CHAPTER 1

Introduction
“Cultures” do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to make them do so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a particular self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship.

(Clifford, 1986: 10)

On the face of it, journalism and Journalism Studies have witnessed a shift toward the users1 of news. Long characterized by a separation between editorial and commercial departments and by extension between journalists and their audiences (Costera Meijer, 2003; Gans, 1979; Schlesinger, 1978), financial constraints and technological innovations have both forced and enabled journalists to pay more attention to news users (Anderson, 2011; Batsell, 2015; Cornia, Sehl & Nielsen, 2018). Not coincidentally, in recent years, news users have also piqued the interest of journalism scholars, who had traditionally been more concerned with news production and products (Bird, 2011; Hartley, 2008; Picone et al., 2015). However, although news users have taken center stage in discussions about journalism, they have yet to get a seat at the table. That is, while they form the underlying force behind many of the key issues and (scholarly) debates surrounding journalism – revenue models, mis- and disinformation, audience fragmentation, to name a few – news users are still more often spoken about rather than spoken with (Costera Meijer, 2013; Peters, 2012). As a result, we have comparatively little understanding of news use from an emic perspective (Pike, 1967; see also Swart, 2018): how news users themselves experience and make sense of their everyday news use. Their perspective is needed to arrive at a fuller understanding of (changing) news use, which, in turn, is essential because this understanding affects how news users are imagined, approached and engaged with by various actors, including journalists, scholars, educators and policymakers. The relevance of focusing on the mundane experiences of news users is reflected by the fact that the Consortium of Emerging Directions in Audience Research (CEDAR) – a network of early-career European audience researchers – recently selected “a renewed commitment to researching widespread and fundamental audience experiences such as reading, viewing, listening, and interpreting, also with regard to social, digital, and newer media” (Ytre-Arne & Das, 2019: 189) as one of their five priorities for audience research.

At least three trends within journalism studies sustain the relative neglect of an explicit user perspective. First, much research related to news audiences concerns studies of how news organizations and journalists imagine or engage with their audiences (e.g., Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018; Loosen & Schmidt, 2012; Nelson, 2018),

1 Although this dissertation sometimes uses the terms “user” and “audience(s)” interchangeably, as a rule it prefers “user” when referring to those engaging with news. The term allows for the inclusion of a wide range of (dimensions related to) news use, such as different media and platforms and different user practices (Picone, 2016).
rather than vice versa. Second, despite a recent increase in studies focusing on how people experience and make sense of their news use (e.g., Kümpel, 2019; Swart, 2018; Toff & Nielsen, 2018; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018), journalism studies is still dominated by approaches that methodologically isolate and abstract (Morley, 1992) news use from its embeddedness in everyday life, allowing for (cross-)comparison but in effect necessarily stripping everyday news user practices of their very idiosyncrasies. Third, relatedly, research into news audiences increasingly uses data collected by the news industry itself, namely audience metrics such as page views, time spent, shares, etc. The digitalization of journalism has enabled news organizations to measure and quantify aspects of their audience’s behavior previously out of their reach (Napoli, 2011). Napoli (2011) uses the term “rationalization of audience understanding” (11) to refer to how:

“[..] over time media industries’ perceptions of their audience have become increasingly scientific and increasingly data-driven, with more impressionistic or instinctive approaches to audience understanding increasingly falling by the wayside. The days of [editors] making decisions based on their own subjective assessments of what will succeed and what will fail have largely been replaced by a decision-making environment driven by a wide range of analyses of audience tastes, preferences, and historical behavioral patterns.”

