Chapter 5
Why 'news' matters

In his study of rumours as an alternative kind of news, Tamotsu Shibutani (1966) claimed that news is not just information, but "information that is important to someone" (p. 40). Building his sociological theory on the study of a large number of rumours, he underscored that people gather and search for information about matters that are urgent for them. From such a perspective it is not surprising that one of the core aspects that spontaneously emerged in the discussions with our participants was the *relevance* of news, emphasising that news needs to be important, or to some extent useful, for people to bother to pay attention to it. The broadened definition of news that our young adults adhered to, as well as their news practices, both part of an inherently digital culture, have reinforced the audience's agency in choosing which news to engage in, and calls for a solid understanding of how young audiences construct news relevance in today's multiplex digital media landscape, including which news matters to them and why.

Although we have seen an increased scholarly interest in how news audiences construct news relevance, up until now such studies have only looked at the relevance of traditional news journalism, not paying attention to the widened information repertoires that we, in good company of many other contemporary studies of news perceptions and practices, discuss in this book. In accordance with our phenomenological approach, we understand news relevance from a meaning-making perspective, which means we explore why news matters to young people, and why they care to pay attention to particular information in their daily news feeds, but not others. The heavy, and important, influence of practice theory (cf. Couldry, 2004, 2012) in contemporary audience-centred studies of journalism, has tended to downplay the role of *paying attention to* and *making meaning of* news in contemporary journalism studies. In this chapter we will take a closer look at these dimensions of news relevance and explore how ideas about relevant information play a role in how young people care about news in the digital media landscape.

Approaching the relevance of news

As described in Chapter 2, our 'media day' approach aimed for an open understanding of the young adults' ways of thinking about news, but also a broad understanding of their general information practices – what they valued and found important to be updated and informed about – and if and how news journalism fitted into that picture. This means we did not restrict our discussions to a primarily jour-

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nalistic perspective of either news or news relevance, and we did not normatively construct news journalism as more relevant than other media content; nor did we specifically ask the young people about how they perceived and practised 'the news' until quite late in the interviews (when this aspect of their media use had often become clear anyway). In these talks, however, *relevance* emerged spontaneously as a core topic of discussion, which basically meant what kind of content the young adults chose to pay attention to in the flow of content on the platforms and other digital media that they used.

Despite an increased interest in news relevance from the audience's point of view, what news relevance is from the audience point of view is still somewhat theoretically unclear. In this chapter we will therefore approach the relevance of news in three main steps. First, we will engage in a phenomenological discussion, exploring news relevance theoretically, building in particular on Berger and Luckmann's (1966) concept of the *structure of relevance*. This discussion concludes in a model of analysis of news relevance from the audience perspective that we have also used when analysing the young adults' discourses about news relevance. We will then move on to analyse through which criteria the young adults choose which news to pay attention to in their everyday lives. This discussion ends up in a matrix of four types of digital news relevance, also contributing to a deeper understanding of the ways digital news was understood to be relevant by our young participants. Lastly, the chapter provides a theoretical definition of news relevance from the audience's perspective. As in the previous chapters, we here work with the distinction between 'news' and 'the news', underscoring how the young adults in the concept of 'news' include everything they consider to be news, in the digital media landscape they inhabit.

News relevance from the audience's perspective

Despite an emerging scholarly interest in how audiences construct news relevance, the number of studies of news relevance from the audience's perspective is still relatively small (see however Martin, 2008; Heikkilä et al., 2010, Heikkilä & Ahva, 2015; Lee & Chyi, 2014; Swart et al., 2017a; Schrøder, 2019). One pioneering study in this field is Pamela Shoemaker and Akiba Cohen's (2006) comparative analysis of how ordinary people evaluated news stories as newsworthy compared with how they were covered by newspapers. In an ambitious comparison of ten countries, they showed generally small, and sometimes even negative, correlations between how newspapers framed news as relevant, compared with how it was evaluated by their audiences, concluding that "there is a disconnection between what ordinary people think is newsworthy and how prominent newspapers dis-

play the stories" (p. 110). Another early study is Vivian Martin's (2008) study of *news attendance*, showing how audiences construct news relevance based on assessments of relevance and credibility, on framing, self-identity and orientation affirmation, leading to an 'awareness–relevance–attendance loop' that explains how people acknowledge and pay attention to news they find relevant. Martin particularly highlighted the cultural boundary work involved in the construction of news relevance, relating to aspects of cultural identity, such as gender, race and ideology, something closely related to what we discussed as 'my-topics' in Chapter 4.

