

## **Understanding News Sharing across Social Media - Detailing distribution on Facebook and Twitter**

Bente Kalsnes

Department of Journalism and Media Studies

Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences

Bente.Kalsnes@hioa.no

@benteka

Anders Olof Larsson

Faculty of Management

Westerdals Oslo School of Arts, Communication and Technology

anders.larsson@westerdals.no

andersoloflarsson.se

@a\_larsson

### **Abstract**

News sharing across different social media platforms is increasingly impacting on our news habits. However, we know very little about what makes news popular in these settings. The current paper details what types of news stories are shared the most on two social media platforms – Facebook and Twitter. By conducting a qualitative content analysis and comparing data from four Norwegian media outlets we find that editorial comment pieces about ‘softer’ news topics are more frequently shared than ‘harder’ news topics from all media outlets - except for TV2. For this latter broadcaster, the results suggest that sensational news and news regarding celebrities allows for viral effects to take place.

### **Introduction**

News sharing is not native to digital platforms - as suggested by Hermida et al. (2012: 3), such activity “predates the Internet, from conversations in the office to newspaper clippings sent through the postal service”. Indeed, news sharing could be understood as an inherent human activity - and much like for the production of news, digital technology has sped up processes related to sharing, with news organizations seeking to facilitate such audience dissemination of news by adding Facebook ‘share’ and Twitter ‘retweet’ buttons to their web pages (Singer et al., 2011). Additionally, social platforms have made news sharing visible and quantifiable, since shared news stories appear in our individual social media feeds and also come bundled with different types of metadata - such as those that are analyzed in this paper.

Beyond possibly increasing audience engagement, news sharing practices might have further implications - as suggested by Olmstead et al. (2011; 1), “understanding not only what content users will want to consume but also what content they are likely to pass along may be key to how stories are put together and even what stories get covered in the first place”. Thus, news sharing is a central aspect of what Chadwick (2013) has referred to as the hybrid media system, where news is transferred between social and editorial media, between established actors and their amateur counterparts. Thus, news distribution opportunities might come to impact on the news itself. Indeed, a recent report indicates that news shares in social media are impacting on editorial news selection and prioritization (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016).

With the above in mind, it would seem that existing research does not sufficiently cover what characterizes news sharing outside of an Anglo-American context, spanning different social platforms, or relating to news emanating from different media outlets. The

current study seeks to assess these types of engagement as undertaken by audience members on social media. Our focus is placed on Norway, a welcome contrast in a research field that is dominated by studies detailing US conditions (as suggested by Malix and Pfeffer 2016; Sjøvaag, Stavelin and Moe, 2015). Specifically, we study two of the most popular social media services in this particular context – Facebook and Twitter. With close to 63 percent of the Norwegian population engaging on the former service daily and with eight percent on the latter (Fossbakken, 2014; Medienorge, 2015), such a comparative setting thus appears as suitable for a study on news sharing on the two platforms mentioned above. With this topic in mind, our case country also features elevated degrees of news consumption – online as well as offline (Vaage, 2015). In sum, the Norwegian case could be considered as a particularly interesting one in which to study news sharing on social media.

The study is further motivated by a need to go beyond assessing what types of online features are made available by news organizations themselves (e.g. Karlsson, 2011; Karlsson and Clerwall, 2012; Karlsson et al., 2014; Larsson, 2012a; Quandt, 2008; Steensen, 2011), and to focus instead on how the provided ‘share’ and ‘retweet’ buttons are actually used by audience members (as suggested by Karlsson et al., 2015). The paper at hand seeks to assist in filling the apparent research gap identified by Karlsson and Clerwall (2013) who suggested that “few [...] studies have focused solely on audience metrics” (2013: 68). Specifically, we concentrate our efforts on studying “fragments of social and natural activity” (Lewis and Westlund, 2014: 448), analyzing “social user practices” (Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink, 2014: 11) as made evident through traffic data from Facebook and Twitter. The present article thus combines a focus on news content, the media organizations that provide said content and the social media services through which this content is supposedly spread - a fairly unique research combination according to the research overview performed by Kümpel et al. (2015; 5).

Based on the above reasoning, we propose the following overarching question: what types of stories from which news organizations are shared to comparably higher degrees on what social media platforms? With this in mind, our specific research questions are phrased as follows:

- What are the characteristics of the news stories that are frequently redistributed in these ways?
- Which news organizations are most successful in ‘going viral’ implying the spread of a thing on social networks (Mills, 2012)
- Which, if any, differences can be discerned between the news shared on the two social media platforms under scrutiny?

## **Literature Review**

### *The Audience as Active Recipients*

As touched upon in the introduction, disseminating or indeed sharing news through social media has become an integral part of online news distribution and consumption (e.g. Hermida et al, 2012; Himelboim and McCreery, 2012). As such, news stories that become comparably popular in terms of online sharing could be expected to have impact on the editorial and journalistic processes that ultimately decide which stories get covered in the first place (e.g. Picone, 2015). Besides such possible editorial repercussions, the sharing of news on social media can be understood as an expression of the evolving relationship between news media organizations and their audiences. With such an understanding, online news sharing can be defined as "the practice of giving a defined set of people access to news content via social

media platforms, as by posting or recommending it" (Kümpel et al., 2015; 2). News sharing on social platforms could indeed be seen as allowing for a different kind of participatory media practices. In relation to this, it could be noted that the debate about media audiences as passive or active has been ongoing since at least the 1970s (e.g. Katz et al., 1973), and a thematic link can be drawn between such an initial notion of active audience members to more recent conceptualizations suggesting that "The People Formerly Known as the Audience" (Rosen, 2006) are at least potentially involved as content contributors – labeled "producers" (Bruns, 2010), "prosumers" (Toffler, 1990), or indeed members of a "networked audience" (Marwick & boyd, 2011). While different from each other in certain aspects, these conceptualizations all involve the traditional, producing role of the media professional intermeshed with the largely receiving role often associated with audience members. While such imagery of the audience has indeed come to fruition in certain instances, the bulk of empirical research suggests that for the majority of news consumers, comparably less demanding modes of engagement with or through the media appears as most alluring (e.g. Bergström, 2008; Deuze, 2003; Hujanen and Pietikainen, 2004; Karlsson et al., 2015; Larsson 2, 2012b).

