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Abstract

How and why do people still get print newspapers in an era dominated by mobile and social media communication? In this paper we answer this question about the permanence of traditional media in a digital media ecosystem by analyzing 488 semi-structured interviews conducted in Argentina, Finland, Israel, Japan, and the United States. We focus on three mechanisms of media reception: access, sociality, and ritualization. Our findings show that these mechanisms are decisively shaped by patterns of everyday life that are not captured by the scholarly foci on either content- or technology-influences on media use. Thus, we argue that a non-media centric approach improves descriptive fit and adds heuristic power by bringing a wider lens into crucial mechanisms of media reception in ways that expand the conceptual toolkit that scholars can utilize to analyze the role of media in everyday life.

Keywords: media reception, media change, media persistence, journalism, comparative qualitative research

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From the Barbecue to the Sauna:

A Comparative Account of the Folding of Media Reception into the Everyday Life

José (70) lives in Córdoba, Argentina, and is retired. He does not subscribe to a print newspaper, but sometimes purchases single copies. However, this is not primarily driven by interest in the news: “I buy one on Sunday, which is big, [and] has a lot of pages to then start up the fire for the barbecue. Or wrap a plant that my wife gifts as a present when someone visits us.” Antero (69), also a retiree, lives in Siilinjärvi, Finland. Unlike José, he subscribes to a newspaper, but with hesitation: “many times I have been thinking if I need [it], but I’m just not good with those [digital] gadgets. And you can’t begin warming the wood-fired sauna stove with them.” Despite the almost 13,000 kilometers that separate Córdoba from Siilinjärvi, there is a commonality between the practices by José and Antero: appropriating the newspaper is tied to non-news practices which are meaningful to the actors although they might seem trivial to some scholars. This commonality is crucial to answering the question of how and why people still get print newspapers in this age of mobile communication and social media. **This also inverts the common focus of inquiries on technological change in news consumption by examining the persistence—instead of the replacement—of older media during the ascent of newer counterparts.**

The scholarship on media reception has been dominated by two distinct factors: content and technology. On the one hand, research has aimed to ascertain the social and behavioral impact of different types of content (Chua et al., 2011; Götz et al., 2019; Potter and Riddle, 2007; Wagner, 2019). On the other hand, studies have probed the role that technological configurations have had in the uptake of media (Anderson et al., 2014; Kenski and Stroud, 2006; Lee and Lee, 2010; Valenzuela et al., 2019). Beneath the differences of these two approaches lies a common

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denominator: they are both media-centric. However, there is a growing sense that neither perspective can fully account for the imbrication of media reception into broader patterns of social life. To Morley (2006: 200) there is a “need to ‘decentre’ the media, in our analytical framework, so as to better understand the ways in which media processes and everyday life are interwoven with each other.” We contribute to this theoretical framing by specifying the role played by three mechanisms whereby the interweaving of media reception and everyday life happens: access, sociality, and ritualization. A comparative cross-national analysis makes these mechanisms more discernible because they partly depend on contextual matters. Thus, we draw upon 488 semi-structured interviews conducted in Argentina, Finland, Israel, Japan, and the United States. Our findings show that the enactment of these mechanisms both helps explain the persistence of print newspapers in the digital age and is shaped by broader social dynamics.

Conceptual Matters

We situate our analysis at the intersection of three traditions of inquiry. We first examine research about technological change in the media. Then, we build upon scholarship that has proposed a non-media-centric approach. Finally, we summarize the main findings about the factors driving the consumption of print newspapers.