Martin's study is particularly relatable for us as it discusses news relevance as something that relates to news content, which is how our participants also framed relevance. From the mid-2010s and onwards, however, studies of news relevance from the audience's perspective have heavily engaged with practice theory (c.f. Couldry, 2004, 2012), leaving the dimension of meaning-making and paying attention to news content somewhat underexplored (see for example Heikkilä & Ahva, 2015; Swart et al., 2017b). In a recent analysis of news users in the UK, however, Kim Christian Schrøder (2019) argued that news relevance is the paramount driver of news consumption and that it is constructed around news that affects people's personal lives (and those who are part of it), and relates to people's earlier experiences, as well as news that users believe the people around them will be interested in, also underlining the shareability of news. Schrøder identified five factors that drive news relevance: 1) news story topic (headline and subheading), 2) brand (preference), 3) proximity (human and geographical), 4) sociability (assumed interest of others) and 5) previous knowledge (from the cross-media environment). Schrøder, similarly to Martin, hence sees news relevance as constructed through audiences' relations to news as content in a social context. We did not ask our participants about what news they found relevant – it was brought up spontaneously by them in our discussions, and we hence did not define relevance for them. The way our participants talked about news relevance, however, had much in common with how news relevance is discussed by Martin (2008) and Schrøder (2019).

It is important to separate journalists' constructions of news relevance from their audiences' when addressing news relevance from an audience perspective, something identified also by other scholars. Besides Martin's *news attendance*, Shoemaker and Cohen (2006) use *newsworthy* to talk about that which media audiences find relevant, while Angela Lee and Add Hsiang Chyi (2014) use *noteworthy* to describe the same thing ('newsworthy' in their terminology is relevance constructed by journalists). Another interlinked concept is *worthwhileness* (Schrøder & Larsen, 2010; Schrøder, 2015), explaining why news users include certain news stories in their daily media repertoire, but not others.

Another interesting take on news relevance from the audiences' perspective which is worth bringing forward here has been developed outside of journalism

studies. In a linguistic study of news users' discursive practices, Jena Barchas-Lichtenstein et al. (2021) conducted an analysis of the construction of news relevance as part of daily speech. Building on pragmatist 'relevance theory' (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Wilson & Sperber, 2006), Barchas-Lichtenstein et al. define relevance as input that makes "a worthwhile difference to the individual's representation of the world" (Wilson & Sperber, 2006, p. 608) and establish relevance as dependent on context, concluding that people's construction of news relevance is related to *the scale of collectivities* to which they subjectively belong. This means that people who feel a belonging to larger-scale collectivities are more likely to find 'the news' relevant than those who feel they belong to smaller-scale collectivities. Based on this, they suggest the following provisional definition of news relevance from the audience's perspective: "a news report is relevant if a news user treats it as impacting the everyday experiences and interactions of either that individual or a larger collectivity of which they describe themselves as a member" (Barchas-Lichtenstein et al., 2021, p. 59). These significant findings also have much in common with Martin's (2008) conclusion that audiences' construction of news relevance include dimensions of identity boundary work.

From previous research of news relevance from the audiences' perspective we know that news relevance is a practice that is framed by the everyday context (Heikkilä et al., 2015; Swart et al., 2017b), and that it is constructed through assessments of topics, framing, brand, credibility and sociability, and related to the identity, experiences, culture and proximity of news to the news audience (Martin, 2008; Schrøder, 2019). We can also note that previous research on news relevance from the audiences' perspective has largely seen news relevance as a coherent concept, that may be explained by different surrounding factors, and that it is affected by the scale of collectivities that people feel they belong to (Barchas-Lichtenstein et al., 2021). Barchas-Lichtenstein et al.'s (2021) provisional definition of news relevance is clarifying and useful, but narrows the notion of news relevance to the scale of collectivities that people feel they belong to, leaving out other important dimensions of news relevance identified by previous research. This leads us to conclude that in order to more fully understand how news relevance is constructed by audiences we need a broader definition of news relevance that can be used as an analytical approach in our investigation. In the following section we will discuss the phenomenological concept of the *structure of relevance* as a way to develop a theoretical understanding of news relevance which may serve as an analytical approach for empirical analysis.

News and the structure of relevance

According to phenomenological theory, the *structure of relevance* transforms the world from chaotic to meaningful by guiding our perceptions and how our interests are shaped, and hence informs where we direct our attention. Husserl called that which competes for our attention in everyday situations *themes* (1999). Everyday life is multidimensional, not least in digital culture where mobile devices multiply the arenas where we can be present and interact with others, forming our culture of information 'abundance' (Boczkowski, 2021). This means several themes simultaneously exist around us, and we constantly have to choose which one(s) to turn our attention to, in our meaning-making practices (Campo, 2015, p. 137). That choice is neither consciously made, nor conducted in a vacuum, but immediate, often unconscious, and socially structured. As developed in the introductory chapter, we think of this practice as an everyday navigation, something we are constantly involved in and routinely practice, but do not pay much attention to, unless something unexpected occurs that breaks our routinised approach in everyday life. The structure of relevance thus helps us not to experience the world as a chaotic arrangement of unique objects, dispersed in space and time, but as *types* we are already familiar with: "mountains", "trees", "fellow-men" or "news" (Schutz, 1953, pp. 7–8). The structure of relevance may hence be understood as a socially derived and conditioned matrix which guides the selective processes defining how we perceive a situation (Campo, 2015, p. 137). It makes us pay attention to the themes in the surrounding world from which we estimate we can construct meaning in the most significant way, given our interests, knowledge, and previous experiences.