As for the channels through which news items are supposedly shared, social media are understood here as platforms that allow users to connect to one another in networks, as well as to create, produce and distribute content in these networks (i.e. boyd & Ellison, 2007). Indeed, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have been studied from the point of view of how media users find and engage with news, as well as from the corporate view of how media organizations use the services at hand in order to distribute and promote news stories (e.g. Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2014; Krumsvik; 2013; Larsson, 2016). As alluded to above, previous research has demonstrated that what could be considered as more demanding forms of user engagement - such as online commenting or journalist-reader collaborations - have proven less successful (e.g. Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall, & Fast, 2015; Larsson, 2012b, 2016). In comparison, supposedly less demanding forms of interactivity - such as liking or sharing news stories - has been found to be used more by audience members, and thus to carry more promising potentials for news organizations (e.g. Hujanen and Pietikainen, 2004; Larsson, 2011). Such willingness to engage primarily through less challenging modes of interaction provides a rather different view regarding the role of the audience than the one proposed under labels like 'citizen journalism' or 'participatory journalism' (e.g. Nip, 2006). Instead, the practices under scrutiny here are often theorized resulting in descriptions of audience members as active recipients (Singer et al. 2011), engaging in what Hille and Bakker (2013) describe as "audience distribution" (p. 663) of ready-made journalistic items rather than creating content themselves.

### *Distribution of News through Social Media*

Such active recipients, who potentially redistribute content through a variety of social media platforms, can be advantageous for media organizations. Specifically, online news sharing can escalate the audience reach of media sources significantly (e.g. An et al., 2011), thereby increasing the potential for news items to reach the coveted status of having gone 'viral' (e.g. Messner et al, 2012; Phillips, 2012). These mechanisms have been studied by media professionals and researchers alike. For instance, in a series of publications by Krumsvik and co-authors (Bang et al, 2014; Krumsvik 2013, 2015), the authors suggest that encouraging news consumers to share content on social media can be understood as one of the main strategic options for user involvement. To be precise, the authors identify four different types of online user involvement: *Distribution*, *Donation*, *Deliberation* and *Data*. Beyond our current focus on the *Distribution* variety, the strategy of *Deliberation* is closely connected to

the legacy of editorial media as an arena for public discussion and debate, often expressed in the online environment as comment fields provided in combination with news items. The *Donation* strategy concerns involvement of the public in the journalistic process to function as citizen journalists to some degree, allowing for journalists to utilize contributed articles, images or videos. Finally, the *Data* strategy is focused on collecting user data for targeted advertising through so-called single-sign-on (SSO) services<sup>1</sup>. Our emphasis on *Distribution* – news sharing – is further motivated by the increased importance given to this particular strategy as evident in a survey of Norwegian newspaper editors (Krumsvik, 2015).

The existing research on news sharing as undertaken on social networks is typically centered on one of four different aspects; the content, the users, the media organization, or the network (as suggested by Kümpel et al., 2015; 2). For example, in order to characterize the news content that is shared online, one early study analyzed the psychological features of the most shared stories via email in New York Times (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Specifically, the authors found that stories that succeeded in creating strong emotions - *arousal*, either positive (happy) or negative (angry) – achieved higher viral effects than stories that were considered as less emotional. Thus, news articles expressing strong emotions (positive or negative) will be spread more. Accordingly, social sharing of news might give precedence for more so-called soft news compared to hard news. Soft news is often characterized by topics such as entertainment, celebrity, and lifestyle news, while hard news typically refer to topics that are usually timely, important and consequential, such as politics, international affairs and business news (Reuters Institute, 2016).

Additionally, the prominence of the sender (here, a news organization) or even the social media platform might impact on how widely news is spread (e.g. Ingram, 2015). While news sharing is seen as important by the media actors themselves, previous research has indicated that audience members appear as somewhat skeptical of embracing the previously discussed roles of active recipients. Indeed, based on a comparative study of the role of social media in news consumption in eight countries, Nielsen and Schröder (2014) found that only a minority of respondents participated in news sharing through social media. For example, the authors disclosed that among the queried online news consumers, 13 percent of the queried Danes reported to share news via social media, with 33 percent of Italians and 11 percent of UK citizens providing similar answers (Nielsen & Schröder, 2014; 13). As such, while a majority of the respondents accessed the social media platforms for social purposes, only a relatively small portion of the users access the platforms for “more publicly oriented purposes like accessing, finding and engaging with news” (Nielsen & Schröder, 2014; 15). Even though social media has lowered the threshold for interacting with news through comments and shares, many users are reluctant to participate in such public sharing behavior, as suggested by Meijer and Kormelink (2014, 674). Specifically, their findings suggest that the anticipated perception of peers could be one of the reasons why social media users refrain from news sharing. Users might feel the need to curate their social media profiles, and certain news items might not fit easily with the public, online view that we as social media users wish to uphold. Our current efforts, then, will attempt to uncover what types of news actually does get shared through social media like Facebook and Twitter.

