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Do you think it is sex? You are wrong!

This is what people share most on social media

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Table of contents

Acknowledgments

1 Introduction: what and why?

My aim is to study the interface between traditional and social media by focusing on the media content that people share on social media.

Sharing has quickly become an important part of news distribution and consumption. Reuters Institute's Digital News Report (Newman, Levy and Kleis Nielsen 2015) reveals that 63% of Facebook users in twelve countries say that they find, share or comment on at least one news story in a given week. In a study on the metrics of the 25 most popular US websites (Olmstead et al 2011), researchers found that Facebook was the main source of traffic to the five most visited sites. A more recent study (Wong 2015) shows that already 31% of the traffic to websites comes from the eight most popular social platforms. This means that social media are already more important in terms of bringing traffic than search engines. According to Wong, this change occurred in 2014.

These figures indicate a huge change in people's ways of finding and consuming media content. In order to understand better what this means to traditional media and what we should do about it, I aim to find answers to two research questions.

1) What kind of legacy media content do people share most on social media?
2) How does sharing affect editorial processes?

Why is this important?

Porn. This is the term many journalists use when they speak about the articles most read and shared on digital devices. According to them, pursuing clicks and shares – and sometimes even measuring them – is a form of journalistic prostitution. These critics are concerned about the quality of journalism and the integrity of journalists. Their understandable concern is that if the management of media organizations focus solely on the most read and most shared articles, they want journalists to produce more and more content that is quick to create, easy to read and has nothing to do with traditional news values. If that happened, who would cover the complicated, important issues? Who would tell people about things they are not interested in but which have a big impact on their lives? What would happen to long-form, in-depth quality journalism? Will all journalists end up writing about sex and crime?

There is some truth in these arguments. Sometimes the most read lists show that people want to read quick, easy stories about sex, violence, gossip and scandals, but my hypothesis is that this is only part of the truth.

There are two problems with this criticism. The first is arrogance. These arguments are based on the assumption of an ignorant audience who do not know what they should read and watch and of superior journalists who know better what is important and significant. This attitude was feasible a couple of decades ago when the media had the power to determine society's agenda by choosing the talking points of the day. Nowadays, that power is shrinking in tandem with the growing influence of social media. People

now have other options, and do not have to follow the traditional media, which leads us to another problem with this criticism and that is: the media business strategies.

Robert Picard argues that when changes in technology and audience behaviour are disrupting the business models of the traditional media, the main problem is not the technological change but the fact that the media organisations are facing difficulty in creating value. In order to succeed, media companies need to be able to produce so much value that people are willing to pay for their products. According to Picard, the media have to create better value for five central stakeholders: consumers, advertisers, investors, journalists and society. (Picard 2006).

This study concentrates on the first of these groups: the audience. This is the key group for the success of any media. Especially for commercial media, it is the audience and the audience alone who decides what content they want and, by that choice, also decides which media organisations are going to survive and which are not. So, if the traditional media want to survive, they must listen to their audience with far more attention and respect than has been the case in the past.

This is the first reason why researching sharing is important: sharing tells us a lot about our audience. It can tell us about people's interests, expectations, and what kind of content makes them engage. This knowledge is so crucial that the appeal of a story has become a new and ever more important news criterion. "Interesting is the new important", –goes the new journalists' catchphrase.

Understanding sharing is important also because it can change the business models. An online survey of 1,600 Canadians showed that a significant number of social media users value the recommendations of their own network to find news rather than relying on a news organization or journalist (Hermida et al 2013). This means that the social media are diminishing the role of the traditional media but, in tandem with that, they also help the legacy media to find new audiences and create new business models.

The third reason is this: sharing changes editorial practices. Olmstead et al state that understanding both what content audiences want to consume and what they want to share may be a key to how stories are covered and "even what stories get covered in the first place" (Olmstead et al 2011).

By studying sharing, I hope to gain a deeper insight into the issue of what arouses readers' interest. What kind of things interest people so much that they want to share media content with their friends or followers? What can we journalists learn from this? What if our intuition has been wrong? What if we truly do not know what kind of things people want to read? Are there topics, ways of reporting or journalistic genres that we journalists have overlooked but that might be of interest to our readers?

2 Previous research

There is a lot of research on social media but relatively little on sharing. The previous research on social media is multidisciplinary but it has one thing in common: concern. Researchers seem to be quite worried about the consequences of widespread social media usage. The reason for these concerns varies depending on the particular branch of science.

Psychologists and psychoanalysts seem to worry about growing narcissism, alienation and loneliness (Watts 2014). Researchers in the fields of medicine and education are concerned about the safety of children, cyberbullying and "Facebook depression" (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson 2011). Most concerned are the media researchers. Some of them are worried about the business models (Newman 2011), some about the quality of the news and even about the quality of the audience. If the audience does not read a comprehensive set of news any more but instead reads only stories that interest them or check a few links on social media, are they sufficiently well informed about society to take an active part in it (Tewksbury & Rittenberg 2012)?

For the first part of my study I examined previous research with the intention of finding answers to three questions: how important are social media in people's lives? What kind of material is shared most? And, finally, what are the motives behind sharing?

So, what do we know about social media, sharing and audience engagement?

The growing usage of social media is verified by many researches and statistics. Facebook has, according to its own statistics, already over 1.3 billion monthly active users. The amount of monthly active mobile users is 945 million and daily active mobile users 556 million (Facebook Annual report 2013). Twitter is smaller, with over 240 million monthly active users (Twitter Annual Report 2013).

One of the most recent studies of social media usage is the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2015, which examined media usage in twelve countries. According to the report, 41% of the respondents (over 20,000 online news consumers in the UK, Finland, US, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Japan, Ireland, Australia and Denmark) say they use social media for news. Facebook is by far the most popular social medium for finding news, followed by YouTube, Twitter and WhatsApp, in that order. Social networks' popularity varies from country to country. Twitter is a remarkable news source in Spain, the UK and US but not in Finland. WhatsApp is hardly used in US but is an important source for news in Spain and urban Brazil. The popularity of Facebook is demonstrated by the fact that it is widely used by all age groups, while Instagram and WhatsApp are more popular among younger groups (Newman, Levy & Kleis Nielsen 2015).

The importance of Facebook comes from the huge number of users, but not only from this. As Newman (2011) puts it, "It's not just the number of people using them (social

media), it's also the time they spend doing so that makes the networks so significant in media terms".

Facebook is far bigger than Twitter but the two differ also with regard to how people use them: they tend to spend time on Facebook while Twitter is a more important source for breaking news (Newman 2011).

Even though the active and growing usage of social media is often seen as a threat to the legacy media, it has also brought some advantages for the traditional media. Facebook and other social platforms now generate a huge amount of traffic to the legacy media sites, even more than search engines (Wong 2015). Search engine optimization is still important to media sites, but the social media referral traffic is growing rapidly (Wong 2015, Newman 2011 and Newman, Levy & Kleis Nielsen 2015).

On the other hand, a big part of the content of social media comes from the legacy media. 65% of news links on Twitter come from the mainstream media, and 35% from elsewhere (Newman 2011).

Sharing news seems to be very popular in Brazil, Italy and Spain. Finland is fifth and UK ninth out of ten countries. The Digital News Report 2014 reveals that 54% of the Brazilian sample share news stories via social network or email. In Finland the amount of sharers in the sample is 24%, and in the UK it is 16% (Newman & Levy 2014, page 15). We should keep in mind that the participants were only asked about news. It might well be that they share other kinds of media content even if they do not share news.

Young people share and comment more on social media while older people tend to share news via email and comment on news sites. Differences between national cultures have a greater influence than age. In some cultures (such as Brazil, Italy and Spain), it is more common to share on social media (Newman & Levy 2014).

The content shared on Facebook and Twitter differ from each other. According to Newman, on Facebook people tend to share major news stories and, on the other hand, funny and unusual events. Twitter is more serious-minded and people are interested in different angles on a running news story (Newman 2011).

According to Newman, the most shared stories on Twitter can be divided into four categories: 1) disasters and deaths 2) the latest news on breaking stories 3) quirky and funny stories 4) provocative comments and analysis. The mood of the most shared stories in his research was either shock, funny / weird or surprise.

Berger and Milkman have examined the question of the most shared articles from a different perspective. They analyzed nearly 7,000 New York Times articles to find out what kind of articles were most likely to make it to the newspaper's most e-mailed list. They found that content that evokes emotions is more likely to become viral, especially content that could be classified as positive. They also divided emotions into active and passive and found that activating emotions such as awe, anger and anxiety were connected to the articles that were the most shared (Berger & Milkman 2012).

Why, then, are people sharing? Alfred Hermida offers a range of answers in his book "Tell Everyone – Why We Share & Why It Matters". There are many answers, but they

all have one thing in common: it is all about relationships. The more specific reasons include our urge to build social interactions by giving and receiving social assets like information, to build social, cultural and professional capital by sharing what we know and to express ourselves by highlighting what interests us and what we value and care about. In addition to all that sharing is also a way of talking about ourselves. It might seem self-centred and egoistical but, as a matter of fact, it does not differ that much from our everyday talk, between 30 to 40% of which is telling others about ourselves. To compensate for the talk about me, myself and I, we also share in order to enrich the lives of others, to give them tips, information and experiences that we hope they will like and value (Hermida 2014).

3 Methods: what did I do?

I had two research questions, both of which needed a research method and material of their own.

3.1 Research material

My research questions were "What kind of legacy media content do people share the most on social media?" and "How does sharing affect the editorial processes?"

The first question was best tackled by classifying and analysing a significant amount of the most widely-shared media content.

I classified the most widely-shared content of three media outlets: Helsingin Sanomat and Yleisradio from Finland, and the BBC from the UK. All three were selected because they are among the biggest in their country in terms of digital readership. More details of these companies can be found in chapter 5. In addition, I wanted to restrict this research to news organisations in order to keep the research material comprehensive and comparative. Some of the organisations I invited were unwilling to contribute, so the media companies taking part in this research are a collection of organisations that are successful in attracting digital readers and also willing to share their metrics.