As we cannot know everything about reality, Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 56) mean that we pragmatically "live in a commonsense world of everyday life equipped with specific bodies of knowledge". A person's stock of knowledge is constructed by the sedimentation of our previous experiences, derived from our own experiences or from experiences communicated by others (friends, parents, influencers or 'the news', etc.) (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 7). The stock of knowledge is a resource that is activated when interpreting and acting, *navigating*, in the world (Campo, 2015, p. 141) and steers our attention to things we believe will be meaningful to us (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 57). An individual's construction of relevance is hence dependent jointly on her *interests*, *previous experiences*, and *social situation* (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 59).

Schutz separated three different sets of relevances: 1) thematic or topical relevance (which focuses our attention on themes, and can be both intentional and imposed), 2) interpretive relevance (which assigns meanings to experiences or objects) and 3) motivational relevance (which regulates where we direct our

attention). In practice the three types of relevances are interrelated, and Schutz (1970, p. 133) later explained:

> it is quite possible that a shift in the system of interpretational relevances – as with the introduction of a new concept – becomes the starting point for building up a set of new motivational or topical relevances which do not thus far pertain to the familiar stock of knowledge at hand.

This clarification indicates that there are three different *dimensions* built into the structure of relevance, rather than three distinct *kinds* of relevance. Constructing relevance around themes in everyday life thus means we interpret the world around us in relation to earlier experiences and the social situation we are in. When a person for example is confronted with a new topic in the media, she starts to (routinely) interpret and value its relevance according to her position in the world, her previous experiences, and the situation she is currently in. The process of interpretation interplays with the motivation for paying attention to a specific topic and start making meaning, and is hence also intentional. This way of reasoning goes well in line with Martin's (2008) awareness-relevance-attendance loop, where knowledge about specific topics, gained by engaging in the news, breeds relevance and feeds attention for further news on the same topic. Already in the 1970s Schutz pointed out that everyday life contains numerous themes that simultaneously call on our attention, and that various aspects of our identity, experiences, and interests interplay in everyday life. In today's 'abundance' culture, discussions about information overload (Ji et al., 2014; Schmitt et al., 2018) and 'digital disconnection' (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020; Syvertsen, 2020) have shown that this aspect of human life is even more accentuated, underscoring the importance of understanding the construction of news relevance as a kind of navigation, part of our routinely conducted everyday practices (Heikkilä & Ahva, 2015; Swart et al., 2017b; Schrøder, 2019). In the previous chapters we have shown how news today is consumed in various different ways, but often synchronically with other media or other content, intermingled with other everyday practices, or in the interstices of time (Dimmick et al., 2011; Boczkowski et al., 2018), which means it is not given the specific, information-oriented attentiveness we often believe it should, although older media research has shown that people in previous media landscapes also took part of the news in parallel with other everyday tasks (cf. Berelson, 1949; Bausinger, 1984; Morley, 1986; Bengtsson, 2007). Against this backdrop we will here put forward an approach to news relevance from the audience's perspective, built on phenomenological theory, formulated like this:

> The construction of news relevance is the process in which an individual decides what news content to pay attention to. News relevance is constructed against the backdrop of earlier experiences, interests, social context, and the everyday situation at hand.

The everyday situation at hand involves both the actual situation – whether one is alone or with others, still or in motion, relating to competing themes in the surrounding world, and so on – and the way the information is mediated (via a certain media technology, another human being, etc.).

Four types of news relevance

It is initially worth again acknowledging that news relevance was not part of any predefined theme that we strived to discuss with our interviewees, but something which appeared spontaneously as the young people were asked to speak freely about what kind of media content and information they considered important to stay updated about, and which they habitually engaged in. Besides the broader discourses about news, journalism and media practices discussed in the previous chapters, the interviews also revolved around the attention the respondents paid to various kinds of media content, and how and why that specific content was considered meaningful to them. As already mentioned, previous research has largely aimed at explaining how the practice of choosing what news to engage in takes place, and why news audiences care to engage in certain topics of news. In this book, we have also looked deeper into the different ways news was considered relevant as it was articulated by our young participants, and from this analysis we have revealed four kinds of news relevance, distinguished from each other by the character and combination of three fundamental dimensions: *purposes*, *scales* and *temporalities*. In the following, we will first present the four identified types of digital news relevance, and after that discuss the three dimensions that in different combinations constitute news relevance from the young audience's own perspective.

