in this chapter are joined to establish the basis for exploring the podcast phenomenon from the perspective of the listeners rather

than, for instance, to investigate the podcast as a representation or performance. The framework comprises theories concerning engagement, affect and emotion, sound, listening, and intimacy, and is set to investigate a phenomenon of podcast listening that is experiential (Soltani 2018:195). It is formulated to elaborate how the listeners' experiences are subjectively meaningful to each listener personally and how they also construct socially shared experiences and meanings. With this said, this study acknowledges the nature of the lived reality as socially constructed, which implies that knowledge and meaning of the 'reality' are socially constructed by human beings jointly and rather than existing in advance (see e.g., Amineh & Asl 2015). The chosen theoretical framework emphasizes how cultural practices and subjective media experiences have broader societal significance and is linked to the methodology chosen to investigate this case, which I develop in the next section.

Methods

Investigating human experience

To understand the podcast listeners' lived experiences, this study aligns with the phenomenological approach as 'the study of human experience' (e.g. Sokolowski 2000:2). The aim of this approach is to avoid pre-conceptions as the podcast listening is experiential in its nature (Soltani 2018:195). Instead, this study seeks to paint a picture of the podcast listeners' first-person experiences. However, the findings of the study are based on interpretations of these experiences, and my task as the researcher was to remain reflexive when interrogating my own understandings (Finlay 2008:27-29). Even though the approach of this study offers subjective descriptions of the experiences of individual listeners, it also shows how these experiences are social. These experiences are *inter-subjective,* as they are not only subjective to each participant but also experiences of 'other selves and of society,' reflecting broader social intentions (Husserl 1946, cited in Wagner 1970:7).

Interviewing audiences

The main method for studying the audience's experiences was the qualitative interview, which gives voice to the audience members and attunes the researcher to listen to the participants and understand their multi-modal and context-dependent experiences (Hill 2018:7). However, as the focus of this study is listening and not the podcast as a cross-media product, the focus of the audience interviews was on the podcast's audio storytelling. Ten qualitative interviews were conducted with listeners of Ångestpodden. Participants were selected based on whether they had been regularly listening to the podcast for a minimum of one year. This would most often mean weekly listening. All interviewees were Swedish, since Ångestpodden is produced in Swedish. As it was easier to find female listeners for the interviews and, in fact, all of the people who contacted me via the invitation form were women, all ten participants of the study ended up being women. It was not considered purposeful to force men listeners into the sample because the listeners of Ångestpodden were observed to be predominantly women.

The interviews were conducted in a conversational form with open-ended questions, to encourage the listeners to talk about their listening experiences at length (Byrne 2012:219). Even though the subject of the podcast easily invites personal and intimate stories about mental health struggles, the participants were not asked personal questions or encouraged to talk about such issues if they did not initiate it themselves. All interview materials were anonymized, and the names of the interviewees were changed in the analysis of the paper to protect their identities. All participants signed and received a copy of a consent form which informed them about the outline of the research, the anonymization of the interview material and asked for their permission to record the conversation.

Because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted over video call. This set some limitations on observing the interviewees' bodily expressions, creating an additional challenge to the intent of establishing a good connection with each participant. However, I asked the participants to prepare for the meeting by finding a quiet place with a good internet connection and, if possible, somewhere comfortable to sit like a couch. Despite this, the important aspects of space and place in sensory ethnography are lost when conducting interviews remotely (Pink 2015:32-43). Instead, I encouraged participants to describe their everyday surroundings and sensory experiences of listening,

although those descriptions are quite different from experiencing it there with them. I will return to this question below.

Another issue in the interview process was language. I proposed that each interviewee use either Swedish or English; but that I would prefer to speak English. Six out of ten interviewees chose to speak Swedish as it felt more comfortable to them, and they did not regard themselves as fluent English speakers. I also proposed to each interviewee that they could change the language anytime in order to express themselves better. Indeed, the six interviewees who spoke Swedish generally gave longer answers than the ones who spoke English. Thus, they may have felt freer in their expression. However, it should be noted that the length of the answers does not necessarily reflect the quality of the material.

Experiencing as a researcher

The primary interview findings were supported by auto-ethnographic findings on the podcast listening experience, particularly focused on *sensory embodied experiences* (Pink 2015). This offers 'accounts of personal experience to complement, or fill gaps' of the study (Adams, Ellis & Jones 2017:3). Auto-ethnographical listening of the podcast enriches the understanding of the embodied experiences with podcast listening as these 'inner' experiences are highly subjective (Hokkanen 2017; Pink 2015:97-98). In practice, this meant that I listened to the podcast, observed my own sensory experiences and noted my reflections using fieldnotes. Seven episodes of Ångestpodden were selected systematically to include one episode from each year of the podcast's airing history. This resulted in seven approximately one-page documents of ethnographic fieldnotes. Excerpts from three of these documents were also analyzed as a part of this study, as these were seen to enhance the interpretation of the listeners' experiences.

Embodied experiences are relevant not only to knowledge about oneself but also to an understanding of these experiences as social (Hokkanen 2017:26; Pink 2015:26). However, as sensory knowledge is intimately tied to the researchers' individual experience (Pink 2015:43), reflexivity was needed to acknowledge how analyses of both interview and ethnographic findings inform one another (160). The audience interviews formed the primary material for analysis, and the sensory

observations further supported and exemplified those findings. This shows, for instance, in the design of the sensory observations as they were conducted in similar listening situations that were described by participants. This design, thus, considered the importance of 'specific socialities and materialities' in sensory experiences of the participants (Pink 2015:43); and aimed to compensate, to some extent, for the limitations of the interviews over video call. Moreover, as auto-ethnographers put 'a mirror on themselves' (Werner 2019:561), this approach called for me to be reflexive about my own role as both the observer and the subject of observations.

Analysing data

Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed systematically with an iterative coding process. The initial analysis of the interview data was carried out inductively (Miles et al. 2014), looking for recurring words, phrases and patterns emerging progressively from the conversations. As the analysis proceeded, the *parameters of media engagement*, formulated by Dahlgren and Hill (2020), were introduced as initial structuring themes. The five parameters of *context, motivations, modalities, intensities* and *consequences* informed the analysis as a model for mapping media engagement as 'a nexus of relationships' (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:2).

The analysis process was cyclical, in that the initial interview data was revisited in the later stages of analysis. The recordings from the video interviews enabled me to listen to and watch them over and over again, to pay further attention to facial and bodily expressions and get a sense of the emotional states of participants. Returning to the original data also ensured that selected quotes were not taken out of their context and treated as real human expressions. As the fieldnotes of the sensory ethnography served as additional data, they were used to enhance the findings of the audience interviews. However, it should be noted that sensory ethnographic listening was carried out before the analytical coding of the interview material. This was not done so that my observations could inform the thematic findings of the interviews, but to not have the thematic findings heavily leading my observation. The seven auto-ethnographic listening sessions eventually provided a broad selection of material that enhanced the findings of the study.

Analysis

Empowered in anxiety

Anxiety often makes people turn inwards (Paulsen 2020). Some may even see it as a weakness. However, in my conversations with the listeners of Ångestpodden, my respondents continually mentioned a sense of empowerment. Simply put, empowerment is about coming from outside of power to inside of power to make decisions and express agency (Rowlands 1995:102). Empowerment means to *feel* active and able instead of *feeling* passive (Mäkinen 2006). The empowerment of the listeners could be sensed. They were passionate and had a sense of purpose, seeking understanding of themselves and others. This was present in how they spoke of the message of Ångestpodden or, more accurately, how they *interpreted* it. They resonated with the discussion of Ångestpodden concerning anxiety. All emphasized the importance of talking about anxiety and mental illness. Maria did not hesitate when I asked her to tell me her version of the message of Ångestpodden:

> That anxiety is difficult but not dangerous. That if we talk about it, it can become not easier but at least more understandable. To dare to get close to the difficult. (Maria)

Sara pondered the same question:

> I think the biggest one is that everyone should be open about anxiety. So that everyone would feel safe about talking about it, in every age, and every gender and every time in your life. (Sara)

Talking, in this context, is active. It is about turning outwards, making oneself and one's ideas heard and known. Talking about anxiety is daring, as Maria remarked. When emphasizing the importance of talking, the listeners emphasized the importance of daring and sharing difficult experiences. There is an implication of power in the way the listeners spoke of this, an implication that one can make a difference by talking. The importance of talking connects to, as Maria and Sara mentioned, the need for understanding and feeling more comfortable around anxiety for everyone equally.

All interviewees emphasized how Ångestpodden makes anxiety and mental illness appear or feel somehow less dramatic, thereby normalizing it. ‘Normal’ as a cultural construction means not being *deviant* or too deviant from the average (Davis 2013:1-2). While the sense of anxiety as something dramatic implies a state that is drastically deviant from what is normal, normalizing it makes it more understandable and brings it closer to the individual’s own experience of human life. Nearly all interviewees told me that listening to Ångestpodden has made them feel less alone, both in the sense of having the podcast as company and in the sense that it offers stories one can relate to. Hanna expressed believing that many listeners experience the feeling that ‘we are not alone in this’. In this connectedness in anxiety, there is also a sense of acceptance. Amalia told me that Ångestpodden gives her a sense of comfort:

> I really think it is the way they're able to talk about hard subjects. It all comes to the way they talk about it. Because that makes me feel accepted. That makes me feel seen. (Amalia)

This way of talking was often described by the listeners as ‘relaxed’ or ‘everyday’. Maja explained thinking that Ångetspodden speaks of anxiety differently from the common way: ‘It is not so clinical,’ but it comes from ‘normal people.’ That normal people are responsible for this talk rather than experts behind clinical facades may create a feeling that one is accepted as a member of society, as ‘everyone else’. The sense of empowerment is certainly a connective experience.

In addition to the sense of power from *within* as a sense of self as able (Rowlands 1995:102), there is a sense of power *with* as a sense of unity (Drury, Evripidou, & Van Zomeren 2015). This sense of belonging can help the listeners feel better when they themselves experience difficult days. It can make one feel less deviant, less afraid, and more powerful. This sense of belonging was not just a consequence of the listeners’ engagement; it also proved to be what motivates their listening. They long for belonging, for not being alone, and for hearing talk about anxiety. Maja concluded that ‘It feels like we come together in anxiety.’ There is thus a motivation of *socialites* (Dahlgren & Hill, 2020:15) as an audience member, as a member of a group brought together in anxiety. One can certainly see engagement as an ‘energizing internal force’ (Dahlgren & Hill, 2020) that may transform into something shared and even more powerful, an energizing force of shared experiences.

Civic listening

Although listening has been commonly seen as something passive and private (Lacey 2013:11-12), Ångetspodden can create listening experiences that are private and personal but also connect the listener to a broader public sphere, a *listening public* (Lacey 2013). This was evident in the way the listeners resonated with the message of the podcast. They referred to a shared goal and the collective power of talking. The listeners reflect on and draw from their own life experiences and their 'responses to media are connected to their awareness of themselves and their relations with others' (Hill 2012:303). They show how, even when perhaps being in the auditory bubble (Bull 2006:133) of podcast listening, media engagement is cultural resonance (Hill 2019). The listeners' reflections resonated with the messages of Ångestpodden. This was especially evident in the way they expressed seeing the podcast as challenging cultural norms. This resonance creates a sense of a shared aspiration, a collective, empowering force.

Moreover, the listeners actively choose to listen to Ångestpodden from the supermarket-like selection of podcasts. They demonstrate an 'agency to fit their favourite shows into personalised schedules' (Hill 2019:4). Some even mentioned that Ångestpodden is one of the very few podcasts they listen to regularly. The listeners expressed mixed motivations for their listening, but nearly all of them emphasized a drive for knowledge about mental health and understanding of themselves and others. As previously discussed, there was also a sense of importance in how the podcast facilitates the important act of talking about anxiety. The listeners can be seen as engaging with a sense of solidarity, 'some kind of social value that resides beyond the self' (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:16). It could be said that the listeners have *civic* motivations, motivations with democratic potential. Without necessarily leading to political participation such as activism, listening to Ångestpodden could still be an act of citizenship (Dahlgren 2009:59). This is perhaps most evident in how Amalia formulated her listening motivation as wanting to become a 'better citizen.' To her, listening to the podcast is about being part of something important:

> When they started, it was like no one talked about that, not what I knew, at least. So, for me, it was like, 'oh, my god, how can you be so brave and talk about this?' It really feels like Ångestpodden, and Ida and Sofie, have been a big part of the opening up and talking about mental illnesses and that stuff. (Amalia)

Hanna elaborated how her motivation is a mix of a drive for knowledge and a desire to follow-up with Ida and Sofie:

> What makes me come back is that I want to hear about them [Ida and Sofie]. One gets a personal connection to them, and one wants to come back to them. Knowledge comes as a side product. (Hanna)

However, she also later expressed a feeling of responsibility to listen to Ångestpodden in order to better understand society and the people around her. This kind of mixed motivation for listening shows how the engagement with Ångestpodden is affective, personal, and often private — but also public and civic. Dahlgren (2006:275-276) writes about how civic agency and competences originate from our private and everyday lives, in which 'we make sense of our experiences, ourselves and the world around us by using both 'our head and heart.' Listening to Ångestpodden with mixed motivations can create an experience that helps the listeners to make sense of anxiety and mental illness, and this experience involves both the head and heart. One can see that both head and heart drive Hanna's engagement, and as a 'side product,' she gains understanding of people and the world around her. Though the podcast listening may not always lead to political mobilization, it may nurture civic cultures (Dahlgren 2013) as a communicative space in the listeners' daily lives that empowers them to seek resources for reflection. As a resource of civic cultures, preconditions for civic agency, and participation (Dahlgren 2013), Ångestpodden can strengthen the listener's sense of civic agency.

The civic motivations of the listeners showed shared social meanings in the listening experience (Lacey 2013:100) such as the importance of the topic and the way the podcast addresses it. The shared social horizon of the listeners included the knowledge that they are a part of the podcast audience. All listeners assumed the podcast audience to consist of younger adults with experiences of anxiety. One shared aspect of the listeners' image of the audience was also its femininity because the podcast hosts are women, the topics tend to skew toward women's issues, and the podcast talk has a slightly feminine tone. Some also pointed to societal norms. Julia explained that there remains a difference in how kids are raised: how boys are raised to 'get up' when they fall, while girls are more often asked, 'are you ok?'. Changing these norms is also something to which Ångestpodden could contribute.

Most listeners hope that as many people as possible, both men and women, begin to listen to the podcast. Some are sceptical about how approachable its youthful and at times feminine tone would be to older people or men. However, their message is clear: the main topic of Ångetspodden is something that brings all humans together. Elsa remarked that this could be better acknowledged in Sweden, explaining her conception of the Swedish mentality: 'You should always just fix your problems, you shouldn't talk about them.' Maja had a similar experience:

> When I have talked about it [Ångestpodden] at my workplace, with colleagues who I am not so close with, they have been like 'Ah, what is it about?' and then, that I just say that they talk about anxiety and the fact that I can easily say it, it has made others feel a bit uncomfortable. And I have needed to explain that no, it's not so dangerous to talk about it. (Maja)

To Ångestpodden listeners, the thought of anxiety as a shared human experience appears to be nearly self-evident. However, sometimes this bubble breaks, as Maja discussed experiencing with her colleagues, and one realizes that those around them may not share the same attitude.

The listeners appeared to maintain that people should not escape from anxiety, and not hiding from it could create a positive effect. Their attitudes seem to align with the writings of Kierkegaard (2014): Being in anxiety and not escaping from it allows people to fully be human beings and to utilize their possibilities. When anxious, people may achieve spiritual fulfilment (Kierkegaard 2014). Ångestpodden does not appear to be a spiritual experience for its listeners, but it does evoke existential reflections and an empowered sense of sharing something with others, of being a human with others. Olivia saw anxiety as inevitable, elaborating this poetically:

> Ångestpodden is about life in general but with the hard parts. Life is not supposed to be a walk in the park. You must live in ups and downs. (Olivia)

Ångestpodden is not a cure for anxiety. However, it can provide its listeners with a positive feeling of empowerment while acknowledging anxiety as a part of human life. Though anxiety can hardly be seen as a positive emotion, one's attitudes toward it can be positive. The podcast may empower its listeners to talk about anxiety, which can further spark a sense of empowerment in unity and

belonging. As discussed in the next section, Ångestpodden creates a sense of belonging particularly through intimate listening experiences that are affective and emotional in nature. This emphasizes how media engagement, and even engagement in the political sphere, is inevitably shaped by affect and intimacy (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:8). In this way, listening to Ångestpodden can be seen as a 'resource for living' (Corner 2017:4), a resource for empowerment, civic agency, and a resource for living with anxiety.

Ångestpodden as the voice of the friend

How do the listeners, then, intimately resonate with the podcast talk itself? The realness of the human voice comes across as something 'vivificates' spoken text, giving it an emotional layer (Llinares 2018:132-133). The realness of podcast talk was reflected on by the listeners in several ways. Some remarked how it almost feels like they are having a conversation with Ida and Sofie even when they do not reach out. Some imagine themselves at the podcast studio or 'sitting around the kitchen table with them,' as Julia mentioned. Perhaps the sense of directness is strengthened by the physical resonance, as the sound resonates 'inside the head' (Corner 2011:96) when it is delivered straight to the ears of the listener through headphones[6]. This creates an intimate space of listening wherein the sound's resonance creates a sense of proximity, a temporal connectivity (Scannell 2019:46) between the listener and the podcast hosts that is enhanced by the absence of the visual, the 'unseen voice' (Corner 2011:96) of the podcast talk. This allows the listener to create their own images (Crisell 1994) of being a participant in the podcast.

Realness is also felt in the mundanity (Scannell 1991) and the sense of liveness (Scannell 2019:94) engendered by the talk of Ångestpodden. Elsa explained this as follows: 'they tell you bluntly how things have been to them, without a script.' Their talk is not polished. 'They can sound quite silly and whimsy sometimes,' Maja noted. Liveness, according to Scannell (2019:94), is a central characteristic in the human voice, 'the revelation of the living soul (the being) of whoever speaks.' It is not just immediacy that creates this liveness in broadcast talk, but 'the sounds of life' that are brought to listeners in their unscripted form, capturing

[6] Indeed, nearly all of the listeners I talked with most often use earphones when listening to the podcast, and when not, the listeners are often alone.

real moments of human interaction (Scannell 2019:94-95). Therefore, even lacking the visual element, or perhaps due to its absence, Ida and Sofie feel real to the listeners. Alice elaborated how she feels the realness of Ida and Sofie in their podcast talk:

> I just feel that they are very real. It doesn't feel too, it feels like we are having a conversation. It's not like two doctors having a conversation. So that's it, they make it a bit more accessible. [...] Ida and Sofie are always just very genuine. (Alice)

The podcast voices are not institutional like the voices of doctors or others behind anonymous professions: they are voices of real persons. As Alice stated, this sense of realness makes the voices of Ida and Sofie accessible. Through directness, immediacy, and liveness, there is a sense of proximity to the talk of Ångestpodden. The podcast talk may be felt as the voice of the friend (Scannell 2019), implying its fundamental, humane proximity (31). As Scannell (2019:33) argues, human talk is 'an innate human capacity and predisposition that must be activated in every individual [...] and it is activated by the voice of others.' It is not just a 'bearer of speech' but also 'the expressive register of a disposition toward others displayed in the grain of voice' (Scannell 2019:33). In its fundamental humane proximity as the voice of the friend, the podcast talk can evoke familiar and pleasurable experiences in the podcast listeners. The talk of Ångestpodden as the voice of the friend could be an important awakener of intimacy in the podcast experience.

Friendly care

What kind of intimate experiences does the voice of the friend experience of Ångestpodden, then, evoke in its listeners? Some listeners cited feeling a sense of warmth when they hear the voices of Ida and Sofie. Maja mentioned having begun to associate the bare voices of Ida and Sofie with feeling good. She said this with a slightly doubtful smile on her face, but it did not sound strange to me, particularly as I had already conversed with six listeners before her who all shared similar experiences. Several expressed that hearing the voices of Ida and Sofie felt 'comforting' or 'cozy.' The metaphor of the voice of the friend is especially fitting here because several listeners explained to me that it feels like Ida and Sofie are their friends. Hanna explained this through the regularity of listening: 'If one listens to them once a week for many years, they become like friends.' Indeed, like

with friends, the listeners are motivated to hear about Ida and Sofie and to follow the events of their lives.

The friendship present in Ångestpodden, the intimate proximity of the voice of the friend, is felt without physical proximity. The notion of mediated proximity challenges the assumption that physical distance and anonymity hinder intimacy, as these at times may even enhance the sense of intimacy (Andreassen et al. 2017:6). Andreassen (2017:53) notes that 'To individuals who have difficulty expressing themselves in the physical presence of people, the internet's lack of physicality and its potential for anonymity might provide comfort.' Though this may be more apparent in online practices and interpersonal relationships, anonymity and physical distance and, furthermore, the sense of distance created by different listening practices certainly impact the listening experience. When asked to describe her relationship with Ångestpodden, Julie pondered over her feelings of proximity to the podcast:

> I do feel very close to it, I would want to say. It feels like they [Ida and Sofie] are my friends. I know that they aren't, but they still feel close. [...] Maybe it is even because one can relate to them but still doesn't really know them that makes it easier to feel close to them and their issues. (Julia)

She expressed feeling close to Ida and Sofie, and, at the same time she knows that she does not truly know them. She feels closeness to their podcast personalities from a distance that provides her space to imagine a relationship that feels good to her. Perhaps this imagining is enhanced by her anonymity as a listener, not really knowing the podcast hosts, which gives her space in her mind to create a sense of appropriate proximity. Moreover, Ida and Sofie's friendship may remind the listeners of their own real friendships. They do not know Ida and Sofie, but they can imagine a friendship that is familiar to them. Sara explained this as follows:

> I think it's really like a healthy friendship. I think that's because I can feel them, the way they are with each other. I can feel that way with my friends. (Sara)

Sara was then quiet for a moment and continued: 'And I think that's really beautiful, the way they talk to each other and care for each other.'

The intimate, friendly proximity of the podcast talk can also be experienced as care by the listeners. This was explained well by Amalia, who described to me the atmosphere of the podcast as follows:

> The atmosphere is comforting. And it's welcoming. It really is like how I'm sitting now with the candles next to my computer. A little bit in between group therapy and when you sit with your friends. Like, it's really in between those two. (Amalia)

When talking, Amalia drew an imaginary circle around her with her hands. This circle symbolized the people around her. She is alone when she listens to the podcast, but in her mind, she is not alone. If Elsa were to describe Ångestpodden, she would call it a 'positive place' and a 'safety blanket.' This sense of care could arise from the care structures crafted in the production practices of the podcast. However, contrasted to Scannell (1996:146)'s notion of care structures as professional production practices, the care of Ångestpodden is felt more as friendship. Scannell (1996:146) writes about care structures as 'the care (the concern) that goes into making programmes,' which 'is there-to-be-found in the programmes themselves.' What is there-to-be-found for the listeners of Ångetspodden is Ida and Sofie's real friendship. However, there is also a sense of professionalism in the care of friendship. Several listeners described the tone of Ångestpodden as 'personal' but also 'professional.' Indeed, Ida and Sofie also know how to interview their podcast guests in a professional and friendly way, as several of the listeners elaborated.

There is, then, a sense that Ida and Sofie instil care and concern into the podcast production. To Alice, it 'feels like they [Ida and Sofie] are concerned about us listeners and that we need to keep listening to them.' The care that is established in the podcast production is showcased in how the podcast is structured. The podcast has a recognizable beginning prior to the guest interview during which the hosts Ida and Sofie chat. This beginning chat often 'recaps' the lives of Ida and Sofie. To Amalia, it creates a warm, humane feeling:

> To me, it's like when you meet a person, and you say 'hello' or 'hi'. And that's really the 'hi' for me in the podcast, that they talk a little bit. (Amalia)

Amalia concluded her thought by explaining the opening chat as a 'warm up' to the episode. It is a part in which the listeners are invited into Ida and Sofie's friendship. The listener is present during these moments between friends before

they meet their guest, giving them a sense of participation in an intimate and exclusive moment. This structure ensures that there is this moment of friendship in each episode. The sense of friendship the listeners feel shows that intimate proximity can be experienced as mediated proximity without the physical presence of others. There is a sense of exclusivity in how the listeners are allowed to witness the moments of in-between-friends. However, these moments are open for everyone who wishes to listen and, furthermore, what we are looking at is still an *imagined* friendly relationship. Moreover, to understand the complex, intimate podcast experiences, the notion of intimacy must be broadened to how intimacy can be transmitted through narratives and experienced not only as interpersonal proximity, but as proximity with the self and with something more public.

Connecting ordinary and extraordinary

The storytelling of Ångestpodden consists of intimate narratives. Indeed, podcasts as a genre is particularly suited for personal, disclosive storytelling (Lindgren 2016). As podcaster Paul Gilmartin explains: 'There's no other medium where you can take your soul out and put it on the table and say: This is me' (Taylor 2011, cited in Meserko 2014:475). Julia described:

> They [Ida and Sofie] dare to talk about their inner fears and they are very honest in the way that they show their negative sides as well as positive sides. And one gets a stronger respect for them, and it makes one feel that one can open up self. [...] They want that we listeners could open up about these issues as well. And I don't think one would feel so strong trust in them if they only showed their perfect self. (Julia)

Self-disclosure as a particular form of openness is often seen as ideal in intimate communication (Jamieson 2005:1). Ida and Sofie discuss their inner fears and vulnerabilities. The sharing of one's vulnerabilities can particularly be seen as a 'generous orientation towards the other,' enhancing openness and balance in interpersonal intimacy (Obert 2016:26). In addition to the moments between the podcast hosts Ida and Sofie, they also invite guests to tell their own personal stories. There is a balance to the sharing of vulnerabilities when Ida and Sofie interview the guests who have experienced anxiety and mental illness. Alice noted that Ida and Sofie's genuineness appears to help the guests share openly as well. This genuineness, then, could be understood as vulnerability and mutuality.

Obert (2016:31) emphasizes intimacy as mutuality: being open about one's own vulnerability with curiosity for the other. The listeners of Ångestpodden celebrate the disclosive storytelling in the podcast, citing the generosity shown by those in the podcast in sharing their personal stories. The telling of personal, disclosive stories is mutual for the podcast hosts and their guests.

There is also a sense of mutuality in the listeners' experiences. Mia Lindgren (2016:5) explains: 'By listening to detailed personal experiences of 'others', listeners become connected to the people whose stories they share.' In other words, listeners resonate with the stories they find relatable. Many of the vulnerabilities disclosed in the podcast storytelling could perhaps be the intimate troubles of late modernity, which Plummer (2003:5-7) elaborates as individual ponderings with, for example, questions of identity, sexuality, or personality types. These intimate troubles are not solely the ponderings of individuals but are commonly shared in modern society (Plummer 2003:9). Such shared and relatable intimate troubles in Ångestpodden are, as exemplified by the listeners, questions of body image, relationship issues, and self-esteem. Through sharing stories of intimate troubles, Ångestpodden connects its listeners to the people telling their personal stories in the podcast.

However, the stories can also connect the listeners with experiences that they do not find relatable. Maja described such an experience with the podcast:

> They had a special short series about assault against women they did, and it taught me a lot. It made me more interested, and I feel that I understand it better now. Before, I thought, 'God, how can someone be with a man like that?'. I have really tried to understand it before but now it got so easy to understand. Those [series] touched me in a whole different way. (Maja)

The podcast may evoke a feeling of 'I had no idea,' and its stories may touch a person in an unexpected way. The podcast also offers stories of the extraordinary to its listeners. Swiatek (2018:173-174) writes about podcasts as an *intimate bridging medium,* describing how they can connect people from different social and cultural backgrounds. The intimate bridging aspects of the podcast show how mediated intimacy has the democratizing potential to create intimate public spheres, spaces for for 'imagining and cobbling together alternative construals about how life has appeared' (Berlant 2011:182). Through intimate narratives, intimate public spheres may affect people's subjective ideas and experiences of

intimacy — even as people's subjective intimacies narrate public intimacies (Berlant, 1998).

Ångestpodden offers its listeners disclosive, personal stories of people's lives, stories that might be left unheard without the intimate and public contribution of the podcast. This shows how Ångestpodden contributes to the transformation of public intimacies. Indeed, intimacy itself can have a transformative power in public normative narratives (Berlant 2008, 2011). The disclosive talk of Ida and Sofie, for instance, their openness about their vulnerabilities, is also felt as a transformative act. Several listeners, like Emma, even called the podcast hosts 'pioneers' in their approach to talking about anxiety. Maja explained to me how she thinks the podcast stands out from others:

> Ångestpodden is not superficial. they [Ida and Sofie] dare to open up their inner self. And they really burn for what they talk about. It feels like Ida and Sofie don't care too much about how they appear, but they are more plain and they don't have to be so sweet. Even though I think they are, I don't think that's what drives them. (Maja)

Alongside the importance of talking about anxiety, listeners also celebrated the transformative power of intimacy. In addition to the topic of anxiety itself, the podcast brings more disclosive, 'real' talk into the public sphere, creating a platform for more marginalized voices and narratives (Llinares 2018).

What, then, is the connective element of extraordinary storytelling? What do the listeners resonate with if not the relatability of the narratives? As previously discussed, human talk brings text emotionally alive (Llinares 2018). The affect of sound can be 'dynamic, collective emotionality that connects with people's shared social experiences' (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:6). Maja realized that she could unexpectedly understand women who stay in abusive relationships, showing the bridging power of affect and emotion. Expressions such as 'moving' and 'touching' denote an affective experience as a kind of 'push' to emotion that may even present as an embodied reaction (Shouse 2005). As the case of Ångestpodden shows, there is a sense of realness in podcast talk that enhances the listeners' affective and emotional resonance.

Now, I elaborate the embodied affect using an excerpt from my own sensory ethnographic observations when listening to Ångetspodden:

> When Lizette talks about her time with anxiety syndrome, I can hear that she is almost crying. This is also when I start listening more carefully. The story fills my head and I feel like I focus less on what I am doing. I almost get a tear in my own eye, too. I get a slight anxious feeling, a slight squeezing sense in my throat which makes it feel a bit thinner. I can relate to the feeling I sense in the voice of Lizette. Even though I am not particularly thinking about my own experiences, Lizette's story and her emotional voice bring up a hint of familiar anxiety. [7]

During my listening experience, I could feel the embodied 'squeezing' sensation in my throat, and the emotion of anxiety. Her emotional voice *affected* me as well. The power of Ångestpodden as an intimate bridging medium is demonstrated in how it bridges the public storytelling of strangers with the 'realm of sensory, embodied experience' (Lacey 2013:23). In other words, when the podcast storytelling evokes an embodied affect, it is felt as resonance through shared affect and emotion. Despite being subjectively felt, the embodied affect is also something shared, as it is evoked by the emotions of the storyteller.

At times, the emotional experiences of Ångestpodden relate to the listener's own memories, as Elsa reflected: 'They can remind you of something and it can make you feel sad or anxious.' She added that Ångestpodden has helped her to realize that anxiety is shared. Ångestpodden thus also bridges and crosses the boundaries of light and dark emotions. In addition to evoking the positive affect of talk as the voice of the friend, it can also connect the listener with difficult emotions. Offering a spectrum of affective and emotional experiences, intimate storytelling may help the listeners reach intimate proximity to oneself, to 'do intimacy,' as Plummer (2003:13) describes it — a deep connection to one's own emotions. The listeners explained how the podcast has led them to reflect on their own emotional lives and existential questions.

However, Berlant (2008:viii) notes that the participants of an intimate public sphere are 'marked by a common lived history; its narratives and things are expressive of that history while also shaping its conventions of belonging.' The potential of the podcast as an intimate bridging medium may not necessarily cross all boundaries. Gender could be such a boundary. As all of the listeners mentioned, they believe that most people listening to Ångestpodden are women.

[7] Listening diary, 26.03.2021, episode 59. 'Generaliserat ångestsyndrom med Lizette,' listening situation: no headphones, alone in the kitchen in the evening, doing dishes and other chores

In addition to the perhaps feminine tone and topics covered by the podcast, gender may also set cultural boundaries for intimate experiences (Jamieson 2005). Despite some listeners hoping that anyone could listen to Ångestpodden, this is not likely to happen, even in a theoretical sense, and Ångetspodden is perhaps more likely to be the voice of the *female friend*. The voice of the friend of Ångestpodden may, then, be more familiar, more ordinary, to female listeners.

Shifting proximity in spaces of ordinary

The hyper intimacy (Berry 2016) of podcast listening is not only about the proximity created by intimate storytelling and the affect of sound; it also denotes ways of listening. To really understand the listeners' experiences with Ångestpodden, one must also understand their different listening situations. These situations comprise practices, places, and spaces of listening. Six of the ten listeners stated that they often listen to Ångestpodden on their regular walks, and eight also while they do daily chores at home. In addition to the resonance of sound, this shows that podcast listening can comprise many different sensory experiences. Podcast listeners in urban spaces receive 'at any given moment, a vast amount of information,' and how the patterns of information create complex spatial experiences in which 'any place becomes more than one place' (Barrios-O'Neill 2018:154). Podcast listening frees other senses to focus on other tasks, or perhaps to freely drift in between imagined worlds of the podcast storytelling and one's actual surroundings. Indeed, 'for the mobile listener, incoming information from either world can be included in the train of thought' (154). The listener is able to move freely, to feel the cold of the wind or the warmth of the sun, to observe the shapes and details of landscapes. These other senses are stronger in the possession of a podcast listener then they are of a viewer of, for example, audio-visual media. The podcast listener is not at all 'glued to the box.'

This excerpt from my listening diary elaborates on this:

> When Viktor, the guest, talks about his difficult childhood experience, I can imagine the boy in the story, and I get a stomach feeling I get when I remember something in my own life history that makes me feel uncomfortable. When I get immersed into the story, it almost turns into a cinematic experience, and I can really picture the events in front of my eyes. But then my eye suddenly catches the sun and I look at my surroundings again, almost with new eyes, remembering the spring afternoon around me. I move forward and the landscape changes,

> sometimes I pass a dog walker. Sometimes I don't pay attention to my walking and notice that I have already walked to the furthest end of the park.[8]

Podcasts have been described as a *cinema for the ears,* as 'the possibility of an audio-only experience that evokes intensity, scope and figurative power, such that the experience is deemed cinematic,' Llinares (2020:342) writes. The imaginative space of listening 'created by this posited lack of an image, playing on a listener's memories, interpretations and emotions' may enhance this imagining, and Llinares (2020:343) argues that the different properties of the podcast voice, including different tones and sound effects, evokes our cinematic imagination. The emotional properties of talk in the storytelling of Ångestpodden, as exemplified in the listening diary above, may play a role in evoking the cinematic experience. If Ångestpodden evokes cinematic experiences for its listeners, it creates a listening space in which the imagined worlds of podcast storytelling meet the listening surroundings and practices, such as a walk or daily chores. In this listening space, ordinary and extraordinary intertwine, and 'any place becomes more than one place' (Danielle Barrios-O'Neill 2018:154).

