



# REPORT ON MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN DENMARK

## Active, overwhelmed, diverted or addicted?

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How various segments of the Danish population perceive and comprehend news and current affairs, and the significance of their views in a social context.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>GUIDANCE FOR THE READER</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>SUMMARY OF THE REPORT’S MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<u>Daily life with media, news and current affairs</u> .....	7
<u>Networks and their significance</u> .....	8
<u>The public sphere - outlook and relationships</u> .....	8
<u>Reactions, effects and trust</u> .....	9
<u>The citizens, the media and society</u> .....	10
<u>The importance of our findings in a social context</u> .....	11
<u>Five ideal categories of attitudes to news and current affairs</u> .....	12
<b>PROJECT BACKGROUND AND CONCEPT</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<u>News and the news universe</u> .....	14
<u>The project’s basic issue and theories</u> .....	16
Daily life with news and current affairs content .....	16
Networks and their significance.....	17
The public sphere .....	17
Reactions, effects and trust .....	18
The citizens, the media and society .....	19
<b>OVERVIEW: RESULTS IN FIVE CHAPTERS</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1. DAILY LIFE WITH MEDIA, NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS CON- TENT</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<u>Content - what are news and current affairs for the citizens?</u> .....	21
<u>Types of Media</u> .....	24
<u>PlatformS</u> .....	24
<u>Locations and attitudes to news and current affairs content</u> .....	30
<u>Summary</u> .....	34
<b>CHAPTER 2. NETWORKS</b> .....	<b>36</b>

<b>Physical and online networks</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>News and current affairs content via personal networks</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3. THE PUBLIC SPHERE - OUTLOOK AND RELATIONSHIPS</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Outlook</b> .....	<b>43</b>
Which media?.....	43
The role of paywalls in forming the user's outlook .....	44
The personal outlook.....	44
Outlook via social media .....	45
The indiscriminate outlook.....	48
Outlook in brief: Personal versus institutional approach to news .....	48
<b>Relationships</b> .....	<b>50</b>
Relationships from mouth to mouth.....	50
Relationships via social media .....	52
Relationships – a summary .....	52
<b>CHAPTER 4: REACTIONS, EFFECTS AND TRUST</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>Reactions</b> .....	<b>55</b>
Comment .....	55
Like .....	56
Share online .....	56
Debate face to face .....	56
Seek to learn more .....	57
Opt out.....	59
<b>Effects of media use</b> .....	<b>59</b>
Participation .....	59
Emotions .....	60
React or behave differently.....	60
Take political action .....	62

Change own opinion.....	62
Changes others' opinion .....	62
<b>Trust .....</b>	<b>62</b>
Trust and mistrust in society.....	64
Trust and mistrust of politicians .....	65
Trust and mistrust in the media.....	66
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5. THE CITIZENS, THE MEDIA AND SOCIETY .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>What is important to keep track of? .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Reflections on own behaviour in connection with news and current affairs content ..</b>	<b>76</b>
"Important" versus "moronic" .....	76
Tunnels and islands. Transition from general knowledge to special interests.....	76
<b>The media and their role .....</b>	<b>77</b>
Between empty spaces and quality. An industry that prostitutes itself and teaches us	78
Everything we learn is subject to interpretation.....	79
Media coverage lacks a sense of proportion .....	79
The media as "a spreader of fear" .....	81
Summary .....	81
<b>Reflections on social media specifically.....</b>	<b>82</b>
Debate culture on social media. Hate, misunderstandings, hostile comments .....	82
You never know if you are being watched.....	82
A sense of emptiness and distraction.....	82
Social media make the world smaller.....	82
Summary .....	83
<b>Media and social competency .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Four basic attitudes to news and current affairs content.....</b>	<b>84</b>
Active .....	85
Overwhelmed.....	85
Diverted .....	86

Addicted.....	86
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR FINDINGS IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>APPENDIX: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Phase 1. Segmentation.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Phase 2. Interviews .....</b>	<b>94</b>
Recruitment .....	94
The phenomenological life-world interview .....	95
<b>Phase 3. Qualitative research. Transcription and coding.....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Phase 4. Quantitative research.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Differences between populations in interviews and questionnaire survey .....</b>	<b>96</b>

# GUIDANCE FOR THE READER

The purpose of this project is to study different segments of the Danish population and their perception of news and current affairs and its significance in a social context. In the following, there are short descriptions of the key conclusions and five concise sections that summarise the five chapters describing the results. Based on our conclusions, we also identify five types of users of news and current affairs.

As for the report itself, the first two chapters are about media and networks. They establish the context and provide an overview of the Danes' everyday coexistence with the media and news and identify the networks they belong to. The next three chapters examine (i) the public sphere, (ii) effects, responses and trust and (iii) how we reflect on and consciously deal with news and current affairs. In the early chapters, the results are descriptive. The final chapters are dedicated more to their connotations, effects and repercussions. A discourse on the design of the research and the methods used is enclosed in the appendices. Each chapter can be read on its own or in conjunction with the remaining chapters. Similarly, we imagine that a busy reader could settle for reading only the following brief summary.

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# SUMMARY OF THE REPORT'S MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS

This report is based on a two-part survey. The first (and most important) part is an interview survey comprising in-depth interviews with 101 Danes, distributed in 11 segments, subdivided by geographical location, education/income and whether or not they have children living at home. Subsequently, in cooperation with Kantar Gallup, we conducted a questionnaire survey among 2000 representatively selected Danes. Together, the two surveys form the basis for this report's results and conclusions.

