

How digital converges cross-media news typologies across countries: A comparative study of news consumption in Estonia and Portugal

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Abstract:

In this article we argue for the relevance of the internet in the convergence of news consumption in cross-country research in Estonia and Portugal. Being different in their histories and media systems, the comparative research revealed similarities in people's news repertoires in the two countries, which led to interesting conclusions about the changes in audiences' news universes. In comparing the repertoires special attention was given to online journalism content: why people use this content, how they evaluate the credibility of the news, and how they make sense of their news selections. The results show that online news repertoires are converging across the two countries, especially in repertoires where consumers are focused on the quality of news, but also to some extent in cases where they mostly got news from social media.

Key words: Cross-country research, internet news media, news repertoire, Estonia, Portugal

Introduction

The way audiences approach journalism has changed greatly in the digital culture. Traditional journalism, resting on taken-for-granted values such as credibility and trust, is

facing new challenges, and when getting news from social media, audiences can place their trust in people who are members of their social circles (Hermida *et al.*, 2012). This raises some questions about how audiences may still trust the news in the age of digital and social media, even if they are critical of their news providers. Additionally, this leads us to consider the current relevance of journalism in people's lives. In order to discuss these issues, we focused on the following research questions: How do people describe the role and importance of journalistic content in online environments? Are credibility and trust, traditional characteristics in news contexts, still relevant to people?

The comparative analysis between Estonia and Portugal is based on data collected in the context of the 12-country study, which is described in this special section (for details of the study, see the Introduction to the Special Section by Nossek *et al.*, and the Estonian and Portuguese country studies). Our study is intended to explore the forms that digital environments contribute to a convergence of audience news consumption patterns in geographically and culturally distant countries, with the possibility that the internet is drawing them closer together. Even though we took our point of departure in the historical differences between Estonia and Portugal, we focused on the current similarities between the countries, which make it possible to observe the consequences of what the globalized forces of the internet can bring to national news consumption practices. In fact, our results point to a convergence in the repertoires that we analysed.

This article includes a literature review on how technologies have changed the traditional news media environments from the perspective of audiences. Then we describe the country context level and the methodological implications of qualitative cross country research. In the results section, we present an integrated perspective of four identified common country repertoires related to online environments. Future research could examine in more detail the convergence trends that can be found in digital news consumption in an increasingly interconnected Europe.

Theoretical framework

Technologies have changed news media landscapes in multiple ways. In the online environment it is easy to produce all kinds of content. There we can find news produced by different providers not traditionally associated with news: individual bloggers, opinion leaders, portals of NGOs and interest groups, and news channels of local municipalities. These supplement the traditional news providers: online versions of printed newspapers, news sites of public service broadcasters, etc. Historically decisions about what is worth publishing – the role of ‘gatekeepers’ – was mainly the responsibility of editors and journalists. During the last century ‘newsworthiness has been viewed as a concept that only journalistic actors can truly understand’ (Vos & Finneman, 2017: 276). Today the public information field consists of content derived from many different sources, and sometimes questions of transparency, credibility and factuality arise in relation to evaluating content. In the situation of information overload, sources of information are not always clearly visible. The boundaries between journalism and non-journalism content have blurred.

Due to the availability of a diversity of content online, there are far-reaching and sometimes even controversial processes in audiences' news consumption. It is not only technologically easy to consume news in an online environment, but news is often free or cheap and widely available to many people (Himma-Kadakas & Kõuts, 2015). The availability of different content makes it possible for everyone to build highly personalised news repertoires: this has been labelled as a process of audience fragmentation (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). The power of audiences in media-audience relationships has grown: each person can follow the content that is interesting or useful to him/her (McQuail, 2010; Brites, 2015).

Studies of news consumption on the internet show that news is still important to audiences in the online environment. Information processing by professional journalism has given credibility to the news published on the internet as well (Newman & Levy, 2014; Ofcom, 2014). Access to the news associated with one's friends is among the top two reasons for using social networks (Guallar *et al.*, 2016), and this is true also among younger users (Craft *et al.*, 2016: 9). Even so, some researchers have found that online news consumption has a strong habitual component (Schrøder, 2015b; Brites, 2015; Brites *et al.*, 2017) and 'online news consumption mimics traditional offline reading habits' (Flaxman *et al.*, 2016: 318). On the other hand, 'users 'stumble upon' news as a by-product of their other online activities' (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014: 212-213).