Finally, while the majority of research on news sharing on social media has focused on Twitter (e.g. Hedman, 2014; Skogerbø and Krumsvik, 2014), media reports indicate that Facebook is a much more important network for news distribution compared to Twitter (Lichterman, 2016; Owen, 2016). Our current efforts, then, compares the roles of Facebook and Twitter in news sharing processes related to four Norwegian news outlets. We are particularly interested in what characterizes the most popular news stories in terms of received shares, which news organizations are most successful in achieving such distribution,

and if any differences can be discerned in this regard between the two social media services under scrutiny, Facebook and Twitter.

## Method

Given the supposedly sensitive issues related to online sharing practices discussed earlier, data collection was performed in a non-intrusive way. As pointed out by Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink (2014), studies regarding news consumption and engagement typically employ surveys or diary-based study designs – methodological approaches that can indeed provide interesting insights, but that are potentially marred by overestimations of news use by respondents and informants (e.g. Nielsen and Schröder, 2014).

With this in mind, data were collected with the assistance of Storyboard, a Norwegian company which offers “social media analytics tool for online publishers, helping journalists, editors and media analysts to get the full picture of what stories are being shared right now” (Storyboard, 2016). Storyboard collects data via the RSS feed (Rich Simple Syndication) of news sites as well as by assessing the ‘share’ buttons for different social media services that are often found embedded on web pages – such as newspaper web sites. It should be noted that ‘shares’ that are performed without using the ‘share’ button (i.e. the pasting of the URL of an article on Facebook) is not included in the data presented here. Given our focus on the uses of the ‘share’ buttons on the news web sites themselves, any activities that takes place beyond these sites is not included. Thus, while the total share number of the articles studied are likely to be higher than what is indicated in the following, we nevertheless argue that the approach taken provides useful insights into news sharing practices.

Given their dominating status in the country at hand, we chose to focus our analytical efforts on share and retweet data from Facebook and Twitter respectively. Specifically, data on Facebook sharing and Twitter retweet from a selection of Norwegian news organizations were provided covering a one-year time period (from November 1, 2014 to November 1, 2015). The studied news organizations were selected in order to provide a mix of different, yet highly popular Norwegian media outlets. An overview of the included organizations is introduced in Table One.

- INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE -

The four news organizations under scrutiny are the broadsheet *Aftenposten*, the public service broadcaster *NRK*, the commercial broadcaster *TV2*, and the tabloid newspaper *VG*. It should be mentioned in conjunction with Table One that the total number of news stories that had been shared or retweeted at least once on either of the two services amounted to 158 043. To be precise, 24 682 news items (15.6 % out of the total 158 043) were redistributed on Twitter but not on Facebook, while the reverse was true for 28 210 news items (17.8 %). In comparison to the numbers provided in Table One, we can thus conclude that there appears to be considerable overlap between the two services – suggesting that overall, if a story gains attention by being redistributed on one of the services under scrutiny, it is likely to receive attention in this way also on the other.

Since we are interested in news sharing on social media, it was pertinent to identify and compare the most shared - and potentially - viral news stories. Here, we apply the term viral as the ability to reach comparably higher amounts of shares on news stories compared to common sharing practices. While quantitative means were used to identify news stories of specific interest, more qualitative approaches were employed to describe the contents of these stories.

For qualitative analytical purposes, the articles were assessed according to *topic* and *genre*. The *topic* describes the main theme of the article. Inspired by the categorization scheme employed by Sjøvaag and co-authors (2015), we analyzed articles topics according to nine main categories: Politics (including war and terrorism, demonstrations and public administration); Economy (including personal economy, business, finance and markets); Crime (including murders, violence, trafficking, police issues and trials); Social issues (including work, health and education, environmental issues, consumer, construction and traffic issues); Culture (including arts, media, royalty, curiosities, leisure and popular culture); Sports; Accidents; Weather; Science and technology issues

The *genre* describes the type of news story, mainly differentiating between *News*, *Comment and Feature* to indicate the tone of voice (objective vs. opinionated) in the articles (inspired by e.g. Bastos, 2014; Larsson, 2016; Singer, 2011).

As the qualitative design of the study at hand involves the assessment of rather few cases, traditional reliability measures were deemed unsuitable (e.g. McHugh 2012). Instead, initial categorization was performed by the first author, with the second author reading the articles and reviewing the categorization in tandem. As both authors agreed upon the categorization, the results were considered reliable.

## Results

For the remainder of the paper, we will use the term *share* to indicate distribution, both on Facebook and Twitter. Initially, we asked what differences could be discerned between news shared on Facebook and Twitter. As Table Two demonstrates, Facebook emerges as highly popular in this regard when compared to Twitter.

- INSERT TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE -

The results presented in Table Two show how sharing on Facebook is undertaken to such degrees that Twitter is almost dwarfed by comparison. To illustrate, the most shared story on Facebook is redistributed more than 34.000 times, while the most popular story on Twitter in this regard is retweeted 1460 times – effectively, less than the tenth most shared story on Facebook as visible in Table Two. This example does indeed strengthen the view of Facebook as the preferred platform for Norwegians to share news stories online. This result is not surprising given the general popularity of Facebook compared to Twitter. Indeed, as Facebook appears as the social media platform of choice for Norwegians online – efforts to engage users on Twitter would seem somewhat unnecessary.

