Nonlinear News Production and Consumption: A Collaborative Approach

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People depend on news to make sense of happenings in the world, but current digital news products do not live up to their potential in this regard. Interactivity in relation to news is often seen as a way to give the consumer control over when to consume something and on which platform. Less attention has been placed on what should be consumed and how. Within the project MyNewsMyWay, a news service was constructed that makes possible a more in-depth and varied media consumption than what traditional news services offer today. In the follow-up design study OurNewsOurWays, additional attention was put on the possibility of combining professional news material with user-generated content.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The media are crucial for the upholding of a meaningful public sphere in contemporary societies. But this is not something that functions automatically. Due to commercial and political pressures, there is an obvious risk that the media do not offer the kind of material that is necessary for people to make sense of their everyday lives. A crucial genre in this context is news. In times of increasing globalization – a “shrinking world” – people depend upon the news to inform them about things happening far away and close to home. However, news is a difficult genre. The criticism that news producers are not fulfilling their responsibility to society is heard with increasing frequency. Instead of providing news consumers with material that helps them make sense of difficult happenings all over the world, the news output focuses on sensational events, presenting them in simplified ways. Not enough time is spent on contextualization, on putting events within meaningful perspectives, and there is an emphasis on consequences rather than on backgrounds. The critique may be raised towards the way news is presented in many kinds of media, but the critique is particularly relevant to television – the arguably most important medium in this context. As Michael Ignatieff [1997], who has followed many of the latest violent wars and disasters around the world, writes:

Television has unfortunate strengths as a medium of moral disgust. As a moral mediator between violent men and the audiences they crave, television images are more effective at presenting consequences than in exploring intentions; more adept at pointing to the corpses than in explaining why violence
may, in certain places, pay so well. As a result, television news bears some responsibility for that generalized misanthropy, that irritable resignation toward the criminal folly of fanatics and assassins, which legitimizes one of the dangerous cultural moods of our time – the feeling that the world has become too crazy to deserve serious reflection.

To address the current situation, hopes have been high for the interactive media [Downes and MacMillan 2000, Kiousis 2002]. Through interactivity, people should be able to use available material in more meaningful ways, question top-down models of news production and take part in the news production process on a more equal basis [Gunter 2003]. But does it work? A recent review of the history of online journalism paints a bleak picture [Scott 2005]:

The trend towards speed, constant repackaging, and superficial topics facilitated by the web make a mockery of ‘contextualized journalism’ promised by prominent new media analysts. Multimedia, hyperlinks, dynamic updates, and interconnection with archives of related contextual content have great potential in the abstract but amount to very little if the logic behind business operations runs against the grains of such innovations.

It could be argued that actions on the web are changing the role of the media in relation to news. Amateur bloggers are challenging professional journalists with alternative perspectives on news stories and through YouTube debates and Facebook groups, citizens are becoming increasingly involved in knowledge production. But traditional news corporations are slow to follow. As of now, interactivity is not a major feature of most online news services, at least not if interactivity is to be seen as something seriously transforming the way we look upon news production and news consumption [Chung 2007, Deuze 2003, Oblak 2005]. Put in other words, digital media hold a potential that is not being fulfilled. What can be done about this?

The objective of the project MyNewsMyWay (demo available at http://www.ist-nm2.org/) has been to take part in this discussion in a constructive way. Based on both theoretical and practical work, the objective of MyNewsMyWay has been to develop new ways of working with the genre of news and new ways of making it available for the engager (which is our term for what traditional TV calls the viewer). This has meant questioning the traditional views of what the genre “is”. It has also required significant work on how different engagers would want to access the material, and what kinds of experiences they would like to get out of the encounter. In many discussions of interactivity in relation to news, the main selling point seems to be to give the consumer control over when to consume something, and to give the consumer the control over which platform to consume the material on. This seems to us trivial. Less attention has
been placed on what we regard as far more important points: what should be consumed, and how it should be consumed.

