A Gap in Networked Publics?

A Comparison of Younger and Older Journalists' Newsgathering Practices on Social Media

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Abstract

Several recent studies have examined how professional journalists use social media at work. However, we know little about the differences between younger and older journalists' use of social media for newsgathering. We conducted 16 in-depth interviews comparing eight young journalists (median age = 24) with eight older journalists (median age = 50) in Norway. The younger journalists reported using multiple social media platforms, such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, to collect politically significant information, news observations, sources and comments. By comparison, the older journalists reported relying heavily on elite sources on Twitter. This reluctance to use a variety of social media platforms may limit older journalists' exposure to a variety of news sources. As a result, younger journalists seem to follow a more multi-perspectival approach to social media and may be more innovative in their newsgathering. Hence, younger journalists may be exposed to more diverse types of news sources than older journalists. Together, the findings indicate a generational gap in 'networked publics' concerning how younger and older journalists approach newsgathering in social media.

Keywords: social media, social media natives, newsgathering, networked individualism, older and younger

Introduction

In the last decade, social media platforms "have become powerful tools to capture information flow, gauge public opinion, and disseminate news" (Lee 2015: 312). Hence, a large body of recent research suggests that professional journalists turn to social media for newsgathering (e.g. Lee 2015; Reid 2015; Johnston 2016; Brandtzaeg et al. 2016; Brandtzaeg, Følstad & Chaparro Domínguez 2017; Yamamoto, Nah & Chung 2017). Several news events are now breaking on social media, and news organisations are increasingly devoting time and resources to social media newsgathering (Reid 2015). In particular, the increasing use and impact of social media has become critical for documenting news during crises, war zones, political elections, sports events, and other stories about humans and society (Brandtzaeg et al. 2016; Stephens-Davidowitz 2017).

Brandtzaeg, Petter Bae & Chaparro Domínguez, María Ángeles (2018). A Gap in Networked Publics? A Comparison of Younger and Older Journalists' Newsgathering Practices on Social Media in *Nordicom Review* 39 (2018) 1, pp. 95-109. doi:10.2478/nor-2018-0004.

The Global Social Journalism Study (2015) found that 51 per cent of 3,000 surveyed journalists from 11 different countries reported being unable to do their jobs without social media. The survey revealed distinct differences in the journalists' levels of use and patterns of adoption of social media. Specifically, younger journalists reported using social media more than older adult journalists (over the age of 45 years), who were more sceptical of and resistant to social media (Global Social Journalism Study 2015).

This divide in social media use between younger and older journalists, as well as among editors, has also been confirmed in academic studies (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre 2013; Rogstad 2014; Yamamoto, Nah & Chung 2017). Studies on the general population similarly suggest that age is the most significant predictor of the use and adoption of new communication technologies (Brandtzaeg, Heim & Karahasanovic 2011). Moreover, data from the World Values Survey confirms that a significant generational gap exists with respect to the use of diverse sources in information gathering and sharing (Kiser & Washington 2015).

Social media use is rapidly growing throughout society, creating and providing new networked publics for citizen-generated content that, in turn, serves as an important source of information for professional journalists (Yamamoto, Nah & Chung 2017). In particular, younger people are considered early adopters of social media. For example, in 2008 in the U.S., only 21 per cent of the general population between 30 and 49 years old used social media, while more than 60 per cent of those between 18 and 29 years old used social media. In 2016, a total of 80 per cent of those between 30 and 49 years old and 86 per cent of those between 18 and 29 years old used social media (Pew Internet 2017). During the same period, even higher penetration of social media was documented in Norway (IPSOS 2017), where the current study is situated.

In general, the extant literature does not clarify how age differences may impact journalists' use of social media as a research and newsgathering resource. As shown above, several reports have revealed relatively large differences between younger and older people's social media use. However, scholars have largely failed to describe or understand these differences in more detail. To our knowledge, no in-depth research studies have yet examined how younger versus older generations of journalists use and experience such social media platforms as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat as news sources.

