

JYU DISSERTATIONS 776

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Margareta Salonen

# Revising the Understanding of Gatekeeping Theory

## Factors and Practices of Post-Publication Gatekeeping

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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCES

JYU DISSERTATIONS 776

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# **Revising the Understanding of Gatekeeping Theory**

## **Factors and Practices of Post-Publication Gatekeeping**

Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella  
julkisesti tarkastettavaksi yliopiston päärakennuksen salissa C1  
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in building Capitolium, auditorium C1, on May 4, 2024, at 12 o'clock noon.



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## *Dedication*

*To my dad. I learnt from the best, I learnt from you. You were and are my cornerstone, always and forever.*

*With this dissertation, I want to honour the life of Pertti Mauritz Juhani Salonen, my dad (28.12.1949–10.4.2024). You were looking forward to your daughter becoming a doctor (PhD), the first one in the family. I am proud to be able to fulfil that wish soon.*

## ABSTRACT

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The dissertation examines the triadic relationship of news media, audiences, and social media platforms in the digital news environment. Through the theoretical lens of post-publication gatekeeping, it addresses what happens with news after its publication and how audiences and news media interact in a digital news environment.

The dissertation combines three empirical sub-studies that explored factors and practices of post-publication gatekeeping. Article I examines the social interactional relationship between Finnish newspapers and their social media audiences on Facebook. Article II addresses the relationship between Finnish newspapers and their social media audiences and the role of visuality in social media journalism in Instagram context. Article III examines the role of audience data in Finnish newspapers' editorial decision-making in Finnish newspapers. Qualitatively oriented research covered posts on Facebook (n=180) and Instagram (n=894), the online comments made on them, and newsroom interviews (n=9). Content analysis, digital conversation analysis, visual interpretation, tabulation of instances, and statistical descriptions provided complementary analysis.

With this dissertation it is argued that today's digital news environment demands talking about *shared gatekeeping power* and *post-publication gatekeeping*. In a digital news environment, news media are no longer the sole gatekeeper. They share gatekeeping power with platforms and audiences that iteratively influence each other. Multiple factors, such as audiences, social media platforms, and regulations (legal and ethical) shape the news and gatekeeping post-publication, as do social interactional and other practices.

In practice, the work suggests that news media and audiences jointly possess potential to apply conversational means of looking after the social media discussions taking place in news media's social media spaces, to mitigate such negative forms of communication as hate speech. News media should consider the visuality aspect of social media platforms too as news takes on increasingly visual forms. From the legislation standpoint, the study shows that news media also should closely monitor the development and application of the EU's 'Digital Acts'. Furthermore, the dissertation contributes to the field of journalism ethics via practical social media-related recommendations for the Finnish Press Council, which revised its Journalistic guidelines in 2023–2024.

Keywords: audiences, Finnish newspapers, gatekeeping, journalism ethics, news media, post-publication gatekeeping, regulations, social interaction, social media platforms, visuality

# TIIVISTELMÄ

Salonen, Margareta

Revising the Understanding of Gatekeeping Theory: Factors and Practices of

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Tämä väitöskirja tarkastelee uutismedian, yleisöjen ja sosiaalisen median alustojen välistä vuorovaikutteista suhdetta portinvartijateorian valossa hyödyntäen julkaisun jälkeisen portinvartijuuden teoriaa. Tutkimus siis tarkastelee sitä, mitä tapahtuu uutisille niiden julkaisemisen jälkeen, ja kuinka yleisöt ja uutismedia ovat vuorovaikutuksessa digitaalisessa uutisympäristössä.

Työ on artikkeliväitöskirja joka muodostuu kolmesta empiirisestä osatutkimuksesta. Tutkimukset käsittelevät julkaisun jälkeiseen portinvartijuuteen liittyviä tekijöitä ja käytäntöjä. Artikkelissa I tutkitaan suomalaisten sanomalehtien ja yleisöjen suhdetta ja sen vuorovaikutteisuutta Facebookissa. Artikkelissa II tarkastellaan Instagramin kontekstissa kotimaisten sanomalehtien ja yleisöjen suhdetta ja sen vuorovaikutteisuutta sekä visuaalisuuden merkitystä journalismissa sosiaalisessa mediassa. Artikkelissa III keskitytään suomalaisten sanomalehtien yleisödatan käyttöön ja merkitykseen toimituksellisessa päätöksenteossa. Tutkimuskokonaisuus on laadullisesti orientoitunut ja sen aineisto muodostuu Facebook- (n=180) ja Instagram-postauksista (n=894) ja niiden kommentteista sekä sanomalehtien työntekijöiden haastatteluista (n=9). Analyyseissä hyödynnettiin sisällönanalyysiä, digitaalista keskustelunanalyysiä, visuaalista tulkintaa, sekä kuvailevaa tilastoanalyysiä niin, että menetelmät täydensivät toisiaan.

Väitöskirjatutkimuksen perusteella esitetään, että nykyisessä digitaalisessa uutisympäristössä tulisi puhua *jaetusta portinvartijuuden vallasta* sekä *julkaisun jälkeisestä portinvartijuudesta*. Tutkimukseni osoittaa ettei uutismedia ole enää ainoa portinvartija digitaalisessa uutisympäristössä, vaan se jakaa portinvartijuuden valtaa iteratiivisessa vuorovaikutuksessa sosiaalisen median alustojen ja yleisöjen kanssa. Uutisia ja portinvartijuutta muovaavat julkaisemisen jälkeen useat erilaiset tekijät (*factors*), kuten yleisöt, sosiaalisen median alustat, regulaatio (laki ja etiikka), sekä erilaiset käytännöt (*practices*) kuten esimerkiksi vuorovaikutuskäytännöt (*social interactional practices*).

Tutkimuksen tuloksena todetaan, että uutismedioilla ja yleisöillä on molemmilla mahdollisuus vuorovaikutuksen keinoin huolehtia sosiaalisen median keskusteluista niin, että vihapuhe ja muu negatiivinen keskustelu jäisi vähäiseksi. Lisäksi tutkimus nostaa esiin sen, että uutismedioiden kannattaisi huomioida sosiaalisen median alustoja ja niillä tapahtuvaa toimintaansa myös visuaalisesta näkökulmasta, sillä uutiset saavat yhä useammin visuaalisia muotoja. Lainsäädännön näkökulmasta tutkimus nostaa esiin, että uutismedioiden olisi tärkeää huomioida EU:n digisäädöksiä (*Digital Acts*) kehitystä ja sovellettavuutta omalla toimintakentällään. Tällä väitöskirjatyöllä on ollut vaikutusta myös journalismin etiikan saralla, sillä sen tuloksia koskien journalismin toimintaa sosiaalisen media alustoilla on hyödynnetty Journalistin ohjeiden päivitystyössä (2023–2024).

Asiasanat: journalismin etiikka, julkaisun jälkeinen portinvartijuus, portinvartija, portinvartijuus, regulaatio, sanomalehdet, sosiaalisen median alustat, uutismedia, visuaalisuus, vuorovaikutus, yleisöt

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## LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS AND DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

### **Article and sub-study I**

Salonen, M., Olbertz-Siitonen, M., Uskali, T., & Laaksonen, S-M. (2023b). Conversational Gatekeeping – Social Interactional Practices of Post-Publication Gatekeeping on newspapers' Facebook Pages, *Journalism Practice*, 17(9), 2053–2077.

I was in charge of the study design and laying out the theoretical framework. I manually gathered the Facebook data that I had access to through a previous research project. Analysis was conducted partly by me alone and partly with the second author, Margarethe Olbertz-Siitonen. I was in charge of the findings section, and the discussion section was a joint effort of all four authors – Margarethe Olbertz-Siitonen, Turo Uskali, Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, and I. All the co-authors also commented on the study throughout the work.

### **Article and sub-study II**

Salonen, M., & Laaksonen, S. M. (2023). Post-publication gatekeeping practices: Exploring conversational and visual gatekeeping on Finnish newspapers' Instagram accounts. *Nordicom Review*, 44(2), 253–278.

I was in charge of the study design and of writing up the theoretical framework. The Instagram data came through the Meta-owned CrowdTangle platform, to which the second author, Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, had access. Analysis was conducted partly by me and partly by Salla-Maaria. We were jointly in charge of the findings section, and I was responsible for the discussion section, with her assistance.

### **Article and sub-study III**

Salonen, M., Ehrlén, V., Koivula, M., & Talvitie-Lamberg, K. (2023a). Post-Publication Gatekeeping Factors and Practices: Data, Platforms, and Regulations in News Work. *Media and Communication*, 11(2), 367–378.

I was in charge of the study design and presenting the theoretical framework; also, the second author, Veera Ehrlén, contributed to the theory section. I conducted the interviews and gathered data from them. I also conducted the analysis and wrote the sections on it and the findings. All authors – Veera Ehrlén, Minna Koivula, and Karoliina Talvitie-Lamberg – commented on and honed the findings section. I wrote the discussion section mainly by myself, but my co-authors too contributed. They also commented on the study throughout the work. This sub-study was part of a larger research project.



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They say it takes a village to raise a child. I argue that it takes an entire academic community to raise a doctoral student. I feel extremely fortunate as this has been the case for me. I started my doctoral dissertation project in the spring of 2019, and ever since then I have had the opportunity to experience new academic pursuits and learn from senior and junior researchers around me.

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Jyväskylä, 22nd April 2024  
Margareta Salonen

## FIGURES

FIGURE 1	Factors related to post-publication gatekeeping .....	67
FIGURE 2	Processes of (post-publication) gatekeeping in the digital news environment .....	69

## TABLES

TABLE 1	Methods and materials of the three sub-studies .....	51
TABLE 2	Summary of the aims, research questions, and main contributions with each sub-study .....	59

# CONTENTS

DEDICATION

ABSTRACT

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS AND DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FIGURES AND TABLES

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION .....	15
1.1	The Researcher's Positionality .....	22
2	THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	24
2.1	The Digital News Environment.....	24
2.1.1	Platform and (News) Media Regulation.....	25
2.1.2	Social Media Logic and Characteristics .....	29
2.2	News Audiences in the Digital News Environment .....	31
2.2.1	The Audience Turn .....	32
2.2.2	Negotiating Norms through Content Moderation.....	34
2.2.3	Datafied Audiences.....	35
2.3	Gatekeeping in the Digital News Environment .....	37
2.3.1	Factors of Gatekeeping: Audiences, Social Media Platforms, and Regulations.....	38
2.3.2	Toward Post-Publication Gatekeeping .....	41
3	METHODS AND MATERIALS .....	43
3.1	Methods and Materials of Sub-Study I.....	44
3.2	Methods and Materials of Sub-Study II .....	47
3.3	Methods and Materials of Sub-Study III .....	49
3.4	Social Constructionism As a Perspective on Philosophy of Science ...	52
3.5	Research Integrity .....	53
4	ORIGINAL ARTICLES AND FINDINGS.....	58
4.1	Sub-Study I - 'Conversational Gatekeeping: Social Interactional Practices of Post-Publication Gatekeeping on Newspapers' Facebook Pages' .....	60
4.2	Sub-Study II - 'Post-Publication Gatekeeping Practices: Exploring Conversational and Visual Gatekeeping on Finnish Newspapers' Instagram Accounts' .....	61
4.3	Sub-Study III - 'Post-Publication Gatekeeping Factors and Practices: Data, Platforms, and Regulations in News Work' .....	62
4.4	Summary of the Main Findings .....	63

5	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....	66
5.1	Factors and Practices of Post-Publication Gatekeeping .....	66
5.1.1	A Social Interactional Perspective on Post-Publication Gatekeeping .....	70
5.1.2	A Visual Perspective to Post-Publication Gatekeeping .....	73
5.1.3	Regulatory Perspectives on Post-Publication Gatekeeping ....	76
5.2	Reflections on Limitations and Future Research.....	79
5.3	Evaluation of the Study .....	82
	YHTEENVETO (SUMMARY IN FINNISH) .....	86
	REFERENCES.....	92
	ORIGINAL ARTICLES	

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation revises our understanding of gatekeeping (theory) and how it can be viewed in the 2020s in the field of journalism studies. This study has been built on my desire to better understand gatekeeping from practical and theoretical viewpoints. From the practical standpoint, I wanted to see what needs to be taken into consideration so that we have an up to date answer to the question of how news turns out as it does in light of today's conditions. This is a question that gatekeeping scholar Tim P. Vos has many times presented when talking about the nature of gatekeeping (e.g., Vos, 2015). From the perspective of theory, I wanted to understand how this over 70-year-old body of theory and the related field have kept with the pace, as gatekeeping is one of the foundational theories and concepts in the field of journalism studies. This concern too has been presented by gatekeeping studies and by various scholars (e.g., Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Vos, 2020).

To pursue my task, I needed to start by mapping out the central players for gatekeeping in connection to news and news distribution. One of my first conference papers, which later provided the seeds for this dissertation's sub-study I, asked 'Who are the gatekeepers of social media?'. While preparing the paper, which was presented under that title at the Future of Journalism conference in 2019 in Cardiff, I started to ponder who (or what) possessed more power over the other. I quickly came to the understanding that it is impossible to answer the question of who is the ultimate gatekeeper above all others. At the same time, I realised that it might be possible to understand the power (im)balance among the many, quite different players. For example, I as a member of the audience have the ability to comment upon and interact with news via social media and, therefore, have the power to state my opinion about the news in the form of comments. However, my ability and position are dependent on the actions and decisions of the news media: I can comment upon and interact with news media's social media posts only when posts have been made and conversation functionality is enabled.

From the viewpoint of news media, social media platforms on which operations rely set boundaries for news media's actions. News media neither own nor

fully control the digital environment where they act and publish news. Social media platforms possess power over news media in terms of what their algorithms and technical affordances allow news media to do. In turn, the platform's algorithm is influenced also by my actions – the actions of an audience member – as my interaction leads to changes in the algorithm, just as the actions of news media when operating via their social media accounts.

This thought process led me to the understanding that news media, audiences, and social media platforms all take part in the power negotiation on social media platforms and that this could be viewed through the theoretical lens of gatekeeping, traditionally applied for looking at the processes and practices behind news media's publication decisions. Therefore, the initial aim for my study was formulated in the conference paper that was presented in Cardiff in 2019. The focus stayed nearly the same throughout the numerous processes for this project. The aim behind the dissertation is to understand the triadic relationship of news media (newspapers), audiences, and social media platforms in the digital news environment in the Finnish context.

This work addresses the digital news environment as an environment where news circulates after its publication and one that is algorithmically driven and increasingly datafied. These conditions mean that platforms' logic, especially how their algorithms recommend content and action, is highly involved in the processes of news circulation and that the use of data and data-based or related decisions are shaping such processes as news circulation. The current digital news environment in which news circulates is to a great extent embedded in the structures of platform society (van Dijck et al., 2018). In platform society, social, cultural, technological, and economic factors all come into play with regard to the platform-based digital society in which we live today and where news circulates (van Dijck et al., 2018). This context is increasingly visual, for many of the social media platforms may be regarded as highly visual and visuality can be seen as an in-built part of a platform's logic, with Instagram serving as an example (Gibbs et al., 2015; Hermida & Mellado; 2020; Highfield, 2019). The context wherein news and social media platforms function is also highly regulated. Laws of the relevant country and region, prominent among them the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the EU, and journalism ethics, expressed in forms such as the code of ethics of countries' press councils, are part of recent regulatory processes that shape news production and the digital news environment where news circulates.

This is also the context where news media, more particularly Finnish newspapers in the case considered in this study, operate. Newspapers are interesting actors as old and new media forms, 'hybrid media system' (Chadwick, 2013), become highlighted in their actions. Newspapers used to be secure actors in the media landscape, since their cash flows were steady and income was frequent. That was in the time before the rise of the Internet and social media platforms (Heikkilä et al., 2023), a development that changed the game for newspapers, which then needed to adjust and develop digital products. They had to figure out how to navigate between the old and new forms of media; that is, the printed



newspaper was no longer enough for their business. Here lies the root of my interest in studying newspapers' performance on social media platforms and in datafied news work. I wanted to understand what the digital context does and means for their news dissemination and gatekeeping practices. Finnish newspapers are in a situation of having faced a steady decline in circulation and in number of publications (Hellman, 2021). At the same time, Finnish people show the world's strongest trust in the news (Newman et al., 2023) and, furthermore, trust print and digital newspapers the most, above all other forms of news media (Uutismedian liitto, 2023). With news getting consumed increasingly through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, both globally and nationally (Newman et al., 2022, 2023), it is, therefore, pivotal to understand newspapers' social media activities and how the newspapers perceive the digital era through datafication of news in Finland but also globally. That is, audiences' actions and all kinds of digital traces related to news are tracked and they shape editorial decision-making in the newsrooms (Breiter & Hepp, 2018; Tandoc & Vos, 2016).

The associated interest in the movements of audiences can be described by the term 'audience turn' (Costera Meijer, 2020), which highlights news media's increased attention to their audiences, movements of them, and how they interact with news products. Relations between news media and their audiences before the rise of the Internet have been described as a top down relationship. Audience preferences were given less attention than now, in an age of social media where the relationship has developed from one-way to profoundly two-way (Nelson, 2021). Audiences today have the ability to interact with news media's content via social media through social interactional practices such as liking, sharing, and commenting. Audiences also are able to be in more direct contact with news media / journalists as news media's social media posts provide a forum for conversations between audiences and journalists. Of course, that is only if journalists take part in those conversations that they have initiated and for which they have opened their digital gates.

Likewise, the emergence of social media platforms and increased interest in the movements of audiences has shaped journalism studies as a field. As Vos (2023, p. 1052) notes, journalism scholars need to try to understand the structural contexts that shape news and to do so by paying attention to how audiences make sense of news. In 2024, the field of journalism studies is now reaching the mature age of 100 years (Singer et al., 2023), and the epistemic question of what journalism studies is continues to be debated (e.g., Carlson & Peters, 2023; Vos, 2023), thus keeping the field in flux. However, Singer et al. (2023) note in their extensive review that scholarly interest has turned especially toward examining digital journalism – toward studies that take the technological embeddedness of news into account. Digital journalism, which perhaps we should call a sub-field, has started to emerge and evolve, especially over the last 10 years (Franklin, 2013; Steensen & Westlund, 2021). In addition, there is a line of research that I see as connected to digital journalism research: social media journalism research (e.g., Hendrickx, 2021, 2023b; Hermida, 2012). This dissertation draws deeply from the

latter. In the bigger picture, this work is situated in the field and tradition of journalism studies, but to understand the nuances of this research it is important to highlight the connection to the sub-fields of digital journalism and social media journalism research.

My doctoral project has taken this direction so that its output can help the field of journalism studies better understand the increased interest in audience participation in news and the digital context where news circulates (Singer et al., 2023). I also sought to provide conceptual frameworks and theoretical understanding that are needed for a better understanding of the current digital news environment (Mellado et al., 2020). A previous study, by Hermida in 2020, looked at audience participation and social media platforms' stance in the digital era by utilising gatekeeping as a perspective; that is, it considered gatekeeping from the post-publication viewpoint. Through this temporal lens, that study explored audiences, platforms, paraphernalia, and practices that shape gatekeeping and through which it can be viewed.

The dissertation enters the discussion of post-publication gatekeeping and, as Hermida (2020) recommended, explores different kinds of factors and practices that shape news after its publication. This study utilised Hermida's factors of audiences, practices, and platforms but considered the fourth factor, that of paraphernalia, embedded in the platform factor. Platforms are technological constellations, and paraphernalia alone is not a factor that has the power to shape news post-publication. A platform is needed to mediate or display the news. For example, a mobile device alone does not automatically mean news can be consumed; it needs a browser or another application to access the news.