MyNewsMyWay explores the situation where the audience become critical engagers; when the content constitutes new dimensions of flexible nonlinearity and enables new potentials for comprehension. MyNewsMyWay therefore addresses questions dealing with the kinds of experience that arise from the process of consumption. How can one make the news output available in such a way that it leads to more meaningful experiences than the ones consumers are able to gain today? However, we are also interested in changing the way news is produced. Is it possible to create production tools that will facilitate a more in-depth and varied media output? Is this possible to achieve without giving rise to unreasonable amounts of extra work for the journalists and editors involved?

In this paper, we present the approach and design of MyNewsMyWay. We discuss its potential and limitations, and explore how it might be generalized for the emerging many-to-many communication patterns of the interactive media.

2. THE MYNEWSMYWAY APPROACH

The project MyNewsMyWay was conducted within the framework of the EU-funded program New Millennium, New Media (NM2). The objective of the program as a whole was to construct new software production tools and a new delivery system for non-linear media, thereby enabling the creation of media genres where the story told is adapted to the preferences of the engager. This meant going beyond the notion of “time-shifting”, thinking instead in terms of “shape-shifting”, making it possible to, for instance, seamlessly and in real-time modify a program, adding new material or changing the length of a program [Ursu et al. 2008a, Ursu et al 2008b, Williams et al. 2004, Williams et al. 2006]. Importantly, the project entailed collaboration between technical partners and artistic/cultural partners, who provided the requirements for the production tools to be developed in the project. Eight experimental productions were produced simultaneously with the construction of the tools.

Within the framework of the NM2 program, the objective of MyNewsMyWay was to develop new means of news production and consumption. The work was carried out in collaboration with SVT (public service Swedish Television), who provided the project with professional archive material and contributed their news-production expertise.

Every genre has its specific characteristics, and an initial step for the project was to identify the characteristics of news that were crucial to take into account when
developing a new news service. The first thing noted was that the genre is unusually rigid. Even though fictional elements are sometimes used in relation to news, for example, it is still the case that the Western world shares a fairly strong consensus on what a news production should look like. This means that consumers know very well what they are to expect when watching a news program.

Another point of departure was the fact that, for many people, the consumption of news is part of the daily routine of everyday life. People turn to news at certain times, just as much to uphold daily routines as to learn something new about what is happening in the world. Thus, the challenge for the project was to find a way to make news consumption more meaningful, while respecting the conventionalized and ritualistic nature of the genre.

In other words, we had to create a service which would make it possible for viewers to take part of news stories much like they do today, yet offering a more in-depth and involving experience when desired. Given this, we aimed for a TV experience rather than a PC experience. News consumption is linked to the routines of everyday life. We did not want to break that link but rather to support it. News is, of course, already today consumed through the use of a computer, and this will become even more common in the future. However, aiming for a TV (living-room) experience was a way of building on the social experience of watching news. It was a way of trying to keep the consumption communal, making it possible for consumers to discuss what they were watching at the time of watching.

Secondly, we aimed for keeping news watching as a program experience rather than as an experience consisting of watching isolated stories. The service was therefore constructed so as to provide the feeling of watching a whole program, albeit a program that could vary in length and content depending on the engagers’ choices.

3. DESIGNING MYNEWSMYWAY
Given the approach described above, the design of MyNewsMyWay is based on the notions of:

- directness (visual representation of information, user recognition)
- consistency (predictable, similar throughout the system, drawing on common television and Internet skills)
- simplicity (simple but not simplistic, based on engagers’ existing experiences).
One of the major challenges was to create flexible and interesting interaction functions that were easy to use. We needed to accommodate a full spectrum of engagers, ranging from interactive-media novices to highly advanced users of interactive and participatory media. Our goal was to combine a low adoption threshold for interactive-media use with interesting and relevant functionality.