Media Change

One common finding from scholarship about media change tied to technological innovation has been that the emergence of a new artifact does not usually mean the elimination of preexistent ones (Bolter et al., 2000; Jenkins, 2008; Marvin, 1988; Peters, 2009; Uricchio, 2003). Thus, a sizable body of work has focused on the relations between “new” and “old” media (Humphreys, 2018; Keightley and Pickering, 2014; Rymarczuk, 2016) underscoring that media “include both technological forms and their associated protocols (...) a vast clutter of normative

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rules and default conditions, which gather and adhere like a nebulous array around a technological nucleus” (Gitelman, 2006: 7). Discussing this matter in the context of political communication, Chadwick (2013: 4) has argued that

We need to understand how newer media practices in the interpenetrated fields of media and politics adapt and integrate the logics of older media practices in those fields. We also need to understand how older media practices in the interpenetrated fields of media and politics adapt and integrate the logics of newer media practices.

The scholarship on the historical evolution of print newspapers since the emergence of the commercial web provides an illustration of these dynamics. Initially, decision-makers reproduced print practices into the digital realm (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2002; Lehman-Wilzig and Cohen-Avigdor, 2004; O’Brien, 1999). Then, they gradually changed aspects of print newspapering while keeping the original format mostly intact (Cooke, 2005; Lehman-Wilzig and Cohen-Avigdor, 2004). Finally, they created an entirely new way to present content in the digital sphere (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2002; Chan-Olmsted and Park, 2000; Deuze, 2004). To Author (2004: 4), “online newspapers have emerged by merging print’s unidirectional and text-based traditions with networked computing interactive and... multimedia potentials.”

The various modes of incorporating newspapers—and other traditional media—into digital media have been tied to their imbrication into broader routines that ground them within the fabric of everyday life. Sometimes this has been connected to a certain nostalgic ethos. Bolin (2016: 261) describes “technostalgia” as an experience that “is highly collective and represents a shared media experience of people who have similar experiences of bygone or outdated media technologies”. Natale (2016: 593) adds: “oldness should be understood as an attribute related not to media in themselves, but rather to how we experience, perceive, and feel about media”.

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There has been comparatively less attention paid to the persistence of older media than to their incorporation into their newer counterparts. However, there is still a sizable portion of the population who read newspapers in print and consume broadcast media. Understanding their practices can help illuminate valuable media reception dynamics. We adopt this approach to examine the persistence of print newspapers in an era dominated by mobile and social media communication.

Media Reception

In recent decades, scholars have inquired into how media reception is shaped by everyday practices (Alasuutari, 1999; Bird, 2003; Bourdieu, 2001; De Certeau and Mayol, 1998; Moores, 2012; Morley, 2002). One aspect of this work has been the development of a non-media-centric sensibility into the study of media, looking beyond content and technology issues and towards the imbrication of media reception into broader everyday practices (Couldry, 2003, 2012; Krajina et al., 2014; Moores, 2011, 2012; Morley, 2006, 2009; Pink, 2004, 2012). To Cefai and Couldry (2019: 15), “the modernity of media is linked to the capacity of our attachments to media objects to attach us to a broader world.” **This is consistent with Carey’s ritual view of communication aiming to “rebuild a model of and for communication of some restorative value in reshaping our common culture” (2006, p. 27).**

Thus, Pink (2015: 12) has suggested that “we need to attend to how media content and representation are part of the sensory and experiential ways by which we engage with media in everyday life.” Recent empirical studies have shown the value of a non-media centric approach. Pink and Fors (2017: 12) explored the intertwinement of self-tracking technologies with how people feel in their everyday environments, and found that “through engaging with this deeper situatedness... we can further understand the contingent and emergent ways of being in the

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world related to technology design and use.” Mollerup and Gaber (2015: 2,917) underscored non-media factors in their analysis of street screening initiatives in Egypt as modalities of “place-making”:

Images became part of the continual making of the streets and squares they moved through as they emplaced the revolution in people’s everyday neighborhoods. Screenings enabled particular ways of knowing because they embodied the togetherness, danger, discussions, resistance, and other characteristics of the revolution.

We contribute to the development of this conceptual framing by exploring the mechanisms of access, sociality and ritualization in the case of newspapers, with the hope that the lessons extend to other media artifacts. This is because these artifacts are variously accessed; sociality dynamics likely influences which ones are chosen and how they are used; and their uptake becomes part of larger rituals that mark everyday life.