Even though one of the motivations for using social media is to be connected with news, some studies show that 'both Twitter and Facebook are used least frequently by those with information motivations' (Lee *et al.*, 2013: 311) and in Facebook a growing group of news-avoiders is detectable (Ksiazek *et al.*, 2010; Velsker & Kõuts, 2015). Nevertheless, social media can give personal credibility to news: news stories shared and recommended by friends and family gets more attention and is more trusted. Social media function like personal filters, 'rather than solely relying on the professional judgement of a news organisation or journalist' (Hermida *et al.*, 2012: 815-816). Social media reduce information overload, facilitate sense making and play an important role in providing a diversity of opinions (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014). Thus, social media can have push-and-pull effects in the news universe. For example, Guallar *et al.* (2016) conclude that journalism content shared in social network sites, for some people, can be trustworthy sources: they found in their study that 'especially those older than 40 expressed greater confidence about the content found in social networks if the content had been previously published by mainstream outlets' (Guallar *et al.*, 2016: 361).

Indeed with the changes in technology the differences between online content have become fuzzier: for audiences 'the boundaries between news and other information are clearly shifting' (Swart *et al.*, 2016: 2). In fact, for some groups all internet content can be seen as news (Yadamsuren & Elderez, 2011). Still, news produced as the result of professional journalistic work has been conceptualised as important for keeping people in contact with the broader societal context, with the state and society (Milner, 2002; Dahlgren, 2009; Carpentier, 2011). The well-known relationships between news

consumption and participation in society have been analysed in several studies. Using a total news consumption index to test those relationships, Ksiazek, Malthouse and Webster (2010) concluded that 'even a little dose of news was associated with a disproportionate increase in civic participation' (2010: 564). Democracy as a form of government that relies on the participation of members of society cannot function without means of informing people about the state of society.

Against this background, the question for us is how digitalisation converges cross-media news typologies among audiences that function within different media systems. The aim of the study is to analyse the position and role of news produced by professional journalism in the news repertoires of online media users in Estonia and Portugal.

Context of the study

Comparative research is very hard to do and the difficulty increases when working with qualitative and non-representative data. Although comparative research is difficult, it is necessary (Livingstone, 2003, 2012). We argue in this article that comparative research on culturally distinct countries that lie outside the Anglo-Saxon axis is urgent.

Comparative research needs to be contextualised in terms of the countries studied, in relation to the research questions and the participants' answers and positions (Livingstone, 2003, 2012). In the following paragraphs we will therefore describe the country contexts, both recognizing the differences and in this case especially going deep into the similarities (Livingstone, 2012) that show the current social and media changes in both countries, where the internet has introduced levels of news consumption that challenge the *status quo*. The stressing of what is common in countries can challenge national stereotypes (Livingstone, 2003).

Estonia and Portugal are distant geographically and very different culturally. The two countries have been treated in the media systems analysis as representatives of different journalism-society relationships. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), Portugal belongs to the Mediterranean polarised pluralist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 11), and Estonia belongs with all of the Eastern and Central European countries to the post-socialist model (Terzis, 2007). According to Peruško *et al.* (2013), about a decade later Portugal and Estonia appear to fall within the same South/East European model in terms of the structural characteristics of their media systems (journalistic culture, party influence, newspaper circulation, etc.). If we add to the media systems classification the dimensions of audience agency – media use variables – as Peruško *et al.* (2013) did, then Portugal and Estonia clearly represent polarized Europe in respect to media use, where 'the countries cluster along the North/South divide of wealth and development' (Peruško *et al.*, 2013: 149). The 'southern' group have 'lower mean scores of all media use variables (except television)' and the 'northern' countries are grouped together according 'to their higher means scores on all media use variables except television' (Peruško *et al.*, 2013: 147). Estonia and Portugal fall in the middle of this spectrum and they oscillate between models; we will discuss the particular factors that apply to our article.

Recently media landscapes have created numerous digital opportunities everywhere in Europe. Internet use, also for news, has quickly increased in Estonia and Portugal. In Estonia, thanks to the availability of many online news channels more Estonians today follow news on the internet than through traditional channels (Vihalemm & Kõuts, 2017). In Portugal, the internet has greatly changed the media environment, traditionally dominated by television. It has provided opportunities for online news consumption, including online traditional media, especially newspapers, and social media. In both countries the biggest social network is Facebook and in Portugal seven out of ten people read print media news on Facebook (Cardoso *et al.*, 2015); in Estonia about 60% of social media users share and comment on news stories (Kõuts-Klemm *et al.*, 2017).

As far as television news is concerned, we can find similarities and slight differences that are related to historical differences in the two countries. Television is not as relevant for Estonia, even though in Estonia the biggest group of television users, mostly the elderly, are heavy users. Average television viewing time has not changed much for Estonia in recent decades (it has remained at approximately three hours per day among the adult population: Kantar Emor 2010-2016), but it is consumed more for entertainment than for news (Vihalemm & Kõuts, 2017). On the contrary, in Portugal, television is traditionally the most generally used medium for news consumption, despite the rise of the internet (Cardoso *et al.*, 2015; Cardoso, & Martinho, 2016; Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social [ERC], 2016; Silva *et al.*, 2017).

