

# MEDIÁLNÍ STUDIA

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## MEDIA STUDIES

JOURNAL FOR CRITICAL MEDIA INQUIRY

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To cite this article:

Lehaff, J. (2021). They get a lot of news from Facebook: The impact of social media on parental news modeling in the digital media landscape. *Mediální studia*, 15(2), 147–166.

ISSN 2464-4846

Journal website: <https://www.medialnistudia.fsv.cuni.cz/>

**2/2021**

# THEY GET A LOT OF NEWS FROM FACEBOOK: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON PARENTAL NEWS MODELING IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

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## ABSTRACT

*The popularization of digital technologies in the modern media landscape has called into question the role of parent-child behavior modeling in news socialization. On these technologies, news coexists with many other types of content, rendering its use externally invisible and thus less available for imitation with potential consequences for younger generations' future news use and civic orientation. This article reports on the everyday news behaviors of a quota sample of 24 Danes between ages 18 and 25 based on a combined qualitative methodology. An analytical design using laughter as index of face-loss points to sources of embarrassment in interview subjects' news repertoires, uncovering a young audience that is aware of but uncomfortable with their parents' news habits. This is in part a result of social media, where parents' liking, commenting, and sharing behaviors simultaneously make their news practices more available for observation and less available for idealization.*

Keywords: Facework ▪ Laughter ▪ Mobile news ▪ News use ▪ News literacy ▪ Parental influence ▪ Social media ▪ Young adults ▪ Qualitative audience research

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Parental behavior modeling is a bedrock of child socialization: children learn by seeing their parents do, and parents' behaviors influence children into adulthood (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 2001). This is an important component in the development of civic participation and orientation behaviors, including news use (Jennings, Stoker & Bower, 2009). Seeing their parents consume news – reading the morning paper, listening to radio news programming on the road, or watching evening news – instills children and adolescents with models of news behavior that are reproduced later in life (Cobb, 1986; York & Scholl, 2015). However, with the move of news use

onto individualized digital technologies, socialization to news users can no longer be taken for granted. On popular technologies and platforms, news coexists with many other types of content, rendering its use less observable and consequently less available for imitation (Peters et al., 2021; Edgerly et al., 2017; Peters, 2012). This raises questions about younger generations' future news use and by extension their future civic orientation and participation.

This article draws from encounters with 24 Danes between the ages of 18 and 25, asked about their news practices. Using semi-structured interviews and a card sorting exercise as elicitation device (Picone, 2018), the study design promotes reflections about a broad spectrum of sources that young adults turn to for information. This includes social media, which hold a significant position in young adult news repertoires (Peters et al., 2021) but inspire mixed feelings and little esteem (Sveningsson, 2015). Analytically, this article uses laughter as paralinguistic marker of facework (Goffman, 1967) to identify sources of embarrassment in the news repertoires of young adults. The analysis reveals a young audience that is uncomfortably aware of their parents' news habits. While parents still influence young adults' developing news repertoires in the modern media landscape (Edgerly et al., 2017; York, 2019), the young adults in this article enshroud parental news practices in laughter, as behaviors they witness jar against their ideals and norms of news and media use. Social media are an important source of their knowledge of and discomfort with parents' news practices. Regardless, subjects express both a hopefulness and an expectation that they will themselves grow into better news repertoires with age, even if their parents have not.

## 2. MODELING NEWS USE

The idea that children learn media behaviors by observation is old, and research dedicated to the process spans many decades, media landscapes, and technologies. Modeled parent behavior has been associated with offspring reading (e.g. Notten, Kraaykamp & Konig, 2012) and television habits (e.g. Bleakley, Jordan & Hennessy, 2013; Webster, Pearson & Webster, 1986), as well as computer, internet (e.g. Vaala & Bleakley, 2015) and mobile phone use (e.g. Hefner et al., 2019). Across technologies, news use has drawn academic interest in particular for its function as predictor of future civic participation and orientation (e.g. Conway et al., 1981; Jennings, Stoker & Bowers, 2009; York, 2019; York & Scholl, 2015). Accordingly, parent-to-child intergenerational transmission of news use has been demonstrated repeatedly through the years, and parental modeling has been offered as explanation for the parent-child resemblance of patterns of newspaper use (e.g. Chaffee, McLeod, & Atkin, 1971; Clarke, 1965; Cobb, 1986; York & Scholl, 2015), use of television news and public affairs content (Chaffee, McLeod, & Atkin, 1971; Conway et al., 1981; Kim, 2019), and cross-media news selections, or repertoires (e.g. Edgerly et al., 2018).

