Chapter 6
News as facts and stories

In this book, our discussions about young people's information practices have often revolved around media use *beyond* news journalism, as few – although some – of our respondents considered news journalism the most essential information provider in their everyday life (however, as we have discussed in the previous chapters, most of them considered news journalism a reliable and trustworthy source of information).

This chapter, on the other hand, will be dedicated to a closer look at perceptions about news journalism and the meaning-making around it, or, more correctly put, to a closer look at why the young adults, just as youth across the world, often preferred other information formats to 'the news' when constructing their 'media day'. From previous research we have learnt that 'news avoiders' – people who regularly consume little news – avoid news first because of the overload of news, but also due to the negative content in news, as well as the technological features of aggressive algorithmic news technology. Digital media have multiplied the total volume of news available in the world, and this abundance of information paralyses people, and hinders them from engaging in meaningful news practices rather than helping them to find the information they would find worthwhile. As Tali Aharoni et al. (2021) have suggested though, digital media have not only transformed the amount of news and information in the world, but also how that information is produced, distributed, perceived and practised. Here, we propose the idea that news journalism, distributed and practised via digital, mainly social, media, is perceived mainly as *facts* and as such is regarded as irrelevant, meaningless, and boring (for a similar discussion see Hendrickx, 2024). To find meaningful and valuable information, the young adults we interviewed instead turned to other media formats, particularly in social media. This suggestion, again has similarities with the findings that Clark and Marchi presented in *Young People and the Future of News* (2017), where they put forward the dullness of news journalism and the problems with journalistic storytelling, articulated by teens participating in their study, as the main reasons why young people refuse to engage in a majority of news journalism. Our suggestion is similar, yet different, as we here present an alternative perspective on what a meaningful story is, and what makes its value lasting.

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Use and non-use of news

Before moving into the empirical analysis, we will here briefly discuss the practice of side-stepping 'the news' in search of vital information. This practice is in contemporary news research sometimes conceptualised as *intentional news avoidance*, something which has been given substantial attention by academics and news organisations during the last decades (Park, 2019; Karlsen et al., 2020; Goyanes et al., 2023; Andersen et al., 2024). News avoidance is also often seen as a primarily passive behaviour, conducted by those who lack political engagement, have a weak feeling for their citizen duties, or less established routines for consuming news. Based on her studies of politically engaged, but alternative, audiences, Jennifer Rauch (2020) however, argues that resisting the news can be a deliberate political statement, part of a critique of the perspectives and voices of mainstream media (see also Clark & Marchi, 2017).

Despite voices like Rauch's and Clark's and Marchi's, trying to understand more deeply young people's own reasons for sidestepping 'the news', the concept of news avoidance is often normative and therefore risks missing the nuances of people's media practices, as has been pointed out by Mikko Villi et al. (2022). They suggest we make a conceptual distinction between those who actively avoid news journalism (as part of an alternative information practice) and those who simply do not use it and conceptualise the latter practices as 'non-use'. From our fieldwork, conducted among a wide range of ordinary young adults, of which only a small minority were heavily engaged in political activism, this conceptualisation provides a more adequate articulation of what many non-journalism practices are about, as 'news avoidance', along with many other kinds of (non) media practices – for example sports avoidance, porn avoidance or podcast avoidance – may not be such a strong statement as the word 'avoidance' assumes. As we will show here, many of the young people we talked to did not articulate their non-use of 'the news' as such a strongly distinguishing practice, but resulting from the fact that news journalism was neither considered the only, nor the most relevant, important, or meaningful, media content to keeping them updated about what is relevant in their world. The idea of non-use of news journalism as an illegitimate everyday practice is connected to the idea of the central role of news journalism in democracy and keeping up with the news as a citizen duty. But if young people today (in line with the findings of, for example, Peters et al., 2022 and Stald, 2023), keep up to date about the world through a broad palette of information including channels far beyond 'the news', and hence in their everyday lives habitually sidestep news journalism but not relevant information about the world as *they* see it, why is it so? Clark and Marchi, in their study of the connective news practices of teenagers (2017), point to the problem of journalistic narration as one of

the factors explaining young people's disillusionment with 'the news', in combination with the streamlined implicit audience of news journalism, and its business models, leading to a loss of authority of journalism. Our open discussions with the young people, where we did not ask them specifically about their use of news journalism, also often revolved around how dull the young people considered 'the news' to be, and how they turned to other media formats to find meaning and content that spoke *to them* and *with them*, when searching for information they found valuable in relation to their own lives and those that are part of it.

