

9. Youth news media use in Estonia

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This chapter discusses how young people in Estonia engage with media and how they make sense of news. The chapter introduces research data from recent studies and surveys, focusing on media users in their late teens and 20s. It appears that young people's engagement with news is still quite strong, though highly individualized, selective and interest-driven, both technically and in terms of content. Their patterns of media use are far from homogeneous, but it is evident that the written press and linear television have lost importance as the preferred and quickest sources of information. Instead, the role of social media sites has grown, although the trustworthiness of their content is perceived to be quite low.

In the past ten years, Estonia has witnessed the cultural transformation that has occurred with the change from text-based to digital-based “reading”.¹ These developments have brought about a major change in the ways and means of obtaining news and differences in choices and preferences, which are especially visible between age groups. The latest devices, platforms and media consumption trends have been adopted most enthusiastically by young (and resourceful) people.² It has also been claimed that their speed of information use is different from that of older generations – for many young people, linear and print media as information providers are just too “slow”.³ This chapter gives an overview of how young people in Estonia use news media and

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what motivations/lack of motivations they have. The chapter also asks how young media users define news and newsworthiness, and to what extent their own interpretations agree or disagree with the traditional Anglo-American concept, which is dominant in news research.⁴

The Estonian media system and general media use patterns, with a focus on young audiences

The Estonian media system, characterized by a liberal and market-oriented media policy and a moderately developed self-regulatory system of journalism,⁵ serves a population of only about 1.3 million inhabitants, with two major subpopulations: Estonian- and Russian-speaking communities (comprising about 68% and 24% of the country's population, respectively).⁶ Despite the small size of the market, the diversity in media platforms and channels is significant. One of the recent studies, conducted by Kantar Emor in 2016, includes nearly 30 national and local newspapers (eight of them in Russian) and 40 magazines.⁷ The Estonian TV broadcasting market, on the other hand, is shaped by three main channels: Estonian Television (owned by Estonian Public Broadcasting) and the commercial channels Kanal2 (owned by AS Eesti Meedia) and TV3 (owned by Providence Equity Partners). Altogether, there are more than 20 radio stations and about 10 TV channels, along with a number of international services. All of the main newspapers and the Estonian Public Broadcasting produce content for online platforms on a daily basis; some outlets also provide news in Russian and English.

The general trends in media use demonstrate that even though television is still the preferred source of news and information (in 2017, 46% preferred TV as the primary source and 31% as a complementary source), the proportion of those preferring online websites is on the rise (the respective numbers in 2017 were 30% and 28%; in 2016, they were 26% and 29%). At the same time, radio and the printed press have lost importance as the preferred sources of news (10% preferred radio and 4% newspapers as the main source, nearly 40% and nearly 30% as a complementary source).⁸

In addition, a survey conducted by the research company Kantar Emor revealed that the number of newspapers and magazines read by people has decreased, especially among younger age groups. In

2000, 15 to 29-year-olds read, at least from time to time, four to seven different magazines and regularly read a couple of newspapers. By 2016, their repertoire had shrunk to sporadic and irregular reading of one or two newspapers. The TNS Atlas survey from early 2018 showed that 14 per cent of 15 to 19-year-olds still read newspapers almost every day, which is only half of the rate of 20 to 29-year-olds.⁹ Watching television (on TV sets) has also decreased among young people. While in 2000, 15 to 19-year-olds spent approximately three and a half hours and 20 to 29-year-olds more than four hours a day watching linear TV, the data from 2016 reveal a decrease in TV watching to two hours a day in both groups. A similar tendency can be found with radio listening, which has dropped to one to two hours per day from two and a half to three and a half hours in 2000 among young people.¹⁰

These results are mirrored by those of another representative study, “Me. The World. The Media”, conducted in five waves by the University of Tartu during the period 2002–2014. An analysis of the 2014 survey data revealed that half of those aged between 15 and 29 had abandoned some of the traditional media forms for new forms, including social media.¹¹ Over a third of them had completely stopped reading newspapers, slightly less than a third had stopped listening to music on the radio, and a quarter had given up watching TV programmes (in real time) and films on TV sets. Almost a fifth of them had abandoned following news programmes on TV, and one-tenth news on a radio. At this point, it should be emphasized that several on-demand services and TV watching on the internet are on the rise and have changed consumption patterns significantly.