In response to the changes in the digital news environment described above, I argue here that we need to look at post-publication gatekeeping from the perspectives of social interactionality, visibility, and regulations. Firstly, social interaction and social interactional practices such as liking, sharing, and commenting are important to understand so that we better comprehend the (two-way) relationship between news media and audiences and also the practices by which news is interacted with. This has been highlighted also by Bro and Wallberg (2014, p. 453), who noted that we need a better sense of the practices of news commenting and other such factors that influence gatekeeping. Secondly, it is important to connect the role of visibility to the idea of post-publication gatekeeping. Visibility is one of the major characteristics of social media platforms (Hermida & Mellado, 2020), yet the views of audiences and the output gate of news media in general are studied very little in connection with visual gatekeeping (cf. Schwalbe et al., 2015); that is, scholars seldom tackle what kinds of visuals are chosen for publication and how they circulate. Thirdly, we also need a deeper look at how regulation – by legislation and journalism ethics – can be understood through the lens of post-publication gatekeeping in a constantly changing regulatory environment. While prior work (e.g., Seuri et al., 2022) has identified a link between traditional gatekeeping and regulations, with post-publication gate-

keeping representing a new line of gatekeeping studies, we do not yet understand how regulations shape the digital news environment and processes of news from that temporal perspective.

Therefore, this dissertation addresses the following questions:

- 1) *What kinds of social interactional practices related to post-publication gatekeeping do audiences and news media engage in within the setting of news media's social media accounts?*
- 2) *How is visibility intertwined with the factors and practices connected with post-publication gatekeeping?*
- 3) *How are legislation and journalism ethics intertwined with the factors and practices connected with post-publication gatekeeping?*

This study was conducted by means of a multi-method approach (Loosen & Schmidt, 2016). Emphasis was on qualitative methods, such as qualitative content analysis and interviews, but the first two sub-studies were supported by numerical evidence through tabulation of instances and descriptive statistics. Taking a multi-method approach, especially with the use of multiple qualitative methods, supported my main intention, which was not to obtain generalisable results but, rather, to understand the nature of and phenomena behind the post publication gatekeeping that takes place in the digital news environment. The study's perspective on the philosophy of science – namely, social constructionism – supports that intention. Social constructionism sees the understanding of the world as constructed between people through daily interactions (Burr, 2015, p. 4) or between human and non-human participants in a networked manner (Latour, 2005). Therefore, this dissertation is anchored in seeing how the reality of gatekeeping is constructed jointly with journalistic actors and others who shape the production or processes of news. With regard more specifically to post publication gatekeeping, this study sees that it constructs different kinds of human and non-human actors and that, besides news media, audiences and algorithmic platforms jointly take part in constructing our understanding of (the post-publication) reality.

To provide answers to the research questions and speak to the study's aim – of understanding the triadic relationship of news media (newspapers), audiences, and social media platforms in the digital news environment in the Finnish context – three sub-studies were conducted for this compilation dissertation. The first sub-study (Salonen et al., 2023b), carried out in the context of four Finnish newspapers' Facebook accounts, explored how the social interactional relationship between news media and audiences unfolds in conversations on a social media platform in terms of post-publication gatekeeping. It argued that social interactional practices are a post-publication gatekeeping factor and introduced the concept of conversational gatekeeping. That is, through social interaction, journalists and social media audiences are able to build mutual understanding and create norms while also deciding on the content/action that is appropriate or wanted in the public news space formed on the particular online platform.

The second sub-study (Salonen & Laaksonen, 2023), set in the context of four Finnish newspapers' Instagram accounts, contributed to emerging theories of post-publication gatekeeping by showing how different kinds of conversational gatekeeping practices emerge at micro level in the multimodal context of Instagram. The study argues that visuality is a post-publication gatekeeping factor but also that visuality is connected to the practices of post-publication gatekeeping. It introduced the typology of conversational gatekeeping styles (with affirmative, critical, corrective, and invitational styles) that helps one understand the social interactional relationship between news media and their audiences, alongside the micro-level practices of post-publication gatekeeping.

Lastly, the third sub-study (Salonen et al., 2023a), with a context of three Finnish newspapers, examined datafied news work from the perspective of post-publication gatekeeping and how (audience) data form part of editorial decision-making in news media from news workers' perceptions. The sub-study extended and empirically validated Hermida's (2020) post-publication gatekeeping framework, and argues that regulations – legislation and journalism ethics – are a post-publication gatekeeping factor and that audience data shape editorial decision-making and, thereby, processes of gatekeeping.

In its contribution to theory overall, this dissertation has revised, empirically validated, and extended our understanding of post-publication gatekeeping and the factors and practices related to it. The study found that post-publication gatekeeping constructs multiple intertwined, iterative factors and practices that shape and through which gatekeeping can be viewed post-publication and that give feedback to editorial decision making that takes place in newsrooms. Accordingly, this dissertation presents an argument that news media share gatekeeping power with the platforms and audiences that are iteratively influenced by each other and by regulations and various kinds of practices related to news.

At the same time, this dissertation holds practical implications for journalism and for newsroom practices. For example, the first sub-study articulated the notion that, though news media and audiences create the norms for social media discussions jointly, audience members decide on the norms themselves if news media are not present in the conversations. This can lead to decisions based on, for example, audience members thinking it is okay to use racist slurs and engage in hate speech. Therefore, it is pivotal for news media to be present and to monitor and moderate their social media discussions such that they can perform their gatekeeping duties. This is important also because the code of ethics established by the Finnish Press Council requires news media to monitor their social media discussions and remove content that violates human rights and privacy (Council for Mass Media in Finland, 2023). It is vital to recognise also that the triadic relationship of news media, audiences, and social media platforms calls for shared responsibility; that is, besides news media, audiences and social media platforms should do their part to keep discussion environments safe and ethical. Human participants with fuller understanding of the context, language, and culture are especially necessary.

The second sub-study too made some practical contributions. For example, it illuminated news media's great invitational power to invite audience members to join in forming the final journalistic product through social media commenting. By deciding what visuals and what kinds of visual frames to use, news media exercise power to control their Instagram account's visual flow and invite audiences to those visually initiated conversations that they particularly wish for. Instagram as a highly visual environment (Gibbs et al., 2015) is particularly alluring to news media for making such visual invitations. Since news consumption has grown more and more into visual formats and platforms (Newman et al., 2023), it is all the more crucial for news organisations to recognise the importance and power of visuality in connection with social media news production.

From the standpoint of sub-study III, this dissertation suggests that news media should closely monitor and review their gatekeeping practices and responsibilities in relation to the EU's new 'Digital Acts' and journalism ethics. For example, news workers expressed hopes that in the future they would be able to follow how their audiences migrate from one platform to another. In preparing its Digital Markets Act, the EU aimed to enable cross-platform actions (European Commission, 2023e), which could and should mean that news media get access to multiple customer paths, on different platforms. With regard to journalism ethics, this study suggests that (Finnish) news media pay more attention to ethical aspects of audience data use and general newsroom practices. The Finnish Press Council is revising its code of ethics, with the new version to come into force in 2024. As a member of that council and of the working group that is doing the revising, I make a strong recommendation, supported by the findings of this study, that newsrooms pay close attention to audience members' positions in relation to news, especially in the digital news environment.

Now that I have briefly introduced the dissertation and explained 'what this is all about', I can introduce the theoretical framework for the dissertation, in Chapter 2. It draws on previous literature on the digital news environment, the audience turn, and gatekeeping. By the end of the chapter, I build a picture of the study's aim and research questions, revisiting them in that light. The third chapter presents the methodology and unpacks how each sub-study was conducted, also from an ethics standpoint. After this, the fourth one summarises the original articles (the reports on the sub-studies) and the key findings that they brought forth. Then, the fifth and final chapter discusses and joins together the sub-studies, and it presents limitations along with future directions for the next generation of (post-publication) gatekeeping scholars. That chapter concludes with discussion evaluating the study.

Before moving on to those chapters, I want to introduce my positionality as a journalism researcher in brief and the personal perspectives from which I conducted the work for this dissertation. Self-reflexivity is important for a study's transparency (Tracy, 2013, p. 229). I view my positionality as rooted in the experience I have gained as a (news) media consumer and journalist thus far in my life. Therefore, I want to reveal something about myself and how I see the world of news and journalism.

## 1.1 The Researcher's Positionality

My earliest memories of news media come from the portion of my life when I was around 5–7 years old. I can remember the regional radio station (Yle Radio Keski-Suomi) playing on our kitchen radio, and the public service (YLE) and commercial (MTV3) evening news marked important moments in our daily news routines. In addition, our regional newspaper, *Keskisuomalainen*, appeared every morning in the mailbox right outside our family's house, and the cartoons at the back of that broadsheet were a must-read every day. I can also remember when the recession hit in the 1990s and we were no longer subscribing to the regional newspaper. The evening news probably became even more important then. So I would describe myself as familiarised with news from early on.

The next big 'media memory' is from when we started receiving cable TV. That was a huge thing in those days, at the turn of the millennium, when entertainment still hinged on having a DVD player at home and the Internet was a luxury, for only a few families. I can still remember watching CNN's live broadcasting on a television set in my room and seeing how the second plane hit the World Trade Center's twin towers on 11 September 2001. It was my first year of high school. After that, my media memories became bound up with the early years of social media. I remember MySpace being a 'big thing' but somehow not attracting me. Then came IRC-galleria, the Finnish version of an early social media site, on which I got hooked. I was a first-year student of speech communication at the University of Jyväskylä, and the year was 2005. In the previous year, I had started to work at the regional radio station that we used to listen to on that radio in the kitchen. I think that is when my identity as something more than a news consumer started to develop. I became a journalist, continuing in that capacity for a couple of years. Besides working for the regional radio station, I worked for the local weekly in my 20s. I remember also how I heard about Facebook for the first time. It was 2006, and I was visiting Berlin and my exchange-student friends from Potsdam over New Year's. They told me that there is a thing called Facebook where you could connect with your friends and that it is going to be huge. I believe it was in late 2006 or early 2007 that I joined Facebook – as soon as the networking site became available in our region. Because I was among the first people in Finland to do so, I would therefore call myself an early adopter of social media.

In 2015, I was finishing my master's studies and found myself working for our university as a research assistant after Professor Stephen Croucher asked me to join his research team in the field of intercultural communication. The next year, I ended up working for the university's journalism division, and there began my path to becoming a journalism scholar. I started my doctoral studies in the spring of 2019, and over the past few years I have built myself an identity as a journalism but also a social media researcher.

News is important to my day-to-day life, and, regrettably, news and social media are the first things I check every morning, in my bed as I wake up – they

constitute my spatial and temporal post-publication gatekeeping practices, as Alfred Hermida (2020) might say. I am keen on understanding the world of news and journalism more thoroughly and deeply. I am also a staunch advocate of audiences' rights, and that is probably what drew me into the 'business of journalism ethics' in the form of becoming a member of the Finnish Press Council in 2021. Past years have also seen me work on research projects through which I have maintained close contact with some of the newspapers studied in the dissertation project. So I see myself as somewhat biased toward advocacy for 'legitimate news', but I also see myself as someone who does criticise and thinks very critically when looking at the news, especially how the items are framed and portrayed on social media. Therefore, even though my spirit and background are pro-news, I feel that I can maintain objectivity relative to news and journalism, and I believe I have been able to do so. Above all, I feel that my highly critical nature is important for me as a researcher. At this juncture, I need to state that my supervisor, Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, has described me as a stubborn individual who is always critical, no matter what is said or who says it. I find that a pretty good reflection of me and my soul as a researcher. Thus I could ensure that every step of this study needed to pass my personal 'critical gate' and that I have thoroughly pondered each step that I have taken in the process of writing the dissertation.

## 2 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study consists of three intertwined elements. I begin my presentation of it by looking at the current digital news environment, which can be described as highly datafied and dependent on algorithmic platforms. Secondly, I tease out the effects of the so-called audience turn in journalism and journalism research, before, thirdly, looking at all the aforementioned aspects in light of gatekeeping theory and explaining the historical development of the theory in view of today's conditions.

### 2.1 The Digital News Environment

The highly digitalised society around us can be described with the *platform society* concept, which was introduced by van Dijck et al. (2018). With the concept, they refer to a society in which social, cultural, technological, economic, and (geo)political structures are intertwined within a highly corporate global platform ecosystem that is driven by algorithms and fuelled by data (pp. 4–5). The concept is closely connected to ideas of *platformisation*, a notion that, for Poell et al. (2019), involves platforms having transformed our way of living such that every aspect of public and social life – including journalism, transportation, entertainment, education, finance, and health care – is tied to globally operating platforms such as those of Meta, Google, and Amazon. Another concept for tackling the ubiquitous digitalisation and socio-technological transformation processes of the 21st century is the *digital trinity*: platformisation, algorithmisation, and datafication of society (Latzer, 2021).

In practice, in the context of news, this means, for example, that third-party platforms are entering use in increasing numbers for news distribution, with those platforms being run by algorithmic recommendation systems that dictate the visibility level of news items. Further, datafication in the newsrooms is evident as audiences' digital footprints get followed and decisions get made in light of audience practices made visible through (and therefore quantified via) metrics.



Through these examples and concepts, it becomes clear that the *digital news environment* where news items circulate and interact is increasingly datafied and dependent on (and intertwined with) algorithmic platforms. That is, the digital news environment is to a great extent embedded in the structures of platform society.

### 2.1.1 Platform and (News) Media Regulation

News that is published in a digital news environment and then circulates there is regulated by the legislation of each country and region and by journalism's self-regulatory boards and guidelines. Throughout the remainder of the dissertation, I use the term 'regulations' to refer jointly to legislation and journalism ethics. The level of regulation depends upon which part of the world is involved in the situation we are looking at. Regulation can be contextual in other respects also; for example, it may be particular to the social media moderation that takes place in newsrooms. Next, I pay closer attention to the regulations that shape and influence news and its production, looking firstly at the legislative angle (mainly with regard to how the EU regulates social media platforms and their users, including news organisations) and secondly at how journalism ethics can be seen as a regulatory factor in the digital news environment.

Since this study adopted a Western viewpoint, regulation is presented from that viewpoint. In the US and Europe, the most powerful platforms that shape and form the basis for our platform society are the US-based Alphabet/Google, Amazon, Meta, Apple, and Microsoft (GAMAM), or the Big Five as van Dijck et al. (2018) term them. Their platforms, which offer a forum for news publication and consumption, are regulated by regional and national laws both. Regulating these legislatively is a burdensome task in that these platforms each have their own rules and are subject to several sets of regulations, with many US-based platform companies having been reluctant to apply regulations imposed by the EU in such domains as how data generated via the platforms get transferred between the US and the EU (Chee, 2023). It is noteworthy also that the news media themselves are users of these platforms – they do not own or fully control the accounts that they maintain on the platforms. News audiences have even less control when acting in settings of news media's social media accounts: basically, their power extends only to interacting with the news posts that news media have produced and published. This power imbalance – or should we say supremacy of the platform companies – is part of the reason the EU has now started to regulate social media platforms more heavily.

It is good to bear in mind that there is an entirely separate platform society if we look beyond the Western viewpoint. China's state-controlled platform society is run mostly by the country's 'big three' tech companies: Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent (BAT). Even though these societies are separate from each other, one platform does unite them: TikTok, which has gained popularity for news and other use in the Western world (Newman et al., 2023), originates from China, in whose markets it is known as Douyin. At the same time, TikTok has raised regulatory questions in the Western world in realms such as privacy on account of its

connections to Chinese officials. Questions of the same kind have arisen from operations on the Western side, because some of the platform companies based there have grown so big that their power can negatively affect markets and democracies both, and they struggle with operating transparently (van Dijck, 2021). Identifying platform governance as a concern, van Dijck (2021) has stressed that future focus should be on the structures of platformisation rather than on tech companies' leverage and number of platforms. This could render it possible to influence the future of our platform society more effectively and pinpoint the structures and technologies behind it. Clearly, then, regulatory aspects are crucial for the future direction of platform society.

On the EU level, regulation of platforms has now begun a new shift. Some new 'Digital Acts' that regulate the use of data and digital services have already come into force. In 2022, the Data Governance Act (DGA), Digital Services Act (DSA), and Digital Markets Act (DMA) saw daylight. The Data Act, taking a stance on access to and distribution of data (European Commission, 2023a), and the AI Act, for guaranteed safety and transparency of the artificial-intelligence (AI) systems used in the EU region (European Commission, 2023b), are due to enter force in the near future (as of writing this in the fall of 2023). Below, I look at the acts that are already in effect and their impact on the journalistic field.

The Data Governance Act's purpose is to increase trust and availability in data's sharing and reuse and to support common European data spaces in the public and private sector alike, facilitating the sharing of data across these sectors (European Commission, 2023c). The Digital Services Act takes a stance on responsibilities associated with digital services (i.e., platform companies' services); it allows the EU to adopt a stance to illegal content that circulates in the digital environment. This entails, for example, according any user the right to flag illegal content online and opening the reasons behind platforms' content moderation to being contested by users (European Commission, 2023d). Users now hold more rights to their own digital content and over surveillance of online spaces. The Digital Markets Act, in turn, is aimed at the identification of large-scale digital platforms that provide so-called core platform services (such as the Big Five), those that the EU calls gatekeepers. Entities identified by the EU as 'gatekeepers' have to comply with obligations and prohibitions listed in the DMA (European Commission, 2023e). By using the term 'gatekeeper platform', the EU has striven to highlight the central, crucial position that these giant platforms have in our daily activities - their supremacy. This reflects how much platformisation has influenced our life and why finally regulating these US-based platforms in the EU region is important.

In practice, this means, for example, that Amazon and Google are not allowed to favour or give greater visibility to their own products and services at the expense of their competitors'. In addition, the 'gatekeepers' need to support data transfer and compatibility by enabling messages between WhatsApp and Telegram, for instance. The DSA and DMA's 'grace period' is about to end (the new set of rules starts to apply in late 2023 and early 2024), so the major platforms ('gatekeepers') must begin following these new regulations in their everyday

practices very soon. It should prove very interesting to see how these platforms enable, for example, cross-platform data flows and the handling of these flows. For news media, this could mean that tracking of customers' paths on multiple platforms might become available.

Before the era of Digital Acts, of various kinds, the General Data Protection Regulation, which came into force in 2018, probably was the strongest guiding regulation at EU level for the current digital news business. The aim behind the GDPR has been to prevent personal data breaches (Kunova, 2018): the information that news organisations gather from their audiences needs to be handled with care, so that they don't breach anyone's rights and unnecessarily disclose personal data. News media do enjoy some GDPR-linked exemptions that allow journalists to do their work more freely. For example, journalists don't need consent to process personal data when they prepare or publish news stories, even if they store news story materials for a longer period (Hallamaa, 2018). The GDPR hence has had stronger impacts on the business side than on creating journalistic content.

Some of the positive effects of regulation and of the power of the GDPR over the news business in Europe have become visible very recently, while others remain in process. In Australia, news businesses won a battle over their content in 2021 as Meta and Google were forced to start paying to use that news content on their platforms upon the country's passage of a law that requires platform operators to do so (Kaye, 2022). This marked the first case of the tech giants being compelled to start compensating news organisations. A similar uprising against the platforms unfolded in Canada in 2023, when passing the Online News Act meant that the law would start forcing platform companies to pay for the use of news content. This resulted in Meta withdrawing all news content from its platform in June 2023, and currently (in December 2023) there is no news circulating on Meta-owned platforms in Canada (Tuomasjukka, 2023). This situation, which could be described as deplatformisation of news, could have major consequences for democracy, news consumption, and information-sharing in the region. In Europe, the GDPR has provided leverage for several countries where news organisations have started seeking compensation for news content. So far, France and Germany have been successful, Denmark is currently negotiating the amount of compensation, and some news businesses in Finland are expected to start negotiations in 2024 (Tuomasjukka, 2023).

