Is news engagement worthwhile?

Studying young audiences' engagement with YouTuber-like news content

Marju Himma-Kadakas & Raul Ferrer-Conill

Department of Geography, Media and Communication, Karlstad University, Sweden

Abstract

While traditional media often fails to engage young audiences with news, YouTubers' content gains popularity and attracts attention with specific stylistic practices. Based on dimensions of audience engagement and a worthwhileness approach, this article examines how young audiences engage with YouTubers' formats and genres used in news media products. Findings of five focus group interviews with Estonian teenagers show that while specific dimensions of engagement may increase due to a more relatable format, interest in traditional news content remains limited regardless of repackaging to a YouTube-intrinsic production. This article contributes to audience studies by demonstrating to news organisations that trying to engage younger audiences through mere formatting while forgetting content might not be worthwhile. However, making news more entertaining and adopting the youth's interpretation of what news *is* could prime young audiences to consume news through social media.

Keywords: news engagement, worthwhileness, YouTube formats, news production, young audience engagement

Introduction

One of the most established narratives about news consumption in the industry and academia is that young audiences have progressively disengaged from traditional news media over the last three decades (Loader, 2007). Alternative narratives suggest that such a decline is not so much indicative of a lack of interest, but rather a signal of significant change in the news consumption habits of young people (see Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018; Brites & Kõuts-Klemm, 2018; Costera Meijer, 2007). Moreover, the apparent disconnect appears to be caused by news playing a different role in young people's daily lives, contrasting news moments, emerging news consumer types, and perhaps most importantly, alternative news sources and formats (Newman et al., 2018). Tamboer and colleagues (2022) have studied Dutch early adolescents' views on news consumption and literacy and found that youth often regard news as boring, repetitive,

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negative, and disconnected from the topics relevant to them. Rather similar are some results from the US, stating that young people consider news to be boring, and additionally, they are exposed to news mostly through peer recommendations via social media (Clark & Marchi, 2017). Simply put, younger generations consume news differently (Kalogeropoulos, 2018). Thus, the predilection of young audiences for online, visual, and contextually relevant news (Huang, 2009) has rendered the study of news engagement impractical, as news consumption happens differently and elsewhere.

To address this, news organisations are trying to attract younger audiences and increase engagement by adapting news content to their media interests, for example, playful approaches and entertainment (see Ferrer-Conill et al., 2020), or disseminating news where they consume it, for example, social media (see Haim et al., 2021).

This study examines how young audiences engage with these new formats and genres pushed by the news media as products which they may feel are worthwhile to engage with. To do so, we collaborated with the Estonian daily financial newspaper *Äripäev,* owned by Swedish media corporation Bonnier Group, which is experimenting with novel ways to attract young audiences, a trend that is widespread across several Nordic and Baltic media houses (Bucht, 2018; Östberg, 2018), and with similar news use patterns in Nordic and Baltic countries (Vihalemm, 2006). In this case, *Äripäev* is trying to create news products that disseminate the news in video formats via YouTube, which explains the selection of the platform in our study. Moreover, news consumption among youth has increased on social media and in video format (Newman et al., 2020), of which YouTube is the most established platform. Novel formats and platforms such as YouTube offer possibilities to soften "hard" journalistic content to catch the attention of those interested in more entertaining formats (Huang, 2009; Nadler, 2016; Otto et al., 2017).

Young Estonians' news consumption habits are similar to their peers' preferences in other countries – they consume less news on traditional media, but their engagement with news in Estonia is still quite strong, though highly selective and interest-driven, both technically and in content (Opermann, 2018). Although for young Estonians, the definition of news may differ from adults' perspective, the motivations for news consumption are similar to those of adults (Brites & Kõuts-Klemm, 2018). According to the Media Literacy Index 2021 (Open Society Institute – Sofia, n.d.), Estonia ranked third between Denmark and Sweden; therefore, in the context of media and information literacy (MIL) and news consumption, Estonia belongs to the same cluster as the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, and Ireland. While there are similarities and differences between countries in terms of MIL and news consumption, there is also a need for more detailed insight into what makes news engaging and worthwhile for young people.

We argue that by repacking traditional journalistic content in new formats, news media may be conflating engagement with interest in the format, and unless they align formats, audio/visual codes, and textual and linguistic expression to the subjective experience, young audiences' engagement with news might not be worthwhile. This is important because the industry's attempt to reclaim youth's news engagement through social media techniques that appeal to the youth, rather than creating content that genuinely promotes a more holistic understanding of news for younger audiences, could prime younger audiences to consume the news through social media rather than directing the audience to proprietary content. We support this reasoning with a theoretical bridging of the news engagement and worthwhileness concepts.