Alice described her experience of a shifting focus when listening to the podcast while working:

> It's easy to be able to focus on what they are saying. Sometimes I get spaced out, then I jump back. That's it. (Alice)

In addition to becoming immersed in the storytelling, there are also those moments of spacing out. These moments appear to give a moment of distance, a reminder of one's irreducibility (Obert 2016:26-27) from the story and the people in the podcast. Without irreducibility, one can lose the balance in intimacy and one's proximity to the self (Obert 2016:26). The intimate modes of listening carry distractions that remind the listener of their separateness. Maria, for instance, explained that she often likes to do something fun and simple, like 'a silly puzzle,' while listening. This calms her, perhaps making her less puzzled with the negative emotions that the podcast might evoke. Hanna, similarly, described a sense of relaxation in doing a task that is 'down to earth' while listening to Ångestpodden.

[8] Listening diary, 29.03. 2021, episode 115. 'ADHD som superkraft med Viktor Frisk', listening situation: listening with headphones on, on a walk in the park in a sunny afternoon

Down to earth refers to that which is practical, humble, calm, and pleasant. It is something quite ordinary and it can perhaps ground one in the present moment.

The following excerpt from my diary elaborates on this sense of being grounded:

> I am in my own moment here on the floor, doing my workout. My workout distances me from the story because I also need to focus on my exercise. All the time, I feel grounded to the floor and in my own being. I am constantly feeling the movement and my breathing, and it is harder to immerse myself deep in the story when I feel physical exhaustion from the workout.[9]

This experience of feeling grounded in a repetitive, practical task or literally being on the ground may add balance to the podcast listening experience. It can feel cosy and create a sense of comfort and pleasure, and a way to keep the listener within a safe distance in the mediated proximity of listening.

The expressions of being grounded or performing a task that is down to earth also literally carries an aspect of spaces and places in the listening experience. Although podcasts can be listened to almost anytime, anywhere (Bottomley 2015:166), the listeners of Ångestpodden also have patterns of places and spaces in their listening situations. Some prefer to listen to the podcast when in motion, when on relaxing walks or when commuting to and from work, and others in the comfort of their homes. What unites these places is their ordinariness. The listening spaces can also be perceived as intimate. As almost all of the listeners emphasized, Ångestpodden means taking time for themselves. Hanna explained that she sometimes listens to the podcast while taking a bath, and Emma remarked that she listens to it while in bed. The listeners create their own intimate spaces of listening with personal listening practices and places of the ordinary. In these places of the ordinary, the listeners encounter stories of the extraordinary. In some ways, this experience makes the extraordinary feel more ordinary. Though life is perhaps not easy as a walk in the park, as Olivia stated, one can *take a walk in the park* when listening to Ångestpodden.

[9] Listening diary, 05.04.2021, episode 228. 'Janice gästar,' listening situation: listening with headphones on while doing a light workout at home

Crafting the podcast experience

Podcasts' uniqueness lies in their ability to intimately bridge boundaries between people by providing audiences a high level of nearness, directness, and accessibility (Swiatek 2018:184). However, podcast experience does not only comprise what the podcast provides its audiences but also how they themselves craft their listening experiences, which connect the ordinary to the extraordinary in entangled ways. Podcasts offer a high level of listener control and demand more selection and active engagement from the listener (Spinelli & Dann 2019:30). Several listeners described having attempted to match their mood to the podcast episode, listening to episodes with a lighter topic when they feel less anxious and the more difficult episodes when they feel down. This is, for instance, so that they do not risk their good moods.

Some, like Amalia, also prepare to make the experience more bearable by, for example, reflecting on the topic in advance. She actually did the opposite of matching her mood with the episode:

> I would say that the most important thing for me when it comes to the episodes that I think will be overwhelming and very emotional is to not listen to them when I'm feeling down or anxious. I can pause an episode without hesitation if I feel like it's not the right time for me to listen to it. Or skip a sequence and continue listening to the rest of the episode. (Amalia)

There also proved to be a notion of care in the Ångestpodden experience. However, this is present in a different perspective than what was discussed as the care of friendship; rather, it is care crafted by the listeners themselves. The listeners may craft their listening practices in a way that is experienced as care. Scannell (1996:149) sees what he calls 'dailiness' as a kind of an ultimate care structure in broadcast media. This dailiness comprises the actual daily service of traditional programming, such as daily news, enhancing the rhythm of everyday with the routines they provide (Scannell 1996:149). As can be seen in the listener's engagement with Ångestpodden, similar to this dailiness are the routines created by the active listeners themselves. The ways of listening may foster a sense of dailiness and, in turn, ordinariness. As the listeners remarked when describing their listening routines, they indeed often seem to occur similarly from week to week. The weekly listening moments perhaps become a caring structure and a part

of the ordinary in the listeners' daily life. The listeners play an active role in constructing this care structure and shaping their own podcast experience.

The entire period during which Maja has been a listener of Ångestpodden, she has been living in an extraordinary period in her life. She began listening to the podcast during the global COVID-19 pandemic. When spending an unusual amount of time alone, she began taking walks during her lunch time, often having Ångestpodden keep her company. Listening to the podcast during periods of more acute loneliness made her life feel more ordinary:

> When it has felt difficult and I haven't been feeling so well, I have had a strategy to listen to it a lot. Then I have it in the background and I have listened to it so much that it's almost like their [Ida's and Sofie's] voices automatically make me feel a little bit better in some way. It may sound a bit silly, but then I have those two friends with me, and it gets easier. It's like having them as company. (Maja)

Podcast audiences can create their own strategies for listening when they long for belonging. The listeners craft their podcast experiences in ways that may enhance their intimacy. They prepare for their listening to ensure that they are in their mood and atmosphere. They do not only become attuned to proximity with the podcast talk and storytelling, but to intimate proximity with themselves. Their podcast experiences involve intimate reflections on their own emotional states, both when preparing for listening and when listening to the intimate stories of others.

One can certainly see that podcast listening is an intimate experience in different, complex ways that involve podcast talk, the narrative aspects of storytelling, and the variety of ways that the podcast audience crafts their own intimate listening experiences. Podcasts, like Ångestpodden, provide platforms for intimate narratives that would perhaps otherwise be left unheard. They also enable a freeness of the podcast talk that creates a sense of realness in the listening experience. In addition to the democratic potential of podcasts, they can also provide meaningful, subjective experiences for listeners. Podcast audiences are active, and their mixed listening motivations drive the meaningfulness of their engagement. Podcast experiences may connect the ordinary and the extraordinary, the self and others, the private and the public, and the subjective and the shared in ways that evoke intimate and cultural resonance and — perhaps most of all — sense of belonging.

Concluding thoughts

This case study has investigated how the listeners of Ångestpodden engage with the podcast and find meaning in their listener experiences. It also sheds light on how podcasts, more generally, may create particular kinds of listening experiences. However, this study argues that podcast experiences are not only crafted by the podcast hosts and creators but also by active listeners who have the freedom to establish their own listening habits and routines. It could thus be said that podcast experience is a dual craft. This concluding section discusses the findings of the thesis in more detail, returning to the research questions presented at the very introduction of the paper.

How do the audiences of Ångestpodden make meaning of their engagement with the podcast?

This study has approached listeners' experiences through the notion of media engagement (see Dahlgren & Hill 2020). It has sought to gain a nuanced understanding of the ways in which listeners experience Ångestpodden subjectively and how it is interconnected with socio-cultural environments. The method of qualitative audience interviews gave voice to audiences of Ångestpodden, addressing them as listeners with agency. With this approach, the study has certainly discovered an active podcast audience with mixed motivations and ways of listening. The listeners have a drive to learn about anxiety and mental illness and they relate to the message — or messages — of Ångestpodden, reflecting on what it means to them personally. This kind of cultural resonance (Hill 2019) can be seen as nurturing civic cultures and civic agency (Dahlgren 2006, 2013) as listeners connect with shared concerns and civic aspirations.

The emotion of anxiety is what creates a sense of connectivity as the listeners reflect on anxiety as a shared human experience. They relate to others in anxiety and connect with others in their drive for knowledge, seeking to understand other peoples' experiences with anxiety and mental illness. The listeners of Ångestpodden are empowered by the sense of belonging in anxiety. They come together as a listening public (Lacey 2013) in their shared, civic aspirations and, crucially, in their sense of belonging in anxiety. Even though anxiety may entail

negative emotion, the listeners' attitudes toward it are not necessarily negative themselves. The shared message goes: *we should talk about it*.

Ångestpodden is not a cure but a resource for living (Corner 2017:4) with anxiety. It brings the dark of anxiety into the light, offering a sense of friendly human proximity. Furthermore, its talk and storytelling normalize the listeners' experiences of anxiety. It reminds them that they are not alone and makes extraordinary experiences with anxiety relatable and a bit less 'extra'. It is not only the podcast itself that creates this experience. The listeners, crafting their own ways of listening, experience the podcast in ordinary places, carrying out regular, everyday tasks such as household chores. The listening experience, including how the podcast talks about anxiety and how listeners engage with it, shapes experiences of it as ordinary. When longing for belonging, listeners can utilize Ångestpodden as a resource in their daily lives. They may strategically listen to the podcast in order to have it as company and as a friend in extraordinary circumstances, such as a global pandemic. Listeners themselves create experiences of care with the podcast, both in establishing routines of listening and in utilizing Ångestpodden as the voice of the friend in their daily lives.

How is intimacy experienced in the listeners' engagement?

Intimacy runs through the analysis of this study, bringing together different aspects of the podcast experience. The notion of hyper intimacy (Berry 2016) has offered particular insight about the podcast experience. This case study shows how the listeners' intimate experiences with Ångestpodden have to do with how the podcast is produced, in terms of its talk and storytelling, and how the listeners craft their own listening practices. Intimate listening experiences with Ångestpodden are enhanced by the sense of proximity with human voice. The notion of broadcast talk as the voice of the friend highlights the intimate properties of talk (Scannell 2019:28-31) and it is particularly fitting for this case study as the listeners expressed how they feel as if Ida and Sofie were their friends. The friendly proximity of Ångestpodden can even be experienced as care. The podcast's intimacy can, on the one hand, be experienced as an intimate relationship, as some of the listeners describe how they can imagine themselves having a conversation with the podcast hosts, despite the lack of physical proximity.

On the other hand, intimacy can be understood as more than interpersonal exchange and proximity. This study has taken a more nuanced approach to intimacy as something that is also individual and public. Following the notion of intimate public spheres (Berlant 2008, 2011), podcasts create and distribute narratives of intimacy into the public, demonstrate the democratizing potential of podcasts, and enable audiences to connect with a diverse range of intimate narratives as evidenced in the findings of this study. Ångestpodden can be seen as an intimate bridging medium (Swiatek 2018). Although the issues that Ångestpodden covers are often intimate troubles commonly shared in modern society (see Plummer 2003), intimate storytelling may also connect listeners to stories of the extraordinary. These stories are not necessarily common, but they may, nevertheless, enable the listeners to connect to the storytellers through the affect of sound.

Yet, even encounters with the extraordinary may nurture listeners' intimate connection and openness with oneself. As the analysis has shown, the podcast experience may involve intimate contemplations of one's own emotional state and wellbeing. As the podcast experience is also crafted by listeners themselves, so is the podcast intimacy. The different listening practices, in different places and spaces of listening, shapes and balances the mediated proximity. Podcasts like Ångestpodden may connect the ordinary and extraordinary, and private and public in different, intimate ways. Moreover, this case study has shown that podcasts contribute to transforming human experiences of intimacy.

What can this case study tell us about how podcasts matter as a media genre?

Contrasted to radio, podcasts have potential to democratize the media landscape (Swiatek 2018). In addition to enabling more diversity among intimate voices in the public sphere, podcasts are more flexible in their oral expression as they are free from the restrictions of traditional broadcast media conventions (Llinares et al. 2018). One can see this freedom of expression shaping the listening experience of Ångestpodden, demonstrated by how *real* the listeners find the conversations and friendship between its hosts. Moreover, podcast listening is not *only* about listening or, perhaps, we should say that it is about more than making sense of what one hears. The different sensory experiences in podcast listening do not only include hearing but also the embodied and visual elements of the surroundings

and listening practices. Affective and emotional connectivity to podcast storytelling may even create a cinematic experience, enhancing the listener's imagination.

The methodological approach of this study explored a possible way to investigate the experiences and practices related to podcast listening. Ultimately, this study shows how sensory ethnography enhances understanding of podcast listeners' experiences. The experiential is a useful, empirical resource when studying podcast listening as it is, undoubtedly, a sensory experience. This approach can enrich and give more detailed descriptions of how podcast listening is embodied.

Going forward, such research could further investigate the production side of podcast intimacy. For example, future studies could examine whether the hosts of Ångestpodden are aware of the intimate possibilities of the podcast; and whether and how they *intend* to create intimate experiences for their listeners. This would broaden the understanding of the podcast experience to also consider the role of podcast producers in media engagement.

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Media path to identity: The journey of the Vietnamese young generation making sense of their identity in the media space

Thanh Nga Nguyen

Introduction

> Do you identify yourself as more German or more Vietnamese?
>
> That's difficult. That is a question that I have all of my life.
>
> I would say that I have struggled with it all of my life as well, but I have a better idea now though.
>
> /Huy Tran - The journey to search for identity - Youtube/

Elie, one of the informants, showed me this excerpt from a talk show featuring an influencer on social media about his own reflection of identity during the interview. I was surprised, less because we followed the same internet celebrity but more so because the video was exactly about the topic that I was investigating. When the section on the excerpt above came up, I noticed her face filled up with contemplation. It was inevitable that she was going through different emotions and thoughts compared to mine. For me, it was the person and his personality that drove me to the story. For Elie, and perhaps for thousands of the young

immigrants born and raised overseas, it was driven by more than just mere interest in a charismatic figure. It is, in a way, motivated by the notion that the video serves as guidance and a chance to look for hints towards identity reflection from someone who shares a similar contextual background.

That's the uniqueness of media in providing spiritual materials to its users - the capability to convey a crafted narrative embedded with culturally rich values. Its role in an individual's identification of self within a society is irrefutable, as identities are becoming more and more 'socially mediated' (Harré 1983). People negotiate their identity through materials that construct their lives, including media, in which the cultural value promoted in media space is believed to generate multiple senses of belongings and reinforce their collective identity. Elie's encounter with the video above reaffirms the roles of the media for delivering those kinds of content to the second generation. Media and its deterritorialised characteristics in the digital age have become an essential and meaningful element for the identity negotiation of young immigrants. It has been observed that different types of media take different accounts in the identity negotiation process of immigrant groups, which has resulted in multiple forms of integration.

Transnational media is one of the types that have distinguishing impacts on the immigrants whose few reminders of their home country transcend national borders and enter their cultural life. It critically promotes long-distance nationalism to cross-border audiences who are deeply rooted in country of origins and possess the desire to sustain the connection with homeland (Aslama & Pantti 2007:53).

Few other diasporas have had such a rigorous history of having access to the homeland mass transnational media as the Vietnamese had in the Czech Republic. Diasporas nowadays might enjoy their homeland media thanks to the internet and cable TV. Still, the Viet-Czech diasporas have had ample time and resources for long-term community development, thus gaining this decade-long access. Therefore, compared to most cases, there is a greater possibility for homeland transnational media to not just foster long-distance nationalism among the Vietnamese immigrants in Czech Republic but also extend their influence on the new members due to the vertical interactions within a family and community. However, would the Vietnamese mass transnational media have similar impacts on the identity negotiation of their offspring, who are given the name 'banana

kid'- a comprehensive description of Vietnamese children in Czech from the inside and out, which is white inside but yellow outside?

With the recent emergence of social media, the landscape of mass media promoting singular national reference is shifting towards new forms of media that could contain multinational representations. The identity issue happening in these platforms is believed to be far more complex than the traditional media due to their specialisation in individual customisation. Furthermore, social media is noted to be more favoured by the young generation in the current time. Yet, the library of studies on the impacts of these new challengers to cultural identity articulation acquire limited attention, and the second generation, who is documented to be the more active users on these platforms, is barely examined.

With the contextual perspective provided, the thesis sets out four objectives. The first objective is to investigate the issue of transnational media sustaining or not in the context of the Vietnamese second generation's media consumption. The second objective proceeds to examine how best to understand the reason for the absence and presence of the Vietnamese second generation in the flow of transnational media, specifically government-based Vietnam TV - one that the first generation heavily relies upon.

The third objective aims to examine the second generation's practices on social media environments that have the linkage to cultural aspects of two cultural worlds called as 'home' for them with the hope to disclose their identity negotiation process to contribute to the ongoing dialogue of identity study on digital media. The final objective is to present analytical arguments based on the informants' response to why transnational media is gradually being replaced by social media in the role of influencing identity formation.

Having defined the objectives, this paper attempts to answer three research questions:

1. What role does the mass transnational media, specifically Vietnam TV, play in the Vietnamese second generation?
2. Why could or could not the transnational media sustain in the second generation's media consumption?
3. How does the Vietnamese second generation relate to Vietnam and Czech Republic in their identity negotiation process through their use of social media?

Literature Review

Identity

Identity became widely used in social analysis, especially in ethnic movements in late-1960s America. Afterwards, identity established itself in other studies under the umbrella of social science such as sexuality, gender, religion, ethnicities, class, immigration, nationalism, and culture. Within only 50 years, identity study evolved from issues of maintaining a sense of self-unity to making exploration of identity as something more self-reflexive, with a strong component of normativity in terms of what construct a desirable self (Moran 2014).

When it comes to immigrants, ethnic identity has been acknowledged to be even more monumental than most social groups because understanding their ethnic identification is instrumental in helping them adapt to their life in the country of settlement economically, socially, and politically (Zimmermann et al. 2007). In most cases, immigrants go through 'acculturation'- a constant process of physical and symbolic interaction used to adapt to a new culture (Park 2013). The two-dimensional model of measuring ethnic identity provides a compelling argument in an immigrant's fluid and dynamic ethnic identity complexity, which proposes a co-existence and complementary interplay of two different societies when an immigrant commits to them (Constant et al. 2006). Their affinity to the values and beliefs of the country of origin or the country of settlements can go either way, both ways, or no way whatsoever. Most researchers and policymakers yearn for biculturalism (Phinney et al. 2001) as immigrants would be well-adjusted if they feel at ease in both their ethnic group and the host society.

Their offspring adds a layer of complexity to ethnic identity as a study shows the second generation faces a social divide in their coming-of-age experience despite the majority growing up to be bicultural, coined as 'a part yet apart' (Kibria 2002). The desire to fit in remains vivid, but their own journey to search for ethnic identities carries on simultaneously. How they search for identities shift as second-generation members are suggested to no longer prioritise one identity over the other (Brettell & Nibbs 2009). Their social relationships in their parents' host country could be even more complex because, their families, ethnic groups, and schools rarely overlap. They could pick up multiple cultural identities without even realizing it. Moreover, their acculturation process to their ethnic identity

happens in their most vulnerable-to-change state in their life. Indeed, going from childhood to teenage years to adolescence to early adulthood amounts to just 20 years compared to a human's lifespan, but differences emerge drastically, especially during the teenage years when a self-awareness of their ethnic negotiations is constantly developed (Kibria 2002; Park 2009).

Biculturalism of the second generation results from the constant negotiation and renegotiation of identities when transitioning from adolescence to early adulthood (Kibria 2002). They go through a unique transformation coined as the 're-acculturation' phase (Park 2009). They might even experience 'reverse acculturation' where they introduce their culture of origin to their host community utilizing deterritorialised advanced communication platforms (Kim & Park 2009). Their going back-and-forth nature marks a complex depth in the second generation's ethnic identity negotiation. And so, when considering how media consumption and social media platforms influence the identity negotiation of second-generation migrants, the interplay between ethnic identity, transnational media, and digital platforms is focal.

Media and immigrant's identity

Anderson's (1983) work on nationalism as an imagined community argues that the media creates space for people seeking a sense of belonging. For Anderson, understanding a nation as a territorial and social space should be revised to be more socially and culturally constructed. Accordingly, a nation is built in sovereign manners through the imagination of people who share common traits, beliefs and perceive themselves as part of that group even though they haven't met each other. Based on Anderson's framework, Mahmod (2016) suggests an extensive version of this concept in the contemporary digital age. He argues that nationalism is becoming transboundary with the help of spatial and digital media that carries traditional media and its presentation of a singular and coherent culture with related identities across its border (ibid). Understanding nationalism at this point is the core condition for further comprehension of social cohesion in the imagined community on cyberspace, where different identity's articulations and belongingness strongly take place (Lutz & Toit 2014).

Thompson (2012) argued that a new wave of media coincides with a shift in nature in the presumed phenomenon of ethnic minorities resisting national

culture and their tendency to tie with their root culture. New technologies carrying multiple national representations and allow them to be explored with little restriction are reinforcing the ethnic minority to carry on and negotiate new, hybrid cultures beyond the pre-conceived reach of the collective imagined community (ibid). For instance, Bernal (2018) understands the deterritorialised characteristic of the internet as ambiguous, supporting diverse imaginary construction, and allowing multiple forms of territoriality. She observes diaspora is much like cyberspace, alternating the meaning of territorial locations and borders and using the internet to make possible new crossborder spatialisation of identity.

Calhoun (2016) commented that the imagined community concept is the foundation for studying immigrants' identity in media space, in which they connect with the unacquainted others through the materials that media bring up. Social media are dynamic platforms that could surround the people with the same 'imagined' community together. The more complex the materials circulated within the imagined group of people are on the social media platform, the more the acculturation processes intensify. Therefore, this thesis draws the attention of the imagined community being examined thoroughly through the multi-scope aspects of social media, as it is the place where various processes of identity formation are presented. The emphasis on social media is due to the identity formation being developed here is far more complex from the idea of the imagined community of mass media, which are usually restrained by the single nationalism concept.

The Host and Home Media to Immigrants

Many scholars have offered pictures of symbolic spaces that media provides for acculturation, and how different media interfere with migration experiences in the new country (Johnson & McKay 2011; Miller 2011). Mass media is vital in national identity construction, addressing a fragmented audience body that is considered culturally different in many respects (Schejter & Douai 2007). In contrast, Payne (2008) introduced the term ‘demassified media’, which serves dispersed audience groups that are culturally homogeneous. These comprise migrants’ populations as well, whose identity is embedded in a shared culture from which they may be physically absent. Concerning the fact that two media types functionally differ, it is reasonable to postulate that they address differing

integrative needs for dispersed populations faced with the complexities of enacting dual roles such as assimilation and ethnic affirmation models (Lee & Tse 1994).

Host media is documented as a navigation tool for the immigrant in the new environment, enabling them to better understand local customs, gain access to more resources, and actively participate in social activities, especially civic engagement. Dalisay (2012) examined media consumption of immigrants in America. Their usage of native language print media, television, and radio are associated with three new identity acculturation indicators: English proficiency, preference to use English, and American political knowledge. Immigrants especially shared that knowledge of politics in native media is essential for them to be able to practice their right of performing civic engagement.

On another hand, homeland media and its significant effect on social cohesion have been documented of bridging the immigrants to the culture of origins and fostering national identity formation. For example, Aksoy and Robins (2000, 2003) emphasize Turkish immigrants in Britain, France, and Germany's active usage of transnational television from Turkey across Europe to think about their own identities and their relationship with the host society. Thus, the new media network provided by homeland media does not only serve as space for Turkish to build their imagined community, promoting long-distance nationalism among 'Turks abroad'. Beyond that, thinking across the spaces helps them to reflect about the natural construction of their identity.

The second generation and their media consumption.

Though several studies have found a correlation between ethnic identities and media consumption among first-generation immigrants, how different types of media consumption and identities influence one another among second-generation immigrants has not been thoroughly investigated. The second generation, by default, does not have a direct emotional connection to a recently departed ‘homeland’, which in them arises a different identity conflict since their way of attributing ‘home’ and identity varies from their parents. Furthermore, the second generation is likely to view the cultural meaning and boundaries embedded in media content differently. This creates a separate need for study explicitly designed for them as the distinction between host and home country media cannot be fully extended to them due to a lack of a sense of 'home' media.

Second generation and transnational media

The first generation relies heavily on transnational practices, including media consumption, but not for their children (Kasinitz et al. 2008). Rumbaut (2002) studied the post-immigrant generation in the US, who originated from Asia and Latin America and investigated several existing transnational attachments. The results reveal that together with other transnational elements, transnational media is hardly sustained in the second-generation immigrants as there is no 'tingling sensation' over the 'homeland' that never lost to them in the first place.

Conversely, these arguments were not supported by some other scholars as they insist that transnationalism is capable of being maintained and passed down through generations (Levitt & Waters 2002; Smith 2002). Moreover, studies suggest that ethnic media and the ethnic identity of second-generation immigrants are in a reciprocal relationship. Oh (2015) shows that transnational media has influence on second generation identity constitution, but ethnic identity can also become a socialising force for the reception of transnational media in second generation Korean Americans. Similarly, Park (2013) argues that ethnic media played a significant role in building identities and learning about cultural heritage, but the young generation only becomes conscious of their choice of media when they reach adolescent age.

The abovementioned studies not only disclose how the second generation make sense of their identity, but they also shine a reflection on migrants' integration process to the new country. Puzzlingly, the second-generation groups give different answers for their acceptance of 'homes', which manifests through their media consumption. They are either resisting the inherence of transnational value and thus, becoming well-assimilated to the host country or undertaking the negotiations associated with the binary culture the media represents. These conflicts in previous studies' findings have made the issue of transnationalism's existence in the second generation become an open empirical question. Thus, contextually, how would the Vietnamese second generation undertake this process?

Second generation and social media

The emergence of the second generation happens in the period when the media industry is more well developed with numerous advancements in media technologies. The second generation is thus granted easier access to broader

networks and information on cyberspace, enjoying the deterritorialised characteristic of the internet (Hargreaves & Mahdjoub 1997). Furthermore, with the uprisings of multinational media consumption and more accessible mobility to immerse in different cultures, the young generation is better equipped to embrace multiple layers of cultural identities (Alonso 2010).

One important space for acculturation on the internet is social networking sites (Croucher 2011). Social media can provide voice and networks to individuals and groups on the dynamic transnational landscape and an environment to document social activities, which could reflect self-presentation and identity. Though they may take different forms in their function, purpose and delivery, social media are, in essence, influenced and represented by personal interconnections (Dayani 2017). This structure enables the immigrants to facilitate their own choice of social contacts and handle their multicultural identities (Croucher 2011). Therefore, individuals are given the capability to redefine their national identity and create a sense of belonging, agency, and place in their respective homeland(s).

Social media is also noted to be an effective tool for immigrants' acculturation (Dayani 2017). The setup of virtual communities through social media enable immigrants to interact with more individuals possessing similar backgrounds, with family and friends back home and establishing new relationships in the host country (Nardon & Aten 2012). Through those social networks, positive effects towards the acculturation process can be built, anchoring the identity formation process. Social networking sites have become a significant part of most young generation immigrant groups, so their role in providing a space for identity articulation cannot be ignored (Gomes 2016). Thus, Croucher (2011) calls for more insights into 'the changing landscape of global media and its concomitant effects on adaptation' because of its potential to be a very complex issue.

Methodological Approach

This thesis investigates the specific case of Vietnamese second generation in Czech Republic to understand the importance of media in second-generation immigrants' identity articulation process. Given this topic is about human affairs, undoubtedly no concrete knowledge could respond to this issue as different contexts can produce different understanding at different times (Flyvbjerg

2001:30). Therefore, this thesis follows phronetic approach using case study to earn context-dependent knowledge closely linked to 'real life' (ibid:73).

For data colletion, the thesis adopts qualitative methods to grasp the richness of data, by which the author is exposed to the stories and experiences in which people's acts, thought, and interpretation of the world around them (Bazeley 2013:4). Two qualitative methods were employed: interview and observation. However, the interview method serves as the primary method for collecting the majority of data of this thesis. Only a part of it depends on data from the fieldwork of the previous research with the same topic (Nguyen 2020).

Design and sampling

The interviewees needed to be born in Czech or follow their parents to Czech from a very early age. I recruited participants for interviews by using snowball sampling technique, which ensures the informants share the characteristics related to the research interest (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981:141). However, in snowball sampling, people tend to refer to those they know and have similar traits. Hence, this sampling method can have a potential sampling bias, which might hinder the researcher from earning conclusive results (Byrne 2012). To avoid this flaw, the sources did not only rely on one person's referrals. I initiated contact with three people that I already had connections with from previous research (Nguyen 2020). They referred me to more of their Vietnamese friends, who they call 'banana friends'.

The informants are diversified in terms of age and occupations. They are from 18-30 years old, which is the age range of the majority of the second generation because the time from when their parents entered the labour program to now is 32-54 years. The process continued until the 10th interview was finished. This limited sampling size is due to the saturation of the sources. Towards the end of the sampling process, answers collected from the informants had shown repeating patterns with the previous ones, making the need to continue interviewing more informants disappear.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted online with video call due to Covid-19 pandemic travel restrictions. I used English and Vietnamese for interviewing. The informants chose the language, as this was essential to let the informants express their feelings and thoughts in the most comfortable way

(Blommaert & Dong 2010). Hence, it enables me to obtain rich information and explore different nuanced meanings of data.

An interview guide was developed with four themed sections: biographical information, transnational media consumption, social media consumption, and identity. Biographical information contains questions about background, migration circumstances and language usage, serving to build trust and willingness by letting the author and interviewees know more about each other. Section two and section three dive deeper into the media world of the informants discovering how they think when making choices and interpret those selected media content. The last section is covered with questions of self-understanding and self-experiences when growing up as immigrants in Czech. This section aims to justify the premise of arguments made while listening to the answers for the second and third section, ensuring strong argument building later in the analysis part. Jensen (2013) noticed the common problem of conducting interviews is that the informants are not completely honest with what they think or mean what they say. Thus, complementary questions were also made mid-interview to extract the meanings and implications of the informants' words.

Besides the interview, I also used the data collected in my field trip back in 2019 when I was working on the same topic. The fieldwork was conducted for four days in Prague, Czech Republic. Data collection was executed by the ethnography method of informal interviews, go along, and observation. I visited a Vietnamese family having both first and second generation living together. I made observations of their media practices and casual chat while staying with them. Additionally, I paid attention to public spaces around the city. I visited many Vietnamese restaurants, grocery shops and the most famous Vietnamese trading complex called Sapa in Prague. This field trip acquainted me with the Vietnamese community in Czech, gaining contacts, and earning the premise knowledge of their media context.

Analysis Methods

The data underwent six analytical steps following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guideline for inductive theme analysis: transcribing of verbal data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and composing the report. I chose to transcribe everything to English since seven out

of ten interviews were conducted in English. In this step, I was able to draw some of my initial ideas while listening to the records.

Coding categories were formed based on the preliminary themes of transnational media and social media to turn the blind eyes to information that are not relevant to the research interest. Different categories were defined as language, time of consuming media, attitude towards media, content, external impact (friends, family, social networks), internal impacts (identity).

These categories were then organized into themes. Additionally, media habits of a person tend to change according to different stages of life and the changing media landscape. Hence, a biographical order is applied to dissect the media consumption of different stages in informants' lives, from the time that they were little and lived with their family until their current stage of life when they already broke away from parents and gained full control of their life.

Ethics

A consent form, which stated the explicit purposes of this research and how the data collected would be used, was sent to all of the informants before conducting interviews. The interview only began once I received the consent form with the informants' signatures on it. In addition, the names of informants were changed based on the requests of the informants.

Towards Discussion

Media choice made by the immigrants' young generation could reveal their way of negotiating identity between two cultural worlds (Pfetzer 2013). This chapter discusses the media's role in helping the Vietnamese second generation in Czech connect with their heritage and thus making sense of their identity. Four sections will be presented in chronological order of different stages in young generation's life, answering the specific issues: the media landscape of the Vietnamese community in Czech, how this landscape affects the first and second generation, and how the Vietnamese second generation perceives the images of 'home' embedded in different media.

The dominance of Vietnamese television in the first generation's acculturation journey

Satellite television has long been favoured by the Vietnamese community in Czech Republic. The first generation and those newly arrived are usually found absent in the flow of Czech media, yet actively practice Vietnamese satellite television mainly due to their low proficiency in Czech and the lack of programs that suit their interests (Kim 2020). Encountering Vietnamese television programs is just a very usual thing in Czech. Every Vietnamese restaurant or grocery shop typically has a TV with a random Vietnamese channel displayed all of the time. And the Vietnamese run small grocery stores or restaurants on every corner of Czech cities.

The picture becomes more evident if one visits the largest and most popular Vietnamese enclave, trading centre and market called SAPA in Prague. This place brings to the visitors the feeling of rich Vietnameseness in the atmosphere. It resembles a smaller version of Vietnam society in the heart of Europe, which contains all the familiar components - a busy market with voices of bargaining, the distinctive smell of Vietnamese food and the sound of Vietnamese languages coming from the TV screen. Seeing the owners and clerks in the shops immersing themselves in the TV programs whose origin they moved away from is an everyday image of Vietnamese life there. Moreover, many Vietnamese households also subscribe to Vietnamese satellite TV, deeming them the most affordable and reliable media outlet.

Vietnamese channels on satellite TV - abbreviated as VTV - have long been established and rapidly developed in the past decade in Czech. Along with the digital movement of the world, in which people's media trend of using internet TV has become a normality, Vietnamese national broadcast station established VTVgo, which is the official online TV system of Vietnam Television. This service targets millions of Vietnamese viewers living abroad, offering live TV and the largest exclusive videos on multiple fields in Vietnamese.

One could say that VTV caters almost exclusively to the first generation. It is an indispensable part of their migration lives, serving several functions such as entertainment, a source of information, and beyond that, providing social and cultural cohesion with the homeland by keeping them updated with the happenings in Vietnam. Thus, VTV carries a comprehensive image of 'home' for the first generation. Its importance to the first generation was even acknowledged

by the second generation as Sika knew about the popularity of VTV just because her parents and their friends were 'watching it a lot'. Furthermore, VTV breaks away the family boundary and is utilised for discourse among the first generation's community since Luna recognised a few dramas on VTV were 'very famous among my mom's friends'. In this sense, VTV does not only serve as the connection between the first generation and their homeland but also provides social and cultural cohesion among the Vietnamese immigrants. This connection serves as the foundation for building a 'home' environment in Czech, strengthening the community bonds, which is significant for maintaining ethnic identity. However, it is worth raising questions here that does the second generation also belong to this community? Are they and their identity also affected by the media landscape of their parents? These questions will be explored in the following section.

Passing down the images of 'home' to the second generation through VTV

The family is the first and most important social group in which the child acquires the first knowledge, skills, habits and the sense of who they are and where they belong to (Petani & Karamatić 2014). Moreover, when a child lives in an immigrant family context, where their parents possess multiple transnational ties, that child tends to be influenced by their parents and unconsciously adopt transnational practices. Mass media have become a part of the family environment, and its presence and messages have an impact on members of the family (ibid). Transnational media, or specifically VTV, is pivotal to the first generation and Vietnamese family context that has profound implications of 'home'.