Historically, the relationship of consumers to newspapers is very different in the two countries, which reflects the dissimilarities in literacy and cultural structures. Newspaper circulation is rather high in Estonia, and the Estonian newspaper market shows high diversity in titles available to readers. The biggest daily is still the national high-quality newspaper *Postimees*, and the next largest one is the national tabloid *Õhtuleht* (Kantar Emor 2016). But readership numbers for printed press have gone down. Generally, the news interest among the Estonian population is relatively high: more than 61% say that they follow news every day or even more frequently (Vihalemm & Kõuts, 2017). Portugal, historically, has had low levels of newspaper news consumption, especially quality news consumption; the most popular newspaper is a tabloid and the quality newspapers are struggling to stay alive, with continually decreasing circulation and sales (Correia & Martins, 2017; Silva *et al.*, 2017).

These rather different realities reveal that, apart from online environments, the countries clearly differ in their media orientations and preferences: one has a strong audiovisual culture, and the other has a strong writing and reading culture. So, in view of Hallin and Mancini (2004), Peruško *et al.* (2013) and the contexts of the media landscape of the countries, we can ask ourselves if digital culture is now providing the opportunity for a convergence in news consumption in the digital environment, and if it is bringing quality preferences closer to each other in the two countries. This perspective can contribute to deconstructing the stereotype that separates the two countries from the wider quality media preferences that are traditionally associated with Nordic countries.

Method and research questions

Estonia and Portugal participated in the cross-media news consumption study on a similar basis to other project countries (see Introduction by Nossek *et al.* in this Special Section).¹ The 36 participants in every country were asked to sort Q-cards of 36 news channels into grids based on the relevance of each channel for them in everyday life; the comments they gave during sorting were recorded and after the sorting exercise in-depth interviews were conducted. The configurations of news channels on the 36 grids were analysed with the help of a factor analysis for every national sample and detailed information about each country's news repertoires is given in Silva *et al* 2017, and Köuts-Klemm 2017.²

The repertoires distinguished by the factor analysis in each national sample and complemented by the qualitative materials from interviews made it possible to examine the sense-making processes underlying the audiences' news selection. The basic intention of the cross-national study was not to focus on national representativeness, but rather to explore news consumption of people 'at eye level' (Schrøder, 2015a; Kobbernagel & Schrøder, 2016).

In the Estonian sample, we opted for a factor solution which encompassed nine different repertoires, and in the Portuguese sample seven. For the present analysis we selected those news media repertoires where the dominance of online media in the list of preferred news channels was clear: at least two online channels were among the top five channels in the informants' news media repertoires (see **Table 1**). Since news on the internet was the focus of our analysis, we examined in detail only the repertoires that contained prominent online news channels and gave attention to the trends that could be seen to emerge from the repertoires.

Table 1: News media repertoires containing online news media channels in the Estonian and Portuguese samples

National news media repertoires in the Estonian and Portugal samples (number and label from the country reports) ³	Common labels and descriptions of the news repertoires
1.'Serious quality news interest on the national and international levels' (EST) 1.'Quality media lovers' (PT)	Individuals with quality⁴ news orientation, with online prevalence In this repertoire, both countries experienced similar references, such as the option of traditional quality news and quality news in the online environment. National and international news was of greatest interest. The online environments were related to traditional versions of quality media, especially of newspapers with national or international brands. In both countries, informants were highly interested in quality news
5.'Mainstream online news channels in combination with Facebook' (EST)	Individuals who combine the country's quality national news media and news channels available

6. 'Online newspaper lovers and radio news avoiders' (PT)	<p>online with social media</p> <p>These informants had a special interest in national level news, which they searched for online and offline, mostly in newspapers, and they complemented their news diet through social media</p>
8. 'News in social media 'if I have to...'' (EST) 5. 'Online-based media and social media addicts' (PT)	<p>Individuals who follow news mainly on social media</p> <p>This repertoire had in common the fact that the informants had contact with news in online environments, especially on social media and other online platforms. In the Estonian case, their media environment included radio and national quality newspapers, which they did not turn on or subscribe to on their own initiative</p>
9. 'Highly selective quality news media orientation' (EST) 7. 'Television, press & social/ online-based media consumers' (PT)	<p>Individuals who have occasional contacts with traditional channels through social/online media</p> <p>This common repertoire included a prevalence of online news consumption in combination with traditional media, in this case in Portugal with television prevalence and in Estonia with local/regional daily newspapers, and where the informants also had preferences for quality news</p>

These four repertoires selected for the present comparative analysis encompassed 19 of the 36 Portuguese interviewees and 14 of the 36 Estonian interviewees. The first three repertoires were oriented to similar issues. The last repertoires in the Table – the Estonian 9th and Portuguese 7th – were not very similar in their content. The news platform preferences differed significantly: in Estonia they were rather newspaper-oriented, and in Portugal rather TV-oriented, but they were similar in the sense that they combined the most widely used platforms in the respective countries (e.g. local newspapers in Estonia and national TV in Portugal) significantly with online content.