This compensation enabled by regulations is already bringing huge changes to the power relations between news organisations and platform companies. Monetisation in the current digital news environment has been among the agenda-topping questions for news media, especially newspapers. Platform companies such as Meta and Google have taken a greater share of advertising and similar revenues in the past few years, but now they are being forced to provide remuneration. We will probably see many (court) battles in this field before money starts flowing steadily from the platform companies' coffers to news organisations. With the amount of news content that is produced in the English language being so vast, it is no wonder that the platforms are fighting back, as

witnessed in a counteroffensive under way in Canada. Remuneration processes here in the Nordic region might get implemented more easily, because the amount of news content in Finnish, Swedish, etc. is much smaller. This is, of course, something we will learn about in the coming years when more countries and news organisations start to make use of the compensation opportunities that the EU laws provide.

Alongside legislation, codes of journalism ethics hold regulatory power over news media and journalistic work. From the perspective of media accountability, journalism's ethics and values can be seen as internal factors in accountability whereas legislation is an external factor (Eberwein et al., 2019). National press councils are an example of the internal forces in that they are often regarded as the highest authority for ethics in journalism. In Finland, the Council for Mass Media in Finland (Julkisen sanan neuvosto, or JSN), also referred to as the Finnish Press Council, is the institution that sets forth the guidelines for journalistic self-regulation and supervises journalism to ensure that it is conducted ethically yet also such that the freedom of the press does not get jeopardised. Ever since it was founded, in 1968, the Finnish Press Council has provided a code of ethics for steering decisions within the journalistic field.

If we look at codes of ethics for news media in general, four roles in the journalistic field can be pinpointed, according to Fox et al. (2023): *action-guiding* that provides normative guidance to the field, *disciplinary* that backs up rules by sanctions, *public-facing* wherein the public are consulted about the performance of news media, and *identity-forming* with which a code of ethics is written so as to lay a foundation for professional identity. In research that analysed the codes of ethics of 12 European councils, Fox et al. (2023) saw the Finnish code of ethics, sometimes also referred to as journalistic guidelines, as serving the normative role of guiding the action. With regard to the case of the Finnish council, I as a member of the press council would argue that our code of ethics covers all four functions to at least some extent, even though they are not clearly expressed in the written statement that Fox and colleagues analysed. The Finnish Press Council imposes sanctions on those news media that are found to have not been following the guidelines (the news medium and channel in question must publish announcements of these). I personally exemplify the code's public-facing action as I serve on the council as a member of the public and make sure that the views of the public are heard in the council's discussion of cases. Through the work we do as a council, I see also that the mentality in the field is such that Finnish news media and journalists are diligent in following the guidelines, which is something they take pride in. Why not all of these roles are clearly visible in the current code of ethics is, of course, a good question. The Finnish Press Council is revising its code of ethics in 2023–2024 because it is aware that these guidelines, which were most recently revised 10 years ago, are not up to date, especially in light of platform companies' and algorithmic systems' immense influence on the news business (Salonen, 2023). Against this backdrop, I look next at the mechanisms and

structures underlying the social media platforms that now exert such a great influence on the way news is portrayed and circulated in the digital news environment.

### 2.1.2 Social Media Logic and Characteristics

Besides understanding the structures behind the platform society and the companies involved, looking at the logic according to which these platforms function and shape the field of news is important. It is noteworthy that platformisation and platform logic are overlapping concepts: platform logic can be seen to be embedded in platformisation. One of the earlier studies to cover social media logic was the one in which van Dijck and Poell (2013) introduced the notion that social media logic follows and has become entangled with mass media logic.

Mass media logic, also referred to as media or news logic, has been characterised as institutions becoming part of media culture and, correspondingly, media penetrating all domains of day-to-day life (Altheide & Snow, 1979), whereas social media logic is described as ‘the processes, principles, and practices through which these platforms process information, news, and communication, and more generally, how they channel social traffic’ (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 5). The latter logic is seen as extending into four domains of guidance to social media platforms: *programmability*, which refers to platforms having the ability to trigger and steer users’ communication with the aid of their algorithms while users have the ability to influence the flow of communication through their interaction; *popularity*, which is best characterised in terms of the functions of algorithms, since these play a major role in dictating what kinds of content and interaction are given prominence and become popular while simultaneously being influenced by user-side interaction; *connectivity*, which involves the socio-technical structures of networked platforms that connect and afford content to users and with advertisers; and *datafication*, which entails both predicting user actions and using the predictions as fuel for platforms’ functions. In a sense, programmability, popularity, and connectivity all are grounded in the conditions of datafication (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 9), since platforms’ performance is generally measured through user metrics. In sum, before the rise of the Internet and its social media platforms, mass media had nearly full control of the information environment and its content, but now control and circulation of information items, such as news stories, is shared with algorithmic platforms.

In practice, news media have been balancing between these two logics, ideas amid the implementation of platformisation ever since the platform system began coalescing, in the lead-up to the 2010s. News media have expressed doubts about the ways in which they can perform and produce content on social media platforms (Caplan & boyd, 2018) and about how much newsroom metrics influence or should influence the ways journalism is conducted (Tandoc, 2019; Tenor, 2023). This balancing act has led researchers to ponder the situation from different angles in the past few years. For example, research has examined competing communicative logics between Facebook posts and article teasers on news me-

dia's Web sites (Haim et al., 2021) and delved into the use of questions or question marks in Facebook posts as calls to action (Haim et al., 2021; Lauk et al., 2019). A study-report compilation from 2023, *the Digital Journalism special issue on platformization of news*, has now articulated the notion that news media have in many ways adopted the platform logic and that said logic has merged with news logic and become embodied in journalistic routines and working practices (Hartley et al., 2023). This is evidenced in, for example, the ways in which stories and framings get designed for social media platforms (Hågvar, 2019; Hartley et al., 2023). The rivalry between these two logics and their merging with one another has been a timely topic over the past decade.

Returning to ideas of social media logic that can be seen as a part of the platform and even media logic, Hermida and Mellado (2020) talk about the dimensions of social media logics and characteristics of social media that become apparent in forms of journalistic norms and practices. These characteristics they cite are structure and design, aesthetics, genre conventions, rhetorical practices, and interaction mechanisms and intentionality. Further along, I undertake closer inspection of the interaction mechanism and aesthetics that highlight the social interactional and visual nature of social media platforms. Regarding the interaction mechanism, Hermida and Mellado (2020) described social media platforms as affording social interactionality by favouring some forms of interaction more than others, and they used the notion of aesthetics to denote verbal and visual styles of social media spaces. Gibbs et al. (2015) point out that every platform has its vernacular nature; for example, Instagram's is related to highly visual forms and modes of communication. If we look at Facebook, we can identify the conversations and social interaction taking place on the platform as facets of its vernacular nature; after all, the platform was designed to enable connections through interactions among its users (Bruns, 2018, pp. 71–72; Kavada, 2015). In general, social media have accentuated the social interactional relationships on the platforms (van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

If we turn our attention to the news use on Instagram and Facebook, the Digital News Reports of Oxford University's Reuters Institute give us good insight into recent years. From comparing between the reports for the years 2019 and 2023, it becomes clear that Facebook has managed to retain its position as the number-one social media platform for news, but at the same time it is obvious that consumption of news is increasingly taking place on highly visual platforms such as Instagram (Newman et al., 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). In the case of Finland, around 30% use Facebook for news and around 10% use Instagram for news. The percentage has stayed nearly the same for Facebook for the past five years, but in the same span of time Instagram has nearly doubled its percentage of news consumers in Finland, from 6% to 10% (Newman et al., 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). Noting this phenomenon is important because scholarship on journalism on visual social media is a research area that has not yet been given very much attention (Bossio, 2021) and because journalism in visual formats has become embedded in everyday social media practices (Highfield, 2019).

Visuality of news has been studied in general terms in the digital news environment (by, for example, Ferrer Conill et al., 2021) and specifically in the context of social media platforms (e.g., Bossio, 2021; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022), but more studies would shed light on the nature and specific features of visual social media (Highfield, 2019), and, as Ferrer Conill et al. (2021) point out, we need to learn more about the fragility of visual boundaries in a digital news environment. A similar conclusion about the state of research on visual social media was expressed in a study review that was conducted in previous work by my colleagues and me (Salonen et al., 2021). In the review, which looked at previous research that had studied journalism in social media platforms, it became clear that most of the studies had focused on textual elements of social media rather than looking at either the visual elements or the multimodality (text and visuals jointly) of social media platforms.

What all of this means in terms of journalism in the digital news environment is that the logics and characteristics of social media are something many news organisations and journalists nowadays take into account when they plan their content and products for social media, intentionally or unintentionally (Hendrickx, 2021). Journalism has merged its logic into the logic of platforms, which can create opportunities but also threats, as recent research by my colleagues and I (Ehrlén et al., 2023) highlights: platform- and content-related confusion can occur among young audiences, especially when news media content conveyed via social media mimics general social media content and comes in quick snippets mixed with all other kinds of social media content. In practice, this leaves some members of young audiences confused about the content they encounter on social media in regards to whether the content is a legitimate news item or just a piece of content of the usual sort that circulates through social media. While the study did not look more closely at the elements that cause the news items to resemble other kinds of social media content, one can assume that visual characteristics of social media play some kind of role here.

In conclusion, social media logic and characteristics have a major role in shaping news items that circulate in the digital news environment. Highly visual social media platforms are popular places for news consumption (Newman et al., 2023) and also afford related discussion in the course of providing for conversation, one of the main functions of social media (Kavada, 2015). The latter feature is highlighted by Marchionni (2013), who argues that journalism is being seen increasingly as conversations between journalists and their audiences – that is, as a two-way relationship. This is something I explore more in the next section.

## **2.2 News Audiences in the Digital News Environment**

Journalism and journalism studies have experienced an increased interest toward journalistic audiences. Both have started to embrace audiences instead of ignoring them or taking them for granted, the latter having very much epitomised 20th-century journalism. Of course, ‘letters to the editor’ and other such channels

were available in the pre-Internet era, but decidedly less emphasis was given to audience preferences, and the relationship was mostly top-down. With the journalistic field having suffered from revenue and trust issues ever since the Internet's profile began growing in this domain, at the dawn of the 21st century, news media worldwide started to recognise that the digital news environment demands a two-way relationship with their audiences (Nelson, 2021). The Finnish context was no exception: here, the news-media industry has faced struggles similar to those that Nelson (2021) cast it as facing in the US. However, in Finland the struggle is more on the revenue side and focused on maintaining one's audiences, given that Finns' trust in journalism has remained the highest in the world for some years now (see, for example, Newman et al., 2023). Matikainen and Villi (2015) echo the notion that audiences in the Finnish context are no longer passive watchers but, rather, participative as they take part in the production and distribution of news. This two-way relationship highlighted by Nelson (2021) and by Matikainen and Villi (2015) can be described under the term 'journalist-audience relationship' or, giving the spotlight not to a single journalist but to the institution or an organisation, by reference to the news-media-audience relationship. The associated attention to the audiences of journalism has been conceptualised and discussed increasingly in the last few years. It is what I delve into next.

### 2.2.1 The Audience Turn

The concept of the *audience turn*, introduced by Costera Meijer (2013, 2020), probably supplies one of the terms employed most often to highlight journalism's and journalism studies' heightened interest in the audience's position, behaviour, and preferences in the context of news (e.g., Hendrickx, 2023a; Swart et al., 2022). It brings out the sense of journalists' fear of losing their autonomy and/or giving excessive emphasis to audience preferences and of, thereby, eroding the quality of the journalism. However, the changes wrought by 21st-century digitalisation have prompted newsrooms to follow their revenue streams – in this case, their paying customers and audiences – even at the expense of the quality discourse in journalism.

In respect of the audience turn, Costera Meijer (2020) listed four 'tipping points' that the news media industry has weathered between 1995 and 2020, by reflecting on the Dutch media landscape. The first came with the growing popularity of commercial TV news (such as 'reality TV' shows) in the 1980s and 1990s. It drew attention towards audiences, but the actors still largely ignored audience preferences, anchoring their rationale in journalism's quality discourse. Second is the professional's increased awareness of informed citizens in the early years of the new millennium, which meant that journalism became more interested in people's day-to-day life and that the quality discourse grew more inclusive, such that 'softer news' became regarded as somewhat newsworthy. The will of the audience still remained marginal to decisions, though. With the third tipping point, audiences' expanding role became apparent in the revenue streams by the end of the first decade of the millennium. Platform companies started gobbling up the majority of the advertising revenue; therefore, news media needed to steer



their business toward more subscription-based and digitised models. This meant also that audience preferences started to matter more. The fourth and final tipping point, affecting where we currently stand, involves large-scale implementation of audience metrics and a 'digital first' policy; news is increasingly made for digital and social media platforms, and a close eye is kept on how much time users spend with news items and how news items are interacted with by clicking, liking, commenting, and such. With the experience of this final impetus, audiences have truly become central figures and embedded in journalism.

Their embeddedness becomes articulated clearly also through such notions as participatory or engaged journalism. Batsell (2015) has spoken of the second half of the 20th century as an era of disengaged journalism: it was an age of one-way mass media that did not pay attention to audience interaction. In contrast, for 21st-century journalism to be engaged it needs to invest in its audiences so that they develop a habit of coming back to the news medium's content and thus converting audience attention into revenue (Batsell, 2015, pp. 2-3). The concept of participatory journalism (Holton et al., 2016; Singer et al., 2011) highlights the changing nature of the journalist-audience relationship also with regard to growing reciprocity: journalists are more open to interacting and even learning from their audiences.

Furthermore, audience participation (or lack of it) is sometimes described with the term 'engagement'. Oftentimes, interaction taking place on social media platforms is quantified or observed through platforms' affordances that become apparent through metrics for engagement that are likes, shares, comments, etc. Studying audience engagement is a very complex matter, as Steensen et al. (2020) showed by introducing a heuristic theory for audience engagement under which measurement of audience engagement has to take into account the technical-behavioural, emotional, normative, and spatiotemporal facets. That is, it is not solely the platform metrics that need to be accounted for; for example, one must be aware of the emotions and beliefs behind the audience actions manifested in the metrics. Another perspective on audience engagement attends to culture. Demonstrated by a 2023 study by Ferrer Conill et al., it focuses on 'cultures of engagement' that reflect how audiences engage - in their case, with news posts on Facebook. They found that audiences' engagement cultures varied between one Scandinavian news outlet and the other.

Other terms have been applied to describe the actions and relations between news media and audiences. One that has been used for capturing the connectedness and reciprocal relationship between journalists / news media and the audiences is 'social interaction'. This term, which highlights the relational level of audience engagement and stresses the human participants' connection to news consumption (Hermida, 2012, p. 317), has been used to highlight audience participation in the form of gatekeeping in social media (Bro & Wallberg, 2014). Additionally, in the context of social media studies, the term 'social interaction' can be regarded as having a powerful connotation in creating an understanding of the power dynamics that manifest themselves on platforms, as van Dijck and Poell

(2013, p. 2) articulated well in stating that ‘social media have changed the rules and conditions of social interaction’.

### 2.2.2 Negotiating Norms through Content Moderation

Talking about power dynamics leads us to one function connected with audiences’ social interactional behaviour that has become central alongside the rise of the audience turn, that is, content moderation (Gillespie, 2023). Content moderation affects audiences’ ability to comment and participate with news. It is an excellent example of the power play among social media platforms, news media, and audiences. In the bigger picture, social media platforms themselves are the ones that can fully control the moderation on them – of course, within the limitations of the legislation of the given country and region. News media can moderate and control what has been published on their social media accounts within the tools that social media platforms have afforded them, in the manner they find suitable for their purposes. News audiences have less extensive means to participate in the moderation, but they can notify social media platforms and news media about the content that they feel is in need of review.

We can look at this power play at a more detail-oriented level. News content and, more generally, all content that audiences consume and interact with by commenting on social-media platforms is nowadays pre- or post-moderated at least to some degree. Content-moderation work on the platforms is performed by human actors or may be automated. The human actors consist of moderators employed indirectly by the platform companies, for example, Meta uses subcontractors for its moderators (Njanja, 2022), alongside regular users of the platform who can flag content they think is offensive (Gillespie, 2018, p. 87). Platforms also moderate by automated means; that is, they are able to filter out unwanted content that circulates on platforms and that they deem inappropriate. Platforms are able to detect undesired content that takes the form of videos or photos relatively easily, but when it comes to understanding the context and ‘small languages’ such as Finnish, moderation lags behind (Gillespie, 2018, p. 97; Roberts, 2016, 2019).

If we look, then, at content moderation specifically in the case of journalism and Finland, the language issue places moderation on the textual level mostly in the hands of the news organisations that maintain their social media accounts. Especially when the news media actors want to decide what is accepted content and behaviour with their accounts by way of norm-building. Here too, moderation can be done either via in-house moderation or by buying ‘human-made’ moderation from outside – for example, from the Finnish News Agency (Suomen Tietotoimisto, STT) or from a company that can provide AI-facilitated moderation services, with Utopia being one such company in Finland (STT, 2023; Utopia, 2023). Moderation of audience comments is especially important, since the code of ethics obliges Finnish news media to either pre- or post-moderate audience comments (Council for Mass Media in Finland, 2023). In addition, audiences themselves can perform moderation tasks: they can use the flagging mechanism and report content through the platform’s affordances (Gillespie, 2018) or contact

newsrooms directly. It is good to keep in mind here that news organisations as much as their audiences are all just users on the platforms, as noted at the beginning of this subsection. Platforms hold the ultimate decision-making power over the visibility of all kinds of content, news content included, that circulates on them. This has led to a situation where news media need to balance their autonomy in decision-making and norm-building but also play by the rules of platform companies and social media logic.

Besides platforms' regulation power, legislation plays an important role in news media and platform regulation. In the case of Finland, the Finnish and EU-level laws need to be followed when news media, users, and the platform companies themselves operate in this domain. The aforementioned Digital Services Act recently introduced by the EU regulates content moderation on the platforms especially strongly. The DSA forces big platform companies to pay more attention to content moderation, and it also gives platform users more leverage to question the moderation decisions made by the platform players. For news media, this makes for interesting times, as they too are users who have rights and responsibilities in the eyes of the law yet, at the same time, the field is highly self-regulated. The current code of ethics of the Finnish Press Council highlights that user comments, while they are not journalistic content, are something news media need to carefully follow and take action on if human rights or privacy is jeopardised (Council for Mass Media in Finland, 2023). So, besides legislative factors, news media need to consider their own ethics. Even though journalism as a field is such that it tends to adhere assiduously to rules and regulations, it is good to bear in mind, as Gillespie (2023) notes, that solving problems that arise with social media content moderation should be mainly a responsibility of the platforms that are responsible for the problem existing. That is, people outside platform companies can do only so much even though regulatory factors and ethics do get considered.

### **2.2.3 Datafied Audiences**

Datafication of journalism was already briefly tackled in conjunction with our discussion of audience engagement and social media logic, but, since it is central for understanding the audience turn and is an in-built part of social media logic, it is good to take a deeper look at what it means. As audience engagement and social interaction are often viewed through quantitative measurements, the audiences of news have become increasingly datafied. Datafication generally entails digital data from all walks of life getting collected and analysed (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). In the case of journalism, this means that news has become increasingly quantified and that datafication shapes the production and consumption of news (Porlezza, 2023; Tenor, 2023). Furthermore, human interaction on digital platforms is turned into measurable digital traces (Breiter & Hepp, 2018), and audiences are able to influence editorial decision-making through the digital traces they leave (Tandoc & Vos, 2016). This attests to how datafication has shaped audiences' position in the news production.