In the traditional conception, home is associated with a physical place where our ancestors are from and where we feel safe, comfortable, and welcomed. Deriving from these sensations over a 'home', McLeod (2000) claimed that the word 'home' contains valuable meanings, providing us with 'a sense of our place in the world, which tells us we came from and where we belong' (cited in Heckman 2006). Thus, nowadays, 'home' has become a widely used metaphor to describe the sense of belonging and indirectly express a part of identity.

The electronic landscape has enabled people to be at 'home' from distances through media goods. Hence, VTV functions as 'home' in the family environment for the first generation. The second generation is exposed to transnational media as long as they are still in the same environment as their parents. Similar answers were given by ten interviewees when they were asked about their encounter with VTV:

> My parents watch VTV, but I don't. When I used to live with them, I don't remember watching it, but I do remember the program being in the background. (Ngan)

VTV appears in their memory of when they were living with their parents. With multiple transnational activities, including media practices being shared with them, the young children' identity negotiation continues with VTV. The meaning behind the action of sharing these transnational practices could also be considered a way how the first generation delivers the image of 'home' and teaches their children the value of 'home' cultures. However, the second generation does not have a close connection with their origin because they do not often go back to Vietnam.

> The last time I visited was back in 2015. I mostly returned to visit my grandparents. (An Do)

Furthermore, there are not only one but two places that have been called 'home' for them since they started to develop their awareness of the surrounding world. One is Czech, where they were born and raised, and where they perceive the image of 'home' on their own. Another is Vietnam, what their parents have always called 'home', despite them not having close attachment in terms of languages, cultures, and people. Their perception of Vietnam 'home' is merely influenced by their parents through transnational practices. Therefore, the 'home' image perceived by the second generation undoubtedly differs from the first generation. This throws the Vietnamese second generation into the confusion of identity, which Elie shared:

> We all feel a bit lost when it comes to identity. Because as I said, our parents always want you to say that you are or we are Vietnamese, we shouldn't say that we are Czech. But we are, and it is true, we grow up here. (Elie)

VTV's existence in Vietnamese families has tied the Vietnamese second generation with ‘home' in different ways. The section thus dives deeper into two nuances of VTV consumption: the habit of watching TV and the transnational contents itself on VTV programs.

Watching VTV attributing to Vietnamese conventional values

Morley (2001) noted that understanding of home is significant to understand those media that have been around within the home environment. Home is not a backdrop to media consumptions, but it is a context and the condition for the constitution of the meaning of many media-related practices. The ‘home’ created by the first generation is heavily influenced by the nationalistic idea resembling a truly Vietnamese ‘home’ with all of the national symbolic components as it was acknowledged by Julia:

> When I get home, it is just a whole mini Vietnamese world here, from the food that my mom cooks to the language that we speak at home to the music and movies that we watch together. (Julia)

Lash and Friedman (1992) claimed that these media goods, such as television, radio and so on, should be considered the ‘national symbolic', and this nation is where they have their ‘home’. In this regard, VTV and the practices around it are also considered the national symbols contributing to the making of ‘home'.

As immigrants, the young Vietnamese generation is constantly reminded by their parents about the conventional family values. In addition, those values are being kept very strictly in their diasporic life, such as the importance of dinner time, family language and education.

> I speak Vietnamese 100% at home to communicate with my parents. They restricted me from speaking Czech at home. (Nghi)

> My parents are very strict. When my Czech friends were having fun at a pub or hanging out together, I must come home to have dinner with my family and do homework. (Mai)

The pattern of watching VTV during dinner time was found in the narratives of all ten informants. Dinner is considered as news time for them, at which all of the family members gather around the dining table, have dinner and watch television.

As they spent dinner time with family at home following their parents' command, they adopted the habit of consuming VTV and became more familiar with it. Even when the young generation is well assimilated to Czech society and culture, their parents believe family should be maintained in conventional Vietnamese ways. The habit of watching VTV as an element attributing to conventional family values is also considered as one of the most distinctive cultures that take crucial account for their ethnic identity formation (Kim, 2020).

> Not necessarily dinner time, sometimes I watch VTV with my parents because we only have one TV in the house. (Henry)

Moreover, since Henry's parents are the ones who control the remote, he had to follow his parents to watch VTV because he just simply wanted to use television. From this perspective, as the central media of the family, VTV functions to unite all family members together in the same practice, blurring the barrier between generations and the differences in identity.

As for Luna, VTV was always turned on in the background of any family activities as she shared that 'I usually watch TV in the evening and when cooking with mom'. One can argue VTV or the action of watching VTV implicates the meaning of 'home' (Vietnam). Thereby, the first generation uses it to create a sense of 'home' at home. This home is the transnational space within which the transnational activities and sentimental longings take place. The children also experienced this process of 'homebuilding' mediated by their parents (Espiritu & Tran 2002). Furthermore, Small (1997:153) noted that for the individuals living in the transnational space, regardless of the generations, their identity might be forged by developing sentimental attachments to an imagined homeland and a transnational political self-consciousness, which makes us refer to Luna's saying that 'I also value a lot like the value of family in Vietnamese culture'. Apparently, the Vietnamese second generation's identity was also influenced while being exposed to those Vietnamese cultural meanings that were transmitted by their parents. Moreover, even though this habit of watching VTV for Vietnamese second generation was merely impacted by the first generation while being tied to the critical family conventional values, it also serves as a steppingstone for them to approach broader cultural values of Vietnam, brought by VTV.

Perceiving the parents' 'home' through a television set

The interaction with VTV is believed to facilitate the connection between the second generation and their culture of origins by providing the opportunity to be acquainted with the cultural value implicated in the TV programmes and the use of national language by Vietnam television. Transnational media is, indeed, crucial in the construction and negotiation of ethnic identity (Onuzulike 2013). However, this does not mean that transnational media can define the identity, but rather it serves as a communicative space of inclusion, belongingness and segregation (Bailey 2007). In this regard, transnational media is the platform that could bring about identity resistance, appropriation, reverse representation, and identity assertion.

For Julia, even though VTV has always been there, in her media consumption, it has failed to provoke a sense of belonging for her to different cultural meanings offered on VTV programs, which resulted in her resistance to watch VTV.

> Usually, we had television turning on in the background while I had dinner with my parents. But I am not really interested in that. (Julia)

Another form of resistance, as testified by Julia is by not paying attention to the VTV. Even when they were impacted by their parents' transnational ties, it could not create the connection between them with Vietnam media or anything related to it. The reason was that they 'don't understand it' and 'not interested in it', which point towards different aspects of VTV. The 'understanding' here primarily refers to the indication of the language, and 'interest' is associated with the content embedded in VTV. In this respect, they could not identify themselves with either language or content related to Vietnam.

Other informants like An Do shared that he had the experience of watching different programmes on VTV. He either tried to know what was presented on VTV or was requested by parents.

> The programmes I watched back then were game shows or news. But, for news, I didn't really understand much back then because they spoke quite fast in formal Vietnamese. (An Do)

For the second group, they had the experience of consuming VTV in a more proper way by attention to the content presented by VTV. Nevertheless, language

was found to be the common cause hindering informants of both groups from building further interest and keeping up with VTV. In addition, the informants specified and stressed the difficulty of listening to different accents or the slangs used by the narrators coming from different provinces on VTV.

> It depends on the narrators who host the programme because you know Viet has many accents and different slang. And about the content, if it is the news and they use professional terms I cannot really understand. (Luna)

As briefly mentioned above, there is a distinct boundary of language used at home and outside the family context for the Vietnamese second generation. Although Vietnamese was strictly ruled as a family language and actively used by the young generation to communicate with their parents, their performance in Vietnamese was not as good as their Czech.

> I can't say that my proficiency in Vietnamese was good. I could only communicate inside the family context, such as I couldn't convey specifically what to eat as my vocabulary was limited. It must be Czech because I have been educated here since first grade. (Henry)

The reason for their low proficiency in Vietnamese is they are more active Czech society. Furthermore, being with the Czech nanny, should be taken into consideration as it is a common phenomenon among the Vietnamese second generation in Czech (Souralova 2014). The Czech nannies significantly impacted their identity formation since childhood through language and cultural lessons (ibid). Therefore, one can argue that the Vietnamese second generation was well-assimilated to Czech society.

> I spent my childhood time with a Czech family and spoke the language with their children, so I see Czech as my native language. I feel no different from a regular Czech except for the appearance. When I talk to a native through telephone, they don't recognise any difference. (An Do)

His confidence in his competence to communicate with the local peers further leverages his beliefs to be 'identity' equal with a Czech.

Language, more than just a tool for communication, is crucial to enter an entire nation and the foundation on which nationality is imagined (Salomone 2010). Ignatieff (1993) adds that it provides the sense of belonging allowing allow a

person to develop their identity with the land of language that they feel belong. The use of the national language on VTV creates an imagined community called Vietnam, where the audiences understanding this language can further develop the relationship with Vietnam and national identity. In this sense, the Vietnamese second generation does not belong to this imagined community, as their Vietnamese proficiency was not sufficient, and they feel excluded from what was presented on VTV. Consequently, the gap in language creates a sense of 'otherness' for them and causes a loss of interest in the programs. The experience of using Vietnamese at home enabled the second generation to develop bicultural characteristics. However, given the heavy influence of Czech culture when they were little, their identities were forged more by Czech society. And when mainstream society lets the individual feel discouraged because of their cultural background, the distant development of cultural identity is further restrained. In this connection, they feel they belong to Czech and feel more at 'home' when they can comfortably communicate in the Czech language. They watch VTV not because of VTV itself as they were unable to identify themselves with some common traits in the culture, of which language was a part.

Leaving the language barrier behind, the Vietnamese second generation found themselves the contents that they could enjoy without the need of understanding language. The genres that kept them up with VTV back then were dramas and music shows, which utilised and emphasised the sound and images to deliver the messages to audiences.

> I used to watch Paris by Night with my mom and dad. But you know, it is not my music, it is the music that the older generation would prefer more than us. (Valerie)

Paris by night, despite not bearing any Vietnamese name, is a household show that preserves and celebrates the melodramatic performances of the traditional Vietnamese music genre to fill the cultural void felt by the migrants. It is not merely a form of entertainment but is among mediated media products that promote a condensed sense of cultural identity.

The Vietnamese second generation stressed that because of the differences in music taste between generations, they could not enjoy it. Paris by night appealed to their parents since they are familiar with the 'Vietnameseness' in the music and production values. Music may be personal and subjective. But without a rooted

understanding of the music's soul and a gradual familiarisation to the music's acoustic features, which ties to specific perceptual, cognitive, and affective faculties, it proves difficult for the young second generation to develop an attached familiarity in terms of cultural identity and a sense of 'home' to the transnational media products. Since the conceptions and value of the nationalistic idea are neglected in the Vietnamese second generation mindset, it is not easy for them to immerse in those kinds of music. Bosch (2014) stated that 'the act of tuning in' is a crucial key to identity formation for the audience. Hence, the second generation could not enjoy those cultural products, thereby not constructing an identity towards Vietnam.

Another kind of content consumed by Luna was Vietnamese drama:

> It is about a mom-in-law being mean to her daughter-in-law. It was ridiculous for me but was kind of very famous among my mom's friends. (Luna)

The show's popularity stems from the misconception rooted in Vietnamese culture and society regarding the strained relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, which is woven from the old custom in the feudal regime. According to Levitt (2009), most of the second-generation immigrants compromise with the norms of the host society where they were born and raised, or even are more deeply embedded in those cultures. Thus, it affects their grasp of homeland's cultural norms, especially for those who don't have a close connection with their heritage but only experience it through their parents (Lee & Kim 2014). Naturally, such a thing as a national myth and culture could not be understood if one does not have the national ideology in the first place, similarly to Luna, who could not accept the story presented on Vietnam drama and found it 'ridiculous'. In other words, she could not attach herself to those national ideologies and thus flex away from the construction of national identity.

Schiller (2004) made a clear distinction between transnational ways of being and transnational ways of belonging. Transnational ways of being concerns how people conduct social relations, behaviour and individual engagement related to transnational activities, but does not have any identity association. Whereas, transnational ways of belonging 'combines the action and awareness of identity that action signifies' (ibid:1010). These are emotional processes in which people use memory, nostalgia, and imagination to connect to different locations bound together by a shared destiny and history. Departing from this perspective, the

Vietnamese second generation was practising the transnational ways of being but not belongings. They participated in transnational activities by consuming VTV but could not identify themselves with the mediated cultural products and language. Moreover, those mediated Vietnamese cultures and products could not generate the feeling of belonging for the Vietnamese young generation with their country of origin and thus failed to interfere with their identity awareness.

In addition, VTV could be understood to build a barrier between first and second generation. The perceptions of cultural meanings and language hinder the second generation from stepping into the Vietnam world embedded in VTV. Consequently, it makes them feel like the 'other' to Vietnam and its people, including their parents. On the other hand, as the central media in the house, VTV can unite family members together , blurring the barrier between them caused by the aforementioned factors. However, this uniting effect only impacted their way of practising transnational ways of being but could not interfere further into their transnational way of belonging.

Breaking away from parents

This section explores media consumption of the Vietnamese second generation when they are breaking away from the 'home' environment that their parents created. Most informants are in their adolescent age – a period when identity formation strongly takes place (Sabatier 2008). Indeed, the second generation at this time are exposured to diverse cultures and make their own decisions which significantly reflect their self-understanding leading to self-presentation. A glimpse into the media consumption of the second generation at the time without any interference could help uncover the changes in their mindset or the rise of cultural awareness and belonging.

It is worth restating that the interaction between the informants of this study and VTV discussed above only happened in their childhood when they were living with their parents, quoted:

> Once I moved away from home for study and work, I didn't get to see it anymore. (Julia)

Luna, however, is less bound to family activities despite still living with her family as part of her coming-of-age.

> I get back home quite late after drama school. But since I forgot when it is like to watch TV again, so I don't look for it. (Luna)

Still, VTV does not seem to stay in the second generation's media consumption in both cases.

For Luna, the 'home' that she returns to since starting drama school, identity-wise, has shifted to the 'home' of an adolescent enjoying some of their first moments of independence. Her saying 'Since I forgot what it's like to watch TV again, I don't look for it' somehow goes against the human's nostalgia. Nostalgia presents how individuals connect to their past, referring to the happy moments and fostering the urge to live out the past experience (Yang 2003). In Luna's case, the good moments are good to embrace but not good enough to want to relive that experience again by watching TV with her family. It probably has a relation with the struggle that she experienced with VTV, such as the language and understanding the culture. Those create the feeling of 'excluding' from the meaning of Vietnamese cultural attachments to VTV. Moreover, Batcho (2018) claims that nostalgia could strengthen cultural identity, social bonds, attachment to the home, and continuity of self. The 'home' embedded in VTV was created by Luna's parents to replicate the 'home' of their own but not yet identified by Luna. Therefore, it could not strengthen her social bonds with 'homeland' and her cultural identity, particularly her Vietnamese identity that has never been lost in the beginning. It affirmed that the young generation is not in the phase of transnational ways of belongings as they were not emotionally attached to VTV.

Other informants also shared that TV in general has been removed from their media consumption. Instead, they find their own media for daily consumption.

> I use social media all the time because of work. I also use it for personal use to communicate with my friends because I cannot see them now. (Elie)

After moving out, the second generation is given more freedom for making their own media choices. They turn to social media, claiming it is handy and flexible. There is no distinct time for using social media, which differs from when they consume VTV that was only consumed in a particular family time. They use social

media for entertainment, work, and social networks. Several social media platforms are used by the second generation, such as Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, etc. Moreover, social media does not only hold one function of connecting people at its purest meaning when it was initially introduced to the public. Nowadays, social media acts like a virtual society where different activities and layers of meanings are digitally presented, creating a society as sophisticated as the actual one. It connects people both through direct communication and intermediate materials such as news, music, images, video, and so on.

Unlike VTV that only facilitate one-way communication, social media emphasize two-way communication and personal preferences. It contains all functions in one platform and allows users to filter out the information that they aren't as interested in, which is impossible with the mainstream media. Social media is notably widely used among the young generation, who are born in the digital world, and the Vietnamese second generation is no exception. From here, mainstream media- VTV- apparently receive a different meaning from the Vietnamese second generation compared with their parents. If for the first generation, VTV is emotionally made use of in their life because it represents nuanced meanings of 'home'. For the second generation, it is no more than a tool for communication purposes. Therefore, since there are no emotional attachments between the second generation and VTV, VTV is understandably replaced by a new media that performs more flexible communication functions.

Living in their own media world

Examining how the second generation's consumption takes place on Facebook and Instagram is neccesary to follow up their identity negotiation process. Zhao et al. (2008:1817) stated 'identity is an important part of the self-concept' and it is 'the totality of a person's thoughts and feelings in reference to oneself as an object'. Media consumption on social media could disclose the user's identity since it stresses personal preferences of everyday concern, lifestyle, and life theme, thereby presenting a self-image that derives from group belonging, combined with the value and the emotional meaning they feel associated with (Sihvonen 2015).

> I think I use social media mostly for entertainment. I use Instagram to follow some Vietnamese celebrities. And Facebook for getting updated information about the Czech. (Julia)

The Vietnamese second generation consumption on social media is diverse in terms of content and sources of information. As for content, their interests lay on different aspects of society such as politics, cuisine, tourism, and entertainment. In addition, those contents are not only produced in Czech, but also from sources of diverse origins, one of which is Vietnam media. Especially the Vietnamese second generation is captivated by contents related to lifestyle in Vietnam. To uncover how the Vietnamese second generation moves back and forth between two cultures on social media and negotiate their identity, this thesis looks closely at different aspects of their consumption, which are divided into two main categories: news and lifestyle.

News

The news mentioned in the following content refers to a large scale of social issues rather than a small scale of group community information. Muller (2013) pointed out that news media that generate national self-image could encourage audiences to identify with the nation. In addition, many studies stressed the relations between media and national cultural identity, in which news coverage is considered crucial for the process of building national identity. For instance, it reflects users' knowledge about their own country better than other foreign countries, which helps to construct civil identity.

> I mostly read news in Czech and English when it comes to global and local news. But very rarely in Vietnamese. (Henry)

> It is usually about international news and Czech news as well. I don't really follow Vietnamese news. (Julia)

Not only for Henry and Julia but the fact is that in the answers of all of the informants, Vietnam news did not appear. They primarily consume news from international and Czech media.

> Because I am working in marketing, so I need to know about the current trend. Moreover, young people here are very interested in political content, and so am I. (Henry)

Informants are quite engaged in the political issues in Czech and actively following the news. They also share with their peers and colleagues about that news because

it has an impact on their lives. Henry talked about how they possess a huge interest in politics and compare it with other Czech young people. His expression when saying 'young people here are very interested in political content, and so I am' demonstrates that he identically considers himself as young Czechs just like other friends

His enthusiasm in politics, contrasting the generally low levels of political interest proportionally shown by young people (White et al. 2000), is by no means just a personal preference, but rather, is reinforced by the 'mere exposure' effect, where repeated exposure to an activity, topic or stimulus co-influenced by their peers provides ample conditions to strengthen their attitude towards politics. Besides, for the immigrants' young descendants whose status is targeted to be socially categorised, politics is understandably a gateway in the search for their identity. Identity always exists within politics (Younge 2018) because societal change comes when a group of individuals sharing the essential identity works together to bring their desired ideas into a reality through politics.

Even in normal circumstances, no one would enter politics from a completely blank state. Instead, it's the desire to mold worldviews, improve their civil status, and overall participate in the country's social development where they consider it as their own country that builds up their interest.

Furthermore, they show concerns about the global news, for which it is a topic of discourse with their friends and colleagues. The challenge of fitting in and the opportunity that it presents require them to share common discourse with those they interact with the most, which further contribute to their direction of finding identity.

> I follow the local news here to know what is going on in my neighbourhood. I read them to translate to Vietnamese for my parents or some of my relatives here because they are not good at Czech. (Nghi)

Nghi has also become a translator in the family who reads the news and translates it for her parents and relatives, who have language barriers. In a way, she unofficially functioned as a 'cultural bridge' between broader society and her families, bringing foreign ideas and perspectives back home and translating them in a way that her family members can better understand. In that process, the

second generation's identity is imbued with the culture sets of two worlds, which lead to the development of bicultural identity.

Lifestyle

An individual's lifestyle relatively encompasses one's routine activities and behaviours while doing them (Lynn & Angeline 2011). As a result, it is through the lifestyle that an individual's perspectives and attitudes in their way of life can reveal. One's lifestyle has the ability to immerse themselves into cultural symbols that best resonate with personal identity and forge a sense of self. Social media affordances allow people to present their lifestyle and connect people with similar traits in lifestyle. Such consumption of users on lifestyle content could produce different relationships, objects and personal identity. Those arguments lead the thesis into investigating the correlation of the second generation's choice of lifestyle content on social media and the identity that they are forging.

In term of lifestyle, the Vietnamese second generation follows quite a significant number of Vietnam pages on both Instagram and Facebook. Moreover, the content that they follow illuminates Vietnamese cultures from different components of lifestyle.

> There are some that I follow because I just like them. Some people have similar struggles in life with me, or the same diet that I have and they are also Vietnamese that are living in Europe. (Mai)

Mai follows some Vietnamese influencers that shared the same background like her because she felt the similarities of identity with them. Her ethnic identity is provoked once she feels familiarised in terms of identity background but not familiarised in terms of life patterns. 'Identity is defined as a constitution based on recognising familiarities and shared derivations' (Hall 1996, cited in KOC 2006:37). Additionally, the concept of familiarity presented is associated with the meanings of sameness, belongingness and unity. Mai, in this regard, constructs the identity of Vietnamese children who live in between cultures. Besides, this identity background of 'Vietnamese living in Europe' has bound people seeing those posts and are conscious of the issue of origin just like Mai. Consequently, it shapes an imagined community on social media (Anderson 1983).

> When I suddenly found a Vietnamese on the explore section of Instagram, with black hair and speaking Vietnamese, it made me curious and clicked in. I am

> reminded of the word 'đồng hương' (compatriot). However, a part of me feels I am not 100% Vietnamese since I was born in Europe and grew up in Czech. So it is both close and strange. (Sika)

Alternatively, Sika connects to Vietnam by following Vietnamese influencers because of their appearance and language. Thereby it raised her awareness of heritage and cultural identity. In other words, Sika had the experience of discovering herself as a Vietnamese while feeling associated with the Vietnamese people in social media posts, at the same time realizing that she is different from that group because, identically, she is not fully Vietnamese. They might possess similar appearance features, but they are different regarding their coming-of-age circumstances and mindset. On this account, it causes confusion for Sika with the feeling of both 'close and strange'.

Departing from that point, we could see the differences between the transnational media use of the first and second generation. The second generation has the tendency to connect with transnational media that are common among people their age and resist the transnational media that is favoured by the old generation. Thus, the acceptance of transnational media counts on the types that could satisfy the generations' preferences.

Besides, the Vietnamese second generation also expresses their enthusiasm for Vietnamese cuisine by actively following Vietnamese food profiles on both Facebook and Instagram. It is worth mentioning that even before the Vietnamese second generation entered the mediated world of food, food has already been a significant element, which is made used by the first generation to bring their children closer to Vietnamese culture.

> I do follow some Vietnamese food bloggers on Instagram. I remember it was one of the things that I enjoyed learning about the cultures when I was in Vietnam. (Elie)

Duruz (2006) indicated that food could facilitate linkages, references, or a sense of belonging between people to a place and construct place identity. Pictures of Vietnamese food on social media have stimulated a sense of belonging for Elie and thus, made her become a loyal subscriber to those profiles. Moreover, Elie emphasized that food is one of the most enjoyable parts of her way of learning about Vietnamese culture. The more the Vietnamese second generation see these

visuals of Vietnamese foods on social media, the more they are reminded of their culture of origin and urged to reconnect with their cultural heritage. Consequently, the second generation constructs a cultural identity towards Vietnam by consuming mediated food on social media.

Finally, the cultural identity constitution of the Vietnamese second generation is also found in the concept of 'homecoming', in which they are curious by the pictures of the land and sceneries where their parents come from.

> I do follow some Vietnamese travel pages on Instagram. When I see those beautiful places and delicious Vietnamese food pictures, I usually share with my mom and tell her that I want to visit there or want to taste that food. (Valerie)

Deriving from Proshansky et al. (1979) 's framework of place identity, they argue that place has functions to provide a sense of belonging, construct meaning and foster attachments. Altman and Low (1992) further developed the concept of place attachment that demonstrates when people feel connected to a place, such bonds will impact their identity development, perception, and practices. From this standpoint, the Vietnamese second generation is constructing place identity towards Vietnam as they are strongly fostered to come 'home' after seeing the touristic pictures on social media. Moreover, they are aware of that 'home' being where their parents come from, and where they have their origin. Therefore, their action extends from showing a fascination for those places to sharing with their parents about their desire for revisiting.

Identity

The construction of identity is a continuous negotiation process, which does not only stress how others perceive one but also how one makes sense of their own identity (Hall 1997). In addition, Damon and Hart (1992) noted that self-understanding is considered as cognitive based for personal identity formation.

> If you have asked me that question like 5 years ago, I would say that I feel more Czech. But right now, I don't think so. It is a balance of both. (Luna)

> I think of myself, neither 100% Vietnamese nor 100% Czech. Having both Czech and Vietnamese, my name - Tran Ová Thanh Thuy - contains both culture Vietnam and Czech. (Julia)

We receive their confirmation, but their identity negotiation processes are already clearly disclosed in their choice of media content and how they consume them on the platform of social media. All the informants have presented themselves becoming more and more engaging into two cultural worlds and feeling comfortable being in both of them. There was no negative feeling generated for the second generation while attempting to fit themselves simultaneously in two cultures but confusion, which made them negotiate back and forth their identity. However, this confusion does not hinder them from furthering their relationship with Czech society and Vietnamese society. Instead, they find their own way of compromising and absorbing the values of two cultures in the media environment.

Notably, they do not immerse themselves in all content about Vietnam. There are aspects they find themselves not fit in, such as the political issues in Vietnam. This reflects that they have always considered themselves as Czech citizens. Therefore, they constitute their national identity by engaging in political news, which impacts their current life because they are both physically and mentally raised and resided in Czech. Vietnam could not connect with them through the news because it is hard for them to understand such a society through only several visits. Instead, they construct identity towards Vietnam by reconnecting to the origin and trying to understand the culture that has already been presented in their lives. They recalled cultural aspects that been taught by their parents and from which they are more familiar, such as the cuisine, travelling places and from sharing the common lifestyle among people in the same generation. What they do to 'reconstruct' their identity is strengthening that connection. They embed the emotions and feelings into those transnational ways of being turn it into transnational ways of belonging in their own way.

The immigrant children's experiences are not just a continuation of the first generation's involvement in their ancestral homes but rather an integral part of growing up in a new destination (Levitt 2009). The changes in the consumption and attitude towards media unveil that there is a huge change in the identity formation process of the second generation from the time they lived in the same environment with their parents. From resisting to consume VTV, they have found their own way of reconnecting with the culture of origin in different forms of media. Accordingly, they have shifted from a single identity to becoming bicultural. Ultimately, while the meaning of home for the first generation is a

place, a memory, nostalgia, or experience, the meaning of home for the second generation is a pursuit of the images of home in their own way by their own value.

Lastly, how the Vietnamese second generation use mass media and social media to negotiate identity discloses the influence of two media to them. Mass media, which promotes strong nationalism and ties to the single perspective, failed to provoke the feeling of belonging for the second generation because they do not only possess one identity. The bicultural identity exists in the Vietnamese second generation that does not allow them to accept a single point of nationalism. Instead, social media, which is disconnected from national reference, serves as a perfect place for the second generation to undergo the multiple acculturation process and possess multiple identities at the same time.

Towards The End

The thesis has revealed the significant changes in the Vietnamese young generation's media consumption along with the changes of living environments. Specifically, they switched from consuming VTV to becoming active users of popular social media such as Facebook and Instagram. The thesis argues that factors such as family, environment and self-awareness take significant accounts in the way they choose the media platform and content, impacting the identity articulation.

What role does the mass transnational media play in the Vietnamese second generation?

The analysis has uncovered that VTV existed in the media consumption of the second generation only during their time co-living with parents. Moreover, their transnational media consumption was not urged by self-interest or self-motivation. Instead, the first generation has both directly and indirectly impacted their children to watch VTV. It was indirect in the way that VTV was included in the transnational practices that the second generation had shared while they were living with their parents, who possess a strong sense of belonging to Vietnam. Hence, the home that the second generation return to every day is the home that built by their parents to resemble a truly Vietnamese 'home' with all of the

national symbolic components. VTV is considered as one of those national symbols. It also contributes to the family convention of Vietnamese, which is one of the most distinctive cultures that take a crucial account for their ethnic identity formation and maintenance (Kim 2020). Besides, the first generation impacted directly on their children's consumption of VTV in a way that VTV is seen as the crucial tool for the first generation to teach their children the Vietnamese cultural values and language that are embedded in the TV program.

The young generation only adopted VTV as the practice of transnational ways of being but not transnational ways of belonging, which is explained by how they did not develop feeling with VTV and practices around it (Schiller 2004). Moreover, VTV's failure in generating a sense of belonging for the second generation is considered due to their successful integration into Czech society shown in their low proficiency in language and lack of nationalistic ideas of Vietnam. The language was a considerable obstacle hindering them from entering the culture and further developing their feelings with Vietnam. Additionally, since nationalist ideas were solely delivered by their parents, the cultural meanings of being a Vietnamese and Vietnam pictures were not rooted in their own experience. They are only transferred to them with the help of their perception and imagination. Hence, it was insufficient for them to fit in the mediated cultural products presented by VTV. Subsequently, it caused a loss in their interest and pushed them away from constructing the national identity of Vietnam.

Scholars have offered conflicting findings about whether transnational media sustain in the second generation or not. This thesis argues that the transnational media can sustain in the young generation. Nevertheless, it depends on the context and the type of transnational media, since different demographic groups might have their preferences of the transnational media that is suitable for them. The use and meaning of transnational media passed down from the first generation are hardly sustained in the second generation if they cannot generate emotions and a sense of belonging. This emotional attachment is the glue binding them with specific transnational media, making it the irreplaceable element regardless of how rich in features other media offer. On the other hand, the vice versa effect will appear. The second generation will continue their journey to find the transnational media that they can develop a sense of belonging and perceive that media by their own value.

A striking finding emerged in the analysis, which was not a part of the initial scope of interest. Mass transnational media has two-sided effects on the relationship of the first and second generation. It could be a barrier between two generations due to different perceptions towards cultural values that are embedded in VTV. As for the second generation, Vietnam brings up the feeling of the 'others' to the country and their parents. Simultaneously, VTV, as the central media in the house, could unite family members together, blurring that barrier. Considerably, this uniting effect only impacted their way of practicing transnational ways of being but could not interfere further into their transnational ways of belonging. Ultimately, it draws attention to the picture of which mass media is more meaningful towards the inter-generational interaction, rather than being an identity negotiation tool.

Why could or could not the transnational media sustain in the second generation's media consumption?

The above results provide a ground understanding of why transnational media only sustains in the second generation's media consumption when they had their parents around and lived in a family environment. Vietnamese second generation did not hold onto VTV once they moved away from their parents. This thesis argues that it is because they did not have any emotional attachment to VTV, for which they only used it as a means of no more than a communication tool. Additionally, its function is not suitable for the young generation anymore to live in the current digital age, where there are high demands for a media that is more convenient and accumulates many functions to support work and daily activities. Consequently, VTV was quickly replaced by more well-developed social media services. Specifically, Facebook and Instagram were preferred by the informants.

How does the Vietnamese second generation relate to Vietnam and Czech Republic in their identity negotiation process through their use of social media?

This thesis discovered that the second generation have distinguishing interests in the media flow of two countries on Instagram and Facebook. When the Czech media attracts the young generation with political news, Vietnam media is appealing to them with content regarding lifestyle. They constitute their Czech national identity through engaging in political news in two ways. Firstly, they considered themselves as a regular Czech that should engage in political issues to

improve their civil status and overall participate in the social development of the country where they view as their own country. Secondly, engagement in political news helps them fit in the society by sharing common discourse with native friends and colleagues, equalling their status with the others. At the same time, they undergo the reshaping phrase of identity, where their identity is affected by people around them.

Vietnam could not connect with them through the news because they have never established a connection with Vietnam's politics or experience of living as its citizens. Instead, they construct their identity towards Vietnam through the cultural aspects that they had a chance to encounter through their parents' lesson of 'home'. It is argued that the young generation reconnected to Vietnam through lifestyle content. Moreover, they strengthen that connection by developing a sense of belonging to it. Namely, they are embedding the emotions and feelings into those transnational ways of being that they were not emotionally attached to before. They started to practice transnational ways of belonging in their own way. Ultimately, this thesis has shown that while the meaning of home for the first generation is a place, a memory, nostalgia and experience, the meaning of home for the second generation is a pursuit of the images of home in their own way by their own value.

The second generation's media consumption and habits unveil a considerable change over time in the identity formation process of the Vietnamese second generation. They have shifted from a single identity to bicultural identity, which is reflected by how they feel comfortably immersed in the cultural worlds of both Czech and Vietnam on social media. The bicultural identity formation process of the Vietnamese second generation relies on the direct interaction between them, and the media produced by the Czech and the Vietnamese.

Lastly, this thesis explored that identity formation being developed on social media is far more complex than the idea of the imagined community in mass media which are restrained by a single nationalism concept. Of note, this point is aligned with Croucher's viewpoint (2011:263) that 'the changing landscape of global media and its concomitant effects on adaptation' has the potential to be a very complex issue. The thesis argues that this is a suitable media environment for studying people, who possess multiple identities as it is the place where multiple cultural representations take place. In this regard, it also considers second generation immigrants.

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There and back again: Online media engagement of transnational migrants in London

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Introduction

The idea that people will spend their entire lives in one geographical location, thereby living by one particular set of cultural norms, is perhaps not as normal as it used to be (Levitt & Schiller 2004). It is becoming increasingly common for people to belong to more than one society simultaneously in recent decades (Skeldon 2018:4). As a result of these changes, the interest in the research field of transnationalism has grown exponentially. This thesis sets out to examine how new forms of technology have affected transnational migrants and how having to deal with multiple audiences influences their online media engagement. While people crossing borders and relocating to new countries is not a new phenomenon, there is still a need to look at transnationalism since several things have changed in recent years, and new developments have made transportation and communication more accessible than in the past. Advancements in technology and ways of thinking have merged the world "in ways that reconfigure the contemporary organization of power and identities" (Schiller 1997:155). These developments have led scholars in the field to argue for a restructuring of transnationalism and rethinking the conception of "the local, national, regional" (ibid).