Our study contributes to a growing body of literature that incorporates audiences in journalism studies. We explore the relational nature of engagement that is supposed to establish a nexus between what news young citizens consume and how, and how news organisations can meet their expectations. Our findings are based on five focus groups with Estonian teenagers aged 15 to 18 after showing them four out of ten YouTube news videos created and published in cooperation with a daily financial newspaper in 2019. We believe this qualitative approach captures a better understanding of the subjective nature of the engagement experience because it pursues an in-depth investigation by discussing with young audiences how they engage with news. The findings show that while specific dimensions of engagement may increase due to a more relatable format, interest in traditional news content remains limited.

Theoretical framework

The ways in which young audiences engage with news are measured and interpreted differently across the journalistic field. We believe that a more productive way to scrutinise engagement is to understand when and how users want to engage with the news. Hence, we use Schrøder's (2015) notion of worthwhileness to help us determine the news selection process that audiences enact daily. Similarly, we employ YouTubers' techniques drawn from Himma-Kadakas and colleagues (2018), which show the relations between YouTube genres, formats, audio/visual codes, and textual and linguistic expression, and how they may spark willingness in young audiences to engage with news.

Avenues of news engagement with youth

News is often described as serious, well-researched and sourced, and written by experts for experts (Harrison, 2008). This is a reductionist take on journalism built on the apparent "dissonance between ideal and pragmatic, informational and entertainment" roles of journalism (Conboy, 2010: 412) and the often-misplaced distinctiveness and seriousness of journalism. Embedded in this regime of seriousness that favours hard news and democratic issues over human-interest stories, several genres of journalism – such as sports, entertainment, or lifestyle – tend to be classified as sensational, trivial, or salacious, having their legitimacy questioned (for a discussion on other forms of journalism beyond hard news, see Dubied & Hanitzsch, 2014; Hanusch, 2012).

A broader understanding of news embraces diverse narratives and formats that also engage a broader audience. As traditional news brands tend to play a small role in young people's everyday lives (Kalogeropoulos, 2018), the gap between traditional serious news and young audiences' news habits and preferences seems to widen. With regard to this, Newman and colleagues (2018) identify two essential aspects: 1) traditional news brands see news as what one should know, and 2) young audiences see news as what one should know (to an extent), but also what is useful to know, what is interesting to know, and what is fun to know. Furthermore, though traditional media are the most reliable source of news (Opermann, 2018; Wolf & Schnauber, 2015), most scholarship points to a shift away from traditional news sources and formats by young people (Kalogeropoulos, 2018). This shift is dominated by incidental news consumption on social media (Boczkowski et al., 2018), and sometimes youth distance themselves from traditional

news altogether (Kõuts-Klemm & Brites, 2017). What seems clear is regardless of whether they are news seekers or news avoiders, the patterns of news consumption among young audiences combine a wide array of media devices, sources, and services, "resulting in repertoires that operate across and within media devices" and platforms (Edgerly et al., 2018: 208). Engagement thus manifests beyond techno-behavioural encounters, extending to emotional, normative, and spatio-temporal dimensions (Steensen et al., 2020). Broadening the concept of engagement might be the key to making younger audiences consider news a worthwhile activity.

The worthwhileness of news for young audiences

Bengtsson and Johansson (2021) argue that any approach to studying peoples' perceptions and consumption of news should consider time, space, and sociocultural relevance. In everyday life, news consumption may be strongly related to the normative idea of being a good citizen. Brites and Kõuts-Klemm (2018) showed that traditional news brands shaped audiences' understanding of what news is; however, the youth were more open to interpreting alternative means of production and channels as proper for news. Young people, especially, appreciate the immediacy and understandable nature of news mediated by social media (Sveningsson, 2015). On the one hand, this indicates that news discourse is interpreted from the standpoint of hard news being serious, and human interest and narrative news not. On the other hand, it refers to the uses and gratifications that replenish the spectrum of reasons why people make certain decisions over news content in their media repertoire. Operationally, the worthwhileness approach (Schrøder, 2015) provides a compelling theoretical tool that extends the uses and gratifications approach. Worthwhileness determines people's everyday selection of news (Schrøder, 2015), and Schrøder defines seven dimensions that explain why audiences consume certain content (see Table 1).

Our theoretical proposition is that content scoring high across these dimensions will maximise young audiences' perception of worthwhileness concerning the consumption

Table 1 *Descriptions of Schrøder's worthwhileness categories*

Category	Description
Time spent	A medium must be worth the time spent, and the news media that are experienced as more important are more worthwhile; others are used temporarily at a convenient time (e.g., mobile moments).
Public connection	This helps maintain relations to one's networks and the wider society. Schrøder divides public connection into "democratic worthwhileness" (content that caters to one's identity) and "everyday worthwhileness" (content that links one with their personal networks).
Normative pressures	Usage or non-usage of a medium depends on how significant others find the medium.
Participatory potential	Participation through (inter)activity, sharing, liking, and creating content can be meaningful for some people.
Price	The news medium must be affordable and worth the price.
Technological appeal	The technological features and technical quality potential of the device or medium.
Situational fit	The suitability of the time and place for using the medium.

