

Doing one's shopping in the 'supermarket of news': News media repertoires in French-speaking Belgium

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Abstract:

This article presents the findings from an empirical study of news media consumption and its relation to democratic life in French-speaking Belgium. Q methodology was used to build up a typology of news media repertoires, and the democratic activities were captured through a survey questionnaire. The 36 informants were recruited in order to reach a diversity in terms of gender, age, location and education. Four news media repertoires emerged out of the statistical analysis: the 'traditionalist news viewers', the 'new generation quality news readers', the 'audiovisual and social media lovers', and the 'digital news omnivores'. The article examines the profiles of these repertoires individually, delineates the collective repertoire of French-speaking Belgium, and briefly reports on the analytical findings from the survey of democratic activities at an aggregate level. The overall pattern mostly reflects continuities in the evolution of the French-speaking Belgian media landscape, although some interesting changes are taking place at the intersection of legacy and new media forms.

Keywords: cross-media, news consumption, news audiences, news repertoires, Q methodology, democratic engagement, French-speaking Belgium

The 'supermarket of news' metaphor in the headline is borrowed from Schröder (2012). It suggests that nowadays news is plethic: it is available across a wide range of formats and platforms, and people combine (a selection of) these in a variety of ways in their everyday lives. The purpose of this article is to shed light on the crossmedia news consumption

patterns of French-speaking Belgians. It presents the main findings from an empirical study that seeks to investigate what are the news media ‘repertoires’ (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012) of French-speaking Belgian users, and whether and how these repertoires relate to democratic activities in diverse societal spheres.

This study is part of a broader European comparative project on cross-media news repertoires as democratic resources (see the articles by Nossek, Adoni & Perusko, and by Schrøder in this Special Section) that was initiated by Hanna Adoni and Hillel Nossek as a spin-off of the EC-funded COST Action IS0906 *Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies* (2010-2014; <http://www.cost-transforming-audiences.eu>). Thus the present study is aimed at providing insights about the news media repertoires of French-speaking Belgians as an input to the cross-cultural comparison carried out by the research network involving 12 participating countries. The study for Dutch-speaking Belgium has been coordinated by Kristin Van Damme (Ghent University) and is the subject of a separate article in this Special Section. Methodologically, the project replicates at a larger scale a research design based on Q methodology that was first developed and implemented by Schrøder and Kobbernagel (2010) in a 2009 study in Denmark.

Societal context and media landscape of French-speaking Belgium

According to the Ministry of Economy, SMEs, Self-employed and Energy, Belgium has a population of about 11.2 million (January 2015). The Belgian system of government is a complex one because legislative and executive power is dispersed across several levels – in addition to the federal level – based on language and territory. The Communities are based on the three official languages: Dutch, French and German. They are responsible for education, culture and media, among other competences. The Regions are based on territory: Flanders in the North (Flemish Region), Wallonia in the South (Walloon Region) and the Brussels Capital Region in the centre. The Regions are responsible for economy, employment, energy, transports, environment, etc. Brussels is a bilingual Region (French and Dutch). 57.5% live in the Flemish Region, 32% in the Walloon Region and 10,5% (mostly French-speaking) in the Brussels Region. Because of this complexity Belgium is known as a ‘surrealistic’ country and is sometimes referred to as an institutional ‘jumble’ (Dujardin, Dumoulin, Beyen & Destatte, 2009).

With respect to religion, Belgium is a neutral State, which means that religion is considered as belonging to the private sphere. The State officially recognizes (and subsidizes) several religions and philosophical movements. Most people in Belgium are Christians (65%, including 58% Catholics), nonbelievers/agnostics (20%), atheists (7%) or Muslims (5%) (Eurobarometer, 2012).

The Belgian mediascape is characterized by (1) a social responsibility of the press (e.g. public broadcasting service/PBS), (2) a historically strong party press, which has shifted to neutrality over the last year, (3) an external press pluralism in print, (4) a strong professionalization and (5) an internal press regulation (Raeymaeckers & De Dobbelaer,

2015). As a result, like most northern or central European countries, Belgium is classified by Hallin and Mancini (2004) as a Democratic Corporatist Model.

Overall the media landscape is divided into two media spheres depending on the two main official languages of the country. While the market is already small because of the size of the country, the language divisions fragment even more the Belgian market, with the media from France being very influential as well in French-speaking Belgium.

In French-speaking Belgium, as regards print newspapers, Rossel is the largest media group with the quality daily newspaper *Le Soir* (70,593 copies; source: CIM April 2014–March 2015) and the regional daily newspapers *Sud Presse* published in different local/regional editions (106,315 copies in total). The second largest group is IPM, which publishes the quality daily newspaper *La Libre Belgique* (41,962 copies) and the tabloid daily newspaper *La Dernière Heure* (60,608 copies). The third group, Tecteo (actually a public company), produces the regional newspaper *L’Avenir*, which is also available in several local editions (91,545 copies in total). Besides, French-speaking Belgium has an economic and financial newspaper, as well as a free daily newspaper (*Metro*), the circulation of which is almost as large as that of *Sud Presse*. Several weekly magazines are published by three main companies, which are active in both the north and south of Belgium: VNU/Sanoma, Roularta and De Persgroep.