Such research has also shown that behavior modeling is a complicated process.

One complication noted by Clarke (1965) in a study of 15-year-olds' newspaper use was the disparity between the interests of children and adults. Children have children's interests and parents adult interests, and so a parent's interest in public affairs will not automatically transfer to their child. In keeping with this, the study found transference of newspaper content preferences from parent to child to be only modest. However, Clarke (1965) found that greater amounts of overall parent-child interaction combined with parental interest in public affairs' and newspaper use did increase children's interest in public affairs, as "interaction provides opportunities for the child to gain social recognition from his higher-status parent. A high degree of social contact also means that a parent is a more visible model to the child" (p. 544). Similarly, Chaffee, McLeod, and Atkin (1971) found that parental modeling in isolation had little impact on adolescent newspaper readership, but that parent-child communication of public affairs importance in combination with news behavior modeling was impactful on adolescent news viewership and newspaper reading. Cobb (1986) added more influential factors to this, such as perceived time availability for newspaper reading, access to a newspaper in the home, and demographic variables, but still found that "heavy readers" of newspapers among their adolescent subjects reported the highest newspaper readership by the male parent, compared to "sporadic readers", "scanners", and "apathetic readers".

Common to radio and television media, which have dominated previous news media landscapes, is an immediate observability: television news can be seen and radio heard by others in the room. Thus, in addition to providing a means for parents to model news use, television and radio create a media landscape in which children and adolescents are subjected to news content (Conway et al., 1981). However, the role of television and radio have changed, their use becoming increasingly individualized as prices of media devices have fallen, no longer restricting their presence to one communal living space in the home but dispersing them through a multi-screen home for individual use behind closed bedroom doors (Livingstone, 2007). Nonetheless, the television continues to be found in communal living areas where parents often remain in control of the remote, and parent television news use remains predictive of adolescent television news use (Edgerly et al., 2017).

The newspaper affords a different mode of observable news modeling. Whereas television and radio allow others in the room to vicariously observe content, both the television and radio artifacts are multi-genre devices with significant non-news uses. Consequently, their presence is not associated specifically with news use. The newspaper differs in this respect. Although newspapers contain non-news-related content and such content is an important appeal for users (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991), the newspaper artifact is prototypical (Rosch, 1978) of news. This prototypicality impacts the potential for symbolic coding, which is key to the retention process in observational learning. During symbolic coding, a general symbolic value is extrapolated from specific actions observed under specific circumstance so that a similar behavior may be performed under similar circumstances (Bandura, 2001).

The strong association between newspapers and news content means that modeling of newspaper-reading should with greater likelihood result in some form of news media use, whether by “matched modeling”, where the parent behavior is copied using the same media, or “generalized modeling”, where the extrapolated symbolic value is transferred to a different media good, such as television news watching or online news-reading (Edgerly et al., 2017). In keeping with this, parental newspaper reading has been found to predict general future news use by offspring (York & Scholl, 2015). In contrast to the vicarious observability of television or radio news and the strong news association of the newspaper, seeing a parent attentively looking at a mobile phone can symbolically translate to a wide variety of media uses, from YouTube-viewing to news reading, and may be modeled as any of these. Consequently, observational learning of news use may be undermined by the move of news use onto less vicariously visible digital formats (Peters et al., 2021; Edgerly et al., 2017; Peters, 2012).

Edgerly et al. (2017) have found that children still model parental news use, including device-specific matched modeling, and offer a number of explanations why this may be the case: children may form an impression of parent digital news use when borrowing parents’ electronics; they may see their parents’ screen when spending time together; they may hear their parents discussing news while using individualized digital devices, or they may be encouraged by their parents to use digital devices for news. However, an additional explanation is that much digital news use occurs via social media, where it is visible. Just as youth are aware of their own public and political actions on social media and how they may be interpreted and judged by onlookers (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Thorson, 2014), youth are also able to see, interpret and judge the actions of others. While children may have less direct access to observe digital news practices in the room, they can observe these virtually, with greater specificity, and longer: even after moving out, a young adult can see their parents liking, commenting, and sharing news on social media. The results of this analysis show that young adults do not only render judgement on the news that they are exposed to via social media and their own practices therewith; they also see and judge their parents’ news behaviors as they are made visible on social media. This raises new questions about parent-child news socialization and observational learning in a media landscape dominated by social media, calling on us to consider digital news technologies as making news use *differently* visible, as opposed to less visible.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This article reports on a study using a combined qualitative methodology of semi-structured interviews and a card sorting exercise to learn about everyday news seeking habits among young adults. The interviews were conducted among a quota sample of 24 Danes between the ages of 18 and 25, taking place in June/July 2019. Although participants were selected with an equal distribution in terms of gender,