Moreover, this thesis will also emphasise the importance of "the individual" when studying the media practices of transnational migrants. It is essential to analyse how transnational migrants view themselves and reflect upon their own online media engagement to conceptualize better the effects of being a transnational migrant in London and its influence on their engagement. Several scholars in the past have argued that the early conceptions of migrants no longer suffice and that there is a need for an updated way of looking at transnational migration (Cristina Szanton-Blanc & Linda Basch 1992; Levitt & Schiller 2004). This is important because there is now a new kind of migrant population that has emerged, one that has strong ties to their host country while simultaneously still remaining strongly influenced by their home country (Levitt & Schiller 2004:1002). Even more recent work on migrant transnationalism calls for a more updated view of the term, one that does not view migration through "the lens of conventional migration theory" (Nowicka 2020:1). Building on these prior studies, this thesis also suggests that a new conceptualization of migrants' transnational participation is further needed, one that understands that it takes place within different levels and takes their everyday engagement into consideration.

Transnational migration refers to belonging to more than one society at a time, which is increasingly common. However, what this thesis sets out to investigate is how transnationalism might show in migrants' engagement in online media. Individuals will respond and engage with media in various different ways based upon their own past experiences, the environment in which they find themselves in and how they identify themselves (ibid). For that reason, as will be explained in the literature review section, this thesis will opt to use a broad model of media engagement, more specifically Peter Dahlgren and Annette Hill's 2020 *parameters of media engagement*.

This thesis will look at transnational migrants based in London. The capital makes for a suitable setting to observe migrants considering its vast transnational population. However, it is important to note that there are several different types of migrants. Migration can generally be split up into two broad categories, *voluntary* and *forced* migration. This thesis will focus on the former since they make up such a large percentage of the total migrant population in London. Voluntary migrants can be further divided into two separate categories, with those being *labour* and *education* migrants (Levitt & Schiller 2004:4).

It is important to study and observe both labour and education migrants, seeing as they play an important role in the economy of the city but simultaneously have very different roles within the city. Moreover, their circumstances may be different in terms of prior social networks, the purpose of their stay and the chances of them staying long or short term.

Thus, this thesis asks three main research questions.

1. What role does online media engagement play in transnational migrants' integration into London communities?
2. How do transnational migrants navigate multiple audiences and levels of political engagement on social media?
3. How is political engagement manifested through transnational migrants' online self-expression?

To answer these research questions, this thesis will use qualitative semi-structured interviews focusing on migrants' online media engagement. As will be argued in subsequent sections, it is difficult to identify and establish the participants' sense of belonging and media use in their host country through quantitative studies. A qualitative study is better suited to such a study of transnational migrants. Furthermore, migrants' self-expression and sense of belonging are determined by more than just one factor since it is "context-specific, multidimensional and, therefore, difficult to study quantitively" (Paasche & Fangen 2012:1).

Literature Review

In order to answer the research questions initially set out, this thesis analyses transnational migrants from a broader and more updated lens while also using a combination of theories. This section explains why it is important to take into account migrants' multi-dimensionality when it comes to their online media engagement. Every migrant has their own story - stories that are altered by migration - affecting their different levels of engagement and what they use online media for. It will suggest that, especially with the ever-growing rise of technology, transnational migration needs to be looked at from a more updated and modern

lens, taking into account these new online technologies. This thesis' core theoretical argument is that that one should not focus simply on, for example, their past experiences or self-identity but rather acknowledge that all of these elements are important in determining the individuals' online media engagement. One element cannot be claimed to be more important because no two migrants are the same and, therefore, cannot be generalised.

Adrian Athique's 2016 *transnational spectrum* was chosen as one of the primary theoretical frameworks because it emphasises and acknowledges that transnational engagement takes place within numerous locations and different contexts. As will be shown below, Athique argues that we engage with media in three separate contexts. It is important to mention, however, that Athique's work is solely based on comment feeds and online forums. The *transnational spectrum* can be helped by combining it with Peter Dahlgren and Annette Hill's *parameters of media engagement*. Their model is robust and provides a conceptual, practical and analytical model that can be applied in real-world case studies. In this case, it can be used a "toolbox" for looking at and analysing migrants' online media engagement (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:12). By combining these two frameworks, this thesis advances Athique's work on online commenting activity to a broader sense of online media engagement, with a particular focus on political self-expression. I discuss each aspect of the theoretical approach below.

Transnational spectrum

A common argument is that transnational migration is not new and that early transnational migration studies may have slightly exaggerated its novelty. While this is a valid claim, there are essential differences between the embodiment of old and new transnational migration (Levitt & Jaworsky:2007:10). Some of the most important differences include the online media technology revolution, globalization of media and the ease of transport (ibid). Social media networking sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter have made long-distance communication easier and faster than it has ever been. Thus, the fixed view and conceptualization of migration needs a rethinking, more specifically one that looks at people's everyday activities on digital media. Like Levitt and Schiller, as well as Athique, this thesis attempts to adopt an approach to transnationalism that "distinguishes between the existence of transnational social networks and the consciousness of being embedded in them" (Levitt & Schiller 2004:6).

One significant change brought about by these technologies is the transnational character of modern-day media engagement: this new ability to access information and communicate with people in a manner that was not possible prior. In order to understand transnational media engagement, Athique argues that one should look at individuals through what he refers to as the social imagination (Athique 2016:177).

Athique's categorizations and methods are highly relevant to this study, especially when looking at individuals across national borders. Mainly because of his argument that transnationalism is best understood as a spectrum with various different important elements that influence it rather than a "set of extraordinary disruptive conditions" (ibid:155). Most importantly, he argues that individuals' views of the world will differ from one another because their perception of the world are unique to themselves. The meanings that we make from events and things that are seen in online media will be determined by our self-identity, our perception of the world and "our own place in the scheme of things" (ibid). Instead of just taking individual elements that influence transnational media (such as culture, ethnicity and background) this spectrum captures the audiences' "subjective inter-relationship between the personal, communal and political" (ibid:144). This engagement takes place within different contexts and with different intensities. A detailed qualitative case study that focuses explicitly on transnational migrants, such as this research, differs from Athique's work but also has the ability to complement his theory while providing examples of the linkages between different media forms and transnationalism (ibid:3).

Athique argues that media engagement takes places within three separate levels, those being *Individual, Local,* and *National.* Each level is relevant to this thesis to a certain degree. Firstly, it can be beneficial to observe media audiences on an *Individual* level since it is helpful to view migrants in this manner because in the time of globalisation it is crucial to "account for a more sophisticated, and context-sensitive, viewer" (Athique 2016:147). As stated in the introduction, for this reason, it is helpful to observe migrants' everyday engagement, given that this engagement will most likely differ from person to person. Thus, media engagement cannot be regarded as a static phenomenon, and it is important to "recognize its subjectivity" and the fact that a multitude of different factors can influence it (ibid).

Secondly, observing transnational audiences on a *Local* level, their thoughts and actions can be compared in relation to their geographical location and surrounding environment. Migrants' cultural identity will, mostly, be more multi-layered than those who constantly remain in the same place largely because relocating to new locations often means being exposed to new cultures and ways of thinking. Lastly, the *National* level can be useful since transnational migrants will often communicate with individuals in both their country of origin and host country, which in the context of this research is London. The *National* level entails the place of consumption situated with "the practical boundaries of political administration" (ibid). This is relevant for a study on migrants because they will have two, if not more, of these political administration fronts. This adds a new dimension to the *National* level for migrants not fully taken into consideration by Athique.

Gaps in previous research on transnational migration

It is important to mention that there are certain gaps in Athique's model that this research will attempt to build upon. Firstly, Athique does not explicitly look at transnational migration but rather transnational audiences in general and only briefly writes about migrants. Instead, he observes the "theoretical foundations of transnational communication" and how these transnational audiences are formed (Athique:4). This is important because, as he states, the *National* level is defined by a transnational understanding of political borders and administration. However, when looking at migrants, they suddenly have to deal with borders and administration on two fronts, their home country and their host country. Is it the case that because of this, transnational migrants have to constantly be hyper-aware, which can lead to them wanting to take a break from online engagement? Does the fact that they deal with two separate fronts make them more media savvy?

Secondly, while Athique primarily focuses on comment feeds and online forums, this thesis will hopefully provide be a more detailed look into how this can be applied to transnational migrants. By using interviews, it will allow the transnational interviewees to fully express themselves since this feels like something that is important to explore. Athique states himself in his introduction that his book does not provide an empirical account of transnational audiences (Athique:3). He does, however, mention some authors who have provided

qualitative research on transnational audiences, such as research done by Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller (2012). However, this research and the other research examples that he provides mainly deal with transnational family relations, and none of them specifically focuses on the whole political and everyday aspect of this engagement.

Instead, that particular research is more concerned with the long-distance connectivity of the family members in question. Thus, this research will move online comments into a broader sense of the parameters of online media engagement. Although transnational migrants can be (and have been) analyzed and observed from a macro perspective, which is a term used to describe and observe a group of people within a society (Jung & Moro 2012:55), this thesis will take a different approach. Instead, this thesis will use a micro-perspective since it focuses on transnational migrants on an individual level (Boccagni 2012:35). Or in other words, as Ewa Morawska puts it, “transnationalism from below” (Morawska 2003:620). This way, Morawska stresses the importance of analyzing the “feedbacks between immigrant transnational involvements and their surrounding societal structures” (ibid). The micro perspective, or “transnationalism from below”, calls for a deeper analysis into transnational migrants’ identities, economic activities and also, as in this research, their political participation (Morawska 2003:631). The fact that this research looks at their online engagement within all of the aforementioned sections adds another layer to the ever-growing transnational migrant field.

In addition to Athique's work, some of the theories and studies previously mentioned, such as the one's by Schiller and Levitt, fail to fully contextualise transnational migrants' online media engagement within their everyday lives. Qualitative research on different migrants' transnational media use can shed light upon why some groups of migrants integrate into a society differently than others. In a sense, Athique is mainly concerned with emphasising that transnational media audiences are transnational because media is generally transnational nowadays. However, this thesis is not just interested in looking at the reception side of this engagement but also the self-expression side, which is why it makes sense to look at engagement. Thus, as previously stated, this research will move online comments into a broader sense of online media engagement, as shown in the next section, by drawing on *the parameters of media engagement* model.

Transnational online media engagement

When observing the altering ways transnational migrants interact with online media, it is also relevant to analyse how and why they engage with different online content. Media engagement, like Transnationalism, is a term that has different interpretations and definitions. In spite of the fact that there has recently been an increase in academic research looking at online media engagement, there is still a lack of studies that actually define what engagement is (Smith & Gallicano 2015:82).

Prior research on media engagement and audiences has looked at engagement through what is known as uses and gratification (U&G) framework (Shade & Kornfield & Oliver 2015). While the U&G framework has many strengths, one of its main limitations is that it makes fixed assumption about audiences. Instead, this thesis argues that engagement can occur and also be encountered in several different ways, depending upon a number of factors such as a person's self-identity, background, age and the environment they find themselves in. For that reason, this thesis sets out to use Peter Dahlgren and Annette Hill's model entitled *parameters of media engagement* since it allows for a broader view and analysis of transnational migrants. Instead of measuring audience engagement, which reduces audiences and the public to consumer groups, this theoretical framework links "the personal, the socio-cultural, and the politics" to create the building blocks for the *parameters of media engagement* (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:1). The framework stands out because it moves away from viewing engagement as a metric and instead sees it as a marker for para-dynamics. The model is divided into five separate themes: *contexts, motivations, modalities, intensities* and *consequences.* These five parameters provide more flexibility in conceptualizing engagement as the relationship between the individual and their specific context. Whereas U&G attempts to find patterns in motivations and rewards across large samples, the *parameters of media engagement* model is sensitive to contextual factors such as time and place, which may be particularly important in the everyday media practices (or avoidance) of transnational migrants. The five parameters are used in the coding of this study's data and will be discussed in more detail in the analysis.

Given that online media engagement is so multidimensional, this model is suitable for a research about migrants because, as previously mentioned, they will engage with online media in a variety of different ways. In addition, online media

engagement takes place within affective and cognitive modes. These modes then lead to "switching" between positive and negative engagement and, most importantly disengagement (Dahlgren & Hil 2020:11). Positive engagement can involve "emotional identification" such as relating to something or supporting something online. In contrast, negative engagement can refer to "emotional dis-identification" with, for example, a particular political party or any sort of organisation (Hill 2019:12). Disengagement, on the other hand, can be used to understand how individuals "disengage" from certain things within media. In the context of this thesis, it can be used to observe, for example, how certain migrants decide to take a break from engaging with online media due to feeling overwhelmed with having to keep up with so many different sources. The reason for the importance of not leaving out disengagement is because it has not received as much academic attention from researchers within the field of media (ibid).

Therefore, it is important that we spend time analysing non-participation and disengagement. As audiences, we disengage constantly, because we cannot be fully engaged in media all the time, and therefore engagement is to some degree defined by its opposite. Migrants, like all other audiences, are disengaging and re-engaging all the time. This disengagement can come in many forms and different intensities. This particular angle is vital to include particularly when researching migrants. This is mainly because, as Sara Ahmed states, "emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments" (Ahmed 2004:119). Instead of simply regarding emotions as "psychological dispositions", it is better to also understand how they work and how they are formed (ibid). By acknowledging the relevancy of affect and emotion in migrants' engagement, one can better understand "what compels a group" to maintain their transnational networks and relationships, or vice versa (Wise & Velayutham 2017:117).

Online self-expression

Online media engagement on social media applications, such as Facebook and Twitter are built around self-expression. This form of online expression is needed for producing and circulating content on platforms, which is why platforms entice us to do so through designing their platforms. Self-expression can be defined as the articulation of an individuals' personhood. In some cases, especially within an online setting, this expression may be authentic or inauthentic depending on the

individual (Tshivhase 2015:38). The idea and debate regarding self-presentation is not necessarily a new one within the field of media, with Erving Goffman writing about it in his work *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* in 1959. The main argument in his work is essentially that the way in which individuals present themselves is an "ongoing process of information management", meaning that people are regularly attempting to influence the impression that other individuals have of themselves (Papacharissi 2009:347).

In the same way that Goffman (1959) argued that the setting and people around you will influence your performance, it could be argued that migrants will engage with media in different ways depending on the platform that they use and the audiences of those platforms. Thus, online self-expression is a way in which individuals can present themselves to others to make a sought-after impression. Previously, such research on self-expression has primarily focused upon close interactions with participants (Strimbu & O'Connell 2019:804). With the introduction of online media applications, however, there is now a new way for people to self-express and present themselves. This "performance" of audiences in modern times is now far more calculated, meaning that people now have more control over how they are presented. In the case of migrants, they can decide to present themselves to their new networks in London differently than to people from their country of origin. It could be argued that the deviation from one's offline personae can be explained by either a lack of self-awareness or even an intentional misrepresentation of the self, acting in a "self-idealizing way" (Bailey et al. 2020:8).

Although migrants have received considerable coverage and engagement in the media in the West in the past years, especially since the European migrant crisis in 2014, there is still a lack of coverage from the migrants' own point of view. Instead of hearing the stories and reflections of the migrants, the media is dominated by a Western perspective. That is one of the reasons why this thesis opts to instead focus on migrants' own self-expression. More specifically, how people use engagement in online media to present a certain version of themselves within an online environment. This was particularly interesting given the fact that it has been a relatively understudied topic in previous existing academic literature. Most previous research has instead focused on online exposure, meaning how individuals are affected by being exposed to certain narratives in online media and how that can have an effect on said individuals. The internet can, after all, provide

a unique setting for expressing a different version of oneself (Seidman 2013:402). Looking at online expression is important because it can shape how individuals see themselves as citizens (Lane et al. 2019:49).

Political self-expression is also a highly relevant topic, and a prevalent theme within this thesis. For extra-parliamentary activism such as political protests and other social movements, online media has gone from being a tool to a medium that can be used to make your voice heard (ibid). For migrants in London, particularly those who cannot vote, online media expression and engagement is hugely important since it can, not only, allow them to gain knowledge but at the same time allow them to "coordinate their actions to address joint concerns" (Shah & Cho & Eveland Jr. & Kwak 2005:536). Shah et al. argue in their research that individuals' use of media for gathering information contributes to online and offline self-expression which can later on encourage civic engagement (ibid). Thus, it could be argued that online self-expression leads to people taking action in an offline setting at times (Bennett & Segerberg 2012:745).

Moreover, previous research that suggests that the experiences that individuals have in an online environment will have an influence on their "offline attitudes, perceptions and behaviours" (McLeod & Liu & Axline 2014:59). For migrants, their online self-expression may be influenced by how other individuals in not just their host country but also in their country of origin respond to how they present themselves online (ibid). They have to deal with multiple audiences which can be difficult for some, particularly if the two countries are very different from one another culturally and socially. This is important because a migrants' online engagement and expression can influence "offline relationships with family, friends and community organizations" (ibid).

Online expression can also be used as a tool for migrants to gain a sense of belonging within their host country. A key element of modern forms of political engagement and protests is the relationship between belonging self-expression (Scholz et al. 2017). Online websites and social media applications are spaces in which migrant diasporas in London are "imagined and recreated" (Marino 2015:2). For migrants, in particular, online self-expression is important to examine because it provides new opportunities of "representation and experimentation with new and different identities" when they relocate to a new country (Koles & Nagy 2012:2). In the following section, I detail how this thesis methodologically investigates migrants.

Methodology

The methodological approach deemed most suitable for this type of research was a qualitative approach since the aim was to allow the transnational participants to express themselves freely and reflect on their own engagement. Using a qualitative approach was important because, as has already been established before, online media engagement is subjective, and migrants will have their own unique ways of engaging with online content.

Research design

Initially, this thesis was interested in solely focusing on transnational migrants' political engagement online and comparing it with UK residents. However, early on in the research process, it became apparent that making the assumption that every participant would regularly be politically engaged online on a daily basis was simply not the case. Thus, the design of this research focused instead on more general everyday online engagement as this would lead to more revealing and insightful observations. Furthermore, there seemed to be a lack of previous research focusing on the media engagement of migrants and specifically, differences between different types of migrants. For this reason, this thesis opted instead to compare online media engagement between education and labour migrants. As mentioned in the introduction, they both contribute greatly to the economy of London and, despite the Brexit result, the city remains one of the most popular destinations for students and workers around the world. Transnational migrants in London were chosen as the target group for several reasons. Firstly, they form a sizable group of the population in London. Suzanne Hall, whose ethnographic research partly inspired the design of the interviews, stated in 2013 that the capital had the most intense concentration of migrants, with around 42 per cent of the UK's entire migrant population living there (Hall 2013:7). Secondly, previous research on this topic seemed to focus on one particular group of transnational migrants from a specific country (Portes & Haller & Guarnio 2002:284). By interviewing transnational migrants from around the world this thesis was able to compare the engagement between different nationalities from different continents.

The interviews focused on three themes: the *Role of Media in Integrating into New Life in London and Finding a Sense of Belonging; Online Media Engagement (Five Parameters);* and *Online Self-Expression.* The first theme allowed the participants to discuss their own story and how they ended up in London. It attempted to get some context about the interviewee. The following two themes led to a deeper analysis of how these practices are formed and how they are related to the contexts that they are in. By dividing the interview guide in this manner, the thesis was able to combine their story of migration and networks they have formed to their social media habits and their media consumption.

Sampling

The sampling for this research was made up of fourteen semi-structured qualitative interviews divided evenly between labour and education migrants. Snowball sampling was used to recruit all of the interview participants. Each participant was required to have lived in London for over a year at the very least. Because of restrictions with interacting with individual outside of your household during the COVID-19 pandemic (UK Government 2021), the interviews were conducted online through Zoom. Every interview that was conducted was in turn transcribed and coded. All of the empirical data from the interviews was coded using an inductive and deductive approach, with specific quotes and keywords being selected to highlight the text and, in turn, be divided into separate themes for coding.

This research adopted the snowball sampling technique to recruit all of the interview participants. Each participant was required to have lived in London for over a year at the very least. Because of restrictions with interacting with individual outside of your household (UK Government 2021), the interviews had to be conducted online through Zoom. Conducting online interviews led to some difficulties, such as participants not being be able to connect to the meetings at the correct time. Some of the interviews had to be rescheduled to different dates and times because participants were suddenly unavailable. However, as Christine Hine states, researchers conducting online interviews should "embrace a sense of uncertainty" when conducting such a study (Hine 2015:89). Another clear limitation of only conducting interviews in an online setting was the lack of "richness and spontaneity" from face-to-face interviews (Allen 2017:1145).

Coding procedure

The coding process started inductively with the identification of particular themes that stood out in the interview transcripts. A deductive approach was then used to find keywords and quotes that stood out corresponding to the themes in this thesis. The data was then sorted into three overarching themes and subcategories. The theoretical frameworks then provided subcategories for each of these three themes.

For the first theme, *Role of Media in Integrating into New Life in London and Finding a Sense of Belonging,* this thesis used Adrian Athique's *transnational spectrum*. Athique's framework was operationalised by splitting the theme up into three subcategory sections; *Individual, Local* and *National.* Each of these three categories had particular codes that were based upon the answers of the participants. The *Individual* category included codes relating to *Self-Identity, Current occupation, Past experiences*, and *Personal relationships*. The *Local* category was accompanied by codes such as *Social environment* and *Geographical location*. Thirdly, the *National* category included the codes *Home country media engagement* and *Host country media engagement*.

The second theme, *Online Media Engagement (Five Parameters),* was coded based on Peter Dahlgren and Annette Hill's *parameters of media engagement.* They present five separate levels which were operationalised into five categories. *Contexts* were coded when the participants mentioned engaging with online media during a particular time or place or a particular platform. The *Motivations* was coded when the participants explained their reasoning behind engaging with or posting something in online media.

Modalities was coded when interviewees referenced the type of online media they consumed and their feelings when consuming it. Phrases regarding the amount of time spent on engaging with something and how "deep" an engagement was were used to code for *Intensities.* Lastly, the category *Consequences* was coded when participants said that their online engagement had led them to taking action in real life, taking a break from online media or completely disengaging from particular online platforms or sources.

The third, and final, theme was *Online Self-Expression,* which was coded depending on the different types of self-expression that the interviewees mentioned. All fourteen interview were then compared which resulted in three

main subcategories that stood out. The first of which was *Social*, which was coded when participants expressed themselves, for example, regarding a film that they had watched or tagging and sharing memes with friends. *Political* was the second subcategory and was coded when participants shared a political article or tried to interact with local politicians through social media applications. Thirdly, the subcategory *Informative* was categorised whenever a participant shared a link regarding information regarding, for example, the latest Covid-19 government policies or links to a donation page. It also included whenever a person shared something for their work, such as a recruiter sharing an advertisement for a job.

Ethics

A consent form was sent to the participant before every interview that informed them of how their answers would be used in this study. It also informed them that their real name would be kept anonymous and that only their age, nationality, gender and occupation would be disclosed. Each interviewee provided their consent in written form and then orally at the beginning of every interview. It was important for each interviewee to be aware of their privacy and "confidentiality" before each interview (Allmark et al. 2009:49).

The fact that certain questions were related to Covid-19 meant that it could also be a sensitive topic for some which could make the interview "emotionally intense" (ibid). For this reason, it was established early on in each interview that the participant was not obliged to answer any question that they did not feel comfortable with.

Analysis

In order to answer the thesis' research questions, this research conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with migrants living in London. In total, fourteen interviews were conducted, seven with labour migrants and seven with education migrants living in London. This section will be based upon their answers, which is the foundation of the analysis of this thesis. By interviewing two different types of migrants, this research can compare and contrast to see whether there are any differences and similarities between the two. The analysis shows that there is a difference between education migrants and labour migrants, showing

that contexts matter. However, there are also several similarities. Regardless, three main themes arose from the interviews. These were 1) *Role of media in integrating into a new life in London and Finding a Sense of Belonging*; 2) *Online media engagement (Five Parameters)*; and 3) *Online Self-Expression*. These three themes also informed the analytical coding of the empirical data and added further subcategories for each theme along with quotes from the participants.

Role of media in integrating into new life in London and finding a sense of belonging

The success of integration is difficult to fully measure since it is so multi-layered and includes different aspects such as civic engagement and political participation. Furthermore, integration should be regarded as a two-way process that includes both the host country and the migrant. This is evident based on the interviews since it seems to suggest a slight difference in how education and labour migrants used media to initially integrate into their respective societies. However, in almost all cases, online media played an important role in helping them find a sense of belonging once they had relocated from their country of origin to London.

Virtually all of the student migrant participants stated that they used social media to a certain extent to meet people when they first moved to the city. This was mostly done through Facebook groups that they found or through WhatsApp group chats that they were added to when they moved into their student accommodation at university. For the student Arwen, 25, Brazil, finding friends with similar interests through Facebook was accommodating since she stated that she did not enjoy attending big gatherings filled with strangers, which often occurs as the first year of university commences in the UK. In many of the other cases, it could be argued that social media made it easier for migrants to assimilate into their new life in London. For Randy, 30, Italy, Facebook played a vital role in helping him establishing new networks in London and maintaining contact with his family back home in Italy.

> "I joined a group called Italians in London on Facebook once I found out that I was moving to London. There I met my future roommates, who are now some of my best friends. And three years later, we are still living together".
>
> – Randy, 30, consultant, Italy

The case of Italian migrants in London is particularly interesting, partly since there has been a massive increase in people from Italy choosing to relocate to the UK. In fact, three of the participants in this research originated from Italy, Randy and two students. While neither of the two students used the same Facebook group that Randy had used, they each joined the Italian society of their respective universities online, one at Westminster University and the other at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies). Thus, like Randy, they used online media to find other Italians in London. Sara Marino states in her research that London has become known as "the Promised Land" for young Italians who are looking to pursue careers due to the lack of opportunities in Italy (Marino 2015:2). In more general terms, diasporic communities in London have been changed significantly because of online technologies. Migrant diasporas can now be imagined and recreated using, for example, social media applications. While diasporas have consistently depended on networks, the Internet is crucial to those networks and has taken on "a central function in many migrants' day-to-day lives" (ibid). Through online media engagement, migrants can form a new life away from their country of origin and "re-create a community of comfort that is real in its emotional and political consequences" (ibid).

While the results from both set of migrants were mostly similar, analytical coding showed that labour migrants were initially more likely to establish initial relationships with others in an offline setting than student migrants. This was mainly done through people they met at work or their friends, who already lived in London, introducing them to new people. Thus, not all migrants used online media to establish networks in London once they had relocated. When Haley, 29, Belgium, a project manager in central London was asked about her first point of contacts in London, how she met them, and whether online media played a role in this, she said explained that she did not use social media to meet people in London but instead used it to stay in touch with her friends and family in Belgium. This reflection showed that Haley, like a number of the other labour migrants, did not rely on online media to initially integrate into their London communities to establish contacts but did so instead through their work and people they had already met. Online media, however, still played an important role in allowing them to maintain close contact with their friends and family back in their country of origin.

Most participants explained that they only planned on remaining in London for a few years before returning home. The distance from their home country was generally the main reason for not wanting to remain in the long run. The empirical data suggests that, not just for the students but also workers, there was a greater probability of staying in London longer for those who came from Europe since it was easier for them to visit their family regularly. Having your family live across the globe meant that flights and travel in general would be more expensive. However, being able to connect with their families across the world with social media had made the distance more bearable for many of the participants.

Hilary Perraton (2014) argues that, although concrete data is scarce, it is possible to make generalisations about migrants who stay in their host country or return home. For many, staying in their host country is out of their hands due to government policies. Those most likely to remain were those who were academically gifted and from upper-class families (Perraton 2014:234). She argues that returning back to the country of origin was, for many, "never a realistic option for many of these who enriched their own lives and that of the universities that hosted them" (ibid). This falls in line with many of the education migrants who expressed their desire to remain in the city after graduating. One of them even began to work at her university while simultaneously studying her master's degree. Sam, 24, who now works as a lab assistant at a university in London, was offered a place after his studies which he quickly accepted since he was keen on staying in the city.

Another interesting finding was regarding the comparison of integrating into London versus other places. Five of the participants claimed that, compared to other cities they have relocated to in the past, London was more welcoming and felt it was easier to establish new networks. This was apparent as Deandra, 26, student, stated that she was surprised by how easy it was to assimilate into the London society when she first came because she had found it difficult when she moved to Lausanne in Switzerland for work three years prior. Anthony Giddens points out that cosmopolitans found in big cities openly embrace and even encourage "cultural complexity" that arises as a result of an increasingly more globalized and digital world where people create connections with strangers who have different beliefs and live differently from themselves (Giddens 2002:4).

Online media engagement (five parameters)

As mentioned in the methodology section, for the online media engagement theme of the analysis, this thesis will use Dahlgren and Hill's *parameters of media engagement* model. They present five separate categories, and the following section will show how this research operationalises those categories. With the participant data collected from the qualitative interviews, this model was applied to the coding across the five parameters. As the data was coded for the second time, the stronger relations began to appear.

Contexts

The first level is the contextual level which is interested in the actual point of entry, how individuals enter and encounter media content. Media contexts are of particular importance to this research on migrants' every day online engagement because it is nuanced and situated to a particular region, time and place, and particular distribution platform (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:13). Dahlgren and Hill argue that media engagement is relational, and therefore see it as a "nexus of relations" (ibid:2).

The participants in this research all seemed to suggest that they had at least somewhat of a routine when it came to their online media engagement. For example, both Stan, 22, student, and Billie, 27, marketing assistant, had a similar routine where they would check their social media applications in the morning and then try to avoid it until after dinner time. Michonne, 27, teacher, on the other hand, said that she usually only uses social media applications on her way to and from work. She explained that her commute was rather long, and using her phone made her travels more bearable. Regardless of the specific reasons, virtually all of the participants explained that they were more engaged during a particular time of the day. This was to be expected since Dahlgren and Hill state that the place where individuals engage with media is significant (ibid:13). This particular context, time, can also be connected with intensities, which will be discussed later in this section.

An interesting observation from several of the participants was how their online media engagement in London differed from the one their country of origin. Student migrants in this research were generally willing to try new forms of online media once they had relocated to London. Conversely, labour migrants were less likely to start using new social media applications to communicate. Éowyn, 24, a

student from Sweden, explained that she was surprised at how differently students in London use social media networking sites (SNS) compared to Swedish people. For example, according to her, people her age were far less likely to use Snapchat to communicate with their friends in London. In Sweden, however, it was her primary source of communicating with her friends. This showed how online media use could be culturally specific. This also showed how the first point of contact when moving to a new place has the ability to influence a person's engagement.

Oliver, 21, student, also explained that his media habits had changed significantly due to moving to London. Not only did he try new social media applications, but he also felt that his time spent using social media had increased, primarily because he wanted to maintain close contact with his friends and family from back home.

> "I appreciate it a lot more now because I get to see my parents and sister and I feel close to them even though I am in another country. It is very good, and especially now with the whole Covid thing I am not able to travel there as much as I would like...it's good being able to catch up".
>
> – Oliver, 21, student, Denmark

This further proves the argument that "local, regional and global contexts impact on the ways people engage and disengage with media" (ibid:13). This, in turn, can also be linked with Adrian Athique's theory that media engagement has now become a transnational phenomenon. This level also includes several "meta-contexts", such as post-truths or even a Governments policy decision. Both student and labour migrants expressed their scepticism of only acquiring news material from social media applications such as Twitter and Facebook. They found a lot of the information there to be untrustworthy and preferred to use more reputable news sites as their main source for acquiring news.

Motivations

For many participants, the motivation was simply to be entertained, like scrolling through videos on TikTok, for example. Others, such as Éowyn, were motivated to check Twitter for updates from politicians that she follows due to her own interest in politics. Another common motivation for several participants was simply needing a break from their work-life or studies. This showed how, for many participants, their motivation to engage with online media drew on "affect

and emotionality" (ibid:15). Like Dahlgren and Hill argue, the analysis in this research found that the motivations behind a person's media engagement will depend on their interests, self-identity and the place in which they find themselves in.

For some, getting involved in politics online in their host country made them feel more ingrained in the society that they live in. For example, Oliver explained that once he moved to London to study Politics, he got involved in the London Labour Party Facebook group. He was motivated to do so firstly because he wanted to get involved with political issues but secondly, also wanted to make new friends in his London community. This kind of motivation showed that the migrants in this research, whether they were students or working, had different ways of finding a sense of belonging online through different "communities, groups and networks" (ibid:15).

Some regarded being politically engaged in online media as a "duty" that motivated them into taking some form of action online. Certain conversations regarding the motivations for posting something online also led to the question of what actually counts as being politically engaged online. Is it enough to simply share something online, or does it have to go beyond that?

> "Like, I know I am not going to change something drastically by just sharing a Black Lives Matter link for donations on my Instagram, but it just felt like I had to do something".
>
> Billie, 27, marketing assistant, France

Many saw it as their responsibility to share particular messages around or write their own opinions about a specific event. It can be argued that this particular form of motivation stems from "some kind of social value that resides beyond the self" (ibid:15). As Dahlgren and Hill state, some individuals regard this particular sort of engagement, such as news or recent social injustice events, as their obligation (ibid:14). Thus, the empirical data showed that there were personal and collective social motivations, often overlapping with one another, for choosing to engage with online media.

A point was raised by Deandra, where she questioned how much of her engagement was necessarily voluntary. She spoke of the invasiveness of

encouragement to engage with media and how news could become old within minutes.

> "…we are pestered with smartphone notifications. This makes me wonder how much of that engagement being studied is voluntary".
>
> – Deandra, 26, student, Italy

She went on to question how much of our engagement is voluntary and how our content is, in many ways, picked by online algorithms. Deandra was not alone in such reflections as other participants explained how they thought that their engagement was not solely of their own will, but instead that they felt encouraged to engage with media because of things such as ads or notifications on their phones. There is voluntary engagement, such as how people choose to act and perform their identity (civic and political identities), but that is not to discount the fact that there are many examples of involuntary engagement, like what Deandra mentioned, or seeing certain ads on public transport, for example. This can be linked with other variables within the conceptual framework and, also, with the Consequences of media engagement, how does what we see impact us?

Modalities

The participants had different preferences of styles and themes when it came to their online media engagement. Some explained that they were more likely to remember the content of an article online if it included some visuals, as it made it more memorable and helped convey the message of the article. Most participants used various different online media platforms to obtain information and communicate with people in both their country of origin and in London. This can be linked with Madianou and Miller's "polymedia" approach. They argue that people are "increasingly free to choose" between a multitude of different platforms (Miller et al. 2016:4). Polymedia is, according to them, an emerging "environment of communicative opportunities" (Madianou & Miller 2012:170). Moreover, this could also be linked with what Annette Hill refers to as "roaming audiences", which refers to individuals that "access media through myriad ways" in different places and at different times (Hill 2019:34).