All three organisations gave me a list of their hundred most shared articles (including data journalism, videos, calculators, etc.) over three months: August, September and October 2014. I then classified these articles under several dimensions.

The materials from the different companies are not completely comparable because all of these companies have their own way of gathering metrics and they also included partially different social media platforms. Despite these differences, the material is good enough to be comparable.

The BBC metrics, which I obtained from NewsWhip, a company that tracks the sharing of content on social networks, include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest. From Facebook the metrics used is the "Facebook total" number, which is the sum of the likes, shares and comments. Yleisradio metrics include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Google Plus. For Facebook, the metric used is the number of shares. The metrics of Helsingin Sanomat include Facebook and Twitter and is gathered differently from Yleisradio and the BBC. Instead of showing the amount of shares, it shows the amount of traffic to the articles coming from those two social media platforms, so the first article on Helsingin Sanomat's list is not the one that has been shared most but the one which attracted most readers from Facebook. In practice that article is probably also the one that was also most shared.

To find answers to my second research question, I interviewed representatives from the same three media organisations. The interviewees were deputy editor-in-chief Päivi Anttikoski and social media producer Kirsi Alm-Siira from Helsingin Sanomat, online edi-

tor for news and current affairs Timo Kämäräinen from Yleisradio and social media editor Chris Hamilton from the BBC.

3.2 The most shared articles: classification

I had a total of 300 articles which I classified by topic, headline, form, genre, length and angle of the articles, and finally by emotion.

An article could be classified under two or more categories simultaneously. An angle in an article can be both individual and international at the same time, as was a BBC article entitled *Malala wins Nobel peace prize*. It tells the personal story of Malala Yousafzai, who fought for girls' right to education in Pakistan and was attacked by the Taliban. At the same time it tells an international story of the status of women's rights in Pakistan. In a few rare cases an article can be categorized under two seemingly contradictory categories, like "feel good" and "tears". A BBC article entitled *Czech honour for Briton who saved Jews* is an example of this exception. It is an article about a man who saved hundreds of children's lives during the Nazi regime. For the reader it evokes feelings of respect and awe for the man and joy for the saved children, but at the same time it can make the reader cry for the children who did not survive. As the article contained a video of the reunion of the man with many of the saved children, it also evokes sentiment and possibly tears of happiness.

The categories and their subcategories are as follows:

Topics

For the topics there are six categories: domestic, foreign, sports, art, health and science, and lifestyle.

These topics were divided according to the traditional divisions employed in newsrooms. In addition to the traditional categories of domestic, foreign, art and sports, which can be found in most news organizations, I added health and science, and lifestyle. The category of health and science was added because the popularity of health and science articles is so high that it felt justifiable to count this as a separate category. This was also noted by Jonah Berger, an associate professor of marketing, in an interview in the New York Times (Tierney 2010), in which he says that "Science kept doing better than we expected". Lifestyle is a newcomer in newsrooms but it seems to get quite a lot of shares so it deserves a category of its own. Under this classification, lifestyle is defined quite broadly. It does not refer only to articles about beauty, decor or fashion but to all articles addressing personal life choices and ways of living. That is why articles about charity or parenting belong to this category.

Headlines

In previous media research, several methods have been used to categorize headlines but few of these are new enough to take into account the new types of headlines for digital articles, mobile devices and social platforms. As I was unable to find a categorization suitable for my research I created my own. I divided headlines into four categories: fact-based, mysterious, opinion and personalized.

Fact-based here means traditional news headlines that tell what happened, revealing the most important information in the article already in the headline, as in an article from Helsingin Sanomat: *County Council denied use of the word whisky in private blogs.*

A *mysterious* headline is the opposite of a fact based in terms of revealing information. It may hint at or promise something of the forthcoming content but it leaves the main content a secret, for example: *Depression explained in four minutes.*

The *opinion* category includes all headlines that express a clear opinion, whether that opinion represents the view of the journalist who wrote the piece, an interviewee or someone else. The headline does not necessarily reveal whose opinion it is, as in the headline: *We should not live in the rhythm of the early birds.*

The *personalized* category is for headlines that clearly address the topic from a personal point of view. It includes two types of headlines. The first are first-person narratives, for example *I'm so tired of sex* and the second headlines that directly address the reader, such as *Try the HS test: which education would suit you best?*

Feelings

In their research of what makes content viral, Berger and Milkman (2012) divide feelings in two ways: first into either positive or negative, then into active or passive. Hermida, (2014) on the other hand, classifies feelings into five categories: joy, sadness, fear, anger and disgust.

For this study, I needed a more specific classification than that of Berger and Milkman. I created my own, borrowing aspects from Hermida and asking my own social media network what kind of feelings they recognize when they read and share articles. Based on that, I decided to use four categories of emotions: feel good, tears, anger / frustration and amazement.

Feel good articles are those that encourage the reader to rejoice at the success or happiness of others. These are articles that make you want to comment: "Way to go", "Well done!" or "I'm so happy for her!" Humorous articles were also classified into this category, likewise positive or cute stories about animals.

Tears is a category for stories that evoke empathy, sorrow or nostalgic feelings.

Anger / frustration relates to articles with negative content that evoke frustration at one's inability to do anything.

The *amazement* category is for articles containing a strong element of surprise or evoking provocation.

Classifying articles by feelings seems difficult and one can argue that it is also very subjective. This is true to a certain extent. To diminish the amount of subjectivity, I read also the discussions following the articles if I was at all unsecure how to classify an article. I then classified the article based on the feelings that the readers had tended to express during the discussion.

Form

There are six categories of form: articles (news / feature, long form / short form), data journalism, columns, video and multimedia, online live reports and other.

The *articles* category refers to content which is mostly in the form of text and is not a column or a blog post. Articles are further divided in two ways, first by genre and secondly by length.

Genre: news / feature

News is hard to define. Zelizer and Allan (2010: 80) define it as "new information about an event or issue" and add that this information is shared in a systematic and public way. That is a good but insufficient definition, so I added elements of commonly recognized news values: timeliness, impact and prominence. Since some news items do not fit every news criteria, I chose timeliness as the most important element. If an article did not contain new information about immediate events, it was not classified as news.

A *feature* is often defined as a distinctive, long, in-depth article about issues that are likely to be of great interest to the audience (Zelizer & Allan, 2010: 42). In this research, though, I have classified as feature all articles that do not fulfil the criteria for being news.

Length: short form / medium length / long form

I have used different boundaries for the length of articles in English compared to those in Finnish. This is because the structures of the languages are so different. In Finnish, you need fewer words than in English, although the words themselves are often longer. This is why I required more words for a BBC article to be classified as a long form article than for an article in Helsingin Sanomat or Yleisradio.

The limits in English are:

Short   500 words or less

Medium   501–999 words

Long   1000 words or more

The limits in Finnish are:

Short   300 words or less

Medium   301–799 words

Long   800 words or more

For videos, the time limits are as follows:

Short   30 seconds or less

Medium   00:31–01:59 minutes

Long   2 minutes or longer

Data journalistic articles were classified as long if they were long tests (with 10 or more questions) or contained interactive content which required a long time from a reader and short if they were tests or calculators with only one to five questions.

Columns are articles in which the content maker expresses his or her own opinion. This category contains columns, blogs, leaders and opinion pieces. News articles which contained a separate analysis or comment by a reporter were categorised as both news articles and columns.

Data journalism here refers to either interactive content or content produced via using big data or coding.

Video / multimedia is a category for videos and multimedia articles.

Online live report is a category for the ongoing live reporting of a news event.

Other is a category for articles which do not fit in any of the previous categories.

Angle

From which perspective did these articles approach their theme?

International: An article was classified as international if its main perspective was about a foreign country, international affairs or something that had happened abroad.

National: Articles in this group approach their topic from a point of view that concerns the whole nation or a large proportion of its inhabitants.

Local: This refers to articles concerning smaller communities, for example, one city.

Individual: The main focus of these articles is a story about one person or a small group of people, for example, a family.

3.2 Editorial practices: interviews

My second research question is "How does sharing affect editorial processes?" I examined this question by interviewing media representatives from Helsingin Sanomat, Yleisradio and the BBC.

The questions I asked can be divided into four categories: strategy, metrics, audience relationship and newsroom practices.

Strategy and sharing:

1) How do you define success in social media?

2) What are your targets regarding sharing?

3) Do you see any risk in offering your content for free to the social media companies?

4) Do you pay for visibility on social platforms?

The metrics and platforms:

1) How do you measure sharing?

2) Which platforms are the most important ones?

3) What platforms do you think will be the most important in the future?

4) Have you performed any experiments using any new platforms? What have been the results of these experiments?

Audience relationship:

5) What have you learnt about your audience from measuring sharing?

6) Have you found any new ways of engaging your audience via social media?

Newsroom practices:

7) Who decides what is shared, when, where and how?

8) What strategies do you use to boost the sharing of your articles?

9) Do your journalists participate in discussions about articles a) on your web site b) on social media? Is that expected and or rewarded?

10) Does sharing (metrics and or targets) affect the decisions regarding which topics are covered?

11) Does this affect how the stories are covered?

3.4 Problems and questions concerning the methodology

Why did I choose to concentrate on the legacy media? Why not study new media, for example Buzzfeed or Upworthy,for whom sharing is their number one priority? Would it not have been more interesting to find out what their most shared articles are, and what kind of sharing strategy they employ?

I concentrated on the legacy media for two reasons, one of which is practical and the other is academic. The practical reason is that this research is designed to help the management and journalists of the legacy media to develop their content strategy and audience engagement. The academic reason is that content produced by the legacy media is still the most widely-shared content on social media. The most tweeted sites in January 2015 were the BBC, the News York Times and the Mashable. The most shared on Facebook were PlayBuzz, the Huffington Post and Buzzfeed. (Newman, Levy and Kleis Nielsen, 2015).

Another question concerning my methodology is whether I am comparing like with like. As explained is chapter 3.1 different companies gather their metrics differently and the lists of their hundred most shared articles are not totally comparable. However, in my judgement, the metrics are similar enough for the results to be compared.