Sometimes when people's non-use of news journalism is discussed it is framed as a problem and as something different from how equivalent practices were constituted half a century ago, although our argument in Chapter 4 contributes to a questioning of this. Here, we will seek an alternative understanding of why many young adults today disregard news journalism in their daily media routines and point to some old and new explanations of how and why they understand, talk about and practise (or not) 'the news' the way they do. Just as Clark and Marchi (2017), we see *storytelling* as a key dimension in understanding these news practices, although in this book the practices of not using 'the news' have more the character of non-use of news journalism, rather than a deliberately alternative practice (although we also found elements of that among our participants). Therefore, the notion of what constitutes a story is in this context discussed somewhat differently from what Clark and Marchi do. Phenomenologically, we will look at the non-use of news journalism through the lens of the 'horizon' of a theme, where a theme, as we discussed in Chapter 4, is that which competes for our attention in everyday life, in light of a theoretical perspective on news as events, facts and storytelling, borrowed from journalism scholar Tuchman (1976) and cultural theorist Walter Benjamin (1936/2006). Tuchman and Benjamin have both, in related but different ways, discussed the significance of storytelling in our understanding of the emerging information society, and the role of news in it. Their different perspectives will be used to dig deeper into, and shed light on, the logic of contemporary 'non-use' of news journalism, and hence to contribute to a deeper understanding of why young audiences are 'abandoning' news journalism today.

News journalism as stories and events

Today everyone knows that news is a social construction. Framing theory is a hugely used perspective in contemporary journalism studies (Entman, 1993, 2007), originally building on the works of Tuchman (1978), Herbert Gans (1979) and Todd Gitlin (1977), who explored and developed the constructivist perspective on news. Tuchman, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, introduced the 'win-

dow metaphor' as a way to understand how news journalism opened people's views to the world, while simultaneously creating the limitations to, or frames of, what was actually possible to see. Another of Tuchman's important contribution to contemporary journalism theory is her claims about news as stories, and of journalists as storytellers. In the short article "Telling Stories" (1976), Tuchman argued that "reports of news are *stories* – no more, but no less" (p. 93), also emphasising that storytelling is a craft, a practice, that transforms an *event*, consisting of sheer facts, to a *story* that is meaningful to those who listen to it. Drawing from Erwing Goffman's (1975, pp. 10–11) notion of 'frame analysis', she distinguished between the raw *events*, that she discussed as originally being "strips of the everyday world" or "an arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of on-going activity", and the *frame*, which is "the principle of organisation that governs events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them" (Tuchman, 1976, p. 94).

In this short but important text, Tuchman sets out the argument that news journalism provides the frame that transforms strips of social reality into meaningful stories. "As frames", she said, "news stories offer definitions of social reality" (1976, p. 94). One of her arguments for this, building on her extensive ethnographical newsroom studies, was that when news reporters talked in their own words about their journalistic work, these discourses revolved around the making of stories, rather than reporting about events (1976, pp. 95; 1978). Claiming that news is stories may imply that it is neither factual nor objective, something which may be controversial to say, but Tuchman argued that "being a reporter who deals in facts and being a storyteller who produces tales are not antithetical activities" (Tuchman, 1976, p. 96).

In our contemporary society, public discourse about news journalism has largely changed, and the claims that Tuchman made in the 1970s are common knowledge today. It is no longer suspicious to talk openly about 'the angle' of an article, and journalists often directly state what kind of quote they want an interviewee to deliver before starting the interview. The idea of news being stories has in the light of the decreasing interest in news among audiences worldwide, and particularly so when looking at younger audiences, also resulted in a heightened discussion about the lack of narration in news journalism, where an increasing emphasis on the narrative dimension of news journalism is sometimes put forward as a solution to the problem with audiences who turn away from news journalism (Clark & Marchi, 2017; Buozis & Creech, 2018).

In light of these discussions, it is important that we reflect not only on the role of storytelling in news journalism, but also on what a good story is. What makes a good (news) story from the audience's point of view? What characteristics, features and values constitute it? Popular culture research told us long ago that storytelling involves more than a narrative structure, as it comprises the content of the story,