Print Newspaper Consumption

A significant portion of the relevant scholarship has examined four main types of factors that affect newspaper consumption: socio-demography, content, needs, and habitualization.

Some studies have focused on the role of socio-demographic indicators such as education, age, gender, income, and residence (Barnhurst and Wartella, 1991; Burgoon and Burgoon, 1980; Loges and Ball-Rokeach, 1993; Peiser, 2000). Schoenbach and his colleagues (1999: 237) have argued that newspaper reading in America is influenced by a combination of “a higher income, a good education, being male and of an age indicating a state in life that may be called ‘established’.”

A second stream of scholarship has examined the role of content factors, either in the form of specific type of stories, placement and/or design, or the association between newspaper

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consumption and other media technologies (Atkin, 1995; Cho et al., 2016; Korzenny et al., 1983; Malthouse and Calder, 2002; Schoenbach and Lauf, 2002; Wanta and Gao, 1994). McCombs and his colleagues (1988) found that placement on the front page of a section is the most important predictor of readership, followed by the space devoted to the item and placement on the upper half of the page.

Other studies have centered on the influence of various needs fulfilled by newspapers (Hastall, 2009; Kippax and Murray, 1980; Lee, 2013; Shoemaker, 1996; Tewksbury and Althaus, 2000). Kippax and Murray (1980) tested the perceived importance of 30 media-related needs. They found that “newspapers are perceived as satisfying eight needs (...) concerned with understanding, knowledge, and credibility (...). [Print papers] are not perceived as satisfying any emotional needs, but are seen to serve an informational function” (Kippax and Murray, 1980: 346).

Another stream has delved into habitualization processes (Authors, 2017; Authors, 2019; Bogart, 1989; Diddi and LaRose, 2006; Lee and Delli Carpini, 2010; Tewksbury et al., 2008). Stone and Wetherington (1979) found that reading a newspaper is enacted through certain repetitive actions including having a stable method of getting the paper, and a particular time and special place to do so, and reading three or more days a week, and more than 15 minutes each day.

These streams of scholarship have made important contributions regarding the factors that shape newspaper reading. However, we suggest that some of these factors acquire greater heuristic potential when understood as part of a perspective that examines the role played by broader patterns of everyday life in shaping media reception. To probe this issue we draw upon evidence gathered through a five-country comparative study.

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Methods

This paper examines data from a project that collected 488 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews conducted between March 2016 and February 2019 by teams of local interviewers in five countries: Argentina (158), Finland (100), Israel (82), Japan (77), and the United States (71). These countries have geographic, linguistic, and cultural variation, while upholding two features constant: they are all democracies (Marshall, Gurr and Jagers, 2014), and the penetration of internet access is relatively high, ranging from 80% in Argentina (SInCA, 2017) to 90% in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2019). Moreover, the percentage of respondents in the 2020 Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2020) stating that they rely on print newspapers as a weekly source of news is 23% for Argentina, 37% for Finland, 27% for Japan, and 20% for the United States. In Israel, data from TGI suggests that the average exposure rate for each of the two most popular newspapers was 23-25% that year (Ice, 2020).

Interviews had an average length of approximately 45 minutes, and were audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviewers shared an interview guide which was translated into local languages—lightly adapted to contextual circumstances—and helped interviewers explore topics pertaining to the consumption of news, entertainment, and technology. The recruitment process centered primarily on snowball sampling (Heckathorn, 2011). In each of the countries, a small number of interviewees was chosen, somewhat evenly distributed according to gender, age, and socioeconomic status. After the interview they were invited to share contacts potentially reached out for interviewing. Some of these acquaintances were approached while others were placed on a waiting list. This procedure was repeated with each person who was subsequently interviewed. The selection process purposely did not screen for newspaper consumption and consistent with the ethnographic approach, this practice was discussed once each interviewee volunteered

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information about it. Since it is possible that interviewees read newspapers but did not mention it, we cannot calculate the exact prevalence of readers within the sample—this does not constitute a limitation because the value of our methodology is not tied to statistical representativeness. Based on the data presented above, if the interviewees matched the population of their respective countries, the number of interviewees reading the newspaper on a weekly basis would be approximately 130. The final sample consisted of 56% women, and the average age was 43.2 years old. It included a broad spectrum of occupations, from attorneys to manga writers, and from students to retirees.