Thus, it can be argued that the internet has become an integral part of the information space of media users in Estonia. According to the Kantar Emor study, the share of internet users has tripled since the 2000s, reaching 83 per cent by 2016. Among 15 to 29-year-olds, the use of the internet is ubiquitous. In 2017, 98 per cent of people aged 16 to 24 used the internet every day, regardless of gender, age, prevalent communication language or education, as can be seen in the data from Statistics Estonia. Dependence on the internet has intensified even more due to the spread of smart devices: nearly 614,000 people in Estonia use smartphones for internet activities,¹² and about 75-80 per cent of

smartphone owners are between 15 and 29 years old (according to the “Me. The World. The Media” 2014 data).¹³

The main types of news media usage profiles among young people

Although there is a great deal of diversity and fragmentation in media practices and the “news repertoire universe”,^{14,15} systematic sociological research reveals larger patterns that distinguish different types of users. As previous studies have demonstrated, the main socio-demographic characteristics in shaping such a typology are age, education and ethnic background, and/or the prevalent communication language, which in Estonia is either Estonian or Russian.¹⁶

The data from the most recent wave of the “Me. The World. The Media” survey confirm that the engagement with news content in various media forms in general is relatively high: more than 61 per cent of the population reported that they followed news across various media platforms at least once a day or even more frequently.¹⁷ At the same time, the number of frequent and regular users of news among younger age groups is much smaller: slightly over 20 per cent of the 15 to 19-year-olds and more than 40 per cent of the 20 to 29-year-olds followed news on a daily basis.

It is interesting to consider *when* in one’s life course news use habits and patterns evolve and crystallize. Triin Vihalemm and Marianne Leppik have discussed news audiences’ formation within the context of Estonia, proposing that such practices emerge somewhere in the 20s,¹⁸ and become more deeply entrenched later. Before that age, people tend to have rather sporadic and inconsistent news use habits.

From a topical point of view, different age groups prefer different content in news. In young people’s repertoires, topics related to “human interest” and entertainment, and those related to stage of life, are more likely read and paid attention to: youth issues, education, pop culture, technology, etc. For middle-aged and older adults, other topics and issues become more compelling: family and children, work life and career-related issues, politics and social issues, culture and history, health and well-being, etc.¹⁹

What might be the most common features of young news media users have been proposed and elaborated on by Peeter Vihalemm and Ragne Kõuts-Klemm (see Table 1).²⁰ Based on a cluster analysis of the

Table 1. A typology of media users, 2014. Per cent of Estonian respondents

	Type						
	Multi-active users of traditional media	Active users of new media	Moderately active users of traditional media	Moderately active users of traditional and online media	Users of only new media	Passive media users	The average among Estonians
Per cent among respondents	16	13	22	18	14	17	100
Gender							
Male	53	42	39	49	53	50	47
Female	47	58	61	51	47	50	53
Age							
15–19	1	14	<1	9	17	1	6
20–29	6	43	1	26	54	6	20
30–44	16	22	9	32	22	17	19
45–54	26	15	12	17	5	21	16
55–64	27	3	24	14	1	21	16
65–74	20	2	42	3	2	23	18
75–79	5	1	10	0	0	11	5
Education							
Lower than Secondary education	5	13	10	18	35	41	20
Secondary education	43	46	60	53	43	50	50
Higher education	52	41	30	30	22	9	30

Comments: Types with most younger users are shaded (N=1,020).

Source: Survey “Me. The World. The Media”, 2014. Vihailemm & Kõuts (2017, p. 269).

data from the “Me. The World. The Media” study, the authors have distinguished between six types of general media users, of which two (type II and type V in Table 1) consist of proportionally more young people than the other four.

The first of the two salient types or clusters in the typology, which are dominated by the younger generations, has been labelled “active new media users”, consisting of 13 per cent of all respondents, 14 per cent of the 15 to 20-year-old and 43 per cent of the 20 to 29-year-old respondents. The dominance of online media shapes their media repertoire, and the frequent use of smartphones and tablets characterizes

their preferences in terms of media forms. This type spends rather little time watching TV, while they have quite high cultural interests, follow international media (in other languages) and are interested in information from all around the world.