Relevance to know how to act

One core aspect of relevant news that came up in the interviews with the young adults was that news was considered relevant when it provided information that would help our participants (or their close ones) to act adequately and make sound decisions in certain situations, emphasising a strong and familiar connection between news and future action. This aspect of news is closely related to a traditional understanding of news, and this dimension of relevance from the audi-

ence's perspective has been identified also by Schrøder (2019). It points to the importance of having access to adequate information to know how to act in diverse situations in everyday life and includes micro as well as macro dimensions of information. Information that one needs to know how to act was often related to very mundane things such as what to wear when leaving home ("Should I wear mittens today?"), how to spend the weekend ("What films does the cinema show?") or where in the world it is safe to spend a future holiday ("What's the political situation in Egypt at the moment?"). It was also seen as relevant to have accurate information in relation to acts of broader civic duties such as how to vote in future elections, although such information was not considered immediately useful in the same way, but as information which could be stored for later occasions. In discussions about news, this aspect of the news-ness of news (Edgerly & Vraga, 2020a, 2020b) relates to the value of being informed about the world, a core dimension of informed citizenship (Moe, 2020). The main purpose of this kind of relevance is *action*, exemplified by one young woman who, in relation to the ongoing pandemic, discussed what kind of information she found relevant to know about like this: "What life is like for us at the moment, what's allowed or not, restrictions, and what is closed down? How to act in everyday life" (Michelle, 19, unemployed, countryside).

Others said they liked to be informed about "general news: what happens in my area, or around me". Such information they found in different channels: in the local newspapers or on TV, but more likely in social media (groups). Penelope, the 19-year-old woman who had finished the gymnasium and currently worked as a childcare assistant while planning to move on to further studies, said she normally paid attention to content and clicked on links in her daily media feed that:

> affect child nurseries around [my city] or would affect public transport in [my city] or if it affects my education. If they, let's say, would remove a course. I don't know exactly, but if it would affect my personal life, or me personally, I would absolutely click on it.
>
> (Penelope, 19, childcare assistant, metropolitan area)

This type of relevance also includes information that is vital for one's close ones: parents, grandparents, relatives, and friends. Abril, a female gymnasium student with an immigrant background from South America, underscored the relevance of news that may be important for her relatives in other parts of the world:

> What's important to me is what happens in the world, but particularly in Spain and Peru, because I have relatives there. So, I want to be informed if there is a protest, or something about [the] Corona [virus] in Spain or Peru. I'm very interested in that. I get my information from Facebook or Instagram, and some of it from Twitter.
>
> (Abril, 18, gymnasium student, metropolitan area)

From a phenomenological perspective this underlines the close relationship between imposed and motivational relevance: it is not enough that information is available in one's media feed, it also needs to fit into one's structure of relevance to be worth paying attention to. Our study was mainly conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, an unusual period of time when the lives of (young) people across the world were heavily restricted, as schools and universities went online, those who could worked from home, and restaurants, gyms and national borders were closed. Unique for this period however, at least in Sweden, was that these restrictions were constantly shifting due to the spread of the virus and could vary from one week to the next. This unusual situation made updated information about the pandemic immediately relevant for everyone who wanted to act as a responsible human being. The Covid-19 pandemic in this way underlined the critical, even existential, dimension of information, and the urgency of knowing how to act in times of crisis. The pandemic was however not the only example of existentially pressing information put forward by the young adults: Hamza and Yousef, two young male refugees studying to get their gymnasium degree and who lived under the pressure of being thrown out of Sweden if they did not manage to get a stable and secure financial situation within a certain timeframe, underscored the urgency of knowing how to act accurately in their precarious life situation. For them, changed laws regarding permissions to stay in Sweden would determine their future life in a very essential way ("Can I stay in Sweden, or do I have to go back to Afghanistan?"), and they therefore actively tried to minimise the role of 'irrelevant' news that would steal their attention from the kind of information that was most important to them. Hamza said:

> "I basically block pages that publish news of the world. I only follow friends and acquaintances, and they don't normally share news from elsewhere either, so I'm isolated from that kind of news."
>
> (Hamza, 22, gymnasium student, metropolitan area)

Included in this strategy was also that these two young men resisted news from their home country, Afghanistan, as they did not find the information they came across about Afghanistan of importance for knowing how to navigate in their here and now, as refugees in Sweden. In relation to matters that they considered to be of relevance to them, however, they used a broad range of information sources: news journalism, Google search, the Swedish Migration Agency's web page, and so on.