A third, smaller concern regarding the research material is that in the Helsingin Sanomat material, one of the columns, *Koulukiusaajan vanhempi, ota oppia yritysjohtajalta / Parent of a bully – learn from a business executive,* is written by myself. I decided not to omit it from the material. Why? As I was not evaluating the articles but only classifying them, I think that the potential problem of impartiality is smaller than the consequences of omitting an article would have been.

There is still one more question to consider. There are a variety of reasons why people share articles. Some people might do so because they think they are bad or ridiculous or they want to highlight the mistakes in them. However, in this research, sharing is considered to be an expression of interest and engagement. As this research does not try to identify the motives for sharing, this is a restriction that should be born in mind when analysing the results. Having said that, I think that this is probably an uncommon motive for sharing. For example Hermida (2014), who has written about the motives behind sharing, does not even mention it.

4 Results: classification

4.1   Helsingin Sanomat

Topics

Topics, HS
[chart]
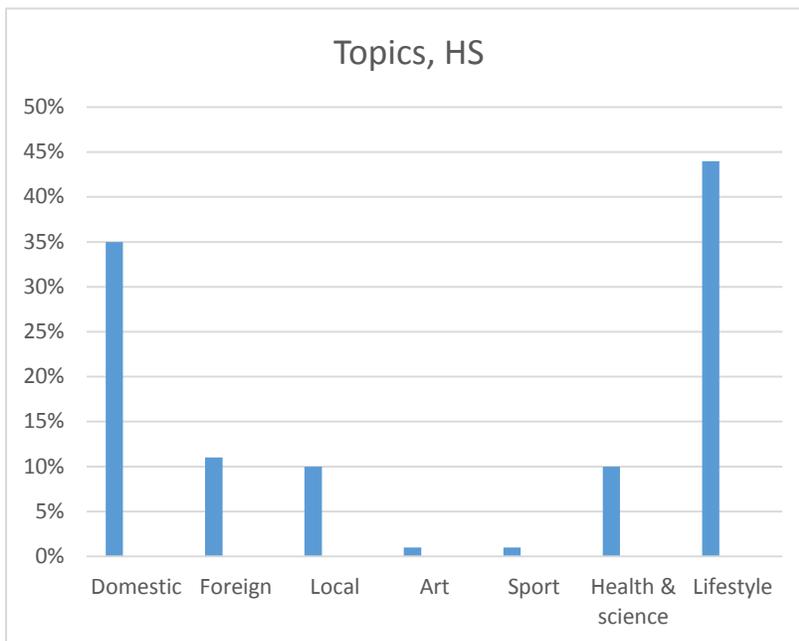
The vast majority of the most shared content from Helsingin Sanomat fell into the lifestyle and domestic categories. As much as 44% of the articles related to lifestyle and 35% were domestic. 16% of the articles were classified as both lifestyle and domestic. In other words a considerable amount, 36%, of the most shared lifestyle articles also have a national level, and approximately half of the most shared domestic articles had a touch of lifestyle in them. Articles about money, work and parenting often fell into this group.

Headlines
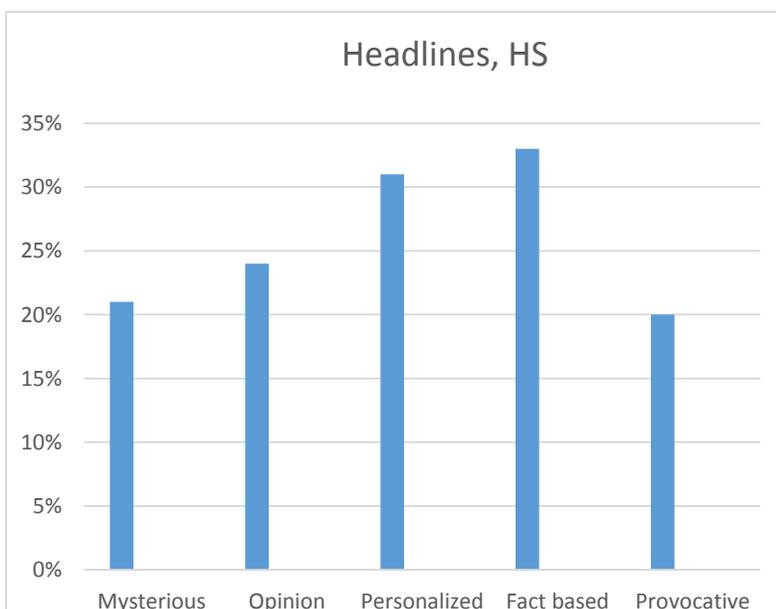
Headlines, HS
[chart]

The headlines of the most shared articles were divided relatively evenly across the four categories. The fact based and personalized categories were the biggest, but they were only slightly bigger than the others.

Form and genre
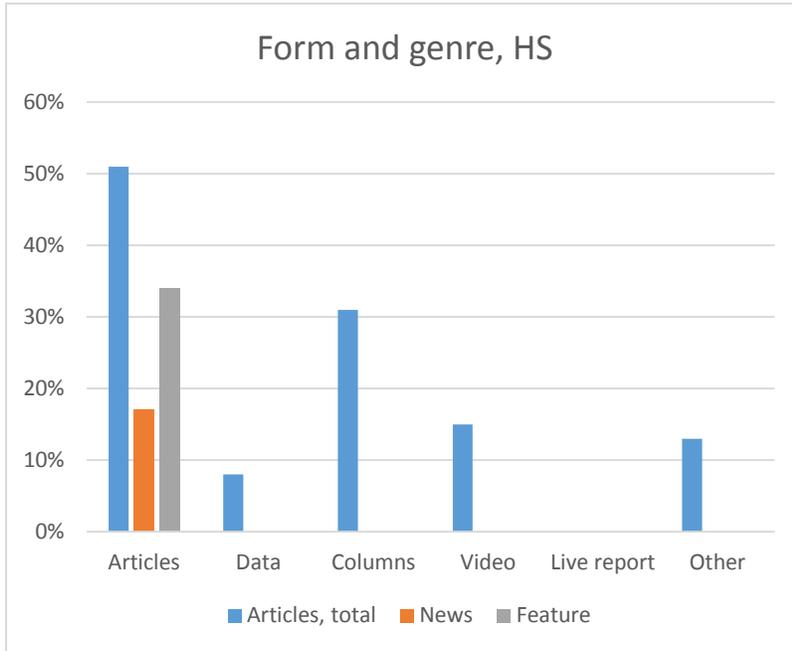
Form and genre, HS

In terms of form and genre the two biggest groups were feature articles (34%) and columns (31%). 17% of the most shared articles were news, 15% were videos and multimedia and 8% were data journalism.

Length of the articles
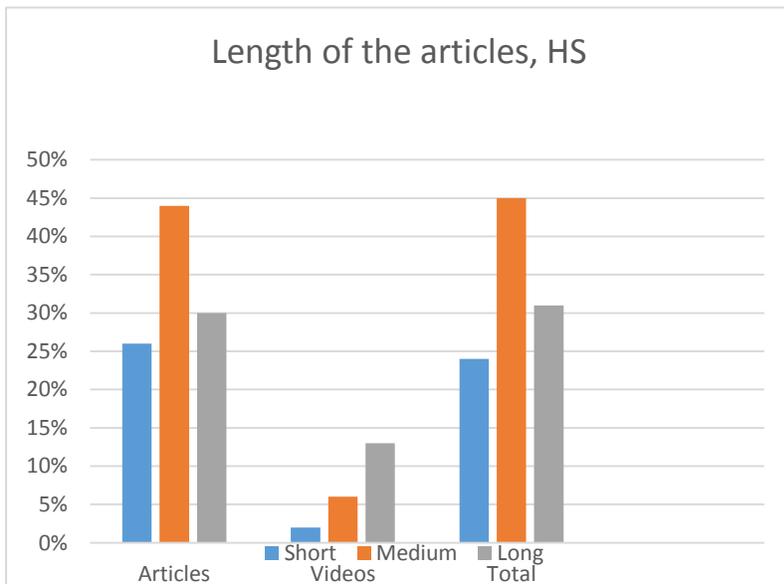
Length of the articles, HS

As the chart shows, most of the shared articles (44%) were of medium length, followed by long articles (30%), and then short articles (26%).

Regarding videos and multimedia, the situation was different. Long videos were shared considerably more than short ones.

Angle

Angle, HS
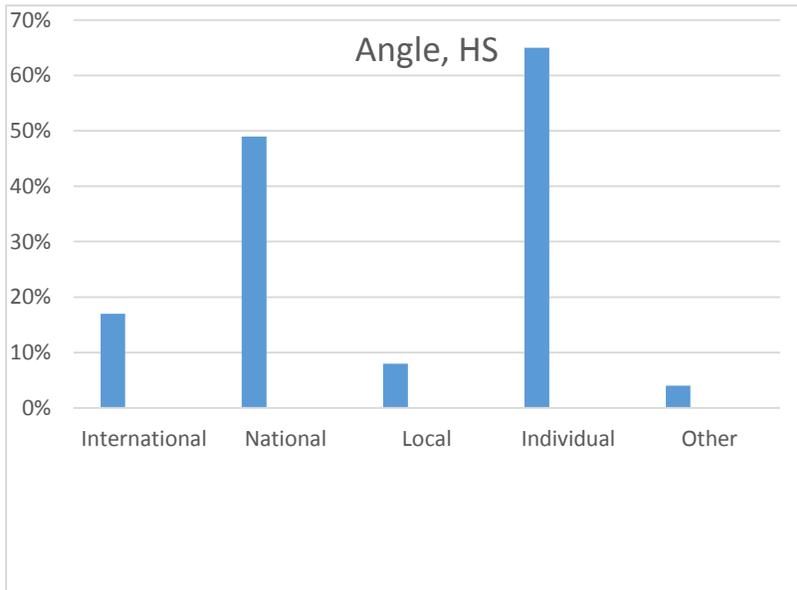
On angle, the results were clear. As much as 64% of the articles fell under the individual category, and 49% for national, 17% for international and 8% for local articles.