Ferrer Conill and Tandoc (2018) put forth the notion that journalism as a field has changed so much that newsrooms have established various positions, such as social media manager, engagements manager, and analytics manager, that are responsible for audience engagement and providing the newsroom with insight from audience data. They have also pointed out that newsrooms balance between their civic duty to report what audiences need to know and what audiences want to know, with the latter often being interpreted via audience metrics (Ferrer Conill & Tandoc, 2018; Tandoc & Thomas, 2015). Journalistic autonomy is another factor tied in with civic duty, and in the age of audience metrics it represents a big question for the balancing act – namely, how much journalistic instinct and values guide the publication process vs. how much audience metrics do (Tandoc & Thomas, 2015). Dodds et al. (2023) raised similar concerns that a shift toward datafied versions of audiences is creating questions about platform-dependency and editorial autonomy. For example, in the case of news conveyed via social media, audience metrics have had a crucial impact on ‘news softening’ on the Facebook pages of Belgian mainstream media outlets, according to Lamot (2022).

Another question with the use of audience metrics is how reliable or realistic the metrics can be considered. In general discussion, Pink et al. (2018) talk about how knowledge created through data is often ambiguous. Datafication may create a mismatch between data-generated understanding of an individual and the person’s own experience (Talvitie-Lamberg et al., 2022), a situation sometimes described with the concept of data double (e.g., Ruckenstein, 2014). Steensen et al.’s (2020) study backs up the contention that audience metrics alone cannot tell the whole truth. Hendrickx (2023a) too offer an important notion, by bringing the agency and deliberateness of online actions into scholarly discussion: audiences’ actions are many times incidental rather than deliberate.

Furthermore, with regard to digital news consumption, it is important to remember also that newspapers are still quite often read in print form, at least in Finland (Heikkilä et al., 2023, p. 93; Reunanen, 2022, p. 12). This too can ‘confuse’ the metrics, as a very recent finding by Heikkilä et al. (2023, p. 171) suggests: some readers of Finnish newspapers left several stories unread in the digital version because they wanted to save that reading experience for the print version. Bypassing the story online did not mean that these readers were uninterested. Quite the opposite. It is impossible to be aware of the bigger picture surrounding news consumption in the case of Finnish or Swedish newspapers, since mainly the digital-domain numbers are followed, and details from print and digital circulation seldom are examined jointly (Heikkilä et al., 2023, p. 36; Tenor, 2023). What is certain, however, is that the current news environment is highly digitised even for newspapers. The setting can be described also as a hybrid media system – that is, a complex combination of older and newer media forms (Chadwick, 2013) that interact with audiences and social media platforms.

In any case, the current media system, which I refer to as the digital news environment, has experienced changes, as vividly illustrated in the discussion

above covering platforms and audiences' roles. These changes have, in turn, influenced and shaped how we see the processes of news production and delivery, along with the theory that explains this – that of gatekeeping. This is what I untangle next.

### 2.3 Gatekeeping in the Digital News Environment

Gatekeeping is one of the foundational theories in the field of journalism studies. It was first introduced in 1947 by Kurt Lewin in the field of social psychology in the course of researching how food items found their way onto our kitchen tables through different channels, gates, and decision-makers (Lewin, 1947). A couple of years later, Lewin's apprentice David Manning White applied the idea in the context of news and researched how publication decisions were made by a wire editor of a morning newspaper, 'Mr Gates' (White, 1950). Ever since, scholars of gatekeeping theory have striven to explain the mechanisms and phenomena behind the processes that lead to news media's publication decisions. As Shoemaker and Vos (2009, p. 1) define it, gatekeeping is 'the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day', or, as Vos (2015, p. 4) states, gatekeeping answers the question 'How does news turn out the way it does?'

According to Shoemaker and Vos (2009) and Vos and Heinderyckx (2015), gatekeeping can be viewed at five levels of analysis or influence. At the *individual level*, studies have looked at how gatekeeping decisions are constructed by individual actors (e.g., Bissell, 2000; White, 1950). At the *communication routines level*, they have, for example, covered how routines make an impact on gatekeeping (e.g., Shoemaker et al., 2001). Studies at the *organisational level* have sought answers to how, for example, gatekeeping practices form in organisations (Gans, 1979). From an even broader perspective, research has explored a *social institutions level*, examining, for example, how Silicon Valley as a social institution affects journalism (Vos & Russell, 2019), while others consider how social and cultural contexts at *social system level* influence gatekeeping, as in the case of the Syrian conflict (Pantti, 2015). Jointly all these levels highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of gatekeeping. Vos (2015, p. 4) saw also that the levels together represent a set of factors that exert forces 'as information moves back and forth through the news construction process'. This means that different kinds of factors shape the process of gatekeeping in different (temporal) phases of the process.

If we then look at gatekeeping theory and how technological changes have influenced past studies, we find that the field's theory has followed all the major technological advancements involving journalism since the 1950s. Abbott and Brassfield (1989) compared print and electronic media, and Berkowitz (1990) studied the gatekeeping processes of local television news. In the online context, Meraz and Papacharissi (2013) looked at the rise of news events on social media, Singer (2014) researched user-generated visibility on media Web sites, and Wel-

bers and Opgenhaffen (2018) studied social media editors' impact on news diffusion. From the perspective of audience metrics and datafication, Vu (2014) pointed out that newsrooms' editorial decisions are increasingly data-oriented, and Tandoc (2014) that Web analytics is changing the gatekeeping process as journalists pay more and more attention to audience opinion in their decision-making processes. This leads to the conclusion that information gained from audience and platform data is part of the journalistic gatekeeping process and that various technological advances have influenced and shaped our understanding of the theory.

### **2.3.1 Factors of Gatekeeping: Audiences, Social Media Platforms, and Regulations**

As already noted, audiences have gained power in the digital news environment and in the processes of gatekeeping, especially through their actions on platforms, and have become a factor in gatekeeping. Consequently, social media platforms hold power over news distribution and the visibility of journalistic content, and, therefore, they need to be considered as a factor that influences gatekeeping. Hence, we can see deep roots of the audience-turn and platform-society concepts in the processes of gatekeeping. Regulations are another crucial factor shaping news and gatekeeping – they set the rules for the digital news environment where news circulates. Recent studies have looked at the news-media–audience relationship as well as the relationship between social media platforms and journalism through the theoretical lens of gatekeeping, as is teased apart below. I will now consider gate-keeping from the viewpoint of audiences, then from the standpoint of (visual) social media platforms and regulations that shape the environment where the platforms function.

The book *Gatewatching*, by Bruns (2005), is one of the earliest works to highlight audiences' rising role in the gatekeeping process in the digital news environment. They understood that audiences have become influencers and co-producers of news content in the ubiquitous online environment and that this has had implications for gatekeeping and the old model wherein only journalists controlled what passes the gates. Bruns called audience members gatewatchers because they observe the output gates of news publications and other sources so that they can identify important material when it becomes available (Bruns, 2005, p. 17). Bruns continued to develop the concept of gatewatching and related ideas through a second book, *Gatewatching and News Curation* (2018), which looked at audiences alongside journalists' practices/roles in gatewatching and highlighted the role of social media platforms in all of this. In the digital news environment, both audiences and journalists watch multiple gates (of social media) and browse through information items, and they curate and give visibility to such items as they deem shareworthy as well as newsworthy (Bruns, 2018).

Likewise, other studies have highlighted audiences' role. Shoemaker and Vos (2009, p. 124) stated that 'we must conceptualize readers having their own gate, and they send news items to others in the audience when the interaction between newsworthiness and personal relevance is strong enough'. With an idea

following in the same vein, Singer (2014) talked about *secondary gatekeeping*, a concept that refers to the secondary practices that audiences are able to engage in by observing the output gate: users have the ability to upgrade or downgrade the visibility of a news item online. Concepts such as secondary gatekeeping and gatewatching describe and highlight audiences' power and ability to give prominence and visibility to news items online through social interactional practices such as commenting, sharing, and liking the news. The interactional aspect of gatekeeping has been highlighted also by Bro and Wallberg (2015), who describe gatekeeping as a non-linear process of communication in which audiences and news sources interact.

If we then factor in also platforms' roles in the gatekeeping process, we notice that changes have emerged relative to the pre-Internet era: news processes from publication through dissemination to audience engagement take place increasingly on third-party platforms (Bruns, 2018, p. 6). As Karlsson et al. (2022) describe matters, gatekeeping is now shared among news organisations that publish the content, audiences who share the content, and algorithmic platforms that spread the content. This change in the gatekeeping process can be explained through the concept of *network gatekeeping*. Introduced by Barzilai-Nahon (2008), it identifies processes and mechanisms behind gatekeeping that take place online, not just the networked relations among diverse stakeholders of gatekeeping. In today's context, these stakeholders could be such entities as social media platforms and news audiences. In work a few years later, when social media had gained wider popularity, Meraz and Papacharissi (2013) introduced a similar concept, *networked gatekeeping*. Through their empirical research into Twitter, they described networked gatekeeping as a process wherein the elite and crowds jointly determine information relevance by means of social interactional practices afforded by the platform, such as mentioning and retweeting on Twitter. These two concepts (Barzilai-Nahon 2008; Meraz & Papacharissi 2013) highlight the social interactional relationships between various actors taking part in the gatekeeping process online and thus pinpoint gatekeeping as a networked process.

The digital news environment has literally been an inspiration to some gatekeeping scholars. Bro and Wallberg (2014) introduced the concept of *digital gatekeeping* by highlighting the role of social media in the current gatekeeping environment. They note that factors of numerous kinds now shape gatekeeping, and they talk about 'the new generation of gatekeepers', by which they refer to the audiences and their ability to take part in the gatekeeping through social interactional practices, such as commenting, sharing, and recommending. Bro and Wallberg referred to digital gatekeeping in another study also (2015), highlighting especially the increasing influence of external actors, who have transformed the principles of gatekeeping. Later, utilising the concept of digital gatekeeping, Wallace (2018) pinpointed the role of algorithms and audiences in the gatekeeping process. This work proceeded from the same idea, that several actors take part in gatekeeping. They named four actors – journalists, individual amateurs, strategic professionals, and algorithms – that follow their own logic but at the same time operate simultaneously and iteratively in the processes of gatekeeping.

Besides being networked, the digital news environment and social media platforms in it comprise a multitude of visual elements. Social media platforms especially can be characterised as highly visual (Hermida & Mellado, 2020; Highfield, 2019), as was discussed above in conjunction with characteristics of social media. Visual forms of news have intrigued gatekeeping scholars, who have looked at the role of visuality in the processes of gatekeeping – what kinds of visuals are chosen for publication and how visuals circulate – even though visual gatekeeping studies are scarce (de Smaele et al., 2017; Schwalbe et al., 2015). For example, Pantti (2015) examined the role of non-professionals in the use of networked images and the social media visuals that news outlets have published in connection with the conflict in Syria. Pantti and Sirén (2015) studied how journalists view the use of non-professional images and the verification of images from multiple sources, including social media. Furthermore, de Smaele et al. (2017) looked at how routines and organisational influence have shaped the processes behind visual gatekeeping.

One previous study considered the circulation angle especially, and how the digital news environment is connected with visual gatekeeping. In it, Schwalbe et al. (2015) noted the rising role of audiences in visual gatekeeping. That is, journalists share gatekeeping power with their audiences after news is published. While news media still perform traditional gatekeeping functions by selecting, publishing, and disseminating news images, audiences too disseminate images. In the online context, audiences can also verify amateur images alongside journalists, by, for example, commenting and challenging the accuracy of an image. Schwalbe et al. (2015) called this the *gatechecker* function.

The final factor of gatekeeping that needs to be considered in relation to the digital news environment is regulations. As my discussion of regulations above stresses, legislation and journalistic self-regulation are closely connected in journalism and, hence, are something that journalistic practitioners need to take into account and monitor. In connection with gatekeeping studies, regulations have been discussed from a couple of viewpoints. Barzilai-Nahon (2008) points out that regulation is part of the gatekeeping mechanism and refers to state or industry regulation from treaties and agreements, for instance, and to self-regulation of information which might lead to restriction of the range of topics or issues, for example. Seuri et al. (2022) highlight the importance of regulating platform companies and big media companies such that regulation can yield positive outcomes for the information environment and counterbalance the network effects that create platform monopolies. Further, Seuri and Ikäheimo (2023) posit that the EU is currently leading the way for the regulation of media content and social media platforms within its region.

In summary, the influence of audiences, highly visual social media platforms, and regulations can be seen in the processes of gatekeeping as highlighted by the aforementioned studies. Prior literature attests also that the fundamental idea of gatekeeping – limited publication space and a limited number of gates through which news can be published – has given way and the dynamics of journalistic gatekeeping have changed (Vos, 2015, p. 7). Social media platforms and



the digital news environment ensure that there is limitless publication space. Furthermore, the idea of gates controlled solely by the news media is outdated, in that the digital environment provides a limitless number of gates and publication channels.

### 2.3.2 Toward Post-Publication Gatekeeping

Studies mentioned in the previous subsection (e.g., Bruns, 2005, 2018; Bro & Wallberg, 2015; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Singer, 2014; Wallace, 2018) show that gatekeeping scholarship has turned its attention to the output gate – that is, what takes place next after news is published and/or what influences or shapes gatekeeping after news is published and in circulation. That is, gatekeeping studies have shifted temporally to the post-publication viewpoint even though previous studies have not specifically used the term ‘post-publication’. A case in point is Hermida’s (2020) study introducing the framework and concept of *post-publication gatekeeping*. The 4Ps framework presents four factors – *publics*, *platforms*, *paraphernalia*, and *practices* – that shape gatekeeping processes and through which one can examine gatekeeping post-publication. ‘Publics’ refers to the audiences of news, to whom the news is addressed, extending from ordinary citizens to politicians, businesspeople, and journalists themselves. ‘Platforms’ denotes the platform companies, such as Google and Meta. ‘Paraphernalia’ refers to the materiality of gatekeeping, such as mobile devices and operating systems, and ‘practices’ to the social (spatial and temporal) practices around how people engage with news, e.g., consuming news while travelling by bus or lying in bed.

This temporal perspective to gatekeeping, brought to our attention by previous studies, should be explored further. The research by Hermida (2020, p. 16) called on scholars to look at the factors and practices involved in post-publication gatekeeping and at how they affect flows of news and information after news is published. Hermida’s article cited a particular lack of studies that address digital metrics’ influence on editorial decision-making. Singer (2023) agrees that the emerging sphere of post-publication gatekeeping is in need of more studies. Research focusing on post-publication gatekeeping makes sense also in light of several researchers’ calls for studies that examine the field of gatekeeping creatively and in a manner drawing from multiple viewpoints and methodologies, such that the field is up to date (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 130; Vos, 2020, p. 90). I argue that, in addition, we now need attention to social interaction and the social interactional practices applied between news media and audiences in connection with gatekeeping in the context of social media. This gap has been highlighted also by Bro and Wallberg (2014, p. 453), who articulated the notion that we need fuller understanding of the practices of news commenting and the factors that influence gatekeeping, especially in the form of empirical and reflective studies. Furthermore, I would argue that we need to look at the role of visuals in connection with post-publication gatekeeping, an area in which research remains very rare (cf. Schwalbe et al., 2015) even though visibility is one of the main characteristics of social media platforms (Hermida & Mellado, 2020). Lastly, I posit that

we also need to dig more deeply into how regulations – from legislation and journalism ethics – are understood in light of the shift to post-publication gatekeeping, since they display closer links to traditional gatekeeping (Seuri et al., 2022) while heavily influencing the digital news environment.

Against this theoretical background, this study was aimed at understanding the triadic relationship of news media (newspapers in this setting), audiences, and social media platforms in the digital news environment in the Finnish context. Exploring factors and various kinds of practices that shape gatekeeping post-publication, the study asked the following research questions:

RQ1: What kinds of social interactional practices related to post-publication gatekeeping do audiences and news media engage in within the setting of news media's social media accounts?

RQ2: How is visibility intertwined with the factors and practices connected with post-publication gatekeeping?

RQ3: How are legislation and journalism ethics intertwined with the factors and practices connected with post-publication gatekeeping?

In the following chapter, I introduce the methodology behind the three sub-studies that I conducted, which form the basis for the presentation in this dissertation. These sub-studies helped me to answer the research questions and address the study's core aim, as elaborated upon in the chapters on the findings and discussion.

### 3 METHODS AND MATERIALS

This compilation dissertation was created by following a multi-method approach to study and understand the triadic relationship of Finnish newspapers, social media platforms, and their audiences. The main emphasis of the study was on qualitative methods, but elements of quantitative research, such as tabulation of instances and descriptive statistics, were utilised to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the social media datasets in the first two sub-studies. For the third, a purely qualitative one, semi-structured interviews were employed. The qualitative emphasis of this dissertation work enabled me to develop a deep understanding of the studied objects of study, the relationships between various subjects of study, and phenomena related to the digital news environment (Tracy, 2013). Besides recognising those actors important for a solid understanding of post-publication gatekeeping and providing numerical evidence of frequency for the objects examined or the phenomenon at hand, I was able to consider the side and perceptions of the studied subjects in relation to post-publication gatekeeping when I qualitatively analysed social media data and news worker interviews.

A multi-method approach was chosen so that it would be possible to gain broad-based and deep understanding of the phenomena and theories under study and to use the individual methods in supporting and complementary ways. I use 'complementary' to mean that one method fills another method's 'blind spots', and 'supporting' refers to using a method co-operatively for design of another (method) (Loosen & Schmidt, 2016; Loosen & Scholl, 2011). In the case of this dissertation work, all the sub-studies can be regarded as mutually complementing. They fill out and add to one another, layer upon layer, such that the separate sub-studies jointly build the bigger picture of the subjects studied. From the standpoint of support, each of the first two sub-studies was individually built such that another method was built on top of the previous one; for example, in sub-study II's case, visual interpretation was built on premises emerging from iterative content analysis. Furthermore, I agree with Loosen and Schmidt's (2016) contention that innovative study designs that draw from multiple methods are

needed if we wish to analyse journalism in the digital age. Multi-method approaches are sometimes referred to as mixed-methods, but, as a methodological study by Anguera et al. (2018) that extensively reviewed the use of the terms 'mixed-methods' and 'multi-methods' shows, there are diverse distinctions, across research fields, and defining a study as multi-method or mixed-method has other elements of complexity too. For this study, the taxon 'multi-method' was chosen because the study's design adopted and adapted the ideas of Loosen and Schmidt (2016), who saw the latter approach in particular as a good fit for (digital) journalism research.

One can regard journalism research as encompassing three basic methods, *interviewing*, *content analysis*, and *observation*, that empirically allow access to social reality, per authors such as Loosen and Schmidt (2016), according to whom a multi-method approach can be identified if two or more of the methods mentioned above are used to conduct research and each of these methods consists of either qualitative or quantitative modes or a combination of them. In accordance with that view, Anguera et al. (2018) concluded that a study can be regarded as a multi-method one if it uses complementary methods and has a common overall research goal that is reached by integration of the methods at the stage of arriving at conclusions from the study. In the case of this dissertation work, all of the criteria listed above for multi-method research are met and the methods most pertinent for journalism research were utilised. In summary, the three sub-studies that form the pillars for this dissertation all included forms of content analysis, one sub-study used interview materials, and two of the sub-studies combined elements of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Also, the study honoured Anguera et al.'s definition, in that the integration of separate sub-studies and methods took place only as the conclusions were being drawn for this larger-scale project. Furthermore, as Loosen and Schmidt (2016, p. 5) point out, there are three lenses constitutive of the 'trinality' of journalism, which are 1) content, 2) production/producers, and 3) consumption/consumers. Research using two or more of these lenses can be regarded as multi-method. All together, the three sub-studies encompassed by this dissertation looked at the news media's content (Facebook and Instagram content), the producers of that content (news media organisations / journalists), and consumers (audiences), thereby examining the triality of journalism. With the following subsections, I explain in more detail how each sub-study was conducted and how they all complement each other in my pursuit of coherent understanding of the triadic relations among news media, social media platforms, and their audiences.