geographic location (provincial city or rural/capital city), and job or educational status (Peters et al., 2021), the salient demographic characteristic for the purpose of this analysis is one that unites them all: their age, participants having all grown into adulthood in a news landscape characterized by the predominance of digital media. The analytical design draws on linguistics traditions analyzing, categorizing and theorizing functions of laughter as a tool to preserve face (Goffman, 1967) in spoken communication (e.g. Adelswärd, 1989; Nesi, 2012; Phipps, 2016; Wilkinson, 2007).

Although young adults have normative conceptions about what constitutes good news use, their information seeking practices may not conform to these ideals (Costera-Meijer, 2007; Sveningsson, 2015). This can affect their esteem of themselves as news users and civic participants and their self-reporting, as they dismiss practices that are not aligned with their ideals (Sveningsson, 2015). Of course, discrepancies between news practices and ideals are not isolated to young adults, similar gaps resulting in feelings of discomfort among some adult news users (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). In an interview setting, such discomfort can be related to a loss of face, instigating processes of facework and repair that allow participants to disassociate themselves from incidents where gaps between practice and ideal are laid bare (Goffman, 1967). Conversely, instances of facework can serve as indices of such gaps, allowing us to infer news norms and ideals by their breaches. To this end, laughter serves as a practical index when analyzing interviews, being an audible and often-transcribed expression (Myers & Lampropoulou, 2016) that may flag a perceived face threat (Adelswärd, 1989). For instance, Nesi (2012) finds instances of instructors' laughter during lectures to serve as means of recovering or bolstering lecturers' competence face in connection with teasing students, lecturer error, and disparagement of out-group-members. Phipps (2016) notes uses of laughter during intercultural research encounters: for social repair when politeness conventions are breached, for intercultural repair, for performance of professional competence, and – significantly for the use of interviews in this study – for the presentation of the self with the unfamiliar and consequently imagined researcher. Thus, in the context of this study, participants are not responding to breaches with news ideals held by the researcher, but ideals superimposed onto the imagined researcher by the participant. In other words: the ideals are their own. Accordingly, the transcribed interviews were explored for instances of laughter for subsequent coding and analysis in a process informed by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to identify news ideals held by the participants in the study.

During the research encounter, participants were asked about their everyday practices with information sources and media and to sort 35 cards with prompts covering a range of information sources and media according to significance in their news repertoires (Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017). The variety of information sources represented on the media cards, which included Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, online broadsheet newspapers, analogue broadsheet newspapers, online tabloids, analogue tabloids, tv news, radio news, influencers and more, was developed to reflect

the broadness of young audiences' news repertoires and commonality of popular sources and technologies herein (Peters et al., 2021), including information sources young adults have been shown to have mixed feelings about (Sveningsson, 2015). This format presented many risks of face loss by virtue of its design, the broadness of both questions and card-prompts broaching subjects that could otherwise have been avoided to preserve face (Goffman, 1967). Additionally, interview participants agreed to repeat the interview process at a later date, making them less "free to take a high-line that the future will discredit" (ibid; 7). Importantly, only participant-initiated laughter was included for coding and analysis, as the interest was on young adult's own news preferences and ideals. To qualify, laughter must be in response to their own sense of face-loss rather than an appeasement of the interviewer's loss of face or the interviewer's recognition of participants' loss of face.