Data were analyzed through three rounds of coding following a grounded theory approach (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). First, we open-coded to identify possible recurring concepts. Second, once those concepts were identified, we looked for specific categories and their properties (Glaser, 2007). Third, we determined relationships across categories and properties. We ended the analysis process after we reached theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). The validity of the findings was ascertained by triangulation of data sources from five countries (Denzin, 1978). The quotes included in this paper were translated from the originally-spoken language into English by the authors native in the respective language. Pseudonyms are used when reporting responses.

Findings

We present the findings divided into three parts tackling the above-mentioned mechanisms: access, sociality, and ritualization.

Access

There are multiple ways of accessing the print newspaper, from home delivery to single-copy purchase, and from free acquisition in public transit to incidental encounters in coffee

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shops. These and others were pursued by interviewees with significant differences across countries underscoring key dimensions that structure local contexts.

Most of the interviewees in Israel did not mention either having a subscription or regularly purchasing single copies at the newsstand. Instead, they often noted that it was typical for them to get free newspapers. Naima (75), a retired teacher living in the south of Israel, said:

Today everywhere there are literally piles [of free newspapers]. Even in the swimming pool, someone always brings it to the club. [...] And I think even those who used to happily buy the paper, wouldn't buy it today, because newspapers seem to have gone down a bit, haven't they?

Many interviewees stated their unwillingness to pay for print newspapers. Heli (65), a retired building engineer from the north of Israel, confessed that she had given up her subscription due to the widespread availability of free newspapers:

You get it in Nahariya everywhere for free [...]. They distribute it here in the center next to the train station, in three spots. I don't go, I don't take the newspaper, but my husband goes shopping, so when he's standing at the checkout there's a stack of newspapers there.

Interviewees also talked about the incidental appropriation of the newspaper. Gadi (82), a retired factory manager from Ashdod, said that he reads the newspaper "only when I get the chance. [...] I walk by and someone gives out the newspaper. I'll take it. I don't buy newspapers." Assaf (27), a software engineer from Tel Aviv, stated: "I used to take the train to the base so I happened to read much more *Israel Hayom* because it was accessible and available and I could. But now I'm taking the bus so there's no *Israel Hayom* on the bus."

In a continuum that goes from accessing print newspapers for free to paying for them, interviewees in Japan seem to be at the opposite end of their counterparts in Israel. Many

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reported subscribing not just to one but to multiple newspapers. Fumiya (62), a high school teacher in Tokyo, said: “I subscribe to *Nikkei* and *Tokyo Shimbun*. And also to *Shimotsuke Shimbun*, which is the local newspaper... [and] to *Sankei* and *Asahi* and *Akahata* on Sunday.” In addition, print newspapers appeared to be omnipresent in the workplaces of many interviewees. Yoshitaka (37), an office clerk at a non-profit organization, stated: “we have ... all four national papers in the office (...). I do have chances to glance at them. I also read the *Akahata* (a paper by Japan Communist Party) at work.” Ryuta (20), a night-school student, talked about combining home and work: “I read *The Saitama Shimbun*, a local paper in the province north of Tokyo, at home, and *Nihon Nogyo Shimbun* (Japan Agriculture Paper) at work.” Moreover, even without a subscription, readers in Japan explained they can easily access newspaper copies at kiosks, public transportation, and/or convenience stores. Rie (64), a subway kiosk vendor, said:

It’s cheaper to subscribe, but I won’t [have any excuse to] go out on holidays and weekends. If I have to buy the paper outside, I will go out. I’ll buy it at a kiosk on my way to work. I always try to buy it at station kiosks. When they are closed, I’ll get it at a convenience store.