Since the production was situated on the border between television and Internet, certain decisions had to be taken early on. Firstly, a **remote control** was used for executing the interactions rather than a keyboard or a mouse; secondly, the **television screen** was the medium to design for rather than the computer monitor; and thirdly, the design would not demand audience activity but rather **encourage** the audience to interact within the general framework of lean-back consumption.

The remote control assured that the interactions were available on a device with which everyone was familiar, and which most people found easy to use. It also encouraged/forced the designers to develop simple interactions that could be executed through a simple button click. The television screen is a device in front of which audiences have gathered for decades. Consumption patterns may be changing but the desire to enjoy moving images in a large screen format is still strong. An important characteristic of news is discussions and debates in the micro-environment of the living room, which was another reason for designing for the television screen.

Research has shown that the news genre is losing its younger audience [Patterson 2007]. By allowing the audience to engage with the news material, having the power to interact and shape their own news experience, MyNewsMyWay wished to explore whether younger audiences can find their way back to the news genre. At the same time, there was no wish to discourage audience groups who prefer a professionally produced news program. Therefore the need to design an interface that allowed both active and passive news consumption was given great attention.

4. NEWS CONSUMPTION WITH MYNEWSMYWAY
The starting point of MyNewsMyWay is the Entry screen (Figure 1), a graphical screen showing main headlines for each of the different sections as infinitely looping sets of thumbnails, each displayed for 4 seconds. The thumbnails show the top 5 listed news items as a thumbnail loop representing each section, thus each loop lasts 20-seconds. Headlines and dates are applied on top of the thumbnails. The Entry Screen gives the engager an overview on what is currently making the headlines.
Figure 2. MyNews.

From the Entry screen the engager can go to the MyNews section (Figure 2), the General News section, the Sports section, the Culture & Entertainment section, the Economy Section, the Home & Leisure section or do a search and edit the profiles.
The MyNews program is compiled automatically based upon the engager profile and the metadata tags added to each news story. It gives the engager the latest news updates on the topics that he or she finds interesting. An engager can ideally have as many predefined profiles as desired, but only one at a time is active. The profiles can be constructed to cover different topics, program durations and breadths of scope (Figure 3). The flexibility allows the engager to create the rules for his or her own news program. Here, as well as in the other sections, it is possible to watch the clips in full screen.

MyNews has a default playing time of 20 minutes but the engager can change the duration even during playback.
The other sections — the General News section (Figure 4), the Sports section, the Culture & Entertainment section, the Economy Section and the Home & Leisure section — contain one Latest Edition and four Single Clips. The Latest Edition is equal to the broadcasted prime-time news show about the specific section topic. General News, however, contains two Latest Editions — one is national and the other is a local news program. The section screen shows the four latest (or prioritized) Single Clips and one Latest Edition as looping thumbnails. The engager can select and show the Latest Edition, or a single video clip. If no interaction has been recorded while watching any video clip, the program will automatically return to the Section screen.

There are three major interaction modes within the system: More, Related and Increase/Decrease Time. The More function allows the engager to add clips to the currently playing Single Clip, Latest Edition program or MyNews program. The function is always available during playback, and allows the engager to get an in-depth view of news items and create an understanding for the context of an event in real time. If More is pressed during a Latest Edition or a MyNews program, a clip is added after the currently-playing-clip has ended; it starts playing automatically. After the added clip has ended, you return to the same point as before within the program. If More is pressed during playback of the added clip, another clip will be added in the same manner as above. If the
function is pressed during a Single Clip, a clip will be added after the current clip has ended and it starts playing automatically.

The Related function allows the engager to view a list of clips, each of which is broadly related to what he or she is currently watching. This gives the engager the possibility to engage with different aspects of the news item context. The function is always available during playback. If Related is pressed during a Latest Edition or a MyNews-program, after the currently-playing-clip has finished, then the engager is presented with a list of related stories to choose from. Having watched one of these related stories, the engager is then returned to the point in the original MyNews or LatestEdition program from which they departed and the original program continues.