We already mentioned why we searched for similarities in news media repertoires, i.e. that the digital news consumption emerging in both countries is restructuring the media landscape and making the news preferences in the two countries more related to one another. The four repertoires are further described below. However, in order to better explain the context of news consumption in both countries we will briefly mention some of the repertoires, mostly containing traditional news media, which were left out of this comparative analysis.

Two of nine repertoires in the Estonian sample were very distinct from the Portuguese: 'prevailing interest in local news with a slight interest in infotainment on the national level' and 'specialized and selective repertoire based on individual interests'. On the Portugal side, there was a repertoire that indicated that there was also a tendency to just take a quick look at the news, the 'News Snackers' repertoire (Silva et al., 2017), which

has no connection to Estonian profiles. Besides these completely different repertoires, we found some repertoires with a television news dimension that had some points in common, but that did not significantly feature online news channels.

Considering previous debates and contexts to do with digitalisation, we argue here that online environments established common ground among the two countries; online opportunities can highlight common trends in current news consumption and challenge traditional patterns. Thus, the research questions for the present analysis are:

- How do the interviewees describe the role and importance of journalistic content in relation to online environments?
- Are credibility and trust – traditional characteristics in news contexts – still relevant to news consumers in the age of digital and social media?

We will answer these research questions in relation to the four comparable news media repertoires in Estonia (EST) and Portugal (PT) listed in **Table 1**.

Findings

In the following section, we will compare the content of paired news media repertoires in the two countries.

1. Individuals with quality news orientation, with online prevalence

In both countries a news repertoire appeared that combined the news channels known in the countries as quality journalism: international news providers, national public service news magazines, quality newspapers etc.

Quality news interest was characteristic of the biggest number of informants in the Estonian and in Portuguese samples: six and ten individuals respectively. The label ‘quality news orientation’ was attributed by the interviewees to well-known media outlets that rely in their news production process on professional journalism standards. They generally stated that it was good that they had news online with multiple opportunities to search for reliable information. This was considered a kind of step forward in their news media opportunities. The interviewees pointed out the quality brands they used on national and international levels.

For instance, I was quite interested in what happened in the US and Cuba and so I entered the site of the *New Yorker* to read an article that was published there, and by chance I clicked on an article to read it. [...] I also wanted to read the *NYT*'s editorial on the issue, so I went to their website specifically to read the editorial. (PT17-M18-34-higher education⁵)

Sometimes I just take a look at other media channels, sometimes at foreign media to see if they have the same news story there ... Only international affairs, of course, not Estonian events ... But, sometimes you read a story in *Äripäev* [*Estonian daily business paper*] and it seems like a public relations piece... such a pseudo-event. (EST6-M35-60-higher education)

The need for the indicated channels is probably related to the interviewees' wider interests in societal events and processes. In several interviews in Portugal and Estonia they claimed to have an interest in 'hard news', and this wasn't necessarily related to the occupational or educational needs of the interviewees. On the contrary, this was a genuine interest that was not focused on special needs. One interviewee from Portugal said: '[if I need financial information not for work but for personal interest] I will search in business web portals, from Portugal or Bing' (PT16-M35-60-higher education). An interviewee from Estonia said: 'it is important to follow *PSB-news*: it is serious and trustworthy' (EST4-F18-34-secondary education).

This type of news usage combines the highest quality news media available in the country and content by international news providers: 'If the news is about the privatization of TAP [*Portuguese airline company*] or the Sócrates [*a former prime minister who was arrested*] case, I will look at information everywhere' (PT19-F18-34-higher education). The interviewees' readiness to consume such foreign recognized media brands as CNN, BBC, the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* is rather unusual compared to the usual news consumption practices in both countries.

It is possible to conclude from the interviews that people with this news repertoire do not rely on the classifications made by experts about what quality media are, but they decide for themselves, since their consumption practices are broad. They use a lot of different channels and are able to compare those channels. As one interviewee from Estonia critically stated: 'In Estonia serious media are missing... for example like *The New York Times*. /.../ From time to time I hope that Estonian media will be more serious but I am disappointed frequently (EST19-F18-34-secondary education).