Online media invites both cognitive and affective engagement, as was shown by the data. Most of the participants had their own unique strategy that they used

when looking for reliable source material. This cognitive engagement depended on their country of origin and what they deemed themselves to be reliable. In one of the interviews, Oliver revealed that he studies politics and has gained experience and knowledge of how things such as news and political ideas spread in online media, which has led to a change in his online media engagement. This sort of cognitive engagement was also found in the other interviews as well. As mentioned earlier in this research, these sorts of answers prove that media engagement is not static but instead subjective (Athique:157). The interviews and the empirical data suggest that transnational migrants' online media engagement is shaped by their self-identity, current occupation, experiences and relationships. Their affective engagement with online media involved what happened before the actual engagement took place, what they experienced during the engagement and what that led to (Hill 2019:60). These affective processes of media engagement "work across a short and long timeframe", as will be discussed in the next section (ibid).

Intensities

For many of the participants, such as Stan and Kyle, their online media engagement was sporadic and depended on several things. For Stan, the level of his engagement depended on whether he was staying with his family or his flatmates. For Kyle, it mainly increased in the last year because he could not travel back home to visit his family and friends in Brazil due to travel restrictions. According to him, online media helped him cope with his homesickness as he was able to Skype with his family regularly. The interviews proved that, as Dahlgren and Hill put it, a person's "time bonds with media are vital to engagement", impacting the duration and affective dimensions of engagement (Dahlgren & Hill 2020:19).

The Coronavirus outbreak also had a significant impact on the intensity of the participants' engagement. Most of the interviewees explained that they felt their engagement had increased throughout lockdown, whether it was binge-watching series or just generally spending more time on social media than before. Mary, for example, explained that she began watching the television show The Office (US) during lockdown, which eventually led her to joining groups related to the show on various different social media applications. This was an example of a more intense form of engagement where "deeper connections" were made with a number of different collective groups (ibid:18). Moreover, for some, online media engagement became more communal, while, it became more individualised for

others. Billie explained that she believed that lockdown measures meant that people's only possibility of interacting with other people was by being engaged online.

Consequences

The consequences of online media engagement depended on the individual. For some, the consequence of online engagement led to an increase in self-confidence. Others explained that their engagement with online media had inspired them to take action in real life. Five student migrants and two labour migrants stated that they had been inspired to take an activist approach to issues regarding the environment and social injustice after being exposed to those issues on social media. Facebook was the main source used for organising and finding out information regarding protests. Certain participants got involved in political protests on UK based issues for other reasons such as not being able to vote, which led them to take action in real life with issues that concerned them. Peter Dahlgren and Claudia Alvares state that there is an increasing amount of people that feel that there is a lack of political parties that listen to their needs which makes them feel "marginalised by the political system" (Dahlgren & Alvares 2013:50). This can, in turn, lead to people "turning to alternative paths of participation" (ibid).

For others, it was for this particular reason that they disengaged from UK politics online since they knew that they could not vote. Some of them explained that they were put off by UK based political content in online media because they felt like it was more difficult to make a change as a migrant. This was particularly the case for migrants who had only been in London for a short amount of time and did not necessarily have any long-term plans of staying in the city longer than a couple of years. Often, if people do not experience any openings for participation, the blame of this should not solely be put on media because it also has to do with actual real power relations and structures within a society as well. The media can, however, reinforce those or even in other cases function to subvert them and work in the opposite direction to encourage engagement and participation, as has been shown in the empirical data. Media can, as Peter Dahlgren states, invite us to engage "with both our hearts and our minds" (Dahlgren 2013:53).

The empirical data shows that some consequences can be positive, while other's can be negative. Some of the participants explained that they believed that being a transnational migrant positively affected how they navigate online media. This

is evident since the material from both sets of migrants suggests that they have become hyper-aware or more skilful at navigating online media, due to their transnationalism. For example, Haley argued that speaking three languages allowed her to read sources regarding, for example, a recent event from three different angles. According to her, being able to compare the way in which certain things were reported by different countries helps her in figuring out what is trustworthy and what is not. However, a number of migrants explained that having to keep up with news from both their country of origin and the UK could at times be tiring and would sometimes lead to them taking short breaks from interacting with online media. Feeling overwhelmed by online media often led to the participants choosing to avoid certain platforms for a while. Again, the time and place played an important role in when the interviewees decided to disengage. It is important to spend time analysing non-participation and disengagement because, as audiences, we frequently disengage. Today, there is almost too much media that we are confronted with in our everyday lives. For that reason, each individual will create a strategy of how to deal with this. Each participant in this study has their own particular routine and selection, and disengagement, because it is simply impossible to engage with everything.

An interesting consequence of online media engagement came from Mathilda, a student from India. She said that she often shares articles and posts her own thoughts on ongoing issues to her social media accounts in comment sections or on her own Facebook page. However, Mathilda explained that she had received messages from people back home asking her why she was concerned with issues in Europe and did not post about Indian issues, such as the Indian farmer's protests that have been ongoing since 2020. This resulted in her choosing to not be political on Facebook, since that is where she had most of her connections from her home country, and instead began using Twitter because it allowed her to decide who could actually see her posts. Thus, she felt more comfortable expressing herself on a different platform in order to avoid certain opinions from some of her contacts from her country of origin. This was similar to Sam, 24, lab assistant, who asked his friends not to tag him in pictures of him at demonstrations as he did not want his family members to see him attending them since he believed that they would disapprove. These two examples show the different types of consequences of going beyond engagement. Although this sort of consequence of media engagement did not come up often in all of the interviews, it is still an illustrative case that shows how context can really influence

behaviour at this level. Even though there were few examples of this, it was still a good case to highlight despite not every migrant in this study saying something similar. This is one of the benefits and values of conducting such a small sample, since it allows for a deeper analysis of instances such as this. This is something that would not have been possible with a quantitative study using surveys, for example.

Overall, as with the previous theme, there seemed to be both similarities and differences between the two sets of migrants. Virtually all of the participants stated that the pandemic has had an effect upon their online engagement, as shown by the analysis of the *five parameters of media engagement*. For most it had become more intense as they spent more time online due to outdoor restrictions. Some participants, however, also felt overwhelmed by the amount of media that they were consuming which led some to disengaging from certain platforms and types of media that they consumed. The analysis has also showed that those migrants' who lived with more than one flatmate were more likely to have a more communal online media engagement, as they would often share pages and articles with one another.

Online self-expression

This research also wanted to focus on self-expression because it is a critical way that engagement is produced. For many participants, online media platforms provided a necessary outlet to express oneself. There were several different reasons why the participants decided to express themselves online, such as for social, political or informative reasons. Focusing on transnational migrants meant that there was an interesting aspect to their online self-expression, which also led to the question of how people bring in their homes into their expression. For some participants, their self-expression depended on the platform they were using and the audience they thought they have on said platform. Instagram and Facebook were the two most used social media platforms for more social self-expression. Some of the student migrants also used TikTok for self-expression through short videos. Twitter, on the other hand, was used by some for more political self-expression. Regardless of the platform, many expressed that being able to be self-expressive online and connecting with other people had eased their move to London. Arwen, 25, said that moving far from home for her studies was made significantly more accessible by online media:

> "I remember seeing this video or something where this guy was saying that he is as much an American, or a citizen of the US as he is a citizen of Instagram. And I was like… it makes sense. I am as close to people back home in Brazil as I am with my neighbour here in London who I see every day".
>
> – Arwen, 25, student, Brazil

In many ways, she was referring to the fact that she is able to live her everyday life with people online simultaneously as in real life. In the past, it was more common for us to just have one-self. This is the self that people tended to be most of the time, with friends and family. While the chances are that people acted differently depending on who they were with, which can be linked with what Erving Goffman referred to as a "front", it could be argued that this was still your single, real-world self. However, with the dawn of new online media technology and the rise of social media applications, this has changed significantly since people are now able to live two completely different lives: offline and online. This has both its pros and cons, as one of the interviewees stated he thought it can be dangerous to solely live your live within an online setting.

Another interviewee, Randy, 30, consultant, explained how at first, his use of social media was something that he used for validation, and wanted to get likes on his posts from friends back home because he wanted them to see his life in London. He explained that eventually he realized that it was unnecessary to depend on likes and retweets and did not get any satisfaction from this online validation that he had been craving. This was a common theme among some of the interviewees, how one's online self is just a finely curated version of the whole person. Certain participants argued that they felt that they expressed themselves differently online to people in London than to people in their home country and stated that having to deal with multiple audiences could at times be tiring.

The importance of the role that social media plays within politics cannot be understated. In a lot of cases, as seen in the empirical data, online media has the ability to alter an individual's political self-identity, particularly when moving to a new country. As Daniel Lane et al. stated, political participation and expression online has the ability to "influence not only political behaviour, but also citizens' more fundamental political self-concepts" (Lane et al. 2019:34). Some participants explained how they felt that their political identity had changed as a result of moving to London, and in turn how they express themselves politically

online. Others simply claimed that they were more willing to read and keep up with political events, while others claimed that their political opinions had changed significantly. Stan, 22, explained that since moving from his small hometown in Italy he had lost contact with certain friends because of his altering political beliefs. He explained that being exposed to different cultures had helped him form his own ideals, which affected his relationship with some of his friends back home. This falls in line with one of Arjun Appadurai arguments in his book Modernity At Large, where he argues that it is normal for this to occur as "generations easily divide" as ideas ranging from politics to culture "wither under the siege of distance and time" (Appadurai 1996:44). In other words, in many cases, as transnational migrants spend more time away from their country of origin their culture begins to become an "arena of choice, justification, and representation" (ibid). As early as 1996, Arjun wrote about how assimilating into new surroundings can be difficult because of the "politics of representing" oneself as normal to new people in one's new environment. The fact that migrants now have access to new forms of communications and expressing themselves gives it a whole new dimension. It is now more common, especially with younger migrants, for their self-identity to be influenced by online media since they can easily find likeminded people.

The analysis of the theme of Self-Expression resulted in several insightful findings. Answers from the participants showed that both sets of migrants had many different reasons for expressing themselves in an online setting. One of the few differences between the two was that student migrants were more likely to use newer social media applications such as TikTok than labour migrants. In general, labour migrants were slightly less likely to express themselves socially in online media and choose to do so privately amongst friends through Facebook messenger or WhatsApp. However, most of the participants, nine to be specific, claimed to have shared information or tried to raise awareness for social and political issues that they deemed important at some point over the last year. The results also showed that a number of migrants, particularly the younger ones, felt that their political identities had changed, albeit to varying degrees.

Summary

Overall, three main themes were identified, each of which was linked to the research questions that this thesis set out to answer. The themes were 1: *Role of*

Media in Integrating into New Life in London and Finding a Sense of Belonging, 2: *Online Media Engagement (Five Parameters)*, and 3: *Online Self-Expression.* Across the three themes certain similarities began to arise between the migrants in this study. For both sets of migrants, online media has played an essential role in different ways. All participants expressed, in some manner, that online media has allowed them to cope with their move to London and that they imagined that it would have been much more difficult to adapt without access to social media. Certain participants even argued that had it not been for social media, they probably would not have stayed in London as long as they have. When reflecting upon their own media engagement, a common theme amongst the participants was the feeling of being overwhelmed by having to keep up with multiple sources from their country of origin and the UK. This had different consequences depending on the individual but often resulted in some form of disengagement.

However, the analysis of the participants across all three themes also suggests that there were differences in the online media engagement of labour and student migrants. One of the most significant differences between the two migrants across the three themes is that labour migrants seemed more reluctant to express themselves publicly on social media than student migrants. However, most participants stated that they had at least shared a donations page or something similar at some point over the last year. There was a common sentiment that people felt a certain degree of responsibility to be at least somewhat politically engaged and raise awareness for social and political issues. One of the most apparent differences was how education migrants were more likely to use social media to make connections when first moving to the city.

The political identity of labour migrants was more likely to remain unchanged following their move to London, especially the older participants. Student migrants, on the other hand, explained that they had become more politically active online, and their political identities had flourished while being within a new mediated environment. Moreover, certain participants, both labour and student migrants, claimed that having to deal with multiple audiences led them to develop different ways of expressing themselves within online settings. Overall, however, most individuals expressed that they felt it was their duty to be somewhat politically engaged and raise awareness for social causes. The intensities of migrants' engagement also varied greatly, but Covid-19 seemed to have affected them all in some manner. For some, media engagement became more

individualised but for other's it became more communal and led to a deeper form of engagement. The importance of place and time was apparent when migrants' spoke of their different levels of engagement. In the conclusion, these similarities and differences will be discussed in light of the research questions and theoretical approach.

Conclusion

At the beginning, this thesis argued that the view that individuals stay put in a specific geographical location is not necessarily the case anymore, at least not for many people. Transnational migrants have been of increasing interest within the field of transnationalism. Moreover, while previous research has provided some interesting insights, this thesis has suggested that, as Peggy Levitt & Glick Schiller (2004) argued, there is a need for more research primarily focusing on how migrants use online media. This includes studying migrant's media use not only as a means of keeping in touch with contacts back home but also as a way of integrating into their new environment in their host country.

The thesis asked three main research questions.

1. What role does online media engagement play in transnational migrants' integration into London communities?
2. How do transnational migrants navigate multiple audiences and levels of political engagement on social media?
3. How is political engagement manifested through transnational migrants' online self-expression?

To answer these questions, this analysis of interviews with 14 migrants living in London was split into three separate themes, the first of which was *Role of Media in Integrating into New Life in London and Finding a Sense of Belonging.* This theme was analyzed using a coding scheme based on Athique's work. His argument that transnational media engagement occurs within three separate contexts (*Individual, Local* and *National)* was helpful as these three were useful categories for a coding scheme. It also argues that migrants' media engagement takes place

within different locations and contexts. The research found that successful integration is difficult to measure, given that it is so multi-layered. However, what can be drawn from the empirical data is that online media played a role, to varying extents, in helping migrants adapt to their new lives in London.

While Athique's theory was helpful in the analysis, this thesis argued that the theory should be taken further and specifically focus on migrants more thoroughly. One of the main gaps in Athique's theoretical framework was his lack of focus specifically on migrants. Particularly because, as mentioned earlier, migrants have to deal with two borders of administration. Thus, this thesis questioned whether this makes migrants hyper-aware when dealing with online media, or whether it may lead some of them to take a break due to feeling overwhelmed by having to deal with these two borders. The results from the interviews suggest that it is essential to account for migrants specifically for this reason. A number of the participants argued that being a transnational migrant resulted in them having to keep up with more online sources than most people, and often resulted in participants disengaging from certain platforms or specific subject online. Although not conclusive since it was only based upon the answers of a few migrants, the answers meet the claim that migrants should be further taken into account by Athique in his framework. Another gap in his framework is that it only focuses on comment feeds and online forums. Instead, this study attempted to give a broader and more detailed look into how this can be applied to transnational migrants through qualitative interviews.

Therefore, the second theme that arose was *Online Media Engagement (Five Parameters),* which was linked to the second research question. Dahlgren and Hill's *parameters of media engagement* model was used as the coding scheme for this particular theme. A common limitation of previous qualitative studies on this subject is that they focus solely on regular and visible instances of transnationalism and in doing so ignore most of those who are involved in transnational activities less frequently, or disengagement in this case (Portes & Haller & Guarnio 2002:284). Instead, this research opted to look at migrants' everyday online engagement. The *parameters of media engagement* model was useful in advancing Athique's work on online commenting activity to a much broader sense of online media engagement. The model provides a framework that can be applied to real-world case studies. Most importantly, the Dahlgren and Hill model refrains from making fixed assumptions about audiences and their engagement.

The two theoretical frameworks allowed for a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the empirical data from the interviews. The fact that the answers regarding migrants' online media engagement were so varied but also similar at times, proves how multidimensional they are, further justifying the use of the robust *five parameters of media engagement* that encompasses all of the important elements of their engagement. By analysing each of the five levels, this research was able to clearly see what was similar and what differed in terms of the engagement of the fourteen migrants.

The final theme investigated was *Online Self-Expression*, responding to the third research question. This theme was closely connected to the second theme, seeing as online self-expression is a critical way that engagement is constructed. The self-expression of the migrants was varied and depended heavily upon the individual seeing as they each had different ways of expressing themselves in an online setting. Most of the interviewees, particularly students, agreed that a person's online identity was most likely somewhat different to their actual offline personalities. However, this varied greatly depending on the individual. Sometimes this was done subconsciously, while other times, it was done on purpose. The analysis of this last theme, as with the previous two themes, solidified the overarching core argument of this thesis which is that migrants are multimodal.

Throughout, this thesis has emphasised that migrants' online engagement is unique and complex. As the empirical data has proven, the engagement will vary between individuals and depend upon many different factors. While self-identity and personal relationships are undoubtedly relevant, one cannot be said to be more important than the other, simply because migrants cannot be generalised. Virtually all participants had their own unique strategy and routine for their online media engagement and consumption.

The research has dealt with migrants and attempted to get into their assimilation and what role the media plays for them. However, the more profound analysis of the thesis attempted to find how these practices are formed and how they are related to their contexts. In other words, how is their migration story connected to the networks that they have made and how does this show in their media habits and general media consumption? The empirical material suggests that one's current occupation will ultimately determine how much online media is initially used for assimilation. Results from the interviews also show that a person's self-

identity and the environment they find themselves in will also play an important role in how and to what extent a person engages, and disengages, with online media. In the introduction, this thesis already established that there can be no defining and concrete answer regarding how transnational migrants' online engagement, simply because it is far too multidimensional. The results from this thesis have shown precisely that. The answers were thoroughly varied and depended heavily upon the individual. Having said that, some patterns could be spotted from the empirical data.

This thesis initially set out with the argument that migrants are multidimensional. The study found evidence for that in the differences between the two sets of migrants. Empirical data from the interviews suggests that student migrants were slightly more likely to rely on online media to integrate into their lives in London. Student migrants were also slightly more willing to be politically flexible and vocal online. However, most claimed to have at least shared a link to raise awareness for a certain social or political cause. Student migrants were also more likely to argue that their political identities had flourished in some senses since moving to London.

Nevertheless, there were also several similarities between the migrants. All of the interviewees, both student and labour migrants, argued that online media played a significant role in helping them adapt to life in London. Most participants also discussed having to deal with multiple audiences. Some felt that being transnational and consuming sources in multiple languages had helped them become more aware of what online sources to trust and which ones not to. However, many felt that it could be tiring having to keep up, for example, with news from both their country of origin and their host country, often leading to disengagement. Dealing with multiple audiences was difficult, especially for those who felt that London and their home country differed culturally and socially. Furthermore, virtually all of the participants claimed that the pandemic affected their online engagement. For some, it became more intense and communal while other's felt that it had become more individualized.

Thus, while differences were found, the research also found a number of commonalities amongst the participants. This leads to the question of what it means that there are some common trends amongst the migrants' media engagement? What the results seem to suggest is that there is some structure to online media engagement. The models used in this study can be useful because

they highlight the fact that there are commonalities, but also differences. Some things unite these two sets of migrants, and that is why it is important to look at these different contexts and levels of engagement. The argument that migrants are multidimensional and highly individualized still stands. However, within these similarities each participant had their own unique strategy of interacting and engaging with online media. Even though some of the reflections of the participants were similar, they were still individually unique. Thus, while there may be similarities amongst the migrants on the surface level, when this research really dug into their individual level it found that everyone has their own story and, as a result, everyone has their own online media practices. This thesis has shown that qualitative research on migrants is essential because just relying on quantitative studies would lead to a loss of nuance.

However, this study was also limited by certain factors, so it is important to mention its limitations. As mentioned before, only fourteen interviews were conducted, meaning that the findings from this research cannot be said to be conclusive. Certain aspects of this study also merit further exploration, such as increasing the age range of the participants given that the age range in this study was fairly low (21-30). Increasing it could perhaps illuminate further differences in the online engagement of labour and education migrants in London. Furthermore, future research on this subject could also include involuntary migrants since their answers may differ significantly from voluntary migrants. In the future, a more ethnographic approach with participant observation could perhaps help illuminate new aspects of transnational migrants' online media engagement. In conclusion, these are just the initial findings in a field were, despite claims that the novelty of transnational migration has been overemphasised, there is still a lot of uncover on how online media has affected the lives of transnational migrants.

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Identity and mobility in a mediated city: A case study of recent Turkish immigrants in Berlin

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Introduction

Cities are built on networks of connections: from different streets that connect the neighborhood, to internet cables and digital maps that connect residents virtually. Cities are not only materials; cities are also imagined and mediated through practices (Krajina et al. 2020). The city's connectivity plays a role in who we are when becoming residents of the city and what the city means to us. Moreover, cities have a scenery where we practice our everyday life in the presence of others (Cresswell 2013). This empowers the dynamic of identity in an urban setting. This characteristic of the city from the offline world is extended to the online environment.

In this study, I examine the online and offline circulation of materials, communities and information in the city of Berlin. This thesis is an invitation to walk alongside recent Turkish immigrants in Berlin. On this journey, we will look at the city's widely promising aspects through the eyes of immigrants. Immigrants find creative ways of adjusting the limitations in the city on an everyday basis, and they build tactics to find a solution to the different barriers of urban life (de Certeau 1988).

This research is important for two reasons. Firstly, media and communication research that goes beyond institutional media (such as mass media or journalism)

is needed (Andersson 2019). In media and communication studies, approaching communication within contexts enables the researchers to grasp a bigger picture of human experience (Moores 2012). Secondly, this study highlights immigrants' viewpoints since they are less advantaged actors in societal power dynamics (Harding 2008). Immigrants are often studied in relation to how they maintain communication with their home country. However, the opinion of the immigrant is relevant to more than only migration issues (Metykova 2016). Immigrants build intense connections to their local place of living (Nedelcu 2019:248). Media and communication plays a significant role in building that connection. In addition to the definitions provided by natives, it is critical to consider alternative definitions for concepts such as home, belonging, and locality (Aksoy & Robins 2000).

Objectives and research questions

The first objective of the research was to look at how media and communication practices connect immigrants with their living space. I was interested in online and offline practices that recent Turkish immigrants engage with in order to maintain a connection to their local neighborhoods. The second objective of the research was to investigate the different mobility aspects in life of the informants. With this aim I focused on mobility of goods, imagined mobilities and physical mobilities. In what ways are Turkish immigrants limited or empowered by mobility? With the third objective, I looked at how these different practices relate to identity work. I was interested in the way informants of the study imagine the city. I approached identity in this case as multidimensional and did not focus on one particular dimension of identity, such as political or ethnic identity. Identity, in this research, is defined as a process of becoming (Hall & Gay 1996).

In relation to these objectives, I formulated two research questions:

1. What are the media and communicative practices that connect recent Turkish immigrants with Berlin?
2. How do these practices relate to identity of recent Turkish immigrants in Berlin?

Literature Review

There are several key arguments within academia that are central to this research. Firstly, I argue that everyday life, and its range of shared ordinary activities, is a rich source of empirical material within the social sciences (Highmore 2001; de Certeau 1988). I also detail how everyday experiences of time, place and even mobility are not always equal between different groups of people (Morley 2017; Back & Sinha 2018; Massey 1991). Lastly, I closely examine how the concepts of identity and imagination relate to people's relationship with where they live (Cresswell 2013; Morley 2000, 1995; Amin & Thrift 2002).

Framing research in everyday life

Everyday life is where living happens, made up of different social and emotional interactions. How we approach simple, everyday activities reveals much about who we want to be and the values we want to uphold (Highmore 2001; de Certeau 1988; Thrift 2007). Everyday life is dynamic, as it is where the 'unfamiliar' becomes 'familiar' and the 'most revolutionary of inventions' is absorbed in the 'mundane' (Highmore 2001:2). That which we accept into our everyday lives, and consequently becomes ordinary, speaks to our identities and values. It is within these mundane goings-on that researchers can see how people's lives function from day to day. However, it is not easy to discuss, or even research, everyday life, as it is something that is often taken-for-granted, mundane and certainly tedious (Löfgren 2008; Ehn & Löfgren 2010). The everyday is made up of repetitive acts that rarely attract our direct attention. However, it is in those small quotidian details that we can understand how practices come to be. These 'micro moves' of everyday life (Ehn & Löfgren 2010) are the area of investigation in this thesis.

In studying everyday life, I draw upon what de Certeau (1988) called the poetics of everyday life. While there are social, political and other structures that direct our actions, which de Certeau called strategies, ordinary people also develop ways of resisting and making opportunities out of this power from above, which he called tactics (ibid.:35-37). The strategies of urban planning, therefore, cannot fully anticipate the tactics of pedestrians in how they choose to move, just as much

as a map can give an overview of a city but cannot show how people choose to navigate it (ibid.:95).

Experience of time and routines

Highmore (2001:12) argues that certain embedded routines in our everyday life are rooted in cultural practices. How individuals choose to follow or deviate from them speaks to their personal values (Ehn & Löfgren 2010). Media is as well embedded into daily life and routines (Madianou & Miller 2012; Polson 2013). Digital media and the internet are not considered an outsider technology; instead, they have been 'routinely incorporated into the everyday life' (Haythornthwaite & Wellman 2005:6). In diverse ways, media affects how we conduct our routines, whether physical or virtual. In this relation, the offline and online environments are continuous social spaces (Moores 2012:22).

The disruptive event of moving to a new country makes immigrants particularly aware of what is different about their everyday activities and routines both in their countries of origin and their adopted ones (Moores & Metykova 2009:314). As newcomers, they become more aware of the routines and practices that they once took for granted in an online or offline environment (ibid.). For instance, in different bureaucratic systems, immigrants wait hours, days, months, and even years to travel to their new country. Morley (2017:87) noted this, calling the phenomenon 'the politics of waiting'. In this structure, certain groups' access to 'that fast-track lane' of life is limited. For example, Back and Sinha (2018:2) studied immigrants' experiences living in London and noted how Londoners' fast-paced lives contrasts with the city's immigrants' experiences: 'Thousands of lives remain on hold here; prohibited from working legally, immigrants wait for the Home Office to process their immigration claims in the shadows while others briskly rush past. These unequal experiences of time in an unfolding life are another aspect of the migrant city.'

Understanding place as a network of socialities

Most academics make a distinction between place and space. Place is a practiced space infused with meaning (Tuan 1979; Ingold 2007). Tuan (1979) observed that spaces when they hold meaning for people, they become places. In this approach, the place is built through repetitive practices, rituals and routines. We transform a space into a place through everyday activities, such as media practices.

Moores (2012:32), for example, argues that returning to a newspaper every day and repeatedly engaging with it transforms that paper into a place of comfort for the reader. In a general sense, our relationship with certain media practices transform them into a place.

While spaces can be structured by impartial parties, such as how urban planners design cities, only the communities that live in those spaces can add meanings to them. Massey (1991) emphasized community and connection as defining factors of place and what makes a place unique. In this understanding, place is more than its historical past or the plan its governors had designed for it. Definitions that relate place to its background in politics or history (Rodman 1992) remove the power from groups like immigrants, which are not necessarily aware of the history of the place. Massey (1991) preferred to define place as a container filled with social relations that build networks of communication (material or immaterial). As 'theater[s] of social action' (Cresswell 2013:34) or 'networks of socialities' (Massey 1991:34), places give immigrants the agency to define what place means to them. This understanding allows immigrants to be part of an open place wherever it offers them chances to practice everyday life and build social networks.

Mediated city and beyond

Mediation is central to our understanding of the city as a place of everyday life encounters (Andersson 2019). In a mediated city, active actors are constantly changing the city through mediation and remediation (Amin & Thrift 2002). This is in close relation with Massey's (1991) definition of place as hybrid and plural, highlighting that mediation is not a new concept. In addition to digital media technologies, older definitions of communication as transportations and connections between two physical points also mediated the city as a form of infrastructure. Commonly known mediums of communication in the city include billboards, advertisements, television screens, and similar media platforms. Having that said, mediation can occur within cities' infrastructures as well as within material culture and everyday practices (Vretenar & Krajina 2017 cited in Krajina et al. 2019). This can occur in all the elements of the city life, like in streets, in transportation (Löfgren 2008), in shop signs (Trinch & Snajdr 2017), or it can also be mediated through communities and neighborhoods (Krajina et al. 2020). As Morley (2017) asserted, nothing is left unmediated.

Roaming in cities

This study looks closer at the way the city is mediated for immigrants and how they in turn remediate the city. Mediation is a multi-dimensional experience. On any ordinary walk, many experiences occur simultaneously, and we are constantly moving between offline and online communications. In view of this, I intend to link the different modes of mediation in a city to Hill (2019:14)'s concept of 'roaming audiences'. The roaming audience conceptualizes media as a landscape that audiences traverse, 'roaming' between different sites of media and communication within it. Roaming audiences also relates to the idea of being in more than two places at once and moving between different forms of stories and messages (ibid.:14). The experience of the city requires a person to constantly roam between different mediations in everyday contexts. This creates a circle of materials, stories, infrastructures, and technologies that audiences encounter in the city and constant movement through blurred borders. In this sense, city is defined as a structure of connexity (Mulgan 1997). Connexity defines how the world is entirely connected by movements. Thus, the city's online and offline materials, from infrastructures to social groups, are all in a connexity framework where residents are constantly roaming between these sites which serves to mediate the city.

On mobility

Mobility in the city can be divided into five categories (Elliott & Urry 2010). First is corporeal travel, which comprises different movements, from daily commuting to migration or leisure travel. Second refers to the movements of any objects such as imported objects or gifts. Third is imaginative mobility, which takes place when encountering pictures of different places online or on television and leads us to imagine ourselves in different settings. Fourth is the virtual mobility that occurs live and simultaneously to an offline event—such as using a mobile phone to perform a video call and watch the wedding of a friend who lives far away. Fifth, and last, is the communicative travel that occurs through text, letter, email, and any other way we send a message to another person (ibid.:16). In this project, I analyze the connections across these different modes of mobility and the roles they play in the lives of my informants.

Mobility from below

Massey (1991) believed that the experience of 'place', 'flows', 'interconnection', and 'mobilities' are not equal for everyone. Immigrants have 'contained mobility' (Morley 2017) that restricts their mobility and movements in a place. An example of these hierarchies in mobility is observed in visa restrictions, residence permit issues, and the housing crisis. Scholars have recognized that issues surrounding passports, visas and national borders should be more relevant to the way we think of communication and culture (Georgiou 2011:205–220). In many cases, immigrants still have little input on geographical borders or where to settle after their arrival in a new place. This shows that the ideal of a borderless, placeless, and connected world has not fully met its aim despite all the technologies that are available. In all aspects of communication and mobility, from access to high-speed internet to border control, place and border limitation exist for marginalized groups, and they must create a way to free themselves from it.

Mobilities that are imagined

Movements and mobilities of bodies are not limited to physical movements. For instance, while walking, we are also consciously thinking, remembering, and through different technologies, such as mobile phones and smart watches, we tend to imagine ourselves in different settings (see de Souza e Silva, 2006). Thus, while movements do happen in the physical world, the imaginative mobilities of our mobile bodies allow us to move beyond the physical border. Studies have shown that technology and media are changing the understanding of territory and mobility (see Hepp et al. 2018).

In relation to communicative, imaginative and virtual mobility, inspired by the concepts of roaming audiences (Hill 2019), I argue that the borders between different mobilities and sites are blurred. This is because, in our everyday lives, these mobilities are interconnected and are constantly being used in relation to each other (Elliott & Urry 2010:16). As we roam, we are in constant movement in between different modes of mobility. This intertwined connection between mobility sites allows us to imagine ourselves in different settings or to find a connection to places that are physically far away. In turn, I emphasize the importance of material mobilities and their connection to other dimensions of mobilities, particularly in regards to communication studies. I argue that we also experience an imaginative mobility and roam when we encounter the materials in the city that remind us of our different memories in different parts of the world.

The wider approach to mobility and movement in media and communication studies showcases how the movements of people, goods, and ideas are interconnected.

Material mobilities

Moores (2012) considered imaginative mobility as one of the central dimensions of media and communication studies. However, he also suggested that we should not underestimate the important role that everyday life's embodied and material mobilities play in communication studies. Material mobilities are taken for granted in daily practices and often are overlooked in media and communication analysis (Krajina et al. 2014:688). Morley (2017) referred to container boxes and movements of goods as one such practice that has changed contemporary life. The material goods transported in different ways, whether the luggage of immigrants (See Krajina et al. 2014:689) or container boxes, move the material culture of different countries to the immigrants' new country of residence. For instance, the role that mobility of goods plays in immigrants' lives is shown in the ethnic supermarkets and shops that sell imported products for immigrants in Canada which have helped them to maintain and perform an ethnic identity (Wang & Lo 2007). The consumers were not only users of the products but also circulators and retailers of their ethnic identities in the new space (ibid.). The case of ethnic supermarkets shows how materials and our encounters with physical products can contribute to people imaginatively traveling to another place. I intend to use this context to bridge the gap between the mobilities of goods and imaginative mobilities.

To become translocal

There is more than one way to practice everyday life with an immigrant identity because the different dimension of immigrants' identity is pluralized. There is a cluster of words used to describe a person who moves from the land they were born in to a new place. Based on different interests, financial and political situations, the classifications include 'expats', 'immigrants', 'diaspora', 'refugees', and 'displaced'. If diaspora is a general umbrella term encompassing immigration, that means a singular definition of a diasporic identity stands in contrast to the texture of identity (Hall & Gay 1996). Hall believed that identity does not have a unified, singular definition. Rather, he saw identity as more of a process of

becoming that is in constant change. At its core, identity is a tool for establishing relations with our surroundings (ibid.:9). Identity work relates to the way we idealize, imagine, and fantasize about our surroundings (Hall & Gay 1996:3). In this way, identity work relates to the social imaginary. What Taylor (2004) referred to as 'social imaginary' is often the practices that one develops to live in harmony with their surroundings. Social imaginary is a common understanding of common practices that legitimizes the way we are (ibid.:24).

In this research, I examine how my informants imagine their being and becoming in an urban setting. Whenever people refer to themselves versus a particular idea–in this case the urban life–they are approaching topics of identity (Hall & Gay 1996:13). This ensures that their imaginations and processes become part of a narrative (McAdams 2011) of who they are and how the past and future looks for them. They position themselves in a story in which they are the main character. This is an example of narrative identity (ibid.), which is a way to make a positive meaning out of negative events such as displacement. Motivated by narrative identity, I analyze the ways that my respondents' identity work is hidden in the story they share with me.

Identity and place are similar in concept. As previously discussed, place and the mediated city are dynamic and changing structures (Massey 1991). They are both in a constant process of becoming (Hall & Gay 1996; Massey 1991). Place is considered a platform for the 'creative production of identity' (Cresswell 2013:39). In this way, we are constantly negotiating who we are and who we want to be in our spaces of living and we want to present ourselves in front of eyes of others. Spaces of urban life are where relative strangers pass one another and yet influence each other (Taylor 2004:168), 'each individual or small group acts on their own, but with the awareness that their display says something to others' (ibid.).