Relevance that keeps one's personal history together

The above discussion confirms what we already know about news relevance from the audience's perspective: that it is personal and relational, relating closely to one's immediate here and now and the actions required to manage everyday life. Another vital way 'news' was considered relevant for the young adults, that made them pay attention to it, was if it related to their earlier life history, what Campo (2015 p. 143) calls "experiences sedimented in my biography". This type of news relevance is relevant for the purpose of keeping one's personal history together and relates to an individual's earlier experiences. This is not only a way of connecting to varied spatio-temporalities of an individual's past, but also strengthens one's own personal chronicle and evokes previous stages in life. Its purpose is *remembering* and it links events in, and information about, the world to one's individual life history. This type of news relevance is constructed specifically (but not only) in relation to two different categories: geographical places where one has previously been, and broader themes relating to one's personal life history (relating to interests one has had, stages in one's individual development, or specific experiences of the past). The importance of geographical proximity for news relevance was identified by Johan Galtung and Marie Holmboe Ruge (1965) in their canonical discussion about news values from a journalistic point of view (see also Schrøder, 2019). Geography, however, also relates to respondents' personal identity and previous experiences beyond proximity, and the spatial dimension of relevance is hence also constructed in relation to places where one, earlier in life, has travelled, met people, experienced things, and made friends. Young Swedes have in general travelled a lot (even though this is of course class-based), and many of the young adults referred to backpacking in Southeast Asia, working their way through Australia, hiking in the US, or different kinds of holidays and school-related trips abroad. Those among our participants who had an immigrant background related to places where they had lived, where their ancestors lived or where they had relatives, and felt a connection to in that way. Such former experiences, including personal connections to people in these places, were described as essential aspects of news relevance. Maria, who worked as a care assistant in a home for the elderly, not only put forward news about the town where her grandparents live as particularly relevant for her to be informed about, she also paid specific attention to what happens in Indonesia:

> Sometimes I check [Covid-19] statistics from Indonesia too. Because I have travelled there with my school, to look at their health care system. We toured around and studied it, how their

> health care system worked and other things. And then I got to know new people, and we even became friends.
>
> (Maria, 21, nurse assistant, mid-sized town)

Other themes relating to one's previous life stages, beyond sheer spatiality, were also important in the construction of news relevance. Ylva, a 20-year-old care assistant who lived in a small town, talked openly about her previous struggles to find her way back to normal life after having suffered from bullying in school, developing anorexia and adding several other diagnoses to that. Even though she now had left those problems behind, and saw them as part of her past, she still considered mental (un)health one of the most important topics in the news. She mainly found such information from YouTubers, bloggers and influencers, and Ylva eagerly turned to them for relevant news. In this way, the young people activated varied aspects of their identity and their earlier experiences when constructing news relevance, sometimes consciously articulating it as a strategy to handle the overwhelming flow of information they experienced in their everyday life.

Relevance relating to one's existential sense of self

The *topic* of news is a central aspect of news relevance (see Schrøder, 2019) and as discussed also in previous chapters, the young participants often spontaneously referred to their 'my-topics': one or a few topics that they were so engaged in, that they defined their deepest sense of self. Examples of such topics were feminism, the environment, LGBTQ+ and racism, but also rarer themes were mentioned such as 'the question of cannabis' (relating to broader aspects of individual freedom, censorship and scientific knowledge). Daniel, a 26-year-old hairdresser, put forward his identity as a homosexual as the most defining aspect of his identity when looking for relevant news, going beyond other aspects of his personal life. When asked if he was interested in information about his father's home country, Turkey, he replied:

> No, I only know what my dad tells me. And I usually don't listen to that because I don't care too much about it. Unless it would affect *me* in any way. If I would feel "Oh my God, how can they do this or that". But it's just, well … I don't know, bad things happen everywhere, and you cannot keep up with it all, and engage in it all. You must choose what's … *your* thing, kind of. (…) I think a lot about what affects me, and that is LGBTQ+ issues. So that's my focus.
>
> (Daniel, 26, hairdresser, metropolitan area)

These 'existential' topics were framed as unique interests, with a special position in the young person's idea of who they were. Despite being generally well in-

formed in the areas of the 'my-topics', the young adults wanted to know *everything* about these topics and kept updated via various sources of information: influencers, YouTube channels, podcasts, activist accounts, memes, friends with specific knowledge in the area, but also news journalism locally, nationally and globally. Interest in such topics was framed as temporally and geographically indifferent; it was not important where in the world an event had occurred or what place the news referred to; as Daniel expressed it: "if they change a law in Uganda that's harmful to LGBTQ+ people, I want to know!" News relating to such topics was deeply connected to the young adults' identity, and this kind of news was considered relevant – besides its topical relevance – as it contributed to deepening their existential sense of self.