Schröder (2019: 165) puts the impact of audience metrics into perspective by arguing that news users’ “inconspicuous everyday acts” such as clicking are “one formative force alongside the technological, aesthetic, and institutional forces that shape the media institution at the highest level.” Still, while ethnographic and interview-based studies have shown that journalists do continue to take their professional judgment and their normative ideals seriously (Karlsson et al., 2013; Nelson & Tandoc, 2018; Welbers et al., 2016), there has been an undeniable (if uneven) trend toward “measurable journalism” (Carlson, 2018). It is therefore worthwhile to consider the extent to which such audience data capture and reflect people’s everyday news use. In the quote above, the rationalization of audience understanding suggests that 1) metrics capture the tastes, preferences and usage patterns of audiences, and 2) because of their scientific and data-informed nature, metrics are more objective than previously available approaches. However, metrics are a “discursive construct” (Ang, 1991), an “institutionalized audience” (Napoli, 2011) that is constructed and measured in and on the terms of the industry’s stakeholders, such as news organizations, advertisers, measurement agencies and platform owners (see also van Dijck, 2013b). As a result, so Napoli (2011: 170) argues, research using these data reflects “established conceptualizations of the audience,” rather than contribute to a fuller understanding of actual news users. Ang (1991) even
goes as far as to suggest that our limited understanding of audiences is because of its being “colonized” by “the institutional view of the audience” which “silences actual audiences” (2). As Livingstone (2018: 177) asks ironically, “if data reveal what people ‘really’ do on and through digital media, why talk to them anymore?” While there are certainly limits to people’s introspective capacities and abilities to self-report (Prior, 2009; Rosenstein & Grant, 1997), it seems worthwhile to critically assess metrics by exploring what exactly is (or is not) being measured, and by looking at the real people behind these discursive constructs.

This dissertation seeks to understand news users explicitly in and on their own terms, from their own vantage point. In doing so, it fits within a recent shift in journalism studies that puts the user first (e.g., Costera Meijer, 2006; 2013; 2016; Peters, 2012; Picone et al., 2015; Swart, 2018). Specifically, following Costera Meijer (2006; 2013; 2016), it takes people’s experience as point of departure. Where she uses experience as a heuristic device that is more revealing about people’s actual news use than their views or opinions (Costera Meijer, 2006; 2013), this dissertation also takes a closer look at the methodological and epistemological implications of taking ‘experience’ as point of departure for studying everyday news use. Its central question is deceptively simple: How can people’s experiences of news use be captured, and how can these experiences help make sense of everyday news use? Following Costera Meijer (2016)’s suggestions for practicing audience research, this dissertation draws inspiration from Tracy (2010), who uses, first, the notion of “requisite variety” (Ashby, 1956) to refer to “the need for a tool or instrument to be at least as complex, flexible, and multifaceted as the phenomena being studied” (841, emphasis in original). Various creative methodologies will therefore be used and developed to capture a wide range of dimensions related to everyday news use. Second, using Ellingson’s (2008) idea of “crystallization”, Tracy (2010) describes the goal of (qualitative) research as “not to provide researchers with a more valid singular truth, but to open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue” (844). Rather than aiming to arrive at a unified audience theory, this dissertation seeks to make sense of and do justice to the messiness and contradictions of everyday news use in all its complexity.

**Journalism’s understanding of audiences**

Before making the case for studying everyday news use via users’ experiences, I will first discuss the recent attention news users have gained in journalism and journalism studies and what this has meant for audience understanding. This relatively recent interest in news audiences is no coincidence. Although it has become somewhat of a cliché for audience researchers to begin their work with the observation that the media landscape
is rapidly changing, it is hard to overstate the transformation the news ecosystem has undergone in the past decade or so. Argued from the perspective of the user, these changes boil down to increases in two forms of agency: choice and control (Napoli, 2011). First, today, users have a practically unlimited amount of options for news use. If before it was conceivable for people to more or less ‘finish’ the news of the day by reading a couple of newspapers and watching and listening the day’s bulletins, today – with search engines and social media at their fingertips – they have instant access to more news and information than they could consume in their lifetime. Second, if before people were largely dependent on set news production and distribution schedules, today they have more control over when, where and how to consume news. The combination of portable devices, increasing internet speed and expanding data plans, and the disintegration of news content into individually consumable pieces enables people to use news any place and any time. They can also engage with content more actively, including liking, sharing, commenting and even contributing to or producing news.