Not all instances of laughter were indexical of facework related to news norms for which reason instances of participant-initiated laughter were subsequently manually sorted for relevance and thematically coded. For instance, the following sequence in the interview encounter with Camilla was not included in analysis despite apparent relevance for multiple coded themes, as the laughter was not ultimately an instance of facework connected to news use:

"I actually got the History Magazine when I lived home, but I don't anymore because now I have to pay for it. My mom, she obviously had some sub...subscrip... yeah. [laughs] Well, she had those on some newspapers." (Extract 1, Camilla)

Judging from its placement in the flow of speech, Camilla's laughter here is not pointed at her disuse of news media used by her mother or her unwillingness to pay for news but is best explained as a retrospective index (Glenn, 1989) of linguistic incompetence at the failure to self-repair the mispronunciation (Wilkinson, 2007) of "subscription" [Danish *abonnement*]. This laughter is an instance of facework, but based on its relative temporal closeness (Sacks, 1989) to the mispronunciation in the ongoing flow of speech, not related to norms of news use. Conversely, Ayesha's (F, 24) laughter upon mentioning the kinds of news content she received via a family Whatsapp group exemplifies news-related facework, underlining a disclaimer:

"Some of it's from Facebook, where people just write posts and stuff, and then there's a picture. Those are the things I often don't believe. [laughs]" (Extract 2, Ayesha)

Two themes stood out in the coding and analysis of laughter-passages in the 24 interviews. The first was related to *technology* and the second to *family*, parents especially. The focus of this article is on these themes, building on a many-decades-long academic concern with the role of parents in the socialization of children and young

adults into news users. Parents remain an influential factor in young adults' developing news repertoires in the modern, digital media landscape (Edgerly et al., 2017; York, 2019). However, the laughter in the sequences that follow in this article indicates tensions in their role in news socialization.

## 4. LAUGHABLE NEWS PRACTICES

### 4.1. Media brands and technologies

Interview subjects illustrated the impact of parent-child modeling in their developing news repertoires in terms of choice of media brands and technologies. For instance, Anna (F, 23) identified her parents as the source of her preference for one Danish national broadcaster over the other, expressing a sense of collective familial identity by virtue of the shared preference. Social media have made news-sharing part of identity expression, changing how adolescents relate news use to identity and the role of news in identity formation (Andersson, 2018); however, news use and identity were also intertwined in young adults' news repertoire outside social media. For Anna, the choice of media brand was tied to family identity:

“I sometimes watch DR’s programs [Danish public broadcaster]. Not TV2 [Danish national television station]. I’m not really from a TV2 family. I’m from a DR family [laughs].” (Extract 3, Anna)

Using the names of the two national news broadcasters as attributive nouns to modify *family*, Anna establishes two conflicting types of families: TV2 families and DR families. As hinted by her laughter, the conflict between the two media is synthetic: DR and TV2 featured prominently together in multiple news repertoires found in the study (Peters et al., 2021). However, the dichotomy that Anna constructs signals media choice to be more than a matter of preference. To Anna, the choice between DR and TV2 was part of a family identity which she emulated with her own news use. Her prioritization of DR over TV2 established her belonging to the type of family that uses DR as opposed to TV2.

In their early years, "children watch television news because that is what their parents are watching" (Conway et al., 1981, p. 166). Ostensibly, this has decreased with the multiplication of media devices in the home and increase of bedroom culture (Livingstone, 2007), but as Jakob (M, 22) illustrated, parents continue to shape their children's news media environment (Nathanson, 2015). Reflecting on his use of television programming, Jakob laughingly recollected televised morning and evening news shows as a “natural” part of the daily routine hearkening back to his childhood home, where the television was a feature of a common area and lighter news formats provided a shared backdrop:

“Good Morning Denmark [televised Danish morning show] is the kind of thing that’s just running on the TV while we’re in here [the common living space], and it’s been that way since I was really little. It’s just been like a completely natural [laughs] part of the daily routine that at some point during the day you’d either watch Good Morning Denmark or Good Evening Denmark [televised Danish evening chat show]. And Debatten [televised political debate program] starting this past year, I think. I think I watch that more than my parents.” (Extract 4, Jakob)

Jakob’s parents had directly shaped his news media environment in a way characteristic of the news media device of choice: the television. In Jakob’s childhood household, the ‘family television’ served as a feature of the communal space (Livingstone, 2007). In this way, Jakob’s parents had not just visibly modeled news use as by reading the newspaper at the breakfast table but directly made Jakob a news user from a young age by creating a communal habitat audibly and visually immersed in news. Jakob went on to reproduce this setting in early adult life by integrating televised news programming into his own home space. Jakob’s reproduction of the news-immersed communal space in his own home was a true reproduction of its origin in that it included the same medium, the television, matching the model provided by his parents (Edgerly et al., 2017), and the same programming, Good Morning and Good Evening Denmark. The laughter in the extract can be related to the status of the programs in question, both belonging to the popular lifestyle and inspiration genre of news programming rather than the “hard news” genres typically prescribed by civic ideals. His laughter thus served to distance Jakob from his parents’ and his own naturalized news practices. In support of this reading, Jakob immediately went on to explain that the family’s regular programming also included DR Debatten, a well-respected political debate show regularly guested by experts and prominent political figures, emphasizing the significance of this program in his own media repertoire.