Relevance for situating oneself in the world

The last identified theme is that of relevance to a broader understanding of the world, a theme which is not explicitly useful in relation to any identified situation, but that gives a broader orientation to the world and puts it in perspective. If the purpose of the former category was to deepen one's individual sense of self, the purpose of this type of news is rather to provide a broader understanding of the world and of one's own position in it. This dimension of news relevance, just as the already discussed 'my-topics' embraced the young person's interest in the broader structures that frame singular events, structures what they could also relate to their own position in the world (relating to what Clark & Marchi (2017) call 'inserting oneself in the story'; see also Martin, 2008; Schrøder, 2019). This purpose is less centripetal than the above-discussed types of relevance, and more directed to the lives and conditions of unknown others and one's own relation to them. In the discussions with the young adults, this type of relevance was articulated in statements such as "it is important to be informed, to have a broad general education" (c.f. *bildung*), and "it is important to have knowledge, not only about your own world, but also about other people's lives". As such, it also relates more directly to the public dimension of news, and to *public connection* (Couldry et al., 2007a; Kaun, 2012; Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2022), as discussed in Chapter 1.

This kind of relevance was related both to specific events, for example political elections in foreign countries, or natural disasters, such as flooded areas on the other side of the world, but also to larger societal structures, such as economics, racism, or climate change. Such news was brought forward by several of the interviewees as it engaged them to the extent that they started to reconsider their own identity and their own position in the world from a global perspective. One example that was going on in parallel with our fieldwork, and that was brought up in many

interviews, was the Black Lives Matter movement and the killing of the African-American George Floyd. This event and its aftermath were greatly covered by news journalism, but the young adults in general engaged more with, and were more deeply moved by what they learnt about this affair in social media. Many described how their social media feeds were flooded with BLM-related content during this period, and how they 'dived into' social media to search for, and share, information about it. The killing of George Floyd and all the things that happened after it not only dominated their social media feeds in terms of number of posts. Several of our participants also talked about how they were deeply emotionally moved by what happened and started to question and rethink their own position in the world, as white, privileged Swedes in a peaceful Nordic country. This also sparked them to act and show solidarity in different ways and through different channels. Axel, a 23-year-old man who studied music production, described such an existential awakening and willingness to actually do something, coming from what he learnt from his Instagram feed and some music-oriented pages on Facebook.

> It was everywhere, more or less. I mean, my entire Instagram was filled with just black pictures, so the entire feed was just black. And I posted about it too, because it's so important to pay attention to it, actually. To *do* something about it, if you can. On Facebook, you can take part of what they call 'events': you can see people who shows black culture and black art. So, they show you black musicians and artists. And it's been *so* nice to follow, I think. And it is *so* important to follow and support, and help, sort of, as much as you can.
>
> (Axel, university student, 23, mid-sized town)

Others shared similar stories about global injustice disclosed in social media; police brutality in Nigeria, democratic backsliding, feminist activism across the world, LGBTQ+-related issues in different countries, and so on, and how that made them rethink their own situation as human beings and their (privileged) position in the world, from a global perspective. Such globally spread world events, that the young adults felt were often superficially (if at all) covered by 'the news', were important when negotiating what kind of human being they were, and wanted to become. The young adults in this sense also considered 'news' they received from social media more meaningful than 'the news' as it related to the structural dimension and broader consequences of news events, rather than just to single events (something which will be developed more in depth in the next chapter). Another aspect that was brought forward in this discussion is also the broader spectrum of means of communication available in social media 'news', compared with 'the news', for example music, visual material and memes, that was seen as something that made 'news' in social media more meaningful than news journalism, as it made it easier to *feel* the news. Such broadening and affective dimensions of world events that, according to the young adults, were often superficially (if at

all) covered by news journalism, were important for the young adults, for their understanding of the broader structures of the world, and for negotiating their own role in it.

This broader understanding of the world and negotiation of one's own position in it was sometimes also related to more specified geographical and socio-spatial communities. Jennifer, a 23-year-old woman who was studying to become a singer, considered Instagram the perfect news provider as it kept her up to date with her specific 'my-topics' (feminism was one of them) as well as information relevant to the different communities to which she belonged. When asked what media she first checked when she woke up in the morning, she said:

> It's absolutely Instagram, yes (...) I check what people do. I forgot to tell you that I follow quite a few feminist accounts where I get news, and the 'search bubble' also shows some news and stuff. I get so much information on Instagram about the world, about my friends and what other people find important.
>
> (Jennifer, 23, student, metropolitan area)

This type of news relevance relates well to what Barchas-Lichtenstein et al. (2021) discuss as the link between the collectivities that people belong to, and the kind of news they find relevant. It is closely related to one's stock of knowledge, guided by one's interest in the world, and one's own position in it.