For news organizations these new forms of user agency create challenges. From a production perspective, people’s ability to use news on their own terms means that their attention can no longer be taken for granted. Indeed, while the available options for news use continue to grow, users’ attention remains finite, making attention a highly coveted and competed over resource (Webster, 2014; Stroud, 2017). In order to succeed in the attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Goldhaber, 1997), news organizations must first attract and then measure the attention of users. This quest for attention is a zero-sum game: any attention a news organization does not capture will go to its competitors. As a result, it is not only ad-supported news outlets that seek to maximize the number of eyeballs they attract; subscription-based news organizations, too, must prevent their subscribers’ attention from going to their competitors. Even public news organizations must justify their use of public money by proving their ability to reach significant parts of the public (Hanusch, 2017; Karlsson et al. 2013).

What follows is a media ecosystem in which news organizations are on the hunt for users’ attention. Broadly speaking, we might divide their strategies for attracting and maintaining attention into those focused on the content, the form, and the distribution of news. Content and form strategies play into what (news organizations believe their) audiences want. The former includes personalization (allowing users to tailor news to their own preferences) and soft news (e.g. entertainment, human interest stories), while form strategies include a sensational or narrative style (e.g. clickbait, exemplars). Distribution strategies center on delivering news to where the audience is, e.g. through social media, newsletters, and push notifications. Whether such strategies are successful is typically measured through audience metrics such as ratings, clicks and time spent. As noted above, these metrics are not neutral: they represent the – often
strategic and economic – interests of the different players involved (Ang; 1991; Napoli, 2011; Webster, 2014). Nonetheless, they are often seen — or at least used – by both journalism professionals and scholars as representing the actual experiences, interests or preferences of users. This is not inconsequential. First, metrics are typically used to predict which content will attract further attention, and these predictions in turn affect the subsequent behavior of both news professionals and news users (Webster, 2014). Webster (2014: 92-93) captures this strikingly in the following quote:

A forecast doesn’t change the weather. Predicting we’re going to get an inch of rain doesn’t make it so. And if it does rain, you can measure the accuracy of your prediction. All you have to do is go to the rain gauge to know whether you got it right. The social world doesn’t always play by the same rules. Predictions about social activity can affect the thing they’re predicting.

Research has shown how user behavior as measured in metrics like clicks impacts journalistic practices, including news selection, news presentation and news placement (Tandoc, 2015; Nelson & Tandoc, 2018; Welbers et al., 2016). Metrics also impact subsequent user behavior: popularity indicators on news websites (e.g. “most viewed”) affect selection choices (Knobloch-Westerwick et al. 2005; Yang, 2016). In other words, the “institutionalized audience” (Napoli, 2011) consequently impacts the behavior of real users.

A second reason metrics are not inconsequential – more to the point of this dissertation – is that they evoke or contribute to a certain understanding of news audiences. Most notably, clicking patterns have been taken as evidence that users are mostly interested in junk news (Tenenboim and Cohen, 2015; Tewksbury, 2003). As a Dutch research report concluded in no uncertain terms: “If it’s up to the internet public their interests consist of news about crime and entertainment and famous people […] [They] want ‘sex murder on horror holiday’” (Ruigrok et al., 2013). However, the potential problems of metrics as measure of news use are well-illustrated by Swedish research that compared news consumption on the same news website using both pageviews and time spent. Whereas news related to the public sphere made up just 9% of pageviews, it accounted for 20% of the time spent on the website (von Krogh & Andersson, 2016). It is easy to imagine how these results fit into a respectively pessimistic and optimistic portrait of news users and their interests. This begs the question: what exactly do metrics measure? Do clicks, for instance, capture users’ interests or are they – as Chartbeat CEO Tony Haile (2013) suggested – “a measure of the provocativeness of link copy”? Part of this dissertation, then, is to critically assess two dominant metrics in journalism and
journalism studies (clicks and time spent) by exploring what they mean from a user perspective.