Public service broadcasting is historically important in Belgium, but it has been challenged quite early by commercial broadcasting as well as by foreign/international broadcasters (mainly French ones in the French-speaking community). The commercial TV channels of RTL-TVi reach 24.7% of the market and the public service TV channels of RTBF 22% (CIM, 2014). There are some other TV channels, including local ones, but they have small audiences. More significantly, international providers account for a total of 44.8% of the market share, with the French commercial TV TFI reaching 15.1% and the French public service TV channels reaching globally 14.4%.

Regarding the radio landscape, the market shares follow a different pattern. In French-speaking Belgium, the PSB group RTBF is the most prominent with a global market share of 37.1%. The main commercial radio stations are Bel RTL (14.1%), Radio Contact (12.9%) and Radio Nostalgie (11.88%). There are also many other private (independent) radio stations. International radio providers (including from France) are almost absent.

According to the *Baromètre de la société de l’information 2015*, most Belgian households (over 80%) have at least one computer and are connected to the Internet (situation in 2014). The most important motive for getting an Internet connection at home is to access news/information (61% of the households who have access to the Internet at home for the last 12 months). The three most cited online activities are emailing (91% of the individuals who have used the Internet in the last three months), searching information about goods and services (84%) and using online banking services (72%). Communicating through online social networks and reading online news are each cited by 62% of the users.

In French-speaking Belgium, the news websites by *Sud Presse* (regional/local newspapers) are collectively the most successful ones with a total of 602,260 visits on 19

October 2015 (source CIM). The tabloid newspaper website *dhnet.be* reached 345,829 visits on the same day and *lesoir.be*, from the quality newspaper *Le Soir*, 297,795 visits. The other quality newspaper's website, *La Libre Belgique*, has a smaller audience. The broadcasters' news websites are quite successful, with the public broadcaster RTBF ranking first (738,000 visits) and the commercial broadcaster RTL-TVi second (661,545 visits).

According to the Belgian Social Media Monitor – June 2015 by Peeters (2015), almost half of the country has a Facebook profile (5.8 million Belgian members). Then come LinkedIn (2.5 millions), Google + (1 million) and Twitter (1 million).

Method

This study used Q methodology (Davis & Michelle, 2011) in order to figure out how users combine different types of news media in their everyday life. It therefore integrates qualitative interview techniques with a quantitative procedure (factor analysis) based on a card-sorting task. During the interview, the informants were asked to sort 36 cards on a pyramidal grid, each card representing a particular media type belonging to one of the following categories: TV news or current affairs (on a TV set or any other technical device), radio news or current affairs (on a radio set or any other technical device or on the Internet), printed newspapers and news magazines, newspapers and broadcasters' online text multimodal news (apps included), news on social media, and other news media. The informants had to place each card on the grid depending on the extent to which they agreed with the claim that this media type 'plays a big role in daily life', with numerical values ranging from -4 (far left) to +4 (far right) and the middle column having a zero value. A media type can play a big role in daily life for different reasons that the informants were encouraged to elucidate during the interview. Non-existing or unknown news media types were placed in the zero column, where they affect the least the statistical analysis. The resulting card sort represents the informant's 'media universe' (**Figure 1**). The 36 card sorts were then factor-analyzed in order to figure out their similarities and differences, ending up with a typology of news repertoires in French-speaking Belgium.

In addition to participating in the Q interview the informants were asked to fill out a short likert-style questionnaire about their activities in different societal spheres, i.e. participation in news coverage, deliberative activities (e.g. writing a letter to an editor, expressing opinion in social media, voting in media-invited polls), social and cultural activities (e.g. meeting the family/friends, going out to movies), political activities (e.g. attending protests, being a member of a political party), and using media resources for feeding conversations. The survey data allowed examining whether the news media repertoires resulting from the statistical analysis are somehow related to these different sorts of democratic activities.

The reader can refer to this Special Section's Introduction by Nossek, Adoni, Perusko and Schrøder for a more complete description of the methodological design, and to Kobbernagel & Schrøder (2016) for further details on the mechanics of Q analysis.

As regards the French-speaking Belgian study more specifically, two pretesting interviews (with informants having very different news media consumption habits) were

Figure 1: Example of a completed card sort on the grid



carried out during the preparation phase of the instruments. These interviews were mostly aimed at testing the practicability of the interview procedure and the relevancy of the (translated) Q cards for French-speaking Belgian informants. The actual fieldwork took place between November 2014 and April 2015. The informants were recruited according to a quota sampling scheme (see the Introduction by Nossek, Adoni, Perusko & Schröder in this Special Section) representing a diversity in terms of gender, age, location (with the Brussels Region as a whole being considered as the capital city) and education (see **Appendix 1** for a description of the French-speaking Belgian sample). More information about the French-speaking Belgian fieldwork is available in the full 'country' report at <http://hdl.handle.net/2078.3/177996>.