When looking at these categories, I found very clearly the same pattern as for topic: a combination of national and individual is very popular and very often shared. Up to 30% or the articles fell into both the national and individual categories. Especially popular were articles about health, money, children and education.

Feelings
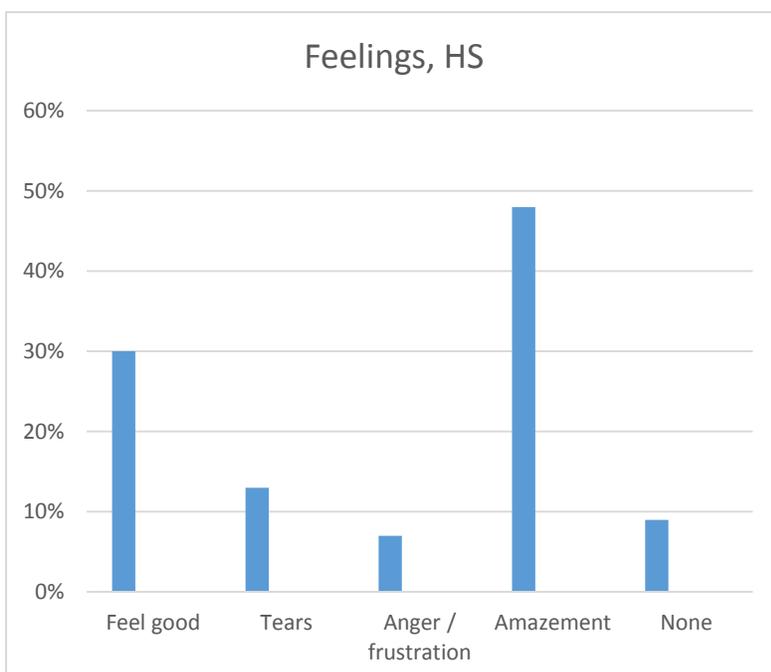
Feelings, HS

In terms of feelings, the results for Helsingin Sanomat were very clear. Most of the articles fell into either the amazement almost half) or feel good (30 %) categories, while the tears, anger / frustration and none categories constituted only 7–13% of the articles.

4.2 The BBC

Topics

Topics, BBC
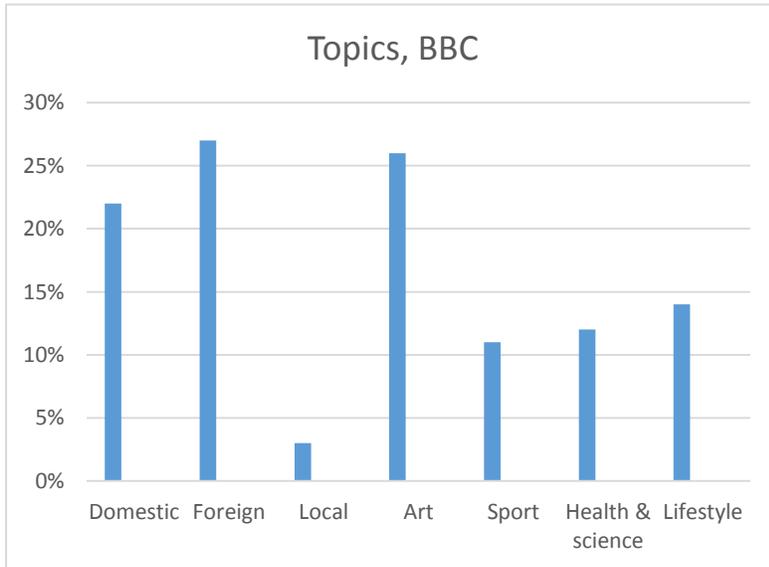
Domestic and foreign news, and art were the most shared topics from the BBC. 27% of the most shared articles were foreign, 26% art, 22% domestic and 14% lifestyle.

Headlines
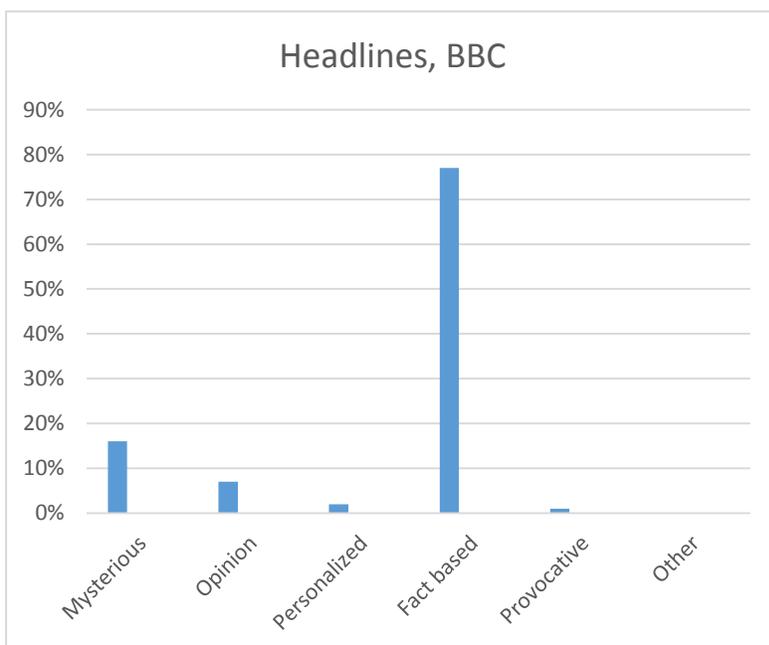
Headlines, BBC

The vast majority (77%), of the most shared BBC headlines were traditional fact based news headlines. 16% of the articles had a mysterious headline. Other headline types were very rare.

Form and genre, BBC

Form and genre, BBC
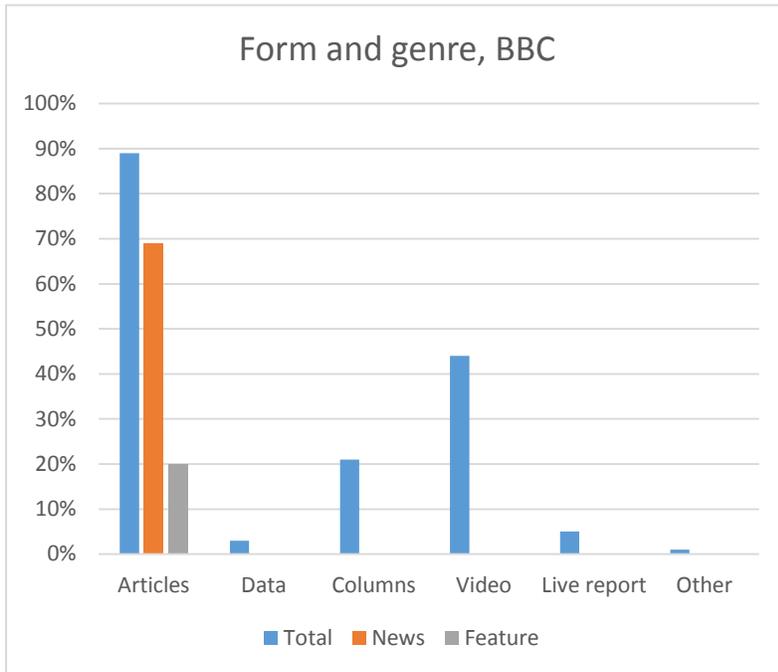
In terms of form, the BBC results were very clear. News articles and videos, and a combination of them, were the most shared ones. Up to 69% of the content was news articles and 44% of all articles contained a video.

23% of the most shared content were feature articles and 14% fell into the category of columns. Most of these were actually not columns or blogs but short editorial comments in a news articles.

Length of the articles

Length of articles, BBC
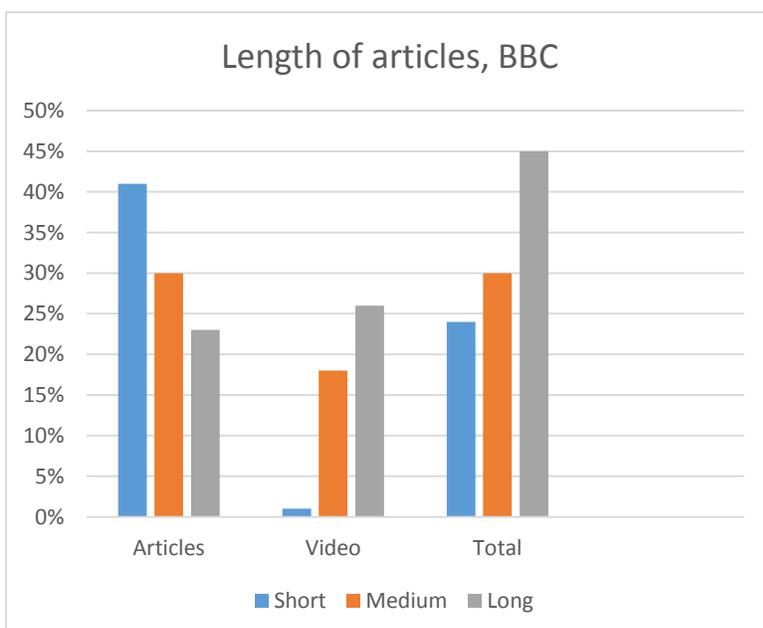
In terms of text-based articles, short articles are more widely shared from the BBC than long or medium length ones. As a matter of fact, the shorter the better. Short articles are shared more than medium length ones, and medium length ones are shared more than long form. That is true of text, but, when it comes to videos, the situation looks very different. The longer the video, the more it is shared.

A notable amount of the short articles contained a long video. When the length of the videos was taken into account, the unconditional majority of the most shared articles were long: 45% were long, 30% of medium length and 24% were short.