The Increase/Decrease Time function allows the engager to change program duration. The function is available both in advance of watching and while watching a program, and the engager sets the desired duration by pressing the (+) or (-) buttons on the remote. The function is available for Latest Edition-programs and MyNews-programs, but not when playing Single Clips.

5. HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS
First, it must be noted that the current prototype of the system runs on top of a selection of news clips from the Meta archive of Swedish Television. We performed the selection manually according to the principles of professional journalistic work: What events are involved, how are they structured internally, what is the chain of events leading up to the current event? In an ideal full-scale system, the content generation mechanisms should run on top of the full archive. The rest of this section introduces the mechanisms implemented in MyNewsMyWay for automatic content generation and selection.

The post-production of MyNewsMyWay is exclusively done in the NM2 tools, i.e. no additional software is used to manage, trim or describe the video content.

In order for the system to be able to find the most relevant clips for a specific engager profile and viewing context, an ontology has to be constructed. In this particular case, the ontology was based on the SVT archive keyword directory, but modified and added to throughout the description process. The SVT keyword directory offers ten top-level classes: Economy, Leisure, History, Culture, Philosophy, Medicine, Science, Politics and Technology. There are hundreds of subclasses and the total number of categories is approximately 1500. We also added the top-level category Location which holds all the world’s nations and, for Sweden, all major regions and cities, as well as places mentioned
in news clips in the MyNewsMyWay database. Moreover, we increased the granularity of the ontology by adding names of persons and groups, companies and institutions.

Selection rules determine which video clips are selected when the engager selects More or Related. The first version of the rules was based only on finding the clip with the highest count of Topic matches. This led to a bias towards clips with many annotated instances (i.e., many meta tags), and clips with fewer annotated instances were never selected. In the second iteration, the rules look at the level of congruence between media items rather than the specific number of instances that match. This resulted in increased relevance of the selected clips, even though the results were still highly dependent on how many clips were on that topic in the database. (See Ursu et al 2008b for details on the narrative structuring and other aspects of content generation in the NM2 Tools.)

6. EVALUATING MYNEWSMYWAY

MyNewsMyWay has been demonstrated and evaluated a number of times. One session was held at Swedish Television where professional journalists, editors and other staff used and evaluated MyNewsMyWay. We also presented it at the Moving Images conference in Malmö and collected observations from the attendees’ use of the system. The results of these presentations were positive. Most importantly, the professional journalists were enthusiastic about the production tools and saw new possibilities to reach a younger audience.

To complement and elaborate on the results from these informal observations, a formal evaluation was carried out by The Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO, the partner within the New Millennium, New Media program responsible for business analysis and consumer behaviour). The evaluation was carried out in June 2007 at the School of Arts and Communication in Malmö. In a living room setting, thirteen young people, both male and female, individually or in groups of two or three, were given a short demonstration of the tools. Then they had the opportunity to use the remote control in order to experience the production. After that, they were interviewed. The questions concerned their experience of using the tools as well as their views of the business possibility of the tools. The interviews were carried out by members of the TNO evaluation team. For each participant, the introduction lasted about 25 minutes and the interview about 35 minutes. Interview data were analyzed using conventional qualitative analysis methods, and the overall results were as follows.

On the whole, the outcomes were quite positive. The idea of personalized news was generally appreciated; only one participant out of thirteen failed to see the value of
personalization. Moreover, participants found the remote-control interface simple and easy to learn. Some of the participants saw the viewing experience as a personal experience but others could imagine viewing with friends or family. Most of the participants liked the idea that the tools could make possible the offering of different perspectives and viewpoints on the same event. Finally, most of the participants felt that the tools could be commercially exploitable.