Prior in-depth research has largely approached journalists of different age ranges as a homogeneous group. Yet, younger journalists who were teenagers when social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook become popular for sharing and self-expression may have more experience and practice with social media than older journalists. For example, younger journalists who grew up with social media might not use the 'same values, new tools' approach to social media common among mainstream news organisations (Newman 2009: 1). Thus, younger journalists may be able to provide unique insights into the trends, challenges and new forms of journalism, newsgathering processes and networked public spheres (Johnston 2016). By comparison, older journalists with longer professional experience are more likely to hold onto familiar newsgathering practices and be more sceptical of alternative news sources, such as social media platforms (Yamamoto, Nah & Chung 2017). To further explore this gap, our study examines the different ways in which younger journalists and older journalists use social media for research and newsgathering.

Concerning theory and concepts, most studies examining the role of social media in journalism have relied heavily on traditional theories of mass communication and journalism, while failing to consider relevant theories in interpersonal communication (e.g., Lee 2015) and knowledge useful for understanding people's social media use.

In this study, we aim to fill the gaps in the journalistic literature by first applying the concept of 'social media natives', a term that builds on the 'digital natives' concept formulated by Prensky (2001). This concept may help us better understand the differences between how younger (social media native) and older (social media immigrant) journalists use social media for newsgathering.

Second, we use the concepts of affordances and networked individualism (Rainie & Wellman 2012) to describe the ways in which people connect, communicate and exchange information around looser, more fragmented networks (Wellman et al. 2003). This approach helps us better understand the social media newsgathering processes from which journalists benefit.

In the next section, we describe affordances, networked individualism and social media natives in more detail. We also relate these concepts to the context of journalism.

Theoretical framework, key concepts and research question

Social media natives

Prensky (2001) argued that specific technological, historical and generational experiences are important factors in understanding how students learn. We believe that the term 'social media natives', rather than 'digital natives', is useful for identifying the group of journalists currently entering the profession. Younger journalists are, historically speaking, the first generation to have grown up with social media as a primary communication and information channel. These social media natives might socialise, think and process information differently than social media immigrants, or older journalists. Furthermore, Rogers' (1995) studies of innovation diffusion show that younger individuals tend to be more open to new and innovative ideas than older individuals. However, other researchers (e.g., Hargittai & Hinnant 2008) have challenged this notion of a younger, digital-savvy generation, as younger people often report large variations in technical skills and media literacy. Still, Rogstad (2014) found that younger journalists are more active social media users than their older counterparts.

Affordances and networked individualism

Affordances can be described as "possibilities for action between an object/technology (e.g., social media) and the user that enables or constrains potential behavioural outcomes in a particular context" (Evans et al. 2017: 36). In terms of affordances, social media is a powerful tool that enables journalists to gather news without restrictions in time or place (Brandtzaeg et al. 2016). Social media may support newsgathering from a variety of alternative sources. Thus, recent research has shown that journalists are increasingly turning to social media in general, and Twitter in particular, to support their coverage of news and political events (Hermida 2010, 2013; Papacharissi & Oliveira 2012; Hedman & Djerf-Pierre 2013; Wilson & Supa; 2013; Rogstad 2014), get story ideas, break scandals, find sources (Lariscy et al. 2009; Lee 2015; Brandtzaeg et al. 2016)

and self-promote (Berglez 2016). Social media, therefore, functions as a significant resource tool and an enormous base from which to understand, cross-examine and report on the world. Through social media's new networked publics, today's journalists can research and reach people relevant to their news stories better than ever before (Bruns & Highfield 2016).

The concept of affordances relates to Barry Wellman et al.'s (2003) influential theory of 'networked individualism', which explains central aspects in understanding the culture and social affordances of social media. Networked individualism is supported by a social system (e.g., mobile phones and social media) for problem-solving, which offers people helpful and crowdsourced information about their surroundings. In the context of journalism, this 'social system' relates to what Hermida (2010: 297) described as a Twitter 'awareness system' – "a system that provides journalists with more complex ways of understanding and reporting on the subtleties of public communication".

According to Benkler (2006), social awareness systems (i.e., social media) for gathering politically significant information, observations and comments have enriched new public spheres. From this perspective, social media contributes to broader participation and a greater diversity of views, complicating the notion of a single public sphere. In other words, social media is "[u]npacking the traditional public sphere into a series of public sphericules and micro-publics" (Bruns & Highfield 2016: 125). Boyd (2007) labels these micro-publics 'networked publics'.