Next, focusing on the topics featured for Facebook in Table Two, the topics are dominated by Social Issues (6), followed by Science and Technology (3) and Crime (1). As for Twitter, the topics are more diverse - Social Issues (3), Sports (3), Crime (2), Politics (1), Culture (1). Strong opinion pieces about parenting, Islam, psychiatry and football dominate the most shared stories on the latter platform.

The most frequently shared story on both platforms deals with the terrifying repercussions of school bullying in the story of Odin, an Oslo school pupil who committed suicide due to severe harassment. The story at hand is shared 24 times more on Facebook than the most shared story on Twitter – coincidentally, the very same VG article. This particular news item was a major feature in VG's Saturday magazine (Mikkelsen and Åsebø, 2015). Besides being shared to a higher extent, the story later received many journalistic accolades, including the most prestigious such award in Norway. Beyond the Internet, the Odin feature also created huge engagement offline, resulting in thousands of people walking the streets of Oslo in November of 2014, protesting against school bullying. Related to this, news items

regarding childhood, the well-being of children and parenting were topics that frequently received high social sharing in the Norwegian news context. Thus, emotional stories and strong and provocative comment articles characterize the most shared news stories in Norway. In sum, the tabloid newspaper VG tops the list of most shared stories regardless of platform - all due to the popularity of the highly emotional Odin story.

Our third research question is geared towards assessing which news organizations were the most successful in achieving virality - understood here as reaching comparably higher amounts of shares. Focusing on each studied news provider respectively, the following tables provide assessments in relation to these issues.

In addition to having produced the most shared story in Norway in 2015, Table Two also showed us that VG succeeded in providing three of the most shared stories on Facebook among the four media outlets, and five of the most shared stories on Twitter. Table Three, then, gauges the ten most shared stories from VG on Facebook and Twitter, showing a mixture of characteristics among the articles that reached popularity in this way: genres such as news stories, comments and feature are represented, and the topics range from bullying, Snapchat, parenting to terrorism.

- INSERT TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE -

Many of the most shared VG stories can be described as opinion pieces provided by VG commentators or external writers. For instance, “Question for the Muslim terrorist” is written by one of VG’s commentators in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo terror attack in Paris. The opinion piece, which condemns Islamic terrorism, emerged as one of VG’s most shared stories on both platforms. While news items and comments covering such shocking events could be expected to be shared to higher extents, it is perhaps a bit more surprising to find news about social media among the most shared stories emanating from the tabloid newspaper at hand. News about social media updates might be topics that are so provocative or useful that people are willing to share them in their social network. The sharing of the article “This is how you get tricked by ‘like and win’ competitions on Facebook” could be seen as a way to warn friends in their social media networks.

For VG, Twitter shares were dominated by articles about immigration, Islam, the Middle East and football. The different types of stories shared on the two platforms also indicate a difference in the user groups on Facebook and Twitter as previously discussed. While Facebook enjoys considerable spread among Norwegians, Twitter is sometimes described as consisting of a more elitist subset of the population (Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014), thus the domination of foreign news and comments on Twitter is not so surprising. Nevertheless, users of both platforms appear to be more inclined to share comment-type articles or opinion pieces (5 out of 10 for both Facebook and Twitter).

Next, we turn to Aftenposten. Similar to VG, Table Four shows that Facebook is the largest distribution platform for the newspaper at hand.

- INSERT TABLE FOUR ABOUT HERE -

Compared to VG, Aftenposten has a considerably lower share count on both of the social media platforms studied. Aftenposten’s most popular story in this regard is shared fewer than half the times (16,681 times) compared to VG’s most shared story (34,452 times). Table Four also shows that Aftenposten has the lowest share count on Twitter among the studied four news organizations. As for the contents, we see that parenting and school bullying again achieve high levels of popularity on Facebook for Aftenposten. On the other hand, we find that stories covering Islam, terrorism, immigration and vaccination are most shared on

Twitter. Aftenposten's most shared articles are even more dominated by opinion pieces than for VG. Thus, we see that the Aftenposten foreign news articles are spread heavily on Twitter, while domestic, so-called 'soft' news appear to dominate the stories most shared on Facebook. Taken together, these differences in sharing patterns seem to confirm the previously mentioned socio-demographic tendency for Twitter to be characterized as the social media of choice for urban, well-educated societal elites – supposedly the type of news audience that would be most interested in stories like the ones detailed in the bottom half of Table Four.

Moving on to NRK, it is worth noticing that this organization emerges with the lowest number of shares among the top distributed stories on Facebook (7,160 shares).

- INSERT TABLE FIVE ABOUT HERE –

As shown in Table Five, the most shared stories from NRK reach across more topics than we have seen so far among the studied news organizations. Here, the popular stories range from 'soft' topics like interior decoration trends to what could be considered as 'harder' types of news, like freedom of speech issues. Nevertheless, healthcare emerges as one of the common denominators among NRK stories shared on Facebook. For Twitter, education, volunteer work, corruption, health care and extremism appear to be popular topics in terms of sharing. Similar to VG, NRK reaches higher levels of sharing through a mixture of different genres (news articles, features and comment pieces) - not mainly by means of comments pieces, as for Aftenposten.

Finally, gauging the comparable numbers from the commercial broadcast competitor TV2, Table Six suggests a somewhat different pattern for their most shared stories.