An evaluation such as the one carried out here is valuable, but should of course be taken with caution. The evaluation group was rather small and there are no grounds for statistical generalization of the results. Furthermore, the group consisted only of young people and it is well known that young people’s familiarity with new technology is quite different from older people’s; the results could have been more negative with older people in the group. Still, when it comes to young people we would argue that the results of the evaluation hold a certain value, not only in the sense of corroborating the design ideas but also, and more importantly, by identifying two main issues to be addressed in the future development of MyNewsMyWay and similar systems. These issues are: the question of a news anchor and the disadvantages related to increased interactivity.

6.1 News Anchor Presentation.

The evaluation of MyNewsMyWay use showed that MyNewsMyWay programs lack the familiarity of a traditional news show. The news genre on television depends on its presentation, not only that news anchors give you a warm welcome but also that they introduce and explain every news clip and connect one news story to another. A personalized news program like MyNewsMyWay does not provide these relationships, which represents a major drawback in terms of engager experience.

To improve the MyNewsMyWay service, all clips in the database should be conjoined with their corresponding news anchor presentations; this would make it clear which news show the clip comes from and also make the MyNewsMyWay program more similar to a traditional news show. There should also be a customized news anchor presentation, telling the engager that he or she is about to watch the personalized news program. The disadvantage of joining a news clip with its anchor presentation is that it will be outdated much sooner; studios change stage set design and news anchors come and go. A standalone clip is more durable than a story presented by a news anchor.

In producing and maintaining an interactive news service, an editor must at all times have the choice to enable or disable the presentation of the news clip; i.e. story and presentation must be separate entities. For example, when a particular news program
refurbishes the newsroom, the interactive editor can choose to disable the anchor presentations dating from before the refurbishment.

6.2 Engager Competence and Skills in Relation to Increased Interactivity.
There is a tension between passive and active modes of news consumption. The disadvantage of handing the interaction choices over to the engager is mainly that it requires much more activity (reduces the lean-back experience) and demands more from the engager in terms of searching, selecting and browsing competence.

An interactive news service must at all times provide passive modes of interacting with the material, i.e. engagers should not need to be active every time they watch news. Weighted annotations can be used to provide More and Related interactions that are adequate for most of the engagers on most occasions.

7. THE TOOLKIT IN A NEWS PRODUCTION ENVIRONMENT
Even given the success of the development of the news service, integrating the tools into a professional news production environment poses many challenges. The system design would have to focus on optimising the production when it comes to format, metadata and ontology standardisation as well as flexibility.

To improve ingestion and annotating efficiency, an intelligent script logging tool would be very useful. Many broadcasters subtitle the bulk of their programming in real time, and a script logging tool that easily and automatically could extract metadata keywords from that information would be a giant leap forward for the annotation workflow.

At its current stage the system cannot support a multitude of end users (not surprisingly the system has not focused on achieving scaled distribution at this stage of its development). A news service would demand a system that can support thousands of users simultaneously logged in. The same obvious concerns arise when it comes to quality of service; further development is needed to ensure a seamless end user experience in terms of video and audio quality, buffering times and interaction responses.

A non-linear narrative editing software meant for reconfigurable news production must be customized for a news production environment. All parameters that an editor will use must be there, and different features would need to be available for persons with different roles in the news organisation, eg. journalists, producers, super users. Developments approaching these needs have already been addressed in the toolset. The possibility to configure and save the set up of the work space is a good start, and will
prove to be even more useful when it is coupled with improvements to the user friendliness of the tool set Graphical User Interface. New features directly needed for a news producer would have to be implemented, such as different tabs where headlines, dates and so on could be added and configured.

The production of an interactive news service is an ever expanding production, and this means that multiple producers will have to work on the same project. Today a project cannot be worked with on several machines at once, nor can two projects be merged into one. This needs to be addressed in future developments of the toolset.