The second type is labelled “users of only new media” and was not as clearly present in the fourth wave of the survey conducted in 2011. The type consists of 14 per cent of all respondents, 17 per cent of the 15- to 20-year-old and 54 per cent of the 20 to 29-year-old respondents.

Fact Box. Media habits and lifestyle of the six types of media users among Estonians, 2014 (see Table 1).

Type 1: Multi-active user of traditional media	Reads newspapers, magazines and books; listens a lot to radio and watches TV. Interested in news, discussions and documentaries. This type is a keen consumer of culture. The frequency of use of the computer is moderate, while the use of social media is rather low. Many contacts in Estonia and abroad, and travels quite often. Active as a citizen.
Type 2: Active user of new media	Uses traditional media via smartphone and tablet. Quite frequently follows foreign media reports; has a need to be thoroughly informed. Has an interest in culture; mobile, with an active social life. Many contacts in Estonia and abroad. Focused on work and self-development. Active as a citizen.
Type 3: Moderately active user of traditional media	Reads newspapers, watches TV and listens to the radio at average levels. Does not follow foreign media very often; rarely uses a computer. About one-third do not use the internet. Likes to read books and has a versatile pattern of culture consumption. Moderately active as a citizen.
Type 4: Moderately active user of traditional and online media	Watches TV frequently, especially entertainment shows, but is not keen on following news programmes. Follows online media, and has an interest in foreign media content. Has quite low interest in culture and literature; is slightly interested in sports. Has a more mobile lifestyle than Type no. 3. Moderately active as a citizen.
Type 5: User of only new media	Almost no interest in media or books. Very little engagement with culture. Active and frequent use of the computer, especially social media use. Minimally follows online media and foreign media channels, with a clear preference for entertainment. Has a vibrant social life and an interest in sports activities. No interest in politics or civic participation.
Type 6: Passive media user	Low media use. Limited following of TV and entertainment shows. Has a poor knowledge of foreign languages, which also limits their media use. More than half of this type do not use the internet. Has very little interest in books. Has a non-mobile lifestyle. No interest in politics or civic participation.

Source: Survey “Me. The World. The Media”, 2014. The fact box is compiled based on the study by Vihalemm & Kõuts (2017).

They have almost no contact with traditional media forms: they do not read newspapers and books, and do not watch TV (on TV sets) or listen to the radio. Their media repertoire consists of very little journalistic news programming; instead, they immerse themselves in the internet and social media, where they get news and information that attract their attention. From the lifestyle point of view, both described types are focused on studying and/or working and have vibrant social lives

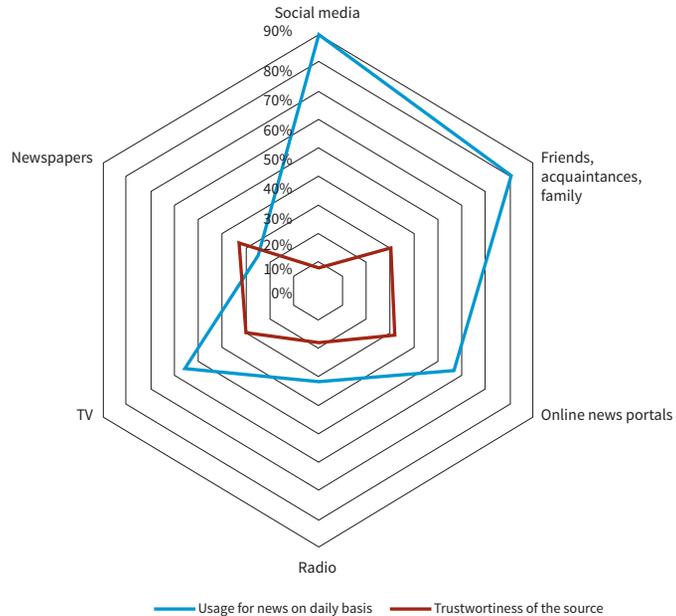
full of entertainment, sports and other activities. The first type is also characterized by greater (domestic) mobility.