### **3.1 Methods and Materials of Sub-Study I**

The first sub-study (Salonen et al., 2023b) was conducted by utilising a dataset of 180 Facebook posts and their comments published on four Finnish newspapers' Facebook pages between November 2018 and February 2019. Facebook was cho-

sen as the study context because in recent years it has been one of the most relevant platforms for news consumption and, according to the Digital News Report for 2023, remains the number-one social media platform for news in the Finnish context (Newman et al., 2023). Access to the Facebook data came about through the previous research project LUOTSIVA (Lauk et al., 2018, 2019), in which I worked as a project researcher between 2017 and 2019. In the latter part of the project (Lauk et al., 2019), four Finnish newsrooms participated in a collaborative research experiment and tested several kinds of publication strategies. The dataset of 180 posts is an output from that testing phase: the participating newspapers provided us with the URL links for the posts they created during the experimentation. In the project we organised the URLs alongside detailed information about them in spreadsheet format and took screenshots of the posts created and their comments to ensure that the data could not disappear and so that the posts would be easier to handle and analyse. All newspapers gave their consent to the research project and to further use of its material in the dissertation work. The four newspapers that participated varied in size, resources, and scope, and they represented three distinct business conglomerates at the time of the research. These were *Keskisuomalainen*, which is the biggest regional newspaper in the Central Finland region; *Sisä-Suomen Lehti*, a small local newspaper in the same region and belonging to the same conglomerate as *Keskisuomalainen*; *Kaleva*, which is the biggest regional newspaper in the northern stretches of Finland; and *Jämsän Seutu*, a medium-sized local newspaper for the southern parts of the Central Finland region.

Three, quite different research methods were utilised to analyse the data. They were chosen for their mutually supportive nature; each part of the analysis was built on top of the previous part (Loosen & Schmidt, 2016 p. 10). For the purposes of the first sub-study, the 180 posts and their comments were analysed by means of iterative content analysis (Tracy, 2013), tabulation of instances (Silverman, 2011), and digital conversation analysis (Giles et al., 2015). Firstly, we examined these 180 Facebook posts and their comments by drawing on theory- and data-driven qualitative iterative content analysis (Tracy, 2013). We aimed to look at the social interactional instances that featured gatekeeping and its secondary practices – post-publication practices – in the social media environment. These practices were deemed to be present if the posts or comments indicated that news content, its presentation, or its public reception was treated either as problematic or as acceptable. This phase was a result of an iterative process as we went back and forth between data and (gatekeeping) theory to build an understanding of our dataset (Tracy, 2013). Tracy’s iterative approach (2013, 2018) is discussed further in the following subsections, on sub-studies II and III.

Next, we formed the tabulation of instances (Silverman, 2011, pp. 66–67), to equip ourselves to provide some numerical evidence of the frequency of the posts containing evidence of post-publication gatekeeping practices. We identified 31 posts out of the 180 as clearly indicating social interactional post-publication gatekeeping practices: 19 were indicative of conversations that dealt with what

was appropriate or desired content for the forum, and 17 were indicative of misunderstandings, reassurance, and factual errors taking place in the forum (these two categories were allowed to overlap). In addition, we noticed that three posts did not follow the normative conventions of the forum even though, according to the experimentation notes provided by the journalists in the previous project (Lauk et al., 2019), these posts had been moderated by journalists. These three posts, addressing immigration topics, disconfirmed a notion that was developing in our analysis – that conversational gatekeeping was emerging – and therefore constituted a deviant case (Edwards, 2006) demonstrating participants’ normative goals that were, in fact, non-normative.

In the third phase of the analysis, we used digital conversation analysis (digital CA) to explicate the conversational nature of post-publication gatekeeping practices taking place on Facebook. This method was chosen because it explores how mutual understanding is achieved through social interaction between/among those conversationalists – in this situation, the journalists and audiences – and because it looks at the logic and functions of conversations (Sacks et al., 1974). Furthermore, digital CA has its roots in classic CA, a method that has been used since the late 1960s to study human interaction. Conversation analysis in general is purely focused on the investigation of social interaction of humans (e.g., Farina, 2018; Sacks et al., 1974). The method, for which conversations unfold on a turn-by-turn basis, proceeds from the assumption that each turn provides grounds for the next one and that every subsequent turn expresses an understanding of the previous one.

A classic example of these turns and CA comes from Schegloff’s 1968 study on openings of telephone calls. The ringing of the phone is regarded as the first turn, and answering the ringing device is the second turn. Together these turns form a summons–answer adjacency pair. In the context of the first sub-study, the equivalent is taking the posts published on Facebook by a newspaper/journalist to be the openings, the first turn, and the comments made by the conversationalists (audiences or journalists) to be the answer, the second or another following turn. Schegloff’s 1968 study, carried out in technological settings, was one of the earliest to apply CA. Hence, even though there is a relatively new line of research (e.g., Farina, 2018; Giles et al., 2015; Meredith, 2017) that labels itself as *digital* conversation analysis, it is good to bear in mind that the method at large had technologically oriented beginnings.

What truly differentiates digital CA from classic CA is that digital CA takes into consideration the technological embeddedness of talk – i.e., that the analysis and conversational practices taking place are tied to the particular platform in use (e.g., Giles et al., 2015). In this case, they are bound up with the technological architecture and affordances of Facebook. Facebook as a technological constellation affords a forum for closer inspection of everyday talk and social interaction. According to Farina (2018, p. 8), digital CA is a suitable method for studies with Facebook since the platform provides a forum for naturally occurring social interaction and since this technique has a history of application to study Facebook interaction (e.g., Farina, 2015; Frobenius & Harper, 2015; West, 2015). What seems

to have gained little previous attention in the digital context of CA, especially in the context of Facebook, is the phenomena of *repair* and *correction* (cf. Meredith & Stokoe, 2014). From a conversation-analysis perspective, repair is a mechanism through which conversationalists confront trouble or problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding (Schegloff, 2007, p. 100), and correction is a class of repair that contends with an actual error (Meredith & Stokoe, 2014, p. 186). By addressing the phenomena of repair and correction in this sub-study, we were able to anchor our research more deeply in the roots and traditions of (digital) CA and interactional studies (Koivisto et al., 2023, p. 8).

Next, we applied the idea of a summons–answer adjacency pair and the phenomena of repair and correction to our dataset and analysed three posts and their comments in depth with the aid of digital CA. Two of the posts offered examples of the emergence of post-publication gatekeeping practices (conversational gatekeeping) and demonstrated how gatekeeping materialises in and as social interaction. The third post, capturing a deviant case, demonstrates what can happen if the conversation is not subject to gatekeeping by any actors on Facebook (i.e., if conversational gatekeeping does not occur). That is, we analysed how mutual understanding was built and achieved or how it was not. With the assistance of a multi-method approach and placing primary emphasis on digital CA, we were able to demonstrate how gatekeeping and post-publication gatekeeping practices can emerge in conversations. We developed the concept of conversational gatekeeping accordingly, for how conversations are means of gatekeeping and how conversations are a target of gatekeeping. In the following section, I present in detail how conversational gatekeeping can be seen to unfold as several kinds of social interactional practices (reflected in the typology of conversational gatekeeping styles) in the context of Instagram.

### 3.2 Methods and Materials of Sub-Study II

The second sub-study (Salonen & Laaksonen, 2023) was conducted with a dataset of 894 Instagram posts and their comments that were published on four Finnish newspapers' Instagram accounts between April 2019 and March 2020. Instagram was chosen as the study context because its use for news has been growing globally over the past few years and in the Finnish context it is among the most popular social media platforms for news (Newman et al., 2022, 2023). The participating newspapers were the same as in the first sub-study: the regional newspapers *Keskisuomalainen* and *Kaleva* and the local papers *Sisä-Suomen Lehti* and *Jämsän Seutu*. Permission to research the newspapers' accounts was secured from the representatives of each newspaper. Access to the Instagram data was via the Meta-owned CrowdTangle data platform (CrowdTangle Team, 2020), to which the second author has user rights. For each post, the full set of CrowdTangle data consisted of the account name, follower count, timestamp, post type, number of likes, number of comments, number of total interactions, URL for the original post, and photo ID, alongside a textual description text.

To gain a deeper, multimodal understanding of the Instagram data at hand, we utilised a multi-method approach that put emphasis mainly on content analysis. We analysed the data in three stages. Firstly, to generate a general overview of the dataset and afford comparison of the newspaper-specific content and activities, we looked at the interaction statistics of the full dataset ( $N = 894$ ) and applied Silverman's (2011) tabulation of instances. Through a spreadsheet program's descriptive statistics, we obtained a sense of the interaction activity of each newspaper, such as the average interaction rate for every category of news topics, and by counting the instances in our dataset we uncovered the frequencies for the topic categories. For this, I went through every individual post (i.e., instance) manually, categorising it by news topic (e.g., 'Entertainment and lifestyle' or 'Politics') on the basis of a scale adapted from the one developed in the previous project (Lauk et al., 2018). Since we were taking a multimodal approach, I assigned each post a category after viewing both its text and the visuals (photo, image, or video content) in the post.

In the second stage, we focused on the posts that had been commented on ( $n = 352$ ), since the main focus of attention was on gatekeeping as a process of social interaction. Looking at the comments let us identify post-publication gatekeeping practices by following the conceptualisation of conversational gatekeeping (Salonen et al., 2023a) that was developed in the first sub-study. The second stage's work treated the original post by news media as a digital summons, a trigger that opens the conversation, and the following comments as answers/responses to the opening call that the news media made. Conversational gatekeeping was regarded to be present if there were follow-up comments pertaining to the content, framing, or publication value of the original post or of the actual news published on the newspaper's Web site. That is, we examined how conversations/comments were gatekept or were means for gatekeeping.

From this stage, we ended up with a subset of 42 posts and accompanying comments that met the criteria. Next, both researchers went through that subset and engaged in iterative content analysis (Tracy, 2018) that alternated between data and theory. Tracy's (2013, 2018) phronetic iterative approach to qualitative data analysis, which can be regarded as a form of qualitative content analysis, suited the purposes of sub-study II well since we looked at the body of data as it was in the first stage and then in the second stage started to recognise emerging patterns by alternating our gaze between the data and the theoretical concept of conversational gatekeeping. After we had gone through all the social interactional instances/practices present in the data, we identified the existence of a variety of styles in how audiences and news media performed conversational gatekeeping: affirmative, critical, corrective, and invitational styles. The styles represent post-publication gatekeeping practices that take place between audience members and news media: the first two styles are applied by audience members, the third style by both, and the fourth style by news media.

In the third stage, we looked at the visibility of conversational gatekeeping. Both of us went through the subset of 42 posts and their comments again, to examine whether there was something in the visual elements that was a target of



gatekeeping: we coded the gatekeeping as targeted at the textual comment, the visual content, or the story as a whole (i.e., both). After this, we had 23 posts that were indicative of conversational gatekeeping related to the visual elements of the posts. During this part of the analysis, we paid attention also to the aesthetics of the visual images (Müller, 2011) by asking three questions. 1) What is in the image? 2) What meanings are present in the image? 3) What larger social contexts are present in the image? In consequence of this stage of the analysis, we learned how visuality is enmeshed in connections with each conversational gatekeeping style.

The use of a multi-method approach, making use of supporting methods and of qualitative and quantitative elements both, resulted in building a thorough understanding of the multimodal context of Instagram and conducting detailed micro-level analysis of the textual and visual elements of posts connected with the Finnish newspapers' Instagram accounts. In the following section, I explain in more detail the use of Tracy's (2013, 2018) qualitative iterative content analysis, which was the sole method of the third sub-study, the work that contributed directly to theory-based discussion of the factors and practices that are part of the post-publication gatekeeping.

### **3.3 Methods and Materials of Sub-Study III**

For the third sub-study (Salonen et al., 2023a), we utilised data gathered by interviewing nine news workers, from three Finnish newspapers. All the news workers dealt with data-related questions in their daily working practices. Their views on data use in news organisations varied, since they differed in their positions within the organisation. Some worked with content production (as a social media producer), some with more managerial tasks (as head of technological development), and some directly with data (in the function of lead developer), for example. Prospective interviewees were selected via peer recommendations (i.e., snowball sampling) within each organisation. These semi-structured interviews took place either face-to-face or via Zoom between May and August 2022, and on average they lasted 96 minutes (their total duration was 866 minutes). The interview themes were 1) collection and use of data from news media sites, 2) collection and use of data from social media platforms, 3) ethics and responsibility in data collection and use, 4) news media's approach to social media platforms, 5) news media's approach to legislation dealing with news content and data-related practices, and 6) moderation of news content and associated discussions.

This sub-study was part of a larger research project (Talvitie-Lamberg et al., Forthcoming) in which we looked at (audience) data's collection and use and its ethicality from the perspectives of young audiences (Ehrlén et al., 2023) and news organisations. This sub-study aligned with the latter perspective. The three Finnish newspapers that participated in this research too varied in size, scope, and resources. Representing three separate media conglomerates, they were *Helsingin*

*Sanomat*, which is the biggest national daily newspaper in Finland; *Keskisuomalainen*, the aforementioned regional newspaper for the Central Finland region; and *Karjalainen*, the regional newspaper for the Northern Karelia region. The two regional newspapers are the largest newspapers in their geographical area with regard to circulation. Participants from each newspaper gave their consent for this research.

Analysis of the interview material was conducted by means of qualitative iterative content analysis (Tracy, 2018), a method that combines and alternates between deductive (theory-based) and inductive (data-based) approaches, thus resulting in abduction. The method can be used in combination with other methods, as was done in sub-studies I and II, or on its own (p. 61), as this sub-study III illustrates. We opted for this method because it ‘focuses on more narrow aspects of the data that have potential to extend specific theories or address practical problems’ (Tracy, 2018, p. 63). For this study, the theoretical framework of post-publication gatekeeping introduced by Hermida (2020) provided a starting point and was empirically validated and extended. From a practical standpoint, the method brought out news workers’ perceptions and practices related to data use.

The analysis that led to the validation and extension of Hermida’s (2020) framework was not straightforward. As Tracy (2018, p. 63) describes the iterative approach, it ‘does not require that researchers recognize, from the beginning, the exact direction or methodology their research will take’. This gave me flexibility for designing the sub-study, which proved valuable because at the beginning of the research process I was unsure how to proceed. With this sub-study being a component of the other research project (Talvitie-Lamberg et al., Forthcoming) and part of my dissertation project at the same time, I needed to figure out how to combine two sets of objectives. I started thinking about my ongoing interviews and looking at the interview data I had already collected. As I cycled back and forth with the data, I started to think about my pre-existing theoretical understanding of the core subject matter of the larger research project: datafication in journalism and audience data use. I also took into consideration what I already knew of post-publication gatekeeping, understanding of which was the objective of my dissertation project. Then I realised that Hermida’s (2020) framework was something I could try to apply in the context of datafied audiences. I did this by revising the preliminary research questions and reconsidering the theoretical background in accordance with the empirical evidence as Tracy (2018) recommended. Ultimately, this iterative process resulted in an extension to Hermida’s framework for post-publication gatekeeping – namely, the suggestion of regulatory factors.

Another of the methods I could have chosen is the traditional grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967), but an inductive approach was ruled out since it purely looks at the dataset in question. I wanted to maintain the theoretical connection to post-publication gatekeeping so that the theoretical aspect of each of my sub-studies could complement the others’. Also, I was familiar with Tracy’s (2013, 2018) method, which had been used in a supportive manner in the

first two sub-studies when my colleagues and I created conceptual frameworks for conversational gatekeeping and the typology of conversational gatekeeping styles. Now, in the third sub-study, Tracy’s method was expanded to apply across the entire dataset and serve as the sole analysis method. The method proved to be sufficiently flexible but at the same time also enough on its own to guide me through the analysis process and enable me to make theoretical and practical contributions to the field of (digital) journalism studies.

Having described how the three individual sub-studies were conducted (see Table 1) and how they jointly in a complementary manner (Loosen & Schmidt, 2016; Loosen & Scholl, 2011) helped me to build my doctoral research and fulfil my aim for the study – of understanding the relations between news media, audiences, and social media platforms – I devote the next subsection to examining those sub-studies through the lens of social constructionism as I explain the philosophy of science behind the dissertation work.

TABLE 1 Methods and materials of the three sub-studies

Article	Materials	Analysis Methods
<b>I: ‘Conversational Gatekeeping: Social Interactional Practices of Post-Publication Gatekeeping on Newspapers’ Facebook Pages’</b>	180 Facebook posts and their comments connected with four Finnish newspapers’ Facebook accounts from the time between November 2018 and February 2019.	Quantitative content analysis in the form of tabulation of instances (Silverman, 2011); qualitative iterative content analysis (Tracy, 2013); and digital conversation analysis (Giles et al., 2015). The main emphasis was on digital conversation analysis.
<b>II: ‘Post-Publication Gatekeeping Practices: Exploring Conversational and Visual Gatekeeping on Finnish Newspapers’ Instagram accounts’</b>	894 Instagram posts and their comments connected with four Finnish news-papers’ Instagram accounts from the 12-month time span April 2019 – March 2020.	Content analysis in the form of tabulation of instances (Silverman, 2011) and descriptive statistics; qualitative iterative content analysis (Tracy, 2018); and visual interpretation (Müller, 2011). Analysis involved a combination of all of these methods.
<b>III: ‘Post-Publication Gatekeeping Factors and Practices: Data, Platforms, and Regulations in News Work’</b>	Nine semi-structured inter-interviews (totalling 866 minutes) from three Finnish news-papers, gathered between May and August 2022.	Qualitative iterative content analysis (Tracy, 2018) for analysis of the full body of interview data.

### 3.4 Social Constructionism As a Perspective on Philosophy of Science

I adopted the perspective of social constructionism as a premise for the scientific understanding behind the dissertation work. This is a perspective that Berger and Luckmann brought to wider attention in the discipline of sociology. With their 1967 book *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, they introduced an idea of how our realities are socially constructed. Their views were based on works of previous theorists, influencers of the late 1800s and early 1900s such as Karl Marx and Max Weber. Several researchers since the 1960s have taken part in the discussion of how our worlds are constructed from the ontological and epistemological perspectives – i.e., from the angles of what the nature of reality is and how knowledge gets constructed. For example, Burr (2015, p. 4) posited that our understanding of the world is constructed between people through daily interactions. Latour (2005) instead showed the applicability of a social constructivist perspective in his reflection on actor network theory, which explores human actors' and non-human actants' construction of the world they are living in. So, beyond social interaction between human actors, also technology and other non-human actants (such as nature and culture) have a part in how the world is constructed in a networked manner.

Social constructionism can be seen as a good fit for efforts to understand the nature of gatekeeping (Kaziaj, 2016) in that it can help us understand central ontological and epistemological questions here – *what is the reality of gatekeeping, and how is the knowledge about it produced?* I do not have the 'power' or 'knowledge' to say what gatekeeping is and how it is constructed universally, but I can express how I understand gatekeeping and its constructs in the light shed by the dissertation work. Gatekeeping has been addressed before through the lens of social constructionism, by Kaziaj (2016, pp. 141–143), who saw news media as constructing our social realities through the publication decisions and the representations the news media offer. He also made a point of stating that there has been ongoing debate since the 1970s (see, for example, Gans, 1979) about the role of news in how we perceive reality (Kaziaj, 2016, p. 143). When looking at Kaziaj's notions in relation to my dissertation work, from the perspective of post-publication gatekeeping I find that they help me explore the interplay among news media / journalists, audiences, and algorithmic platforms in line with the aim behind my study. I reflect on this in the reports on all three sub-studies separately but also address it in an integrated manner in this compilation part. This dissertation depicts the reality of gatekeeping as jointly constructed with journalistic actors and other shapers of the production or processes of news. Post-publication gatekeeping constructs multiple kinds of human and non-human actors, and this study sees that, besides news media, audiences and algorithmic platforms take part in constructing our understanding of reality. If we look at news media actions generally, we can see gatekeeping as a part of the process of how news media construct an understanding of the world and furnish audiences with it.