Comments: The worthwhileness categories are explained and described based on Schrøder's (2015) outline.

of journalistic content. Stemming from worthwhileness, we ask the first research question by which we intend to bridge the concepts of news engagement and worthwhileness:

RQ1: Do young news audience think engaging with YouTube news is worthwhile? And if so, how and why?

News like YouTubers do it

Since studies on teenage media consumption indicate a shift towards human interest, lifestyle, and personal narrative stories (Bell, 1991; Harrison, 2008), the news discourse should be revisited through the infotainment prism (Edgerly & Vraga, 2019; Otto et al., 2017). By looking at the trends of platform use among the younger population, it is of increasing importance to find ways to "reform" or "develop" news for social media platforms and make it entertaining and easily accessible for young people, but news also needs to be authentic, fair, and meaningful (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Newman et al., 2020).

While talking about perceiving news as journalistic text, we cannot overlook the codes that shape the understanding of what can be interpreted as news. These codes constitute the genre that helps the audience navigate the media content. The genres bridge the gap between the producer, text, and recipient, and when encountering new genres, one must consider the current socio-cognitive understanding of how the recipient and the producer make sense of them (Lomborg, 2011). The presence of reciprocal codes makes possible the existence of genres. In this context, formats define the technical and audiovisual aspects, and genres represent discursive narratives (e.g., challenges, rants, highlights, etc.).

Nevertheless, genres also change, which usually happens through exchanges of codes between genres, and these genres may not always be in the same topical domain (e.g., hard news on television versus life-hack feature videos on YouTube). Audiences feel how language is used and that language is the tool of media messages (Bell, 1991). The idea of the news story is expressed not through the article written, but through the story told by news workers. Peer and Ksiazek (2011) found that while most news videos on YouTube adhere to traditional production practices (e.g., editing techniques, audio quality), they break from common content standards (e.g., use of sources, fairness), leading to a higher number of views of videos with relaxed content practices. In that regard, YouTubers' formats and genres differ sharply from established film and television and are constituted from intrinsically interactive audience-centricity and appeal to authenticity and community in a commercialising space – "social media entertainment" (Cunningham & Craig, 2017: 72).

YouTube formats and genres in combination determine whether the content is percieved as entertaining. At the same time, social media entertainment producers – for example, YouTubers – are expected to be authentic and rigorously differ from established professional media (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Combining an easy-to-follow production style captivates the audience's interest (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2017). Mixing genre codes of news and entertainment lead to forms of infotainment, which is a term that sits at the meso level in a multilevel framework of softening political communication (Otto et al., 2017). Infotainment is related to genre, and the term describes the emergence of new genres by implementing characteristics

of two genres, thus combining information and entertainment in one outlet. This is supported by studies that show how infotainment can enhance political participation (Moy et al., 2005). However, there is much we do not know about what it means to judge content as a mixture of news and entertainment codes (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2021; Edgerly & Vraga, 2019). In both traditional newscasts and YouTubers' videos, textual, linguistic, and visual techniques (e.g., conventions of performance, narrative expectations, and intertextual codes) are significant players in delivering the message. Each medium aligns with a specific audiovisual language specifically crafted to fit the platform. These techniques help the receiver to derive the meaning.

Himma-Kadakas and colleagues (2018) show how YouTubers link specific topics to genres and formats as well as the platform's affordance categories that are performative to the worthwhileness of consuming media. For presenting a particular topic, the precise format and genre must be selected. However, for news content, not all formats and genres are suitable.

In YouTuber videos, the *news* genre gives an overview of a currently newsworthy topic. News is combined with original performance, in which the YouTuber usually performs an (original) song, dance, or other creative content presenting their talent. A how-to format is where the YouTuber teaches how some task or problem is solved, done, or imitated. How-to videos are designed to teach viewers how to make life easier or to explain the topic and offer solutions. The sit-down format is usually filmed in a private room (e.g., in a bedroom), where a YouTuber is framed close-up sitting in front of the camera facing the viewer. The collab format includes visiting actors or collaborators in the video. This has similarities with a news video but is more versatile in its actions and language use. In the sketch format, the YouTuber acts, and the content is usually humorous. In the sketch, various situations are staged to illustrate a topic. The video is usually pre-scripted and contains several short clips of situations and rapid post-production edits.

To produce the videos and assess our participants' responses, we borrowed their framework of YouTubers' techniques (audio/visual codes, affordances, and textual and linguistic expression characteristics). We applied YouTubers' techniques to journalistic news, and we focused on the teenagers' responses and interpretations of the techniques presented in the videos and not on the connotative meanings. We argue that production techniques that are applied in a systematic way to create content that is worthwhile to young audiences would eventually leverage higher engagement with news. Accordingly, our study is guided by a second research question:

RQ2: How do younger audiences respond to the YouTubers' techniques used in the news with regard to their news engagement?