How can polarized identities of immigrants foster the polarization of identity in their place of living? Appadurai (1996:49) claimed that when our image of nationality is disturbed, the meanings of locality gain in importance. Refugees and immigrants that experience this distribution are not 'out of place' or displaced. They rather hold a strong connection to more than one place and, in that sense, are translocals (Brun 2001). In this way, some scholars see immigrants as the ultimate example of a cosmopolitan person (Georgiou 2010:21). Appadurai (1996:33) acknowledged people on the move as those who are shifting the world

and building a new characteristic of landscapes. He adds that 'many displaced, deterritorialized and transient populations that constitute today's ethnoscapes are engaged in the construction of locality as a structure of feeling' (1996).

Examples of these neighborhoods can be found in Low's (2017:182-193) study of a Latino market in Brooklyn. In this ethnic market, different communities from different backgrounds gather to shop from the vendors with Mexican, Chinese, and African American backgrounds (ibid.:182). The migration backgrounds and material cultures that the vendors experience as well as the varieties of memories and sensory experiences, from music and smell to visual representations, produce a new identity structure in this marketplace (ibid.:193). That new identity economically saves the market by attracting a variety of consumers who shop there for a particular experience (ibid.).

Another empirical example of an immigrant neighborhood is Ehrkamp's (2005) study of the relationship between Turkish ethnic places located at Marxloh, Germany, with the identity work of immigrants. The study found that cultural practices, like shopping from Turkish markets or gathering in Turkish tea shops, place their identities in the new location to build attachment rather than to change the country or separate themselves from natives (ibid.:361). Looking closely at the last two examples, I believe construction of translocal place is dependent on mobilities of all sorts. The movements of immigrants, the transportation of goods, and the circulation of ideas hold an overall circle of connexity (Mulgan 1997) that empowers the characteristics of a translocal space. By invoking the Silk Road in this discussion, Morley (2017:102) showed that such a structure for space is not only a modern project. The Silk Road was not only important in movements of goods but was also a way that information, stories, and gossip were circulated from far Asia to Europe (ibid.).

The Latino street market and the Marxloh neighborhood cases alone show a different narrative of immigrant neighborhoods and ethnic places. In the Latino street market, for instance, Latinos were not the only ethnic groups to sell or to shop at the market. In fact, the market's very nature is particularly inclusive, and it attracts natives as well. What should gain greater attention from scholars is the dimension of immigrant's influence on the landscape of their current residences and how they play a role in building the translocal places. This example shows that immigrants have been successful in filling places with social relations. I argue that the word 'immigrant neighborhood' shows that immigrants managed to fill

the neighborhood with their material cultures and social relations. This in turn relates back to the tactics and resistance that de Certeau (1988) was interested in; despite difficult obstacles, immigrants manage to create their own atmospheres in different parts of cities.

Methodology and Sampling

The primary goal of this research is to take a phronetic approach in its examination of recent Turkish immigrants' identity work within everyday life. In doing so, it encourages a dialogue on otherwise taken-for-granted understandings of identity and daily practices. Phronesis does not attempt to make value judgements or work toward a definitive answer (Flyvbjerg 2001:58). It rather attempts 'to provide concrete examples and detailed narratives of how power works' (ibid.:140). The methodology, in this way, is tied with previously discussed theoretical framework since identity is in close relation with understanding of power and value.

Methodological design

In order to grasp all different dimensions of this research, I designed a multi method for this study. The multi methods are designed under the umbrella of 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus 1995). Why ethnography? One of the aims of the research is to involve the direct voice of margin groups in the research field (Harding 2008). Ethnography 'Bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983:2). With a multi-sited ethnography I was able, as an ethnographer, to look at more than one site of study. Inspired by the digital ethnography approach of Hine (2015), I designed a methodology that can look closer at the relationship between the two sites of study, the online and offline environment. The offline and online sites are very close to each other and it is necessary to study them in connection to each other. Involving multi-sited ethnography allowed the method flexibility by being creative in approaching a topic that deals with feelings and abstract experiences.

In running a multi-sited ethnography I combined online and offline autoethnography with diaries and semi structured interviews of my informants. Autoethnography and diaries are the primary methods of this research while the diary plays a role as a supplementary method. Each of the methods complement each other and covers the gaps in the data. My key concern was balancing the methods and their findings. In doing so, I used my autoethnographic finding as a starting point to get closer to the experience of the informants. The ethnographic findings assisted me in better understanding the daily experiences and difficulties of my informants in Berlin. With interviews, I was able to delve deeper into several questions raised in my ethnography as well as their diary. Finally, using data that was collected through a diary as a supplement method allowed the informants' poetic feelings to remain fluid in the study.

Within the autoethnography method, I was able to put myself in the position of my informants and try to create similar experiences for myself (Hine 2015). Immigration, as a word, holds an emotional weight for me. My family and I went through different frustrations of being an immigrant. This research topic is not only something that I am emotionally invested in but it is also my personal passion and close to my professional experience. I have professional experiences of working with immigration issues and refugee status in the midst of the so-called refugee crisis for Europe. I stayed in Berlin to experience the offline daily life of the city through ethnographic encounters. With online applications that are commonly used in Berlin, like food delivery apps, google maps and transportation applications, I familiarized myself with the city and its online community. The autoethnographic experience lasted for two weeks. During this experience, I used writing as a way of 'knowing' my research topic better (Richardson 1994). Writing is a creative process that brings in a scientific value of reflecting on different dimensions of the research problem (ibid.:518).

I am aware that my closeness to the research topic might as well cause limitations in my analysis and that is why later on I contact informants to keep me accountable for my assumptions. Eight informants firstly joined me in writing a diary of their walk in the city. Diary writing (Hyers 2018) turns the research process into a more inclusive environment that gives a form of agency to the informants over their actions (ibid.:38-39). The informants conducted the diary with a guideline that suggested that they walk very slowly and record their walk in any form like photography, sketching, and voice recording. Writing a diary

about the informants' walking experience was inspired by walking methodology in social science (Bates & Rhys-Taylor 2017). Through walking, we access a multi-sensual relationship of the informants and their place of living in particular (ibid.:2). With this walking diary, I observed how they felt on this walk and what a walking experience in the city looks like for the informants. I analyzed the diaries through finding case-related themes with Bazeley's (2013:188-220) guide on alternative approaches to opening and connecting data. The reason behind using this alternative approach was that I was afraid that by using qualitative coding I would lose my perspective on each informants' individuality, ideas and stories (Bazeley 2013:189).

There are certain concerns regarding the diary. These concerns are mostly focused on validity and variety of the data that is collected (Hyers 2018:150). The researcher cannot observe the process of writing the diary (ibid.:161). Not all aspects of the diary might speak for the research question. Therefore, diaries are usually a 'secondary source material' for a multi method approach (ibid.:7). I took these concerns into account and designed a final step in my method: interviewing my informants after they submit their diary to me. Interviews are a way for ethnographers to dive deeper in the topic of study and focus on emergent themes (Hine 2015:80). Hence, I conducted semi-structured interviews online and analyzed it through qualitative coding. According to Seale (2012:209), this method is a suitable method for studying complex issues such as 'values and understandings'. It allows the interviewees to speak in their voice and language. During the interviews, the diaries were a reference point for my informants. They often mentioned that they would not know the answer to certain questions if it was not because of the diary that made them start thinking about it.

The case study

According to Flyvbjerg, case studies are crucial for social sciences in order to study the particular human behavior in context (Flyvbjerg 2001:72). The sample of this research was limited to 8 persons, all recent Turkish immigrants that moved to Berlin in the past 5 years. The age group was chosen between 20-29. I focused on this particular age group because I wanted to grasp the relatively new experiences of the younger Turkish immigrants that are in their twenties. I chose to have 8 informants because of the time constraint, as well as needing enough time to analyze both interviews and diaries, which in total became 16 documents. With 8

informants I managed to have a better communication and more trusted relationship and I did not treat the interviews as 'an isolated one-off encounter' (Hine 2015:78).

'The number of Turkish citizens in Germany stands at 1.7 million people, the number of persons with Turkish immigrant background at roughly 2.4 million' (Ohliger 2008). The recent Turkish immigrants are joining the biggest minority group inside Germany and the biggest Turkish minority inside the European Union (Minority Rights Group International 2020). There is a long history of immigration between Turkey and Germany. On 29th October of 1961, West Germany invited the guest workers from relatively poor villages of Turkey (Nathans 2004:242). They were poorly treated regarding their rights, housing and payments (Der Spiegel 2011). By demands of the Turkish community, they were given the right of 'family reunification' in 1974 (Findley 2005:220) as well as a right to citizenship in 1999 (Haddad 2002:53).

The immigration rate and trends through time have changed. There were lower numbers of immigration from Turkey to Germany until 2012, and less applications regarding family reunification (Aydin 2016). The only form of immigration and visa application that has gotten more popular in recent years is for Turkish students applying to study or professionals from Turkey applying for a job (ibid.). In recent years, political asylum applications from Turkey to Germany dramatically increased as well (Gasperis 2019). My informants were half political asylum and half students or professionals. The informants of the research build their new home in a setting that has traces from previous immigrations. But they have different reasons and motivations for their immigration, as well as different access to media and communication practices during their process of immigration.

Ethics

Coming from an immigrant family as a researcher, I aimed to be sensitive in designing my questions, guide and in collecting data to protect the informants. There was a consent form (Seale 2012) designed to inform the participants about their rights and expectations from this research. That included their permission for recording and sharing the materials they have shared for research purposes. The informants were assigned pseudonyms in this research. Furthermore, the

COVID 19 regulations in Berlin were taken into consideration. I have updated my informants on the information from WHO on what to consider before leaving the house and going for a walk.

Analysis

In this section, I firstly discuss how everyday life of recent Turkish immigrants in Berlin looks like. I invite you to think of the factors that limit the experience of the informants in Berlin. Then, I take a closer look at the role different digital platforms play in their everyday life experience. The analysis will argue that aspects of digital platforms contribute to finding creative ways out of the limitations of everyday life. Further, I discuss the mobility aspects of communication and its influence on the informants' lives in Berlin. There will be a discussion of how the mobility of goods, people, information and ideas has changed different neighborhoods of Berlin and contributed to building a translocal place. In this way, I examine the connectivity of online and offline movements and where the recent Turkish immigrants stand in this flow.

Place and time in immigrants' everyday experiences of Berlin

During one of my walks in Berlin, I entered a Turkish supermarket. While looking through the shelves, I could hear Turkish over the radio. It spoke of the financial hardships for small business owners in Germany because of COVID-19. This is how I started talking to the shop owner; he told me about his own difficulties during the pandemic. When I asked him how it felt living in Berlin, he thought back to the racially-motivated shootings in Hanau that targeted Turkish immigrants and what it meant to him as a citizen. It had only been a few days since its one-year anniversary. Angrily, he said: 'We know how to live here.'

The shopkeeper uses 'we' to associate with the victims of the Hanau shootings. No matter the time he or my eight participants spent in the city, they continue to feel like an Other (Said 1978; Bauman 1991). Communities establish identities based on their perceived differences with the Other (Bauman 1991:110). For the Turkish community, being an Other is not something they have to stop and acknowledge but, rather, something they keenly feel within their everyday lives.

For de Certeau (1988: xix), everyday life happens in our quotidian routines, such as walking or shopping. It is these simple, boring activities that become the basis for how we live our lives (ibid.). What becomes of this foundational knowledge when being an Other colors everyday life.

This is what Thrift (2007:121) calls 'practical knowing' which is the way to know how to do the mundane. Such practical knowledge is not just about knowing how to get around a city, like Berlin, but imagining ourselves within its spaces and its communities (Taylor 2004). Time spent in immigrant neighborhoods, like Kreuzberg, Neukölln and Wedding, not only provides knowledge of how to navigate its streets, but it establishes them as places, a space that holds meaning (Tuan 1979). Berlin becomes a place through the mundane acts and daily encounters within that space (Cresswell 2004:11).

Serkan says he has been 'building a life' for himself as a political asylum seeker in Berlin for one year and six months. The event of moving between countries disrupts their established routines and forces them to build new ones (Moores & Metykova 2009). As recent immigrants, my informants needed time to establish new routines, and had to put forth the added effort to know the city better. Migration is not simply about moving to a new country but also about finding stable housing, being financially stable, learning a new language and culture. It occupies their everyday life and forces uncertainty and new routines upon them. It is also in this process that they recognize themselves as an Other. Informants, like Derya, had to wait long hours for appointments at the German migration office; others, like Serkan and Reha, were denied housing because of their Turkish-sounding name. Ruya, another informant, lives far from the center and since she is working in the center, she spends hours in public transportation.

There are also simple routines that are inaccessible to my participants as recent immigrants to Germany. Reha, for example, had to wait six month to open a bank account because he was a refugee. A bank account is a basic necessity for those residing in Berlin, giving them access to otherwise taken-for-granted conveniences like paying for a ticket without the exchange of physical money or shopping online. Reha's limited banking options show the power geometry (Massey 1991) between refugees like him and other residents within Berlin. Specifically, power geometry refers to the difference in connectivity and mobility between different communities, and how that relates to social status of the community.

Informants also had different experiences of time. Özgür works as a food delivery person, a job he started because he could not afford waiting to find a job related to his studies ('I could not be at home doing nothing anymore'). His experience of boredom parallels Highmore's (2001) observation that boredom is related to social class and privilege. A recurring example among informants is their experience of time in relation to the German migration agency. The lives of some informants are on hold as they wait for the agency to approve their legal documentation, such as Pari who has been waiting 390 days for her residence permit to arrive ('All I did, I waited'). Other informants face disruptions in their everyday lives as they learn the cultural differences in how the German and Turkish approach time. For example, Derya now arrives 40 minutes earlier to her appointments, as German government agencies are not as lenient with latecomers as Turkish agencies.

These experiences with time relate to what Morley (2017:86) calls the politics of waiting. We are all connected with all sorts of movements, from moving around on the internet to moving around physically on public transportation (Mulgan 1997). However, there is a hierarchy to this connexity (Morley 2017:85), as not everyone has access to the fast lane in their everyday life. Pari's wait on her residence permit limited her mobility practically to travel around. In her words she felt 'trapped' both physically and emotionally. There is an explicit hierarchy in what Pari is able and not able to do while waiting for her residence permit and an implicit hierarchy in how government agencies accommodate those with limited transportation means and are forced to live in distant neighborhoods. Acclimating to these differences in time takes experience, learning and unlearning what they know of it when they were still living in Istanbul.

My informants also talked about their efforts to learn how to navigate Berlin on their own. For instance, Derya was convinced she would never learn how to make her way around the city after seeing a public transit map for the first time but has now learned how to get around, even without Google Maps ('Now, I don't need to have Google Maps. I can even help others with address'). My informants' knowledge on how to get around the city is an important part of their orientation and, ultimately, their belonging in Berlin (Moores 2012; Ingold 2007). Mobile applications, such as Google Maps, oriented my informants to the city (Krajina et al. 2020:368), but it was being independent of such applications that made them feel like they belonged. There are numerous studies on how digital applications

facilitate movement around cities (Georgiou 2020:118) but, in my observation, the absence of such applications is part of how my informants identified as belonging in Berlin as informants echoed their independence of google map several times in interviews. Ruya, for instance, states that '[she] knows this city better than those who born here,' therefore establishing her identity in relation to German residents (Hall & Gay 1996:4). Similarly, Reha has to continue using his phone to translate German-language in public but is looking forward to the day when he does not have to rely on it.

Immigrants' imagination of Berlin

Berlin as free and rebellious

I observed a variety of materials involved in the mediation of Berlin for my informants (Andersson 2019; Krajina et al. 2020). How people dressed, for instance, signaled to Mavi that it is a city where she can be free; the Turkish phrases written on its walls made Derya feel a sense of community. Another example are the flags hanging from balconies, representing a range of political orientations, which told Serkan that it was where different opinions are welcomed. He adds:

> 'Here, everyday you see protests, somehow [...] like people are expressing themselves. [...] Sometimes, the protest has a stupid topic but the fact that everyone can, even for that stupid topic, be angry and come to streets is good, isn't it?'

Serkan comes to consider Berlin a rebellious city in seeing its residents protesting. In seeing those within the city 'expressing themselves', the political asylee comes to imagine the city as a place where he can be free. How Serkan comes to see himself in relation to other residents within the city is akin to what Taylor (2004:174) calls the social imagination, which allows him to both see protesting as socially acceptable within Berlin and relate to his surroundings. That said, what Serkan imagines the city to be is entirely subjective (ibid.). The social imaginary is often discussed in relation to citizenship, specifically how the national imaginary brings citizens together (Taylor 2004). In the case of my informants, what constitutes national borders are blurred because they are between countries (Appadurai 1996:49) and how they imagine Berlin is their way of making sense of the ambivalent space between Turkey and their adopted home, Germany. In a

country that has legal systems and infrastructures that may explicitly and implicitly limit what they are able to do and what they have access to, imagining themselves as a part of Berlin becomes a comforting narrative.

Berlin as old, cold and unwelcoming

When I asked Derya if she has ever felt uncomfortable in the city, she talked about when she was desperately looking for a place to stay then and had followed a listing to the eastern Berlin, even if she knew she would look out of place:

> 'We knew we would be the only foreigners — Muslim-looking — in the neighbourhood [Laughs] it was a very cold neighbourhood. [...] You know, we got off the subway there and everyone started staring at us. [...] we were very obviously an outsider there.'

In feeling that 'everyone was looking at us,' Derya began to recognize herself as an Other in East Berlin. Despite having the financial and technical means to make East Berlin her new home, Derya decided against moving to the neighborhood because she considered it to be 'cold' and unfriendly to 'outsider(s),' therefore 'containing' her mobility (Morley 2017). This 'contained mobility' (ibid.) refers to Derya's limited movement, as compared to other residents, within that same neighbourhood.

Informants also draw upon their historical knowledge when imagining the city, which informs where they feel free to move around. It is difficult for informants not to position themselves in relation to this history, as they walk past the many memorials throughout Berlin. Much like Derya, Serkan also finds East Berlin and its buildings to be 'cold' and unwelcoming, characterizations based upon his understanding of its communist history. Some informants also draw on this knowledge to find a sense of belonging, such as Ruya who visits museums because 'it is good to know what happened to the city [in which] you are living, if someone asks questions.' For Ruya, learning the city's history is part of her identity work, making her feel more like a Berlin resident in the eyes of others. However, informants, such as Derya, also visit museums because 'it's nice to be a tourist once in a while.' For them, it is a brief escape from the feeling of being Othered as an immigrant.

Berlin as 'Little Istanbul'

At the same time, there are neighborhoods within Berlin that my informants felt more at ease in. Ruya, for instance, said there are places within the city that she knows better than those who were born in Germany. If there is a part of the city that has been called 'dangerous' before, my informant tells me she has 'been there.' When I asked her to elaborate, Ruya brings up Kreuzberg because of its association with immigration as well as crime (Ucta & Biermann 2015). But where German residents may not feel safe in Kreuzberg because it reminds them of crime and drugs — at least, in Ruya's opinion — she considers the neighborhood home to the best Döner kebab shop in Berlin. She finds a sense of community in the bustling immigrant community of Kreuzberg because, to her, it is not that much different from Istanbul. In fact, several other informants made this comparison, such as Derya calling Kreuzberg 'Little Istanbul'. Finding similarities between the two cities, for them, is another means to orient themselves within the city. To conclude, the neighborhoods and streets within Berlin itself communicate messages and stir feelings in my informants. It is not only physical structures, such as buildings or streets, that communicate such messages to my informants; but the social structures within those neighborhoods too.

Online affordances in stretching time and place

Facebook and Telegram

In searching for informants, I found several Facebook groups where recent immigrants were particularly active. One of these was a group for private home and apartment listings, which I joined. These Facebook groups were active and responsive, as members were quick to answer my questions about housing with numerous comments and private messages. I found a feeling of community through these Facebook groups, bringing to mind how online groups come together where 'people sense a decline in communal sociality' (Miller et al. 2016:192). These Facebook groups are both public and private; and they all serve different goals, from learning German to shopping for secondhand items to connecting with other Turkish academics and students in the city. The community that my informants find in these groups is an example of what Anderson (1983) called 'imagined communities', whereby social relations are

'stretched' across space and time and they can imagine themselves as a part of a cohesive group. This media landscape introduces 'alternative meanings to locality' (Appadurai 1996:49).

To this point, immigrants are able to connect with online groups as a means to not only find their footing in the city but to also build a community, in the absence of the social and familial relations they left behind in Turkey. Peri and Derya, for example, are active in several Facebook groups, including housing groups and groups special to Turkish immigrants, or artists. Peri says she found comfort in the responses to her questions about residence permits in those groups and, in return, tries to offer help where she can in those same groups.

Furthermore, my participants are more confident about participating in these groups, similar to what Miller (2016:177) observed in certain groups feeling more assured in connecting through these online platforms. This is because of their literacy in the German language. Informants can form questions at their own pace online and do not have to worry about Language mistakes (ibid.). For example, Yağmur said she is more comfortable asking questions in these Facebook groups than she is in a face-to-face encounter with an immigration officer ('My writing is better than speaking.'). This, too, reflects how immigrants are more likely to engage in such online groups.

These Facebook groups also exemplify how informants keep 'other people close or distant' in an online space (Miller et al. 2016:177). Serkan, for instance, is active in different Facebook and Telegram groups, where he can keep in touch with different Turkish communities. Despite this, he does not like to be around other Turkish people within his own neighborhood, as the political asylee is concerned that he might be asked about why he had to leave Turkey. If finding housing was not so difficult, Serkan said he would move out of the neighborhood just to avoid political talk. This paradox speaks to the control that Serkan has over who to keep close or distant in online and offline interactions, as he is still able to connect with the Turkish community without having to be in a potentially awkward face-to-face interaction. Derya, has similar experience as Serkan:

> 'I came here because I was exposed to political pressure in Turkey. Turks here ask too many questions [...] Well, I didn't want to talk to Turks in the first months, because I didn't want to go into political issues. I did not used to go to Kreuzberg, or I would never go to a Turkish doctor. Still, they would ask me questions. [...]

> 'Why did you come?' 'Oh, did you come recently, too?' And then, they try to calculate my political view.'

In Derya and Serkan's examples, we can see that there are different ways in which immigrants imagine themselves in relation to others, both in online and offline spaces. While they may be able to meet other Turkish people in Berlin, there is no guarantee that the conversation will veer into their personal backgrounds. This, in turn, informs how free they feel to move around the city ('I did not used to go to Kreuzberg, and I would never go to a Turkish doctor.'). The affordances of online platforms, such as Facebook and Telegram, allow them to control who they interact with and what they choose to discuss. As such, there cannot be broad generalizations that what Turkish immigrants are looking for in offline spaces is the same as what they are looking for in online spaces. One offers community and the other a potentially different type of Othering ('and then, they try to calculate my political view.').

These communicative means in orienting oneself to a place or connecting with others plays into how immigrants address what de Certeau (1984) called strategies, which contribute toward their unequal experience of place and time. Strategies are the structural challenges that make it difficult for immigrants to establish routines (ibid.), rules and conditions such as Peri not being able to travel around or meet her family while waiting for her residence permit or Reha not being able to open a bank account because of his legal status as a refugee.

Immigrants, however, do not passively accept these strategies. De Certeau (1984: xix) adds that people have tactics that 'manipulate the events in order to turn [strategies] into opportunities'. My informants have their own tactics for addressing the everyday challenges of being an immigrant in Berlin. They use online platforms to find a sense of community, where they might otherwise feel explicitly or implicitly Othered being in the city, and seek answers where other sources might be vague or uninviting.

Nebenan

Several informants brought up how the mobile application Nebenan helped orient them to Berlin. It is an application through which they could connect with their immediate neighbors, coordinate events and buy and sell items. I looked through some of the functions that Nebenan had to offer and recognized its affordances for building relationships with those who live around me. The application

provided a safe way for neighbours to connect with one another at a distance, given that the COVID-19 pandemic has limited face-to-face interactions in the city. I got introduced to the Nebenan through my informants. Derya, for example, has used the application to not only sell second-hand items in a communal 'market' setting but to also host a 'small iftar[1] in the garden during Ramadan.' These are events through which she has gotten to know her mostly older neighbours of different nationalities, who would otherwise be complete strangers. Media, here is 'sharpening the boundaries of place' (Andersson 2019:111) by empowering local connections in their neighbourhoods. Of particular importance to my informants is how there is no distinguishing between Germans and immigrants in Nebenan, as the focus of the application is simply people living within a particular neighbourhood.

The use of Nebenan also allows informants to observe others within their neighborhoods. Unlike Derya, Serkan still does not interact that much with his neighbors but uses the mobile application to learn more about them ('I mostly only look, I just observe what people are doing, how they live here. I just read.'). He tries to figure out and avoid what irks them. The reasons for such silent members of online communities differ, including a lack of confidence (Sun et al. 2014). But, in Serkan's case, he is slowly putting more of himself out there.

As a final note, I want to look at how technological infrastructure has impacted the mobility of my informants. The use of online platforms and mobile applications, such as Nebenan, depends on immigrants having access to an internet connection; something that most of my informants did not have when they first arrived in the city. Technological limitations, such as limited access to the internet, certainly impacts what media affordances are available to them (Miller et al. 2016:143, 210) but also where they are able to move freely. My informants recall having to find and stay close to public Wi-Fi connections, such as those on public transportation or in train stations, when they did not have access to the internet or sim card yet.

But affordances can be examined not only in relation to media but geography too. The affordances of places offer the 'possibility for action provided to an individual by an environment' (Raymond et al. 2017). Online platforms and mobile applications, such as Facebook and Nebenan, have stretched the boundaries of

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[1] Iftar is the time of breaking fast in month of Ramadan for Muslims.

place for my informants and allows them to negotiate their own identities in relation to others within the city and be more confident. In this way, the affordances of these platforms provide them with a 'possibility for action' (ibid.) that might not be as accessible to them offline. These are tactics, to use de Certeau's (1984) term, to overcome both the personal and structural challenges of being mobile and social within Berlin.

Instagram

My participants also highlight their use of Instagram in Berlin, as a way to update friends and family and also to reflect upon their own lives. Yağmur feels responsible for 'taking some happy pictures, touristic poses' when she is in the city. Despite the hardships of living in Germany, informants feel that they need to present themselves as 'happy' and convince others they have made the right choice by moving to the country. Derya started a public account after moving to the city and uses it to document what she does from day to day. Not only does it motivate her to take more photographs but it allows her to reflect upon her own life in the city.

Instagram plays into how my informants imagine themselves in the city, specifically in two ways. Firstly, they take pictures of themselves or of their surroundings, which play into how they imagine themselves within Berlin (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998). Secondly, there is a performativity to how my informants used Instagram in the presentation of the self (Goffman 1956). They share pictures knowing that others, either in the public or within their closed group of friends, would see them (Leaver et al. 2020; Goffman 1956) and, in doing so, are conscious of how they might appear. As such, informants turn the camera toward what they want their audience to see. Participants' use of Instagram in capturing and tagging places remediates how they imagine the city to be. An example of this practice is seen in Ruya's Instagram pictures of Kreuzberg and Neukölln. She had included the location where these photographs were taken and attached hashtags, like #Berlintoday. She said in sharing colorful pictures of herself in Kreuzberg, she tries to negotiate the way Kreuzberg is imagined for Germans.

As I took a walk around Berlin, I recognized how the familiar Turkish sights, sounds and smells of these neighborhoods started to disappear as I neared tourist spots. There were no more Turkish restaurants, no Turkish or Arabic written on

the surrounding walls. Yet, in taking pictures of herself within these tourist spots such as Brandenburg Gate or Museum Island, Ruya remediates them as a place where immigrants like herself are present and thriving. In this way, she remediates the city how she imagines — or wishes it — to be. Her use of Instagram mirrors Andersson's (2019:112) observation about how the Rosengård neighborhood in Malmö, Sweden, is represented on social media platforms. Much like Kreuzberg, Rosengård is a neighborhood that is often associated with crime, but it is remediated in a positive way through how residents on Instagram portray it in pictures and hashtags on the social media platform (ibid.).

In her book On Photography, Sontag (1997:2) writes that photography is 'putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge'. While those words were written long before the introduction of Instagram, it speaks to how my informants use photography as a means to both express themselves and to remediate the city on their own terms. In this way, it gives them agency, a means to both have 'an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal' and also 'take possession of space in which they are insecure' (Sontag 1977:6). Being able to take a photograph easily with their phones, then, is a means for them to claim a part of the city themselves, imagining themselves within its spaces where social, legal or even physical structures might limit their movement.

'We didn't belong to anywhere, but we were everywhere.'[2]

The presence of the Turkish community is apparent in the material culture encountered in Berlin, from the Turkish flags that hang from the windows and balconies to the photographs of Istanbul landmarks in ethnic shops, cafes and restaurants. As my walk took me from Wedding to Neukölln, I was surrounded by Turkish music and Turkish markets. There is a market selling halal products and fresh vegetables, its vendors loudly calling out in Turkish that it is all fresh and to come quickly. There is the familiar sight of small, foldable shopping carts, particularly popular back in Istanbul, being wheeled around the stalls. It is as if the materials and lifestyle have immigrated. Derya took a similar route to mine before filling out her diary, and it reminded her of a poem from Constantine P. Cavafy (1975): 'This city will pursue you'. Istanbul, she wrote, had pursued her.

[2] Words of Yağmur,25 years old, female, in her diary.

This is not only evidence of the mobility of goods from Turkey to Germany, but also of ideas and styles. From the pictures of Turkish food across the facade of shops and restaurants to the flags that hang from buildings, these signs and pictures mediate the city as a place of diversity and inclusion; and, through them, my informants are able to define their identities (Trinch and Snajdr 2017). Here Urry's (Elliot & Urry 2010) concept of imaginative mobility similarly applies to the sights, sounds, smells and ideas throughout the Turkish neighborhood. In my autoethnography, I could see that the way I think of imagined mobility is also embodied in the sensory feeling of the environment beside the pictures and media practices. Imaginative mobility within these materials and sensory experiences enabled me to negotiate with myself, where am I at? The Turkish news that is played on television, the smell, the pictures and materials that the informants and I encountered in Turkish shops, restaurants and cafes can be considered all as different sites of a mobility that is imagined.

However, the cultures in so-called 'immigrant' neighborhoods are not monolithic; while such neighborhoods are associated with segregation and displacement in (Vertovec & Wessenderof 2010; Grillo 2007), they are also a point of contact for different communities. Sights, sounds and smells from different cultures populate Wedding, Kreuzberg and Neukölln, which include both Middle and Far Eastern countries. Even then, both German citizens and expatriates rub shoulders in its establishments, some telling me it is because they are more affordable or are open for longer hours. Despite the differences in cultures, these communities have a 'convivial' relationship, held together in the 'daily interactions while living together in a place' (Duru 2015:244). This conviviality manifests in their common connection to their local neighborhood (ibid.).

The intermingling of different cultures also speaks to how such spaces are complex and multidimensional (Jackson et al. 2001:3). In that way, these neighborhoods can be considered translocal spaces, a place not defined by the borders established by the state but continually reconstituted through its resident cultures (Low 2017:179). In this way, the immigrant community is able to reclaim agency over their neighborhoods (Brun 2001), fortified through their material culture and social relations. My informants play a role in the constitution of these translocal spaces by connecting with its residents and visiting its establishments.

The multidimensional experience of participants and I required us to be in constant movement in between different modes of mobility. Mavi wrote in her

diary about her experience of walking to her local Turkish supermarket while video calling her mother in Turkey to figure out the ingredients of her favorite vegetarian Turkish dish, red Lentil meatballs. Mavi as an immigrant video calling her mom while being surrounded by Turkish material in a district of Berlin is performing her mobility in more than one site ('I hear some other people speaking Turkish here. I see a picture of Istanbul right after entrance.'). In her experience we see how the movement of people as immigrants next to communicative and virtual mobilities is in relation with the mobility of materials and imaginative mobilities in that Turkish supermarket. This relationship between different sites of mobility shows how the participants are in constant roaming (Hill 2019) between different sites of communication and communicative activities.

There are two dimensions to these neighborhoods as translocal spaces. First, these are places defined by their networks of social relations, both offline and online (Appadurai 1996; Massey 1991; Perez 2004:14). Here, the relationship the Wedding kebab shop proprietor has with his regular customers is as important to establishing it as a place as the Wedding residents who communicate with one another through the Nebenan mobile application. In an offline environment, fellow immigrants might help each other in translating German and Turkish and as I observed, the advice they give over local Facebook groups also contributes to how it is imagined as diverse and welcoming. Second, the movements of Turkish immigrants also leave a trace upon the city, from the street art that stretches across its walls to the foods and products that follow them from Turkey. A common observation among my informants is that 'home' is not simply about where you are from. As Serkan says:

> 'When you build a home, you don't build it from scratch. You only need to put an effort and time into making it better, to feel it is your home.'

Serkan observes that 'home' is what you make of a place and the mark you leave upon it. He acknowledges that immigrants like himself build this 'home' upon an existing city ('You don't build it from scratch'), rather than demolishing and replacing what came previously. In spreading their culture, there can be a 'shared sense of meanings, loyalties and interests' that come to bring neighborhoods of both German citizens and expatriates together (Low 2017:181). As translocal spaces, they present the opportunity for 'multiple kinds of social, spatial and political formations' (ibid.).

Despite this, recent terrorist attacks upon the immigrant community has made my informants uncertain about the future of these 'immigrant' neighborhoods. After the racially-motivated shooting at a shisha bar in Hanau (DW 2021), Ruya worries for her safety. She walks to the Turkish supermarket where she works every day, wondering if it will be the day it is attacked. Furthermore, far-right parties and their followers have been increasingly vocal about their opposition to the material culture of such communities, such as the 'Anti-Kebab' movement in France that argues the dish is destroying its food culture (AJ plus 2020). This shows the symbolic impact that these material cultures have on the city spaces. Ruya adds:

> 'I belong to Berlin. [...] Actually, we don't question our belonging. We are like 'Oh, O.K. We belong here' and then, in exact moment something like the Hanau happens and Turkish people die, everyone starts thinking, 'Do we belong to here? Will they send us back?' [...] I cannot go back to Turkey now, things have changed so much that I know Berlin far better. Then I put myself in the position of Germans. From their eyes, we don't belong to here. But not from my eyes.'

Much like Ruya, my informants said they rarely questioned whether they belonged in Berlin. It is only when they imagine themselves in the position of other Germans that they see themselves as an Other. Ruya says that responsibility, then, falls upon her generation to push back against negative associations with the immigrant community and to, instead, find common ground. She brings up the example of the people who come through the supermarket, introducing their German friends to the different Turkish dishes on offer and explaining it to them. As in Ruya's opinion the material culture and symbols are more accessible to Germans to engage with and therefore it is a doorway for building a common ground. Maybe then they can see one another as Berliners..

Conclusion

To summarize these findings, this thesis examined the everyday media and communicative practices of Turkish immigrants in relation to their mobility in and imagination of Berlin. It looked at the different ways in which the city is remediated to them, and how that shapes their unequal experience of place and time. Yet immigrants have agency over this experience, acclimating to the city and

connecting with its communities through the use of online platforms and mobile applications.