Data analysis and interpretation

The Q sorts of the 36 informants were factor-analysed. The analysis led to several factor solutions, among which the 5-factor solution was considered as superior. Quantitative criteria were important in choosing the typology (i.e. the model has two or more factors; each factor has at least two significantly positive Q sort loaders; the factors explain 50-60% or more of the variance; preferably none of the factors include negative Q sort loaders; few of the Q sorts are cross loading; and as many Q sorts as possible are included in a factor) but

the selection also had an interpretative dimension, as the factors should sound relevant and coherent in light of the French-speaking Belgian media landscape.

The 5-factor solution (58% of the variance explained) resulted in four well-defined factors, although there are a few crossloaders and one of these factors is weaker – but still acceptable – than the others (see **Appendix 2**). The fifth factor was considered as too weak to be incorporated in the analysis, but one of the card sorts constituting the fifth factor (BEFR04) is a crossloader and was thus taken into account in the analysis as part of factor 2. The other card sort (BEFR22) is lost. Two other card sorts were excluded from the analysis: BEFR12 (not included in any factor) and BEFR36 (at the opposite of factor 1).

We have tentatively named the four repertoires coming out of the factor analysis as follows: the ‘traditionalist news viewers’ (R1), the ‘new generation quality news readers’ (R2), the ‘audiovisual and social media lovers’ (R3), and the ‘digital news omnivores’ (R4). A three-step path is followed in order to analyze each repertoire separately:

- 1) We list *the top 10 Q-sort cards (or media types)* of the repertoire, and provide the categories to which they belong in terms of ‘news outlets’ and ‘platforms’ according to the scheme proposed by Kristin Van Damme (see this Special Section).
- 2) We sum up the main characteristics of the *news consumption profile* of the repertoire, considering, in addition to the top 10 media types, additional analytical dimensions such as the rank of national public service TV news, the rank of national commercial TV news, the highest-ranked online news media, the highest-ranked social media, and the lowest-ranked news media types.
- 3) We specify the *sociodemographic profile* of the informants in the repertoire. As highlighted by Schröder (2015a, p.11), the sociodemographic description ‘is not intended to provide the “hard facts” about the “kind of people” who constitute a repertoire; rather they are meant to be “read backwards” so to speak, i.e. to validate the soundness of the repertoire, when the demographic profile appears plausible for the news media diet in question’.

In addition to analysing the news repertoires individually, we also delineate the *collective* repertoire of French-speaking Belgium and briefly report on the analytical findings from the survey at an aggregate level (detailed analyses are available in the full ‘country’ report at <http://hdl.handle.net/2078.3/177996>). The concluding section aims at synthesizing the different analytical dimensions and discussing the overall picture. This paper does not address the qualitative analysis of the interviews.

Repertoire 1: 'Traditionalist news viewers' (9 informants)

News consumption profile (Table 1): One of the most striking characteristics of this repertoire is the crucial role of broadcasting (considered in this research as a 'traditional' platform). Although it should be kept in mind that broadcast news can also be accessed online, it is unlikely the case here: traditional means of accessing broadcast news are indeed

Table 1: Top 10 news media types of traditionalist news viewers

	Q-sort card	News outlet	Platform
1	National TV news bulletin on a commercial channel	Broadcaster	Traditional
2	National TV news bulletin on PSB	Broadcaster	Traditional
3	TV news and/or current affairs from int. providers	Broadcaster	Traditional
4	TV current affairs, serious	Broadcaster	Traditional
5	National daily tabloid newspaper, print	Print	Traditional
6	TV current affairs, light	Broadcaster	Traditional
7	Local weekly/bi-weekly/monthly newspaper, print	Print	Traditional
8	National daily quality newspaper, print	Print	Traditional
9	Local/regional daily newspaper, print	Print	Traditional
10	Radio news as part of a general PS radio channel	Broadcaster	Traditional

privileged. It should also be noted that among broadcast news, TV news – whatever the type of provider: commercial TV, PSB or international provider (in this case mostly French TV channels like TF1, France 2 or France 3) – is privileged over radio news. The rest of the repertoire mixes quality and popular news outlets. Overall popular news outlets are significant, with the most prominent news provider being commercial TV and national tabloid newspapers being ranked 5th, and local/regional news (both local weekly/bi-weekly/monthly newspapers and local/regional daily newspapers) being in the top 10. The digital news outlets are left aside from the top 10 and are thus not that important in the daily life of this group. Among social media, the 'other' category was ranked 23rd, followed by online video sharing (no. 25).

Sociodemographic profile of the 9 informants: R1 is mainly composed of women (7). It is rather old, with a majority of participants being aged 61 years or more (7). Most of the informants in this group live outside of the capital: 4 informants are located in a major city and 3 are provincial. Most of the R1 informants have a vocational or BA education (4) or a primary or secondary education (3); two informants are higher educated.