#### 4.2. News literacies

Despite examples of reproduction of modeled parental news use in early adulthood, interview participants described a schism between their own technological reality and that of their parent generation. One aspect of this was a perceived gap in media literacies: young news users were unimpressed by the parent generation’s adoption of newer digital formats and ability to distinguish “quality” news from “low quality” news. For example, Anna (F, 23) was confident in her own ability to find her way around digital media sources, but indicated that a lack of digital literacy might have repercussions for her mother’s news repertoire:

“I can usually find my way around a website, regardless of how user friendly it is. But I think most media do pretty well in terms of user friendliness. So,

it's not something I think about all that much. I think it's more of a problem for someone like my mom if she can't figure out how to find the news she wants. Because she's a little less, how can I put it, tech savvy. [laughs].” (Extract 5, Anna)

Digital literacy is one of many media and media-related literacies taught in Danish schools to enable students to find and evaluate information in the modern media landscape (Tinggaard Svendsen & Munk Svendsen, 2021). As news has increasingly moved online where it is impacted by general issues of online accessibility as well as algorithmic individualization, digital literacy has also become an important component of news literacy (Swart, 2021b). However, for those for whom significant leaps of media digitization happened in adulthood, this learning is not as easily come by, exacerbating the tensions between the news and media practices of parents and their children in young adult children.

Navigating digital media is a fundamental part of digital and news literacy, but the proliferation of social media in news repertoires has made matters still more complicated, bringing algorithmic literacy to the fore. This literacy can challenge and intimidate even young adults who have grown up with social media (Swart, 2021a). For instance, Saafia (F, 23) emphasized her mother's civic interest before questioning her news literacy and ability to compensate for the role of algorithmic curation in her news repertoire:

“She's very politically oriented and publicly oriented. [...] But she does get a lot of her information from Facebook, so it's very – Facebook takes up a lot of space, and the news they want you to see, right. It's the stuff that Facebook gets to the top you see [laughs].” (Extract 6, Saafia)

Despite this criticism of her mother's use of Facebook, Saafia ranked Facebook as one of the two most significant sources of news in her own news repertoire, Instagram taking the other top ranking.

Regarding her own reliance on Facebook, Saafia expressed similar concerns, making laughing reference to issues of algorithmic inscrutability once more:

“I don't follow Politiken [Danish broadsheet newspaper] much. It's mostly if something pops up on Facebook... because Facebook has done a good job adapting it to what you're looking at, I think. All of a sudden a lot of things show up that you look at [laughs].” (Extract 7, Saafia)

The repeated laughter indicated a sense of unease about the opaque influence asserted by Facebook on her own and her mother's news repertoires and Saafia's responsiveness to this influence. In her 'algorithmic imaginary', the sensemaking of how algorithms work and what they should do (Bucher, 2015), Saafia emphasized

the influence of online tracking and ascribed Facebook an active role in her mother's news repertoire, but also in her own.

Ultimately, Saafia's algorithmic imaginary, while simplistic, showed an awareness that algorithmic news curation is a feature of Facebook and that Facebook consequently influenced the news that she and her mother saw. This is an important component of news literacy in the modern media landscape that not all young adults possess (Swart, 2021a; Cotter & Reisdorf, 2020). Despite this, Saafia's reliance on Facebook for news was undeterred, in keeping with previous findings that media literacy may not translate into practice among young audiences (Swart, 2021b; Vraga et al., 2021). Regarding Saafia's continued reliance on Facebook, it is interesting to note that Saafia ascribed different degrees of agency to herself and to her mother in relation to Facebook's algorithm. When describing the algorithm's influence on her own news use, Facebook was "adapting it to what you're looking at". Here, the algorithm was impacted by her own actions. However, in the context of her mother, Facebook showed "the news they want you to see". Saafia thus expressed a more positive experience of the Facebook algorithm in her own media use than the significance she ascribed it in her mother's new repertoire, illustrating that young audiences' affective impressions of algorithmic curation not only vary between positivity, neutrality and negativity from group to group (Swart, 2021a) but also vary from case to case.

