

3. Faktuell

Youths as journalists in online newspapers and magazines in Norway

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In 2013, the youth-led non-profit media organization Norsensus Mediaforum (Norway) launched the Faktuell project. From the outset, it was conceived both as a media competence-building project and as an online publication for the 13 to 20 age group. The declared ambition was to enhance the target group's civic engagement and offer participants practical media training as journalists, photographers and video producers. This in turn would encourage active participation and a mainstream youth perspective. At the same time, it would allow participants to improve their digital competencies through involvement in a high-quality online publication.¹ This chapter first briefly outlines the Norwegian media landscape, then highlights the main features of Faktuell before we conclude with reflections on how the project contributes to civic engagement and digital competence.

As in many other countries, the Norwegian media landscape is undergoing technology-driven changes, especially increased digitization and the use of social media and mobile platforms. New stakeholders and markets have emerged, new professions and roles are in evidence, and media usage has changed.² The media policy by several governments has been to support a diverse, free and independent press through various press subsidies.³ How Norwegians access news and information has also changed significantly. In 1991, 84 per cent of the population between 9 and 70 years of age read print newspapers, 81 per cent watched TV and

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71 per cent listened to the radio. In 2017, only 32 per cent read print newspapers, 62 per cent watched TV and 54 per cent listened to the radio. Ninety per cent of the population now use the internet daily to read online newspapers, access IPTV and listen to internet radio. The Norwegian DAB radio is seen by many as a temporary solution before internet radio takes over. Among internet users, most use the internet to access Facebook (73%) or handle email (71%), while 57 per cent search for facts or background material, and 53 per cent watch films, TV or videos. Gender differences in media usage have diminished, and today 92 per cent of internet users are male while 87 per cent are female. In the 9 to 15 age group, 93 per cent use the internet daily, and the percentage increases to 98 per cent among 16 to 24-year-olds.⁴ If we look at social media use, the 18 to 29 age group (the closest to Faktuell's target group that we have updated statistics for) finds Facebook most popular (99 per cent among females and 91 per cent among males) followed by Snapchat (95 per cent among females and 89 per cent among males), Instagram (92 per cent among females and 74 per cent among males) and Youtube (78 per cent among females and 82 per cent among males).⁵ Among the most popular websites in Norway, a high proportion comprised newspapers or news sources, which reflects a continuing Norwegian interest in news. The most popular website was the newspaper *VG Nett* with 895,718 unique readers.⁶ Weeklies and magazines both have online versions but available statistics still only register print circulation.⁷

How children and youths produce news at Faktuell

As can be seen from these media trends, Norwegian youths interact with news and media content. From mobile phones to social media, they are immersed in a technologically rich media environment, in a participatory culture where they are not only consuming media content mainly online, but also producing it and sharing it with others on a daily basis. Yet youth activity in this new media world does not ensure either a fully competent media literary generation or their presence in mainstream media. This is where Faktuell can make a difference.

Faktuell is financed by Oslo Municipality, the Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU), the Open Society Foundation and



Photo 1.
In one of the Faktuell workshops, youths learn about photojournalism.

Erasmus+. Aiming for unbiased reporting and respect for a diversity of views, Faktuell attempts not only to develop journalistic skills among youths but also to provide a fresh and quality-conscious youth perspective on public debate. To bring about these ambitious goals, Norsensus Mediaforum has set up a project management team that is legally and financially responsible for all activities.⁸ In addition, an independent and unpaid advisory steering committee composed of academics,⁹ media professionals and youth representatives provides input on planning and policy. Faktuell consists of two main components: a comprehensive training programme in news content creation and a youth-led online magazine. The training programme comprises five modules: media ethics, basic journalistic skills (investigation and data collection in text, audio, video and photo), storytelling, editing and dissemination training.

To ensure that youths have the chance to interact with professionals and to connect different media generations, all modules are led by media professionals from mainstream media and academia in Norway. Participating youths also meet volunteer mentor journalists, academics and university-level media/journalism students in training sessions and follow-up meetings. Mentors serve as supervisors for the young journalists on language, structure and technical issues. So far, we have interacted with more than 100 schools, student clubs and organizations



Photo 2.
Faktuell participants learn and practice visual storytelling in journalism.

all over the country, and with thousands of young people through targeted social media ads. Once the applications from interested youths are processed, we carry out a participatory assessment of their knowledge of journalism and use of media. For this purpose, we use media literacy evaluation tools to map individual and collective assets and to shape the training programme. With this method, more than 100 youths have completed the Faktuell training programme since 2013.

The second component of the project is an online magazine, *faktuell.no*. Its aim is to motivate participants and other youths to create news content by showcasing their journalistic work and by creating a comprehensive youth-led magazine for the general public. Showcased content is syndicated with mainstream media and project partners in Norway to increase the impact and recognition of the journalistic work. The magazine has also been an experimental laboratory for observing youth content production. From editorial work to marketing, all activities are run by the editorial group of young people aged 13 to 20 from diverse backgrounds, and these are renewed every year. In addition to the core editorial team, we invite individual contributors, schools and youth clubs to contribute to the magazine. The project management team only provides logistic and technical support to the editorial team in addition to mentorship when needed. This relaxed editorial attitude to control has encouraged the



Photo 3.

Faktuell journalists are filming for a 5 episode documentary series about the fifth anniversary of 22 July terror attacks in Norway.

youths to produce content ranging from game reviews to politically themed commentaries.