Repertoire 2: 'New generation quality news readers' (10 informants)

News consumption profile (Table 2): The most salient characteristic of R2 is that reading is the preferred way of accessing news. Even the third most common news media, i.e. international broadcasters, is actually used to read online news on their website. Another salient trait of this repertoire is the prominence of quality news, as is obvious with the high

ranking of national quality print newspapers (no. 1), news magazines or quality weeklies, print (no. 2), news magazines or quality weeklies, online (no. 6) and national quality newspapers, online (no. 8). Radio (current affairs) is preferred over TV, and national PSB is preferred over national commercial providers (which do not appear in the top 10 of this repertoire – they are actually ranked 26th). Both traditional and digital news media are

Table 2: Top 10 news media types of new generation quality news readers

Q-sort card		News outlet	Platform
1	National daily quality newspaper, print	Print	Traditional
2	National news magazine or weekly quality newspaper, print	Print	Traditional
3	Read international broadcaster's online news	Broadcaster	Digital
4	Radio current affairs as part of a general radio channel and/or 24 hour radio news/information channel	Broadcaster	Traditional
5	Read national broadcaster's online news	Broadcaster	Digital
6	National news magazine or weekly quality newspaper, online	Print	Digital
7	National TV news bulletin on a public service channel	Broadcaster	Traditional
8	National quality newspaper, online	Print	Digital
9	TV news and/or current affairs from int. providers	Broadcaster	Traditional
10	Radio news as part of a general public service radio channel	Broadcaster	Traditional

present in this repertoire, which suggests that this group is seeking a certain diversity of platforms. As regards digital news outlets, the websites of traditional (quality) media are privileged over other providers but it is worth noticing that new players are close to the top 10: national, regional or international news sites online, not provided by media, are ranked 11th, and news from born-online news media are ranked 12th. Social media are left aside from the top 10 (Facebook is ranked 18th) but are closer to it than in R1. Another striking observation is that the lowest ranked news media outlets are local/regional newspapers, print (34th position), national tabloid newspaper, online (35th position) and national daily tabloid newspaper, print (36th position).

Sociodemographic profile of the 10 informants: The R2 informants are mostly men (8) and young adults aged 18-35 (6). There is no clear geographical pattern (2 informants are located in the capital, 4 in a major city and 4 in province). It is the higher educated group with 6 informants having a higher education level, 1 informant having a vocational or BA education level, and 3 informants having a primary or secondary school diploma.

Repertoire 3: ‘Audiovisual and social media news lovers’ (11 informants)

News consumption profile (Table 3): In some respects R3 is close to R2: the top 10 of R3 mixes traditional and digital platforms and it has a preference for quality news outlets, as suggested by the higher ranking of national quality online newspapers (only print outlet)

and PSB news media. Yet in several other respects R3 is special. First, among the traditional platforms, audiovisual news outlets (radio and TV, with PSB being preferred over commercial TV) are ranked higher than written news outlets. Second, out of the three digital platforms appearing in the top 5, two are social media (online video sharing and Facebook). This is the only repertoire where social media are ranked in the top 5;

Table 3: Top 10 news media types of audiovisual and social media news lovers

Q-sort card		News outlet	Platform
1	National quality newspaper, online	Print	Digital
2	Radio news as part of a general PSB radio channel	Broadcaster	Traditional
3	News distributed by online video sharing media	Social media	Digital
4	National TV news bulletin on a public service channel	Broadcaster	Traditional
5	News on Facebook	Social Media	Digital
6	TV news and/or current affairs from int. providers	Broadcaster	Traditional
7	National TV news bulletin on a commercial channel	Broadcaster	Traditional
8	Read national broadcaster's online news	Broadcaster	Digital
9	Watched TV current affairs, serious	Broadcaster	Traditional
10	Watched TV current affairs, light	Broadcaster	Traditional

aggregators/personalized news services (no. 12) and news on Twitter (no. 18) are not that far from the top 10. Third, the preference for quality news media is less pronounced than in R2: social media are blurring the lines, and local/regional print newspapers and national tabloid online newspapers, even though they do not appear in the top 10, are not relegated to the very bottom of the list. The two lowest ranked news outlets are national daily quality newspapers, print (no. 35), and national news magazines or weekly quality newspapers, print (no. 36), which is in line with this group's preference for audiovisual and social media news materials – as well as for *free* news outlets, as is also suggested by the fact that free daily newspapers are the highest-ranked print newspapers, which is indeed specific to this repertoire as well.

Sociodemographic profile of the 11 informants: R3 has a majority of women (8) and is less educated than R2 (5 primary or secondary education, 3 vocational or BA education, 3 higher education). The R3 informants are geographically dispersed: 5 are located in the capital, 3 in a major city, and 3 are provincial. In terms of age, a majority of informants are middle-aged (35-60 years) and there are three young adults (18-34 years). There are no older informants in this repertoire.