## Daily life with media, news and current affairs

- The media publishes news about politics, entertainment, and personal events and relationships, all of which flow together in the daily news feed. Many find it difficult to differentiate between the different types of news (and it may not be necessary to do so).
- With regard to content, the questionnaire survey shows that Danish politics (56 %) and weather forecasts and traffic information (55 %) account for much daily access to news and current affairs. Entertainment, e.g. TV series (58 %), gossip and sport are also part of the daily flow.
- The youngest segments are the most interested in international politics, while the oldest segments are the most interested in local politics and conditions. This reflects their respective comprehension of news where the youngest segments have more global focus while older people consider news "from nearby", i.e. local news, most important.
- The mobile telephone is the device most often used to access news and current affairs on a daily basis, not least during short breaks or intervals during the day.
- At home, TV remains an important source of daily news and current affairs.
- Facebook is the predominant digital platform. Many people use Facebook to filter the news feed.

In the conventional mass media, news went from disseminating information about politics, finance and socially relevant events also to include information about the private lives of public figures. Subsequently, social media have added information about our family's, friends' and acquaintances' private lives. Media-produced news especially has changed since private news went digital. Before the millennium, private information and news were primarily exchanged in physical networks and socially relevant news in the conventional mass media. Nowadays, both private and public news are exchanged via the media and in particular via social media. This means that private news has melted into the flow of public and societal news in the media. Danes in increasing numbers access news and entertainment – on many different platforms, »on demand« and in patterns of consumption that reflect the networks, to which the individual belongs. Even though public service channels (DR and TV 2's main channels) do sometimes attract far more than one million viewers to important TV broadcasts (e.g. sports matches, dramas and the International Song Contest), the days when a large share of the population sat and watched the same programme and at the same time, are over.

With regard to content, the questionnaire survey shows that Danish politics (56 %) and weather forecasts and traffic information (55 %) account for much daily access to news and current affairs. The survey also shows that entertainment, i.e. TV series (58 %), gossip and sport, is included in the daily news feed and that the distinction between »news« and »entertainment« is increasingly blurred. These are in fact terms that the private citizen tends to use gradually less often to describe their media habits. Similarly, respondents regard keeping track of family members' (47 %) and friends' (37 %) activities as a natural part of their daily news flow. They regard this information as news or, at least, as something »important to keep up with«. These trends are found in all segments. Another tendency is that the older we are, the more likely we are to keep track of socio-political issues. Conversely, entertainment takes up most of the youngest segments' time and least of the oldest segments' time. Danes express a significant interest in international politics and events in other countries. This trend is strongest among the youngest segments, whereas seniors are more interested in local matters. Moreover, where international news is concerned, Danes currently focus on President Trump and the climate debate.

The interview survey shows that the interviewees use their mobile phone on the fly or when they have a moment during the day to check »what is going on«. The sources of the flow of news into the phone include social media. Facebook is the predominant platform used in Denmark. Many Danes use it as a filter, a mechanism that sorts and helps the user to relate to news. They use Facebook as a source that updates them about their immediate environment and society in general. This means that the flow of news and outlook is determined by the user's personal relationships and network.

Danes use the media in all sorts of places, ranging from the most private (in bed) to the most public (at work, on the bus or train). The media user's choice of place for media consumption is important as it reflects whether the user's media consumption is focused or merely for distraction. The results also show that the place has no bearing on the choice of media used by the individual or on how the user uses the media. There is, however, a pattern. Media use is *either* "wallpaper", i.e. the user browses websites and social media on a phone *or* focused, active media use, where the user forms an opinion of media content. The latter type of use is something the user »sits down« to do, which is generally thought to be arduous and logistically cumbersome.

## Networks and their significance

- For the vast majority of people, their family is the most important network, closely followed by friends.
- There is still a clearly discernible distinction between »strong« and »weak« ties with regard to the weight of importance attached to interaction and the type of interaction that takes place.
- Networking takes place largely via the media. Nuclear families (residing at the same address) communicate online with each other (63 %). At least 85 % communicate with friends, acquaintances and colleagues online.
- Nevertheless, it is slightly surprising to note that online networks do not play as important an independent role as one might expect, Online media are seldom the primary channel of communication in a network. They are rather used to maintain and strengthen existing (physical) networks.
- Respondents do not see digital channels of communication as separate from their physical relationships. They still see them as a supplement rather than a de facto replacement for physical relationships.

The nuclear and extended family still constitutes the most

important network for most. People share daily comings and goings with their family – and, of course, everyday experiences and impressions. In these fora, we often bring up stories we have heard, watched and experienced on the media. It is also here that substantial opinion-forming takes place. Friends are important to most people, not least city-dwellers and households without children, who have more time to cultivate relationships outside the family group. Here too, the news feed is conscientiously debated. The workplace and school are also important fora. However, news and/or political and social matters are discussed less frequently in these networks. If they do discuss these matters, the debate is a random occurrence between colleagues or fellow students. The closest interaction takes place between family members (strong ties), whereas interaction with people with whom they have »weaker ties«, such as colleagues, neighbours and acquaintances in clubs/associations, etc., are usually more superficial. Most users are acutely conscious of the distinction.

Online media, especially social media, are regarded as a supplement to physical networks. Online networks are used to maintain and strengthen physical, everyday relationships or to stay in contact with family and friends who live elsewhere. They function as a type of »sixth sense« that keeps users informed about people they do not see every day. Different platforms are used for different networks. While Danes use LinkedIn in work-related networks and reserve Messenger for family and friends, Facebook is a »meta-network«, in which we connect with most of the people we know, i.e. strong and weak ties. This gives rise to a certain degree of ambivalence with regard to the subjects we communicate and how. Many of us are acutely aware of the dilemma and of the differences between the various platform types, which indicates that the Danish population is generally quite »media-platform-literate«.

## The public sphere - outlook and relationships

- There is no longer any good reason to speak of »gatekeepers« and »opinion leaders« as beacons in the public sphere. There are better terms to describe what is currently happening: »outlook« and »relationships«.
- The youngest segments' approach to news is more »network-orientated« and individualised, whereas the older segments have a more »institutional« approach.
- Most opinion-forming still takes place face-to-face, via relationships, home at the dinner table, at work or among friends. Social media play a surprisingly small role.