Producers with different knowledge in the tools and different views of the world will undoubtedly mean different ways of describing content. To ease the annotation process, the software must facilitate a way for the producer to actually test all, or at least the most common, interactions that the end user has, which are controlled by the metadata input. The producer should be able to easily test, for example, the related function and instantly see the results. The results should be comprised of the file name, still frames of the videos, all annotations to that particular video and the number of instances that matches. Seeing these results would help the editor to further add annotations, or modify the annotations already made, ensuring that the news narrative will be meaningful.

8. RELATED WORK

As stated above, our work concentrates on the what and the how of TV news consumption – what should be consumed, and how should it be consumed. Our approach has been to design a TV news service based on what is known in media studies about significant factors in news consumption, to build it using tools for nonlinear news production, and to validate it empirically.

Throughout the work, our main perspective has been the one of consumption, where we aim at exploring the dimension ranging from passive viewers to more active engagers. This means that the most obvious area of related work is the one where news consumption in the interactive media is addressed from the point of view of the viewer/engager/user. In other words, our contribution should be assessed in relation to existing work in personalized news, news aggregation and automated news production.

At the most general level, the idea of providing viewers with news selected to fit their individual profiles has been explored for quite some time and even made its way into several publicly and commercially available services, such as Google News where the search histories of individual users is used as the basis for the personal selection of news items.
More specifically, the idea of constructing a personal TV news show based on a user’s profile has been investigated in several influential projects, ranging from the seminal work by Merialdo et al. (1999) and the classic Ananova synthetic newscaster, launched in 2000, to research collections such as Ardissono et al. (2004) and the highly publicized (but apparently prematurely terminated) News At Seven project from 2007 where a personalized news show was assembled by mining multiple web sources and presented by avatars. Space precludes a complete review of the research field, but a general characterization is that most examples of reported work approach the task of personalizing TV news as one within artificial intelligence and/or optimization, where the task is to automate production and maximize the fit between provided information and user needs.

Thus, what sets MyNewsMyWay apart from most reported work in personalized TV news is (1) our aim to augment existing news production/consumption structures rather than replacing them, and (2) our multidisciplinary point of departure in media studies and interaction design which entails, among other things, a strong emphasis on the social and societal aspects of news consumption. As we have shown above, these differences have driven our design work in directions that depart somewhat from the mainstream research in the area. The results reported so far concentrate on facilitating professional news production (by ontological and narrative tools to prepare nonlinear news materials) as well as supporting the full scope of news consumption ranging from passive viewing to more involved engaging with the materials and the meaning-making that is always entailed in news consumption.

The final section will introduce a design study where we explore what a more fundamental shift from professional broadcasting to participatory media could entail in terms of news production and consumption. Also here, the work is based more on facilitating social structures and mechanisms than on replacing them.

9. OUR NEWS SOURWAYS: A WIDER PERSPECTIVE ON NEWS CONSUMPTION

The work reported so far has concentrated on production and consumption of nonlinear TV news originating from one established producer. However, it is easy to see how the scenario of nonlinear TV generalizes to a situation where the archives of audiovisual material contains clips from many sources, some professional and some user-generated, where comprehensive annotations and ontologies cannot be assumed and where the sheer volume of the material precludes systematic editorial work.
This scenario is analogous in many ways to the situation in other domains of digital information disseminated through the Internet (such as text, images and general video clips). In those domains, it seems that the most successful navigation and access mechanisms emerging in the online communities all draw heavily on social mechanisms and participation. Consider, for example, the use of tags in Flickr or the editing schemes emerging organically around the Wikipedia. We argue that nonlinear TV news can be approached in similar ways, and to this end we explore the possible design of a social navigation layer which we envision as a sensible addition to systems like MyNewsMyWay once they move into the many-to-many communication contexts of the digital media.

The social navigation layer, which we call OurNewsOurWays, is designed around the core idea of tribes as social units [Johnson and Ambrose 2006, Maffesoli 1990/1996]. Broadly speaking, a tribe consists of a relatively small group of people who know each other and are willing to do things for each other, secure in the knowledge that their altruism will be reciprocated. This sets tribal systems apart from large-scale anonymous social navigation mechanisms such as the oft-cited “People who bought X also bought Y” Amazon feature.