The understanding of reality has been constructed through previous theories and empirical evidence in all of the sub-studies. Through writing up this compilation part, I have gained a more holistic understanding of the subjects and phenomena studied; that is, the particular kinds of constructs that have become apparent in each sub-study have come together to construct a bigger picture: how this study regards post-publication gatekeeping and its constructs. The fact that some of the analysis methods I have used have been mutually supporting, building on top of each other, dovetails well with the idea that separate constructs may interact with each other. Also, the idea of complementation, with sub-studies that complement each other and jointly construct the bigger picture of the subject and phenomena studied, is in line with ideas of social constructionism.

Further, if we look at the datasets, in sub-studies I and II social media data afforded my development of greater awareness of how human participants (news media / journalists and audiences) construct representations of reality on a technological platform and how the platform plays its own role as a non-human actor in the process of building social reality. In sub-study III, the interviewees constructed their own social realities surrounding the interview topics, through their remarks, and I as a researcher participated in the interpretation of their reality through my own views of the reality and by means of iterative content analysis that permits the researcher to draw conclusions from multiple sources (Tracy, 2018). So the reality of the subject and phenomena studied has been constructed jointly by interpreting the data and applying various methods in light of my understanding.

In comparison, proponents of the (digital) CA that was utilised in sub-study I conclude that researchers should work with what becomes observable in the data rather than make assumptions about participants' intentions (see, for example, Gibson et al., 2018). In this respect, (digital) CA might be an 'easier' method to apply in a manner that meshes with views from social constructionism. Iterative analysis leaves more room for interpretations and for the perspective of *interpretivism*, which highlights the interpretation angle when the researcher is considering the objects of study (Koppa, 2023). Interpretivism is described as a perspective very close to social constructionism (Koppa, 2023), and the connected nature of these perspectives makes sense also in the case of my study. Nonetheless, I would argue that, in the bigger picture, this compilation part of the dissertation project and all the sub-studies jointly construct the reality of the objects studied and of post-publication gatekeeping as a whole. Therefore, I contend, my work accords well with social constructionism and with how reality is constructed in interaction by human and non-human actors in this case.

### **3.5 Research Integrity**

Besides the philosophy-of-science perspective, ethical evaluation extends across the entire dissertation project: its sub-studies and this compilation material. From

the beginning of this dissertation project, I needed to carefully consider my options and responsibilities related to the data's collection and storage and to the analysis and publication process for each sub-study. For instance, Tracy (2013) has especially highlighted the value of being transparent and conducting research as ethically as possible for the sake of high-quality qualitatively-oriented research. The government institution in Finland that guides and monitors research in the humanities and social sciences to make sure said research is conducted ethically is the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, or TENK. It reviewed its guidelines for research integrity in 2023. Here, I reflect on my study on the basis of the newer guidelines to ensure that I have maintained research integrity while conducting my studies. Among the concepts identified in the guidelines (TENK, 2023), *research procedures*, *data practices and management*, and *safeguards and agreements* are the ones I find to be the most pivotal for my self-evaluation. I now go through these principles each in turn, though they overlap from time to time.

Under 'Research Procedures', the guidelines describe the entire process of research being conducted in a manner maintaining research integrity: planning, execution, and documentation are to be done carefully and if possible by following open science principles. Looking at my dissertation project after its various processes, which have taken around five years, I would like to claim that I kept research integrity in mind at all times. I feel I was cautious in planning and executing my studies: Firstly, I took time for carefully considering my options and possible pitfalls. For example, while I was choosing the newspapers for study, I wanted to make sure that I had participants from different conglomerates and selected such that they represented different regions and parts of the country. Regarding documentation, I feel I could have done better: I have separate sets of notes in hand-written form in notebooks, in files on my computer, and in the cloud services that the University of Jyväskylä maintains. It is to be noted, as self-criticism, that I was not the most systematic in the ways I documented the individual phases of study. Some parts were documented in the notebooks and some on the computer. While, therefore, it was not systematic, I also feel my documentation was enough at the time (while I was conducting each sub-study), and I got the job done. Also, I do not think that this was problematic for the research or dissertation itself. That said, in my future research projects documentation is something I will give more attention.

As for 'Data Practices and Management', TENK guidelines state that there needs to be agreement (with all the partners and other parties) before data collection as to how ownership, user rights, and handling and depositing shall be taken care of. Compliance with the GDPR must be ensured, and matters pertaining to non-disclosure, confidentiality, and secrecy agreements have to be handled. In addition, the 'Safeguards and Agreements' guidance highlights that permits, consent, and preliminary ethical evaluation need to be attended to before data collection begins. The research needs to follow the guides and regulations

of the scientific field. Scientific research must not endanger the health and security of researchers or of those who are under research. I next reflect on these two principles in relation to all the sub-studies.

In the case of the first sub-study, I gained access to the dataset through the previous project, LUOTSIVA (Lauk et al., 2019). It was agreed with the project leader and participating newspapers that I could use the data for my upcoming dissertation project. I started the dissertation project in the spring of 2019 right after the LUOTSIVA project ended. The dataset was stored via the university's software, and access to it was in the hands of us researchers affiliated with the LUOTSIVA project. For my dissertation project, I created separate spreadsheets and files for my analysis purposes. These too were stored via university software and servers, as had been advised by the university. The dataset did not include company secrets or the like; the content was just 'regular Facebook data' that are visible and open to all who visit the relevant Facebook pages.

With regard to the second dataset, consisting of Instagram data, I asked the same four newspapers that had participated in the LUOTSIVA project whether they were keen on participating in a planned second study. They all granted their permission, which was somewhat of a formality. The dataset was publicly available and access to it had been granted by the Meta-owned CrowdTangle data platform, to which the second author (Laaksonen) had user rights, so seeking permission from the newspapers for the studies was partly because we – and I specifically – wanted to be as transparent and ethical as possible. The EU's GDPR framework (namely, Regulation 2016/679's Article 9) enshrines researchers' right to study data that have been made publicly available by the data subject, and Finnish data-protection legislation (Act 1050/2018's Article 89) articulates that scientific research constitutes an exception with regard to participants' consent rights; that is, consent is not required for data collection that takes place for scientific purposes. Furthermore, on the basis of the GDPR, terms pertaining to scientific research allow overriding people's 'right to be forgotten' (Eduskunta HE9/2018); that is, we did not need permission from the people who had commented in the newspapers' Facebook or Instagram discussions. Since these legal exceptions applied, the requirements set by the University of Jyväskylä and by TENK (2019, p. 19) in connection with ethics pre-evaluation of research were not met in the case of the first two sub-studies.

Besides following the rules of national and EU-wide legislation, the teams and I individually undertook large amounts of pure ethics reflection while utilising social media data in the first two studies. One thing that guided the research processes throughout was the idea 'do no harm', which has been highlighted by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) (franzke et al., 2020) and Tracy (2013), for example. This implies that the benefits of the research should be maximised such that the harm is minimised. In practice, this has meant, for example, that I avoided collecting any unnecessary personal data from the participants in the research and also that I have avoided publishing such data excerpts as could potentially lead to harm for some parties in the given form. Those excerpts that

were published were translated from Finnish into English, and we paid attention to the anonymisation of the commenters, giving it our best effort.

In the case of one excerpt, I considered its publication long and hard because the material was sensitive in some respects. It was a post associated with a newspaper having published a photo from CCTV footage featuring a person with a non-native ethnic background who was charged with aggravated assault. The footage had been released for publication by the Finnish police. Eventually, I made the decision to publish it since the argument that I was making with my research would not have been clear without its example. From my personal viewpoint, that particular social media post and the discussion following it displayed elements of hate speech and the person in the post was being harshly slandered by audience members. I do recognise that publishing the photo in my research reproduced the photo and gave it more visibility. To minimise the harm, I blurred the face of the person charged with the crime and changed the names of the audience members taking part in the discussion. Also, I did not reveal the identity of the newspaper in whose social media account the discussion had taken place. I felt that in this way I could maximise the benefits for society and scientific research through offering proof of an ongoing problem that has been manifesting itself with unmoderated social media discussions. At the same time, I did my utmost to minimise the harm, by making my best effort to anonymise the people connected with the post and comments. Finally, the barrier was lowered a bit by this being publicly available information that had already been released by Finnish officials and news media.

The third sub-study demands a different kind of evaluation, since the data are from interviews and fully consent-based. The representatives of the three participating newspapers were informed about their rights, and they were sent a research notice via email where all their rights were disclosed in detail. Participants gave their consent to the research verbally for the interview records. Furthermore, I and the second author of the paper on that sub-study (Ehrlén) made a data protection announcement for the study as is now required by the University of Jyväskylä. We also followed the ethos of minimising harm by carefully considering the selection of excerpts to be published in the research article. The three newspapers were open about their participation in the research project (Talvitie-Lamberg et al., Forthcoming), but I still promised the individual interviewees that we would do our best to protect their anonymity. This is why we did not disclose which participants worked for which newspaper. Otherwise, they could have been connected through the excerpts that were published in the article. To minimise harm, we disclosed only the interviewees' current job descriptions and how long they had worked in the media industry.

In conclusion, the research evaluation involved perspectives of maintaining research integrity from ethical and legal standpoints. A third aspect that could be reflected upon is the technical accessibility of research materials. Luckily, I did not face any big obstacles, though these are fairly common when we talk about collecting social media data. For example, without the assistance of Laaksonen,



the other author of the second article, it would have been hard to obtain the complete dataset for the Instagram study. Manual data collection would have been very time-consuming, and some of the metadata are visible only through the dataset that Meta handed over to us through their CrowdTangle platform. Meta has restricted the technical availability of data to those attempting to collect material by means of its application programming interfaces (APIs), so even extracting the data via API was not really an option. A fourth question that I could point to arises from the terms of service (TOS) that each social media company has in place. Some time ago in Finnish university circles, there was a lot of discussion about the social media data that could be used for research purposes, discussion that dealt extensively with what the social media companies 'allow' to be used for research purposes. In a further wrinkle, it has been common practice for the companies to change their TOS on a regular basis, which imposes a burden on researchers who conduct their studies for a longer period of time. This question follows: do we apply the TOS that was valid at the beginning of the study or the version valid during the final stages of the study? Of course, it is important to conduct research such that we don't break rules and regulations, but also I feel that we as social media researchers have an obligation to research these platforms that possess and exercise so much (decision-making) power in the current platform society.

I personally think we are in safe waters when we as researchers fulfil our obligation to society and the research community and follow the EU-wide and national laws, which in many cases acknowledge research as a domain that may diverge from standard terms for consent and separate permissions. Further, the most important thing is to conduct research in such a way that the guidelines of such institutions as Finland's TENK are followed. In addition, many of the social media platforms are based at headquarters outside the EU. In some cases, such as that of Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, the company is US-based. In the US, the trademark law that regulates copyrighted material is subject to the fair-use doctrine, which can be applied to cover the use of social media data in scientific research in general (Laaksonen & Salonen, 2018). Again, how the rules and regulations – of which country or region – shall be applied is one more question complicating the use of social media data. When evaluating the work behind this dissertation, I conclude that I have done my best to maintain research integrity: I have described the phases of my research in as detailed and transparent a fashion as possible and done my best to identify and answer the questions that this research has raised.

## 4 ORIGINAL ARTICLES AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents the sub-studies behind the articles and summarises their key findings and contributions. I also bring together all the main individual findings and show how the sub-studies jointly paint a bigger picture of the relational web of news media, audiences, and social media platforms and characterise the nature of post-publication gatekeeping that takes place in the digital news environment. Table 2, below, outlines the research aims, research questions, and main contributions connected with each sub-study.

TABLE 2 Summary of the aims, research questions, and main contributions with each sub-study

Sub-Study/Article	Research Aim	Research Questions	Main Contributions
<p><b>I: 'Conversational Gatekeeping: Social Interactional Practices of Post-Publication Gatekeeping on Newspapers' Facebook Pages'</b> (Salonen et al., 2023b)</p>	<p>The aim was to understand how the social interactional relationship between news media and audiences unfolds in conversations on a social media platform in terms of post-publication gatekeeping.</p>	<p>RQ1: How is post-publication gatekeeping intertwined with journalist-audience conversations on Finnish newspapers' Facebook pages? RQ2: How do journalists and their audiences build mutual understanding on Finnish newspapers' Facebook pages?</p>	<p>The work introduced the concept of conversational gatekeeping – i.e., that, through social interaction, journalists and social media audiences are able to build mutual understanding and create norms while also deciding on the content and action that is appropriate/wanted in the public news space formed on a particular online platform.</p>
<p><b>II: 'Post-Publication Gatekeeping Practices: Exploring Conversational and Visual Gatekeeping on Finnish Newspapers' Instagram accounts'</b> (Salonen &amp; Laaksonen, 2023)</p>	<p>The work was conducted to contribute to the emerging theories of post-publication gatekeeping by showing how different kinds of conversational gatekeeping practices develop at micro level in the multimodal context of Instagram.</p>	<p>RQ1: How does post-publication gatekeeping emerge in interactions in response to the posts made by the newspapers on Instagram? RQ2: What kinds of post-publication gatekeeping practices can be identified in conversations between newspapers and audiences, and how are these practices related to the visual content on newspapers' Instagram?</p>	<p>The work proposed a typology of conversational gatekeeping styles – affirmative, critical, corrective, and invitational – that affords understanding of social interactional relations between news media and their audiences and of the micro-level practices of post-publication gatekeeping. It showed that visuals play a role in the post-publication environment and that news media interact little with their audiences.</p>
<p><b>III: 'Post-Publication Gatekeeping Factors and Practices: Data, Platforms, and Regulations in News Work'</b>(Salonen et al., 2023a)</p>	<p>The work was done to examine datafied news work from the perspective of post-publication gatekeeping and form a general understanding of how (audience) data form a part of editorial decision-making in news media, in news workers' perceptions.</p>	<p>RQ: How do news workers perceive the datafied factors of audiences, platforms, and regulations, and how do these factors shape their working practices from the viewpoint of post-publication gatekeeping?</p>	<p>The work introduced regulation via law and ethics as a factor for post-publication gatekeeping and, thereby, extended the post-publication gatekeeping framework of Hermida (2020). The work identified news workers' ambivalence about audience data use and how those data shape journalistic decision-making.</p>

#### **4.1 Sub-Study I – ‘Conversational Gatekeeping: Social Interactional Practices of Post-Publication Gatekeeping on Newspapers’ Facebook Pages’**

The first sub-study (Salonen et al., 2023b) investigated the social interactional relationship between news media and their audiences on four Finnish newspapers’ Facebook pages. More precisely, it examined the relations via conversations through the lens of post-publication gatekeeping theory (Hermida, 2020). The need to understand this relationship is rising as, alongside journalists, platforms and audiences play a growing part in the gatekeeping process that takes place post-publication (e.g., Bruns, 2018; Hermida, 2020; Wallace, 2018), oftentimes on social media platforms that afford the conversations (Kavada, 2015).

Therefore, the sub-study was designed for understanding how the social interactional relationship between news media and audiences unfolds in conversations on a social media platform in light of the rise of post-publication gatekeeping. The study was conducted with emphasis on a qualitative approach. Its dataset consists of 180 Facebook posts by the four Finnish newspapers and comments made on them, from November 2018 to February 2019. The data analysis used two types of content analysis, tabulation of instances (Silverman, 2011) and qualitative iterative content analysis (Tracy, 2013), and digital conversation analysis (Giles et al., 2015).

The study argues that gatekeeping can be found to materialise as and in social interaction and therefore suggests the concept of conversational gatekeeping. This concept explains how, through social interaction, journalists and social media audiences are able to build mutual understanding and create norms as well as decide on the content and action that is appropriate or wanted in the public news space formed on the specific online platform in question (on Facebook in this case). The study also offers an argument that human actors – journalists and audience members alike – are needed to be present in the social media conversations to understand the given contexts and, on that basis, to create the norms and boundaries for the forum such that the discussion spaces provided by social media platforms and news media can be ethically constructed. As automated content moderation lags, societal and other developments, looking after the conversations still requires humans. Furthermore, if news media / journalists are not present in the conversations, audience members are left to create the norms related to the journalistic content themselves and the news media lose their power of post-publication gatekeeping.

The first sub-study also spotlighted questions about the content that news media publish via their social media accounts. By publishing content on social media, news media open the gates with regard to the given topic. As sub-study I demonstrated, sometimes social media posts can facilitate hate speech and slurs from the audience side in the form of conversations. Therefore, balancing between freedom of speech and of the press is needed. In the bigger picture, this

research makes an argument that news media's social media discussions have a central position in constructing ethical gates for digital spaces.

#### **4.2 Sub-Study II - 'Post-Publication Gatekeeping Practices: Exploring Conversational and Visual Gatekeeping on Finnish Newspapers' Instagram Accounts'**

The second sub-study (Salonen & Laaksonen, 2023) investigated the social interactional relationship between news media and their audiences in connection with the role of visuals in four Finnish newspapers' Instagram accounts. The article expresses the view that news media share gatekeeping power with social media platforms and audiences in the digital news environment and situates itself alongside prior literature in this regard (e.g., Salonen et al., 2023b). This sub-study found that news media are no longer the sole gatekeeper, now that gatekeeping is handled post-publication, after news content has been published and entered circulation (e.g., Bruns, 2018; Hermida, 2020; Wallace, 2018). That view was formed through examination of shared gatekeeping power on a highly visual social media platform, Instagram, and by taking visibility in the processes and practices of post-publication gatekeeping into account. The study presents a picture of gatekeeping materialising as and in social interaction, as conversational gatekeeping, and delves further into the social interactional practices between news media and audiences on social media platforms (Salonen et al., 2023b).

This sub-study was aimed at contributing to the emerging theories of post-publication gatekeeping by showing how different kinds of conversational gatekeeping practices emerge at micro-level in the multimodal context of Instagram. This entailed empirically exploring local and regional Finnish newspapers' Instagram posts ( $N = 894$ ) and comments that were made over a period of one year, from April 2019 to March 2020. Analysis was conducted in three stages, utilising tabulation of instances (Silverman, 2011) and descriptive statistics, next taking a qualitative approach with iterative content analysis (Tracy, 2018), and finally looking at the aesthetics of the visual images (Müller, 2011).

The study posits that conversational gatekeeping can be approached from the perspectives of audiences and news media / journalists, who differ in their ways of performing social interactional practices post-publication. The work resulted in the typology of four conversational gatekeeping styles: affirmative, critical, corrective, and invitational styles. Audiences can affirm or criticise by expressing their thoughts about the news content, actions, or framings on Instagram. By means of correcting, audiences and news media can notify of or correct misunderstandings or (factual) errors that have taken place in connection with the Instagram posts, and by invitations – such as posing questions to the audience – news media can invite audiences to take part in contributing to the news story post-publication. The typology assists in understanding the social interactional

relationship between news media and their audiences in general, along with the micro-level practices of post-publication gatekeeping in particular. Accordingly, we contributed advances to the theories of post-publication gatekeeping and conversational gatekeeping (Hermida, 2020; Salonen et al., 2023b; Singer, 2023).