Methodology

For our study, we conducted five focus groups as the primary data collection method, following a semi-structured guide as a basis for discussion. Since the group interviews were centred on four videos created using YouTubers' techniques, we first describe how the videos were created, and Table 2 shows what characteristics each video contained.

Journalists and journalism students created ten videos in cooperation with the Estonian daily financial newspaper *Äripäev*. Though teenagers are not the usual audience of

this newspaper, *Äripäev's* newsroom was interested in experimenting with a new format that would combine news with social media features to engage younger audiences. We selected four videos containing different characteristics (see Table 2). In the focus group interviews, the videos were shown in full length in the order that they are presented in Table 2, one at a time, followed by discussion. For clarity and economy of words, in this article, we refer to these videos as "YouTube news", and to the formats, genres, and textual-visual aspects of YouTubers as "YouTubers' techniques".

Focus groups

Focus groups have been a popular method in northern European research enquiring into the media use of youth (Strøm Krogager et al., 2015; Bengtsson et al., 2018). The participants of our focus groups were teenagers from three different high schools in Estonia. The groups were assembled with the help of Estonian language teachers at the schools, because this enabled us to surmount the potential influence of socioeconomic status, which may influence news consumption and media repertoires (Lindell, 2018). However, there is a group of countries where the general school system weakens the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement, providing equity of different social positions (OECD, 2020). Estonia is one of those countries. For this reason, we conducted focus groups in cooperation with municipal schools. Lindell and Sartoretto (2018) have shown that social position matters to the extent to which young people "buy into" the normative order that regards news as inherently "good", valuable, and worthwhile. Nevertheless, the limited number of our participants would not have enabled us to make conclusions based on socioeconomic background and gender. Therefore, we show the gender distribution of the focus groups (see Table 3) and keep notice of the potential influence of these characteristics. Maybe due to the sample or the composition of students in Estonian schools, we did not see any differences attributable to gender or class, but we refrain from deducing findings for generalisation.

There are different standpoints on the size of focus groups. Krueger and Casey (2015) state that six to eight participants are sufficient, but the size may vary from four to fifteen (Burrows & Kendall, 1997). Our five focus groups varied from five to twelve participants (see Table 3).

Table 2 *YouTubers' techniques used in the focus group videos*

Video	Genre, format, and affordances	Audio/visual codes	Textual and linguistic expressions
DEAL or NO DEAL: Brits and EU divorcing the marriage (explains Brexit from the aspect of possible personal impact to the young viewer) Length: 2'33'	Genre: news + original performance Format: sit-down Affordances: time spent, democratic and everyday worthwhileness, technological appeal, news-ness	Sound effects, background music Numerous memes and pictures, and the written text emphasises the news facts Editing: jump-cuts to accelerate the pace of presentation, no post-production effects High technical quality	Explaining to the camera Listing of news-related facts Narrative elements: action, resolution, coda Uses slang, includes few vulgar expressions Fast speech rate
THE FUTURE IS NOW: robots writing business news (about using robots in journalism; similar to conventional infotainment news interview) Length: 6'44"	Genre: original performance + news Format: sketch + collab Affordances: time spent, technological appeal, news-ness	Modest sound effects, ambient background music Video footage from newscasts Simultaneous unrelated action in the background Editing: similar to journalistic feature news, no post-production effects Remarkably low technical quality	News interview Narrative elements: abstract, orientation, resolution, coda Everyday word use, similar to formal news texts Speech rate similar to ordinary conversation
ONLY IN 5 MINUTES: stock market explained in kitchen (rises and falls of investing in stock market explained using cooking metaphors) Length: 4'49"	Genre: original performance + how-to Format: sit-down Affordances: everyday worthwhileness	Modest sound effects, background music Few gifs, written punch lines, bloopers Editing: few jump-cuts to emphasise important facts Normal technical quality with minor flaws in sound and lighting	Explaining to the camera Listed facts presented through acting Narrative elements: abstract, resolution, coda Everyday language Slow speech rate
BE AWARE: how you can prevent the financial crisis from happening? (explaining principles of financial behaviour in an acted sketch) Length: 2'57"	Genre: news + original performance Format: sketch + sit-down Affordances: time spent, democratic and everyday worthwhileness, technological appeal	Sound effects to emphasise the facts or jokes, ambient background music Gifs, short video additions, written punch lines Editing: a number of jump cuts to emphasise important facts High technical quality	Explaining to the camera using short sentences, jokes, punch lines Narrative elements: action, resolution, coda Everyday language Fast speech rate

Comments: All ten videos were created and published weekly on *Äripäev*'s news portal (www.aripaev.ee/t/richify) and YouTube channel (see Äripäev, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2019d) from January to March 2019. The videos used in this study were all published in January. Focus group interviews were conducted from April to June 2019. The headlines were originally in Estonian and were translated for this article.