A culture of access centered around subscriptions was also dominant among interviewees who regularly read print newspapers in the United States, Finland, and Argentina—though not as prevalent as in Japan. When asked about her news consumption, Karen (53), in the greater Chicago metropolitan area, noted that

I still receive the *New York Times* and [the *Chicago*] *Tribune* paper copies at home so I did a little glance through those. (...) I don’t spend as much time reading the paper... as I would like to, even though I still can’t imagine not getting a paper in the morning.

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Similarly, Mónica (39), who resides in the greater Miami metropolitan area commented that she gets “the physical newspaper during the weekends... because we don’t want to detach from it.” In Finland, Marie (67), subscribed to “the national print newspaper [*Helsingin Sanomat*] which is very necessary every morning.” Patricia (51), a high-school teacher in Argentina, noted that she begins

The day having breakfast and reading the print newspaper. I do this every day from Monday to Monday. That is, I read the newspaper every day of the week. And, yes, they send it to my home. (...) From Monday to Friday we read *Clarín*, and Saturday and Sunday *La Nación*.

The analysis suggests the presence of a subset of readers who do not subscribe to the newspaper directly, but regularly benefit from subscriptions purchased by others. Carolina (24), a college student in Buenos Aires, stated: “my sister gets *La Nación* delivered on Sunday and when I visit her, I like to read the print newspaper.” Kevin (35), in the United States, said that he reads print newspapers at:

My parents and my in-laws. One gets *The Daily Herald*, and the other gets *The Chicago Tribune*. But they get the actual paper format still. So, like whenever I’m over there, and usually we’re at one of [the] two houses every other day, you know, I’ll kind of pick it up and kind of thumb through the different sections and see what’s interesting.

Along similar lines, Tallervo (24), in Finland, commented:

My parents subscribe to a print newspaper and I read it [when visiting]. If I go to my friend’s house and if there is a newspaper on the table, I might read it. I’m not subscribing to any newspaper myself. If I receive something [in the mailbox], they are ads and I don’t read them.

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Finally, interviewees in Finland and Argentina often mentioned accessing print newspapers in coffee shops and restaurants. Jarno (24), in Finland, commented that he did not subscribe to a print newspaper but “read the newspaper of the city and the regional newspaper in a coffee shop or a restaurant where they have them.” Héctor (47), a merchant in Buenos Aires, said: “of course, the coffee shop, the bar, it’s a habit that one has.” Gastón (24), a public-sector employee, commented that a couple of times per week he has lunch at a McDonald’s in downtown Buenos Aires: “because ... there is a sector with all the newspapers... So, if you arrive early, you get the newspapers that are floating around.”

Sociality

The analysis reveals the existence of a strong collective dimension in shaping access to the print newspaper, coupled with the dominance of an individual orientation tied to enacting reading practices.

In many households this collective dimension is often **tied to generational and gender dynamics**: older individuals tend to structure access for their younger counterparts, and men for women. Lilli (52), in Finland, said: “my husband gives me the print newspaper, some section of it. He knows that I want to have the culture section so I start with it. I usually read it, and then some other parts of the newspaper.” Along similar lines, Carolina in the United States, commented that her “husband reads it and so he cuts out articles for me if he thinks there is something in there that might interest me.” Kendra (35), in Chicago, noted that her grandfather chooses the newspaper and he “tend[s] to pass it around. Even then, that’s not my choice of newspaper but that’s what comes.” In Buenos Aires, Claudia (41), a psychologist, said:

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My husband subscribed to *Clarín*, and that stuck. He reads it on Sundays. I like *La Nación* more, its format, the type of news it publishes. But we already get *Clarín*. We won't subscribe to two newspapers; we don't devote that much time to reading the news. Asako (44), a monk's wife, who lives with her husband, three daughters, and her mother in Tokyo, stated:

I get the largest paper *The Yomiuri Shimbun* for myself, and *Asahi Shogakusei Shimbun* for elementary school students, and *Asahi Chugakusei* (junior high school students) *Shimbun* for my children (...). My husband and I often fight for a paper. One of us ends up reading the kids' paper then.