Yet, journalists have also been heavily criticised for their overreliance on 'elite' sources, which can limit the public's news exposure to only a few sources (Gans 2011). The resulting 'information bubble' and lack of multiple perspectives might stem partly from journalists' limited use and operation of social media. Journalists' reliance on only a few sources may, in turn, lower social media's credibility among readers. The growing lack of trust in news media has been shown by several studies in many countries (Reuters 2016). Therefore, insights into newsgathering practices in social media may reveal the nature of the relationship between various journalists and their sources. Thus, how journalists in general and younger journalists versus older journalists use the affordances provided by social media for the purpose of newsgathering is worthy of exploration.

Research question

In light of this research background, we examine whether and how affordances, networked publics and networked individualism in social media are shaping younger and older journalists' diverse work and newsgathering practices. We do this by asking the following research question: *Compared to older adult journalists, what is distinctive about younger journalists who grew up with social media with regard to their social media newsgathering practices?*

Method and participants

Motivated by our research question, this article combines the theoretical perspectives described above with a user-oriented approach and a qualitative method to reveal the differences between younger and older journalists' social media use.

We conducted a series of open-ended, individual, in-depth interviews with 16 journalists between 2014 and 2015. Journalists were selected as a suitable target group for the interviews because they have extensive knowledge of the field and an ability to reflect on their own communication practices and experiences (e.g., Lindlof & Taylor 2002; Tanner, Friedman & Zengh 2015).

We recruited journalists by contacting major news organisations in Norway and their news editors and asking them to select younger and older news journalists. The news organisations then provided us with a list of relevant journalists, whom we contacted based on their age differences and experiences with news journalism.

First, we selected eight younger journalists who were born between 1989 and 1995 and, thus, grew up with social media. Their ages ranged from 21 to 26 years, with a median age of 24. All of the social media natives were professionally engaged in journalism as either employees of news organisations or contributors of news organisations' output.

Second, we recruited eight older journalists aged 42 to 55 years with a median age of 50. These individuals were generally already adults when social media was established and became popular. All of the older journalists had 10 or more years of experience as professional news reporters.

Table 1 presents key characteristics of the younger and older participants. We selected all interviewees based on their experiences working with news, breaking news and engaging with news in other, more in-depth ways.

Table 1. *Characteristics of the interviewees*

Characteristics	Young journalists (n)	Old journalists (n)
Gender		
Males	4	5
Females	4	3
Professional position		
News reporter at a newspaper	5	6
News reporter at a news agency	2	2
Feature journalist at a newspaper	1	0
Education and working experience		
Autodidact in journalism	1	0
Graduated in journalism	7	8
Still a student (working part-time)	1	0
Working full-time as a journalist	7	8
Several years of working experience	8	8

Comments: All in all, 16 journalists were interviewed. Table 1 shows their distribution with regard to gender, professional position, education and working experience. The category "several years of working experience" denotes two or more years' working experience, which was true for most younger journalists. The older journalists all reported 10 or more years of experience in journalism.

Although the number of participants in this study is small for a rigorous comparative research design, the age differences might indicate how younger and older Norwegian journalists use and experience social media. Furthermore, similar numbers of interviewees have previously been considered typical for similar qualitative research and studies of journalism practice (Besley & Roberts 2010; Tanner, Friedman & Zheng 2015).

We chose Norway as the context for our research because its population exhibits high social media use and adoption (Brandtzaeg et al. 2016; IPSOS 2017). Scandinavian journalists are more eager social media users than journalists in other countries (Global Social Journalism Study 2015). Furthermore, with respect to working culture, Scandinavian journalism is typically characterised by individualism, a high degree of independence and a horizontal leadership and organisational structure (Widiyanto 2013), which may motivate journalists to engage in more innovative newsgathering practices.

To investigate how journalists use social media in their newsgathering, we employed similar interview guides with the younger and older participants. We focused our interviews on open questions concerning the journalists' use of and practices regarding different social media platforms, with a particular focus on how the journalists approached sources and content on different social media platforms. To collect further information on social affordances in social media and to indicate the participants' reach and networks, we also asked the participants to report their numbers of friends and followers on various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The interviews lasted for approximately two hours each and were conducted in neutral contexts, such as cafes.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and then coded using QDA Miner, a qualitative coding software. Based on a rigorous analysis of the extensive transcripts, we derived several themes and connections regarding newsgathering practices and differences in social media use. In addition, in line with our theoretical approach, we developed categories related to affordances and identity. Following other coding approaches, we then compared these emerging themes within and across the interviews to detect similarities and differences in the data (Tanner, Friedman & Zheng 2015). The analysis and the themes that emerged from the coding were discussed and compared throughout the entire process.