- Many people are reluctant to discuss political and potentially controversial topics online – and partly also reluctant to discuss such matters face to face.

The personal interviews showed that it was difficult to maintain the distinction between gatekeepers and opinion leaders. On the contrary, it makes more sense to distinguish between outlook and relationships. This distinction is crucial to the results of this research. With regard to *outlook*, the two public service stations, DR and TV 2, continue to play a very important role in Danes' daily media use. The leading newspapers also play a significant role, although most people read newspapers online via websites and social media rather than in a physical newspaper. Moreover, the results generally indicate that the Danes' outlook is extremely fragmented, especially among the young. The international media play a role for the well-educated and urban population, whereas the rural population tends rather to maintain a local perspective.

While older people have an »institutional« approach to news and current affairs, i.e. their outlook is primarily formed on the basis of specific, selected media, it is remarkable that the youngest segments have a much more »personal« or »network-orientated« approach to news: they follow certain people and their view of the world or their outlook is formed in a dialogue with parents or certain friends, i.e. people who they trust. The user's outlook depends on personal circumstances and the amount of time at his/her disposal. In particular, families with children find it difficult to keep up to date in a hectic life that some describe as »survival«. The young and the old have more time at their disposal but many of them apply various strategies to manage their outlook. Some immerse themselves in their reading, others skim content and take note only of what is important to them and others still have given up on the endeavour.

Relationships affect one's outlook. This applies not least to the younger segments who largely receive their news via social media. However, personal relationships beyond the sphere of social media help to define users' outlook. Their circle of colleagues, friends and families determine from which media the young form an outlook and therefore also which news they access. Another important conclusion is that the vast majority of debates about the news and current affairs still take place face to face, especially within the family. This applies, not least, to households with children. Friends and colleagues also play a significant role in opinion-forming, in which context news content is coincidentally or deliberately brought to the table. Conversely – and contrary to the research team's expectations – social media have no great impact with regard to opinion-forming, even though these platforms are widely used to form an outlook, have fun and be diverted. There is in fact widespread reluctance to use social media as fora for political debate. In the social context,

this is an interesting observation, especially regarding the role of social media in e.g. election campaigns.

## Reactions, effects and trust

- News has emotional impact and affects our actions, not least our lifestyle and environmental footprint.
- Three out of every four have benefited from or acted on items of news in the past year. Less than one in four (23 %) reports that they are unaffected by the news.
- The news provokes changes in personal patterns of behaviour while political participation is a rarer response.
- News that has emotional appeal leads most often to specific action.
- The questionnaire survey shows that the respondents essentially have strong trust in other people, and most trust the news and the media. Conversely, most respondents have little faith in social media and politicians.
- The interview-based survey indicated that there is a clear hierarchy regarding trust in the media. DR is the most trusted media, closely followed by newspapers and TV 2. Respondents trust the tabloids and weekly magazines much less and clearly least, respectively.
- We can describe the Danes' view of the media and news as "moderately trusting". However, Danes' have well-developed critical faculties.

It came as no surprise that news has most impact when it speaks to the emotions. The news item »made an impression«, seemed »fantastic« (positive), »exciting«, »completely out of control« or »fascinated me« or »bugged me«. Another shade of meaning was revealed when the interviewees sought to explain precisely when they choose to engage themselves in an issue, in the sense of »writing to the press« (usually letters to the editor). While one person is persuaded to hit the keys when something »lacks perspective«, another writes when he/she senses that he/she is the type of person who *can* bring a certain issue to the table, to defend neighbours (in this case, refugees and immigrants): »Because I can't just stand and watch. Or couldn't just stand and watch. And because they [the newspaper] brought it up«.

The questionnaire survey indicated that four out of ten find that they sometimes feel angry or helpless but there are also many positive responses. Thirty-one percent affirm that stories in the news have persuaded them to behave differently. There are many such examples in the interviews, typically lifestyle changes related to e.g. health, diet and environmental footprint. A smaller share of respondents states that news stories have provoked them to seek to learn more. Young people in particular find that they are affected by the things they encounter in the media.

The questionnaire survey confirms what we already know from previous surveys: In Denmark, there is a fairly high level of trust. This is probably partly due to the fact that Danes have very strong trust in the TV, radio and newspapers. Conversely, asked directly about social media and politicians, they express distrust.

As for the repercussions for trust, the interviews provide a nuanced picture of the interviewees' relationship with other people, politicians and the media. Certain interesting nuances arise from the personal interviews. The interviewees do not seem to mistrust politicians in general but are sceptical about certain politicians – based on that politician's opinions or personal behaviour. It also becomes clear that interviewees' trust in the media is largely due to DR, although other media, such as Ekstra Bladet and BT, receive some credit because – despite their tabloid methods – they are seen to cover stories that are both credible and important. The interviewees reject only media like Den Korte Avis, most often because they also disagree with their political orientation.

## The citizens, the media and society

- Eight out of ten Danes read about politics and society. That figure is higher than the number that keeps abreast of entertainment and slightly lower than those who like to update themselves about family and friends.
- Most Danes believe it is important to keep up with political and societal matters, although for different reasons: interest, entertainment, to be informed and civic duty.
- Following the news feed is a varied experience, ranging from »important« to »moronic«. People often associate following important matters with effort and self-discipline.
- They often see the debate culture on social media as abhorrent.

- Danes generally regard themselves as critical about the media and they believe that they are capable of distinguishing »fake« from »real« news. The better educated the person, the more this is so.
- We can establish four stances, from which Danes approach news and current affairs: active, diverted, addicted and overwhelmed.

The vast majority believes it is important to track news via the media. Their motivations vary.

The *external* motivations include **social and civic duty**, i.e. keeping track of friends and acquaintances and a desire to pass knowledge on to their children. Parents believe that they are obliged to keep track of the news for the sake of their children's future. If they do not keep track, »something might suddenly happen and I would know nothing about it«. Several interviewees also believe that it is important to talk to their children about things in order to »equip them« for social citizenship. Some reflect that they are not doing this as well as they should.