Scholars’ conceptions of news users: agency and activity

Following journalism professionals, scholars, too, have tried to make sense of how the digitalization of journalism has impacted news use. In order to make the case for taking people’s experience of news use as point of departure, it is useful to briefly discuss how scholars have conceived of news audiences and what this means for our understanding of news use. These conceptions matters, as Picone (2016: 126) points out, for they “shape[,] the questions we want to find an answer to and, in turn, the methods that will allow us to find those answers”.

Over the past decades, several concepts have been used to refer to news audiences, each embodying distinct emphases regarding their object of study. The overall trend in these conceptions is a progression from passive to active, reflecting both academic debates and developments in the media landscape. In the early 20th century, the audience was thought of in singular terms, as a homogeneous, mass public. The focus was on the effects mass (broadcast) media had on the overall population or – later – segments thereof. The metaphor of the hypodermic needle vividly evokes how the (passive) public was thought of as ‘injected’ with a message. This assumption of a passive public directly affected by mass media would soon be problematized by several other mass media scholars, through such notions as the “two-step-flow of communication” (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944) which holds that messages first flow from mass media to opinion leaders and then to the public, and “selective exposure” (e.g. Lazardsfeld et al. 1944) which holds that people tend to gravitate toward messages that align which their previously held beliefs and avoid those that do not. Still, the focus was on the effects (mass) media have on the public. This transmission model of communication thus sees communication as a linear process with a sender sending a (comprehensible) message to a receiver (Shannon & Weaver, 1949).

Subsequent approaches to audiences would focus more on the audience itself, specifically on how audience members were more active than was assumed in (early) media effects research. What these conceptions thus have in common is that they center around the notion of agency or activity. At least three dimensions of agency or activity can be distinguished, each more or less aligned with a different research paradigm: selection or choice, interpretation or meaning-making, and production or sharing (Picone, 2016; Webster, 2014). In the following section I will briefly discuss these different emphases on agency and what they have meant for research into news use.
Selection/choice

A first take on agency is the power of users to select or choose (Picone, 2016; Webster, 2016). This is exemplified by uses and gratifications theory (U&G) (Katz et al. 1973), which shifted focus from media effects’ “What do the media do to the people?” to “What do people do with the media?” (Katz, 1959; see also Katz et al. 1973). A functional approach to media use, U&G imagines individuals as making conscious and deliberate choices, actively seeking media for specific (and knowable) needs, such as surveillance, diversion, personal relationships and personal identity (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972). It is still a go-to for media scholars, particularly those interested in mapping people’s motives for using newer (social) platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2010; Phua, Jin & Kim, 2017; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Although Abercrombie & Longhurst (1988), following Hall (1982), group media effects and U&G together in the “behavioural paradigm”, as both traditions are essentially concerned with the effects media have on audiences, there is a marked difference between the two in terms of the agency attributed to audience members.

The proliferation of news media and platforms in the digital age has also led researchers to study how people combine different media. Media repertoire analysis looks at how people navigate and make sense of the ever-diversifying media landscape by selecting and creating their own relatively stable “constellation” (Couldry et al. 2007) of media that they use (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006). Similarly, Schröder’s (2015) “agency-oriented” (62) notion of “worthwhileness” looks at how people select media from the “supermarket of news”, making a “worthwhileness equation” (63) of such dimensions as price, time spent, and normative pressures. Here, the term “(media) user” is typically used, reflecting a focus on individuals’ active role in putting together their media repertoire or diet, as well as being a more practical (and perhaps more accurate) term for referring to the different media or platforms individuals might use (Picone, 2016).