Results and discussion

In this section, we first describe the findings from the interviews exploring the differences in how older and younger journalists use social media for newsgathering at work regarding the concepts social media natives and immigrants. We then discuss how these findings relate to previous studies and the concepts of networked individualism and affordances, and how possible differences in newsgathering practices between younger and older journalists may point to a generational gap in networked publics.

Social media natives and immigrants

To understand the differences between younger and older journalists' social media newsgathering practices, we first needed to understand what kinds of social media platforms journalists use to observe the news and approach online sources.

As expected, the younger journalists in our study, those who grew up with social media, indicated far more frequent and significantly greater diversities of social media use for professional purposes, including activity on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, YouTube, LinkedIn and Snapchat. In line with previous research findings (e.g., Hermida 2010, 2013; Wilson & Supa 2013), the older journalists were mainly Twitter users with

little interest in exploring other social media platforms. Louise[1] (44 years) highlighted older journalists' dependence on Twitter as follows:

> We sit and monitor the news. (…) Everyone sits with TweetDeck, following a mix of media: the police, others and, of course, foreign affairs. And we follow @ BreakingNews. (Louise, 44 years)

In contrast with the older participants, our younger interviewees recognised Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook as important tools for finding news sources and exploring alternative networked publics. Interestingly, while older journalists reported Twitter as their primary news source, the younger participants primarily regarded Twitter as a channel for a few (e.g., politicians and other journalists), describing it as a 'Twitter bubble' in which journalists talk to other journalists.

While this digital divide in the journalists' frequency and breadth of social media use at work was noted in the Global Social Journalism Study (2015), our in-depth interview study offers additional insight into why and how the new generation of journalists is using social media more and in different ways than their older colleagues.

An obvious explanation for this divide is that younger journalists grew up with social media, while older journalists or social media immigrants did not. For example, only three of the eight older journalists reported using Facebook at work, while all of their younger counterparts used Facebook. A total of seven younger journalists reported using Instagram to follow and observe the world and to gather sources for different topics, while none of the older journalists reported similar use. The younger interviewees even reported using dating apps, such as Tinder, as part of their working practice and to seek new stories and sources. These behaviours align not only with the theory of digital natives, but also with what Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013) labelled 'enthusiastic activists', or young journalists who live fully online and take advantage of all the opportunities that social media offers.

Anna, a younger journalist in our study, described the digital divide between older and younger journalists as follows:

> I think that for those who have grown up like me – with the Internet – there is no distinction between digital and physical lives. But for older people, there are two different lives and two different realities. (Anna, 23 years)

Similar, Ragnar explained the potential divide as follows:

> Twitter is heavily used by my older colleagues. But then, I think that this is because they do not know of other sites, or maybe they are not familiar with them and don't know how to join different social media and groups on Facebook or LinkedIn or similar. (Ragnar, 25 years)

Hence, the younger participants typically perceived older journalists, or 'digital immigrants', as being more afraid and sceptical of using social media (Prensky 2001).

The concept of social media natives suggests that younger people have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and all other available social media. The impact of growing up with social media in this way was explained by one of the younger journalists (the autodidact in Table 1), who was employed by a newspaper simply because of her extensive social media use and writings on Facebook:

> I posted a lot of updates on Facebook. Nobody does this anymore, but before this was a common practice. A small news organisation observed that I could write and asked me if I would like to be an editorial assistant (…). They gave me lots of freedom to do everything I wanted, so I did interviews and stuff from the beginning. (Beate, 24 years)
>
> *Interviewer:* You were discovered on social media?
>
> Yes, on Facebook. (Beate, 24 years)

This quote illustrates the potential importance of social media for younger journalists, even in the transition from growing up with social media to using social media for work. Beate did not need education to become a journalist; instead, social media was her education. By contrast, the older journalists in our study seemed to be more socialised in traditional news norms and practices, in which the public sphere is dominated by the commercial mass media (e.g. Benkler 2006).