What are the media and communicative practices that connect recent Turkish immigrants with Berlin?

The everyday lives of new immigrants are marked by structural challenges to how they socialize and move around, both critical in establishing a sense of routine in their adopted country of Germany. These structural challenges, which can be social, legal or even physical, is what exert power over the day-to-day actions of people. This can lead to immigrants feeling as if they are trapped or stuck in place. However, this does not mean that they are powerless against such strategies. Immigrants have their own tactics (de Certeau 1984) for resisting or making opportunities out of these structural challenges, including the use of mobile phones to acclimate themselves to their surroundings and to find a sense of community.

My informants used online applications like Facebook to connect with other immigrants to find accommodations and to practice their German. They used Nebenan to observe their German neighbors and to build connections with them when offline interactions might be uncomfortable for them because of their limited command of the German language. The use of online platforms and mobile applications, then, is a tactic through which my informants were able to build a relationship with where they live. However, just because my informants are willing to make connections online does not necessarily mean that they are as willing to make those same connections offline. For one, they have more control over who they interact with online, choosing to join online communities of supportive and similarly-minded Turkish immigrants.

Informants also connect with Berlin through their use of Instagram, remediating the city through how they choose to frame and distribute their photographs. It is through this online platform that they are able to present themselves to an imagined audience, showing themselves as happy and satisfied with the decision to move to Berlin. It is also through this platform that informants are able to present Berlin as they imagine it, as vibrant and welcoming places.

There is also a material culture through which informants come to feel a connection with the city. While there are structural challenges that limit housing

options and access to municipal resources in so-called 'immigrant' neighborhoods, its residents are able to reclaim these spaces through its material culture. Informants recognize the pictures of Turkish landmarks and products across storefronts in Berlin and the Turkish street art that adorns its walls. This changes the atmosphere of these neighborhoods, not just in how it looks but how it sounds and smells as well.

It is not only the movement of immigrants through these neighborhoods but the movement of symbols from Turkey to Germany that shaped my informants' connection with Berlin. This is not simply the movement of Turkish goods between the two countries. It can also be seen in the familiar Turkish typography and designs in storefronts and restaurants or heard in the familiar sounds of market vendors calling out in Turkish for customers to purchase their fresh vegetables. With the movement of immigrants through the city also comes the movement of symbols and ideas, which reclaims the space around them. This access to the material aspects of their culture, offered my informants both comfort in their new surroundings and an opportunity to introduce others to their way of life. In doing so, they are empowered to challenge negative representations of their community.

To conclude, we can see the different intersecting mobilities that make up the everyday lives of immigrants, from the movement of material goods between Turkey and Germany to the movement of information and people across virtual environments. Immigrants' use of both online platforms and mobile applications contributed toward both their virtual and communicative mobilities (Elliot & Urry 2010), allowing them to feel more connected to their adopted city and its different neighborhoods. It is in how immigrants move around through online and offline spaces that we can think of them as roaming audiences (Hill 2019), taking in the different virtual, material and sensory experiences of the city. Where they run up against structural challenges that may limit their mobility or sociality, they roam elsewhere for media experiences through which they can find a sense of freedom and belonging. The 'immigrant' neighborhood, for instance, is where they feel a strong sense of connection and mobility, which goes back to its translocality. Turkish culture is not monolithic in places like Kreuzberg, Neukölln and Wedding but, rather, part of a larger convivial tapestry of communities (Duru 2015).

How do these practices relate to identity of recent Turkish immigrants in Berlin?

My informants rarely questioned whether they belonged in Berlin. It is after shocking events, like the racially-motivated shootings in Hanau, that they think about how they appear to German citizens and whether they look like the Other (Bauman 1991). Therefore, they identify as immigrants, as an other, through how they see themselves in relation to German citizens (Hall & Gay 1996). Yet my informants also identified — or, at least, sought to identify — as Berliners themselves. While there may be strategies that implicitly or explicitly set them apart from citizens, they sought out other ways to relate and foster a connection with their adopted city. This identity work can be said to be a tactic against the structural challenges that attempt to put their differences in sharp relief, as my informants choose to find common ground with other residents rather than resigning to being an Other. They are not trying to make Berlin into another Istanbul but, rather, seek to belong by exploring and connecting over the similarities between the two cities.

Immigrants try to further identify with Berlin through their online activities. They can join a range of Facebook or Telegram groups, where they are able to interact with other immigrants or German residents in the city. They are more confident in asking for help and sharing their culture and opinions in online spaces. In applications like Nebenan, there is nothing to distinguish them as immigrants among other users. As such, my informants are able to observe and learn from their German neighbors until such a time when they feel comfortable about making contact. Furthermore, taking and sharing photographs through the mobile application Instagram was also a means through which to show that they and other immigrants like them belong in Berlin. These digital practices play an active role in how my informants imagine themselves within the city and is an active part of their identity work (Hall & Gay 1996).

Yet, I should also note that the study is limited by several factors. The relationship between me as an ethnographer and my informants was built in a limited time, and my offline autoethnography in Berlin was as well limited to two weeks. Therefore, there is a potential for further research on this subject through a long term ethnographic experience. Due to COVID 19 restrictions, I was not able to have face to face interaction with the informants.

Despite these limitations, this research explores the media and communicative practices of recent Turkish immigrants in addressing challenges to their mobility and sociality, and how it comes to shape their sense of belonging in Berlin. Yet I recognize that there is an ambivalence to how immigrants come to think about their relationship to the city, a continuous negotiation of the fuzzy borders between feeling like a foreigner or a local, an immigrant or a Berliner. But can such identity work be reduced to such a simple dichotomy? It is not simply about Turkish immigrants integrating into German society, as such identity work and belonging is more vivid and multifaceted (Aksoy & Robin 2000; Duru et al. 2019). Such research needs to embrace the ambivalence that is inherent within such processes. As Bauman wrote, we should highlight such ambivalence as it is 'the limit to the power of powerful' as well as the 'freedom of the powerless' (Bauman 1991:179). There are strategies that may limit the mobility and sociality of immigrants in Berlin but, as a Turkish shop owner in the city once told me: 'we know how to live here.'

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Mediated city for resistance: The poetic resistance through graffiti in China's urban space and social media

Maizi Hua

Introduction

Urban space has never been just a space for people to live or work. Taking public squares as an example, there were medieval-era carnivals in squares, as well as occupy movements in major cities' squares in several countries after the 2000s - urban space has always been a site of resistance. This research tells a story where a group of young people 'take over' a corner of public urban space in a city in mainland China as a form of resistance. They write graffiti on the surfaces of the infrastructure on a street in that city to vent their displeasures upon the action that the authority banned the singer they all loved.

Controls from above

The story starts with a Chinese musician, Li Zhi, who 'disappeared' from the public's view on April 12, 2019. 'Disappearing' means that his songs were removed from all mainland China's music streaming platforms, as well as all video clips pertaining to him from video sharing platforms. Afterwards, Li's million-follower Weibo account was suspended. On the same social media platform, his

online fan community was disbanded too. Many fans of Li have been waiting for their favourite singer to return from 2019 to 2021, but the reality appears to be the opposite of their expectations.

There is no 'official' explanation for Li Zhi's disappearance. One guess is that his outspoken behaviour, such as writing 'sensitive topic' songs, has irritated the Chinese authorities (Wang 2019). For example, Li has a few songs that allude to the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, which are still considered taboo in mainland China. Another story is that Li filed a series of lawsuits to defend his music's copyrights against some tech giants like Tencent and Alibaba, as well as many entertainment industry moguls. As a result, he was boycotted by those who have conquered all the resources in the industries (Fan 2019). Regardless of assumptions about his disappearance, the fact is that Li's fans can no longer legally listen to his songs, watch his video clips, or publicly discuss him online, let alone get the news of his comeback.

Guerrilla wars from below

Faced with the authorities' tight control, Li Zhi's fans began to play 'cat-and-mouse' games in order to maintain the fandom's network active while staying within the authorities' red lines. One of those sneaky games is seeking help from physical space-writing graffiti on Rehe Road.

Rehe Road is located in Nanjing, the capital city of Jiangsu Province, China. In 2014, Li Zhi released a song *Rehe*, which is named after the street and depicts the other side of the glamour city through the eyes of migrant workers by describing people's lives on Rehe Road. From the lyrics of *Rehe*, one can assume that Li Zhi used to live on the street for some time when the street was still a harbour for the city's newcomers. Rehe Road was filthy, unkempt, and littered with sweat and tears, according to the lines in the song. When the song became popular in 2014, Rehe Road started to attract the song's lovers to visit the street and some of the visitors began writing graffiti on the walls along the street. The exact date when the first piece of graffiti appeared on Rehe Road is unknown, but the first recorded post about Rehe Road graffiti on Weibo was made in early July 2017. The graffiti could be observed across several exterior walls of to-be-demolished buildings on the street at end of 2017. On the walls were many Chinese characters or drawings randomly scattered.

The walls went viral on the Internet in May 2018, prompting some news reports from Chinese mainstream media to introduce the graffiti phenomenon. A city management officer stated in a news report that they had repainted the wall which graffiti was written on for more than 20 times on Rehe Road (Qiu 2018). However, they can never really eliminate the graffiti on the street, despite that the walls were demolished in 2018 as part of redevelopment projects, graffiti writers still could find spaces to write on the street. Now (the year of 2021), if one walks down the street, one might notice graffiti on street signs, streetlamp poles, pavements, tree trunks, bollards, commercial boards, billboards, and other surfaces of infrastructure.

At first, the graffiti was mostly about Li Zhi's songs or the personal stories of the writers. Since Li's disappearance, more graffiti has been written about the writers' longings for Li and their hopes that he will return. Of course, some graffiti has expressed dissatisfaction with the authorities, particularly in the days following April 12, 2019, when texts like 'where there is oppression, there is resistance' and 'science, freedom, democracy' appeared among the graffiti on Rehe Road. Furthermore, the graffiti has not been solely existed on Rehe Road in Nanjing, but also on social media. There are thousands of posts pertaining to Rehe Road and its graffiti on Weibo, where users can publish images or texts about Rehe Road as an implicit method to talk about Li Zhi without risk of being censored.

The case of Li Zhi's disappearance tells the fact that Chinese people are facing an ever-shrinking space for free speech. But young people writing graffiti in urban public space and posting the pictures about the graffiti on social media are all the acts that people adopted to confront and resist the power from above. Thus, three keywords must be addressed in this study: media, urban space/the city, and resistance. Two research questions regarding the relations between these keywords can be formed:

1. In what ways is Rehe Road mediated in physical urban settings and remediated on social media?
2. How has the mediated and remediated Rehe Road become the space of resistance?

Literature Review

Media and cities

'Social life in the 21st century is increasingly life lived in media cities' (McQuire 2008:1). To understand the relationships between media and cities, the first task is to know who are talking about the subject in relevant academic fields. This is a cross-disciplinary research where media studies and cultural geography (or human geography) collide. In the 1970s, there was a 'cultural turn' in the science of geography, which advocated by some influential names such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph. They believe geography should be studied beyond 'scientific purview' and more attention should be paid to 'human experience, awareness, and knowledge', (Tuan 1976:266) or human's 'dasein'(existence) rooted in place and space (Relph 1976:40). At the same period, a 'spatial turn' appeared in media studies where scholars also noticed that media are profoundly affecting people's sense of place (Meyrowitz 1985). The recent decades have witnessed surging studies in the media field talking about media-city relationship (see Adam 2009; Fast et al. 2018; Krajina & Stevenson 2020). Zlatan Krajina (2021:46, italics in original) notices that there are mainly three directions among scholarship on links between media and cities/urban space: *joint historical origin* discussing how media is participating in the process of urban space construction, *mutual definition* revealing the representational feature of media in creating cities, and *new shared developments* focusing on the integration of media and urban space in urban planning and construction. This study goes along but also beyond the second direction of urban media studies mentioned; in other words, to understand both representational and more-than-representational characteristics of media-city relationship.

In the 1980s, scholars noticed that places, such as nations and landscapes, are represented on media under the influence of political and economic powers (Burgess & Gold 1985). At the beginning of the 21st century, scholars started to advocate a non-representational approach, which suggests that social science scholars think beyond mediation by rediscovering the value of the human body and back to the 'materiality of the world' (Thrift 2005:231). Therefore, when talking about mediated cities, it is noteworthy that the mediation of places or spaces is not only the process of weakening the boundaries of places (by

representing them on media, turning them into virtual forms), but also sharpening the boundaries (by 'being there' in the physical space) (Andersson 2019). This academic trend reminds us that in a mediated city, the virtuality and materiality of place and space are inseparable and should be equally explored.

There are three dimensions within the phrase 'mediated cities'. First, *cities as media* as it 'records, transmits and processes information' (Kittler 1996:722). For example, in Shanghai, a Chinese cosmopolitan, People's Square downtown is a place where ancient architecture records the history of the city, and a modern park near the square provides the space where people meet, talk and exchange information (Zhong 2018). The second dimension of mediated cities is *media in cities*. On the one hand, countless media infrastructures such as CCTV and Wi-Fi devices are densely distributed in urban space (Graham & Marvin 2001). On the other hand, there are many visible media in urban space and urbanites are somewhat all tamed to be accustomed to encountering various those media in their daily routines (Krajina 2014). The third dimension is *cities with media*, which McQuire (2008) calls 'media city' and Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (2004) call 'mediaspace'. For the public, such a mediated space is often referred as 'smart cities'. All of these names somewhat reveal the same fact that media and space are merging at the architectural level. Haeusler (2020) uses the example of media façades to demonstrate the phenomena of 'media architecture', which requires city planners and architects to design urban space completely in a data-driven logic. In this sense, the media are not decorations or extensions of urban space, they are there to operate space.

Mediated cities expose city dwellers to more ways to encounter, communicate, and social. Lee Humphreys (2010) conducted ethnographic fieldwork in New York on how residents use an app called Dodgeball to pin themselves and contact friends who are also on the app and nearby. She concludes that the app has parochialized urban space such as pubs, clubs, or cafés by checking-in and gathering friends on Dodgeball. Sometimes, cities mediated by popular culture also provide the possibilities for social encounters. Media pilgrimage is one classic approach. Usually, people love to visit places which appeared on screens, for example, the backlot for British TV series *Coronation Street* has the mature tour service for the fans (Couldry 2000); or, Vancouver city becomes a popular destination for *X-files* fans (Hills 2002). For this study, listeners of *Rehe* visiting Rehe Road is, without a doubt, a media pilgrimage. This pilgrimage is specifically

related to music tourism, which discusses tourism based on the connections between the birthplaces of a music genre or the artists, or the places mentioned in specific songs (Eksell & Månsson 2020). The music pilgrimage resembles a ritual that transforms 'a person, a relationship, a social position, and a place' and creates 'symbols of group membership and values' (ibid.:236).

Graffiti and citizenship

Graffiti in the context of music pilgrimage is the main subject of this study. The first question is what 'graffiti' means in China. There is no consensual definition on China's graffiti in academia. In modern Chinese cities, writing political slogans are the most common graffiti on the streets (Smith 2020; Pan 2014). Some scholars also define contemporary graffiti in China as a 'new form of artistic self-expression' (Valjakka 2011:71). This study embraces a broader sense of graffiti, which refers to all the illicit, unauthorised writing or artwork in public space (Young 2013). There are mainly three types of graffiti in China studied by scholars. The first type is very much like Western graffiti with an aesthetic value that can be regarded as street artwork. For example, graffiti by a Chinese artist, Zhang Dali, was painted on the walls of to-be-demolished houses in major cities in China between 1995 to 1998 (Valjakka 2011; Pan 2014). The second type of graffiti in China is very unique in Hong Kong as a tool for social movements. During the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement in 2014, there were many Lennon Walls scattered throughout the city with handwritten notes expressing their demands for suffrage. This type of graffiti contains strong political intention and is a way to unite protesters in chaotic social movements (Valjakka 2019). The third type of graffiti appears in the form of random writings or drawings in public space in big cities with neither strong political intention nor aesthetic values. For example, urbanism scholar Nick Smith (2020) investigated graffiti written by locals in Chongqing's Ciqikou neighbourhood. Ciqikou was undergoing a redevelopment project in 2008. Residents who used to live there were reluctant to leave, so they wrote graffiti on the exterior walls of houses that were to be demolished, requesting that the area be spared from demolition. Different from the other types of graffiti in China, this type of graffiti is only made up of Chinese characters with no aesthetic value at all.

These three types of Chinese graffiti indicate the motivations of people's act of writing graffiti. One the one hand, graffiti is a communicative tool, 'a plurality of

heterogeneous materials of expression being worked upon, disseminated and coming into reciprocal contact' (Brighenti 2017:132). On the other hand, writing graffiti becomes a way for people from below to claim their 'right to the city', an expression proposed by Lefebvre (1996:154) to describe that urban space is constantly being remade by its citizens. Thus, graffiti is tightly connected to one's citizenship, which guarantees two key rights: the right to participate in decision-making and the right to appropriate the space (Purcell 2002). Writing graffiti in urban space to some extent contributes to people wielding the latter right as a citizen. Furthermore, writing graffiti is also directly connected to one's cultural citizenship, which people combine their 'societal involvement and pleasures in their everyday life' (Hermes 2005:152). In this study, the very term 'citizenship' will not be discussed in the Chinese context, but the discussions from previous scholarship could be inspirations for this study to regard writing graffiti on Rehe Road as the 'resistance'.

One more topic about graffiti in the digital era is significant here - 'mediated graffiti'. Similar to the term 'mediated cities', the mediated graffiti also contains two dimensions: *graffiti as media* and *graffiti on media*. On the one hand, graffiti is thought to be an Internet-like medium since it affords graffiti writers the possibility to establish network (Rice 2012). This study uses the plural form of 'media' to indicate that graffiti can be an analogy to various media platforms in various forms as it is diverse and always changing in time. On the other hand, graffiti nowadays is also largely mediated, mostly by social media. For example, graffiti is often represented on Instagram; conversely, many Instagram elements, such as hashtags, also can be seen in graffiti on streets (MacDowall & de Souza 2018).

The good sides of mediated graffiti are that it has enriched the forms of graffiti (for example, the emergence of GIF-iti) and enabled the ephemeral pieces of work to be kept for a much longer period even after their site's removal (Trivundža & Velikonja 2020). The drawbacks of mediated graffiti are also criticised by many in academia. Valjakka (2019:990) believes that the graffiti on the Lennon Walls in Hong Kong have the 'spatial power', which means that social media cannot provide 'adequate representation of the core physical, material, spatial, and temporal circumstances on-site or of the divergent forms of agency, manifestations, and aesthetics'. Pan (2014) concludes that there are two flows when political-related graffiti in mainland China being digitalised and

disseminated in cyberspace: the flow of exhibition space and the flow of the audience. The former flow results in the deprivation of haptic perception of the graffiti, space and the author, while the latter flow results in the incapability of the audience in terms of participation and acting in reality.

Everyday life and resistance

Everyday life is a common expression and most people have been using it without any second thought. As one of the interviewees responded to Krajina when the interviewee was asked for thoughts on public screens in London: 'I never thought someone would be asking me about that screen?! I don't look at it. It's. . .just there' (Krajina 2014:1). Everyday life, like the public screen in cities, is 'just there', but in academia, it is far more than just there, as it is a field full of meanings and social relations. Henri Lefebvre, as an avant-garde sociologist exploring urban space, points out several decades ago that everyday life was not simply a lived experience but contains 'a deep structure' (Highmore 2004:115). As a Marxist, Lefebvre believes that everyday life is exploitative, oppressive and relentlessly controlled (by consumption) (cited in Highmore 2004:117). To connect Lefebvre's articulation more closely to graffiti writing, one question can be asked: in cities, who has the right to decide the areas in which graffiti writing is allowed? Evered (2019), during his ethnographic research in Gezi Park protest, Turkey in 2013, finds that the state erased graffiti in the square every night and the government labelled the act of writing graffiti as 'terroristic'. In this case, the erasure of graffiti on the walls is the control over social practices (physical space) and the labelling strategy showcases how power can be exercised by 'knowledge' ('representational space' in Lefebvre's words). Also closely related to the context of this study, the simple act of listening to certain pieces of music in our everyday life is infiltrated by power. Li Zhi is banned for implicit reasons and the ban undermines partly his fans' right to enjoying certain songs. In fact, music censorship never stopped in mainland China since 1949 (Yang 2017). Usually, there are no clear explanations for the banned singers or songs. General assumptions are either the singers have expressed unacceptable political views or conducted misbehaviours, or the songs that are explicit, politically incorrect, or too religious (ibid.). However, through all these years' implementation of music censorship, Chinese people have started to accept the situation at will, and they believe the government is really 'protecting them from harmful information'

(ibid.:469). This example reminds us about Foucault's use of the panopticon metaphor, illustrating the omnipresent disciplines in modern society (Foucault 2011). The power of the panopticon is an Orwellian power, which transverses everywhere in everyday life and will eventually be internalised as self-surveillance. For example, the graffiti writers in Macau admit that they have a clear 'spatial taboo' in their minds where they know the graffiti will be erased by the government very soon. Such self-surveillance makes them never 'spray on the walls of historical value' (Zhang 2017:933).

If we accept Foucauldian all-pervading power in everyday life, it appears that powerless people will be disciplined regardless. Fortunately, everyday life is not so rigid; it is porous, with countless minute spaces where resistance can freely enter and exit. In his ethnographic work in a rural area of Malaysia, Scott (1985) noticed that peasants there were adopting various furtive forms of resistance against a nationwide Green Revolution that threatened their land ownership. Scott (1985:29) concludes that peasants' resistance took the form of 'foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth' in everyday life or work. For Scott, these acts are all 'weapons of the weak'. In a similar vein, Habibi (2020) also observes people conduct their resistance in everyday life in his urban media ethnographic research in two creative cities in Malaysia and Indonesia, where local creative communities are adopting 'silent and unnoticed' resistance to deny official narratives, which he calls 'subtle resistance' in his work.

The other example of such furtive resistance in everyday life is conducted by city dwellers. De Certeau (1984:30) distinguishes between the powerfuls' strategy, which is to 'produce, tabulate, impose' spaces, and the powerless' tactics, which is to 'use, manipulate, and diverse' spaces. He claims that city dwellers employ tactics on a daily basis when walking through the city. Walking, according to de Certeau, is a tactic for resisting cartographers and the power they wield in urban planning. In the eyes of de Certeau, the walkers are heroes who 'belong to no one'. He reveals both the gentle aspect of resistance in everyday life and how unconsciously resistance can be. Although not everyone who walks through Paris realizes how heroic they are simply by walking through their city, de Certeau believes that their resistance is real, as evidenced by the results.

Though the terminology used to describe these everyday life resistances varies across regions and time periods, they all share at least two core characteristics: they

are non-subversive and non-violent. In this study, these characteristics are described as ‘poetic’, and thus the resistance is referred as ‘poetic resistance’ here, corresponding to ‘poetic power’ inscribed in everyday life. Putting ‘poetic’ before ‘resistance’ indicates that the resistance primarily operates and occurs at a symbolic, tactical, and mythological level. Thus, it is necessary to clarify the words ‘poetic’ and ‘poetics’ in the context of space and resistance in order to elaborate the ‘poetic resistance’ with empirical data on urban space graffiti in the following analysis. Firstly, it is not the first time that the word poetics is collocated with space. Back in 1958, the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1994) wrote his classic book *The Poetics of Space*, in which he applies phenomenology as the method, acquiring linguistic materials from modern poems to describe people’s imaginations of space in their houses. Though poetics is used in its ‘relating to poems/poetry’ sense by Bachelard, the book inspires this study to rethink the space at its philosophical level that touches on the dasein of human beings, which concerns human’s existence on earth. Secondly, the terms poetic and poetics have implications that go beyond poems or poetry to creative action in general (Frosh 2019:10). Linguist Roman Jakobson (1960) argues that language has six communicative functions, one of which is poetic. Poetic function of language ‘deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects’ (Jakobson 1960:356). Along with Jakobson’s theories, Smith (2020:584) proposes his own term ‘spatial poetics’ to comprehend graffiti as a form of resistance in his case. The anti-demolition residents in Smith’s research took advantage of arbitrary connections between signifiers and signifieds to separate the original meanings (signifieds) from specific signifiers and appropriate them to express their demands.

To sum up, the discussions on mediated urban space, the literature on graffiti in China, and the discussions on resistance in everyday life have provided various perspectives and inspirations to help this study’s analysis go deeper. However, before presenting findings based on empirical data, the next part will first outline the methodologies that guided the study’s design and the methods used to collect and process all of the data.

Methodology

This study's dataset comprises various types of empirical data, including: photos of the graffiti, posts about the graffiti on social media, articles pertaining to the graffiti on the Internet, interview transcripts, and observation notes. All the data is collected digitally due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is crucial to design the data collection process carefully so that it helps the researcher to gain the data that is demanded. The method is inspired by Internet-mediated Research (IMR), broadly defined as research containing the process of collecting empirical data with the assistance of the Internet (British Psychological Society 2017). This study collects visual materials of the graffiti from various periods and reaches out to many anonymous graffiti writers. Additionally, when experiencing the urban space virtually, both the smartphones with high-pixel cameras and various streaming platforms enable the researcher to observe 'people's movements around a city' and collect 'potentially vast volumes of in situ data while participants are on the move' (Hewson et al. 2016:25).

In terms of dealing with the visual materials in the dataset, this study takes Rose's (2016:22) approach, which encourages researchers to 'understand the importance of images' and 'take images seriously'. According to Rose (ibid.), a critical approach to understanding images requires researchers to acknowledge image effects, image social contexts, and 'your own way of looking at images'. Similar to Rose, Banks (2001) distinguishes between internal (the content of images) and external (social context/relations embedded in images) narratives of visual work. Thus, the methodology acknowledges the agency of a variety of subjects, including the image itself, its creators, viewers, and the researchers themselves. Additionally, Rose (2016:308) especially points out that images are important for studies on urban space as they 'can convey something of the feel of urban places, space and landscapes'. In this study, since the researcher had no chance to visit the street in person, the digital photos of the graffiti, the street, and the urban space have provided rich data facilitating the researcher to get a multi-facet sense of 'colour, texture, form, volume, size and pattern' of the graffiti's settings as well as human beings who have connections with the graffiti (ibid.).

Data collection

All types of data in this study are collected via three qualitative research methods: documentation, observations, and interviews. Documentation aims to collect existing documents rather than eliciting data oneself. In this study, documents are mainly from Weibo, a Twitter-like microblogging platform in China. Weibo posts with the location tag 'Rehe Road' were searched when collecting data. There are 1,295 results, of which 420 are relevant to this research (i.e., pertaining to the graffiti) and are marked as 'Post' in following analysis. All valid posts are manually copied into a Word document with a table separating the date, text, images, and all comments for each post. Other supporting documents come from mainland China's other social media platforms, including Zhihu and Douban[1], which are marked as 'Article' in the analysis.

When it comes to the method of observation, this study used urban walking as a method, but in an unconventional approach as the entire process was completed online. On the one hand, Baidu Maps' Total View feature[2] allows users to virtually walk down the street by immersing oneself in a three-dimensional virtual urban space with panoramic photos. On the other hand, a mediated urban walking was conducted with an on-site observer walking on Rehe Road in China and live-streaming the street scene to the researcher in Lund, Sweden via video call. The on-site observer expressed his thoughts and feelings about the street and the graffiti there. The researcher listened to both the voice on the street and the on-site observer's enunciations while watching the real-time video on the screen. The observation was semi-structured, with an observation script prepared, but it was still open to whatever happened on the street spontaneously. This was also a photo-documentation process, as many photos and two video clips were taken during the observation and can be analysed retrospectively as part of the 'coding process' (Rose 2016:314).

Interviews also help with the problem of not being able to 'observe people for a long time' and understanding 'people's ideas, thoughts, opinions, attitudes' (Berg 2014:161). Nine graffiti writers of Rehe Road graffiti participated in the semi-structured interviews. The interviewees wrote their graffiti during 2008 to 2021,

[1] Zhihu is a Quora-like knowledge sharing platform and Douban is a social networking website.
[2] It is the Chinese version of Google Maps' Street View feature.

and they were approached mainly on Weibo and Douban, by direct messaging or posting interviewee wanted advertisements on the social media platforms.

Analytical approaches

Critical visual analysis is the method used to interpret and understand graffiti. Even though the graffiti in this study consists primarily of Chinese characters and words, these texts 'are still undeniably bound to the visual' (Lynn & Lea 2005:42). To analyse graffiti visually, this study employs Hansen and Machin's (2013:174) semiotic analysis approach because it provides a versatile toolkit for producing more 'systematic analyses of photographs'. Hansen and Machin (2013) argue that photographs have two dimensions - denotation and connotation - reminding researchers of considering both the description and interpretation of images, which aligns well with Banks' (2001) emphasis on understanding both internal and external narratives of visual work.

The approach is further inspired by Rose's (2016:24) initiative to examine an image at 'four sites', which underscores that the site of the image itself matters as well as the sites where it circulates. Thus, graffiti images can be examined by analysing their compositions and meanings but also, images about the graffiti on social media are interpreted in the context during their circulation process. Furthermore, when dealing with the virtual materials in the dataset, this study also borrows Barthes' (1973) concept of 'myth' to understand the graffiti firstly mediated by photos and then remediated by posts on social media. The innovative point here is that the myth of mediated graffiti and urban space (Figure 1) contributes to the myth of remediated graffiti and urban spaces construction (Figure 2).

<table>
<tr><td>Signifiers #1
(Denotation) Chinese characters, lines, shapes on walls, trees etc.</td><td>Signified #1
(Connotation) words, sentences, drawings</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Sign #1 → Signifier #2
(Denotation) the literal meanings of words, sentences, drawings, on different media</td><td>Signified #2
(Connotation) the meanings behind the words, sentences, drawings</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Sign #2 → Myth #1
To reveal ideologies, power mechanisms behind</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 1: The myth of mediated graffiti and urban space

<table>
<tr><td>Signifiers #1
(Denotation) pictures, texts, and other elements on social media in a certain order.</td><td>Signified #1
(Connotation) Posts on social media</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Sign #1 → Signifier #2
(Denotation) posts' motifs, implications + Myth #1</td><td>Signified #2
(Connotation) the interpretations of the motifs of social media's posts combined with Myth #1</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Sign #2 → Myth #2
To reveal ideologies, power mechanisms behind</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 2: The myth of remediated graffiti and urban space

The dataset also includes interview transcripts and other documents (such as captions and comments extracted from Weibo posts, as well as articles from other social media platforms). This study uses ethnographic content analysis (ECA) to

analyse these data, which are coded using NVivo software. When ethnographically analysing qualitative data, there are primarily five stages: data collection, protocol development, coding, analysis, and reporting. Patterns (pattern coding) were identified first, followed by the creation of categories and subcategories (focused coding).

Ethics

One potential risk for this study is the digital surveillance problem during interviews. Since apps such as WeChat or QQ are the only two options for the interviewees in mainland China, some interviewees were very cautious about the content of the conversations as certain parts of the interview involved topics related to resistance and transgression. Interviewees usually avoided talking about politically sensitive topics on WeChat, as they were afraid of being monitored. To protect the interviewees, all the questions that were regarded as sensitive by the interviewees had been stopped immediately. Furthermore, for all the interviewees, as well as all the authors of the posts and comments mentioned in the analysis, this study has made every effort to keep their personal information revealed to a minimum and to keep the original data accessible only to the researcher.

Analysis

Mediated Rehe Road

The street: A symbolised place

Rehe Road, as a corner in the big city of Nanjing, is not particularly impressive. However, in the eyes of lovers of the song or fans of Li Zhi, it is more than a path for cars to pass through or a space for city residents. It is a pause in the city's busy traffic, and in Tuan's (1977) theory, it is a place with meanings. A 'place' can be created by filling a specific space with 'social relations, values, or memories', according to human geographers; more importantly, 'place-making' is typically a bottom-up process (as opposed to 'placemaking' as a top-down strategy) (Lew 2017).

What are the factors that make Rehe Road a 'place'? There are two very crucial contributors here. The first contributor is the song *Rehe*. Music can be a place-maker in the sense that it represents places in its various forms, and 'the representation of these places involves the forwarding of specific narratives' (Kruse 2005:89). The lucid lyrics, melancholic melody, and the singer's performance of *Rehe* are all narratives that inject peculiar meanings into Rehe Road. The second place-maker is taxi drivers, which were identified in the empirical data. Most interviewees mentioned their encounters with local taxi drivers and how the drivers' descriptions toward Rehe Road affected their perception of the street. Interviewee #9 ran into a driver who was once a retailer on Rehe Road. The driver described the street as having a lively atmosphere and friendly neighbourhoods in its heyday in the 1990s. However, the driver sighed, stating that the street is now only for the wealthy. Such descriptions had profoundly affected Interviewee #9's perception toward Rehe Road. Several times during the interview, she referred to Rehe Road as a street 'for the wealthy', despite the fact that the street in real world is still under construction and frequently dusty. To some extent, Interviewee #9 looks at Rehe Road with the lens 'borrowed' from the taxi driver. Thus, taxi drivers are a medium, wandering around in the space of the city, adding those anecdotes to the streets, architecture, landmarks and so forth, turning all the urban locales into places by their narratives. The two sources, along with photos circulated on social media about the street, aid the visitors in forming an image of Rehe Road prior to, and even after their physical visit: the song (textual/audio), taxi drivers (oral) and social media representations (visual). Each layer is augmented onto the other, and Rehe Road becomes more than just a city corner.

While the aforementioned place-makers are all very representational-oriented, there are also more-than-representational-oriented place-makers transforming Rehe Road. The human body is an important one. Walking on the street or writing graffiti there are all human's place-making processes - they see, smell, hear, and touch. For example, the topic of weather always arouses our interviewees' memories about Rehe Road. Interviewee #8 could not remember the exact date of his visit at first during the interview, but he remembers that it was a hot day: 'the sunshine was strong, maybe it was early May', he recalls. For Interviewee #2, it was a chilly day, 'so cold that I had to enter a bubble tea shop to get a warm drink'. Coincidentally, *Rehe* has a line saying that 'but there is always one type of weather that makes me nostalgic (about Rehe Road)'. Time flies, but why does a place remain lingering in one's mind years later? Factors like weather always

matters as they are related to human experience and humanity (Cresswell 2015:46-51).