Purposes, scales and temporalities of news relevance

The above-presented analysis has resulted in four ideal types of news relevance, constituted by variations of three dimensions: 1) *purposes*, which describe the different ways news was thought to be meaningful in the everyday life of the young adults; 2) *temporalities*, which distinguish between temporal directions inherent in the ways the themes become meaningful for their audiences, and 3) *scales*, which point to what Barchas-Lichtenstein et al. (2021) underline as the scale of the collectivities to which people subjectively belong. The four kinds of news relevance, and the three dimensions that constitute them, can be presented as a matrix of types of news relevance, and in the following we will discuss the three dimensions of news relevance from the audiences' perspective that make up the model.

Table 1: Four types of 'news' relevance.

Types of 'news' relevance	Purpose	Temporality	Scale
Relevance to know how to act	Acting	Prospective (Future)	Me/known others
Relevance that keeps one's personal history together	Remembering	Retrospective (Past)	Me/known others
Relevance relating to one's existential sense of self	Existing	Introspective (Present)	Me
Relevance for situating oneself in the world	Understanding	Prospective (Future)	Unknown others

Research about audiences' news relevance has often emphasised relevance that interrupts our expectations and makes us aware of something *new* as the most significant kind of relevance (Schrøder, 2019; c.f. Schutz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 189). Yet, we also know that people find news relevant if it, in addition to this, relates to their spatial belonging, earlier experiences and cultural identity (Martin, 2008; Schrøder, 2019), something which resonates well with how our participants constructed news relevance. Besides a largely different approach, there are also obvious empirical connections to Berelsons (1949) old study of what makes news- reading meaningful to its audiences. In this respect, the presented analysis of news relevance in digital culture confirms what we already know from previous research. The young adults that we talked to considered news relevant to pay attention to if it was likely to be useful in a nearer, or more remote, future for themselves, or for identified people in their social circles. In this way, it fits well with Shibutani's notion of news as "information that is important to someone" (1966, p. 40), although our analysis also showed that news relevance is broader and more diverse than this. Besides information to act upon, news is also considered relevant by the young adults in relation to remembrance, existence and to situate themselves in the world. This means the thematic aspects of news relevance, when understood from a perspective of attention and meaning-making, are more complex and multifaceted than previous research has acknowledged.

The second dimension that the analysis disclosed is the variation in temporalities of news relevance in digital culture. As mentioned previously, news is often thought of as that which provides us with applicable information needed to orient in the world and to make pertinent decisions in everyday life. This means news has impending relevance and steers our attention to yet unknown demands of the future. Orientation towards the future is however not the only temporality innate in the identified types of digital news relevance, relating to the different 'zones of intermediacy' of news experiences discussed by Keightley and Downey (2018). An

orientation to the future is obvious in the first type of news relevance, information we need to know how to act, as well as, although more loosely, in the last category, information to situate oneself in the world. A future orientation is inherent in different social and existential aspects of being and *becoming*, but the young adults also constructed relevance in relation to themes that connect them with their own personal history, as a way of keeping their own self, and its social networks, together, as well as around topics ('my-topics') that they relate closely to who they are and want to be, from a more existential point of view. The different kinds of news relevance constructed by the young people hence hold both retrospective and introspective directions, enlarging the temporal dimension of news beyond its futurity.

The attention- and meaning-oriented perspective on news relevance in digital culture employed here also involves the dimension of scale. The scale of news relevance has to do with to whom, or what, information is deemed meaningful. From a phenomenological point of view, we can make a distinction between the way news in digital culture relates to consociates (those we meet face to face, or have a personal relation to) and contemporaries (of whom we have only less detailed recollections, or know merely by hearsay), a distinction described as a continuum of degrees of anonymity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 46, 47; also Schutz, 1967). Barchas-Lichtenstein et al.'s (2021) linguistic analysis of how audiences construct relevance in relation to news journalism suggests that news is considered relevant to a higher extent by those who feel a subjective belonging to larger-scale collectivities compared with those who subjectively belong to smaller-scaled collectivities. We can conclude that three of the four identified types of news relevance relate to consociates, and only one to contemporaries. And even though the last type of news relevance – relevance for situating oneself in the world – had a broader orientation to the public world, and to public connection, the *relevance* of such news was constructed in relation to one's own position in the world.