- INSERT TABLE SIX ABOUT HERE –

For TV2, the most shared stories on both platforms are either celebrity-focused, or of the clickbait 'you would not believe what happened next'-variety. Thus, the commercial broadcaster appears as most successful in this regard when offering news of the 'soft' variety. Be that as it may - the most shared TV2 story on Facebook reports on a scientific breakthrough within cancer research. Furthermore, we see that topics related to immigration, Islam and vaccination succeed in creating shares, just as social media news (about Snapchat) emerge as comparably successful in terms of gaining traction on Facebook. Similar to the three other news organizations, then, Facebook emerges as the main social distribution channel for the site, while the Twitter statistics are found to be relatively low.

## **Discussion**

This paper has examined news sharing on social media in a Norwegian context. Specifically, we were interested in what differences could be discerned between news shared on the two most popular social media services in our case country – Facebook and Twitter. To be precise, we asked what topics and themes appeared to characterize the most shared stories, and which news organizations were most successful in terms of gaining 'virality' in relation to their stories. With the results above in mind, we would like to conclude the paper by further engaging with what we argue are three main tendencies related to our research questions.

First, regarding the two examined platforms, Facebook emerges as the dominating platform for news sharing in the Norwegian context. Such a result confirms findings from international studies, further strengthening the dominance of Facebook over Twitter as a major traffic driver for news organizations (e.g. Nielsen & Schröder, 2014; Ingram, 2015).

This uncovered difference can perhaps be traced to differences in use. While Twitter is typically used for breaking news (Anderson & Caumont, 2014), Facebook can, on a more general level, be pointed to as used for social purposes – for instance, to maintain close ties among friends and family (e.g. Pew 2014, Enjolras, et al. 2013). News sharing in this way can also have other types of social implications, as discussed by Meijer & Kormelink (2014). The anticipated perception of peers could be regarded as integrated in the news sharing process, and when users share stories on Facebook and Twitter, these stories could be said to become integrated into their “public” personae. Thus, news sharing can be seen as part of the “frontstage” performances (Goffman, 1959) of social media users. In this way, we can regard news sharing on social media platforms as a mediated performance of sorts, visible through the algorithms of the services at hand. Following Goffman, then, by sharing heartfelt stories or profound commentary on social media profiles, users strive to show the best sides of themselves - to come across as concerned, engaged citizens to friends, family and acquaintances.

Second, related to the most-shared story, news items regarding childhood, parenting and the well-being of children were topics that frequently received high levels of sharing in the Norwegian news context, and the Odin story reached considerably higher levels of popularity than others. Indeed, emotional stories and provocative comment articles are very common among the most shared articles in our sample.

We also find a difference relating to the types of stories shared on the two platforms under scrutiny. While the most shared stories on Twitter are characterized by what we often call ‘hard’ news (dealing with topics like foreign policy, immigration or military service), the stories shared on Facebook are better categorized as ‘soft’ news - dealing with topics such as parenting, issues pertaining to children, health, and education (see Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr & Legnante, 2012 for an extensive discussion about hard and soft news). As ‘hard’ news is typically associated with timeliness or urgent occurrences (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006), Twitter emerges as a better fit than Facebook for these types of stories. While some stories are indeed shared to high extents on both platforms, the division discussed here can nevertheless be seen as representative of the aforementioned sociodemographic characteristics of social media use in Norway. Indeed, Twitter has often been associated with the ‘chattering classes’ or more elite groups in the Norwegian society, such as politicians, journalists, academics, NGOs and activists (e.g. Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014), while Facebook, on the other hand, is used by most Norwegians, as discussed earlier. With this in mind, the result presented here could be seen as further strengthening this tendency of Twitter users as a small societal elite – a *Twitterati* of ‘hard’ news consumers – while the bulk of Facebook users remain focused on news of the ‘softer’ variety.

Relating to our third question, dealing with how the individual news organizations fared in terms of ‘going viral’, the public broadcaster NRK enjoyed more articles shared overall (as shown in Table One), while the tabloid news site VG succeeded in creating the biggest viral news success with the heartfelt Odin story. Since VG and NRK enjoy the most unique visitors (see Table One), this is not a surprising finding. What is perhaps more surprising is the high degree of commonality for the most popular news items across the majority of the studied news providers. Indeed, for VG, NRK og Aftenposten, we see a clear domination of comment pieces - especially for Aftenposten. For this latter broadsheet actor, nine out of the ten most shared stories on Facebook are comment pieces dealing mainly with education, parenting and health issues. Aftenposten is situated in Oslo, but can nevertheless be described as a national publication that frequently initiates major national debates, either by editorial commentators or as penned by external op-ed writers. TV2, on the other hand, emerges as the odd one out in comparison to the other media actors studied. Indeed, the commercial broadcaster mainly gains traction through their provision of celebrity news –

enjoying success with stories about celebrities or peculiar ‘click-bait’-type stories, in addition to stories about Islam, racism and immigration. Differing from the other three media outlets, TV2 does not publish comment pieces on their news site. For the three other media outlets, however, comment articles with strong and often provocative opinions appear to increase sharing frequencies – a result that most likely has been reached by the media organizations themselves, and which could come to influence what types of stories get prioritized in a digital news landscape which is increasingly characterized by fierce competition for attention – and for shares.

As Krumsvik has shown (2015), while comparably early media company strategies for user involvement were optimistic in nature and geared towards deliberation and debate, challenging financial situations and issues with online moderation have shifted editorial strategies in this regard towards the distribution variety of audience involvement. Clearly, social media distribution is driving valuable traffic for media companies, but a further question is to consider what could perhaps be regarded as the “quality” of this traffic - understood here as the emergence of loyal, returning users. Studies have indicated that users stay shorter when they arrive to news sites via social media compared to if they enter the site directly (e.g. Anderson & Caumont, 2014). Future research could perhaps draw on the findings presented here and attempt to uncover issues of user loyalty in the online context.