As for preferences in social media platforms, Facebook has the highest number of users in Estonia (more than 600,000 users), being most popular among 25 to 30-year-olds and slightly less popular among 19 to 24-year-olds.²¹ Youngsters prefer to use Youtube, Snapchat or Instagram due to their convenient photo and video sharing applications. Facebook seems too boring and overflowing with advertisements for them; they also feel uncomfortable having their parents and grandparents keeping an eye on them on Facebook.²² vKontakte and Odnoklassniki are popular among about 35 to 50 per cent of Russian-speaking communities, respectively.²³

Young people's overwhelming "migration" to the internet and social media networks was also revealed in Statistics Estonia,²⁴ emphasizing the vast variety of activities they engage in on social media, among them news consumption and information seeking, and by the report of the "Structured Dialogue" project (initiated by the European Commission and conducted in Estonia in 2017 by the Estonian National Youth Council).²⁵ The national sample of the latter study consisted of 1,735 young people aged 13 to 30; the data were collected through a survey and individual interviews. Again, the survey results revealed the majority's (89%) commitment to social media becoming the most common and convenient way of getting news and information. Almost the same amount (81%) of information and news came from young people's friends, family members and acquaintances, while about half of the participants followed online media and TV on a daily basis, a third got their news from the radio and a quarter from newspapers. Together with exploring those changing patterns, the study sought to assess young people's perceptions of the credibility of various news and information sources they relied on. Not surprisingly, the results showed a certain discrepancy between the frequent use of sources and their trustworthiness as assessed by the young users. Although the level of trust in sources listed in the survey questionnaire was not very high in general, a clear divide between credibility in established news providers and social media as news sources was evident. About one-third of the respondents saw newspapers and online news portals as trustworthy, but less than

one-tenth trusted information they got from social media networks (see Figure 1 for a comparative overview).

Figure 1. Sources used for news purposes every day and their trustworthiness as perceived by 13 to 30-year-old young people in Estonia, 2017. Per cent of usage and trust.



Comment: (N=1,666).

Source: Report of the project “Structured Dialogue” by the Estonian National Youth Council. The figure is compiled by the author of the chapter.

How do young people define news and what makes news reliable?

This section explores users’ motivations and lack of motivation regarding news consumption, asking: what makes news consumption meaningful or tedious? With this purpose in mind, Maria José Brites and Ragne Kõuts-Klemm conducted a qualitative study in 2015–2016 in Portugal and Estonia.²⁶ The data were collected from 17- to 20-year-old and 36 to 49-year-old people, who were asked to fill in a media diary of their daily experiences with media and participate in interviews. The overall results revealed significant differences between Estonian and

Portuguese young people; some of these can be interpreted in the light of the status that media literacy education has in the school curricula in the two countries. However, this section presents only the results of the Estonian data.

Among the younger Estonian participants, news was defined through several criteria. First, they emphasized that news had to contain, explicitly, *new* information, *new* facts, details and aspects about any event or issue. As one of the interviewees, a secondary school student, stated: “News is something I didn’t know [about] before, and is something interesting.”²⁷

The second significant marker for distinguishing and classifying content as “real news” with particular form and structure is the media brand and its taken-for-granted values. In this case, obviously, responsibility for assessing and providing quality news content was assigned to the producers. However, as the young participants also acknowledged, some subportals of respectable news organizations had taken rather tabloid and sensationalist approaches.²⁸ Therefore, it can be argued that young users are aware of the distinctions between various “genres” of news and acknowledge their specific features. These aspects are more closely attended to when using the internet. News in its most appropriate form was seen as based on factual information, scientific evidence, etc.; on the other hand, there is sensational news, based on gossip, curiosity and unnamed sources, which was classified by the participants as entertainment-oriented content rather than news.

Besides those young people who got their news from the mainstream media sources, the findings of the study revealed a group of young people who were mainly oriented to recommendations and opinions from their peers and other personal sources, especially when the shared or suggested content was meaningful and relevant to their own lifeworlds (the relevance of topics and issues, as pointed out above, is to a large extent life course-related and may change over time). In addition, it should also be emphasized that there are young people who actively avoid news consumption, or avoid particular news topics.²⁹ One such unpopular topic specified by the participants was politics, and the main reason for avoidance was a lack of interest. At the same time, the interview responses indicated personal interest and psychological closeness as important criteria for focusing on

news: “News has to be interesting to me,” stated one interviewee, a vocational school student.³⁰