Figure 5: Watching OurNewsOurWays with a friend, together via audio link but physically separate.
Figure 6. Tribe member lists and communication functions available while watching a clip.
The design of OurNewsOurWays is expressed in a concept demo (available from http://webzone.k3.mah.se/k3jolo/ONS), illustrating a typical situation in which a user receives current and relevant news about an upcoming skateboarding competition, as well as relevant related material, by browsing, searching and communicating with his tribal peers. The systems supports his actions through autonomous relevance assessments (refer to figures 5–7).

The key concept underlying the OurNewsOurWays design, enabling the navigation and access functions illustrated in the scenario, is the notion of social metadata. As stated above, we cannot assume correct and complete metadata in the clip archive which would seem to make the task of locating relevant material virtually impossible. However, given the assumptions on the nature of tribes roving the archives, and specifically the assumption that tribe members will be prepared to share with fellow members, we can mine metadata from the use of each clip, including explicit links that have been made to clips (indicating that the clip was deemed interesting by the link-maker), text and audio comments on the clips, and the amount of activity that the clip has received. By keeping track of the tribal structure (in terms of “friends” and “pathfinders” lists), we can ensure that reasonable integrity requirements are met. Some clips will certainly have
conventional metadata such as content annotations and information about date, time and location. In those cases, the conventional metadata is used together with the social metadata to increase the chances of providing relevant and appropriate material.

The view of future nonlinear TV engagement provided in OurNewsOurWays is characterized by many small tribes with only partially overlapping interests, exploring and shaping the collections of digital TV material in a multitude of ways ranging from searching, commenting, producing, debating and other highly involved practices to lean-back viewing by following the trails of fellow tribe members. Whether this is a credible view of future TV remains to be seen, but we argue that it represents a logical continuation of systems like MyNewsMyWay as the communication structures shift from traditional TV broadcast to the many-to-many patterns of the interactive media.

Moreover, the OurNewsOurWays approach seems to be supported by recent research into the social uses of interactive TV. For instance, Bernhaupt et al. [2008] demonstrate through ethnographic studies the significance of shared experience in the context of families (which may be said to have certain social characteristics in common with tribes) and the related privacy issues thereof. The meta-study by Cesar et al. [2008] similarly indicate social communications as one of the top-priority items on the research agenda for interactive TV (even though they settle for the conventional conceptualization of asynchronous/synchronous versus co-located/distant, without looking further into the nature of the social structures and communications they call for). Finally, and supporting one of the more detailed design choices in OurNewsOurWays, the prototype testing and focus-group studies of Harboe et al. [2008] suggest a high perceived value of always-on audio channels for distant, simultaneous TV viewing. Specifically, they find strong empirical support for the possibility of “geeking out over a common interest” which seems to suggest that tribal structures are well served by synchronous audio links. Further, their studies show that conversation management is generally smooth and that always-on audio fosters a pleasant sense of awareness: “It felt like she was in the room.” Harboe et al. [ibid.] fail to find any support for added benefits of video links as opposed to audio-only communication.

10. CONCLUSION
Interactivity is a frequently used concept both within academia and in the media. However, the possibilities offered by “interactive” media services are often limited. The MyNewsMyWay project has tried to improve on this situation in relation to TV news. We have demonstrated the possibility to give engagers more valuable, in-depth
experiences within the context of existing production and distribution structures. Without much extra effort, it is possible to focus upon a news story and follow it historically as well as contextualize it. And this can be done within the framework of everyday life. MyNewsMyWay does not break with people’s everyday life routines but rather aims at adding to them and giving them more substance. Finally, the work represented by OurNewsOurWays illustrates a way to generalize the concept in the direction of nonlinear news within the many-to-many communication patterns of emerging interactive media.

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