Some interviewees follow the news in order to **keep up** with friends and acquaintances. They need »things to talk about«. Several are afraid that they could fall short. They say it would be »embarrassing«, if someone discovered that they did not keep track of the news. Their desire to keep track of something is controlled by an external force, expressed as »social desirability« (wanting to be like everyone else) or a sense of democratic obligation.

The *internal* (more personal) motivations include **usefulness**; the news is of use or it is in the individual's own best interest to keep track of the news. This motivation is most frequent in connection with work or professional life. Other interviewees mention training and a healthy lifestyle, whereas, finally, there is a small atypical group of middle-aged and older men who are very interested in shares and investment and who keep track of news for that reason.

Another internal motivation is **entertainment value**. Trump is the biggest magnet, although Inger Støjberg's so-called »cake updates« and politicians' reciprocal badgering are also mentioned. This category includes horror or indignation, e.g. about exorbitant golden handshakes or people that have misappropriated public funds.

Even though the majority believes that it is important to keep up to date, this does not mean that they actually do so. In a hectic world, we have so much to see and do. Time is often a limited resource and when we do have time, there is no guarantee that we spend it doing things we consider important. Our results indicate that media usage is a continuum that extends from the things we regard as »important«

to those we see as »moronic« and that, while »the moronic« seeps seamlessly into our everyday lives, »the important« is often associated with a degree of effort and self-discipline. We scroll aimlessly through our Facebook feed on our phone while sitting on the toilet, or we sprawl passively in front of the TV every evening as part of our daily routine.

Active and focused media usage, in which the user reflects on and forms an opinion about content, provides a sense of enrichment and belonging to the world. However, such usage is constantly dogged by the temptation to surrender to a steady stream of emptiness. The result may be »islands« and »tunnels« of knowledge within arbitrary special interest fields. Characteristic of social media as debate fora is a »bloody« and »hostile« tone of voice that scares many people away. Overall, the results show that, although many people are aware of what they wish to achieve with their media usage, this is often difficult to realise in practice.

## The importance of our findings in a social context

Our survey indicates that the young have a different perception of news from that of the older generations. Entertainment and lifestyle content rank at the same level as news about climate change or foreign policy and on media platforms these different types of news flow together, making it more difficult to distinguish between them. News is only one among many amusements and obligations, and has therefore lost the special status our grandparents' generation accorded to it when they sat down to watch news bulletins on DR every evening at 19:30. News usage – its quality, quantity and situation – is in flux. Based on their daily lives, Danes' usage of and responses to news are less innovative, more static and more traditional. The same applies to the degree of trust they have in the news and their sense of mastery over it.

This raises the question: To what extent do the media equip the Danes to be competent members of society? The answer depends on the interviewee. Education appears to be a decisive factor for the interviewee's sense of competency and their responses. As education is a factor that precedes media usage, it is not reasonable to conclude that the media has autonomous effect. Media coverage tends rather to enhance pre-existing differences in the interviewees' attitudes to and engagement in society. However, within the parameters of these differences, the media may have some impact. The results show that content about health and climate issues mobilises some of the people who we would normally describe as passive.

While the traditional media faces strong and increasing competition, news coverage of the type that, in the past,

would reasonably have been described as unifying the public sphere has become fragmented. We conclude that the Danes' responses can be subdivided into two categories: The first category comprises the media-competent and trusting people who believe that they maintain an overview or at least have deliberate strategies for navigating in the stream of news and current affairs. The other category comprises those people who find the news feed overwhelming to the extent that they attempt to protect themselves from it by building barricades of special interests, into which they immerse themselves and remain immersed while everything that has nothing to do with golf, shares or YouTube tutorials whooshes past unnoticed. For some people, daily news coverage is something they »can't be bothered with« or do not have time for.

These strategies with regard to news and current affairs are not clearly distinguishable from demographic factors, although education does explain some of the differences. This means that, more than ever before, it is our individual circumstances that determine how we comprehend news and current affairs content. However, we also find that the media and their brands continue to play a role in Danes' consciousness. Even though we all access many platforms, we are often conscious of their origin, e.g. DR, TV 2, Jyllands-Posten, Radio24syv, etc.

While the medium itself continues to play a role, we find it difficult to remember if we originally read something on Facebook, on the medium's own website, in the newspaper or on TV. The platforms blend together while the medium's identity remains intact. News in the conventional meaning of the term is expanded to include »the private or intimate sphere« and this means that we no longer make clear distinctions between journalistic content and friends' holiday snaps. There is rather a maelstrom of media content that contains all kinds of different information – a hotchpotch of information targeted at the consumer, and private, political, and publicistic information. The media slither into empty spaces during the day – driving to work, sitting on the toilet with your phone, watching TV in the evening – but are often associated with »stress« and »empty calories«, whereas the active, meaningful approach to the media is less common and regarded as something that tends to require insurmountable effort.

Social media are in a class of their own. Passivity is the most common pattern of usage on social media. Many people prefer to avoid discussions and many find that the discussions they come across have an aggressive turn of phrase and uncivilised behaviour. People think that active participation in debates »doesn't really make any difference«. Nevertheless, many switch on social media as soon as they wake up, even before they get out of bed. For young people in particular, their personal network is decisive for the information they

receive, e.g. via Facebook and Twitter.

Finally, it is surprising to note that our qualitative and quantitative surveys do not paint the same overall picture. The objective of the qualitative research was to form the basis of the quantitative research, which was intended to determine the scope of nuances unearthed in the qualitative research. We later discovered that the quantitative research does not capture these nuances. A qualitative interview allows us to follow up on ambiguities, which are impossible to track in a survey, in which the responses must fit into specific categories. Many respondents respond differently when they are asked generally in a questionnaire compared to when they are asked specifically in a face-to-face interview about how they use or comprehend news in everyday life. Whether this is due to a superego issue («social desirability») will be discussed briefly in Chapter 5.