the way it is practised and the situated context of this practice, in combination with the worldview and meaning-making of those who take part in the story (cf. Radway, 1984/2009). In his much-cited, but also controversial, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976/2010), psychoanalyst and cultural theorist Bruno Bettelheim argued that fairy tales help children to handle important existential problems such as separation anxiety, oedipal conflict and sibling rivalries, and that the intense violence and threatening emotions involved in many fairy tales serve to bring forward and shed light on what may well be going on in the child's mind anyway. This implies that stories are both existential and anchored in the reader's own everyday struggles and dilemmas, and emphasises the connection between a story and the audience's own everyday situation. This dimension of storytelling has also been discussed by Frankfurt school scholar Walter Benjamin, as he, just as Tuchman later did, discussed the relation between stories and facts in information society, hence also problematising the surrounding societal (and technological) context of storytelling. In his essay "The Storyteller" (1936/2006), built mainly on an analysis of Russian 19th century novelist Nikolai Leskov, Benjamin put forward three dimensions that are fundamental in all stories. First, he said, stories are *important*. This does not mean important in the same way as news is important – for society at large – but rather that they are important from the individual's own point of view, essential for him/her, and in that sense useful. Secondly, Benjamin said that stories are *enduring*, which points to them as meaningful beyond the immediate here and now. Thirdly, Benjamin claimed, stories involve a *sharing of experiences*. The first and second dimensions point to the timeless dimension of stories, which means that (traditional) storytelling holds lasting values, and does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report has to (Benjamin, 1936/2006, p. 367). The third dimension, storytelling as a shared experience, refers both to the very situation where stories are told to a group (such as around a fireplace), or to the established relationship between a specific storyteller and the person who listens to (or reads) him/her. Nicolai Leskov is, according to Benjamin, a rare example among modern novelists, as he manages to establish such a bond with his readers, even in the detached kind of storytelling that the 19th century novel provides. In his reasoning about the essential characteristics of stories (and storytelling), Benjamin also emphasises the *craftmanship* embedded in storytelling as an artisan form of communication.

As part of the argument about the essence of stories and storytelling, Benjamin furthermore presents an analysis of the characteristics of information and the emerging information society, and in this venture he also touches upon news journalism, that he sees as the epic form of communication signifying the information society. Benjamin points to some of the core features of information

that he believes make it less meaningful than traditional stories. Information, he says, is first ephemeral, and therefore "does not survive the moment when it was new" (1936/2006, p. 366). Secondly, he also claims that information is too closely related to facts, as it "lays claim to prompt verifiability" (1936/2006, p. 365). While he argues that the essence of storytelling is closely anchored in basic dimensions of human life, such as history, memory, morality and the 'meaning of life', information, on the other hand, is rapid, facts-based (verifiable) and geographically dispersed. Information, and in contemporary society thus also news journalism, hence provides people with truthful facts but falls short when it comes to bringing meaning and a lasting value to their lives. He says that "every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories" (Benjamin, 1936/2006, p. 365). It may be clear by now that Benjamin mourns the decline of storytelling in the emerging information society, and the rise of new epic forms of communication, such as news journalism and information, which have come to take its place. He specifically notes the symbiotic relationship between the press and information, and how the capitalist information society has engaged the middle classes as its warriors. He also warns of the consequences of this:

> We recognise that with the full control of the middle class, which has the press as one of its most important instruments in fully developed capitalism, there emerges a form of communication which, no matter how far back its origin may lie, never before influenced the epic form in a decisive way. (...) [T]his new form of communication is information.
>
> (Benjamin, 1936/2006, p. 365)

In the new epic form of communication in information society, Benjamin saw how traditional kinds of storytelling "receded into the archaic" (1936/2006, p. 365) and how new emerging forms of communication (i. e., news and information) slowly replaced them as the most significant kind of communication. This process, he says, obstructs meaningful storytelling in contemporary society, something which risks transforming society as a whole, if we are to again acknowledge Dewey's notion that society exists in communication (1916/1923). A traditional storyteller has a similar role as a teacher or a sage: he offers help, not in one situation, but *for the whole life*, while information promises quick, updated facts, which also convey the assurance of perpetual novelty.

Built into Benjamin's argument is also a critique of the working conditions in which news journalism is created. The creation of meaningful stories lies in the hearty craftmanship of the storyteller, he argues, which he said that the emergent forms of communication work in information society destroyed. Benjamin put forward his argument about the craftmanship of journalists in the 1930s, and today we have an even more heightened debate about under which conditions meaning-

ful news is created and distributed (Westlund & Lewis, 2014; Vulpius, 2023), not least in the light of AI and other digital technologies.