Table 3 *Overview of focus groups*

Group	Duration (min.)	Number of participants	Age	Female	Male
1	65	6	16–17	4	2
2	70	7	17–18	0	7
3	45	5	15–16	5	0
4	68	7	16–17	5	2
5	75	12	16–18	10	2

Comments: All participants of the focus groups were recruited from municipal schools in Estonia.

The participants in each focus group were from the same school, mainly classmates; therefore, they were acquainted. The only criterion for selecting teenagers was age (15–18 years old), which in Estonia is the age of the high-school students. Naturally, the teenage age group (e.g., 12–18 years old) contains divergent media preferences, which depend on age, peer impact, interests, habits, and so on. We chose the teenage age group because they are soon-to-be adults, and thus their reasoning for news selection also reflects the news preferences of young adults. Though it was not a prerequisite for participation, all participants in the focus groups expressed consuming content on YouTube daily; half of them regularly follow local or foreign YouTubers on sports, motivational coaching, or musicians. For referencing a specific respondent, we use a code which indicates the gender (male = M; female = F) and age (e.g., 15), followed by an indication of the participant's focus group (e.g., /FG1). The focus groups were conducted in Estonian, as this was the participants' native language. Focus group transcripts were later translated into English.

Though having one or several dominant individuals within a group may appear as a limitation in focus group interviews (Nyumba et al., 2018; Smithson, 2000), our groups did not noticeably face this issue. Participants in groups were modest in their expression and were therefore encouraged to talk by the moderators. The occurrence of silence is quite common in different types of focus groups, since silence itself is an enduring feature of human interaction (Smithson, 2000). The silence was experienced in all groups, especially at the beginning of the conversation, but was exceeded on both group and individual levels with the support of the moderators. We deliberately organised an all-male and an all-female group to investigate if the conversation dynamics produced a distinct gendered narrative. The transcripts did not reveal any remarkable disparities in discourses over the focus topics by age, gender, or YouTube consumption habits, and therefore the groups are not differentiated by these aspects in the analysis.

A common limitation of focus group interviews is producing normative discourses. This can be especially critical with teenagers being interviewed by older moderators. To avoid that, we used journalism students (20 and 25 years old) as moderators. This younger age enabled the moderators to easily relate the focus group talks to everyday talk, as Smithson (2000) advises. All moderators were female, which may have impacted the results to a limited extent. Another limitation with teenage focus groups is peer pressure, which in our study may have resulted in forming the discourse by dominants

to some extent. The transcripts of focus group interviews were analysed using qualitative focused coding and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006; Ritchie & Spencer, 2002).

Focus group analysis

The text analysis codes were divided into two main groups labelled "engagement and YouTubers' techniques" (E&YTT) and "worthwhileness". The E&YTT category contained subcategories like news-ness (stemming from the news-ness concept of Edgerly & Vraga, 2019), audio/visual signifiers (e.g., memes, music, text, and other graphic and audio effects), genres, formats (both categories described by Himma-Kadakas et al., 2018), and language (referring to both language use and linguistic presentation). Although the main categories for analysis stemmed from theoretical concepts, we additionally applied reflexive iteration – a systematic, repetitive, and recursive process in which the categories of analysis emerge from the data (Neale 2016; Srivastava & Hopwood 2009). As a result, the subcategory infotainment was added to worthwhileness in the review process of codes, since the balance between news and entertainment frequently rose in the focus groups. The worthwhileness and infotainment subcategories reflect all seven worthwhileness dimensions outlined by Schrøder (2015). Infotainment indicates the reception of news and entertainment in mixed forms.

The transcripts were indexed by comparing the highlighted quotes between the groups and cases. The quotes were charted by extracting them and rearranging them into appropriate thematic content. In the interpretation stage, the codes were analysed, interpreted, synthesised, and formed into the results of the study. Two coders coded all focus group interviews in MaxQDA. The minimum overlap threshold between coded segments, which refers to coders' accuracy in highlighting the same segment in MaxQDA when applying a given code, was 70 per cent. We used the MaxQDA's quote matrix function to compare coded segments according to variables.