The overview below summarises some of the report's most important conclusions in a social context. >>See Table A<<

## Five ideal categories of attitudes to news and current affairs

Based on the surveys and conclusions, we have defined and listed five ideal categories of attitudes to news and current affairs. At the outset, we selected segments, after which we conducted interviews, and finally analysed the results. Some of these were suitable for identifying divergences. Others showed little variation. While we are aware that these categories are simplifications, in general and based on the report, we believe that the following five ideal categories encompass much of the range of attitudes to news and current affairs in 2019. >>See Table B<<

Table A

Conclusion	Social repercussions
Technological developments have put conventional media under pressure financially.	This is ultimately a threat to democracy because the conventional media constitute the public sphere, i.e. the adhesive that keeps society together.
Today, citizens have strongly individual media universes and therefore potentially also inhabit individual public spheres.	We no longer all watch the same content at the same time and with the increasing number of channels and platforms, there are so many options that the population increasingly lives in strongly individual media universes and therefore also potentially individual public spheres.
Danes do not wish to fall short in social contexts.	This largely counteracts the negative repercussions of echo chambers and filter bubbles.
Danes generally have well developed «critical faculties».	Danes do not have overwhelming trust in the media and most definitely not in social media, which, with regard to concerns about fake news and misinformation, is an advantage.
There is a tendency for relationships to define outlook.	This means that our personal networks are decisive for the public spheres we belong to and the information we access.
The public service media continue to play an important role.	This means that e.g. DR and TV 2 are in a better position than rumours of their demise might suggest.
In particular, the young have a significantly different usage in terms of technologies and content than the older generation.	The media habits currently displayed by the young may have long-term repercussions for journalism and media companies' business models.
Young people are reluctant to pay for news.	In the long term, this constitutes a threat to the media companies' business models and therefore the traditional public dialogue.

Table B

**Young people** Receive news via social media, i.e from people they know and follow. Their media use is personalised and individual. The young use many media but seldom pay to use them. The young have no news content hierarchy. In principle, entertainment is just as important to them as international politics. Interested especially in climate and Trump

**Older People** Most interested in local matters. Are unlikely to allow themselves to be affected by something they learned through the media. News usage is ritualised, e.g. TV news at a certain time or a newspaper subscription that they maintain despite high cost. Older people receive news from specific media. Their outlook is formed via diverse news categories and prefer classic news.

**City-dwellers** See themselves as particularly media- and socially competent. Think about social media algorithms and journalistic methods. Listen to P1 every morning. Affected by news stories, e.g. change their minds or change habits. Interested in international politics, not in local matters. Regular users of podcasts and streaming services.

**Rural population** They form their outlook, including their political orientation, e.g. in local newspapers and Facebook groups. Prefer Ulla Terkelsen / Rasmus Tantholt to Adam Holm / Martin Krasnik. Ask close family for advice when they need it, also discuss things with neighbours. Enjoy light entertainment, e.g. Søren Ryge or Bonderøven.

**Families with children** Daily life often seems like “just surviving”, taking one day at a time. Media usage is large but it is difficult to find a quiet moment to focus. For parents, children are sometimes the reason they keep track and sometimes the reason they “can’t be bothered”. Children and parents discuss media stories – and ask for advice (both ways).

# PROJECT BACKGROUND AND CONCEPT

This report and the research project that preceded it were prepared and conducted for the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces in connection with its »Report on media development in Denmark«. The theme of this report is »How various segments of the Danish population perceive and comprehend news and current affairs, and the implications of their views in a social context.«. Contrary to several previous reports, this report investigates how Danes regard news and current affairs content rather than how they actually use it. In essence, the report examines *the significance* of news and current affairs in the everyday lives of the population and *their perception* of news and current affairs, and *the impact* hereof.

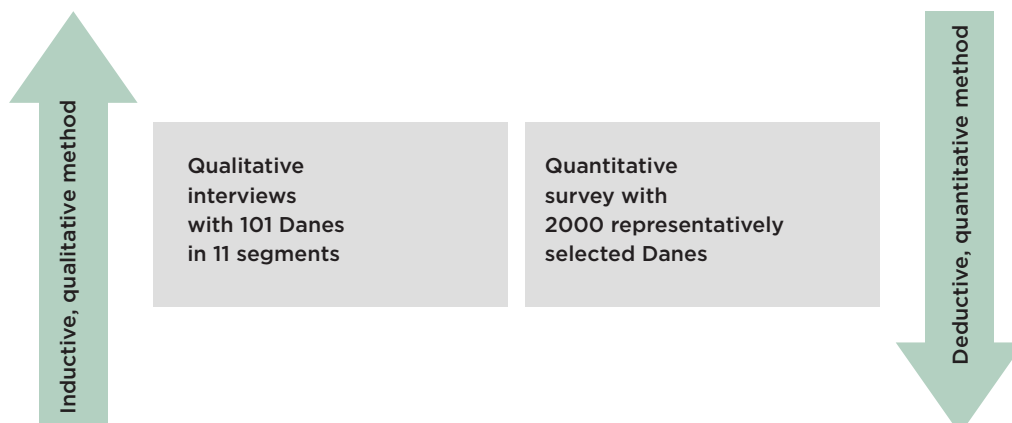
The research is based on two parts: a qualitative interview survey among 101 Danes in 11 segments and a subsequent questionnaire survey among about 2000 Danes. We chose a qualitative, exploratory point of departure in order to learn how Danes comprehend news and current affairs content rather than to track how and how often they use it. As we aimed to investigate all corners of the Danish population, we chose to select and interview a variety of segments, selected with a view to ensuring as much variation as possible. The subsequent questionnaire survey enabled us to generalise our qualitative conclusions. Most of the report focuses on the results of the interview-based survey as this was the foundation of our research. As this report focuses on the results of the research, the research design and method are described in the appendix. >>see [Figure 1](#)<<

## News and the news universe

News has always been linked to our experience and understanding of the world around us. The human being has always been curious to know and understand events in his surroundings. With the rise of the mass media in the 1800s, news communication was standardised and industrialised. Information from a sphere beyond our own personal sphere of experience became essential, and news from near and far came to play an increasingly important role in daily life, and for our perception of the world, our sense of belonging and our social orientation. In his famous work, »The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society« (1989), Habermas stated that the mass media contributes to the establishment of the public sphere and therefore also democracy. In the traditional mass media universe, the public sphere was largely dependent on news produced by the mass media. In other words: the public sphere encroached on our homes while, through interaction with the mass media, we thronged into the public sphere.