Combining quality news channels with a critical attitude towards media is unusual and contrasts with the wider Portuguese approach to media consumption (Cardoso et al., 2015). An interviewee from Portugal (PT10-M18-34-higher education) said that nowadays he very rarely watched television because he wanted more in-depth information. The internet has clearly provided opportunities to have access to in-depth information. Television is mainly used in specific situations, for instance to check on daily events and crime. An interviewee said: 'I may be facing the 40s crisis, right? It is normal [laughs]. Now I see that I have changed during the last 10 years [feeling decreasing confidence in news]' (PT11-M35-60-intermediate school).

In both countries interviewees with quality news orientation were often critical of their own countries' media offering, especially because they could compare national outlets

with international news providers. They had pretty clear ideas about what quality media looked like.

It is possible to do a news story very poorly. It is bad if you ask the opinion of someone who has nothing to do with a particular topic. We have so many conflicts in the world where it is good to get some information from the other party to the conflict. For example, regarding the conflicts in the Arab world or in Israel I like to read Al Jazeera as well: they offer totally different opinions than Estonian media. (EST14-M19-34-secondary education)

Every person has his/her own opinion, but I like it if a story is concrete and clear, without equivocating. And actually you can find a lot of examples where journalists write one thing but in reality the situation is totally different /.../ it depends on the journalist who wrote the article; it is not always very balanced and objective. It can be biased. (EST7-M18-34-higher education)

It is obvious that information should be impartial. But it never is 100%. (PT5-F35-60-primary/secondary education)

Along with critical reading of news media, because they felt that they had a certain knowledge of journalism and how it worked, these informants identified other relevant functions of news in their lives. Some of them also referred to the fact that news media are 'contaminated' by sensationalism and that audiences should pay attention to that: 'In the old days, sensationalism was connected with celebrity magazines and paparazzi in some European countries and in Hollywood. We didn't have those ... advantages, being a small country. Nowadays I think it is everywhere' (PT11-M35-60-intermediate school).

At the same time, news involves fast content nowadays. A Portuguese interviewee said: 'Categorization is done by news aggregators. The sources, in the end, may have less credibility. On the internet the main thing is to be fast' (PT16-M35-60-higher education). Credibility is also associated with the news media that interviewees had selected in their news repertoires.

The news was considered to be something that influenced interviewees' lives, and an interviewee from Portugal (PT18-F35-60-intermediate school) said that the news media should be aware of and take responsibility for that role in society, because sometimes people only read the headlines and simply believe them, when they don't really have enough information. Another important aspect was the use of news in connection with work. News was considered very important for being informed and for forming opinions on issues: 'This is for some event that I don't know about; the best way to have information is to read about it' (PT19-F18-34-higher education). 'Newspapers that I read are from my community. Besides some people and friends that I believe, newspapers that I read have the same function' (PT6-M35-60-higher education).

In Portugal, since they are critical of news media information, they also use entertainment programmes that are focused on satire, humour and critiques of current events and news: '*Governo Sombra [Shadow Government], o Bloco Central [Central Block] (...) Mixórdia de Temáticas [Mix of thematics]...* Some programmes I watch live, and some others through Facebook' (PT10-M18-34-higher education). '– Ah! I follow the Facebook account of the *Daily Show* with Jon Stewart!' (PT11-M35-60-intermediate school). Besides mentioning humour, they also find it relevant to read some blogs that can help to support their own opinions: 'Blogs with news are important to me. I read blogs of people with opinions close to mine and also of people that write about issues that I am interested in' (PT7-F35-60-higher education). Interviewees in the Estonian sample did not indicate entertainment programmes, humour or blogs as additional sources of information.

In conclusion, it can be said that among people whose news media repertoires contained national and international quality news, the credibility of news resulted from comparison with different channels that belonged to their news repertoires. The interviewees were able to compare, to analyse and to evaluate information: it was clear that their media literacy was rather high. These news consumption practices were found among some Estonian informants earlier (Kõuts et al., 2013), but it was rather an unusual group in the context of news media consumption in Portugal (Silva et al., 2016).

2. Individuals who combine the country's quality national news media and news channels available online with social media

The news media repertoire in which people follow websites of printed newspapers and get additional information from social media was represented by two interviewees from Portugal and three from Estonia. The repertoires were labelled in the country analyses more precisely: 'Online Newspaper Lovers and Radio News Avoiders' (PT) and 'Mainstream online news channels in combination with Facebook' (EST). These repertoires had in common that the informants in both countries relied on mainstream channels, such as national tabloid and quality newspapers online, free daily newspapers online and light news from broadcasting, and these were complemented by social media.