Conclusion

The above analysis of news relevance has shown how news matters in complex ways: besides future action, also for remembering one's history and the people that are part of it, defining one's own identity and positioning oneself in the world. It should, however, also be underlined that even though one of the four identified types of news relevance relates to the lives of unknown others, the remaining three types of news relevance construct news in digital culture as relevant from a perspective mainly relating to one's consociates, one's own personal *networks.* Such aspects of news relevance are also underlined by the possibility

for media users, in digital culture, to curate their own news repertoire in order to fit well with their individual structure of relevance. Often implicit in discussions about news is its purpose of keeping citizens informed, so that they can make sound judgements in relation to voting and other civic duties (Schudson, 1998). A basic requirement of news, seen from this perspective, is that it is new, and provides new information about certain topics to its audiences. From a phenomenological perspective, this means the purpose of news is to introduce us to *themes* that add to our current knowledge, and that we will deem worthwhile paying attention to. In this chapter we have, however, in line with other contemporary news audience research, problematised this point of view and shown that although news may be considered relevant by audiences because it is new, the relevance of news is more multifaceted regarding both its purposes, temporalities and scales than we previously believed – and its newness is often, but not always, emphasised from an individual and relational perspective, rather than from the perspective of a joint public sphere. This underscores that our participants want news to be useful or relatable, either for them, or for the people they have relations with. Based on both the theoretical discussion and the empirical analysis, we can hence formulate a definition of news relevance from the audience's perspective:

> The construction of news relevance is the process in which an individual decides what news content to pay attention to. News relevance is constructed against the backdrop of social context and connections, earlier experiences, interests, and the everyday situation at hand. News relevance varies in terms of purposes, scales and temporalities.

It is important to, again, underline that the process of deciding what mediated information to pay attention to, part of the *navigation of news*, is a routinised everyday practice and hence not (always) conscious or voiced, even for the individual involved in it. Following from the theoretical definition of news relevance suggested here, built around the practice of *paying attention* to a piece of information in a specific everyday situation and a social context, and the *meaning-making* processes around it, we can conclude that both the young adults' constructions of 'news' and of relevance are more *centripetal* and oriented to their *relational networks* and the consociates that construct them, compared with the idea about news as that which connects people to the public sphere (even though elements of the public and public connection are included in it). From a theoretical point of view, this clearly underlines that the structure of relevance is both *individual* and *relational* as it is created in relation to the individual's *interaction with the world.* This is in line with Schutz's explanation that the private situation of an individual "is always a situation within the group, his private interests are interests with reference to those of the group (whether by way of particularization or antagonism), his private prob-

lems are necessarily in a context with the group's problems" (Schutz, 1955, p. 238, quoted in Campo, 2015, p. 145).

This finding resonates well with contemporary news research, that has found similar notions of personal meaning-making in relation to news, and of 'inserting oneself into the story' (Clark & Marchi, 2017 also Barchas-Lichtenstein et al., 2021, p. 59; Schrøder, 2019; Martin, 2008). These dimensions of news relevance may at first glance seem to indicate that young audiences are primarily interested in themes relating to themselves and the people they already know. Yet, rather than pointing to an increased individualisation, it underscores the relationality of the self, and the importance of one's networks and personal relationships when constructing the world and what is relevant in it. One of the types of news relevance identified here, *relevance for situating oneself in the world*, also includes broader interests and concerns about things that do not immediately relate to one's own situation and everyday life, but that help in understanding how one's own position in the world makes sense in relation to (unknown) others. The above speaks against the interpretation that young people form a highly individualised generation and only care about themselves. But if news relevance, as suggested here, is 'the process in which an individual decides what news content to pay attention to' and which 'is constructed against the backdrop of an individual's social context and connections, earlier experiences, interests, and the everyday situation at hand', the distribution of news in digital, and particularly social, media, where fragments of information come from varied sources in a stream of mixed content, and where people independently, and according to their own interests, can construct their own personal news feed, may point to an idea of *the public*, which has more in common with John Dewey's (1916/1923) notion than with the Habermasian idea of the public sphere (and public connection). According to this perspective a public is constructed of a group of people "who regard themselves as likely to become involved in the consequences of an event and are sufficiently concerned to interest themselves in the possibility of control" (Shibutani, 1966, p. 38). A public, according to Dewey, is identified by its common focus of attention, which means it is characterised by a conversation around a certain issue or problem and as such forms "a mostly unruly, non-organised and ephemeral phenomenon that comes together around a particular topic" (Ojala & Ripatti-Torniainen, 2023, p. 153). Such sociological perspective on publics has a stronger focus on the audience's own agency in forming a public and hence holds potential to meet the criticism often directed towards a Habermasian notion of the public sphere and, particularly, the role of news journalism in it. Seeing news audiences as forming narrower and more ephemeral publics in this way fits well with the way the young adults

talked about news relevance and how news must be relatable, meaningful, and useful from either their own individual perspective, or that of the people in their networks.