When we put these two intellectuals, Tuchman and Benjamin, side by side, we find two contradictory ways of theorising news journalism, but in which the relation between facts (as information about events) and stories is essential to both. Benjamin argues that journalism and storytelling are contradictory phenomena, as storytelling is "inclined to borrow from the miraculous", while information (and hence news journalism) is required to present accurate facts and as such is incompatible with the spirit of storytelling (1936/2006, p. 365). But whereas Benjamin saw storytelling as an epistemic opposition to news journalism, Tuchman believed that journalism is simultaneously events *and* stories, which as two sides of the same coin – meaning and information, subjective and objective – are equally important dimensions of news, and not at all divergent. Yet, even though these two thinkers have contradictory beliefs regarding the relation between information and storytelling and the role of news in this, they do agree that storytelling in news journalism does not (only) relate to its narrative dimensions – such as the tale, plot or storyline – but also to the deeper and more fundamental dimensions of human life and culture. Benjamin puts this argument forward when claiming that "The storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself" (Benjamin, 1936/2006, p. 378) while Tuchman says that the framing of news as stories "lay[s] a world before us" (Tuchman, 1976, p. 97). In the following section we will move on to see how the young adults related to news journalism, as facts and storytelling.

News journalism as facts and events

The first distinction that Benjamin, just as Tuchman, makes between stories and information, or events, is that stories are meaningful while events are 'strips of reality', without deeper meaning. This distinction came up spontaneously when talking about media use and the meaning of news with the young adults. As we have seen in the previous chapters, our participants, just as most other young people in Sweden and the (Western) world, used social media continuously throughout the day and often put forward social media as their prime source of news and information. We also know from previous research that social media today is the main provider of news journalism for young people, in Sweden as well as in many

other countries in the world.[1] This means that young people in large parts of the world meet news journalism mainly in the shape it takes in social media. Some of the young adults followed social media services of newspapers and public service broadcasting, and hence came across and/or took part in the headlines of the news that these news providers published. Others did not use social media particularly (or at all) for information-seeking purposes, but still received news from news organisations in social media, as people in their networks shared it.

As already mentioned in Chapter 2, we kept our interviews open and did not specifically ask our respondents about news journalism until late in the interviews (if they did not, spontaneously, start to talk about it when telling us about their daily media use and information practices). With those who did not talk about, or just marginally mentioned, news journalism, we late in the interviews asked them about it, in terms such as 'We have not talked about news (journalism)…?' Some respondents directly said "no", stating that news journalism was not of any particular interest to them, and that they did not use it in everyday life. Some said they sometimes came across 'the news' in social media, yet others had friends and family who shared certain news articles or TV news with them in varied media channels as well as face to face (cf. Peters et al., 2022). When asked to elaborate a bit more on news journalism: what it was and what it meant to them, the core value of news journalism that was brought up concerned news as facts and objective information, something Clark and Marchi (2017) in their study of US teenagers also came across. Facts is a cultural phenomenon which is generally highly praised in contemporary society, as well as in contemporary educational discourses (in Sweden as well as elsewhere), and the societal discourse about news journalism as consisting of *facts* may have affected how this discussion turned out in the interviews. Despite this, the role of facts and information saturated these discussions, exemplified by a male waiter (Johannes, 26, waiter, university town) who emphasised that news "really needs to be based on facts, that's essential!" News journalism was by others said to be "relevant facts" and "an event that affects a larger group of people". One young man added that "I think that if you are to define news, it's quite important that people get information about facts, that are shared with others" (Axel, 23, university student, mid-size town). Another male university student underlined the objective dimension of news and said that:

1 https://svenskarnaochinternet.se/rapporter/svenskarna-och-internet-2021/medietjanster-och-nyhetskonsumtion/.

> There has to be news that is genuinely straight forward, just straight ahead, no angles. That's what we should protect the most, that you must be able to take part of world news, and to see and understand things without being influenced politically.
>
> (Edward, 21, university student, university town)

Others did not explicitly mention facts when talking about news journalism, yet underlined the objective dimension of news when describing its character. Absalom, an 18-year-old gymnasium student, living in a lower-middle-class suburb in a metropolitan area, said that:

> News is news, it's things that happen. Important and unimportant things. Things that happen in the world of football is also news, but maybe not as important as if it happens in politics, or the world. Things that happen, that's news.
>
> (Absalom, 18, gymnasium student, metropolitan area)

In the same group discussion, another young man added: "[news] is things that happen, that are shared and that we may be interested in. It wants to distribute information" (Simon, 18, gymnasium student, metropolitan area).