The news interest of interviewees whose media usage patterns belonged to this repertoire was relatively high. Especially in the Portuguese case it can be concluded that recently the internet has produced a revolution and what is happening is that traditional heavy consumers of information tend to shift consumption to the internet (Brites, 2012; Brites, 2015). In this repertoire, a very relevant approach towards the importance of news was identified among Portuguese interviewees, especially reference news, such as *Público*, public channels and buying quality print magazines on weekends (PT26-F18-34-intermediate education). It was revealed in the research that print newspapers on online platforms were appreciated by individuals who mostly consumed information online and at the same time wanted to use a brand with quality information. An Estonian interviewee claimed:

'Mainstream news channels are trustworthy... in fact there is no other option to follow the news' (EST1-M35-60-secondary education).

Usually, the repertoire was restricted to the information selected by journalists and friends' networks: '[I trust journalism because] I know that on the online news sites editors check the information they publish' (EST18-F18-34-secondary education). Trust in a country's mainstream journalism and friends' suggestions was so high that interviewees expressed confusion when asked about other possible channels of news. Sometimes interviewees did not even know what other channels offered news:

I open my computer and take a look at *Postimees.ee*... and sometimes, if something pops up in Facebook, I will go and do a search. [*Why exactly those channels?*]... [*In confusion*] What other choices do we have then? (EST33-M18-34-secondary education)

Especially in Portugal the interviewees stated that they followed news on different platforms: 'I check my smart phone, the internet, and Facebook where I find some news... and that's it. It's like an addiction, because I have several newspapers apps on my smart phone that I usually check. And now that I think about it, during class breaks I go there too' (PT14-F35-60-higher education).

News content from the most widely used online channels was important for interviewees to keep in touch with important national and international events. Journalism is fast and produces a huge amount of news online, where everyone can find interesting content.

News on the internet is easily accessible and you can read it for a long time /.../
On the internet one can somehow get news more often. You have to wait on the news with newspapers until the next day. But on the internet you have news steadily and it is updated. (EST18-F18-34-secondary education).

The same reason to prefer internet news was mentioned by Portuguese interviewees who followed the first repertoire (see above).

As in the previous repertoire, using news to formulate opinions was very common (Brites, 2015): 'All the news that we read influences our attitudes and political opinions' (PT26-F18-34-intermediate education). Being aware of news is something that sometimes happened by chance: 'If I have a newspaper in the house, I will read it. If it is close to me, I will read it' (PT26-F18-34-intermediate education).

In this repertoire among Portuguese interviewees, there were general comments related to differentiated and necessary daily life functions of news: 'Yes, I see [news] clearly in my life, at every level, including the personal... because everybody likes to know what is happening in the world. (...) To know better my reality and the political reality of my country. I have this need to feel a part of the world' (PT14-F35-60-higher education).

Based on the interviews with Estonian and Portuguese news followers, we can conclude that in this news repertoire journalism and news are seen as synonymous and users acknowledge the importance of journalism in a society and the need for credible and trustworthy reporting. Nevertheless, it can be said that their news consumption patterns were rather country-restricted, and international news providers were not part of their media usage preferences, contrary to what was the case with the first common repertoire.

3. Individuals who follow news mainly on social media

In both analysed countries we found a group of people whose news palette consisted of mainly news offered by social media channels. In Portugal, in the repertoire 'Online based-media and social media addicts' there were three interviewees, and in Estonia the repertoire 'News in social media "if I have to..."' was represented by two interviewees. Even though the news media repertoires in Portugal and in Estonia were similar, there were some differences in the attitudes of interviewees towards news. Generally, in the Portuguese repertoire interviewees shared the view of the importance of news, but in the Estonian repertoire they avoided news, their news exposures were infrequent and they were critical of journalistic news production processes.

In Portugal, the informants representing this repertoire said that consuming news was a social experience, especially through Facebook, other social media or SMS and/or email (Silva et al., 2017). These interviewees consumed news on a daily basis and they found it online and particularly through social media.

I have a lot of journalists and politically engaged people in my Facebook contacts and they share news. Through these contacts, I get news (...). It's quite rare for me to go directly to newspapers or television channel sites. It may happen, but it's quite rare, actually'. (PT30-M35-60-higher education)

One of the interviewees from Portugal said that she wrote a lot during the day, and when she took a break she always opted to briefly consult news. Even though she was interested in news, she felt that Portuguese news media were too 'slow' and had too much politics, especially television, compared with other countries. She also said that when she watched news she had to concentrate. She followed the Facebook accounts of people who she knew engaged with news and who shared a lot of information; she found this a very good way to get different opinions on different subjects and she very rarely accessed newspapers or television directly.