Interpretation/meaning-making

A second take on agency centers on interpretation and meaning-making (Picone, 2016; Webster, 2014). These emphases fit within what Abercrombie & Longhurst (1998) have named the incorporation/resistance paradigm. Typically referred to as reception research, the turn to people’s interpretative and meaning-making practices was a reaction to U&G’s lack of attention to users’ sense-making of their media and the humanities’ ignoring of real audiences (Livingstone, 2013; Schroder, 2019). Indeed, it was a corrective to the dominance of text-centered studies, and emphasized that media texts are polysemic (Fiske, 1986) since audiences do not necessarily interpret texts as intended and not all audiences interpret texts in the same way. The paradigm is exemplified by Hall’s (1973) encoding/decoding model, which argues that audience
members, depending on their social position, can decode texts in three ways: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional. These positions were later empirically tested by Morley’s (1980) classic qualitative (interview-based) study The Nationwide Audience (see also Kim, 2004). Reception studies would gradually shift from mostly interview-based qualitative studies of texts to ethnographic case studies that emphasized the functions of media (Alasuutari, 1999), such as Lull’s (1980) study of the social uses of television. Later, reception studies would ‘zoom out’ even more, seeking to grasp the role media played in people’s everyday life (Alasuutari, 1999; see Schröder (2012) for an alternative account of five stages of reception studies). Examples of the latter include books by Bird (2003) and Madianou (2005), which seek to understand how people make meaning through everyday media use.

In addition to texts, audience activity in the form of interpretation and meaning-making can also be applied to how users make sense of news media and platforms (cf. Picone, 2016). Especially fitting with Abercrombie & Longhurst’s (1998) notion of “incorporation/resistance”, “domestication theory” describes how people adopt and integrate media technologies into their everyday life (Silverstone et al., 1992; Silverstone, 1994). If early reception research was a corrective to text-centrism, domestication theory was a reaction to technological determinism (Silverstone, 2006). Both emphasize users’ agency in interpreting and giving meaning to media, whether text and technology.

**Producing/sharing**

A third form of agency focuses on the productive activities of news users. The digitalization of journalism made it possible for users to (more easily) disseminate, contribute to or even create their own content. In other words, the line between the more passive consumers and the more active producers has become blurry, as reflected in such terms as “produser” (Bruns, 2007). In what she calls the “participation paradigm”, Livingstone (2013) argues that “the concept of the participatory audience is more social than that of the active audience”, in the sense that they contribute to “something larger than themselves” (p. 25). While initially the participatory audience led to scholars’ “enthusiasm about new democratic opportunities”, this soon made way for “disappointment with news users’ passivity” (Borger et al., 2013). Also relevant here is what Abercrombie & Longhurst (1998) have called the “performative” paradigm, which foregrounds identity and describes how “[b]eing a member of an audience becomes a mundane event” (37). This is especially applicable to social media use. Research shows that users are aware of how their productive activities such as sharing and discussing news are more or less public and adjust their behavior accordingly (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015). Recently, there has even been a shift toward (what is experienced as) more ‘private’ social platforms like WhatsApp (Swart et al., 2018).
What a focus on agency/activity overlooks

It is clear that agency/activity has been a fruitful lens through which to study news use, especially as the media landscape became increasingly characterized by user choice and control. The notion’s flexibility helps account for a broad spectrum of user activities, from less active (passive reception) to more active (content creation) (Picone, 2016). Yet, as I will argue below, the notion of news users as more or less active has also led to certain questions not being asked. Importantly, this is not to say that these questions are incompatible with the notion of the active user per se; rather, this conception prioritizes certain dimensions of news use while tending to overlook others.

My first concern is that a focus on user activity – naturally – tends to lead to a focus on what users are (or are not) doing. News users’ activities are often dealt with in what could be called an on/off-approach, where the main criterion is whether the activity is present or absent. In other words, activities (or practices) are seen as countable. Useful about counting and categorizing acts of news use is that it allows for comparison and for keeping track of changes in the media landscape. However, there is a danger of essentializing people based on their activities alone, without understanding or taking into account the experiential qualities ‘within’ and ‘without’ these practices. Rothbart & Taylor (1992) describe essentialist thinking as “a tendency to infer deep essential qualities on the basis of surface appearance, a tendency to treat even independent categories as if they were mutually exclusive, and a tendency to imbue even arbitrary categorizations with deep meaning” (12). In regards to news use, it becomes problematic when categorized and counted user activities form the defining characteristic from which conclusions (or assumptions) are then made about news use or news users. The clearest example is metrics: a news user’s action is either registered or not (e.g. they either click or they do not); there is no in-between. Based on these registrations – representing a single dimension of people’s news use – inferences are then made about their interests and preferences. This on/off logic is understandably prevalent within the news industry: user activity (clicking, buying, sharing) generates income or attention, the lack of activity typically does not. However, from an academic (and a democratic) perspective, it is important that the experiences behind such metrics are explored, in order to better understand their meaning. What do they actually measure?