Returning to the key word 'mediated urban space' for this study, how do these place-makers transform Rehe Road a mediated street? On the one hand, all the place-makers mark every ordinary scene on Rehe Road as extraordinary. The barber shop, a lobster restaurant, and a shabby cinema locating on Rehe Road are normal for residents there in their everyday life. However, they are all mentioned in *Rehe*, and that makes the ordinary street views extraordinary, as some kind of spectacle or symbol, attracting numerous visitors trying to locate these places when they arrive the street. On the other hand, the place-makers are playing with the virtuality and materiality characteristics of Rehe Road. Interviewee #6 claims himself a non-fan of Li Zhi; he went to the street because he read an article on WeChat introducing the viral graffiti walls on Rehe Road. He saved the photos of the graffiti walls from the article and when he was on the street, he asked a resident the whereabout of the walls by showing the photos to the resident. Thus, Interviewee #6 was not sightseeing the landscape on Rehe Road but a 'mythscape' there. Applying Barthes' mythology theories (1973) to the analysis here, mythscape refers to the myth adhered to the physical landscape. The mediascape is the first-level sign, consisting of the physical landscape and media representations of the landscape. Then, in the mythical level, the mediascape becomes the signifier, combining with pre-existing perceptions of the place (signified) to create mythscape (Bennett 2002:89). For Interviewee #6 and other visitors who visit Rehe Road because of the song, the singer, or the graffiti, the scenery there is mythscape: the mediated landscape.

Urban space: a media complex

When walking down on Rehe Road, one could not ignore the graffiti everywhere on the street: street signposts, streetlamp poles, billboards, advertising boards, sphere bollards, and even the pavement beneath their feet. They are full of graffiti, be it a simple date, a single word, a sentence, or even a paragraph. In urban media studies, media and city are usually regarded as two intertwining but separate objects (McQuire 2008; Krajina 2014). However, the ubiquitous graffiti on Rehe Road reminds us to reiterate Friedrich Kittler's (1996) argument of 'city as a medium'. According to Kittler (1996:722), the media can be a variety of 'familiar things' in our daily lives. This study goes a step further, claiming that the urban space has evolved into a container for a diverse range of media, a media complex.

The media here mainly refer to social media that young people consumed most in their daily life. Four analogies can be made to indicate how the 'media complex' on Rehe Road shares similarities with social media: Interactivity, Anonymity, Capacity for Assemblage, and Deletability. They will be discussed each in turn.

Interactivity. The Rehe Road media complex affords strangers a platform to encounter and communicate with each other by writing graffiti. For example, there are three graffiti writers were 'interacting' on a tree trunk using the @ sign, which on social media platforms like Weibo or WeChat serves as an indicator of virtual conversation. The three pieces of graffiti with @ sign makes up a whole conversation in which interlocutors are apparently engaging in asynchronous communication under a same topic.

Anonymity. Writing graffiti in urban public space is obviously an act of transgression according to city officials; it is an act that violates official regulation. However, Rehe Road provides the graffiti writers an anonymous space to overcome their fears of being caught committing vandalism. Anonymity in this context does not only refer to the ability for people to write graffiti without revealing their real names or identities, but it is also a feeling of being safe writing on Rehe Road, which is located in a dilapidated redeveloping area. As many interviewees have argued, the buildings will be demolished anyway. Furthermore, for many graffiti writers, Rehe Road is remote from the centre of the city with only a few passers-by, especially at night:

> I arrived at Rehe Road during the daytime on my first day (of my trip to Nanjing) […] Until the night of the third day when I had to say goodbye to Nanjing, I went to Rehe Road again. Under the cloak of darkness, I left my words for the singer who has been accused of misconduct. (Post #129)

The capacity for assemblage means that Rehe Raod can constantly attract song lovers or Li Zhi's fans from all over the country. This characteristic is important not only for establishing a community, but also for forming collective memories through graffiti writing in the same urban space, which is important in place-making (as discussed before).

Deletability. The methods of deleting content on urban space media vary, for example, demolishing the walls, whitewashing the tree trunks, and replacing the advertising boards. With a very Internet-logic sentence, Interviewee #3 expresses his resignation towards the doomed future of his graffiti: 'Not long the graffiti

wall will be 404ed, including my text.' The term '404' stands for '404 not found', which means the webpage the user is trying to access is no longer available. The 404 error can have a variety of technological causes, but for most Chinese netizens, it is usually associated with censorship. The use of the passive form of the word 404 (404ed) implies that there must be some sort of manipulation going on behind the scenes. As a result, just as content on social media can be censored, graffiti in public space can be 'deleted' or 'blocked' as well.

Remediated graffiti

Images about Rehe Road's graffiti can be seen on Chinese social media platforms almost every day. As a result, when the mediated Rehe Road is then represented by other media, particularly digital media, the process can be considered remediation (Bolter & Grusin 1999:45). Rose (2016:28) concludes that remediation occurs when old 'generic conventions' are combined with digital technologies, resulting in the creation of 'their own genres'. If graffiti on mediated Rehe Road is the 'old' medium and genre, remediated graffiti is the 'new' medium and genre. In this study, two types of social media, WeChat or QQ, which are more private, and Weibo, which is more public, are used to remediate graffiti on Rehe Road.

WeChat/QQ: A performative diary

WeChat and QQ are all the products of tech giant Tencent Company in China. Despite the fact that they are aimed at different user groups, they have very similar features, such as instant messaging, a personal timeline page, and video/audio calls. In general, the two social media platforms connect people through users' strong ties (i.e., friends and acquaintances). Interviewees usually share their Rehe Road trip either via instant messages, personal timeline (Moments on WeChat or Q-zone on QQ), or both. Regardless of the channels through which they share information, the principle is that only a limited group of people can access their stories. Interviewee #1 uploaded her Rehe Road photos to QQ Photo, a cloud-based photo storage service:

> The platform is very private for me. There I own a very spacious personal space. […] If I would really draw other people's attention, I would put it in my timeline with an elaborated caption.

The locked text in Moments and the photos in QQ Photo are both digitalised diaries and photo albums in the sense that they document and archive individual's events at a specific point in their life. If, as discussed in previous analysis, the mediated Rehe Road has helped to transform the street's ordinariness into extraordinariness, the remediated graffiti then returns the street to its original ordinary state. Ordinariness, as Highmore (2011:6) points out, is not only about 'being ordinary' but also about 'becoming ordinary'. There are two layers of 'becoming ordinary' within remediated graffiti: Personalise and Disenchant.

Personalise Rehe Road. Personalising Rehe Road refers to turning the street and the graffiti into personal memory, in which 'we tell the story of our lives to ourselves [...], a process that is felt and acted upon' (Garde-Hansen 2011:34), instead of the street existing only in Li Zhi's song or other person's social media posts:

> There will be no Li Zhi on Rehe Road anymore [...] brand new buildings on both sides of the road [...] met another Li Zhi fan, and we both left with disappointments. (Interviewee #8)

Disenchant Rehe Road. Rehe Road is thought to have religious connotations by many visitors. For example, a fan murmured on Weibo 'your chela comes to visit you' (Post #111) when he visited Rehe Road; another one describes his Rehe Road visit as a 'pilgrimage' (Post #159). In their eyes, Rehe Road is more than just a place; it is a 'shrine' (Post #413). Then, when the 'pilgrimage' was recorded into their digital diaries on WeChat or QQ, whether in chat groups or personal timelines, the sacred and holy aura surrounding the Rehe Road abruptly dissipated. Instead, the memories became submerged in a sea of mundane and entrapped in the overwhelming triviality of everyday life. An example from the ethnographic observation from a 500-member WeChat fan group is illustrative. In April 2021, a fan visited Rehe Road during her holiday. She seemed ecstatic about the trip and kept sending photos to the WeChat group. Her photographs drew immediate attention, but the topic quickly shifted. Other group members began to talk about their lunch, the weather in their cities, rather than focusing on the topic of the fan's Rehe Road trip. The buzz of everyday life, photos of food, and screenshots of the weather forecast engulfed the 'sacred' journey.

It is also noteworthy that WeChat and QQ are not completely locked diaries or photo albums; there are also potential audiences out there and the users are fully

aware of the fact. Thus, for them, social media platforms are performative stages where they can show off their travels, music preferences, and individuality among crowds. In this situation, the remediated Rehe Road is their cultural capital, which facilitates the creation of their online persona through cultural symbols and tastes. Such social media taste performances 'present an opportunity for differentiation' (Liu 2007:255) and help the young people encode their attitude with these riddle-like graffiti-related photos or texts. For them, being rebellious without inciting censorship or punishment is a form of capital. This will be discussed with the concept 'poetic resistance' later.

Weibo: A sophisticated network

If WeChat and QQ are for strong interpersonal ties, Weibo is for weak ties between strangers. When graffiti is represented on Weibo, according to Hong Kong scholar Lu Pan (2014:149), it is watched by a distracted audience who 'spends very little time looking at anything'. However, remediated graffiti here is in fact a portal, or an entry point to an invisible network where information is exchanged, individuals are connected, and social capital is shared. 'Network society' (see Castells 2010; van Dijk 2006) is a crucial concept to understand the graffiti on Weibo. Network, defined by Manuel Castells (2010:501) as a 'set of interconnected nodes', has its own operating logic, that is 'the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power' (ibid.:500). A network exists in this sense when there are movements (flows) between nodes. If each Weibo user is a node, three types of flow between nodes can be identified by observing all interactions within Rehe Road graffiti-related posts: information, resources, and interpersonal communication.

The flow of information. In the comment section of Post #120, User A asked the blogger if the graffiti was still there, and User B chipped in saying: 'I heard that the tree trunk has been full of graffiti', to which User C replied: 'It appears that the graffiti had been erased, all the marks were covered.' At least four interlocutors (including the blogger) participated in this conversation, each providing information based on their own personal experiences. Regardless of the accuracy of such data, the network's rich first-hand information is already a significant advantage. Furthermore, there is information available beyond the graffiti itself. For example, people like to spread the news of Li Zhi's comeback in their posts or tips about travelling Nanjing city.

The flow of resources. Since almost all the information about Li Zhi has been removed from the Internet in mainland China, his music listeners or fans have to store his songs on their personal computers or secretly uploading them to a cloud service. The issue is that cloud service providers will delete the fans' cloud-stored files if the files are discovered, so the entries to the files are constantly changing. That is why, whenever Rehe Road-related posts appear on Weibo, there are usually users begging for links to download the singer's work. The download links in Chinese are literally translated as 'resources' (*zi yuan*), which is the same word used to refer to valuable resources such oil, water etc.

The flow of interpersonal communication. In the comment sections of Rehe Road-related Weibo posts, users usually strike 'small talks' to each other. For instance, Nanjingneses' greetings to visitors from other places (Post # 89: Welcome, the girl from Inner Mongolia), concerns for others (Post # 15: You will be quarantined when you return from Nanjing), and making appointments (Post # 72: When will you come to meet me?). Many of these discussions have no clear response; after all, Weibo is a platform for weak ties. Small talks like these can be thought of as network adhesives. They are not crucial, but they can help to tighten the web to some extent.

Within the network around remediated graffiti on Weibo, social capital is somewhat promised, and more importantly, those reciprocal interactions are many-to-many rather than one-to-one. Interviewee #2 recalls that before visiting Rehe Road, some Weibo users gave her some helpful tips about where to go in Nanjing, so she posted her graffiti photos on Weibo with the intention of assisting other Li Zhi's fans in finding the right place to visit. It should be noted, however, that the network is not open to all Weibo users, and therefore a 'countersign' is required. Since content mentioning the singer's name on social media will be usually censored, remediated graffiti plays a significant role as a portal to a platform underground. Anyone who understands the meanings of Rehe Road graffiti on Weibo is tacitly regarded as a node of the network because it is a default that only die-hard fans of Li Zhi can understand the complicated connections between Rehe Road, the song, and the singer. Van Dijk (2006:34) suggests that the network society is loosely organized, but this study's network based on remediated Rehe Road also demonstrates the network is somewhat exclusive and closed.

Regarding the topic of mediated urban space in this study, the physical place is still significant in the network society, despite Castells even has a section in his book titled 'The End of the City?' to demonstrate the global prevalence of virtualised communities. However, this study's empirical data shows that visitors to Rehe Road physically experience the place in a mediated way, where real-world scenes are superimposed on their imagined world. When the graffiti photos on Weibo are used to remediate Rehe Road, the relationship is overturned because the virtual network is built on interactions with a real place. Additionally, Massey (1994)'s understanding of place as a network of social relations can be expanded here from real world to virtual world, where people interact both online and offline and networks in places are more intrigued and sophisticated than ever in (re)mediated cities.

Poetic resistance

The final task for this research is to answer: What messages do these graffiti writers want to send and what goals do they want to achieve with so much effort being put into this small city corner? The purpose of this part is to decode the codes found on (re)mediated Rehe Road. The discussion is sparked by the keyword 'resistance', specifically 'poetic resistance'.

Graffiti: A territorial marker

'I came to Nanjing to see the city in Li Zhi's songs.' This is the text from Post #152 on Weibo. This simple sentence reveals a problem of the ownership of urban space: Whose city? Is it a city that is in Li Zhi's song, or the song depicting the stories in the city? At least, for Post #152, the owners of the city are *Rehe* and Li Zhi.

This is the first layer of resistance, liberating the city from grand narratives and returning it to people. As previously stated, the space on Rehe Road is a complex of media for the graffiti writers, where they can write their personal stories, private emotions, their names, and the names of their lovers. All the marks strewn across Rehe Road are declarations of ownership, asserting their claim to space and the city. Unfortunately, they are not the only group attempting to privatise space. Empirical data in this study suggests there are at least four forces competing for the right to use the space on Rehe Road: government divisions, illegal commercial advertisements, residents, and graffiti writers.

Government divisions include: (1) Urban Management and Law Enforcement, which appeared in the news in 2018 when the first graffiti walls were white painted (Qiu 2018), (2) Gardening Division, which is in charge of the plant conservation, and (3) the residential committee of the street, which used to hang red banners on the walls in 2018 after the graffiti was erased. These bureaucratic organisations have always controlled the space in the governmental dimension, where the banners, the notice signs, the marks of erasure all serve as indicators of social order and power.

Illegal commercial advertisements, the vast majority of which deal with faking certificates and official stamps. These advertisements are a type of graffiti that can be seen in places where Li Zhi-related graffiti has appeared, and they are also resilient, meaning that new ones appear out of nowhere even after they have been erased several times. The advertisements are exploiting space in an economic dimension, where space can be converted into economic capital and profits.

Residents, some of them were indigenous residents before the redevelopment of the street, while the others are residents who have purchased the newly built apartments on the street. They all have legal ownership of the space. When physically inspecting the street, the on-site observer noticed a significant difference in the landscape between the two sides of the street. The area is under construction on the eastern side, where everything is dusty and grey, while on the western side, there are many well-designed modern high-rises. In Post #8, a similar scene is described in a mournful tone:

> [O]n one side of the street there are many high buildings built, and many pretty girls are passing by[3]. However, on the other side of the street, the dilapidated shopping malls are still standing there, where elders are buying groceries. With the walls enclosing all the shabby buildings, everything will be buried, waiting for their rebirth, corresponding to the slogan 'better city, better life'[4].

The indigenous inhabitants own Rehe Road in an emotional dimension, as one piece of graffiti written on the wall of a to-be-demolished bookstore in 2017, stating: 'In this bookstore, my uncle bought a book for me, later he was scolded by my aunt.' Here, the indigenous residents possess real memories of Rehe Road, and this graffiti is an indicator of their spatial ownership, a platform for emotional

[3] A reference to a line in *Rehe*: 'Pretty girls sometimes come and go, but they never say hello.'
[4] A slogan of Expo Shanghai 2010.

expression and a container for their memories. However, for the newcomers living in the modern apartments, the street is more like a fancy 'shelter', where they are compacted in their small suites fixed in large buildings. It is reasonable to assume that those apartment owners work in the city's central areas and only return to the street after work. Hence, such resident's street ownership takes on a functional dimension.

Finally, *graffiti writers* claim ownership of the place/space in a symbolic dimension, where they both physically interact with the street and virtually inject their emotions into space through symbolic expressions. The graffiti here can be regarded as a territorial marker employed by those graffiti writers, as a 'visible manifestation of a group's social space' (Ley & Cybriwsky 1974:505). Graffiti writers do not live on the street, but they do have a social space and a community there. This study tries to describe the (re)mediated Rehe Road's community as a pseudo-community. The members of such a pseudo-community physically and virtually own part of the social space on Rehe Road. This concept aids our interpretation and comprehension of the new human-place relationship in mediated and remediated urban settings.

It is also noteworthy that the competition for the urban space has been spread to cyberspace, where stores on Rehe Road have been circulating their promotion messages in the comment sections where posts are with check-in tag of Rehe Road on Weibo, for example a hamburger restaurant (Post #162) and a hair salon (Post #192). Moreover, an online vendor is also promoting his business of selling Li Zhi's digital albums (Post #174) on Weibo. Thus, it is further self-evident that Rehe Road, as a (re)mediated place, is constantly switching its existence between real and virtual, physical and symbolic.

Graffiti writing: A power subverter

The second layer of poetic resistance is the attempts to subvert the power structure embedded in urban space by writing graffiti. All the redevelopment projects on Rehe Road demonstrate how the ruling class and capitalists are exploiting the urban space as a means of production (Lefebvre 1991). Governmental control of space is also hidden in every tiny corner of space, such as the red banners prohibiting graffiti, the repetitive erasures of graffiti, and surveillance cameras hanging over the street.

The deconstruction of power, which contains the destruction in discursive and mythological ways, is also the source of poetic resistance. Discursive resistance is the most straightforward way. The lyrics of the song *Rehe*, in which the singer sings, 'No one walks with a lover on Rehe Road', are met with resistance, with countless graffiti texts saying: 'I am walking with my lover on Rehe Road.' Others express their discontent with a society that allows very few channels for free expression, such as 'They thought that if they killed all the roosters, there would be no dawn', or 'They wanted to bury us, but they didn't expect that we are the seeds'. These texts are very implicit and reserved.; the audience has a sense that they are resisting something as the texts contain an imaginary enemy 'they'. But who are 'they', who are suppressing folks' speech and who is the tyrant from above? The answer is always open for viewers.

Figure 3: A banner graffitied: 'People do not need freedom' (Source: Weibo Post #130)

Mythological resistance refers to the method used by individuals to deconstruct the power embedded in the origin myth from above by exploiting the arbitrariness of the connections between signifiers and signified. For example, the red banner hanging on the street was graffitied with the text 'people do not need freedom' (Figure 3). Here, the signifiers include the red banner, the graffiti text. The meaning behind the image is that the powers from above (red banner) and below (graffiti) are competing. To delve deeper, the graffitied text on the banner is from one of Li Zhi's songs, which is a satire towards mainland China's authoritarian atmosphere. Is it true that people do not need freedom? The answer is emphatic: 'No, that is not true; people do need freedom.' The graffiti writer's poetic manoeuvre subverts and deconstructs the myth that the red banner has built: the majestic, mighty, invisible power that rules over ordinary people. This is not a one-off occurrence. Interviewee #3, who visited Rehe Road on April 4, 2020, demonstrates a more mythological resistance at a more powerful and profound level. The day was the Qingming day, when Chinese people pay regards to their ancestors or the dead, and it was also the day in 2020 when the government launched a nationwide mourning campaign for the 'martyrs' who sacrificed their lives on the front lines against COVID-19. On an advertisement board, Interviewee #3 wrote his text of 'Missing Doctor Li Wenliang' [5]:

> I felt that I was obligated to write something on the street. First, Li Zhi was 404ed, then Doctor Li, and then numerous voices and groups that need to be heard or seen are 404ed. Not long the graffiti wall will be 404ed, including my text. All of them will be erased, but we remember, that is the most important thing. (Interviewee #3)

Interviewee #3 deconstructs the grand narratives from above and resists forgetting each ordinary name. In fact, Doctor Li is on the list of national martyrs who were publicly mourned on April 4, but for Interviewee #3, he refused to obey the order from above. Instead, he chose to write down the name by his hand in the public space, as he explains: 'The act of writing itself is the attitude, is the resistance.' This deconstruction is fabricated by the selection of date, refusal to take part in

[5] Li Wenliang was regarded as the whistle-blower who spread the message about Covid-19 at the beginning of 2020, when the government was trying to cover it up from the public. Li was admonished on his behaviour from local police station. He died of Covid-19 in February 2020. Upon his death, many Chinese citizens expressed their angers toward the government for their inappropriate accusation of Li, but the criticisms were soon censored.

the government-launched campaign, texts on graffiti; and most importantly, the act of writing graffiti as a declaration of resistance.

Reconstruction of the very urban space comes after the deconstruction process. As discussed before, Rehe Road is mediated and remediated at various levels, after which new values and meanings have already been injected into the street. This is comparable to Humphrey's (2010) research on how people parochialise space by using social media apps to make space for their social scenes. The graffiti writers' reconstruction project on Rehe Road, on the other hand, is far more profound and overwhelming. Borrowing Tim Edensor's (2001) observations on how tourists perform during music pilgrimage, there are usually two types of performance when music fans visiting a special place – disciplined and improvised performance.

Disciplined performance requires visitors to complete choreographed activities on their lists. The choreographed activities on Rehe Road include finding the graffiti, looking for the landmarks mentioned in the song, such as a barber shop, a lobster restaurant, a monument, or a cinema, or watching the scene when Bus 32 crosses Yijiang Gate. All the items on their to-do lists demand their participation and effort. Post #1 compares finding graffiti on the street to going on a 'treasure hunt'. In Article #4, the author admits that he had to wait half an hour in the rain to photograph Bus 32 crossing Yijiang Gate.

These scripted performances, however, are insufficient for those inventive graffiti writers. They have also developed their own improvised performances on the street. For example, Post #89 describes her visit to Rehe Road with the verb 'play'. How does one play on a mundane street? Interviewee #4 exemplifies how to set up one's own game in a seemingly monotonous urban space. Finding, reading, and writing graffiti on the street are all very basics. She discovered six pens hidden among the weeds along the graffiti-covered walls. Usually, it is the 'Easter egg' left by previous graffiti writers. Then she met Li Zhi's other two fans and had a brief conversation with them. When Interviewee #4 was to return the marker pen into the weeds, she discovered a CD in the weeds! A message from the giver was written on the CD's paper cover: 'For the one who also loves Li Zhi.' Interviewee #4 wrote on Weibo about the experience, saying: 'I felt elated!' One comment under the post exclaimed: 'What a treasure!' On Rehe Road, her game was far from over. She pinned a red scarf with a sketch of Li Zhi to the tree trunk before leaving the

street, as a tribute to one of her predecessors who had hung a T-shirt on the same tree trunk.

Interviewee #4 clearly sees the street as a playground that she and other graffiti writers have created entirely on their own. They have completely reconstructed the original power logic embedded in the urban space, when they walk down the street in their path, making those small corners significant. They also use a variety of 'tactics', in de Certeau's (1984) words, to avoid confrontations with the authorities, such as writing their texts on the backs of tree trunks or on the seasonally-changing advertisement boards and so on. On a macro-level and in the long run, powerful authorities control space, whereas ordinary graffiti writers acquire space piece by piece in the short term. It is a 'victory of place over time' in this sense (de Certeau 1984:5).

Furthermore, the self-built playground is also a portal to the underneath network, which contains all information, resources, and interpersonal communication flows. Poetic resistance was carried out by Interviewee #4 and her network-mates unconsciously but sophisticatedly through the use of urban space, social modalities (walking and writing graffiti), everyday technological affordance (a series of acts related to the marker pen), and undercurrent 'revolt' (putting the CD - the very censored material - in a hidden place).

One final point is that the remediated Rehe Road also participate in the process of reconstructing the power structure in the urban space. Post #79 has several pictures showing the arrows, bicycle sign and boundary lines on pavements (Figure 4). By putting all the elements in a different sequence on Weibo in the cyberspace, a new urban space has been constructed, where the original signs employed by the city planners are appropriated by the Weibo user to create her own space. This is a bricolage, a make-do, a small trick that the weak can use to resist the powerful, according to de Certeau (1984:xiii), it is 'poetic as well as warlike'.

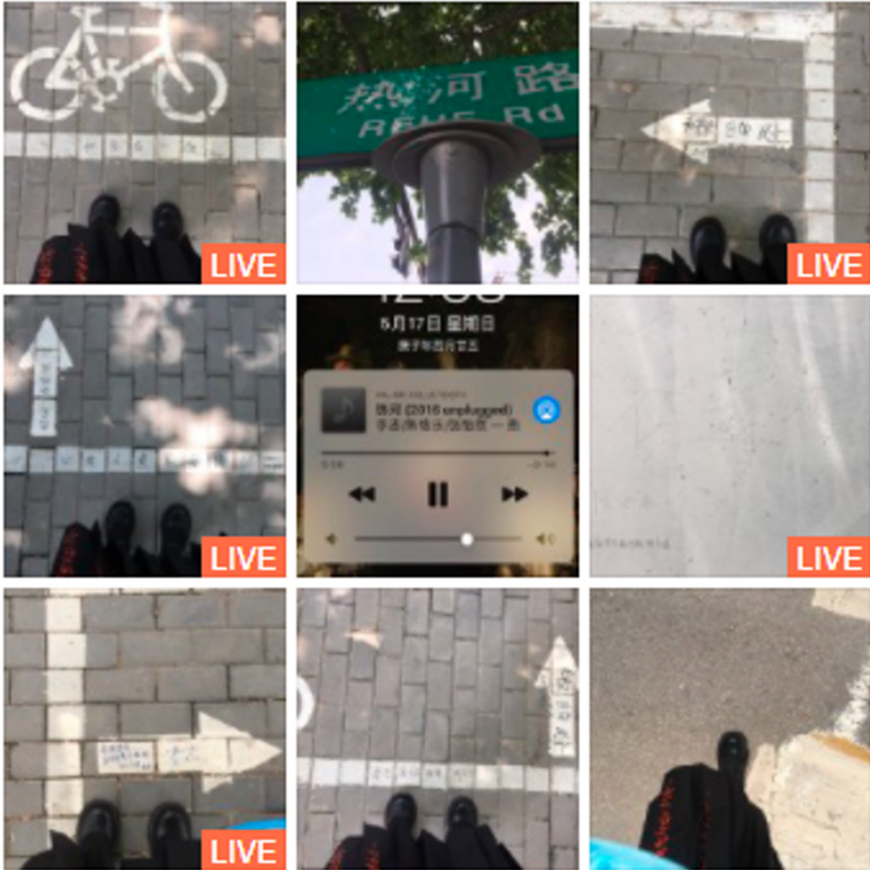

Figure 4 A new urban space on social media (Source: Weibo Post #79)

Conclusion

One point should be made here before drawing any conclusions in this part: the fundamental issue underlying media and city relationship is how human beings interact with the city in a media-saturated era. These thoughts will guide the conclusion as it wraps up the thesis with clear answers to the research questions.

(Re)mediated city: Materiality and virtuality

The first research question asked: In what ways is Rehe Road mediated in physical urban settings and remediated on social media?

In terms of the mediation of Rehe Road, this study decomposes the street into two aspects: representational and more-than-representational. On the one hand, Rehe Road is represented by the lyrics of the song *Rehe*, and the descriptions from local city taxi drivers, and visual/textual materials on social media. This research calls these representations as place-makers. The song inspires spatial imagination, whereas social media representation focuses on symbolic discourses. Taxi drivers serve as mobile media, an interesting finding in this study, making place through 'mobility' (the taxi's physical movement) and 'socialities' (the orality of social chat led by the taxi driver). On the other hand, mediated Rehe Road is far more than virtual representations, it is a media complex in its physical form as well. Media complex here refers to the phenomenon that urban space affords graffiti writers various types of media, like a complex to write things on, including: walls, pavements, posts, bollards, and billboards as media. The media complex on Rehe Road resembles several features of social media platforms. For example, interactivity, anonymity, capacity to assemblage people with similar interests, and deletability. In particular, the deletability feature, which was once a selling point for social media, has now been extended to urban space media, serving as important evidence of the graffiti writer's poetic resistance. Those speckled marks left by authorities during graffiti erasures are all badges for young people who dare to stand out and express themselves in an authoritarian setting.

When it comes to remediation of the graffiti on Rehe Road, there are two orientations – one is to use the semi-private social media such as WeChat or QQ, where the graffiti writers usually semi-lock their pictures and texts like a diary or photo album, documenting their mundane everyday lives. If the mediation of Rehe Road transformed the mundane street into a special place, the remediation of Rehe Road has been disenchanted the street from its holy aura and divorced from its extraordinariness. Concerning the semi-public attribution of WeChat and QQ, the remediated Rehe Road and its graffiti on these platforms are also cultural capital for the young people as posting Rehe Road-related content exhibits their cultural tastes and distinctiveness. The other orientation is the remediation on Weibo, where a sophisticated network among fans of Li Zhi is formed by posts about the graffiti on Rehe Road. Information, resources, and

interpersonal communication are the three flows running through the network. These flows are actually transporting social capital throughout the complex network, benefiting all nodes (individuals) within.

Then how does (re)mediated Rehe Road and its graffiti interplay with the physical street out there in Nanjing city? This study mentions the mythscape which transforms the ordinary real-world landscapes into extraordinary myths and a virtual network on Weibo that is founded based on interactions on the physical street, as well as competitions for urban space both online and offline. In addition, young people reconstruct their own urban space both on physical Rehe Road and on social media space. In these examples, Rehe Road is no longer entirely a physical street, and the social media community is no longer entirely virtual; instead, a new space has been created that is neither real nor virtual.

As noted by Andersson (2019), the mediation of place is not just about weakening the boundaries between real and virtual, but also sharpening. Along with this logic, the main conclusion here is that in a media-saturated urban setting, each place/urban space innately contains both material and virtual natures, and the two are inextricably linked in modern place/urban space. One can say that the fans of Li Zhi have established a community both physical and virtual, offline and online; the community is 'pseudo', this pseudo community's members do not physically live on Rehe Road, but they possess physical social space on the street by their territorial markers - the graffiti. Their network is completely virtual on social media, but they even help each other tackle real-world problems on Rehe Road (for example, helping to locate the graffiti there or leaving marker pens in the weeds). The other product of the integration of physical and virtual place/urban space is a space where creativity and poetic resistance can take place. This will be concluded in the next section.

'I write therefore I am': The act of resistance

The second research question of this study is about resistance: How has the mediated and remediated Rehe Road become the space of resistance? It should be highlighted before unfolding the conclusion of this section: when thinking about resistance in this study, it is necessary to put it in an apolitical context; most of the interviewees in this study even voiced their supports to the authorities concerning the issues such as censorship, erasure of their graffiti, etc. Then, it is

interesting to ponder what is the motivation of their act of graffiti writing, even it is apparently an act of vandalism or transgression that will displease the authorities they support? Before answering this question, it is better to start with the main findings of this study on how they resist on the (re)mediated Rehe Road.

Three layers of resistance have been identified. The first layer of resistance is to reclaim the right to the urban space by writing graffiti, to make graffiti writers themselves a 'pseudo-community' member on Rehe Road, as argued, even though they have no legal ownership of any piece of the surface of the street. Here, the graffiti plays vital roles as 'territorial markers' to demarcate the graffiti writers' social space on the street. The second layer of resistance is the deconstruction of the power structure embedded in Rehe Road. On the one hand, graffiti writers deconstruct power in a discursive way by writing lines that are opposite to the original meaning of *Rehe*'s lyrics. On the other hand, they also resist the authority mythologically, by taking advantage of arbitrary bonds between signifiers and signifieds, to detach the power implanted in the myths that the original mythical signifiers and signified created. The third layer of resistance takes place when graffiti writers have reconstructed the urban space ultimately by their own power. Graffiti writers cast all the original rules and regulations inserted by the urban planners and regulators away and then construct the urban space by their will. One of the key findings in this study is that the graffiti writers have gamificated Rehe Road by their ludic practices on the street - such as writing sentences on the surface of all the infrastructure whimsically, employing the urban space to play 'treasure hunt' games, or deploying the street as their stage to complete their 'performance art'. In this scenario, the graffiti writers have taken over the control of the street from city planners or the street management offices; thus, public order has been reconstructed, rules are rewritten, a new space only for the graffiti writers created, where they enjoy the absolute powers in the new regime. Additionally, the reconstruction work has been transported onto social media where Weiboers represent the urban space in their own ways, bricolaging traffic signs from the urban planners, putting them in a completely new order.

The resistance takes place on the (re)mediated Rehe Road, a brand-new space where the materiality and virtuality of urban space collide. Foucault (1986) has a concept of 'heterotopia', by which he suggests that a space serving as a mirror of the real world. In heterotopia, one sees the real world in a virtual but reflectional way. Foucault (1986) believes that when looking at the world in the mirrors (i.e.,

heterotopia), one 'occupies' the place 'at the moment'. In this sense, (re)mediated Rehe Road in this study is the heterotopia, as we have discussed in the analysis, the graffiti writers possess the space provisionally and tactically. In this half-real and half-pseudo, half-virtual and half-physical space, the resistance becomes very poetic. Thus, this study uses the term 'poetic resistance' to conclude the way the young graffiti writers resist. Poetic resistance plays the games of symbols, styles and myths on one side; but on the other side, there is the deconstruction and reconstruction of power structure taking place. Poetic resistance is also very ambiguous; like poems, signifiers and signifieds can be glued in multiple ways and they are interpreted in even more directions. It is the resistance without discernible targets. Moreover, poetic resistance is rooted in everyday life, most of the time it is even conducted unconsciously, just as walkers as rebellious heroes in de Certeau's description.

The concept of poetic resistance facilitates us to understand the motivations of graffiti writing in a more Chinese context. For those who really regard themselves as 'dissents' in mainland China, poetic resistance is a safe way to express their opinions that is different from so-called mainstream voices. Apart from those 'dissents', most of the graffiti writers, at least interviewees in this study, have no clear political intention at all. They wrote for fun, to demonstrate their rebellious attitude, or to release pressure. However, it is not the content of graffiti nor their motivations of writing graffiti that reveal the core value of poetic resistance, instead, it is the act of writing graffiti *per se* that exposes the key feature of poetic resistance, the resistance to the regulations that forbid graffiti in the public space. This is an act of resistance to the disappearance of their favourite singer, to the time that can eliminate everything. In this sense, Descartes' classic line 'I think therefore I am' can be appropriated as 'I write therefore I am' here.

In the heterotopia-like Rehe Road, physical space in cities becomes appropriate for conducting poetic resistance, as the heterogeneity of cities usually ensures the anonymity of resistance; additionally, the more disciplined the place is, the more powers can be challenged; in this sense, cities with ubiquitous rules and surveillance are the ideal place for poetic resistance. The virtuality of (re)mediated place/urban space also promises the sustainability of the resistance, such as the network on Weibo discussed in this study, which enables each node to provide only limited capital to achieve a broader goal collaboratively.

People come and go on Rehe Road, but writing something on the street can offset the sense of powerless when faced with the mighty state machine or 'dasein' itself. Becoming a pseudo-resident on Rehe Road helps the young to resist, but also facilitates them to build a virtual identity attached to a specific place and space, which as Relph (1976:43) points out, place is 'profound centres of human existence'. To end this thesis, there is a best quote from Interviewee #3 when he was asked that how he digests the fact that his texts on Rehe Road will be erased anyway, he was not pessimistic about it, instead, he became a little emotional in his speech tone:

> What I have done is just an act to empower myself, to grant value to myself. My writings will be erased eventually, but I will write until I am heard. (Interviewee #3).

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