Repertoire 4: 'Digital news omnivores' (3 informants)

News consumption profile (Table 4): Tabloid newspapers, either print or online, are the preferred news media in R4. Overall, this group is also more inclined toward using digital

platforms than traditional platforms (only two traditional platforms – i.e. print news media – in the top 10). Facebook, Twitter and blogs as news outlets are not important at all for this group (they are all ranked among the last 10 news media) but news on other social media is ranked 14th and news distributed by online video sharing media 15th. Another aspect of R4 is its orientation towards local or regional news, with three (online) local/regional media types

Table 4: Top 10 news media types of digital news omnivores

Q-sort card		News outlet	Platform
1	National tabloid newspaper, online	Print	Digital
2	National daily tabloid newspaper, print	Print	Traditional
3	National news magazine or weekly quality newspaper, online	Print	Digital
4	Read international broadcaster's online news	Broadcaster	Digital
5	News from born-online news media	Various	Digital
6	National news magazine or weekly quality newspaper, print	Print	Traditional
7	Local/regional daily newspaper online	Print	Digital
8	Local weekly/bi-weekly/monthly, online	Print	Digital
9	National quality newspaper, online	Print	Digital
10	Read local/regional broadcaster's online news	Broadcaster	Digital

being included in the top 10. Yet this repertoire is also diverse in several respects: it includes quality and tabloid news, local/regional, national and international news, and legacy media as well as born-online media. Interestingly indeed, R4 is the only group where born-online news media show up in the top 10 (even in the top 5). Overall reading news is more prominent than watching or listening to news – even more than in R2. National TV news on a public service channel is ranked 18th and national TV news on a commercial channel is only ranked 25th. The highest-ranked TV news media is ranked 12th and is actually national 24-hour TV news. This is surprising because in French-speaking Belgium the only TV channel corresponding to this news media type is Canal Z, which is focused on economic and financial news and has a very narrow audience. It might be that the ‘national’ dimension of this news media type has been unnoticed by (some of) the informants in this group, leading to confusion with another news media type, i.e. TV news and/or current affairs from foreign/international providers (including 24-hour TV news channels).

Sociodemographic profile of the 3 informants: All the informants are men. Two are old (61+) and one is young (18-34). The R4 informants live either in a major city (2) or are regionally based (1). All three informants have a vocational or BA education.

The collective news repertoire of French-speaking Belgium

Following the same procedure as Schröder (2015a), this section provides an analysis of the top news media types on an aggregated level, using as data the top 5 news media of the

informants, i.e. the news media placed in the two right-most columns of the grid. In **Table 5** we counted the occurrence of these highest-ranked news media in the top 5 of the informants (the entire collection of the 36 card sorts is taken into account here).

Six news media have 10+ occurrences in French-speaking Belgium and all of them can be considered as ‘traditional’ news media. The first three most prominent are TV news outlets, with PSB being the top news media provider in French-speaking Belgium (23

Table 5: The collective news repertoire of French-speaking Belgium

Categories	News media type	Card	No. of occurrences in the top 5
10 + occurrences	National TV news bulletin on a public service channel	1	23
	TV current affairs, serious	5	16
	National TV news bulletin on a commercial channel	2	15
	TV news/current affairs from international providers	7	14
	Radio news (general public service radio channel)	9	14
	National daily quality newspaper, print	12	11
5-9 occurrences	Radio current affairs (general or 24h radio)	11	9
	National quality newspaper, online	18	8
	News on Facebook	27	8
	International broadcaster's online news	26	7
	TV current affairs, light	4	6
	National news magazine or weekly quality newspaper, print	15	6

occurrences). TV news/current affairs from international providers are ranked 3rd, which is mostly due to the success of French TV in French-speaking Belgium. Then come radio news and national daily quality newspapers, print. Digital news media types are not part of the top 5 on an aggregated level. Although broadcasting can be accessed through digital platforms, the interviews suggest that it is only rarely the case in French-speaking Belgium.

The fact that globally our informants prefer (by far) national TV news bulletins on a public service channel over national TV news bulletins on a commercial channel is worth

noticing. This is a surprising result: for several years (although the difference is decreasing), the evening news bulletin of RTL-TVi, which is the first commercial TV channel, has a higher market share than the evening news bulletin of RTBF, which is the first public service TV channel (respectively 42.2% and 33% in 2015). One explanation can be that even if they are watched by our informants, commercial TV news bulletins might not be perceived as being as important in everyday life as public service TV news bulletins are. It should also be reminded that the 3rd position of national TV news on a commercial channel is mainly due to R1's preference for this kind of news media outlets, which is ranked first in this group and does not appear in the top 10 of the other three repertoires.

Online news shows up among the news media types that reach 5 to 9 occurrences, with national quality online newspapers having 8 occurrences, news on Facebook 8 occurrences as well, and international broadcasters' online news 7 occurrences. Thus if traditional news platforms are still prominent in the French-speaking Belgian repertoire, digital news platforms do play a role as well. Worth noticing here is that the difference between national quality newspapers, print (11 occurrences) and national quality newspapers, online (8 occurrences) is weak. While news media organisations (newspapers and broadcasters) remain influent online, it should be noted that Facebook is positioned the same as national quality newspapers online, which suggests an increasing role of interpersonal networks in people's news practices.