The on/off-logic is also inherent in the media repertoire approach (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006), which categorizes people based on whether or how often they use a medium. This, too, is most fruitful for making sense of how people navigate and select media in an oversaturated media environment. Where it becomes potentially problematic is when people are essentialized based solely on their ‘use’ being present or absent, without the ‘experiential qualities’ of these categories being taken into account.
An example is the category of news avoider. While existing statistically (Ksiazek et al., 2010), this category conceals as much as it reveals if not supplemented with insight into how and why people avoid news. For instance, Toff & Palmer (2018) complemented quantitative research identifying correlations between gender gaps in news use and structural inequalities (e.g. Benesch, 2012), by interviewing news avoiders to get a sense of “what those dynamics feel like on the ground” (p. 12). They found, for instance, that those who invested their time and energy into caretaking had little left for news consumption (Toff & Palmer, 2018). This is a valuable addition to an on/off-approach, adding necessary depth and nuance to the statistical category of ‘news avoider’. Not only does it offer potential routes for intervention, but it also raises the question of whether news avoidance is an accurate or appropriate term for the experience described above. The point here, then, is that in addition to focusing on the doing or not doing of an activity (i.e. measuring and mapping news use), it is useful to also understand how and why people do (or do not) engage in news practices and what this means to them. Activities cannot be taken at face value; people’s experiences of them should be taken into account.

My second concern is that a focus on agency/activity sees people as deliberate and rational. This is true for the U&G paradigm, but also for media repertoires analysis (see the notion of “worthwhileness equation” (Schroder, 2015: 63)). The idea of “rational choice” has long been problematized. Webster (2014: 27) points out the assumptions behind it:

First, each individual has settled preferences and knows how his or her choices will contribute to personal well-being or ‘utility’. [...] Second, there is one objective reality that decision makers fully and accurately perceive. Third, decision makers have unlimited computational power to determine which of the available choices will best maximize their utility.

This conception of users shapes research into news use in two ways. First, it privileges what news users themselves are aware of and consequently excludes what they do not know or recognize. As our lives become more and more mediatized – and we live “in” rather than “with” media (Deuze, 2011) – the question to what extent users can oversee and report their own news habits and use becomes increasingly urgent. What has journalism studies failed to grasp about news use because research has depended mostly on users’ own ability to account for and make sense of their news use?

Secondly, relatedly, the notion of deliberate, rational users tends to overlook the way people’s use and preferences are shaped by structures beyond their perception (Webster, 2014). These include everyday structures such as daily routines but also the
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media environment itself. As Morley (2006: 115) notes, “we should recognize that the consumer’s ability to choose options from within a preset menu is a very limited form of power, compared to that of the institutions that construct those menus”. For instance, when Costera Meijer (2016) found that young people in 2014 had a broader conception of what they considered (quality) news than their counterparts a decade earlier, this raised the question of whether this reflected a change in young people’s perception of quality journalism or a change in the range of topics (quality) news organizations cover. Which ‘shaped’ dimensions of news use have we overlooked by focusing on agency?

Again, the point is not that scholars using a notion of active users are not aware of its limitations (see e.g., Bird, 2003; Yuan, 2011). Rather, the point is that a focus on deliberate, rational activities almost automatically leads one to not focus on subconscious and non-deliberate dimensions. Indeed, the fact that scholars point this out as a limitation of their own research suggests that it is not easily overcome (otherwise they would have done so).