The younger journalists in this study also reported using various platforms and sources in their social media newsgathering, as demonstrated by quotes from two younger journalists:

> I spend a lot of time monitoring and stalking on Instagram and, really, just look at people that are relevant to what I'm doing: who they tag, what they put out, what they are interested in, what friends and connections they have, and whom they send shout-outs to, who it is. (Guro, 25 years)
>
> Facebook and Instagram are very important for my work. I get a lot of clues and leads to information and access to content that I otherwise would not have access to. I also have a lot of followers on Instagram, which gives me tips about stuff that is relevant for different news stories (…). In one case, I wrote about a particular sickness. I searched on Instagram for the sickness, and I got up to maybe 90 people with pictures. I contacted the most interesting ones and got a case for my story. (Bård, 23 years)

This latter quote indicates how many of the younger journalists established extensive social media networks before becoming journalists. These experiences may have given them access to multiple voices and sources as professionals. Somewhat surprisingly, and as illustrated by this quote, many of the younger journalists reported using Instagram as a research tool.

One possible implication of the social media divide or networked publics gap is that the older journalists in our study reported relying on elite sources on Twitter (e.g., Gans 2011), while younger journalists reported using several platforms and sources. Though many of the older journalists also used Facebook, most reported using Facebook for private purposes and Twitter for professional purposes. An older journalist explained his typical approach to Facebook as follows:

> I should maybe be better at using Facebook as a working tool. I'm, in a way, stuck in using Facebook more as a leisure thing: something personal to meet up with friends. Even so, I have many work connections on Facebook. It is nothing I use for work. (Ola, 50 years)

Affordances and networked individualism

As shown in the previous results, the younger journalists in this study use a variety of new social media, such as Instagram and Facebook, to reach new networked publics not available or known to the older journalists. Thus, it seems that social media offer several benefits related to social affordances, particularly for young journalists, that go beyond Hermida's (2010) notion of the new 'awareness system' of Twitter journalism. This observation echoes Wellman et al.'s (2003) influential theory of 'networked individualism' and their understanding of young people's social media culture and social affordances.

The younger interviewees also reported using social media as an alternative means to connect with people to source content, interests or eyewitness accounts of events around the globe. Thus, social media not only provides journalists easy access to a new sphere of communication, but also helps them establish relationships with sources and gain new ideas for and perspectives on stories.

Two of the younger journalists described social media as the new coffee house or bar, but with a much wider and better reach due to its unlimited global access. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> Inside this little smartphone [pointing at her own], you have the whole world. You can, through social media, be very close to and observe people who are transparent and open their lives to everyone. (Guro, 25 years)

Similarly, Julie stated that social media creates access to several news sources and interesting arenas for newsgathering and observations.

> You can, in a way, see what people are interested in, what people care about, on both Instagram and Facebook. And this is the most important thing about using social media: seeing what people talk about and observing what's happening. (Julie, 26 years)

These experiences indicate that social media may be redefining the public sphere of journalism. Journalists using social media can observe and contact various people and news sources to get different perspectives on single news events (e.g., Gans 2011; Rainie & Wellman 2012). Hence, the differentiated community of users with whom the younger journalists seem to engage might help improve the flow of knowledge and, thereby, enhance their overall journalistic performance.

In analysing the older group's interviews and social media profiles, we found nothing similar concerning social reach. For example, one older journalist said:

> I have only 50 to 60 friends on Facebook (…) I don't use Instagram or other social media, except Twitter, where I have about 150 or so followers. (Geir, 54 years)

By comparison, the younger journalists reported larger social networks, with some maintaining up to three thousand friends on Facebook and ten thousand followers on Instagram. These large social networks were typically rooted in the younger journalists' long experience with these social media.

Access to wider social networks through social media may provide social affordances that allow journalists to access different segments for different needs. Furthermore, different social media platforms may produce different discussion and information venues, thereby broadening the public discourse and adding multiple perspectives to everyday

journalism (Gans 2011). Two quotes describe these social affordances and the multiple perspectives that follow newsgathering in social media:

> The benefit with social media is that more voices are heard. You get the opportunity to learn about other stories and get in touch with the people and write a news story (…). It [social media] makes it possible to hunt for good stories. (Jennifer, 51 years)

> I'm coming across so many things; in a way, these things can be both short and innocent things and simple things that also, in a way, lead to deeper and more serious things. Yet, it is perhaps the best in the pursuit of sources because there are lots of different groups I attend which contain a lot of interesting people. I simply get in touch with so many people, and it's amazing what things these people come across and discuss. (Bård, 23 years)

These quotes also illustrate the democratic potential of social media as a changing newsgathering process that gives more people a voice. Still, as one participant expressed, realising this potential is not only a question of technology; it is also a question of how journalists and their organisations use it. As one interviewee explained, journalists must have the capacity and skills to exploit the affordances of social media for journalism.