Angle
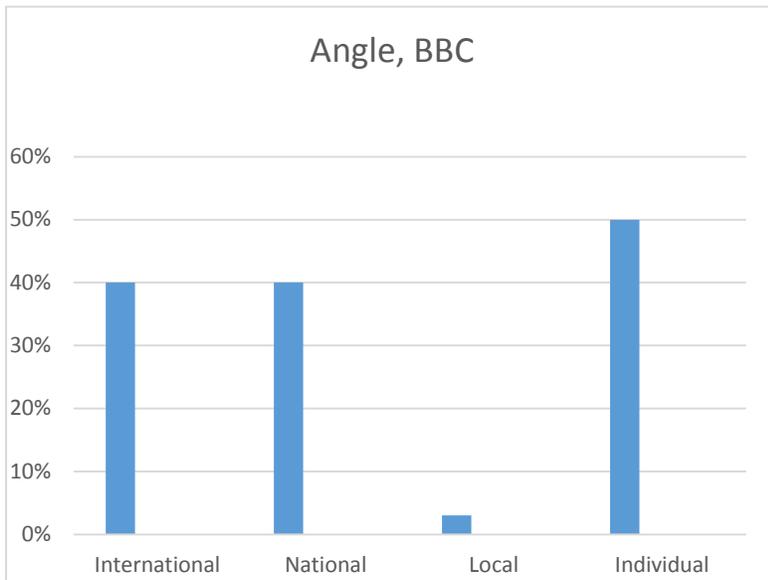
The angles divided quite evenly across the BBC material. Only articles with a local angle were missing, and all of the others were very evenly represented. 50% of the articles had an individual angle, 40% a national one and 40% an international one. The combination of national and individual as well as international and individual angles was clearly the most popular.

Angle, BBC
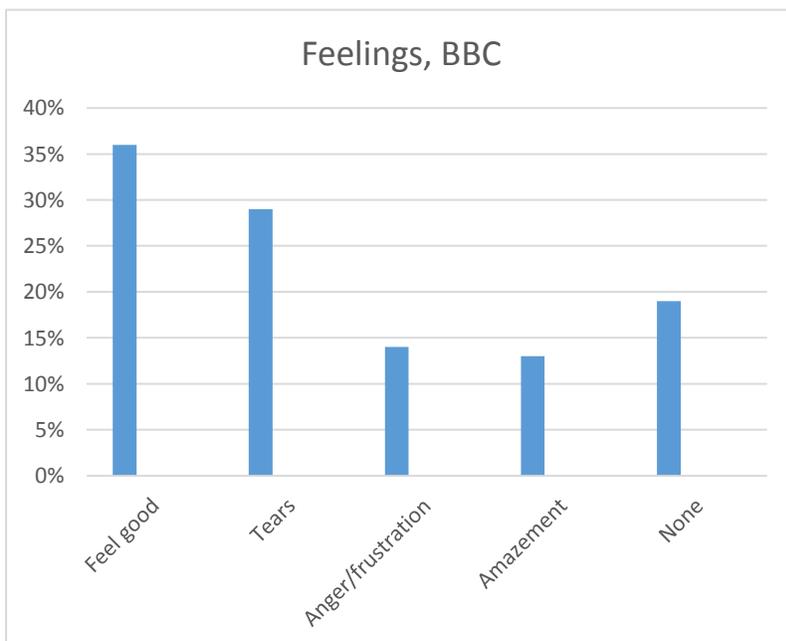
Feelings

Regarding feelings in the most shared articles, positive feel good stories were the biggest category with 36%. 29% of the most shared articles were classified as evoking tears, sadness or nostalgia.

Feelings, BBC

4.3 Yleisradio

Topics

Topics, Yleisradio

[Bar chart showing: Domestic 46%, Foreign 46%, Local 6%, Art 6%, Sports 4%, Health & science 19%, Lifestyle 44%]
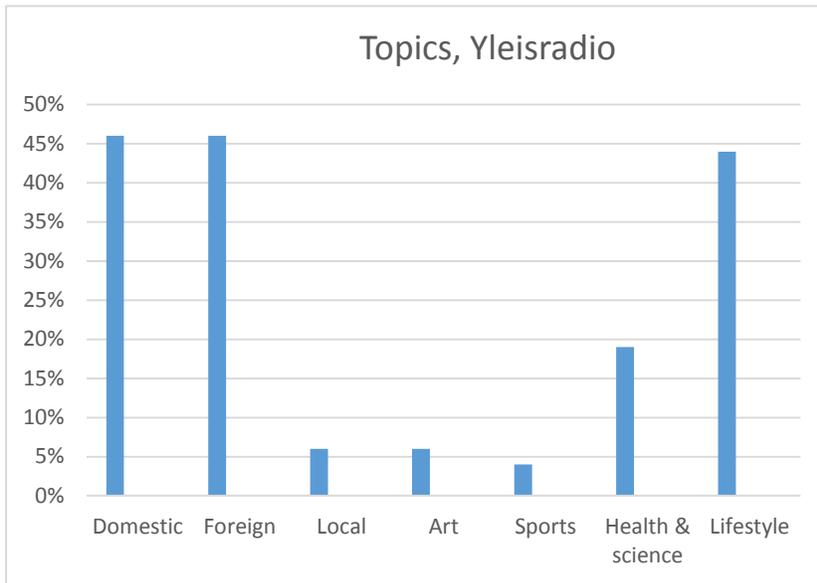
It is obvious, what the most shared topics from Yleisradio are: they are domestic and foreign stories and lifestyle. Domestic and foreign both featured in 46% of the articles and lifestyle in almost as many, at 44%. Health and science were also quite widely-shared topics, at 19%. Others, local, art and sport only had a few articles each.

Among the domestic and lifestyle topics, two groups were remarkably large: articles about children, education and family life and, on the other hand, articles about animals and nature. As much as 25% of the articles addressed children or family life and 12% addressed nature.

Headlines
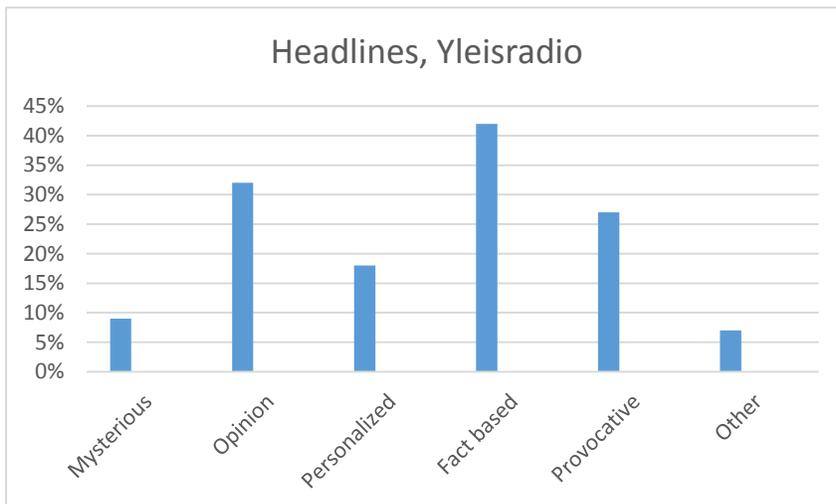
The majority of the most shared Yleisradio stories had a fact based headline. In addition to those, Yleisradio had a lot of opinion (32%) and provocative (27%) headlines.

Headlines, Yleisradio

[Bar chart showing: Mysterious 9%, Opinion 32%, Personalized 18%, Fact based 42%, Provocative 27%, Other 7%]

Form

Form, Yleisradio

Legend: Total, News, Feature
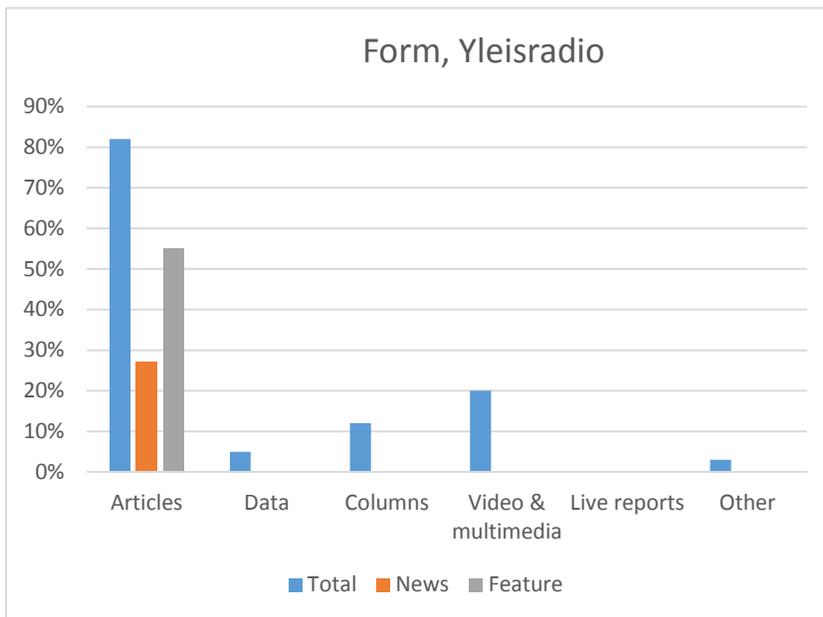
In terms of form and genre the majority (55%) of the most shared Yleisradio articles were features, whereas 27% were news. 20% of the articles contained video or audio, 12% were columns and 5% data journalism.

Length

Length of the articles, Yleisradio

Legend: Short, Medium, Long
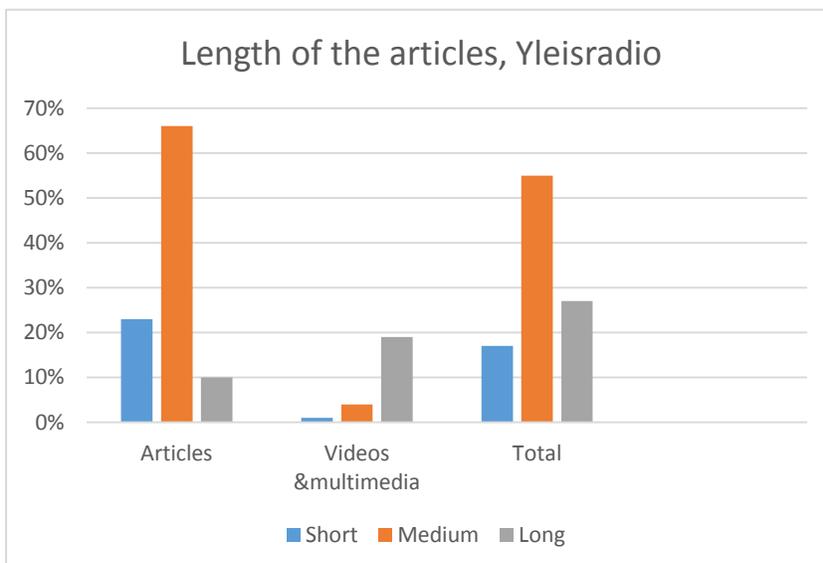
The medium length Yleisradio articles are shared more than short and long articles. When videos and multimedia are included, the picture changes slightly, but still the medium length articles form the majority: 55% of the articles belong to this category, followed by long arti-

cles (27%) and short articles (17%).