Others revealed how they approached 'the news' selectively to only get the facts, as news was seen as so politicised that they tried "to cut [politics] out and just look at the facts" (Erik, 23, student, university town). Facts and information were in general put forward as the main reason why news is considered valuable, and the main reason to include news in one's daily information repertoire. At the same time, facts were neither considered essential in the young people's own information practices, nor considered particularly interesting, as the facts provided by 'the news' seldom made any substantial difference in their own lives. This way of reasoning was exemplified by an 18-year-old man who lived in an underprivileged suburb in a metropolitan area, who told a story about when he was misled by a false piece of news about the death of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. The young man regretted being fooled by the piece of 'fake news', but at the same time did not make a big deal of it, as he did not see that information as particularly important anyway. Kim Jong-un was, according to the incorrect piece of news, supposed to have died during an operation, something which later turned out to be wrong. When reflecting on the occasion, the young man said: "I shouldn't have believed in it. I don't remember if I believed in it, I honestly don't really think I cared. I don't think I had an opinion about it" (Simon, 18, gymnasium student, metropolitan area).

This quote conveys the distinction between facts and opinion, revealing a hierarchy that was commonly brought up by the young adults, where an opinion, either their own individual opinion or one that was shared by someone else, about the facts provided by 'the news' defined whether the piece of news was worth-

while (Schrøder, 2015) bothering about or not. Interesting enough to engage in, the young adults meant, was news that they cared about, that made a serious difference to them, in their lives, as human beings, while other pieces of news were not seen as particularly essential to be informed about after all. This distinction between facts and opinions makes a good illustration of the distinction between news as facts about *events* – things that have happened – and news as *stories* that bring meaning to people's lives.

The futility of 'the news'

Another of the essential dimensions of storytelling put forward by Benjamin in his analysis of the distinction between stories and information, is that stories provide an enduring value. This is what makes a story truly 'useful', a usefulness built into the essential qualities it brings to the lives of its audiences, such as "a moral", "some practical advice" or "a proverb or maxim". Benjamin put forward that the storyteller "has counsel for his readers" while also pointing out that if "having counsel" sounds a bit old-fashioned it is because the communicability of experience is decreasing in modern society (Benjamin, 1936/2006, p. 364). The epic form of communication in information society – news journalism – emphasises, Benjamin meant, a loss of communicative meaning as news provides neither important moral guidance, useful advice nor lasting axioms to live by.

This distinction between news as events and stories was also brought up in the interviews in discussions about the 'futility' of 'the news'. Although our respondents, as has also been found in other studies (i. e., Casero-Ripollés, 2012), acknowledged news journalism mainly as trustworthy and legitimate communication, they also considered it boring (see Clark & Marchi, 2017; Hendrickx, 2024). This idea, that news journalism is 'good' but boring, was for example expressed in a discussion about 'the news' by a group of middle-class female friends, where one of them stated that "you know that the information you get [from 'the news'] is correct" but yet "it's really boring. Really long texts, no Insta stories, just some small pictures. I mean, influencers are more fun, in that sense" (Kajsa, 21, student, metropolitan area). Elias, an unemployed man who adhered to a very outspoken 'news finds me' perception (De Zúñiga et al., 2017; De Zúñiga et al., 2020), and hence did not actively search for any kinds of news in his everyday media practices, still said that 'the news' was his prime source of information, at the same time as he was "tired of reading about all the shit that happens all the time. I really don't care about many of the bad things [in 'the news']" (Elias, 23, unemployed, metropolitan area).

News journalism, in general considered a legitimate but mainly facts-based and somewhat boring, kind of information, was by the young adults often seen as lacking meaning and hence neither particularly important, nor interesting. Such an approach to news was articulated by a young man who said that although he considered 'the news' to be valuable information, he did not appreciate all the (useless) micro-details it flooded him in, exemplifying with details from statistics about the real estate market:

> I don't think I need to know that it has gone down "more than 23%". Or *of course* that can be good to know. But it's not really relevant to store in your head, when it comes to facts.
>
> (Axel, 23, university student, mid-sized town)

This way of seeing news as mainly consisting of micro-facts, a bit boring and rather meaningless, can be understood through the phenomenological concept of horizon, and how the horizon of every theme that catches our attention in everyday life shapes how it is made meaningful to us (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). If we see news as themes that we meet in everyday life, and that compete for our attention with other surrounding themes, the digitally distributed news journalism that the young adults come across in their daily lives, often distributed as headlines published in social media, with its fact-based character, exemplifies themes with very narrow horizons. Schutz and Luckmann (1973) have theorised a distinction between the *inner horizon* of a theme, which only has room for the closest details about it, and the *outer horizon*, which establishes a relation between the theme and other relating themes. There is also the *total horizon* of a theme, which is practically unlimited and may lead to horizons far beyond the details that the theme provided in the first place (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973, pp. 193–195). 'The news', delivered as headlines in social media, stripped of meaning and context, can only be connected to the outer horizon by those who are already well equipped with knowledge about the event, and its social and cultural history and context. For others, with less education, life experiences or interest in world events, these short posts remain just information about, for example, a specific number of dead people, an attack that has struck somewhere or a strike in some remote place in the world. Similar ideas have been discussed by Regina Marchi (2012), who has argued that young audiences are sceptical about the concept of objectivity, and has pointed to "the need for news organizations to return to the original intention of the concept of journalistic objectivity, which was to disaffiliate news from public relations and propaganda, providing the public with information that would allow them to 'not only know but to understand'" (also Schudson, 2001, pp. 162–164)".