In Israel, collective matters are rooted in strong family traditions which are particularly prevalent on weekends, when families get together. Meital (22), a student from Jerusalem, commented that "I sometimes read the newspaper on Shabbat [...] at my dad's, a *Haaretz* subscriber. [...] Or whatever my dad gives me to read." Family's ties sometimes extend beyond the house as María (22), a student in Argentina, narrated: "I have contact with print news when I'm either in Posadas [her hometown] or at my aunt and uncle's house here in Buenos Aires who have [the newspaper] and so I take advantage and read them." Sandra (25) in Finland, explained that

At some point my mother-in-law had gifted us *Keskisuomalainen* [a regional newspaper] for a month. It started to become a habit to have morning coffee with the paper. It was lovely to go back to it, wake up and get some coffee and the print newspaper, so I scanned and read it.

The collective dimension also affects relationships beyond the family setting. Iris (64), an Israeli retired teacher and artist living in Haifa, noted that "because I don't have time to read

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everything, I cancelled my subscription (...). [My neighbor] sometimes gives me the arts and leisure section.” In Finland, Luna (29) nostalgically described accessing and reading print newspapers:

I used to live in a commune, and we shared the costs of the subscription back then. We had the national newspaper every day, and it was so lovely to read it with roommates for a long time, share its sections and discuss its articles. But now when I live alone I don’t know why I would subscribe to it. It was such a social thing. It was lovely. I enjoyed it an awful lot and I do miss it sometimes, but I know that if I don’t live with five people it won’t happen.

Luna’s remarks tie to how sociality is connected with reading practices. Our analysis indicates that reading the newspaper appears to be mostly an individual activity. Beatriz (73), in Miami, said: “I get the print newspaper in the morning. I glance through it, look at the news stories, and I write down which ones I’m going to read when I have more time.” Similarly, Isaac (79), a retired director of a pension fund in Jerusalem, commented that “I usually read mostly the opinion columns in both these papers,” referring to *Haaretz* and *Yediot*. Adam (42), in Chicago, illustrates the salience of individual reading practices outside of the household setting: “I often pick up *The Reader*, which is free around Chicago, and the *South Side Weekly*, and carry it around with me and try to look through it when I’m on the bus, when I’m in the bathroom, when I’m like whatever.”¹ Similarly, Marcelo (28), an administrative assistant in Buenos Aires, noted that he prefers reading print newspapers in coffee shops “only if I go by myself (...). But if I’m with somebody else, then I don’t.”

Interviews note that finding time for oneself is also important. Eliav (32), a digital media worker in Tel Aviv, commented that “reading newspapers in the morning became sort of my

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treat. It's just nice." In that same country, Israela (59), a nurse, said that "it's my time for myself in the morning. The coffee with the newspaper, like the elderly. This half-an-hour is just mine in the morning, no matter what." In Finland, Maire (67), echoes Eliav and Israela by noting that she subscribes to the national print newspaper because "it is very necessary every morning (...). It takes almost an hour [to read it]." In Argentina, Lucas (30), said he reads print newspapers on Sunday: "In general, it's the day [of the week] that I have more spare time, because on Saturday I do more social stuff. [But] on Sunday morning I'm more relaxed at home and can do that."

The statements by Eilav, Israela, Maire, and Lucas also connect to another relevant process for this analysis: the ritualization of everyday life.

Rituals

For many interviewees, especially the older ones, reading print newspapers is a highly ritualized practice. Hisao (69), a retiree in Japan, explained he "read(s) the *Asahi Shimbun* every day (...). This has become my habit. Long time ago". Terttu (71), in Finland, said:

I eat my breakfast, clean up the dishes, and my print newspaper is waiting there. When I open the print newspaper nothing else is happening. I read the newspaper [laughs]. It is a very habitual thing; it would be hard if I ended my subscription.