While Meijer & Kormelink (2014) pointed out that news sharing can be complicated for users, the study at hand has showed that, at least for Norwegian news users, willingness to share news in a social media context is related to engaging, provocative and sometimes humorous content. Given that media actors are increasingly paying close attention to the habits of online news consumers, results similar to those presented above have surely been reached also by the media organizations themselves. One cannot help but wonder, then, how such insights might influence the editorial prioritizations of these and other organizations – possibly promoting news stories dealing with themes influenced by statistics for news sharing, such as those presented here. As commentary journalism appears to drive traffic, we might expect an increase of such stories in the months and years to come. Indeed, while the implications of such possible prioritizations could prove useful in terms of gaining online spread or even virality, the editorial repercussions pertaining to quality or diversity should perhaps be considered in more critical light.

What we have presented here is an aggregated overview of which news stories were shared to comparably higher degrees in the Norwegian context during a one year period. Suggestion for future research could be to dive further into the news sharing practices of individual users. The study at hand is not able to say anything about who is sharing what, or whether the same users are sharing from a series of different news outlets. While we have concentrated on more general aspects of news sharing, a different study design would allow researchers to explore in closer details the social and relational aspects of these practices. One approach, which is not without methodological and ethical challenges, could be to combine different methods in order to examine user news sharing behavior on different platforms. We hope that the insights provided from the current study could be helpful in designing such a study – or indeed for other varieties of further inquiry.

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| <b>News Org.</b>   | <b>Description</b>         | <b>N (%) of articles shared through Facebook at least once</b> | <b>N (%) of articles shared through Twitter at least once</b> | <b>M (Std. dev) of Facebook Shares</b> | <b>M (Std. dev) of Twitter Retweets</b> | <b>User sessions</b> |
|--------------------|----------------------------|--|---|--|---|----------------------|
| <b>VG</b>          | Tabloid Newspaper          | 22 926 (17.2)  | 22 982 (17.7)   | 57.6 (316.3)                           | 7.5 (20.6)                              | 2 189 745            |
| <b>Aftenposten</b> | Broadsheet Newspaper       | 25 355 (19)  | 27 532 (21.2)   | 28.5 (179.5)                           | 5.6 (15.4)                              | 417 675              |
| <b>NRK</b>         | Public Service Broadcaster | 61 868 (46.4)  | 58 944 (45.4)   | 8.3 (64.7)                             | 1.2 (6.1)                               | 2 304 630            |
| <b>TV2</b>         | Commercial Broadcaster     | 23 212 (17.4)  | 20 375 (15.7)   | 39.3 (242.3)                           | 2.1 (6.3)                               | 633 221              |
| <b>Total</b>       |                            | 133 361 (100)  | 129 833 (100)   | 18.9 (151.2)                           | 2.5 (10)                                | 5 545 271            |

*Table One. News organizations included in the study. The Facebook and Twitter data are based on data from Storyboard. The user session data is based on TNS Comscore, which provides official user numbers for different websites. User sessions are provide to give an indication of the news sites' traffic. The list is available at [http://www.tnslistene.no/?list\\_id=1&week=25&year=2015&report=day&metric=uv](http://www.tnslistene.no/?list_id=1&week=25&year=2015&report=day&metric=uv)*

| <b>Most shared news stories on Facebook</b> |   |   |              |                    |
|---|---|---|--------------|--------------------|
| <b>News org.</b>                            | <b>Article title</b>  | <b>Topic</b>                                      | <b>Genre</b> | <b>FB shares</b>   |
| VG  | Odin  | Social issues (Bullying, children)                | Feature      | 34452              |
| Aftenposten                                 | When did it become forbidden to correct ill-behaved children?   | Social issues (Parenting)                         | Comment      | 16681              |
| TV2   | Cancer disappears: The largest breakthrough in 40 years   | Science and technology (Cancer, research)         | Science news | 11190              |
| VG  | The quiet Christmas mourning  | Social issues (Parenting, divorce)                | Comment      | 10803              |
| Aftenposten                                 | Sorrow becomes depressing. 'Ants in your pants' becomes ADHD. Shyness becomes social anxiety. Modern psychiatry is in crisis. | Social issues (Psychiatry, diagnosis)             | Comment      | 10153              |
| VG  | This is how you get fooled by 'like and win' competitions on Facebook   | Science and technology (Social media, Facebook)   | News         | 9591               |
| Aftenposten                                 | I'm in love with the ordinary human being. I'm against the performance culture  | Social issues (Human relations, competitive work) | Comment      | 8266               |
| TV2   | Snapchat with shocking update - owns everything you share   | Science and technology (Social media, Snapchat)   | News         | 7915               |
| TV2   | The police must drive cars that are so old that they stop during emergency  | Crime (Police, budgets)                           | News         | 7887               |
| NRK   | Dear parents, learn more about vocational programs  | Social issues (Education, parenting)              | Comment      | 7166               |
| Education, vocational training              |   |   |              |                    |
| <b>Most shared news stories on Twitter</b>  |   |   |              |                    |
| <b>News org.</b>                            | <b>Article title</b>  | <b>Topic</b>                                      | <b>Genre</b> | <b>TW retweets</b> |
| VG  | Odin  | Social issues (Bullying, children)                | Feature      | 1460               |
| VG  | Martin to Madrid to become Real player  | Sports (Football, Real Madrid)                    | News         | 1140               |
| VG  | Mads Gilbert is evicted for life  | Politics (Palestine, humanitarian aid)            | News         | 1052               |
| NRK   | New Viking course at Seljord folk high school   | Social issues (Education, Vikings)                | Culture news | 850                |
| TV2   | Isac Elliot (14) is surrounded by screaming fans – guards must interfere  | Culture (Celebrity)                               | Culture news | 647                |
| NRK   | 'Mama Inger' might go to jail   | Crime (Begging, solidarity)                       | News         | 615                |
| Aftenposten                                 | The Military said yes first, then they changed their mind   | Social issues (Military service)                  | News         | 576                |
| VG  | Questions to the Muslim terrorist   | Crime (Islam, terrorism)                          | Comment      | 569                |