The sub-study also connected visuality to post-publication gatekeeping, with an argument that visuals play a role in the post-publication environment. While the relatively small dataset precludes generalising the findings, our qualitative analysis suggests that audience members directed their attention to visuals (photos, other images, or videos), especially in affirmative and invitational styles. The invitational style also functions as a powerful tool for performing visual gatekeeping as news media can choose the kinds of visuals via which they invite audiences to interact. Another crucial point is that the Instagram platform's design leaves only the news media actors with visual gatekeeping power: audiences cannot publish images in their comments on posts. Audience members can influence visual gatekeeping only by means of conversational gatekeeping – for example, by affirming or criticising the content presented on Instagram.

Furthermore, we found that the news content published on Instagram by the four Finnish newspapers was highly focused on soft news. Interestingly, audience members seemed to interact quite evenly with soft and hard news. In addition, our interaction analysis showed that the level of social interaction was not high on either the journalists' or audience members' part. That is, most of the newspapers taking part in this sub-study did not actively engage in conversations with their audiences (one local newspaper was an exception). Accordingly, post-publication gatekeeping practices were mostly left to audience members, for journalists were missing. Similar signs were evident in sub-study I (Salonen et al., 2023b).

### **4.3 Sub-Study III – 'Post-Publication Gatekeeping Factors and Practices: Data, Platforms, and Regulations in News Work'**

The third sub-study (Salonen et al., 2023a) focused on the factors and practices that shape gatekeeping in the post-publication environment – i.e., after news has entered circulation. Again, news media can no longer be regarded as the sole gatekeeper of their content after news has been published and disseminated, especially on third-party platforms (e.g., Bruns, 2018; Hermida, 2020). The article about sub-study III examines post-publication gatekeeping in the context of datafied news work and applies Hermida's (2020) post-publication gatekeeping framework.

The aim for the work was general understanding of how (audience) data are woven into editorial decision-making in news media from news workers' perspective and what role regulations (from laws and ethics) play in datafied news work. The study relied on interviewing news workers from three Finnish news organisations; all participants worked for a regional or a national newspaper.

People were recruited to participate in the research in light of peer recommendations and in line with the criterion that data-related issues were part of their day-to-day work life. Participants' views on data use varied somewhat, in that their positions in the organisations covered a broad range: some worked in content-production roles (e.g., social media manager) and some in more managerial roles (e.g., head of technological development). Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author either via Zoom or face-to-face between May and August 2022. The interviews were subjected to qualitative iterative analysis (Tracy, 2018); that is, data and theory were iteratively combined.

The article adds to the recently initiated discussion of news workers' sharing of gatekeeping power in the post-publication environment with audiences and platforms, and its reasoning depicts regulations as a factor in shaping of gatekeeping post-publication. Consequently, this sub-study extends the post-publication gatekeeping framework (Hermida, 2020) to regulatory factors – that is, laws and journalism ethics – and applies it in the context of datafied news. The research also empirically validated the theoretical framework (Hermida, 2020) for the first time. In addition, analysis based on the gatekeeping literature and empirical evidence revealed both that news workers' views of data use and of that use's significance for their working practices were ambivalent and that, nonetheless, the use of audience data is increasingly shaping news workers' journalistic decision-making. Furthermore, news workers' reliance on platform data depended on the particular platform. Also, when asked about journalism ethics, the news workers interviewed connected this domain only with legislative issues, such as the General Data Protection Regulation. In general, the study reflects how journalism (research) is shifting from an audience-centric view to a data-driven one and is therefore experiencing a data turn.

#### **4.4 Summary of the Main Findings**

The three sub-studies were aimed at *understanding the triadic relationship of news media, audiences, and social media platforms in the digital news environment in the Finnish context*. They did so by looking at social interactional practices and different kinds of factors that shape gatekeeping post-publication. In general, this dissertation work contributed to building empirical and theoretical understanding of post-publication gatekeeping, which previously was very limited (cf. Hermida, 2020; Ai et al., 2022). Finnish newspapers' Facebook and Instagram accounts in combination with interviews involving news workers with Finnish newspapers provided the central data and study context. The study context can be characterised also as the digital news environment. This environment wherein news items circulate after their publication is increasingly datafied and algorithmically driven.

The first research question, about *what kinds of social interactional practices related to post-publication gatekeeping do audiences and news media engage in within the setting of news media's social media accounts*, was answered with the aid of the

first two sub-studies. Both demonstrate that news media and audiences negotiate and jointly create the norms for social media platforms by conversational means. They also decide on the content, action, and framing that are to be deemed appropriate for the forum. This jointly created the concept of conversational gatekeeping to describe the intertwined and occasionally interdependent relationship unfolding between news media and audiences have in social media, especially in conversations taking place in association with news media's social media accounts. If news media is absent from the conversations, the norm-building is left solely to the audience members, and the news media hold less gatekeeping power post-publication in consequence. The norm-building and negotiation of what is accepted content, action, or framing in news-media social media accounts and in conversations there can be enacted in four ways through social interactional practices. Audiences have the ability to affirm, criticise, and correct through their social interactional practices, and news media can either correct or invite audiences through their practices. If we look at the nature or frequency of interaction between news media and audiences, these two sub studies attest that news media are not actively taking part in building the relationship with their audiences, especially on the Instagram platform at least as represented in the case of this empirical study.

The second research question, pertaining to *how visibility is intertwined with factors and practices connected with post-publication gatekeeping*, was answered with the aid of sub-study II. The article on that work connects visibility to post-publication gatekeeping by arguing that visuals play a role in the context wherein news is published and in the conversational gatekeeping styles that news media and audiences employ. Visibility is an element toward which some of the audience members directed their comments, social interactional practices, when they were performing conversational gatekeeping on Instagram. That is, audience members made comments about visual features and visual content on the platform. The dataset for visual analysis was relatively small, so the findings cannot be generalised; however, the qualitative analysis suggests that audience members directed their attention to the visuals with affirmative and invitational styles – regarded as the more positive styles. For example, when a newspaper posted a photo of a lake view and a stone that had been cast into the lake, audience members complimented, or affirmed, it by commenting that the photo was 'great' and thanking the newspaper for the publication of the photo (Salonen & Laaksonen, 2023, Figure 1). In another example, audience members offered guesses as to the animal to which a paw print in the snow, as featured in an Instagram post, belonged (Figure 4 in Salonen & Laaksonen, 2023). That post and the invitational style of the news media's performance were entirely connected to visibility.

Furthermore, the invitational style is especially powerful from the standpoint of visuals in that news media can decide on the kinds of visuals with which they issue invitations and hope audiences will interact with: which kinds of 'visual gates' the news media open for conversations. A post that includes textual elements alone and that does not combine text with visuals (i.e., that is not multimodal) could be considered hard to use with the invitational style in light of the



findings from this sub-study. The visuals seemed to attract audience members to participating in post-publication social interactional practices. One more noteworthy conclusion is that Instagram as a technical construction does not afford audience members' publishing of photos or videos in the comments; that is, the availability of visual practices is highly limited in the Instagram setting. This means that the only way for audience members to exert influence is by means of conversational gatekeeping – by affirming, criticising, or correcting the content, actions, or framings that the news media's account has presented.

The third research question – about *how legislation and journalism ethics are intertwined with the factors and practices connected with post-publication gatekeeping* – received answers with the aid of the final sub-study. That research connected the factor of regulations, by law and journalism ethics, to the post-publication gatekeeping and suggested an extension to Hermida's (2020) framework. The study presents theoretical background for the proposed extension, then empirical evidence to support it. The findings reveal several ways in which regulations act as a post-publication gatekeeping factor and how they are intertwined with post-publication gatekeeping practices. For example, when considering the angle of legislation, some news workers highlighted that the GDPR allows audiences to withhold the release of their personal data even after the material has been handed over to news organisations. Accordingly, audiences can withdraw some of the data that inform audience metrics for the newsroom. Another facet accentuated from the post-publication standpoint was that audience members can also refuse to share their cookie data, how they navigate the published content, with news organisations and third parties who have made agreements with those organisations. Another perception of the news workers was that major platforms such as Google's and Meta's should be regulated more strictly in the future so that news organisations get compensated for their content that circulates (i.e., has been published) on those platforms. In addition, when asked about journalism ethics, news workers pondered only legislative issues and did not express thoughts about journalism ethics. Rather, they focused on the GDPR's effects on their working practices. However, from the viewpoint of journalism ethics, press councils have a pivotal role in the media self-regulation process as they oversee news media's working practices (how news media follow the code of ethics) after news items have been published – that is post-publication. Therefore, it would be pivotal for the news workers to better recognise the ethical factors connected to their working practices as they should guide the journalistic work.

Taken together, the findings described above reflect many of the changes that have taken place in the digital news environment and in the publication processes and circulation of news since the rise of social media platforms. Today, several kinds of practices and factors shape and influence journalistic gatekeeping processes from the post-publication standpoint. Besides platforms and audiences, there are key elements of social interactionality, visuality, and regulations that evidently play a role in the post-publication gatekeeping and its processes. This situation and the future of (post-publication) gatekeeping are elaborated upon next, in the final chapter.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, this study looked at the relationship of news media, audiences, and social media platforms in the digital news environment through the lens of post-publication gatekeeping. It did so by focusing especially on social interactional practices and (visual) content of Facebook and Instagram posts and comments published between 2018 and 2020 in local and regional Finnish newspapers' social media and through interviews conducted in 2022 that exposed the perceptions of Finnish news workers at regional and national Finnish newspapers. Having introduced the sub-studies and summarised the main findings published in each article above, I now can elaborate on the findings, draw them together, and offer some conclusions that scholars may find useful for future studies. I will also discuss the limitations of this dissertation project and undertake a self-evaluation of the study.

### 5.1 Factors and Practices of Post-Publication Gatekeeping

This dissertation has empirically validated Hermida's (2020) theoretical framework for post-publication gatekeeping and has both theoretically and empirically extended that framework by adding the factor of regulations. Therefore, I depict the revised framework for *post-publication gatekeeping factors* more fully (see Figure 1), arguing by doing so that this work has yielded a more holistic view of post-publication gatekeeping – of its factors, the practices involved, and the phenomenon itself – than prior theories have been able to do.

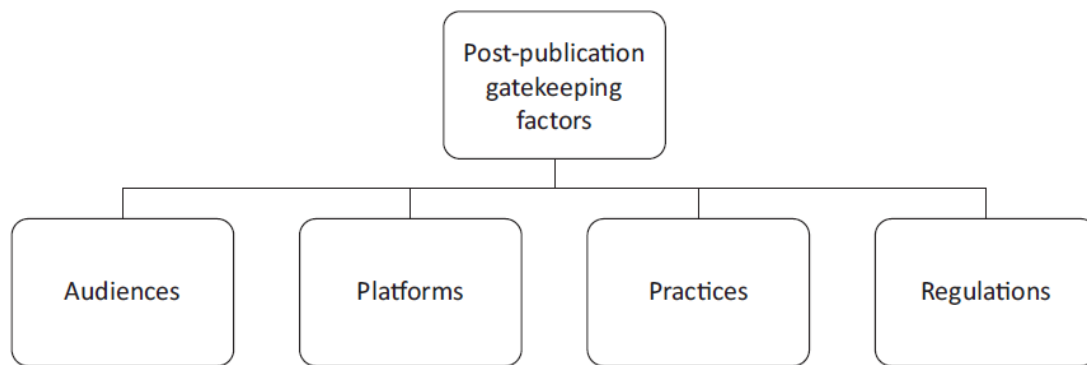


FIGURE 1 Factors related to post-publication gatekeeping

Hermida’s (2020) framework introduced the 4Ps: the factors of publics, platforms, paraphernalia, and practices. ‘Publics’ refers to the audiences of news; ‘platforms’ to the platform companies, such as Google and Meta; ‘paraphernalia’ to the materiality of gatekeeping (e.g., mobile devices and operating systems); and ‘practices’ to the social, spatial, and temporal practices by which people engage with news (while travelling by bus, lying in bed, etc.). The first two sub-studies of the dissertation work focused more on exploring post-publication gatekeeping practices by looking at the social interactional relationship between news media and audiences, and the third sub-study entered dialogue with the other two by looking at the factors and practices of post-publication gatekeeping in the context of datafied news work. The sub-studies jointly formed the framework of post-publication gatekeeping factors and also provided the revised terminology.

This dissertation uses the term ‘audiences’ instead of ‘publics’ because I see the former as more descriptive in depicting the people for whom the news is created, and it is commonly used in the field of journalism studies (e.g., Costera Meijer, 2020). With ‘platforms’ I refer to all kinds of technological platforms used by the news media – that is, the Web sites and applications that they self-govern just as much as the social media platforms that are governed by third parties. Paraphernalia, the materiality of the object, is something that I see as omnipresent and embedded in the platform factor in that platforms are technological constellations. Paraphernalia alone is not a factor that has sufficient power to shape news post-publication. Irrespective of the device, a platform is needed to mediate or display the news. For example, simply a device such as a mobile phone on its own does not mean that news can be consumed. The device needs a platform through which news can be accessed. Also, from the perspective of news media, paraphernalia enables the platform through which news media publish news, for example. Therefore, in the context of this research, I see paraphernalia as having more of a supporting role with respect to the platform factor. I also can see that *visuality*, which has now been explored in connection with post-publication gatekeeping, is part of the platform factor: many of the platforms are highly visual and rely on visual affordances that the platform provides; that is, *visuality* is often a built-in feature of a platform.

Turning to 'practices', then, I refer to all kinds of practices in which audiences and journalists can engage in connection to news. For example, news media apply practices related to content moderation. Practices can be connected to spatiality or temporality as Hermida (2020) suggested or to social interactionality or visuality as this study suggests. This study's notion of social interactional practices refers to practices such as commenting, sharing, and liking social media content. The concept of visual practices, in turn, is used here for practices such as audience members exercising their ability (or lack of it) to comment with visuals, such as photos and emojis. Lastly, the dissertation work has introduced the added factor of regulations. That is, the study considered the influence of legislation (e.g., the GDPR) and journalism ethics (expressed in codes of ethics, for instance) on post-publication gatekeeping. Regulations can now be seen as a new, fourth factor, thanks to the revised framework for post-publication gatekeeping (see Figure 1).

If we then look at the relationship between post-publication gatekeeping factors / practices and traditional journalistic gatekeeping, we see that they interact with each other (as Figure 2 illustrates). The traditional journalistic gatekeeping process includes the aforementioned 'culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages' (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 1) and takes place in newsrooms before news items get published. After news items have been published, they circulate in the digital news environment that is datafied and algorithmically driven, where they interact with post-publication factors (audiences, platforms, and regulations). The audience factor becomes present in how audience metrics shape journalistic decision-making and the platform factor in how social media metrics guide what kind of content is published on a particular platform, for example. A regulatory element becomes especially evident in the GDPR allowing audiences to withdraw their personal data from news organisations' databases – data stores on which newsrooms' decisions are often based – and in cases wherein the code of ethics / press council may demand changes to news media's actions or content after publication, for instance.

This kind of interaction between news items and post-publication factors creates news-related practices that exist in iterative connection to post-publication factors. Practices therefore can be seen as a factor but at the same time as a separate entity that explains where and when news is consumed by the audience members (in the case of spatial and temporal practices); how news and discussions related to it are shaped by news media, audience members, or social media platforms (as with moderation practices); how audiences and journalists interact with news (in social interactional practices); how audience members and journalists interact with and by visuals (by way of visual practices); and other facets to the phenomena. This framing demonstrates how factors and practices operate iteratively in interaction and that, further, they function in the shaping of power over journalistic decision-making and traditional gatekeeping (see Figure 2).

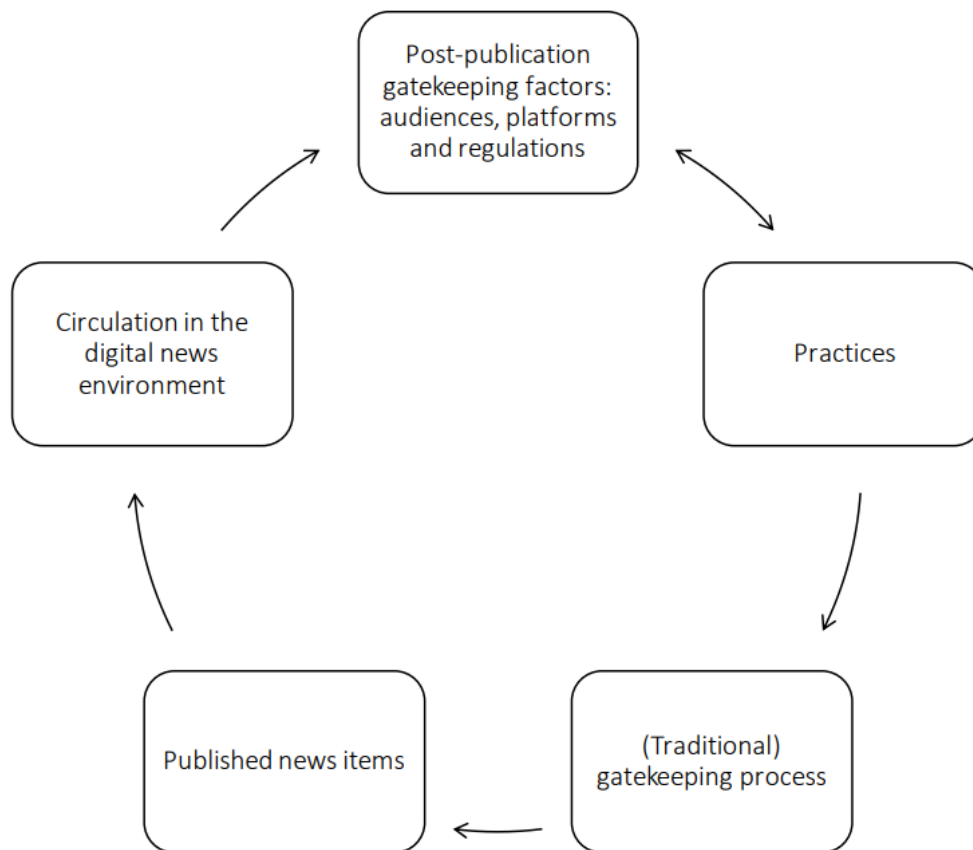


FIGURE 2 Processes of (post-publication) gatekeeping in the digital news environment

On these premises, this dissertation has portrayed post-publication gatekeeping as constructing multiple intertwined, iterative factors and practices that shape gatekeeping, and through which gatekeeping after publication can be examined, and that give feedback to editorial decision-making that takes place in newsrooms. Revising our understanding of gatekeeping theory and post-publication gatekeeping – the main purpose behind this dissertation – is pivotal for grappling with these phenomena, which are clearly important. After all, gatekeeping theory has explained to us the processes behind news – how news turns out the way it does – for over 70 years. The digital news environment is in constant change, and we journalism scholars need to keep with the pace so that the theory field is up to date, as Shoemaker and Vos (2009, p. 130) have pointed out. This study alongside previous ones (e.g., Bruns, 2018; Wallace, 2018) has demonstrated theoretically and empirically how platforms and audiences influence news in the current digital news environment. This brings some questions to the fore: can we still talk about news media’s traditional gatekeeping role, and are journalists autonomous decision-makers when platforms and audiences influence so very much? This study suggests that we should talk instead about *shared gatekeeping power*, and it offers a convincing argument for doing so. That is, news media share gatekeeping power with platforms and audiences that are iteratively influenced by each other and also by regulations and different kinds of practices related to news.

With the following reflections, I will discuss the implications of the factors and practices involved in post-publication gatekeeping that the dissertation work has identified and pinpointed. Perspectives on social interactionality, visibility, and regulations are therefore discussed next.