In some instances, the ritualization of newspaper reading is tied to particular bodily movements and predispositions. Mari (74), a retiree living in Tokyo, in Japan, commented that

Nowadays, few people read the newspaper on the train. But I still read it on the train by folding it like this and this [makes a hand gesture]. Especially, reading a newspaper in a crowded train requires a special skill. You should fold it like this. If the train gets more crowded, I will fold it even smaller. I learned this "technique" because if I read it open like this, you would annoy many people.

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For some interviewees, the centrality of these routines in their daily lives is such, that their absence might be burdensome. Silvia (45), in Miami, noted that “I grew up reading print newspapers... [so] I miss the newspaper now. When I get to [her sister’s home] and all of a sudden, she has it... even from the previous day,” she still reads it. Santiago (41), a professor in Buenos Aires, said that he reads “digital [news] during the work week, and during the weekend nothing better than coffee with milk, croissants and print newspapers... That can’t be replaced... by anything.” Furthermore, sometimes these rituals become ends in themselves, regardless of the news. Imad (62), a teacher from the north of Israel, stated:

[I read the paper] not because I’m interested but rather because it’s been a years-long habit. Always after Friday dinner, I sit down and read the papers but, it’s not like it used to be, I used to sit down and read every single letter in the paper. [...] Today the content is shallow, and I already know most of it so I just skim through the articles.

The enactment of ritualized newspaper consumption relates to broader practices and pleasures of everyday life. Asako (44), in Japan, said: “the Internet is convenient. But I also like reading a newspaper while drinking a cup of coffee in the morning”. Sara (50), in Philadelphia, “like[s] getting the paper, going through it, sorting it out, going through the different sections, I love doing the headlines, I guess I never thought about why I love it.” Ofer (40), a product manager for a technology company in Tel Aviv, explained that “it’s comfortable to read it printed. Especially if it’s a long article, you relax lying down on the couch, read a few pages.” Rie (64), the kiosk vendor in Japan, stated: “I really feel I have to go outside [to buy the newspaper]. When I go out to buy newspapers, I can feel the breeze and this is important to me.”

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The atmospheres and spaces that people create mostly at home in relation to the rituals of newspaper reading counterbalance the work-week acceleration tied to digital media. Thus, these rituals also appear to be experienced in terms of wellbeing. In Finland, Inkeri (56) noted:

Well, the thing is that it is a print newspaper. If you think about it, you spend your days at work [with digital devices] and browse your phone in the evening, so I like the fact that it's made of paper. You can be sleepy [when reading it]... I use my computer and smartphone so much that it starts to bother me sometimes.

Along similar lines, Lucas (30), in Argentina, said:

When I read in print...I like to read more calmly. When I read on digital platforms, the truth is that the speed with which one reads...and also that I read it at work, while I get calls and work at the same time...It's not the same as sitting down and devoting one hour and a half or two to read the print paper calmly.

To Nobuko (65), a homemaker living in Tokyo:

You get a newspaper and it is such a pleasure to open the folded newspaper. I hope I keep having these joyful sensations in future. I enjoy taking a glance at the whole page first and then check the headlines. People in my generation have this type of pleasure, I think.

Discussion and Conclusion

We have aimed to answer the question of how and why individuals still get print newspapers in the digital age. Our analysis suggests that, paraphrasing Nobuko's statement, when readers open folded newspapers they do so by folding the practice into the broader fabric of everyday life. Thus, this account illustrates the heuristic power of a non-media centric perspective and adds theoretical specificity to it by probing three mechanisms that partly account for why these folding dynamics happen: access, sociality and ritualization. Our comparative

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approach helps discern these mechanisms by showing both their presence in the various countries and some variance across them. Our analysis also contributes to scholarship on media change by understanding the persistence of traditional media practices during periods marked by the dominance of digital counterparts, and on newspaper consumption by showing the explanatory role played by non-news factors .