> I organise my social life through Facebook when it comes to parties or soccer training or all of these things. However, it is not a given that I'm good at using it as a journalist. It often requires more; it's about universal journalistic flair. It's about being creative. Some journalists have 20,000 followers on Twitter and are king of Instagram, but not everyone uses it systematically for journalism. (Gunnar, 23 years)

Successful use of social media at work is, therefore, not only about being a social media native, but also about having a good sense of journalism.

To gain more social affordances, journalistic branding may be important. However, the younger journalists, in particular, expressed fears of spamming their friends with news. They also viewed Facebook as more of a private affair for news dissemination than, for example, Twitter, where they were more comfortable sharing, but not necessarily discussing, professional work. A common comment was: "I will not do it too often because I do not want to spam my Facebook friends with news" (Anna, 23). These findings may support the work of Djerf-Pierre, Ghersetti and Hedman (2016), who found a noticeable decline in journalists' valuations of social media affordances from 2012 to 2014.

Despite these findings of younger journalists being reluctant to share news and brand themselves in social media, the various ways in which younger journalists embrace more and different online public spheres than older journalists might imply a gap in the types of networked publics different age groups of journalists approach. Our finding concerning different newsgathering practices in social media between younger and older journalists may confirm the results of a recent U.S. study, which found that editors with longer professional experience as journalists (i.e., older journalists) are less likely than those with less experience (i.e., younger journalists) to rate social media as an important news source (Yamamoto, Nah & Chung 2017). This may indicate a gap in networked publics, as discussed in more detail below.

A networked publics gap

As already shown, our younger interviewees claimed that Twitter was primarily a public sphere created by journalists for journalists, stating that it could be considered an 'information bubble' that largely excludes the general population.

> Twitter has too much importance in the media, and they forget that there are more people outside this bubble [...]. We are only concerned with a very small community within social media. (Gunnar, 23 years)

Another young interviewee described how older journalists had a narrower scope of social media newsgathering, illustrating how some older journalists fail to see the potential of social media platforms like Instagram at work:

> Those that are a little bit older might simply not think Instagram is relevant for their work, but I do, because I know that Instagram is much more than a photo-sharing service. (Anna, 23 years)

The older journalists' heavy Twitter use was confirmed by our older interviewees. One such interviewee stated the following: "Of the social media platforms, I am using Twitter most, and I am using it only for professional purposes" (Lars, 48 years). Another older interviewee similarly said:

> With the riots in Kiev, our most important source was Twitter (…) with *Kiev Post* and the opposition-friendly radio channels, and all of them tweeted all the time (...). And in the Kiev story in today's printed newspaper, most of what I wrote was based on tweets from Ukraine that we followed yesterday evening. (Felix, 53 years)

The older journalists in this study used Twitter to follow established elite sources, including major local news organisations like the Associated Press and Reuters, the police and major politicians. Hence, in keeping with Benkler's (2006) and Gans' (2011) findings, the older journalists in this study largely follow traditional news norms and practices, in which the public sphere is dominated by elite sources and commercial mass media. As a result, they fail to observe and/or address a significant portion of the population (Benkler 2006). One potential challenge is that many journalists may follow identical sources. As one older journalist noted:

> We use Twitter and we search Twitter for eyewitnesses (…). You're in need of stuff and information fast, and often you sit in another country. I remember the terror act in Boston, during the marathon. This case exploded on Twitter, with a lot of tweets with photos and information about the terrorists. Most tweets were generated by American news organisations (…). Then, you realise that all media use the same tweets. Every one of us followed Boston police, other police and local police and news. (Jens, 49 years)

This quote illustrates important differences in how younger and older journalists see and investigate the world through the lens of social media, indicating a gap in how these two groups perceive the online public sphere. While the older journalists in our study mainly approached newsgathering through Twitter, the younger journalists reported engaging with a variety of networked publics. Hence, different social media platforms, such as Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and Twitter, produce different discussion and

information venues, thereby broadening the public discourse and adding new perspectives to everyday journalism.