Another important observation that comes out of this analysis is that free newspapers, popular/tabloid newspapers and local/regional newspapers (whether print or online) do not reach at least 5 occurrences as top 5 news media. This is again surprising in light of the high audience scores usually achieved by these media (cf. societal context). Here again it might be that free newspapers, tabloid newspapers and local/regional newspapers, although used quite a lot by our informants, are not perceived as being that important in their daily life compared to other news media.

Overall, the global pattern observed in French-speaking Belgium reflects (1) a long tradition that values public service media and national quality newspapers, (2) a significant appeal of foreign TV news providers (mainly from France), and (3) a rising new online audience interested in diverse (quality) news content, mostly from legacy media – although these are being challenged by social media and born-online news media.

Survey analysis of the French-speaking Belgians' repertoires: democratic engagement and participation

The short survey questionnaire that followed the Q interview aimed to get a grasp of the informants' democratic activities in different societal spheres. The analysis hereunder is methodologically inspired by Schröder (2015b) and focuses on the aggregate level. For each set of Likert-style questions, an aggregate score is calculated for each repertoire (**Table 6**). For Q1 (questions on one's participation in news coverage), 'Yes' was coded as '1' and 'No' as '0', therefore if the score goes close to 0, it means that the group does not really

participate in news coverage. For Q2 (deliberative activities), Q3 (social and cultural activities) and Q4 (political activities), a score close to 1 means that the activities are ‘not at all important’ while a score close to 5 means that the activities are ‘very important’. In order to ease the comparison between the repertoires, a letter is placed next to the score, suggesting where the score is *in comparison to the others*. Thus, the highest score is signaled by ‘H’ and the lowest score by ‘L’. The results’ relevance does not lie in the exact numbers but in the broader indications they give as to certain orientations toward a range of democratic activities in a given repertoire.

Table 6: Repertoires’ aggregate scores to the Q1-Q4 survey questions

	Q1	RANK OF FIRST SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE REPERTOIRE	Q2	Q3	Q4
	PARTICIPATION IN NEWS COVERAGE		DELIBERATIVE ACTIVITIES	CULTURAL/SOCIAL ACTIVITIES	POLITICAL ACTIVITIES
REPERTOIRE 1	0,28	23 RD (OTHER)	1,62	3,54 H	2,25 H
REPERTOIRE 2	0,33	18 TH (FACEBOOK)	1,89 H	3,34	2,03
REPERTOIRE 3	0,37 H	3 RD (VIDEO SHARING)	1,56	3,12	1,70
REPERTOIRE 4	0,22 L	14 TH (OTHER)	1,05 L	2,63 L	1,17 L

Overall **Table 6** shows that the aggregate scores are low, except for social and cultural activities. R4 invariably has the lowest scores from Q1 to Q4. R1 achieves the highest score for the social and cultural activities and the political activities – which might be related to the older age of this group – but R2 is very close. In addition, R2 achieves the highest score for opinion-oriented deliberative activities (although the score does not exceed 2). R3 ranks first as regards participation in news coverage (R2 is close to the same score), which might be related to the higher significance of social media in this repertoire.

Q5 evaluates to what extent a range of news media types play a role in choosing topics for conversations, using a scale from 5 (‘very important’) to 1 (‘not at all important’). **Table 7** shows the results for Q5. It is in R3 and R2 that the role of news media for feeding conversations in general is the most important while R4 has the lowest aggregate score. Most significantly, the role of each media type for feeding conversations is not the same across the four repertoires. R1 gives a prominent role to traditional media (broadcasting and printed newspapers), R2 gives a preference to newspapers while websites are ranked 3rd, R3 gives a prominent role to radio and then television, which are followed by websites, and R4 is the only repertoire that gives the most important role to websites. This is actually in line with the news consumption profiles of the repertoires (cf. above). It should be noted that social media does not appear in the top-3 of any of the repertoires and is thus not considered by our informants as playing an important role in choosing topics for conversations.

Table 7: Repertoires' scores to Q5 on news media types used for feeding conversations

	Aggregate score	1 ST	SCORE	2 ND	SCORE	3 RD	SCORE
REPERTOIRE 1	3,24	TV	4,60	RADIO	3,89	NEWSPAPERS	3,67
REPERTOIRE 2	3,58	NEWSPAPERS	4,20	TV	4,11	WEBSITES	3,9
REPERTOIRE 3	3,60 H	RADIO	4,45	TV	3,90	WEBSITES	3,64
REPERTOIRE 4	3,13 L	WEBSITES	4,00	TV	3,30	RADIO/ NEWSPAPER	3

Conclusion

This concluding section synthesizes the different analytical dimensions of the French-speaking Belgians' news media repertoires (see **Table 8**) and discusses the overall picture.