However, the news universe is radically changing. New technologies give us broader opportunities to produce, distribute and access news. Digital media, including blogs, Facebook and Twitter, blur pre-existing borders between news production and consumption. It is now easy to publish your own news, and modify and comment on established media stories. From the producer's perspective, this does not necessarily mean that the traditional media will die, rather that they are forced not only to move their news to digital (and mobile) platforms, but also to create an alternative financial model - utilising subscriptions, paywalls or advertis-

Figure 1. An overview of the two research methods used





ing. Meanwhile, recent figures, including those in the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces' Report on media development in Denmark 2019, indicate that international players, such as Google and Facebook, continue to swallow a larger share of the Danish advertising market. The traditional Danish media are under financial and technological pressure in a market in which they no longer have complete freedom of movement or self-determination. Ultimately, seen from the democratic perspective, there is a risk that these developments may bring pressure to bear on critical journalism – and consequently on the public sphere and democracy.

From the citizen and consumer's perspective, we have seen comprehensive changes in access to news. News usage is increasingly digital and the printed media are losing ground. Moreover, much media usage no longer takes place in the home but at work, while travelling and elsewhere on the fly – a development made possible by an explosion of mobile devices, e.g. smartphones and tablets. We already know a great deal about the Danes' media usage from various sources, including recent years' research by a group at Roskilde University (see e.g. Schrøder et al, 2017).. The sources indicate that differences in news usage and interests are predominantly linked to age and education. The younger the interviewees, the more varied (and new) media they use to access news. Interest in the »classical« news is greatest among older and well educated people. However, regardless of age, TV remains the most important news media, although its predominance is weakening in the face of internet-based and social media. We also know how the Danes' news usage compares in an international context, e.g. via the annual Reuters Institute Digital News Report that shows that Denmark is among the countries in which the new digital media have the lion's share of news usage.

However, it is interesting to note that there are appreciable differences between different segments of the population regarding how they access news, their comprehension of news and how important they believe it is to keep track of it. In 2016, Mindshare and the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces conducted a comprehensive questionnaire survey among 7514 representatively selected Danes. The report shows that the young and old comprehend news very differently. As in the Roskilde University research, the young surf many platforms and therefore use news daily in the situations they find themselves in. Older people prefer the classical media, which they also regard as the most trustworthy news media. Furthermore, there are differences regarding the extent to which the Danes access or feel obliged to keep track of the news.

As mentioned above, demographic factors, such as education and especially age, are significant. However, a large number of other factors, e.g. daily routines, interests and a more abstract sense of social obligation, help to define the segments. In recent years, research has focused on the young as a segment that differs widely from the rest of the population. Other reports, e.g. DR Medieforskning (2018, 2019), show that, while young people access news only slightly less often than the average for the entire population, their usage is steered by context and relationships. The individual media user reads news on the platforms he/she is already using, e.g. social media and much of the news content he/she accesses depends on an individual social media feed and therefore his or her own network and relationships.

We know from conventional research that news usage and social interest and engagement have strong links. Regular or very frequent news usage is linked to democratic participation, although it can be difficult to establish which causes which. In Denmark, this was most recently examined and discussed in a 2017 report from the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces on local and regional media content, its role and importance in local communities.

The role played by a number of new media in today's media universe, not least social media, in the news circuit and in the lives of Danish citizens generally is growing. The public sphere is no longer restricted to the traditional mass media. It has taken new forms and is expressed via a multitude of media types and formats. The impact of a simultaneous convergence of the physical and digital is that actions and interactions in the digital universe are just as much part of social reality as physical interactions. The public sphere has become more fragmented than in the past, due to not only the general media universe, but also the fact that social media facilitate a situation in which each of us increasingly receives our news and information via online social networks. News and information usage is therefore no longer dependent on media, journalists and the personal choice of the consumer, but also on the physical and virtual networks, to which the individual already belongs. Personal networks have certainly always been of significance (the workers read *Aktuelt*, the CEO *Børsen*). What is new here are the digital networks that duplicate and supplement physical networks. It is therefore not only the variegated media picture, but also broadly the increasing influence of the social networks that help to fragment the public sphere.

All of these factors affect citizens' social political and democratic orientation and, ultimately, social cohesion. As the Danes increasingly inhabit closed or partially closed information and news "bubbles", the result may ultimately be an impairment of our common perception of and support for the social project. Research into any and all of these aspects could help us better to understand the current state of the public sphere and its impending future.

## The project's basic issue and theories

This project is intended to build on previous surveys (mentioned above). We aim to examine in more detail the individual's specific habits regarding access to news and current affairs content, and to investigate precisely what they understand as »news« and »keeping track«. In addition, we focus on how news and current affairs content affects the individual by means of tracing his/her responses, actions and sense of his/her own role in society and vis-à-vis the media. Using a micro-informative approach, we seek to examine in detail some of the trends that previous surveys have merely outlined. Our point of departure is also phenomenological and qualitative, and largely based on personal interviews with interviewees representing various segments of the population.