The study also investigated what motivated young people’s news consumption and found that, while among the young Portuguese people a relationship between citizenship and news consumption was articulated (i.e. news consumption was seen as a social responsibility of a good citizen), the young Estonians’ strongest motivation was the need for personally important, educative, “mind-broadening” and knowledge-providing information, which, among other things, helped to prepare them for their future (beyond school). Also, news, according to the Estonian young people, helped to keep them up to date and acquaint them with domestic and international issues and events. The participants, however, also mentioned some demotivating factors concerning news consumption: for example, explicit bias in sources, implicit biases referring to stereotypes or certain attitudes, inaccurate facts, an excess of bad and frightening information (e.g. about catastrophes and tragedies) and one-sidedness in news reporting (vs a more all-encompassing approach), leaving users with the impression that “all news looks the same”.

Therefore, one may claim that at a time when the concepts of “post-truth”, “alternative facts” and “fake news” are becoming a focus of public attention, the critical need for news literacy skills (and sometimes healthy scepticism) has become more urgent. A similar point was also made by the participants in the “Structured Dialogue” study, mentioned above. In particular, when the 13 to 30-year-olds were asked what, in their opinion, guaranteed the credibility of news content, the majority of them (76%) pointed out the verifiability of the information or material. The users defined trustworthy news as information in which all facts presented could be checked from the original or other sources, in one way or another; in addition, all sources had to be clearly identified and referenced. In order to be able to check and critically assess any news story, competences and skill in information search, critical reading and analysis are needed to be developed, for example in schools and educational programmes.

Conclusion

To conclude the overview of young people’s news media use in Estonia, as the available data and arguments offered in public discussions indi-

cate, young people are dynamic members of media audiences as well as of society, though they have less life experience than older people. They may be either more or less active and have various preferences in terms of how they navigate the news media landscape. However, they are adapting to diverse new stimuli, while older people may be held back by inertia and commitment to already crystallized practices. Their patterns of media use are far from homogeneous. Thus, it can be concluded that young people's engagement with news in Estonia is still quite strong, though highly selective, and interest-driven, both technically and in terms of content. Based on these findings, it can also be concluded that, together with the ever-increasing individualization of media and information practices, the understanding of news is also changing among the public, both young and old.

Notes

1. Lauristin (2014).
2. Kalmus, Masso & Lauristin (2017).
3. Niitra (2015).
4. Hamilton & Tworek (2016).
5. Kõuts-Klemm (2017); Stetka & Örnebring (2013).
6. Statistics Estonia (2017).
7. Heinla (2016).
8. Standard Eurobarometer 88. November 2017.
9. Niinas (2018).
10. Heinla (2016).
11. Vihalemm & Kõuts (2017).
12. Järv (2018).
13. Kõuts, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Siibak & Lauristin (2017).
14. As shown in the study by Kõuts-Klemm and Brites (2017), young people's preferences in Estonia reveal various news media repertoires, as is the case with other age groups. Some have quality news orientations with online preferences; some combine quality news, online news and social media; others follow mainly social media through which they also have contacts with traditional channels – some occasionally, some more frequently.
15. Kõuts-Klemm (2017, pp. 375-377); Kõuts-Klemm & Brites (2017).
16. Vihalemm, Lauristin & Kõuts (2012); Kõuts-Klemm (2017); Seppel (2017).
17. Vihalemm & Kõuts (2017, pp. 254-256).
18. Vihalemm & Leppik (2014).

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19. Opermann (2014); Vihalemm & Kõuts (2017); Kalmus, Masso & Lauristin (2017, p. 631).
20. Vihalemm & Kõuts (2017, pp. 266-271).
21. Communication agency Dalton (2015).
22. Idol (2018).
23. Lõugas (2012).
24. Ait (2017).
25. Project “Structured Dialogue” (2017).
26. Brites & Kõuts-Klemm (forthcoming).
27. Brites & Kõuts-Klemm (forthcoming).
28. E.g. subsites <https://elu24.postimees.ee> and <https://sobranna.postimees.ee> within the website of the largest quality daily *Postimees*, available at the link www.postimees.ee.
29. Velsker & Kõuts (2015).
30. Brites & Kõuts-Klemm (forthcoming).

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