|     |  |                   |         |     |
|-----|--|-------------------|---------|-----|
| NRK | The cynical sports                               | Sports (Football) | Comment | 548 |
| VG  | The Mullas of the Norwegian football association | Sports (Football) | Comment | 538 |

*Table Two. Most shared news stories from VG, Aftenposten, NRK and TV2 on Facebook (upper half of Table) and Twitter (lower half of Table), November 1, 2014 - November 1, 2015.*

| Article title  | Facebook | Topic   | Genre   |
|--|----------|---|---------|
| Odin   | 34452    | Social issues (Bullying, children)              | Feature |
| Question for the Muslim terrorist                                      | 15333    | Crime (Islam, terrorism)                        | Comment |
| The silent Christmas sorrow  | 10803    | Social issues (Family, divorce)                 | Comment |
| This is how you get tricked by "like and win" competitions on Facebook | 9591     | Science and technology (Social media, Facebook) | News    |
| Warns against virus on Facebook  | 7431     | Science and technology (Social media, Facebook) | News    |
| Mistreatment of patients   | 6759     | Social issues (Health, patients' right)         | Comment |
| Carpenter for service  | 5926     | Social issues (Social status, manual work)      | Comment |
| This is how stress changes the body                                    | 5534     | Social issues (Health, stress)                  | News    |
| It is illegal to lift the cat by the skin                              | 5447     | Crime (Animal health)                           | News    |
| Everyone else is doing it  | 4602     | Social issues (Parenting, teenagers)            | Comment |
|  |          |   |         |
| Article title  | Twitter  | Topic   | Genre   |
| Odin   | 1460     | Social issues (Bullying, children)              | Feature |
| Info to VG: Martin to Madrid to become Real Madrid player              | 1140     | Sports (Football, transfer)                     | News    |
| Mads Gilbert is excluded for life                                      | 1052     | Politics (Israel-Palestine conflict, doctor)    | News    |
| Questions to the Muslim terrorist                                      | 569      | Crime (Islam, terrorism)                        | Comment |
| The Mullahs in the Football association                                | 538      | Sports (Football)                               | Comment |
| The One Direction concert - song by song                               | 380      | Culture (Concert)                               | News    |
| The 17th of May speech to my son                                       | 322      | Social issues (Parenting, integration)          | Comment |
| The online warriors  | 320      | Science and technology (Online trolling)        | Feature |
| Apostles of apathy   | 312      | Sports (Football, FIFA)                         | Comment |
| A society of bullies?  | 286      | Social issues (Public debate)                   | Comment |

*Table Three. VG's ten most shared news items on Facebook and Twitter.*

| Article title   | Facebook shares | Topic  | Genre   |
|---|-----------------|--|---------|
| When did it get forbidden to correct ill-behaved children?  | 16681           | Social issues (Bullying, children)           | Comment |
| Sorrow becomes depression. 'Ants in your pants' becomes ADHD. Shyness becomes social anxiety. Modern psychiatry is in crisis. | 10153           | Social issues (Psychiatry, diagnosis)        | Comment |
| I'm in love with the ordinary human being. I'm against the performance culture  | 8266            | Social issues (Human relations, competition) | Comment |
| You who are completely unmotivated by school and want to quit: Now, listen to me  | 6873            | Social issues (Education, motivation)        | Comment |
| Editorial comment on homework   | 6292            | Social issues (Education, homework)          | Comment |
| A child died in vain because his parents did not believe in vaccines  | 6171            | Social issues (Health, vaccines)             | Comment |
| Five reasons why every Norwegian should care about farmer policy  | 6081            | Politics (Farming policy)                    | Comment |
| The Child Welfare system saved my life  | 5135            | Social issues (Child protection)             | Comment |
| Muslim boat refugees threw 15 Christians off the boat   | 5026            | Politics (Immigration)                       | News    |
| Dad, I hate school  | 4576            | Social issues (Education)                    | Comment |
|   |                 |  |         |
| Article title   | Twitter RT      | Topic  | Genre   |
| The Government wants to introduce paywall on NRK.no   | 492             | Politics (PSB, paywall)                      | News    |
| We do not fight racism and Islamic terror by refusing facts   | 428             | Politics (Islam, racism)                     | Comment |
| It is not whether we call it marriage that is important, it is whether it is voluntary or not                                 | 416             | Social issues (Islam, marriage)              | Comment |
| A child died in vain because his parents did not believe in vaccines  | 415             | Social issues (Health, vaccines)             | Comment |
| Why am I more Norwegian than Helge Storhaug   | 390             | Politics (Immigration, Islam)                | Comment |
| Elin Ørjaseter: This comments from Max Hermansen this weekend makes him a less important public participant                   | 373             | Politics (Immigration, Islam)                | Comment |
| Martin Ødegaard and the letter ø conquers Twitter   | 367             | Sports (Football)                            | News    |
| Bjørn Stærk after the Charlie Hebdo terror: A conflict about the future of the Muslim word                                    | 350             | Politics (Islam, terrorism)                  | Comment |
| Worries in the richest country in the world   | 345             | Culture (Humor, minor problems)              | Feature |
| Immigration facts from Sweden that Swedes don't want to talk about  | 335             | Politics (Immigration, Sweden)               | News    |