While digital and algorithm literacy have become increasingly significant given technological developments, core news literacies such as recognition of journalistic content and information evaluation (Potter, 2004) remain relevant in young audiences' perception (Swart, 2021b). However, in this matter, too, interview participants expressed concerns about older generations' capabilities. Said Ayesha (F, 24):

"There's the stuff in the family Whatsapp group where they share all kinds of stuff. [...] I never take it seriously. [laughs] [...] It can mean something to me if it happens to be articles I trust and stuff. But some of it's from Facebook where people just write posts and stuff, and then there's a picture. Those are the things I often don't believe [laughs]." (Extract 8, Ayesha)

Ayesha laughs, signaling a perceived distance as well as paralinguistically distancing her own conceptions of news-ness (Edgerly & Vraga, 2020) from that of her family. Young audiences' process of information evaluation is closely linked with their recognition of journalism (Edgerly & Vraga, 2020; Swart, 2021b), and so for Ayesha, because information shared on Whatsapp by her family did not belong to the journalistic media genre, its credibility and legitimacy were inherently flawed.

Additionally, participants were not necessarily impressed with their parents as sources of news. Thus, interview participants' laughter was tied to the role their parents played as conveyers of news, questioning the worthwhileness (Schrøder, 2015; Schrøder & Steeg Larsen, 2010) of the news they conveyed.

“If they’ve heard something scary, like about drugs or something [laughs]. They’ll go ‘oh, this can happen if you drink too much alcohol’ [laughs]. It’s mostly scare tactic news, they’ll show me. So that’s pretty funny [laughs].” (Extract 9, Lærke)

Lærke bucked against what she deemed to be ‘scare tactic news’, meant as instruments of socialization by her parents as opposed to civic information, laughing, perhaps in embarrassment at an infantilizing news function superimposed onto her by her parents, which clashes with normative symbolic associations between adulthood and news use illustrated in this study (Peters et al., 2021) and previous research (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991). Her explanation furthermore indicates discrepancies between parents’ and their young adult children’s conceptions of the public connection aspect of worthwhileness: parents and their children in these cases do not share the conception of what constitutes a “matter of concern” (Schrøder, 2015; Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2010). As noted by William (M, 24):

“My mom will often say something or other. It rarely interests me, but of course I end up with the stories just the same.” (Extract 11, William)

### 4.3. Social media news practices

In addition to cringing at their news literacies, interview subjects were unimpressed by parents’ public behavior in connection with news on social media. Exemplifying this, Lærke laughed at her father’s activities on Facebook,

“Sometimes my bio-dad will tag me in something. He’s really into that. [laughs]”, adding “if it’s some weird Trump thing, I might not read it [laughs]”. (Extract 12, Lærke)

This tagging behavior conflicted with preferred social media news-sharing practices expressed by interview subjects, where privacy and discretion were at the fore. Interview subjects showed great awareness of their online presentation of self, finding certain engagements with news, in particular sharing and commenting, unappealing (see also Andersson, 2018; Storsul, 2014).

The line between appropriate and excessive levels of exposure on social media is of course not constant or consistent within generations, nor necessarily distinct between generations. For instance, when asked whether she ever commented on news articles shared on Facebook, Saafia (F, 23) said:

“No, only if there’s something funny, then I would of course just tag someone.” (Extract 13, Saafia)

As for sharing news in other ways, her answer was no, explaining:

“You’ve learned to stay out of it. [laughs]”. (Extract 14, Saafia)

For Saafia, acceptable levels of visible online participation included tagging. However, this was not true in all contexts. Although Lærke’s father and Saafia shared a visible social media practice in tagging, Saafia’s answer indicated a sentiment shared by other interview subjects: the appropriate level of visible participation was lowered when it came to politics. Subjects did not want to hear about the politics of others online, nor did they want to share their own.