In this repertoire in Portugal, credibility was not stressed as much as in the previous repertoires. Even so, those using this repertoire referred to the relevance of trying to use several news sources as a way of avoiding biased information.

In Estonia the representatives of the repertoire had contacts with professional journalistic production through news sites shared on Facebook in their newsfeeds, although this happened only occasionally and was unintended. Some traditional media channels were

a part of the informants' everyday environments as well, but the contacts with those channels 'just happen', because the channels were there. They did not turn on the radio to listen to news or subscribe to newspapers on their own initiative, but they were exposed to radio and newspapers because of the other people who worked or lived with them. Characteristic of this group was that selections were made by others, while they tended not to be highly interested in news.

I do not read news... because if something important happens I hear about it anyway ... from others. I have so much to do in my personal life, that I have no time to follow what is happening in the world. (EST5-F35-60-higher education)

I catch the news only on Facebook ... Mainstream media are such a waste of time that I choose to ...to not read them. I do not think that world news defines what I am /.../ it has no influence on my world. (EST-24-M18-34-higher education)

For these Estonian interviewees journalism had lost its basic role of disseminating the news. The informants did not value the role of journalism. Even though they had occasional contacts with traditional channels, they did not find the content to be in a form that would attract readers.

I sometimes get the idea that I would like to look around there [on the news sites]. Then I look at *postimees.ee* /... / Then I can see that it probably was demanded of the journalist to publish something and then he/she just threw something in so that something would be published. (EST24-M18-34-higher education)

Summing up, in Portugal and in Estonia there are groups of users who choose to restrict their contacts with journalism to social media, thus relying on their personal networks. Nevertheless, the attitudes towards journalism among the representatives of this cross-national repertoire differ considerably: while the Portuguese interviewees appreciated the news in their news feeds, the Estonian interviewees were not interested in getting news and even avoided news.

4. Individuals who have occasional contacts with traditional channels through social/online media

The fourth variant of similar news repertoires where online media play a prominent role among the top five news channels differed significantly between Portugal and Estonia. In Portugal it was labelled 'Television, press and social/online-based media consumers' and was represented by four interviewees; in Estonia it was the repertoire 'Highly selective

quality news media orientation', where Twitter and other social media, such as Instagram and YouTube, played an important role. This repertoire in the Estonian sample was represented by two interviewees. But we grouped the repertoires together due to the similarities in attitudes towards media usage: they used news channels if they had time and consumed only content that was interesting/useful to them. News usage was complementary to their daily activities, and the selection of channel depended on the situation. At the weekend they kept up with the news, because they had more time to do so, even though their viewing was not heavy (PT9-M18-34-Primary-secondary education).

Yesterday morning I turned on the TV and I tuned to *RTP1* [public service broadcasting], the channel that I usually watch. Then I went to work. At night, while I'm preparing dinner I turn on the TV; usually I tune in *SIC* (private TV channel). I like to prepare dinner while I'm watching the news. (PT24-F60+-intermediate education)

Their content preferences were related to their interests. We found some specific interest in news related to work, such as with an interviewee from Portugal: 'It is always the same specific issue. What I want is to achieve a goal, to make a sale' (R7PT28). There was a disconnection from political matters. So, in this case, politics can be considered something that discouraged news consumption (Brites, 2015): 'I don't follow politics; politics is not for me... [news] has no influence on my [political] attitudes' (PT34-F18-34-intermediate education).

In Portugal, these informants liked to watch television news and to read some (online) newspapers, and were selective: 'I may search for one or another news item that I have seen, but for the rest nothing' (PT34-F18-34- intermediate education). '[On social networks I will open] what catches my attention' (PT9-M18-34-Primary/secondary education). In Estonia, the informants shared the attitudes of the general public concerning the trustworthiness of channels, e.g. in regard to quality newspapers or public service channels: 'I trust the biggest online news from the daily newspaper *Postimees* and from public service broadcasting. I cannot say that I do not trust online news by *Õhtuleht* [tabloid newspaper], but they just do not have enough newsworthy stories' (EST16-F18-34-secondary education). But on the other hand, they were sceptical of journalism generally. One Estonian interviewee said:

No media channel can be treated like the only source of truth. They can say whatever they want about themselves... Mass media are intended to perturb you, to find a problem, to drag you in and then to lead you from one problem to another ... only to distract you. (EST28-M18-34-secondary education)

While in the Estonian sample we noticed some issues related to the trustworthiness of channels, among Portuguese interviewees we did not find any specific preoccupations with

credibility or quality of news, even though in both countries these informants only consume news occasionally. Informants of this group showed somewhat similar preferences to another Portuguese repertoire (Television news and print news media, namely local/regional publications, which is not included in this analysis) 'but the big difference lies in the high importance given to social and online-based media, namely blogs, news on Facebook and news distributed by online video-sharing media. Professional and party-political magazines fall at the bottom of the ranking of preferences' (Silva et al., 2017: n/a).