When engagement becomes worthwhile

Technological appeal

Although technological appeal may embrace several different aspects (e.g., interactivity and technical participation), the YouTube news shown in the focus groups all triggered connections to the production quality. In other words, the engagement with technological appeal of YouTube news was limited to relating with production quality expectations. The focus groups' participants discussed and valued the technological features and quality potential of the device or medium. YouTube provides an appealing arena for news video productions that are enhanced by platform affordances and the production quality that low-budget pieces can achieve. Though news media organisations may consider social media content to be produced with lower quality and limited budgets, our study showed that teenagers critically and attentively evaluate production quality. The videos shown in our focus groups were intentionally produced with different technical qualities, and the respondents were prompt to discuss this feature, noticing unprofessional lighting, faulty sound, incorrect camera angles, colouring, and so on. Teenagers are accustomed to consuming content with varying degrees of technical quality, but the distinction and associations linked to high-quality productions are not lost on them. According to the

respondents, a worthwhile video is a high-quality video, with some even mentioning that they would quit watching a video with low technical quality. All respondents at some stage of the interview assessed technical quality, and this is well illustrated with an excerpt from focus group 5:

> It depends on whom to compare this content. It [referring to the videos shown in focus groups] is better than many YouTubers create; they try to copy others, but sometimes they get out of proportion, they get the editing wrong – too much or too little. In these videos, it is well done, but compared to professional YouTubers, there is room for development. (F17/FG5)

> However, it also depends on the money, right? If you are successful, you can buy better cameras, hire a professional team. (M18/FG5)

These two participants were well aware of technical quality standards since they were both consumers, and many had tried video production. Due to this, retrenchment on production was recognised instantly. Engagement with news carries a technical aspect that resides in normative assumptions of quality. News videos produced by legitimate news organisations, according to our respondents, ought to excel regarding quality. While YouTube affords effortless, fast, and on-demand access to news content, continued consumption – in other words, not clicking on another video – is highly connected to the quality expectation of viewers.

Time spent and situational fit

One of the most valued metrics of engagement for newsrooms is time spent. From a worthwhileness perspective, the temporal engagement with social media news videos equates to the worth of the medium (Schrøder, 2015), while at the same time, it must fit the convenient temporal timeframe for usage. When time is a resource, the length of videos becomes relevant. Our focus group respondents unanimously agreed that in social media, they would more likely watch shorter videos in full length, as one participant clarified:

> Yes, the shorter and more to the point video is better. My attention does not wander, and I do not get tired during a short video. (M18/FG3)

Some respondents said they bothered to watch the video only because it was relatively short. If they had seen beforehand that the video was long, they would not have selected the video for watching. In other words, it is less "costly" in terms of engagement if they need to invest less time. The participants agreed that the second video (6 minutes and 44 seconds) was too long and favoured the shorter videos (see Table 2).

While time is one of the most dominant dimensions in the decision-making of selecting a video for consumption, temporal engagement with the production is not entirely dependent on video length. Several respondents in different focus groups agreed they would be willing to watch longer videos if the content caught their attention and did not become boring, as the following quote illustrates:

> If it were on a relevant topic or, you know, interesting, I would watch it no matter how long it was. […] On some topics, I would prefer more in-depth coverage. (M17/FG5)

Therefore, the temporal engagement with the content has a strong interaction with the emotional engagement of the respondents. Regarding worthwhileness, this means that the situational fit – the suitability of the time and place for using the medium – is crucial to overcome the length of the video and enhance the time spent on content. The narrative across the focus groups signalled that the YouTube news' situational fit was closely related to the connection and perceived needs of the viewer, enhancing the participant's exposure to YouTube news (e.g., being more likely in school, usually as part of an assignment). Though there were respondents who reflected on their willingness to subscribe to YouTube news, the overall standpoint of the discussions led to the situational fit of a classroom. Participants agreed that school was the most probable environment in which to be exposed to the news, showing that engagement and worthwhileness is subjected to the situational and spatial constraints of the viewers.

Public connection and normative pressures

The domain of public connection refers to the affordances that help maintain personal and societal networks. Schrøder's distinction between democratic worthwhileness and everyday worthwhileness as functions of public connection relates to what an adult citizen should know and the extent to which a person can relate to their peers in daily life, respectively. This is closely related to the domain of normative pressures – the perceived expectation by society to be informed citizens, as is the example in the following quote:

> These videos are a cool expression of what we should know or what intelligent young adults should know. (F17/FG3)

The previous quote affirms the normative understanding of what news is, what it is for, and that it is for an "intelligent" audience. Despite an overall detachment from traditional news media (and the corresponding social media), respondents showed an awareness of a particular societal connection to news, as well as a peer connection. In this regard, respondents established that connection back to the school and mentioned that they would watch the news if it were part of schoolwork (e.g., a compulsory part of a school assignment in civic education classes). Therefore, the public connection and normative pressure are interrelated and caused by the overall understanding of the discourse function of news in society. Thus, from an engagement perspective, they feel the overall expectation of being engaged from normative and emotional dimensions of being connected.

The prerequisite for this may be cooperation between news organisations and schools. A final noteworthy point on the normative and connective dimensions of worthwhileness is the generational aspect of the engagement. The norm that there is certain information that the adults must know, which somehow differs from the knowledge that teenagers should obtain, points to different media repertoires that change and evolve with turning points in life (e.g., becoming an adult, entering the labour market, or going to college or university). Respondents perceived that "serious" news needs to be useful for everyday life. In this regard, news engagement depends on finding the media texts, such as news, relevant and meaningful topics based on the normative parameters set by life contexts, such as school and society.