Angle

Angle, Yleisradio

	International	National	Local	Individual

(bar chart values approximately: International 17%, National 51%, Local 7%, Individual 55%)
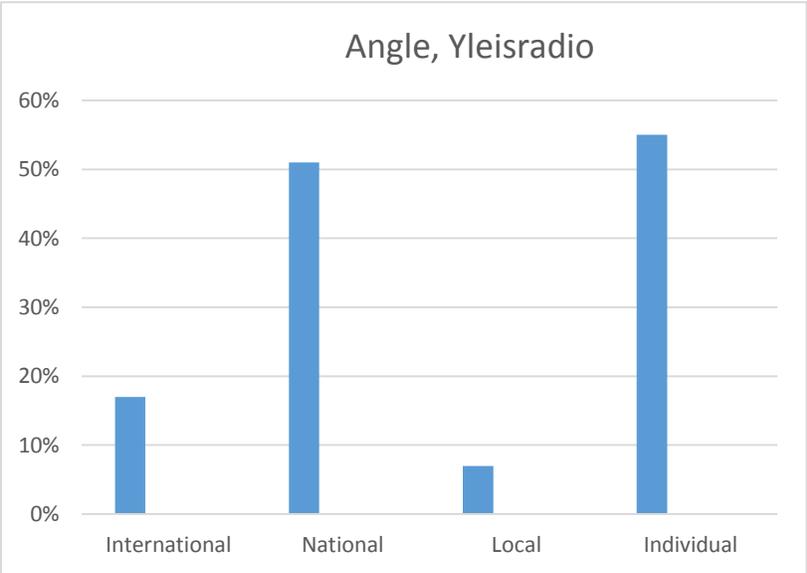
In terms of angle, the results are again very clear. The individual (55%) and national (51%) angles dominate. The combination of national and individual angles was strong. As much as 24% of the articles had both national and individual angles. This means that nearly half of the articles with an individual angle also had a national point of view in them. On the other hand, in the most shared articles with a national angle, nearly half of them also had an individual perspective.

Feelings

Feelings, Yleisradio

	Feel good	Tears	Anger & frustration	What / provocative	None

(bar chart values approximately: Feel good 32%, Tears 11%, Anger & frustration 12%, What / provocative 52%, None 8%)
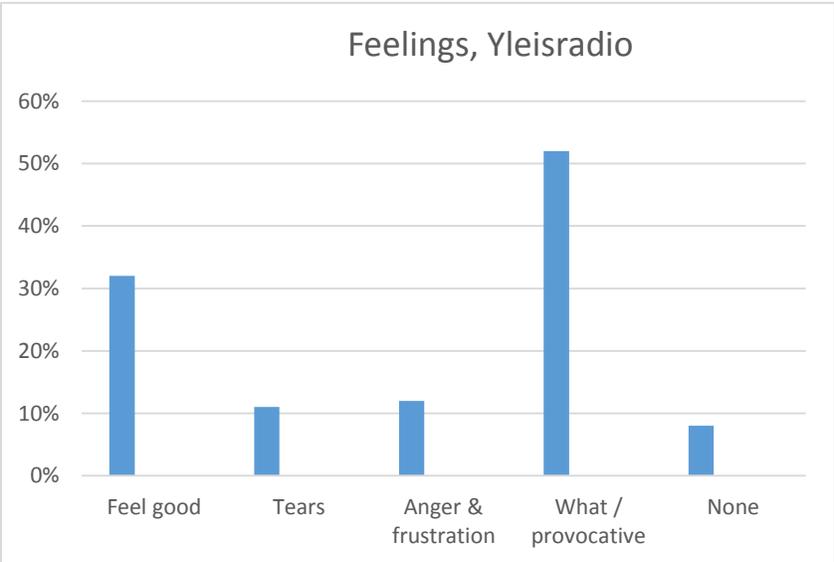
The feelings category was very clear in the Yleisradio material. The most shared articles were in the amazement and feel good categories. As much as 52% fell into category of amazement and 32% were feel good articles. Both the subcategories of tears and anger had only slightly over 10% of the articles.

5 Results: editorial practices

How does sharing change editorial practices?

5.1 Helsingin Sanomat

Helsingin Sanomat is a Finnish newspaper, owned by the publicly listed Sanoma Oyj, which owns several newspapers, 250 magazines, over 20 TV channels, six learning companies and a wide range of online services in several European countries. Helsingin Sanomat runs a daily print newspaper, online publication and an online TV, both behind a paywall.

The social media target of Helsingin Sanomat is that its stories are shared and seen widely, and through that, the paper finds new readers. The preliminary target is to find paying readers to digital content. For that, Helsingin Sanomat adapted a paywall in 2012. The paywall is bendable: it allows readers to read or watch five articles or TV programs per week for free. It also encourages readers to share by allowing free access from social media.

The role of social media has grown rapidly. In March 2015, 11% of the weekly 1.8 million visitors came via Facebook. A year ago, in March 2014, this was only 4%, so, even though the percentage remains quite small, the increase has been rapid, by almost 300%. In absolute numbers, the increase has been even bigger because the amount of visitors has also grown. The amount of weekly visitors was 1.6 million in March 2014 and 1.8 million by March 2015. This means that the number of weekly click-throughs from Facebook have increased from 64,000 to 198,000 in a year (TNS Metrix 2015).

Twitter is still so small in Finland that is not, at least yet, a significant source of readers. Less than 1% of the HS readers come from Twitter.

One of the main targets is to find a new, younger audience.

"The average age of our print reader is 57 years, so we need to find a younger audience. For us, social media are a marketing channel, but also a place where we can discuss and build deeper contacts with our readers, to be close to our audience. It is a place to be if we want to survive", says Päivi Anttikoski, deputy editor-in-chief of Helsingin Sanomat, where her special responsibility is digital content.

Helsingin Sanomat is active on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp, but most of its social media audience comes from Facebook. HS's sub brand Nyt (Now) has been active on WhatsApp since November 2014 when it launched a WhatsApp account which sends a daily message with news and lifestyle headlines, entertainment and tips about events, restaurants or films. HS Nyt was the first Finnish media to start a WhatsApp account, which forms part of Helsingin Sanomat's new social media experiments.

"The next steps will be, for example, social media cards with a picture and a short text on them. We will also do more videos than we are doing now. Videos haven't yet become as big a phenomenon in Finland as they are in the US, but they are becoming more and more popular. Our readers like, for example, short one minute 'explainers'. We have done those, for example, about the Finnish election system."

"We need to rethink also our headlines and social media posts. It has been self-evident for a long time already that print and web headlines should differ from each other. Now we need to realize that social media needs a third kind of headline. The LA Times offers their readers three alternative headlines to choose from when sharing. We could think about something like that for Helsingin Sanomat, too," says Anttikoski.

Until recently, social media accounts have been taken care of by news editors. They share on Facebook and Twitter the stories they find most important and, on the other hand, the stories they evaluate as having good social media potential.

Helsingin Sanomat recruited its first social media producer in April 2015. Her job will be to create a strategy and practices for sharing and presence on social media as well as finding out and testing new possibilities.

"We need to change the work flow and also develop our tools so that it will be easy for every single journalist to share their stories on different social platforms without thinking about the variable photo requirements on Twitter and Instagram or other technical details. Currently, we are developing a tool which allows journalists to share the same post easily on multiple platforms", social media producer Kirsi Alm-Siira argues.

The results of the HS classifications show that features and columns are more widely shared than news. This has been recognized also in the newsroom, which is why news editors tend to share mostly features, blogs and columns on Facebook. News is shared more on Twitter, partly automatically from the web site hs.fi, and partly manually by the social media producer or individual journalists. Previously, Twitter shares only included a link to an article, but nowadays they always include a photo which has rapidly increased the number of likes and retweets.

Anttikoski is happy at the success of feature but is worried about the low performance of news on social media. She remains convinced that the audience is interested in news.

 "It is not that interest in news would sink, it is that we need to learn to make our news more interesting also on social media. Just sharing a plain news link will not evoke any passion. We need to evoke feelings. On the other hand, our paywall gives us an extra challenge in this regard. We have to offer something more and something different from the basic news in order to make people ready to pay for our content."

"Journalism is not in crisis. We are out of money but there are plenty of stories, and we can tell them well. The problem is marketing: How do we sell our good content on social media? How do we show that we have that much more than anyone else?"

According to Anttikoski, Twitter is especially important in breaking news situations and the role of foreign correspondents is especially important here also. The situation puts a

lot of pressure on correspondents though. They have to write both quick news and long, in-depth analyses, comment on videos and live tweet at the same time.

Even though active sharing is a target, Anttikoski says that it does not affect which stories are covered or how.

"No. Not at all. We keep our journalistic values. The social media have no effect on them. We cover the most important and interesting stories and then we share them on social media."

The biggest social media successes of Helsingin Sanomat from April 2015 confirm that people want to share and read very variable articles. They include election debates and graphic videos on elections, a humorous blog post about Finnish men and emotions, and a video about how to make a lamp out of disposable spoons.

5.2 The BBC

The BBC is the UK's public broadcasting company. It is funded by the public license fee and it runs nine national TV channels, 10 radio stations, a wide range of online services and international multimedia channels with TV and online services.