Recent changes in the world of networked journalism, supported by social media, give journalists more freedom to deal with various segments of their networks as different needs arise. However, differences between younger and older journalists with respect to their adoption patterns, previous experiences and use of social media may produce two different kinds of journalism. While the older journalists in this study reported relying heavily on Twitter, the younger journalists reported leveraging a variety of different networked publics to trace and monitor larger diversities of people and connections. These differences illustrate how older journalists may fail to make use of larger communities or actively take part in new public spheres (Deuze 2009), while younger journalists more comprehensively leverage social media's social affordances.

Conclusions

The extant literature offers little information on the differences between social media natives and immigrants in the journalistic workforce or how age affects journalists' use of social media as a newsgathering resource. As far as we are aware, this is the first qualitative study to compare how younger journalists (who grew up with social media) and older journalists use social media for newsgathering.

An important finding is that younger journalists reported engaging in journalistic research across more and different social media platforms than older journalists. Therefore, the younger journalists seemed to better leverage the affordances of various social media platforms and, thus, to be more advanced and innovative in their newsgathering. This finding supports Rogers' (1995) report that younger individuals are more open to new and innovative ideas than older individuals. Furthermore, our results showed that younger journalists viewed their older co-workers as being sceptical and restrictive in their social media use. The older participants confirmed this. Furthermore, whereas younger journalists used Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and other social media platforms in their newsgathering, the older journalists primarily used Twitter. Partially for this reason, the younger journalists saw Twitter as an 'information bubble': a platform mainly for journalists and news organisations. Younger journalists, therefore, stressed the need to go beyond Twitter and use multiple social media news sources.

The younger journalists in our study also indicated accessing greater social reach and more perspectives through social media, as well as connections to larger social networks. Social media natives, therefore, seemed to benefit from the networks and usage patterns of their youth, which increased their ability to use social affordances to create new connections, sources and information across various networked publics. This finding suggests that younger journalists have better social operating systems than older journalists for social media newsgathering. It also suggests a 'networked publics gap', in which older and younger journalists do not typically access the same networked publics.

Despite these insights, this study suffers a few important limitations regarding context and study participants. First, the study was based on a small and explorative qualitative study in Norway. We must, therefore, be cautious about generalising the observed generational differences. Important factors other than age, such as practices and norms in news organisations, organisation size, etc., could influence how journalists make use

of social media (e.g. Yamamoto, Nah & Chung 2017). Our findings indicating a gap in newsgathering practices, however, are interesting and warrant further investigation.

The study was conducted in Norway, a country particularly suited to this research because of its high level of social media penetration. The context of this empirical work could, therefore, provide researchers with insights into the direction in which social media use in journalism is evolving. It is possible that the younger social media natives in this study reflect broader changes in journalistic culture and a more democratic and multi-perspectival approach to journalism. Hence, this study theoretically and empirically advances our understanding of journalists' new and future roles in social media.

First, and in addition to indicating a networked publics gap, the observed newsgathering processes provide insight into new trends and forms of journalism and new newsgathering processes that are beginning to emerge through and around social media. Social media newsgathering allows more voices to be heard and allows journalists – particularly younger journalists – to learn about a wider range of stories from a wider diversity of perspectives. This development may make the future of journalism more democratic. However, further research is required to understand the particular impacts of these new newsgathering practices on journalistic norms, news evaluations and news selection.

Second, by applying the theories of affordances, networked individualism and social media natives, our study shows how these concepts can serve as useful perspectives for understanding differences in journalistic social media practices in future studies. To test and extend our findings, future research should use larger surveys to explore which types of journalists track and monitor which types of networked publics across different generations and countries in more detail. Moreover, future research should engage in more in-depth analyses to understand the key implications of the gaps between older and younger journalists' approaches to newsgathering in social media.

Note

1. To ensure privacy, we used fictitious names for the interviewees.

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Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the EC co-funded FP 7 project REVEAL (Project-No FP7-610928). More information about the REVAL-project can be found at: http://www.revealproject.eu.

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