Searching for the outer horizon

It was already mentioned in Chapter 4 how our young participants often expressed a deep concern about the world and a strong and devoted interest in particularly one or a few 'my-topics' that they considered deeply urgent and existential, and as such significant for their identity and for them as human beings (for similar results, see also Clark & Marchi, 2017; Stald, 2023). To gain deeper knowledge about these – for the young people – existential topics, the young adults often turned to media formats beyond 'the news', such as podcasts, influencers and social media accounts of NGOs. Such broad information practices (see also Peters et al., 2022; Stald, 2023) indicate that youth today do not see news journalism as the most useful media format to establish links with the outer horizon of a certain theme, and that they find other kinds of mediated information more meaningful to take part of in their search for broad and deep knowledge about topics that they find interesting. Instead, their search for such knowledge take them to the mixed and multifaceted content in social media, podcasts, documentaries and other media formats. Daniel, the 26-year-old hairdresser that we have met before, for example, explained how he, after the killing of the African-American man George Floyd in May 2020, deeply felt he needed to understand more about the Black Lives Matter movement, after which he started to search for accounts on Instagram that "explained *in-depth* how darker people have been exposed, and what this is *actually* about", emphasising how social media added a cultural and historic contextualisation to how the event was described in 'the news'. A female Chemistry student, living in a wealthy suburb with her parents in a metropolitan area, in a group discussion proclaimed, unlike her friends in the focus group, that she did not have "one single important account, no politicians, no newspapers, no nothing" on Instagram, yet talked about how she sometimes clicked on links posted by influencers that she followed to get other people's opinions about various topics that she found interesting, and how she took part of others' discussions about news events, as a way of getting deeper information about the original event (Kajsa, university student, 21, metropolitan area). Watching documentaries on streaming services, listening to podcasts and following influencers were all put forward by the young adults as ways of deepening their understanding of certain topics and events that they had come across briefly in either news journalism or social media: their historical background, sometimes conflicting dimensions, and the broader themes surrounding them. A female university student in Political Science, for example, talked about how she had recently broadened her information repertoire for the explicit purpose of getting access to new, and "more *important*", information about societal issues that she did not get from 'the news'. This was exemplified by police brutality in the US, and the already mentioned BLM movement.

She described how she, as part of this attempt, had started to "update what I think is good information" and how she had added several new media formats to her media diet to get as broad and deep representations of these events as possible:

> I get a lot of information from Instagram, but I have also taken one step further and listened to documentaries that have been released. I may also have started to follow other kinds of accounts and other news media. But a lot of it is Instagram.
>
> (Hanna, university student, 22, university town)

'News' provided by social media was in this respect put forward as distinguished from 'the news' as it both broadened and deepened the information the young people received in 'the news' which could be used to get a deeper understanding of the world, also including a more personal, emotional, and human touch.

'News' on social media and the sharing of experience

We will now move on to discuss the third aspect of storytelling that Benjamin put forward, and that was also spontaneously brought up in the interviews by the young adults: its aspect of shared experience. Listening to a storyteller or even reading a story, Benjamin argued, is by nature *shared*, as "[a] man listening to a storyteller is in his company, even a man reading one, shares his companionship" (Benjamin, 1936/2006, p. 372). This feeling of not being alone, and the experience of sharing knowledge and information, was also spontaneously addressed in our interviews, for example by a young woman, studying to become a singer, who talked about how she got 'news' from varied feminist accounts in social media, particularly the 'search bubble' on Instagram, and how she got "*so* much information from Instagram, about the world, and my friends, and what is important *to other people*" (Jennifer, 23, student, metropolitan area). Sharing the experience of news could hence be linked to finding out how other people related to events that had happened. Another young woman stated that she had "a double approach to news, and the thing is that what I find interesting is to read discussions, and how ordinary people discuss" (Ylva, 20, care assistant, small community).