For R1 'Traditionalist news viewers', broadcasting plays a major role, especially television – not only national news but also news from international providers (mostly France). This repertoire also has a more general 'popular' profile with commercial TV news, tabloid newspapers and local/regional newspapers being much appreciated – all these in their 'traditional' forms. This repertoire is indeed more 'traditional' in terms of the platforms used (there are no digital news media in the top 10). Cultural and social activities (family, friends, informative events, reading) have considerable importance while political engagement (mostly informal) plays a medium role (although it should be noted that the other groups are even less engaged politically than R1). Deliberative activities are almost absent and this group does not participate a lot in news coverage (especially through digital technologies). They preferably use traditional media (broadcasting and print newspapers) to feed conversations. Overall, this repertoire – mostly represented by women in our sample – is very close to the idea of a 'traditional' news audience that uses legacy news outlets on traditional platforms, engages in social activities such as meeting the family and talking about news in face-to-face conversations, and engage in some political activities as part of their duty as citizens. There is an obvious generational effect here as R1 is older than the other repertoires.

Reading is the preferred way of accessing news for R2 'New generation quality news readers' (who are actually mostly men). Quality news is prominent while more popular and local/regional media are rejected. This is consistent with the fact that R2 is the higher educated group. R2 mixes traditional and digital platforms, and in the latter case websites are preferred over social media (the first social media is ranked 18th). Social and cultural activities are important, especially meeting friends, which is in line with the younger profile (18-36) of this group. Opinion-oriented deliberative activities hardly play any role in the life of the informants, although this group has the highest score for this kind of democratic activities. R2 ranks second regarding participation in news coverage as well as regarding the role of news media for feeding conversations in general. In this respect R2 has a predilection for printed newspapers, which is consistent with the preferred media types. To sum up R2

has a more demanding approach toward news in terms of media outlets (quality news) and formats (written news), and mixes traditional and digital platforms to access these (platform diversity). Moreover, legacy media (both online and offline) still have an important role in this repertoire – supposedly it is where new generation quality news readers (expect to) find... quality. Although news on social media is not rejected, it does not reach the top 10.

In R3 'Audiovisual and social media news lovers', audiovisual news outlets (especially TV) are very much central and two social media (video sharing platforms and Facebook) appear in the top 5. Newspapers are not absent from the top 10, though: their websites are even ranked 1st, which reflects this group's tendency to access news media through new digital platforms and devices (e.g. smartphones). Thus compared to R1 and R2, print news is rejected out of the top 10 and social media compete with the websites of legacy media. Social media are also given an important role for sharing, commenting news and posting (highest aggregate score for participation in news coverage). R3 is also ranked first (similar to R2) for feeding conversations with news media – with broadcasting (radio first, TV second) as preferred conversational resources. All this suggests that R3 develops a more 'social' approach to news, with deliberative activities and political engagement being less important than in R2. Audiovisual and social media news lovers are middle-aged women with the same average level of education as the R1 informants.

The R4 'Digital news omnivores' (all men, with a level of education similar to R1) have a stronger digital profile than the other groups, with online legacy media being much valued but also challenged by born-online news media. Another difference between R4 and the other repertoires is that in the former national public service TV does not appear in the top 10. Overall R4 is very diverse in terms of news sources or formats (while R2 is more diverse in terms of platforms). Like R1, it has a strong local/regional component, but at the difference of the latter, online media are preferred over traditional (i.e. print) media for local/regional news. Regarding the democratic activities, a striking observation is that R4 consistently has the lowest scores from Q1 to Q5. The informants preferably use websites to feed their casual conversations, which is consistent with the overall digital profile of this group.

The overall pattern mostly reflects continuities in the evolution of the French-speaking Belgian media landscape. Indeed, legacy media, especially PSB and national quality newspapers (whatever the platform), still have an important position across the four repertoires – if not in terms of actual use, at least in terms of 'news worthwhileness', as would say Schröder and Kobbernagel (2010). Users in the older generation (R1) rely upon legacy media and traditional platforms in their repertoire, while younger and more educated users (R2) mix traditional platforms and digital platforms in order to access (read) legacy news media. Even in R3 and R4 legacy media do have a significant role (mostly audiovisual media in the former and media websites in the latter). In addition, the survey results indicate that most of the informants consume news media as 'receivers' rather than 'participants' (cf. the low scores on the democratic dimensions). In certain respects, though, our analysis suggests that some changes are taking place, not only in terms of platforms –