Much as participants expressed finding appropriate levels of visible online participation lower when it came to politics, they also indicated that their comfortable levels of political visibility were lower on social media than off social media. That is, participants were private about their political opinions online in ways that they were not offline. This hesitation has previously been related to the ‘context collapsed’ nature of social media, where young social media users find themselves communicating within many disparate social contexts at once (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Thorson, 2014). For participants, commenting on or sharing an article, which by parents might be considered a small act of engagement requiring “relatively little investment” and “driven primarily by an intuitive willingness to present oneself and forge one’s identity rather than produce information” (Picone et al., 2019), was not experienced as particularly small. Thus, when asked whether she ever joined in debates, Laura (F, 21) remarked,

“Yeah, I may do that. [laughs] Family birthdays can get a little intense.”  
(Extract 15, Laura)

However, whereas she might participate in heated political debates with family, she kept such discussions offline to avoid the more volatile tone she experienced online. Similarly, Saafia described a sense of vulnerability to conflict in online participation with political news content:

“It depends on how much knowledge I have in an area, too, because when it’s about the animal world I’ll comment a lot, but that’s also because I’m sure about what I know, compared to politics – there are so many rights and wrongs according to other people because it’s very personal with your opinions. So on that topic, I’m a bit reluctant. So I’ll mostly say those things in public. [laughs] With friends or family. And colleagues. When we talk about it in there, it’s easier to say your opinion. Compared to writing it down where you’re easily misunderstood.” (Extract 16, Saafia)

The discrepancy between her norms regarding acceptable visible online and offline

levels of engagement evokes an uncomfortable laugh from Saafia, whose answer illustrates how the combination of politics and social media creates a particular sense of vulnerability (Thorson, 2014). She might discuss things online, and she might discuss politics, but politics became a loaded subject on Facebook. The reasons for this may be threefold: a perceived lack of knowledgeability about politics which opened her up to loss of face (Mascheroni & Murru, 2017; Peacock, 2019), the dependence on written argumentation which she found more difficult and prone to misinterpretation than face-to-face argumentation, and the openness to stranger interlocution given by Facebook (Thorson, 2014). Saafia and Laura both expressed a preference for political discussion in social contexts involving close others as part of a strategy to avoid incivility, demonstrating the interrelatedness of preferences previously demonstrated to prevent young adults from participating in online political deliberation (Peacock & Leavitt, 2016).

Ayesha (F, 24) similarly described the combination of Facebook and politics as one of which she was especially wary despite of her political interest and willingness to participate in political discussion offline and willingness to participate on Facebook in other contexts than political discussion. Her concerns about the combination of Facebook and political discussion, however, did not center on avoiding engaging with strangers but avoiding involving her parents whom she knew to have different politics from her own. Ayesha, who is of Pakistani descent, explained:

“There’s a page I’ve started [using], and it’s Pakistani, which is very liberal compared to the Pakistani conservative things... So I’ve started reading that a lot and following their page and stuff. [...] So just to feel that I’m supporting them in a way, right? By sharing – well, I don’t share their content because I can’t. [laughs] My parents follow me on Facebook. [laughs] But just by reading it and like it and things like that.

I: So you can like things without worrying about you parents?  
They’re not smart enough to see that I’ve liked it. [laughs].” (Extract 17, Ayesha)

Ayesha’s comments contrast with the preferences expressed by other respondents in this study and in other studies related to social media (Peacock & Leavitt, 2016). However, it demonstrates a desire to protect relationships, a factor that has previously been related to avoidance of the subject of politics among young adults (Peacock, 2019), and a more general avoidance of contentious topics previously demonstrated in close relationships (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Ayesha furthermore exemplified how, in an otherwise context collapsed network such as Facebook (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Thorson, 2014), a degree of inscrutability in functionalities may serve as a network affordance for young users looking to avoid older publics, their parents in particular.

#### 4.4. Looking to the future

Despite their concerns about the news practices of the older generations in their lives – be they lacking in digital, media, or news literacy or incompatible with the social media presentation norms of young adults – interview participants associated civic interest and news practices with adulthood and both aspired and expected to grow into better news repertoires with age (Peters et al., 2021). Still, even specific aspirations and expectations could run contrary to the practices they saw from their parents. For example, asked to reflect on what she imagined her news repertoire would look like in the future, Saafia, who previously described her mother as getting “a lot of her information from Facebook”, responded:

“I hope I’ll have become grownup enough to dial down Instagram and Facebook a little [laughs] and moved on to something else.” (Extract 18, Saafia)

The symbolic association between adulthood and the newspaper (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991) may well have evolved with the proliferation of digital media, but the association between adulthood and “real” news persisted, even in the face of contradicting parental modeling.