For the BBC, the target in using social media is clear: to reach the largest possible number of people, especially in the UK and especially younger audiences and women. According to BBC social media editor Chris Hamilton, this is because of the public service profile of the BBC.

"We have a loyal core audience, but we need to make sure we are reaching also younger audiences and audiences we wouldn't reach without social media. We are monetized by a universal license fee and we have to be sure that we are attracting everyone and not just serving a particular section of the nation", Hamilton says.

How is this done? The BBC is currently working on its social media strategies and targets. The work is very much in progress but some guidelines are clear.

The BBC has traditionally been an organisation that concentrates on serious journalism and hard news like politics, international affairs and economics, but social media have partly changed that. While the key values of the BBC remain the same – independence, impartiality and truth – the diversity of the content has grown. The growing importance of social media has taught the newsroom at least two main points: first, delivering information is not enough anymore and, second, the media have to meet people where they are, that is on social media.

Most of the BBC's social media followers are on Facebook and Twitter, but the BBC is also active on other channels, such as YouTube and Instagram. The newest area of interest is chat apps like WhatsApp.

The BBC has a social media team of nine to ten people. This team takes care of the core social media accounts, which include the BBC News Facebook page, BBC Breaking on Twitter and BBC on Google Plus, among others. In addition to that, individual programs and BBC sub-brands, like Newsbeat and Newsnight, have their own social

media accounts which are administered independently by the production teams. Many of the regional news teams also have a strong social media presence, managed by the news teams themselves.

Decisions about what to post, where and when are made independently by social media editors or production teams. There are no written guidelines and the strategies are still in progress. There are some practical tactics though which are shared by the social media team, finding the right tone for each post being one of them.

The tone of social media posts is an important factor in reaching new audiences. According to Chris Hamilton, a lot of thought is devoted to the tone by journalists responsible for the social media. The aim is to avoid formality and find a shade of personality, something people can react and connect to. The scale of tones used is broad. The most formal tone is used in news alerts, that are sent simultaneously with one tool to multiple platforms: apps, email, sms, banners on the BBC website and the BBC Breaking News Twitter account. This is used in breaking news situations, when accuracy and speed are the most important aims. In other circumstances, the tone can be less formal. In the main news accounts, the change of tone might be very small, almost indistinguishable.

"Often differences are small that people really wouldn't notice, like writing they'll instead of they will. Running words together makes it sound like someone talking to you rather than a robot."

Then again, many programs and sub-brands are free to use colloquial language, jokes, cartoons and fun hashtags, as in this BBC Newsbeat tweet from May 23 2015: "This dude is face timing his mate a @SnoopDogg experience #bigweekend".

The differences in tone reflect the differences between the platforms and accounts. Some, like the main news accounts, exist mainly to inform, as quickly and accurately as possible, as many as possible. Others, on the other hand, are aiming to create a close relationship and dialogue with their audience. Then, the language and tone of the postings need to be different from the traditional news headlines. Whether the tone is formal or informal, one thing remains constant: it cannot be aggressive.

The BBC uses social media also to gather news stories and find interviewees. It is often the quickest and most effective way of finding people involved in news stories. All social media platforms are used in this way, but, in breaking news situations, Twitter is the quickest one.

The role of individual journalists varies a lot. The BBC encourages people to be active on social media and gives guidelines for behavior – impartiality, for example – but does not require anyone to take part. When discussions or critiques are raised about a BBC story on social media, it is up to the writer of the article to decide whether he or she wants to take part in the discussion or not.

"We have no problem with the journalist wanting to answer. We won't say: don't respond, but one thing I say to people is that Twitter storms come and go, we don't have to respond to every single criticism, but we have to pick up the important ones and make changes."

The BBC has performed several new experiments on social media lately, BBC Trending being one of them. BBC Trending is a blog, defined as "the BBC bureau on the internet. Reporting on what's being shared and asking why it matters" (BBC Trending 2015). The blog – which won a Webby Award 2015 for the news and information category – looks for stories that have gone viral, tries to explain why they are so attractive, identifies the real stories behind them and assesses whether there are ethical problems involved.

Other experiments are information graphic products that pick up interesting statistics about a chosen story of the day, #BBCGoFigure being an example of that, and BBC Shorts, 15 second news videos that are produced primarily for social media and have their main home on Instagram.

"These are very much social first products, they are for our audience to consume on social media, and they are not something that will be traffic drivers (to our website)."

BBC Trending and BBC Shorts are also part of experimenting with videos, trying to find new formats and new ways of making videos primarily for social media.

"What we produce for TV broadcast is kind of a three and a half minutes TV package, and what we produce for digital might be slightly longer. For social media, we think what is the other stuff, what's really interesting, how this story was covered, what it was really like at the scene. The role of the presenter or the reporter is still important but not as a person who reports but as a person who experiences what's happening."

BBC is one of the nine big media companies taking part in the new cooperation with Facebook, in which the media outlets publish their articles directly on Facebook rather than writing a post with a link to the article. The media companies participating in the project, which started in May 2015, are BBC News, Buzzfeed, National Geographic, The Atlantic, NBC News, The Times, The Guardian, Bild and Spiegel Online (Goel & Somaiya 2015).

The project has raised concerns about the growing power of the social media companies, and about legacy media giving their content for free, and in doing so, losing control over distribution and also losing their audience and advertisers who will no longer need to access the web pages of media outlets to find information and entertainment. On the other hand, the project helps the media to reach bigger audiences, promises that the articles will load up to ten times quicker than before, allows the possibility of selling ads directly to the stories or let Facebook sell them and have a slice of the income. It also offers new tools, such as interactive maps.

The issue of whether to give your content for free to the social media companies has been topical for the BBC as well as for other media outlets. And their answer to the question? The same as for Yleisradio and Helsingin Sanomat: trying to find out the right balance of giving content but maintaining control over it.

"That is an ongoing question. We want to present content in a way that we have control over it, but we have to balance that against the way people use social media. They naturally want to stay within those platforms and, when it comes to reaching younger audiences, you've got to give them value in those spaces. You can't just assume they would willingly come to your website. So it is balancing."

5.3 Yleisradio

Yleisradio (Yle) is a national broadcasting company of Finland, funded by a special Yle tax from 2013. Before that, Yle got its funding from the TV licence fee. It owns four television channels, six radio channels, over 20 regional radio stations and runs a variety of online services. Yle's operations are guided by Act on Yleisradio Oy. It produces programs in Finnish, Swedish, Sami, Romani, English, Russian and sign languages.

As a national broadcasting company, its target is to reach as many Finns as possible and produce content also for different minority and special audience groups.

On social media, this means reaching younger audiences, as traditional broadcasting mainly attracts older viewers. Facebook is the most important social media for Yleisradio, as it is for most Finnish media organizations. In March 2015, 11% of the readers of Yleisradio's digital content came from Facebook. This figure has grown rapidly within a few years, as it was only 7% in 2013. At the same time, the amount of audience has grown, so the growth in the number of click-throughs from Facebook has grown more than these figures show.

Yleisradio also has active Twitter and Instagram accounts, but the amount of traffic from Twitter is still small. New platforms to look at now are WhatsApp and Snapchat. WhatsApp is already actively being used by Yleisradio's new brand for younger audiences, Kiosk.

Yleisradio is constantly developing strategies for sharing. According to Online Editor for News and Current Affairs Timo Kämäräinen, a new way of doing this is to employ a clock model which has now been in use for a year. It means that different kinds of content are shared at different times of the day.

"In the morning, people want to read basic news and learn what has happened during the night. At lunchtime, we tend to share news you can use: articles with tips and ideas for problem-solving. In the evening, people are ready to read more demanding content, in-depth analysis and articles they can use to build their identity."

One of the biggest ever social media successes of Yleisradio happened on December 6th 2014, during the Finnish Independence Day celebration from the presidential residence. A 101-year-old veteran of the Winter War was invited to the celebration and interviewed by a journalist from Yleisradio. A video clip of that was published on Yleisradio's web site and shared on Facebook. The video quickly got over 500,000 viewers.

"This video is a good example of the idea that it is the appeal of the content that counts. This story was a good one, because it had so many attractive attributes. A 101-year-old war hero, who was very positive and smiley: everybody loved him. It was a story that was easy to like and nice to share."

The classifications in this research show the same trend for Yleisradio as for Helsingin Sanomat: features are shared much more than news. Timo Kämäräinen is indeed familiar with this issue.

"The news we journalists consider important are not necessarily so appealing that they will be clicked on, let alone shared on social media. That is why we need to try to learn how to make news more attractive to our audience. It is not an easy job to do."

Kämäräinen also admits that the social media potential of a topic affects whether a story will be covered or not.

"It does affect it – and I think it should, otherwise we would live in our own bubble and wouldn't care at all about what our audience is interested in. Social media encourages us to make our stories more interesting, more personal and more emotional. Before social media, we concentrated mainly on politics, economics and international affairs of high importance. Stories about everyday life, people's experiences and emotions were rare. At that time we even devoted a lot of time and energy into cutting out all the emotion from a story."

"This doesn't mean that we wouldn't cover important but less appealing news. We do. At the same time we admit that news about whether the GNP has increased or decreased by one per cent will not go viral. That is a fact we should accept. We will cover the story and don't expect it to be a social media success, but there are a whole lot of important news stories that can be told more interestingly than we do now."

6.   Discussion

6.1 What is shared most?

The results of the first part of this study can be summarized as five observations: the differentiation of the media, the absence of news, the rise of a personal angle, longing for the positive and the growing importance of visual, videos and data journalism.

The differentiation of the media

Classifications of the most shared content of the BBC, Helsingin Sanomat and Yleisradio showed clearly that whilst all three are mainly news organizations, they differ substantially from each other with regard to their most shared content. All three clearly have a profile of their own.

The BBC is the most traditional one of these three. Its most shared content is mainly traditional news with basic, fact based headlines: *Malala wins Nobel Peace prize*, *First Ebola case diagnosed on US soil*, *Duchess of Cambridge pregnant*. The amount of features is significantly lower than in the Helsingin Sanomat and Yleisradio material. It also has a smallest amount of data journalism in its most shared content, but instead the BBC is clearly focusing on and experimenting with new formats of video production.