My third concern with agency/activity is that it privileges cognitive dimensions of news use. In addition to the points Webster (2014) raised about rational choice, this is also true for interpretation: the focus here is typically on whether and how people understand messages, and less on other experiential dimensions of using news. In particular, affective dimensions of news use tend to be overlooked, at least in terms of the affective quality of the experience. For instance, although uses and gratifications approaches do include categories such as ‘entertainment’, affect here is approached as a desired or an achieved gratification. What this overlooks, is what is it like to use news. Which other (non-cognitive) dimensions of news use have been overlooked by a preoccupation with cognition?

To summarize, in order to arrive at a more complex and comprehensive understanding of everyday news use, three interventions are necessary:

1. From assumptions about news users to understanding news users in and on their own terms;
2. From categorizing and quantifying what news users do to understanding what it feels like to (not) use news;
3. From a focus on cognition to including other (experiential) dimensions of news.
Set-up of dissertation

This dissertation contains the following chapters:

**Chapter 2** is a methodological chapter that makes the case for taking experience as point of departure for researching everyday news use. It critically reflects upon three interview-based methods that center around users’ experience of news use – the think-aloud protocol, watching and discussing news, and the two-sided video-ethnography – and discusses their theoretical, methodological and epistemological implications.

**Chapter 3** explores the extent to which news users are interested in tailoring news (use) to their own preferences. Tailor-made news here refers to news that is used on-demand, (explicitly) personalized and used in a productive manner (e.g., commenting, sharing). For this case study commissioned by Dutch public broadcaster NOS Nieuws, an inventory was first made of options NOS offers its users for tailor-made news. Next, five NOS professionals were interviewed about their aims and policies regarding tailor-made news. The heart of the study consists of interviews with 24 news users, aimed at establishing their desire for and experience of tailor-made news. The interviews consisted of several elements, including the day-in-the-life method, the think-aloud protocol, sensory ethnography, ranking exercises and a creative assignment that let informants build their ideal news website using cards. Finally, the results from the interviews were checked through a small survey (N=270).

**Chapter 4** critically assesses the metric ‘clicks’ by exploring why news users do or do not click on online news. Point of departure is the assumption scholars and journalists tend to make about the correspondence between clicking patterns and users’ interests in or preferences for news. Using the think-aloud protocol, informants (N=54) were asked to browse news on their computer/laptop, tablet or smartphone as they normally would and to say out loud the steps they took and the thoughts they had. Focusing on people’s real-time, instantaneous experience of news, the aim was to arrive at people’s considerations for clicking or not clicking, and to see how these relate to their (lack of) interest in news.

**Chapter 5** delves deeper into users’ experience of news content, using two Dutch current affairs TV shows as case studies. It explores under which circumstances viewers consider TV news to be captivating; that is, when they find news both interesting enough to watch and judge it as quality news. Informants (N=56) were shown video clips and immediately afterward were interviewed about their experience of each clip. Because the clips included various topics and storytelling techniques, informants were able to describe in detail which forms they did and did not consider to be captivating.
Chapter 6 starts from the idea that news users have limited insight into their own behavior. It also deals with a concern regarding the think-aloud protocol (chapter 4), namely that this method interrupts the flow of people’s news use. In an effort to uncover hidden and unspoken dimensions of people’s news use and to capture their news practices without interruption, a new method was developed: the two-sided video-ethnography. Thirteen informants were filmed in their own home, using news as they normally would. Their practices were recorded from two angles, in order to capture both the content of the news as well as their gestures, expressions and positions. Immediately afterward, these recordings were watched and discussed with each individual informant. After the researchers made sense of the data, the (initial) results were shared with the informants for additional feedback and insight. The method proved especially useful for capturing and making sense of sensory and material dimensions of people’s news use.

Chapter 7 critically assesses a different metric: time spent. Using the data from chapters 4, 5, and 6, this chapter explores what spending time means from a user perspective. Similar to chapter 4, the point of departure is an implicit assumption – by both journalists and scholars – that more time spent on news use is inherently desirable. The chapter questions whether this is also true from a user perspective.

Chapter 8 concludes this dissertation by reflecting on its theoretical contributions, methodological and epistemological implications, social implications, practical recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future research.