Table 8: Overview of the four French-speaking Belgian news media repertoires

News repertoire	R1 Traditionalist news viewers	R2 New generation quality news readers	R3 Audiovisual and social media lovers	R4 Digital news omnivores
<i>Five most important news media</i>	National TV news on a commercial channel, National TV news on PSB, TV news and/or current affairs from international providers, TV current affairs (serious), National daily tabloid newspaper (print)	National daily quality newspaper (print), National news magazine or weekly quality newspaper (print), Read international broadcaster's online news, Radio current affairs (general channel or 24h hour news), Read national broadcaster's online news	National quality newspaper (online), Radio news on PSB, Online video sharing media, National TV news on PSB, News on Facebook	National tabloid newspaper (online), National daily tabloid newspaper (print), National news magazine or weekly quality newspaper (online), Read international broadcaster's online news, Born-online news media
<i>Five least important news media</i>	Twitter, Read local/regional broadcaster's online news, Facebook, Read national broadcaster's online news, Read International broadcaster's online news	Twitter, Text-TV, Local/regional daily newspaper (print), National tabloid newspaper (online), National daily tabloid newspaper (print)	Regional/local TV news bulletin, Born-online news media, TV news and/or current affairs on national 24-hour news channel, National daily quality newspaper (print), National news magazine or weekly quality newspaper (print)	Regional/local TV news bulletin, Radio current affairs (general channel or 24h hour news), Facebook, Blogs, Text-TV
<i>Number of informants</i>	9	10	11	3
<i>Demographics</i>	Female, 61+	Male, 18-34, higher education	Female, 35-60	Male, intermediary education

out of the ten highest-ranked news media, four are digital media in R2 and R3, and 8 are digital media in R4 – but also in terms of news sources: in R3 legacy media are challenged by social media and in R4 born-online news media are ranked 5th.

Arriving at the end of this paper, one final question to put forward is whether this pattern is specific to French-speaking Belgium or not. It is precisely the purpose of the cross-media news consumption research project to put the country-specific results in a broader, comparative perspective, and the contributions to this Special Section of *Participations* are a significant step toward achieving this objective. Readers are therefore invited to compare the findings from French-speaking Belgium with the news repertoire systems reported in the other country articles, and with the comparative and thematic articles, in this Special Section.

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Appendix 1: Description of the sample of the French-speaking Belgian informants

ID	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION	LOCATION
BEFR1	MALE	61+	HIGHER	LARGE CITY
BEFR2	MALE	35-60	HIGHER	CAPITAL
BEFR3	MALE	61+	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	LARGE CITY
BEFR4	FEMALE	18-34	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	PROVINCE
BEFR5	MALE	61+	VOCATIONAL/BA	LARGE CITY
BEFR6	MALE	18-34	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	LARGE CITY
BEFR7	FEMALE	61+	HIGHER	CAPITAL
BEFR8	FEMALE	18-34	HIGHER	CAPITAL
BEFR9	MALE	18-34	VOCATIONAL/BA	LARGE CITY
BEFR10	FEMALE	35-60	HIGHER	PROVINCE
BEFR11	FEMALE	18-34	VOCATIONAL/BA	CAPITAL
BEFR12	FEMALE	18-34	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	PROVINCE
BEFR13	FEMALE	61+	HIGHER	PROVINCE
BEFR14	FEMALE	61+	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	PROVINCE
BEFR15	MALE	35-60	HIGHER	CAPITAL
BEFR16	MALE	61+	HIGHER	PROVINCE
BEFR17	MALE	61+	VOCATIONAL/BA	LARGE CITY
BEFR18	MALE	18-34	VOCATIONAL/BA	PROVINCE
BEFR19	MALE	18-34	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	CAPITAL
BEFR20	FEMALE	35-60	HIGHER	LARGE CITY
BEFR21	FEMALE	61+	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	PROVINCE
BEFR22	FEMALE	61+	VOCATIONAL/BA	LARGE CITY
BEFR23	FEMALE	35-60	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	PROVINCE
BEFR24	FEMALE	18-34	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	CAPITAL
BEFR25	FEMALE	35-60	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	CAPITAL
BEFR26	MALE	18-34	HIGHER	PROVINCE
BEFR27	MALE	35-60	VOCATIONAL/BA	LARGE CITY
BEFR28	MALE	35-60	HIGHER	CAPITAL
BEFR29	FEMALE	35-60	VOCATIONAL/BA	LARGE CITY
BEFR30	FEMALE	18-34	VOCATIONAL/BA	CAPITAL
BEFR31	FEMALE	35-60	VOCATIONAL/BA	LARGE CITY
BEFR32	MALE	18-34	HIGHER	CAPITAL
BEFR33	MALE	35-60	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	CAPITAL
BEFR34	FEMALE	35-60	PRIMARY/SECONDARY	CAPITAL
BEFR35	MALE	61+	VOCATIONAL/BA	LARGE CITY
BEFR36	MALE	61+	VOCATIONAL/BA	PROVINCE

Appendix 2: The 5-factor solution Q sort loadings

	Composante				
	1	2	3	4	5
aa	-,859				
var003	,802				
var017	,764				
var007	,741				
var016	,681				,464
var014	,656				
var030	,609				
var031	,577				
var013	,540			-,436	
var021	,505				
var012					
var006		,768			
var019		,680			
var015		,669			
var001		,637			
var026		,609			
var009	-,453	,590			
var002	,498	,526			
var008		,494			
var028		,491			-,447
var034			,751		
var010			,677		
var033			,675		
var029			,643		
var023			,580		
var025			,578		
var032		,446	,525		
var024	,436		,513		
var020			,510		
var027			,470		
var011	,443		,447		
var018				,664	
var035		,453		,587	
var005				,459	
var022					-,699
var004		,509			,557