Table Four. *Aftenposten's* ten most shared news items on Facebook and Twitter.

| Article title  | Facebook shares | Topic  | Genre   |
|--|-----------------|--|---------|
| Dear parents, learn more about vocational programs                   | 7160            | Social issues (Education, vocational training)         | Comment |
| "To use Marihuana is to play Russian roulette"                       | 5048            | Social issues (Drugs, Marihuana)                       | Feature |
| Blood crisis   | 4993            | Social issues (Health, blood donations)                | News    |
| Not a word to the press  | 4625            | Social issues (Freedom of speech, elderly health care) | Comment |
| The writing on the wall  | 4418            | Culture (Interior decoration, humor)                   | Comment |
| Christmas cookies make you horny                                     | 4049            | Culture (Christmas cookies, humor)                     | News    |
| Hobby photographer has waited three years for this picture           | 3860            | Culture (Photography)                                  | News    |
| Our children are overprotected                                       | 3708            | Social issues (Parenting)                              | Comment |
| Could not stop laughing for seven minutes                            | 3685            | Culture (Humour)                                       | News    |
| Siblings that are not here anymore                                   | 3525            | Social issues Grief, family)                           |         |
|  |                 |  |         |
| Article title  | Twitter RT      | Topic  | Genre   |
| Starts viking course at Seljord college                              | 850             | Social issues (Education, Vikings)                     | News    |
| Mama Inger can end up in prison                                      | 615             | Crime (Begging, solidarity)                            | News    |
| The cynical sports   | 548             | Sports (corruption)                                    | Comment |
| Siblings who are not there   | 353             | Social issues (Health, vaccines)                       | Comment |
| PST took action against right wing extremists                        | 324             | Crime (Right wing extremists, police)                  | News    |
| Created fake Norwegian IDs in a political campaign                   | 240             | Crime (Political campaign, deception)                  | News    |
| Human right activist thinks Crown prince Haakon has double standards | 237             | Politics (Human rights, monarchy)                      | News    |
| Six good reason why you should still be furious at Skavlan           | 231             | Culture (Humor)  | Humour  |
| Norwegian Syria warrior convicted for terror                         | 226             | Crime (Terrorism, Syria)                               | News    |
| Girls - chose technology, now!                                       | 218             | Science and technology (Education, technology)         | Comment |

*Table Five. NRK's ten most shared news items on Facebook and Twitter.*

| Article title  | Facebook shares | Topic   | Genre |
|--|-----------------|---|-------|
| Cancer disappears: The largest breakthrough in 40 years                          | 11190           | Science and technology (Cancer)                 | News  |
| Snapchat with shocking update - owns everything you share                        | 7915            | Science and technology (Social media, Snapchat) | News  |
| Morten Harket: The industry can tire you out, not the music                      | 7887            | Culture (Celebrity, A-ha)                       | News  |
| Nina (25) won 842.000 NOK on an online game. Then a "technical mistake" happened | 7887            | Social issue (Online casino, fraud)             | News  |
| Now it is proven: The youngest among the siblings is the funniest                | 7887            | Culture (Siblings, humor)                       | News  |
| UDI pays 250.000 a month to have 8 asylum seekers living in this cabin           | 7887            | Politics (Immigration, costs)                   | News  |
| The police must drive cars that are so old that they stop during emergency       | 7887            | Crime (Police, equipment)                       | News  |
| 11 years old and newly educated with three university degrees                    | 7887            | Social issues (Education, talent)               | News  |
| 800 brits are competing to work on this trawler                                  | 7887            | Social issues (Fisheries, jobs)                 | News  |
| Which colour is the dress?   | 7887            | Culture (Humor, dress)                          | News  |
|  |                 |   |       |
| Article title  | Twitter RT      | Topic   | Genre |
| Isac Elliot surrounded by screaming fans -guards must stop it                    | 647             | Culture (Celebrity, Isac Elliot)                | News  |
| Justin Bieber took over Senkveld   | 395             | Culture (Celebrity, Justin Bieber)              | News  |
| Justin Bieber leaves the hotel   | 345             | Culture (Celebrity, Justin Bieber)              | News  |
| Here the reporter is called "Muslim motherfucker" on air                         | 184             | Social issues (Islam, racism)                   | News  |
| "We have measles for a reason – for children to get through it"                  | 144             | Social issues (Health, vaccines)                | News  |
| Patrick Jørgensen's moving audition on "Norwegian Talents"                       | 138             | Culture (Song contest)                          | News  |
| Norwegian Muslims protected the Jewish synagogue in Oslo                         | 136             | Social issues (Racism, Islam)                   | News  |
| Demonstrator made monkey sounds and blew smoke on the TV2 reporter               | 132             | Social issues (Racism, Islam)                   | News  |
| Woman with hijab is yelled at and hit on the metro                               | 129             | Social issues (Racism, Islam)                   | News  |
| Team mates reveal what Ronaldo said to Ødegaard (16)                             | 128             | Sports (Football)                               | News  |

Table Six. TV2's ten most shared news items on Facebook and Twitter.

<sup>i</sup> Single-sign-on services (SSO) facilitate access to several services by using a username and password. In this case, Schibsted (owner of Aftenposten and VG) has developed SPID, a SSO used across different media sites.