Firstly, we examine different segments' news usage and their perception of news and current affairs. Secondly, we examine to which public spheres or parts of public spheres the various segments belong. Thirdly, we examine to what extent Danes feel they are equipped to act in and/or contribute to this/these public sphere(s). Finally, we examine the correlations between these three aspects of the news universe. More specifically, we pose a number of research questions:

- Which types of media do different segments use, where do they use them and which types of content are of interest to them?
- To which social networks (physical and online) do the different segments belong?
- To which public spheres do the different segments belong? How is the individual's outlook formed and with whom does he/she communicate?

- How do the various segments see their own role in and affiliation with society, their trust in others, and their opportunities to affect political decisions and social development?
- In continuation hereof, how do media usage, news usage and public spheres cohere? Is there a link between the perception of news and a sense of competence/mastery?

In the following, we discuss the theoretical and empirical backgrounds for these specific research questions.

### Daily life with news and current affairs content

The first main area of focus in this survey is attitudes to and usage of news and current affairs content. The individual's outlook is decisive for not only his/her perception of the world, but also his/her sense of belonging – and consequently, at the macro-sociological level, how society coheres and democracy functions. As the various reports mentioned above show, the various segments' news usage in terms of how much and which types, differs broadly. In particular, the young have a significantly different usage in terms of technologies and content than the older generation. Assuming that the youngest segments have the same usage patterns when they reach adulthood, this will have repercussions now and in the long term. Opportunities to access all kinds of news are simultaneously improved and impaired. For example, easier access to information and communication 24/7 and on all platforms may be beneficial to the population but is an onerous burden on journalism and media companies' business models.

The term "media" is becoming increasingly ambiguous because, from the users' perspective, the media are dis-integrating. Many interviewees could not say which media was the source of a given story. They simply recalled that they read it via a link from Facebook or Google. Other interviewees cannot recall whether they read the article on social media or in the more conventional media. In the interviews, one of the introductory questions asked specifically about the citizen's media usage: where and in which situations do you read news and current affairs stories, how and with whom do you discuss news and current affairs? These questions can clarify how the interviewees distinguish (or fail to distinguish) between media, platforms, etc.. In subsequent questions, the interviewer takes the interviewee's response into account and seeks to examine the interviewee's train of thought and distinctions, in order to extract as much specific information as possible.



In this respect, »platform« is a tricky term. It refers to the media, terminals, service providers and major media companies. Gillespie (2010) and Bucher & Helmond (2017) have written seminal articles on platforms and platform affordance. For example, Gillespie's (2010) definition is that *»platforms are: online sites and services that [a] host, organise, and circulate users' shared content or social interactions for them, [b] without having produced or commissioned (the bulk of) that content, and [c] beneath that circulation of information, an infrastructure for processing data for customer service, advertising, and profit«*. This definition diverges from earlier, more technical definitions that focused on platforms as technical infrastructure. For Gillespie, a platform is a key supplier or communicator of information which, in the context of this project, is a meaningful path to the Danes' use of news, current affairs and other types of content and services. Inspired by Gillespie's definition, we transpose the term "platform" into the usage context. We regard platforms as channels of meaning through which the users form their outlook and opinions about news. Our definition of the word "platform" intersects with our definition of the word "media". A medium, e.g. DRTV, may well be represented on several platforms. For today's user, the platform rather than the medium is the decisive factor. We will argue (below) that this does not mean that the media as brands are disappearing. Users are most often aware of which media they access, even though they access it via a platform.

These changes are also linked to the user's perception of news. In the past, "classic" research distinguished between »hard« and »soft« news, where the former was regarded as more serious and attractive than the latter (see e.g. Reinemann et al., 2012). Conventional conceptions of news, e.g. in the distinction between »hard« and »soft« news (Reinemann et al., 2012), customarily focused on specific subject areas, such as politics and society, including e.g. economics and foreign policy as these were considered »proper« news. However, now that TV as a medium has a long history, the distinction is blurred. Serious political topics are often discussed in entertainment programmes and sport, gossip and lifestyles reports are woven into the ordinary news flow in newspapers and TV news broadcasts with the more »serious« conventional news related to politics and social matters.

Using our exploratory perspective, we avoid predetermining any specific perception or definition of either news or current affairs. Instead, we base our work on a phenomenological approach, in which we focus on the Danes' conceptions. These will become apparent during the course of the chapters describing the results. They will also be summarised.

## Networks and their significance

From the literature, we know that social networks play an important role in social life and opportunities. Granovetter (1973) makes the distinction between »strong and weak ties«. We have strong ties to our family and closest friends. In these fora, most of us seek care and security, and discuss topics that are close to home, intimate and emotional. We have weak ties to colleagues, acquaintances and more fleeting relationships. These are useful in connection with professional or formal relationships and can be activated in a variety of relevant circumstances. Strong ties foster security and emotions. Weak ties get us a new job or apartment. Both types of ties are relevant and each creates opportunities of its own. However, networks also play a role in opinion-forming in our society. An older theory, Katz (1957), proposes a »two-step flow of communication«. This is classical theory regarding opinion-forming and opinion leadership. Katz claims that most of us »chew on« and form an opinion about the stream of news via particularly strongly engaged people in whom we trust and to whom we listen, i.e. opinion leaders. The population's approach to news also depends on the networks to which they belong. Young people have a different news repertoire than older people, immigrants set more store by foreign media than ethnic Danes, and education plays a significant role in the individual's choice of media. Innumerable investigations into Danes' news usage (among them, Schrøder et al, 2017) have proven such tendencies. Conversely, however, news content also affects our networks. News in the broadest sense can help us to expand our network, reach and perception of the world. Networks and news usage may therefore affect each other.

We distinguish between offline and online networks and describe how they converge. In which networks do people speak about what, and what does the research reveal about where? Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, have developed from social media associated with educational institutions to become »meta media« (Linaa Jensen & Tække, 2013), i.e. portals to all kinds of information, including news. More of a moot point is the extent to which social media have displaced ordinary physical relationships or if they are rather a supplement or extension to them.