A gender-mixed group of 18-year-old gymnasium students in a low-wage suburb in a metropolitan area described that they considered Twitter to be "good because things are trending there that other people talk about". With the exception of a few, the young adults we talked to did not use social media to a large extent to express their own views publicly, but instead often followed discussions among others as an essential part of their own news practices. A male university student claimed he very seldom expressed his own opinions online, but said:

> I often follow others who do it, on Instagram and so, who writes about their opinion. It's really exciting, I think. (...) Yesterday I read about [Swedish influencer] Margaux Dietz who has written a children's book about Africa with only white kids in it. I was very excited to hear people's opinions about that.
>
> Interviewer: So, it's fun to take part of what other people share?
>
> I find that really exciting, yes. I very seldom reply to it myself.
>
> (Emil, 23, university student, university town)

Today, social media allow a plethora of voices to be heard, and the young adults often had an ambivalent approach to this. Few took an active part in open discussions online (although they sometimes discussed things that were important to them in closed groups or communities), as the price to do so was considered high. Ylva, the 20-year-old care assistant, preferred to follow the alternative internet forum *Flashback* to traditional news journalism as she found it more trustworthy due to the large variety of voices present there. She also underlined that she considered online discussions following from events publicised by 'the news' much more important to take part of than the information about the very event. She therefore often chose to check the online comments following a news event rather than information about the event itself, even though she sometimes considered it to be very emotionally demanding to do so (if the discussions were hateful and aggressive). When asked how she navigated her desire to know what other people were thinking about an event, in combination with her concern to not be emotionally hurt by the tone in some postings, she explained:

> Sometimes on the news pages, there are these comments sections. Or ... if there's been a scandal involving a certain person, then it is like ... in social media you get really close to these people. Previously, you saw something on TV and then you did a lot of thinking, I mean, on your own, so to speak. But now you can actually go in and look at this person's Instagram. And get an immediate picture [of what has happened].

She continued to excitingly exemplify her reasoning with talking about a scandal that had recently occurred in 'the news', where a famous TV personality had been caught by the police when he paid a prostitute for sexual services (which is illegal in Sweden):

> I just went directly to his Instagram. There I get his picture of what has happened ... and what everybody else is writing about it, and I kind of roll around in it all! It is as if 'the news' comes from TV, or from ... the authorities, and then everyone is gathering ... somewhere else and discuss it, *with* this person almost. It's such a ... weird thing [laughs] ... yea.
>
> Interviewer: So that's kind of more interesting then, the discussion around it...?

> I think so, yes. Because the media ...or 'the news' gives you *one* picture ... and then there are lots of other pictures ... around it. They inform like this: "This has happened!" It's a bit like in school: "this has happened, now you discuss it in small groups". And then everybody runs to Instagram to discuss it [laughs]. ... Everyone is welcome!
>
> (Ylva, 20, care assistant, small community)

Hanna, the sociology student mentioned earlier, said that for her it was important to receive news from social media beside 'the news', as it both broadened and deepened her knowledge about things that had happened in the world, as well as sharing with her how other people related more personally to the events. Her regular information practices included a combination of 'the news' and 'news' she found online, as:

> Well, first to get broader information. And then, absolutely, it can be more personal, I mean, there is more of people's personal opinions in it, compared with ordinary news. News articles are a bit more professional, or how to put it. *Neater*, in a way. It can be that way on Instagram too, but often it is more personal, you can easily see their personal opinions.
>
> (Hanna, 22, university student, university town)

Daniel, the 26-year-old hairdresser, said he had a particular interest in conspiracy theories, and described how he tried to find information about such theories by googling or searching on varied online sites: particularly Instagram and the already mentioned alternative online discussion forum *Flashback*. Using the death of American businessman and suspected paedophile, Jeffrey Epstein as an example, he mentioned how he googled intensively and searched for hashtags related to Epstein to get more details about the case and what had been said about it. He made a clear distinction between *getting information* about what had happened, which he did not have any high hopes that he would get from these sources, and hearing people's *opinions* about it, and said:

> I wanted to learn more about it. Or 'learn' ... I don't know, but to hear some more stuff... *and see what other people think!* What if I'm not the only one who believes he was murdered in jail, by a lot of rich, political men, that he knew a lot of shit about? Or maybe he just committed suicide ...?
>
> (Daniel, 26, hairdresser, metropolitan area)

When discussing which sources he used most frequently to feed his interest in conspiracy theories, Daniel repeatedly came back to the role of the alternative site *Flashback*, that he saw as a prominent source of knowledge and a good way to learn more about "what others think, or believe, or so". He meant that *Flashback* provided him with the opinions of:

> Just ordinary people, like you and me, who sit down and write a lot of shit, really. But sometimes it is fun to know if people think the same way as you do. When they try to explain something, even if we cannot know if that explanation is a hundred per cent true, that's up to you to check.
>
> (Daniel, 26, hairdresser, metropolitan area)

News journalism, as well as other sources of information hence filled distinctively different roles in the lives of the young – roles that they also articulated clearly. Ylva, the 20-year-old care assistant, repeatedly during the interview expressed profound scepticism of all kinds of news journalism, newspapers and journalists. When asked to reflect about, and develop, why she did not trust or relate to 'the news' she completely turned around and said:

> I do that *too*, of course. They have a lot of facts when they tell us about what has happened somewhere else. Of course! But it is as if, after I have seen something on TV or somewhere else, I just want to go [to social media] to see what other people *think* about it ... or if people have a different idea about what has happened.
>
> (Ylva, 20, care assistant, small community)

The role of shareability in the meaning-making around 'the news' has been addressed also by previous news research such as in Clark and Marchi's (2017) *Young People and the Future of News*, where they discuss the concept of 'connective journalism' as news in which young people may 'insert themselves into the story', and the audience is thus actively involved in the construction of the news event. Connective journalism explains how young people need to find a personal path into the news events and find it relatable enough to be shareable. Our young participants related to the shareability of news mostly as sharing both 'news' and 'the news' with smaller groups of selected individuals, as well as taking part when other people shared their opinions, yet this latter kind of shareability was often put forward as more interesting and worthwhile than engaging in the specific news event that started the discussion.

Conclusion

As we have concluded also in the previous chapters, many of our young participants had a complex media diet that included a mixture of news journalism, social media, podcasts, documentaries and other kinds of content. A majority of them did not subscribe to a daily newspaper or watch the news on TV on a regular basis, but still came across 'the news' in social media or elsewhere. This means they often

received 'the news' as short headlines and links that they had to click on to get the full news story, but which remained snippets as long as they did not do so.

The analysis of how the young adults discussed and related to 'the news' has particularly revolved around the futility and dreariness of news, as well as the disconnection of news journalism from the young people's own lives and the social contexts they inhabit and find meaningful. Both these dimensions can be understood by the relation between news as facts, events and storytelling, and the phenomenological horizon, meaning that which connects singular themes that we encounter with other themes and the broader historic and cultural context to which they relate. Tuchman (1976) early emphasised the dimension of storytelling in news journalism, and particularly how the journalistic transformation from events to stories made news meaningful to its audiences. Also today, storytelling, and particularly the lack of narrative dimensions of news, is sometimes put forward as one of the reasons why (young) audiences abandon news.

Following from the analysis presented here, we see that although Tuchman pointed to storytelling as an essential dimension of news journalism, a dimension which transforms news events from 'strips of reality' into something meaningful, the young adults we talked to, in opposition to this, mainly pointed to the straightforward, objective and factual dimension of 'the news' as its core element and raison d'être. Following from Benjamin's analysis of storytelling, we have learnt that what distinguishes stories from information is that stories are relatable, lasting and meaningful in relation to those who read them and their lives, while information (also including news journalism) hence is not meaningful in relation to people's lives in the same way. When the young adults articulated news as 'important and unimportant things', 'things that have happened somewhere else' or straightforward facts and information about past events, they also articulated that news journalism for them was often beyond what really concerned them. This, then, is an understanding of 'the news' which is quite different from the normative role of news as that which holds society together through a public connection.

One major transformation in the field of news journalism that has occurred since Tuchman formulated her thoughts about news as storytelling, and the role that journalists have in it, is the increasing automation and datafication of not only news production, but also of news distribution. Social media, as the main arena where young people today meet 'the news', have transformed the package of news from headlines followed by a story, to headlines alone, from meaningful content back to the 'strips of reality' that Tuchman (1976) meant was only the starting point for a good, and meaningful, news story.

As already mentioned in Chapter 4, such suggestions are supported by the study of young Danish news audiences, which points to the tech-driven and datafied distribution of news as one of the shaping factors behind young people's dis-

interest and, sometimes, disrespect for news (Stald, 2023; see also Aharoni et al., 2021). As our analysis has shown, news, when it is consumed mainly in social media, and curated based on datafied audience analyses, remains the strips of reality that according to Tuchman is only half of what news can and should be, to be meaningful. Such analysis also emphasises the role of craftmanship in storytelling, that Walter Benjamin emphasised, and that the digitised and datafied distribution of news today has seriously downplayed.