Price and participatory potential

While price may seem like an apparent dimension of worthwhileness, it rarely emerged in the conversations during the focus groups. Less clear is the participatory potential of YouTube news' videos. Participatory potential refers to interactivity that enables sharing and creating content. Though these categories are considered relevant in social media, they did not gain prominence in our focus group interviews. The participatory potential was referred to by two respondents concerning subscription to the channel:

> I would certainly subscribe to this channel because then I would have a notification on a new video, and I would watch it. (M17/FG2)

> I would subscribe to the channel to stay updated on this news. (M18/FG2)

Engaging with the video in YouTube to facilitate social interactions was practically ignored by the participants, and we do not have definitive empirical support for why such a foundational feature of social media was ignored. We believe this is because the interactivity mechanisms afforded by YouTube are so integral to the relational engagement between the users and the content that they become almost invisible reflexes of a generation accustomed to digital media use.

Teenagers' response to YouTubers' techniques in news

Genre and format

Our videos were intentionally hybrids of conventional news genres and YouTube genres, but in some videos, YouTube genres were also mixed. Since genre is a normative category for organising information, we combined formats, narratives, and code elements to see if the respondents could understand and take a position in interpreting the message. In video 2, for example, we intentionally used a simultaneous alternative narrative: There was activity in the background that was not related to the main topic of the video. The respondents in all groups noticed this activity and highlighted that the background movement distracted them from focusing on content (e.g., the news focus of the video), and it occasionally failed to deliver the message:

> The pictures in the video should be connected to the news, and you should not overuse the memes; it confuses the information. The videos should be illustrated, but you should not overdo it. (F17/FG5)

This refers to the fact that the scene and alternative activities in the video all have functions that either support or confuse the recognition of the genre and understanding of the information. The sit-down format (usually in the bedroom) supports the intimate and calm environment in which the message stands out. Explaining through original performance demands action that supports the news but has no extra narratives, messages, or connotations. Videos shown in the focus groups employed hybrid formats of sit-down, collab, and sketch (see Table 2). When the participants were asked about their favourite video, they mentioned the sit-down format (videos 1, 3, and 4), explaining that a sit-down video is more straightforward to follow. This format enables the use of both long and short narratives and is especially suitable for explaining complex information. Respondents stated that activity (e.g., acting in original performance) helped them keep

their attention on the content (videos 2, 3, and 4) when the sit-down format could be monotonous and boring.

Nevertheless, at the same time, they expressed that the unvaried presentation of sit-down also helped if the topic was complicated and required focused attention (as in video 1). The fourth video shown in the focus groups was a hybrid of sketch and sit-down formats, with a bit of sketch at the beginning and the sit-down part at the end. Some respondents found that to be ideal because the sketch caught their attention in the beginning, and then the sit-down explaining part afterwards was easier to follow.

We asked the respondents what topics would gain their interest in the news. The answers in all groups were unanimously "positive news", which in conversation were expressed as news about ordinary (young) people, climate and environment, wellness, and educational stories – all these are usually categorised as "soft" or feature news. As Shoemaker (2006) describes, "hard" news relates to negative, harmful, and dangerous news. This explains why teenagers prefer entertaining or soft news as positive ones. In soft news, timeliness is a less critical news criterion, since such stories contain less negative information. This is also what was experienced in the videos' creation process: Selecting a genre and format for a timely news topic is complicated, since the YouTubers' techniques support timelessness.

> It's good that the video talks about important topics, that it's not like some pointless trash-talk. Moreover, the pop-ups in the video will definitely catch the eye. (M17/FG1)

These results show that our respondents recognised the genres and formats indigenous to YouTube, which refers to the established conventions and norms on that platform. For the respondents, the recognition of genres and formats formed the basis of evaluation for other techniques (audio/visual, and textual and linguistic expression) and assessing their suitability for news.

Audio/visual codes

Audio and visual codes support the receiver in understanding the message and interpreting the information. Since the audio (e.g., music and sound effects) and textual-visual additions (e.g., memes and textual punch lines) are usually apprehended as part of entertainment, these elements may act as confusing codes to the receiver because a conventional news story would not contain these elements. Therefore, it would not be "serious", "hard", or trustworthy.

Most focus group participants found that the usage of memes and illustrative material in the videos aided them in understanding the topic. However, the respondents understood the dominant position of news in the presented videos, but they were also critical about the fine line between news and entertainment. Mixed codes of traditional news discourse and YouTubers' techniques confused the teenagers and hindered them from interpreting the content – the entertainment contradicted their expectation of news that was supposed to be "serious" and "hard". This refers to the fact that their understanding of news was rooted in conventional discourse that divides news into serious and hard news, and human interest and narrative news categories.