Conclusions and discussion

In this article, where we compare news repertoires based on the results of the Q-methodological cross-media news study, we have shown that online news environments may be pushing the news preferences of audiences in the two countries towards convergence. The process was detectable in spite of the context of the distinct cultural and media systems of these two geographically distant countries: Estonia and Portugal. We asked two questions that guided our analysis: how do the interviewees describe the role and importance of journalistic content in relation to online environments in Estonia and in Portugal? And are credibility and trust as news selection criteria still relevant in online news selection processes in the age of digital and social media?

The analysis revealed that clearly the online environment has a direct influence on the consumers of repertoire 1, who appreciate quality news, because on the internet users have easier access to worldwide quality news media. Their news media repertoire consists of different channels and their evaluations of the credibility of journalism content derives from their personal experiences with different channels, both national and international. They were also the group most critical of the news, but their attitude was based on informed criticism.

In the second common repertoire for the Estonian and Portuguese samples, which was more nationally oriented and mostly online-based, the interviewees were concerned about quality and consequently were concerned about credibility and trust when they searched for online news. In both cases, we detected a 'virtuous circle' (Milner, 2002): those interviewees who were more interested in news or combined in their news repertoires different news channels were able to compare the content of news channels and weigh the credibility of news on the internet as well.

In the case of less news-interested online media users in repertoires three and four, the situation was slightly different. In those repertoires where the participants were not as active in searching for news, they were not as concerned with news credibility or trust issues. They became aware of news mostly through social media and their contacts with news were rather infrequent and less intentional than among the first two groups. Their engagement as an audience was somehow lower: news came to them and not vice versa. It is possible to conclude very broadly that for these two groups journalism did not play the role of providing credibility to news. Even a slight tendency to avoid journalism-produced content was detectable among the interviewees in the Estonian sample. In many cases

these interviewees preferred content shared by their personal friends and acquaintances, as Hermida et al. (2012) found in their study. In the cases where the news repertoires of these groups included topics personally interesting or useful to them, the question of credibility did not arise. They seemed to evaluate the factuality or correctness of information based on their pre-existing knowledge of particular topics. Those topics did not include politics or economics.

Some historical-cultural and media systemic differences appeared in the news selection processes of audiences in Estonia and Portugal in online environments. Portugal is less newspaper oriented and also historically has lower levels of news interest; in Estonia, based on the widespread reading habits, questions of the quality of news receive more attention. The digital environment promotes news contacts, going beyond traditional television uses, as in Portugal, or beyond newspapers, as in Estonia.

This study has allowed us to compare sense making in the national audience news selection processes across the two countries: Estonia and Portugal. In the future we hope to develop the comparison further, for instance taking into consideration news motivations and definitions in different age groups. This will provide clearer insights into the influence of the internet on audiences' choices and how this is related to daily life options.

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Notes:

¹ The project was conceptualized by Hanna Adoni, Hillel Nossek and Kim Christian Schrøder in 2013, after the COST Action 'Transforming Media, Transforming Audiences' ended. Twelve countries participated in the standardized study, with the fieldwork being conducted between Sept 2014 and mid-2015. The project aimed to go beyond traditional qualitative research, and to present a cross-national study in a way that would be analytically generalizable through the use of Q-methodology.

² Despite the fact that the Estonian and Portuguese teams used different Q-methodological grids to distinguish news media repertoires (the Portuguese team used a nine-point grid and Estonian team used a seven-point grid), the resulting repertoires were comparable and interpretable, since the research designs and the rationales were the same.

³ The names given to the repertoires are based on the country reports (Silva et al., 2017; Kõuts-Klemm, 2016) and they reflect not only the data collected by Q-card sorting, but are also based on the qualitative data collected through interviews. This explains the somewhat different focuses and shades of meanings in the labels of the repertoires: Thus while the Estonian repertoires were considered in terms of how the news was focused on the personal, local, national and international dimensions, for Portuguese interviewees it appeared more important to refer to the frequency and type of news usage (e.g. snackers and lovers).

⁴ 'Quality' refers to the 'image' some news media channels have among Portuguese or Estonian audiences, revealed in several national studies.

⁵ Interviewee codes in brackets include country code (PT – Portugal, EST –Estonia), interview number, gender (M – male, F – female), age group (18-34, 35-60 or 60+) and educational level (primary, secondary, intermediary or higher).