## The public sphere

For many years, the public sphere was a central term in relation to democracy and opinion-forming. A classical definition of the public sphere, e.g. in Habermas, is largely linked to media development. The creation of national and local public spheres coincided with the rise of newspapers as fora for news, debate and political skirmishes. TV subsequently took on much of this role and today, for

example, TV is still the most important medium in election campaigns and with regard to setting the political agenda (Hoff, Linaa Jensen & Klasttrup, 2016). However, a more fragmented media universe implies that the public sphere is also fragmented. We no longer all watch the same content at the same time and with the increasing number of channels and platforms and larger media supply, there are so many options that the population increasingly lives in strongly individual media universes and therefore also potentially individual public spheres. However, total fragmentation is still some way off. Some news items and events do still attract the majority's attention.

Internet-based media supplement the conventional media but, as debate fora, they do not unite us. There are too many separate arenas and too wide a spread of interaction. The internet is more suitable for the creation of sub-groups and engagement in more limited areas that may or may not interact. Benkler (2006) and Boyd (2011) called these »online public sub-spheres«. Terranova (2004: 156) suggested a more fluid term, »hydrospheres«, to describe public sub-spheres in which focus and participants are changing all the time. Political participation online is fluid and fleeting.

More specific opinion-forming concepts date back to Katz (1957) and his classical »two- step flow of communication«. Contrary to early mass media theory, these concepts showed that opinion-forming and thus the individual's personal universe are created in a two-step process in which the media news feed is often interpreted in social networks via so-called opinion leaders, particularly scientifically and socio-economically advantaged figures, who many people listen to, either due to their competences or simply because they dominate.

Firstly, our perception of the public sphere is media-centric: Where do people source knowledge and information? Secondly, it is network-orientated: who communicates with whom? As mentioned above, there are signs that Danes' individual outlook – the feed of knowledge and information they receive – is becoming increasingly relational, i.e. more so than in Katz' era when opinion leaders were the second level in the digestion of mass media news feed. Today, this relationship is reversed in the sense that opinion leaders – figures with whom we have a personal relationship, in which we as individuals trust and to whom we listen – may be decisive for the content initially received. Our uptake and usage of information takes place no longer principally in relation to the broader media universe (as it was in the heyday of the mass media) but more often through personal networks that share stories or draw attention to certain issues. In its

extreme form, this trend is referred to as a »filter bubble« (Pariser, 2011). The social media news feed based on personal preferences and relationships has helped to boost these developments.

Our research shows to which public spheres Danes belong. Specifically, we take the individuals' personal universes as our point of departure. By gaining insight into how the respondents' outlook is formed, and from whom and in which fora they talk about news and current affairs, we investigate familiar and unfamiliar public (sub-) spheres, particularly including an insight into those aspects of opinion-forming that take place face to face and in online debates and communities. In connection with this, we offer a response to the question of whether online networks and public spheres supplement or replace traditional opinion-forming fora and public spheres.

### Reactions, effects and trust

The news universe and the ways in which Danes interact with news are of crucial importance for their view of the world and therefore for how each of them individually relates to society locally, nationally and internationally. In their comprehensive study, »Media Consumption and the Future of Public Connection« (2006), Couldry, Livingstone & Markham (2006) demonstrated that a sense of belonging to and connection with society originates largely from the picture of the world we receive from the media, through which each of us relates, abstractly and concretely, to others and their reality. News is therefore of crucial importance to social cohesion and democracy.

The report investigates how Danes react to news and current affairs content, to whom they speak about this content and whether this has repercussions on personal or political participation. Trust and competence are the specific repercussions investigated. We distinguish between trust in others, trust in society and trust in the media. As for competencies, we apply concepts in Almond & Verba (1965), who wrote of »subjective political competence« or Barnes et al. (1979), who mention this concept in conjunction with »efficacy« that may be internal (feeling that one is knowledgeable or informed) or external (a sense of the individual's ability to make a difference by taking part). Efficacy can be used to describe a condition or process in which individuals are or can become something as a result of an action. These concepts are often measured in surveys, e.g using Likert scales. Notwithstanding, our research method contains mostly qualitative measurements.

## **The citizens, the media and society**

As mentioned above, we assume that usage and perception of news and current affairs has repercussions on the individual and society. Changes in the media universe do not come out of nowhere. They occur in interaction between media users' usage and their utilising the opportunities afforded by media technologies. The media are similarly fundamental to opinion-forming and democracy. The final part of the research seeks to establish an overview of the interaction between news and current affairs, the role of the media and more general social repercussions. To achieve this, we quote the interviewees and refer to their understandings and the questionnaire survey. From here, the report draws on more general reflections for the purpose of giving overarching hypotheses regarding potential social repercussions of the patterns exposed by the research.

# OVERVIEW: RESULTS IN FIVE CHAPTERS

Each of the following five chapters focuses on one of the five sub-elements of the research. First, we describe the context, i.e. daily life with news and current affairs content, and other content and interests and the networks, to which Danes belong. Then, we examine the public sphere, distinguishing between outlook and relationships with regard to news and current affairs content. Chapter 4 investigates the effects of and responses to news and current affairs content and repercussions in the shape of our sense of mastery and trust. The final chapter covers our own reflections on media behaviour and habits, the role of the media and how Danes experience their own media

and social competences. We also present a typology to show how the individual may relate to news and current affairs content. The table (below) provides an overview over the five results chapters and their sub-sections.

CHAPTERS	SECTION
Daily life with media, news and current affairs	Contents
	Media usage, type / platform
	Media usage locations
Networks	Networks
The public sphere – outlook and relationships	Gatekeepers
	Opinion-leaders
Responses and effects	Effect
	Response
	Competences
	Trust
Reflections – private citizens and the media	What is important to keep track of?
	Own media behaviour
	The role of the media
	The role of social media
	Media competences
	Basic attitudes to news and current affairs content