Regarding access, the analysis indicates a continuum that goes from getting print newspapers for free to various frequencies of paying for them. At one end, interviewees in Israel did not commonly mention either having a subscription or habitually purchasing single copies at the newsstand. Instead, they have newspapers brought in by someone else or access them freely as part of undertaking a non-media activity. At the other end, interviewees in Japan described an array of access options often tied to purchasing newspapers, including multiple home-based subscriptions, omnipresent in workplaces, and ease of access in “third spaces.” Between these two extremes, there were the participants in the United States, Finland, and Argentina. None of the interviewees said their decisions regarding print newspapers were influenced by digital access costs. From the standpoint of media reception, access to the print newspaper—and any other media artifact—is the entry point to the analytical journey. The evidence presented in the paper signals that the various modalities of access appear to be independent of both issues of content and technology, and instead tied to broader cultural (Bloch, 2003) and market dynamics. Beyond the specifics of newspapers, the reception of all media artifacts is shaped by comparable access issues, which are also likely subject to some degree of variability—stemming from cross-national, generational and cultural dynamics, among others—in areas ranging from regulatory frameworks to interpretive regimes.

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Concerning sociality, our account reveals the presence of generational and gender dynamics concerning choice, and the prevalence of individual reading. None of these patterns are the result of variations in content or technology either. The former is a reflection of the persistence of larger patriarchal tendencies that shape media selection (Authors, in press; Benesch, 2012; Bittman and Wajcman, 2000; Gray, 2006; Poindexter et al., 2010; Toff and Palmer, 2019). This, in turn, helps put into broader conceptual perspective the common finding that age and gender influence newspaper consumption: the explanatory power of these factors derives from how they help structure daily life in general, instead of media reception in particular. The latter is a by-product of historical conventions that have turned reading into an individual practice while endowing audiovisual consumption with a more varied range of sociality options (Author, in press). These patterns are also imbricated in the national everyday cultures. For instance, while in Israel collective matters are rooted in strong family traditions, in Argentina these matters also acquire a public dimension in which people interact with others in restaurants and coffee shops. As with the access mechanism, broader patterns of everyday sociality likely shape the reception of other media artifacts and with different combinations of cross-national continuity and discontinuity to be expected in how sociality affects the reception of various media artifacts.

Regarding ritualization, the data presented above—bolstered by decades of social and cultural analysis—suggests that interviewees have highly ritualized everyday lives. Therefore, they fold their media reception into these rituals, and also develop unique habits that are imbricated into their broader routines. These rituals seem to be more prevalent among older interviewees, to whom their practices have sedimented embodied ways of touching, feeling and reading the papers. Moreover, people visit coffee shops and read newspapers they encounter

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there as part of the experience—but they do not go to coffee shops primarily to do this.

Similarly, young interviewees visit their parents as part of family routines and read the newspaper they encounter in their households—but do not visit their parents primarily to get the news. Moreover, many participants usually read the newspaper while eating their breakfast and sipping a cup of coffee—and it is the larger habitualization of daily life that ritualizes news consumption, not vice-versa. As with access and sociality, non-news rituals are likely intertwined with the reception of other media artifacts, with different levels of cross-national variance to be expected as well given preexisting differences in cultures of everyday life.

Taken together, this analysis demonstrates the heuristic power of three key mechanisms of non-media centric approach to media reception, and the role they play in the persistence of older media during an age dominated by newer alternatives. Since the analysis has not exhausted the range of possible mechanisms, contexts and media, future research could expand this line of inquiry by exploring additional mechanisms, national settings, and media artifacts, as well as connections to existing frameworks such as uses and gratifications theory, among others. A fully comparative approach could then build theory by contrasting the various roles played by types of mechanisms, national settings, and media. This could comprehensively account for the role of non-media dynamics in both the reception and evolution of media.

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Endnote

ⁱ Following the emic perspective of ethnographic inquiry, if an interviewee considered a print publication of weekly frequency like the South Side Weekly a newspaper, we took this information into account in the analysis.