In the most shared content of Helsingin Sanomat, features and opinions outstrip everything else. The hundred most shared articles include a variety of columns, blogs and opinion pieces on current affairs. Helsingin Sanomat has the biggest amount of data journalism in its most shared content.

As for Yleisradio, the picture changes again. Yleisradio had a clear profile with regard to headlines: most of the articles have either a traditional, fact based news headline or one that expresses an opinion, often a strong or provocative one. In terms of topics, Yleisradio has a considerable amount of articles about everyday topics, such as parenting and nature.

The absence of news

All three media organisations covered in this research identify themselves first and foremost as news organisations, yet they all produce a growing amount of feature articles, personal interviews and stories about everyday life and it is mostly those stories that the audience seems to share. In Helsingin Sanomat, 17% of the most shared articles were news, and yet we know from the metrics that the absolute majority (up to 85%) of the articles are produced in the news departments, and that feature departments produce only 15% of the articles. Is there a contradiction here?

In the interviews, the representatives from each organisation stated that there is no contradiction. The main focus is on the news but at the same time they are diversifying their content in order to reach new audiences (without losing the old ones) and to keep the business profitable. This is especially important for Helsingin Sanomat because of its

paywall. The basic news is available in the Internet for free, so for paying customers you need to be able to offer something more. It is not a problem that features are doing so well in terms of sharing, but it is a problem that news is not.

What, then, could be reasons for that? There are several possibilities. It might be that the audience's interest in news has fallen. On the other hand, it is possible that people do read news but do not necessarily share it. By sharing a basic news item, you seldom have a chance to express your personality and your aspirations and it is because of that we share in the first place (Hermida 2014: 33). The third possibility is that people want to read or watch the news but, unless it is a breaking news situation, it is enough for them to see the headlines and find out that things are basically the same as they were yesterday or last week.

Whatever the reason, the problem remains and needs to be tackled. If we consider news production to be important, we need to find out how to produce and market news stories so that people will find them interesting.

Rise of an individual angle

The rise of an individual angle was clear within all three media organisations covered in this study. It manifested itself in four different ways. First, there were a lot of stories of ordinary people, their experiences and feelings. Some of the articles only covered a story of an individual, while others combined the story with a national or international context. Second, the popularity of opinions was clear, especially in Helsingin Sanomat and Yleisradio. Blogs and columns were widely shared, and even a few opinion pieces went viral. Moreover, many of the experts interviewed by the media offered opinions either instead or in addition to scientific data. Third, many of the most shared stories took as their starting point a question: what does this mean to an individual? The articles may not have included ordinary people but they were looking for answers and solutions for the individual readers. Fourth, everyday topics like parenting and family life, education, health, nature and money seemed to be very popular.

Traditionally, news journalism has concentrated on politics, economics and international relationships, all of which has been covered from a national, system perspective. The angle of an individual has been overlooked and even despised. In this research material, though, it was clear that the most shared articles covered both of these angles. It seems that the audience wants both information about the social, national or international context and personal stories, views, feelings and experiences. While the importance of news seems to be diminishing, this observation may provide an answer to news organisations that are currently trying to find new ways to engage their audience.

Feelings: longing for the positive and the readiness to be provoked

Editors have known for a long time that it is not enough to write an informative article, or even an interesting one. To connect with your readers you have to provoke feelings. As

Hermida puts it: "Making an emotional connection serves as a catalyst for sharing" (Hermida 2014: 58).

According to Hermida (2014: 57), the most shared content evokes the emotions of shock, amusement or surprise. In my classification, shock and surprise fell into the category of amazement and amusement into the feel good category. My results show that it is precisely these two categories that form the absolute majority of the most shared articles, with the exception of the BBC, where sad articles were more shared than surprising and provocative pieces. There is a simple explanation to this exception: there is a high amount of BBC articles about celebrity deaths - a genre that was totally absent from the Finnish material.

The high amount of provocative articles might relate to the popularity of opinions. There seems to be a need for strong opinions and robust discussion. Almost as clear is the longing for articles that evoke positive feelings. This is perfectly in line with previous research (Berger & Milkman 2012, Kagan 2014). It seems to me that such a large proportion of the media content is negative, even depressing, that, when people find content that evokes positive feelings and inspiration, they tend to share it.

What, then, is positive? It can be many things. It can be a funny or weird article that makes people laugh, it can be a clever solution to a common problem, but in this material most of the positive articles were something else. They were stories about success, whether of individuals or businesses, especially success, strength and courage in difficult circumstances. They were articles that made readers to say: "Wow, what an awesome story!" or "What a remarkable person!".

The growing importance of videos and data journalism

According to Nic Newman, there are three big content trends existing in the changing media environment currently. The growing importance of videos is one of them (Newman 2011). This can be seen in the huge growth of YouTube and in the effort most newspapers are making to increase their video production. In this research, the BBC had most videos, and nearly half of the articles contained also a video. The amounts were smaller but growing for Helsingin Sanomat. Yleisradio is an exception here, as it is not currently increasing the amount of its online videos.

The amount of data journalism is still quite small, but growing. Helsingin Sanomat had the biggest amount of data journalism, and 8% of the most shared HS articles were data journalistic. Data journalism is one of the new tools, growing in popularity and giving journalists a more diverse tool kit to use. In my material, data journalism was used in various different ways and in many cases it was a way of combining informative and entertaining elements in a creative way as in the BBC story about *Your Life on Earth*. It was also used as a way of making a big news item important and useful for an individual as in a Helsingin Sanomat article about changes to the retirement age. It included a simple calculator that calculated the users' retirement age.

6.2 Social media in the newsroom

The three media companies involved in this research differ from each other in size, ownership, business models and targets. Yet, concerning social media, they have a lot in common. In the interviews, I found four issues on which each and every one of these companies is working. These are developing a social media strategy, planning and experimenting with social first products, working out what is the role of a single journalist with regard to social media and how to tackle a range of new challenges concerning social media.

Strategies: work in progress

All three companies are developing their social media strategies. Some of them have had a social media strategy before, and some have not but, regardless of that, the decisions about what to share, how, where and when are still done at least partly intuitively. The social media journalists have quite a clear view about what to share, when and on which platform, but they are constantly struggling to create the right balance of news and features, serious pieces and entertainment.

The companies have between 1 and 10 members in their social media teams but, in all of them, part of the social media work is done in different teams along with other duties by journalists with highly variable levels of knowledge about, and experience of, social media.

The representatives of the companies agreed that they need clear strategies that define both the targets and the tactics related to social media.

Social first

Digital first has been the strategy for many media companies in recent years. At the same time the idea emerged that content should actually be mobile first, not just digital first. Now, the most visionary companies are developing and experimenting with social first products. They are not necessarily developed to tempt audience to click on articles; their aim can be marketing, audience engagement or giving information and experiences to audience on platforms that they already use.

The role of journalists

Journalists from all three media companies are encouraged but not expected to be active on social media. They are also given guidelines as to their behaviour on social platforms. Yet one thing was obvious in the interviews: even though all the companies wanted to engage with their audience, the role of the media and their journalists is still mainly that of informing rather than discussing.

These media companies use social media to share and market their articles, and to look for ideas, information and interviewees, but less to engage in feedback or equal discus-

sion with the audience. If feedback on a single article is provided via social media, it is up to the individual journalist whether (s)he wants to respond or not. Responding to and discussing with the audience is not seen as a part of a journalist's job, nor does (s)he have time for that.

My proposition is that this is one of the things that will change in the future, if the legacy media really want to engage with the audience.

Questions to tackle

The editorial staff of all three media companies face a range of new challenges concerning social media. How to make news more attractive on social media? How to find a functional balance between news and features, news values and attractiveness on social media? How much and what kind of content to give to social media companies for free? What are the most important social media platforms to be active on in order to reach new and younger audiences? What is the right tone to attract them? What to do with trolls?

7 Conclusions

As the legacy media is in turbulence because of the digital transition and its collapsing business models, it has become all the more important to understand the needs and interests of audiences. Examining the most shared content of the legacy media provides valuable tools for creating audience engagement.

The results of this study show that producing content according to the current news values is insufficient. Spreading the right information as quickly and accurately as possible may be enough in breaking news situations but otherwise audiences expect journalists to be able to evoke feelings, analyse, surprise and give them tools to take part in discussions, even tools to build their identity.

Some of the news values, such negativity and objectivity, are even contradicting the type of content people want to share. Classifications of the most shared content of the legacy media indicate that people tend to share positive, feel good stories, opinions and analysing in-depth articles instead of accessing quick, objective news.

7.1 Shareability criteria

Current news criteria are still in use and valuable, but in social media they are not enough. That is why I created the following shareability criteria for journalists who want their stories to go viral. These criteria are not meant to be a statement for the quality of journalism. Instead, they are a collection of guidelines based on my own and previous research about what makes content viral:

1.   Analyse and reflect

Have you been worried about quality journalism? Don't be. Analytical, in-depth articles do go viral.

2.   Write long form

The results of different studies are contradictory on this issue. Some say that you should write long, some that you should write either short or long but not anything in the middle. In my research, mid-length stories did well, but that can be because there are more of these produced than short or long form ones. Alternatively, it can mean that it does not matter whether it is short or long, it is the content that counts. Anyway, one thing is certain: an article does not have to be short.

3.   Combine personal and (inter)national angles

Don't make a choice between a story about an individual and clear, statistical facts. People want them both.

4.   Give people tools to build and reflect their identity

This is why calculators are so popular: people want to compare their views and experiences with others and see how the government's decisions affect them.

5.   Evoke feelings – especially positive ones

6.   If possible, make it fun

7.   Give people opinions they can agree or disagree on

8.   Give your audience someone or something to admire

9.   Do not forget the everyday topics: health, children, nature, money

10.   Be creative: use data journalism, make videos and animations, do memes

11.   After having done all this, share your article under an interesting headline and add a personal post.

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