Looking at the type of the content in the magazine, we can see some common tendencies regarding content creation. Despite our efforts to encourage new ways to approach storytelling, in order to use youthful social media habits while offering considerable editorial freedom, most youths imitate the style and format of well-established magazines and newspapers. Unlike their commonly assumed non-textual and short content consumption habits, they have a tendency to maintain a serious and traditional tone, writing long texts. In text-based news reporting, they usually adopt lengthy blog-style texts. Comparing the text-visual content ratio, videos make up about 65 per cent of all content. The content of most videos also carries a similar traditional tone and averages 5–10 minutes in length. Despite the tendency to film for longer and include more content, the completion rate of video news projects without mentor intervention is as low as 20 per cent. The average pitching and completion of the entry rate is, on the other hand, around 35 per cent.

One common trait in video news reporting is how young reporters prioritize equipment and tools before the story and technique, and

insist on using professional equipment. Similarly, a common pattern for many young video/photo journalists is to rely on visual effects rather than content, often citing mainstream media channels such as VG and popular youtubers. This discrepancy from their social media habits made us revise the training content and focus more on storytelling and strategic communication skills. The training became less tool-centred. In addition, to explore transnational interaction among young journalists, we have recently initiated a dedicated collaborative content creation call under Faktuell. Here Faktuell journalists work together with young journalists from Ireland, Germany, Romania and Bulgaria to find common themes and develop content together.

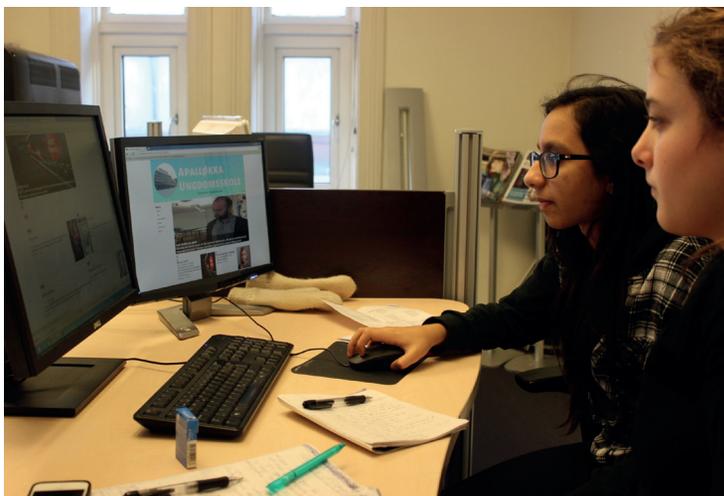


Photo 4.
Two young journalists designing the front page of Faktuell webpage.

Youth and e-learning from a civics perspective

Faktuell shows how it is possible to engage with youth and e-learning in an innovative way. The rapid increase in the use of the internet and social media among young people is considered relevant for education to such an extent that the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016 also investigated the school context for students' use of social media for civic engagement.¹⁰ Although detailed research results are not yet available, there is a clear increase in all

countries in young people's use of social media for political purposes. Additionally, the average scores on the social media engagement scale were consistently higher for those students who generally expressed interest in civic issues.¹¹

Increasing access to, and use of, new technologies permits a re-organization of space, social relations and, hence, of conversation or deliberation. The internet and social media could be defined as a contemporary public sphere.¹² These technologies allow individuals to propose new spaces for politics. The more young people learn about and are accustomed to the use of social and digital media, the more we can expect emerging digitally enabled citizens, possibly with new civic habits, occupying new political spaces. Loader and Mercea (2011) argue that collective and democratic action “is growing new roots”. Social media has lowered the threshold of becoming a sort of journalist to the extent that we can now use the concept of citizen-journalist. One result of this development is the acceleration of many kinds of communication and flows of information – to and from sources and audiences different from before.¹³ New kinds of, and places for, civic engagement are available in our societies, and e-learning should be an important part of school in order to promote this. Yet, it is noticeable that the relevant practices are not permeating all elements of our education system. The Faktuell project, however, illustrates clearly the significance of the NGO sector in empowering young people with civic competencies for a digital future.

With regard to the future, there are two main actions we are planning to take to sustain the relevance of the Faktuell project: 1) to introduce more interactive and immersive forms of reporting with the use of new content creation technologies (including virtual reality and artificial intelligence); and 2) to increase cross-border collaborative reporting projects with an emphasis on intercultural competence building and a better understanding of media ethics and literacy. In addition, the Faktuell project could be promoted as a showcase in the education sector to demonstrate how social media can be used to enhance civic engagement among young people.

Faktuell facts

- Officially started on 1 September, 2013 by Norsensus Mediaforum (Norway), a non-profit media organization in Oslo, working to promote media and information literacy and financed by public grants and media services to public institutions and NGOs.
- The Faktuell project is financed by Oslo Municipality, the Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU), the Open Society Foundation and Erasmus+.
- 242 young people from Norway have participated in Faktuell media training workshops.
- 64 per cent of all participants are female and 52 per cent have immigrant or minority backgrounds.
- 20 journalist/media professionals have participated in the project as tutors and/or mentors.
- The project has inspired similar youth media projects such as Youth & Media by Stuttgart Media University in Germany and the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre.
- The *Faktuell* magazine editorial team is composed of six to eight young people and renewed annually.
- The editorial team is responsible for the coordination of content creation, the social media strategy and marketing.
- 355 entries have been pitched of which 107 have been published in *Faktuell*.

Notes

1. Faktuell (2018).
2. Vaagan & Barland (2015).
3. Kulturdepartementet (2018); Medietilsynet (2018).
4. Vaage (2018).
5. Ipsos (2018).
6. Kantar TNS Gallup (2018).
7. Medienorge (2018).
8. The first co-author is Project Manager of the Faktuell project.
9. The two other co-authors – Heidi Biseth and Robert W. Vaagan – are both members of the Faktuell advisory steering group.
10. Schultz et al. (2016).
11. IEA (2017).
12. Papacharissi (2010); Gripsrud (2017).
13. Jorba & Bimber (2012).

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