Importantly, Saafia’s ambition to decrease her reliance on social media in favor of more “real” news sources was not being enacted. When asked whether she was making changes to her news practices to realize her hope, Saafia’s answer was a blunt “No,” immediately followed by laughter. This discrepancy between practice and ideal similarly appeared among other interview subjects, just as it has been demonstrated previously among young news users (Costera-Meijer, 2007; Sveningsson, 2015).

The failure to live up to personal ideals of news use is not specific to young adults. In a study of the news habits of 50 Norwegian adults, participants expressed discrepancies between their “informed citizen” news ideals and actualized news practices, the gaps between interrelated news and civic ideals and actualized news practice ultimately becoming a source of discomfort for some (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). Young adults can explain their own lacking interest in “real” news with their youth and lacking identification with conceptions of “citizenship” that make news use relevant (Barnhurst & Wartella, 1991) or justify their use of social media for news as “only a pastime” in the face of legitimacy concerns (Sveningsson, 2015), but these justifications may not extend to parents given young adults’ association of civic interest with adulthood.

Whereas portable digital technologies make news use externally invisible (Edgerly et al., 2017; Peters, 2012; Peters et al., 2021), social media lend a new and more detailed visibility to news use. On social media, young adults can observe specific media and news choices via their parents’ liking, commenting, and sharing behaviors even as they reach young adulthood and move out and thereafter. In this way, social media lays bare gaps between their parents’ news behaviors and citizenship and news

ideals. Thus, the difference between the digital news landscape and pre-digital digital news landscapes is not that parents' news behaviors are less available for observation, but that they are less available for idealization. This may impact their potential for symbolic coding in behavior modeling (Bandura, 2001), making parents' media practices less appealing to emulate.

It should be noted that this does not mean that offspring have ceased to model parent news behavior. In fact, in an article raising the question of parental news modeling in the digital media landscape, Edgerly et al. (2017) find both modeling and matched modeling of parent news behavior. Other studies considering modeling in digital formats have similarly found resemblances between parent and child news behaviors, additionally pointing to instances of reverse modeling where parents learn news and media behaviors from their children (e.g. McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002; Nelissen et al., 2019; York, 2019). Parent-child news modeling remains relevant in spite of the technological developments which shape today's news landscape, but the modeling is not unidirectional, nor is it embraced without question. Young adults supplement this modeling with digital and social media literacies taught by education and experience which, however imperfect, lead them to a slew of cognitive and behavioral strategies for judging and ensuring news quality (Swart, 2021a, 2021b). Conceivably, the sense of disappointment made possible by social media visibility may inspire young adults to be more critical of their own news use and more cautious in their implementation of literacy practices even as they model parental news behaviors.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The move of news use onto digital technologies has raised questions about the impact of parental news modeling on children and young adult's socialization into news-users in the modern media landscape (Edgerly et al., 2017; Peters, 2012; Peters et al., 2021). In this landscape, common news behaviors lose vicarious visibility from across the living room, making them less available for modeling (Bandura, 2001). Where parents might once be seen holding a copy of the daily paper or watching the evening news, they may now be seen with a laptop or scrolling on a mobile phone. However, digital media do not render parent news use invisible, lending new and clear visibility on social media. Using laughter as an index of perceived face-loss to point to deviations from news ideals held by 24 young adult participants in Denmark, this article has demonstrated an awareness of parents' news use that hinders idealization. Via their social media presence, young adults are still able to see their parents using news. Not only this, but with the help of parents' likes, shares, and comments, young adults are able to see what news their parents are using. However, in this observability lies a potential problem for news socialization. Whereas the newspaper artifact allowed youth of earlier generations to imagine the significance and quality of whatever it was that their parents were reading about the world, the

parent generations' current social media practices leave less room for imagination. The problem does not seem to be that young people do not see their parents using news, or that they do not want to be news users themselves, but that young people – seeing the news their parents use and their ways of using it – aspire to be better news users. Without exactly knowing what that looks like.

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### Acknowledgements

This article is part of the research project “Beyond the Here and Now of News”, funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark under grant number 8018-00061B. Details on the project can be found at: [www.ruc.dk/en/beyond-news](http://www.ruc.dk/en/beyond-news).

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