> It depends on the person. Some people like to read just introductory textbooks that do not have illustrations. Others want to search for information on the Internet because it is more visual and easier to take in. When the girl in the video started talking, I thought there should have been more memes and pictures; I missed them. (F18/FG4)

While some respondents concluded that the balance depended on personal preference – whether one likes a video with much editing and memes – others claimed that the challenge lies in finding the balance between news content and entertaining supplements, including the use of language.

Textual and linguistic expression

The way language was used in the textual or linguistic expression set the conditions for the respondents to assess whether the language was appropriate for news. This also indicated an expectation for specific expression while interpreting content as news. Some participants did not like foul language or common humour (videos 1, 3, and 4), which they considered inappropriate for delivering the news. This refers to the accustomed understanding of news discourse – news must be in a particular code of language. Other codes of language will be interpreted as "not news" or inappropriate for the genre. On the other hand, some respondents found that memes and language common to the youth makes a news piece more understandable and relatable for them.

The linguistic expression that YouTubers most often use in a sit-down format is explaining to the camera, which is somewhat different from a traditional news discourse, where the reporter usually avoids subjective explaining with the purpose of distancing the author from the content.

However, our respondents favoured the explanatory expression, as it enabled them to relate to the presenter and supported them in understanding the content. First-person, subjective, and informal linguistic expression was assessed as a code supporting news engagement. Linguistic expression was also analysed on the performance level, taking into account the reception of the presentation (e.g., pace, diction, articulation, etc.). When the tempo of the video or the speech rate was too fast, the respondents reflected that textual-visual signifiers (e.g., text or memes) made it easier to follow the story.

Concluding from the results on textual and linguistic expression, we highlight that the interpretative and explanatory style intrinsic to YouTubers functions well as a technique for news engagement.

Conclusion

The results from our study show that repackaging news into platform-driven genres and formats may result in a limited increase of interest in the video, but this should not be linearly interpreted as general engagement with the news. In response to our first research question, we conclude that young audiences in Estonia think that engaging with news is worthwhile as long as the quality of the video is high, the length of the video is short, and the topic is relevant. This complements the current knowledge of factors that attract youth to news (Tamboer et al., 2022; Clark & Marchi, 2017). The participative aspects of YouTube for engaging with others is largely uninteresting to our participants.

Finding interesting topics or content relevant to peers would encourage them to give the videos a try, but the degree of engagement remains in relation to the platform's affordances and interface. Even in the setting of a qualitative study, it is difficult to move beyond the techno-behavioural aspect of engagement. Nevertheless, we see that the time, genre, and form (how the news should look) become the normative factors when choosing to watch the news.

Regarding our second research question, we see that the teenagers' response to the YouTubers' techniques used in the news offered on YouTube is positive and that these techniques assist them in understanding the news content and emotionally engaging with it. This resonates with Newman and colleagues' (2018: 5) assertion regarding video news on social media:

> The experience of news should feel as easy and accessible as Facebook and Netflix. […] News brands need to tell stories in ways that fit the expectations of young people […] The way the news media covers stories may need to change.

This supports our conclusion: News organisations should reevaluate what news is for the young generation and how it could be presented to them to reach their attention span. Making news more entertaining by "speaking the code of YouTubers" may help to engage teenagers' attention on news and might be worth trying as a new practice for news organisations – as they are searching for innovative news content (Huang, 2009; Nadler, 2016; Otto et al., 2017). However, mixing the stylistic codes may confuse young audiences who interpret the content of news as "hard" and thus may not recognise the content as news.

We clearly see that working on making the news worthwhile by paying attention to the specific characteristics of the platform in which the news is distributed has the potential to engage younger audiences. However – and despite our initial thoughts – while YouTubers' techniques can lead to increasing the worthwhileness of news, this study mostly points to the fact that making news worthwhile mostly generates a behavioural engagement with news. Respondents mentioned other dimensions of engagement being important when choosing the videos to watch, but they seem to be of less importance.

Upon reflection, this may be due to the main limitation of this study: its small sample. However, the results open avenues for further research. While specific dimensions of engagement increase importance due to more relatable production techniques, the relation to an interest in traditional news content remains limited, regardless of the repackaging to platform-intrinsic formats. Though our results provide evidence for using YouTubers' techniques in news production, we see potential for further research on teenage audiences' engagement with repackaged news on different social media platforms (e.g., Instagram or TikTok).

The dimension of price deserves more detailed insight in further research. Since YouTube does not charge a subscription fee, price did not appear to influence engagement, as it was not acknowledged in the YouTube news context. Social media users often fail to internalise that the price manifests as data, privacy, or time, becoming an extension of technical-behavioural engagement measured in metrics. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the relation between different forms of price and engagement with news.

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