### **5.1.1 A Social Interactional Perspective on Post-Publication Gatekeeping**

This study has highlighted the role of social interaction by introducing the concept of conversational gatekeeping and therefore arguing that news media and audiences create norms and negotiate what is accepted content, action, or framing in relation to news media's social media accounts. This dissertation has also introduced the typology of conversational gatekeeping styles and argued that norm-building and negotiation are performed in four ways, by affirmative, critical, corrective, and invitational styles. Taking a practical viewpoint, in turn, it stresses that if both parties, news media and audiences, take part in the conversations, the norm-building is a joint effort wherein the values and perspectives of both are present. Again, if news media do not participate in the social media discussions, however, norm-building is left solely to the audiences, and if news media do not participate, they have less gatekeeping power.

Conversational gatekeeping is closely related to previously articulated gatekeeping concepts. Singer's (2014) secondary gatekeeping, Bruns's (2005, 2018) gatewatching, Barzilai-Nahon's (2008) network gatekeeping, and Meraz and Papacharissi's (2013) networked gatekeeping highlight audiences' and/or platforms' role in the gatekeeping processes or practices. What differentiates conversational gatekeeping from these concepts is that the concept of conversational gatekeeping highlights the post-publication viewpoint and sees gatekeeping materialising in and as conversations. It especially highlights the social interactional relationship between journalists / news media and audiences that becomes apparent through micro-level practices, such as commenting and liking, on social media platforms.

Of these concepts, the most closely related to conversational gatekeeping is Bruns's (2005, 2018) idea of gatewatching, wherein audience members as well as journalists can give prominence to content they deem newsworthy and share-worthy. Especially strongly, the affirmative and critical styles that audience members employ resemble the ideas of gatewatching, in that via these styles audience members either suggest or downplay the worthiness of the news content or that of an action or framing related to the news – they decide whether or not to give prominence to something they see by means of the news media's account. There is also a concept, closely connected to ideas about the corrective style, that captures audiences' ability to point out errors or something that needs revising from the news media's side. Namely, Vos (2020) has theoretically elaborated on the idea of gatebouncing wherein networked actors, such as audience members and journalists, can seek illegitimate information and bounce it back through the gates.

The concept of the invitational style seems to be more unique: it is hard to find anything closely related to this from the current theory. This practice gives

full power to the news media to choose the topics and framings open for discussion in their social media accounts. Of course, conversations can flow off-topic, but the first input, what is pushed through the gates, is in the hands of the news media. Invitational-style action can be viewed also from the perspective of content moderation, as the topics and framings that the news-media chooses, to which it opens the gates, make a difference. In a way, a news media can pre-moderate by considering the topics and framings it chooses to use. From the practice standpoint, the question arises of how sensitive topics should be made available for audience comments and what consequences lack of judgement from the news media's side can cause for the general social media discussion environment and democracy.

The ideas of freedom of the press and speech are part of democracy, but if comments and conversations create a hostile discussion environment by enabling hate speech and slurs, the overall result is not beneficial for democracy or for keeping the audiences of news safe. Enabling hostile discussions and not paying enough attention to moderation practices can also be a reputational hazard for news media, because the conversations taking place in connection with news media's social media accounts can be deemed to reflect their institutional values. Therefore, in light of this practical implication, a recommendation that news media carefully consider what they open for social media discussion is offered here. Also, from an ethics perspective, it is important to monitor social media discussions, as the Finnish Press Council, for example, requires news media to do so (Council for Mass Media in Finland, 2023).

Sub-study III offers evidence that Finnish newspapers are currently paying attention to their content-moderation practices but also that the attention level and practices vary among the three newspapers that participated in the sub-study. One newspaper had bought external moderation services for Meta's social media platforms, under which the moderation was conducted by humans and machine-learning software. Some of the newspaper's moderation was conducted in-house by news workers, since they could not outsource TikTok activities, for example - at the time, no-one sold services for TikTok moderation. The second and third newspaper dealt with social media moderation such that moderation was conducted purely in-house and moderation practices were part of news workers' everyday routines. Interestingly, only one of the large newspapers had a designated position of social media editor. Social media editors seem to be more commonplace among news media in other European countries (e.g., Ferrer Conill & Tandoc, 2018; Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2018) than in Finland. This prompts one to ask whether the social media sphere is seen as less valuable or at least less important in the case of the newsrooms studied. The job title's absence perhaps reflects such an idea.

Over the past few years, I have had several discussions with representatives of Finnish newspapers regarding moderation and their social media activities in general. In the course of those discussions, I heard several times that 'our resources for moderation / social media are very limited'. I do understand that moderation and following social media audiences can indeed be a question of

resources, but I want to argue that it is also a question of how news media allocate their resources. What is seen as important and valuable for the company is reflected in its social media values. Social media activities and looking after audience interaction are sometimes not seen to be as valuable as following the direct money flows that lead to the news media's own sites. While 'harvesting' social interactional relationships with audiences is, of course, a matter of money, especially when one is talking about commercial media, I see that the indirect value of having a (good) relationship with current or potential paying customers in the social media domain seems to be underestimated. In addition, in sub-study III, some news workers stated that providing contributions on important societal topics free via social media is democracy work on their part. This is important in that there are people who do not follow news on a regular basis but incidentally see news stories via social media. I suggest as a practical recommendation in light of this study that news media should reflect upon and consider their views and resources in conjunction with their social media activities because the question is one of gatekeeping but also of democracy and journalism ethics. Guidelines from news media on moderation practices are especially vital, needed not least so that audiences can feel safe while discussing matters raised via the news media's accounts.

If we then look at the social interactional relationship between news media and audiences, considering elements such as interaction frequency, this study has concretised the sense that Finnish newspapers are not keen on interacting with – and especially reticent to have conversations with – their social media audiences. Sub-study II, regarding Instagram, rendered the phenomenon especially clear. The data for sub-study I came through a project wherein the participating newspapers gave heightened attention to their social media publishing and interaction with their audiences (Lauk et al., 2018, 2019). The premise was that the newspapers initially did not pay much attention to their audience relations but were keen on experimenting and putting more emphasis on these. Therefore, it is hard to draw very many conclusions in the case of the Facebook study. Still, as news media seem to be not so keen on having a relationship with their audiences, the ideas of the audience turn and the two-way relationship seem 'overrated' in this context (Costera Meijer, 2020; Nelson, 2021). It seems that the situation has partly turned upside-down: before the Internet era, the relationship was described as top-down, and now, at least in the case of this study, we can even talk about a bottom-up relationship where audiences hold the power at least as applicable by conversational means. This situation should serve as a wake-up call for (Finnish and perhaps other) news media in their current attempts to figure out what to do next with their social media accounts. Having less conversational power means that news media have less power to curate the narratives and discourses that are constructed through audience comments.

It is noteworthy also that those Finnish newspapers that have been included in this dissertation work have a social media audience of thousands (see Salonen & Laaksonen, 2023, Table 1). The Instagram follower counts of the newspapers



encompassed by this study varied as of November 2023 from the local newspapers' roughly 1,000 followers through the regional newspapers' 10,000+ to the national newspaper's over 200,000 followers. So the audiences are there, and the power newspapers possess in the numbers of their followers is vast. However, work such as that by Bro and Wallberg (2014) demonstrates the power that audiences hold through their social interactional practices: even though news media publish thousands of posts and have the invitational power to choose the topics and steer discussion to the conversation they hope to have, it is only some posts (often a minority of them) that audiences affirm and see as newsworthy. The post-publication gatekeeping power in social interactional practices that take such forms as commenting, sharing, and liking is solidly in the hands of the audiences. The power of the audiences is something this dissertation spotlights.

Lastly, looking at the social interactional perspective and societal impact lets us see that this research highlights joint responsibility for the discussions that take place via social media. All human members of society are needed if we want to build 'ethical gates' for the digital spaces that are in our everyday use – we need humans to understand humans in the given situation and cultural context, since algorithms can do only so much. Audience members can intervene if they see something illegitimate taking place in social media spaces. We can all flag illegitimate content and make the platform or the news media aware of the situation. Condemning hate speech and the use of slurs is a power that is afforded to all of us by the means of conversational gatekeeping, and it is a power we should use (wisely).

### **5.1.2 A Visual Perspective to Post-Publication Gatekeeping**

This study emphasises the role of visuals in post-publication gatekeeping by providing evidence that visuals are part of the platform factor yet can also be seen as part of post-publication gatekeeping practices. Many of the social media platforms are highly visual, and visuality may be seen as an in-built part of the structures of a platform. When referring to visual practices in the context of this study, I mean audience members' ability to comment with visuals, such as photos, emojis, other images, and videos. This is something that did not become a central element of the study because Instagram as a technological construction does not afford audience members or journalists to comment with photos, other images or videos in an Instagram feed: the platform merely allows the use of emojis/gifs in the comment section. Therefore this in-built part of the platform restricts the use of visual practices.

Visuality or visual practices were not specifically researched in sub-study I, in the context of Facebook. However, it would have been possible to do so as Facebook as a platform affords user posting of visuals in the comment section. This is something that Gibbs et al. (2015) connected with the platform's vernacular, as introduced above – i.e., what is typical for the platform. Instagram is a highly visual platform (Gibbs et al., 2015), and it forces its users to publish content in a visual format. It is impossible to post just plain text on Instagram, except

in the form of comments. Thus the vernacular nature of the platform turns upside-down when we look at the comment section, since visuals cannot be used (emojis/gifs constitute the only exception). So even though Instagram is seen as more visual and as a platform for younger generations and news audiences, it provides less visual power in the arena of comments and conversations when compared to Facebook.

However, the case is quite different if we look at the posts that news media publish in Instagram's news feed and the invitational style of conversational gatekeeping. By deciding what visuals and what kinds of visual frames news media use, news media control their Instagram accounts' visual flow and invite audiences to such visually initiated conversations as they particularly desire. In sub-study II, we could only see what came through the newspapers' gates. We did not know the decision-making process behind the posts; therefore, I am not able to discuss what led to the publication of a particular piece of content. However, we could see the content that was published through the newspapers' gates. We could see that the newspapers posted more soft news than hard news content, and this is in line with some previous findings (e.g., Hendrickx, 2021; Maares & Hanusch, 2020). What is particularly interesting is that audiences interacted evenly with soft and hard news content: they did not seem to prefer one over the other. The pattern is consistent somewhat with Ai et al.'s finding (2022) that news editors preferred to circulate soft news while audiences preferred to interact with hard news content. It could be argued that audiences balanced the visual power, the visibility of soft vs. hard news, by interacting in the same amount with visual posts containing hard and soft content.

This study has the practical implication, and it suggests that visuality is generally something that news media should pay attention to. Social media, particularly platforms such as Instagram and TikTok where news increasingly circulates (Newman et al., 2023), are highly visual environments. In addition, sub-study III pinpointed that some newspapers pay more attention to the visual format and platform vernaculars when they publish via social media. For example, one news worker described visual storytelling as important in the case of Instagram. Visual practices did not become a focus of attention more generally in sub-study III, but this was partly due to the fact that the focus of the study was on datafied news work overall – questions specific to visuality were not asked.

Visuality and the visual form of news is a very timely topic indeed, as recent studies covering social media or platform logic attest. Hartley et al. (2023) concluded that news media have started to apply platform logics and that news production cannot be separated from social media production. Alongside sub-study III, publications by Hågvar (2019) and Hartley et al. (2023) note that some of the stories are designed for social media platforms. In addition, a publication that I co-authored (Ehrlén et al., 2023) paid attention to the way news is portrayed on social media. It articulated the notion that, when encountering content on social media, young audiences were easily confused and were not sure whether the content they saw on social media was legitimate news content. This was because news content nowadays mimics other kinds of social media content so much, and

young audiences felt that it was hard to tell news from another kind of information. These are important findings for news media that produce lots of visual content for social media. Thus this study, with supporting evidence from the studies of Ehrlén et al. (2023), Hartley et al. (2023), and Hågvær (2019), raises the question of how much news media should visually mimic the general social media environment. On its basis, I identify a practical implication that newsrooms should consider this carefully: they should reflect upon how and by which means their brand is recognisable in the social media environment.

In connection with visuality, I also want to discuss gatekeeping from a more theory-based perspective. I argue that this study, especially sub-study II, has established a new line of research by applying the visuality lens to the concept of post-publication gatekeeping. Previous studies of journalistic visual gatekeeping have not used the concept of post-publication gatekeeping or employed that term. Work by Schwalbe et al. (2015) examines closely related matters but does not specifically talk about or highlight the post-publication viewpoint. Instead, they use the term 'gatecheckers' when referring to audiences' and journalists' ability to verify or challenge the accuracy of a (news) image that has been published and is in circulation. In addition, a study by Durani et al. (2023) from the field of information-systems studies has looked at and highlighted audiences' role in visual gatekeeping in the sphere of social media. They noted that audiences act as 'audience gatekeepers' by selectively disseminating visual content and thereby shaping information diffusion. This conclusion is in line with those from the second sub-study and by Schwalbe et al. (2015), as they all recognise that audiences have the power to influence how visual content gains visibility in the digital news environment and what kind of visual content is recommended or affirmed by the audiences. These studies signal that the significance of visuals is also cultivating more scholarly interest in the gatekeeping field and that a new line of visual post-publication gatekeeping studies is gradually emerging.

Lastly, from the angle of societal impact, the visuality perspective draws attention to the general notion that visuality has increasing power in our (platform) society. News has turned more toward visual forms, and the ways news is portrayed affect news audiences greatly. Audiences need to know how to 'read' the visual news, and news media likewise must consider what to publish and how to frame it visually. The actions taken need adapting from both sides – news media and audiences – as this is where the mainstream news business seems to be headed. This motion is probably occurring partially because video and image formats are gaining more popularity in tandem with the rise of highly visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Furthermore, the Finnish public service media (Yleisradio) has been forced to produce more news content in audiovisual formats since 2022 in the wake of a competition law aimed at giving the commercial media more space in written-news arenas (Parkkinen, 2022). If we look at the current digital news environment, we find that the obligation to produce more video and audio content does not seem to represent a bad situation. The law, pushed by commercial media, might even backfire, since they now need to start mastering more and more visual ways of delivering the news if wishing to keep

with the pace. It might be inevitable that this recent turn, with more visual news formats, changes our society and the ways in which news is consumed, post-publication.

### 5.1.3 Regulatory Perspectives on Post-Publication Gatekeeping

By extending the post-publication gatekeeping framework by suggesting and adding the factor of regulations – that is, the perspective of legislation and journalism ethics to post-publication gatekeeping – this dissertation argues that regulatory factors shape post-publication gatekeeping and the way news circulates in the digital news environment. The post-publication lens helps us look at the factors and practices at play after news is published. I recognise that many times law and ethics are already taken into account in the newsrooms before news is published, pre-publication. However, there are plenty of examples of situations wherein we are able to apply a post-publication perspective to regulatory aspects.

Looking at the legislative issues and factors firstly, we can see that the digital news environment and all the platforms and audiences that now take part in the processes of news post-publication have the power to influence newsroom practices. The role of the GDPR became especially evident in sub-study III as nearly all the news workers highlighted how much the GDPR had generally affected their working practices. In general, the GDPR affects the ways audience data can be utilised post-publication also. From the post-publication angle, sub-study III highlighted the matter of the cookie data use that the GDPR regulates. Because the GDPR allows audiences to refuse to share their cookie data with news organisations and other, third parties with whom those organisations have made agreements, news media might not be able to see some of how audiences interact with published news on their sites. This raised concern among the news workers in sub-study III, who felt that this factor makes it difficult to access audience data and therefore challenges their business logic. Another thing that the GDPR allows the audiences is the removal of their personal data even after said data have already been handed over to news media and used, for example, in the audience metrics. News workers depicted data-removal requests as not that usual: though one or two removal requests might come in the span of a week, and the requests are usually made by people working in the information-technology field.

The GDPR has effects also on monetisation and the power (im)balance between social media platforms and news media. In sub-study III, several news workers expressed hopes that regulation would bring some answers to the power imbalance that now exists from their point of view. Platform companies have been reluctant to compensate news-media organisations for the news content that they use and circulate after it has been published by those organisations themselves. This situation has proved tricky, but some progress has taken place in Australia and Canada, for example, in that Google and Meta have started to remunerate news media for the content they use. The pattern is now visible also in the Nordic countries, with negotiations between Finnish news media and the

platform companies having been projected to begin in early 2024 (Tuomasjukka, 2023).

Of course, Google has given back to the community of journalism previously through its different kinds of training and news initiatives, but there is a problem brought along with those initiatives. Through them, Google is able to steer the future of journalism to where it wants journalism to focus next. As Hermidia and Young (2023) note, Google's initiatives narrow journalism's innovation and they validate reader-originating revenue as the key solution for business models, even though people are unwilling to pay for (online) news (Newman et al., 2023). So the question is 'in what ways is journalism better able to keep up its autonomy and to develop further and at the same time receive compensation from Google for use of its products - the news?'. The digital news environment and current shared gatekeeping power have already eliminated some of journalism's autonomy, so the next steps are all the more important for the future directions of journalism.

Now let us look at the situation from the angle of the EU's new Digital Acts. Accessing cross-platform data was a topic that news workers brought up in sub-study III. They figured that it would benefit their understanding of their audiences if they were able to see how audiences migrate published news stories from their sites to different social media platforms and across platform company lines. The EU's enforcement of the Digital Markets Act is intended to enable cross-platform actions (European Commission, 2023e). These 'gatekeeper' platforms need to enable data transfer and compatibility between different platforms across company lines. We are living in interesting times as the new Digital Acts' effects unfold, and the year 2024 will probably start showing us how these laws need to be applied in practice.

The issue of content moderation, discussed in sub-study III, is another thing that the new Digital Acts regulate. The DSA grants audiences more power over the content they have produced and published on social media platforms (European Commission, 2023d). In theory, this could mean that some of the audience members become able to contest moderation decisions made on news media's behalf and content of a news item that has been published, as the EU law lets audiences challenge, for example, moderation decisions on social media platforms that are used by news media. This is not something that I have witnessed or heard about happening yet, but it matches the impression one could get from interpreting the law. Upon looking at all the possible changes that the new Digital Acts might bring, I can now suggest, in light of these practical implications, that news media should monitor and carefully look at their gatekeeping practices with an eye to the new EU laws. The laws seem to be bringing along all kinds of changes that pertain to digital content and concern digitally oriented businesses generally, alongside digital news content and news businesses.

With this dissertation I want to underscore the view obtained of post-publication gatekeeping from the angle of journalism ethics too. The codes of ethics that press councils maintain are an especially important factor in shaping how news work is conducted and what it looks like. In sub-study III, with which I

wanted to find out how ethical news workers thought their actions and daily practices were, I did not get answers from the ethics standpoint: the news workers immediately and only steered the talk to matters related to the GDPR. So the influence of ethics in decision-making seemed to be vague, though some highlighted that journalistic values guide their work. In contrast, I argue that it is important to look at journalism ethics from the post-publication perspective, also because the codes of ethics and the press councils have power to influence news stories that have already been published. For example, Fox et al. (2023) stressed that one function of these ethics codes is disciplinary; their rules are backed up by sanctions. In the case of the Finnish Press Council, sentence is passed on those media outlets that have not followed the code of ethics, with the sanctions including those outlets being required to publish notification of the sanctioning in the given media and via the channels where the violation took place.

Unfortunately, I was not able to tease apart the ethics factors in more detail through empirical evidence. Still, this study has made an impact and a very practical contribution to the field of journalism ethics. I was invited to become a member of the working group that started to revise and update the Finnish Press Council's code of ethics in spring 2023 (we hope to finish the task by spring 2024). The input that has reached the new version of the code of ethics through this dissertation work is concentrated especially in the area of the news-media / audience social interactional relationship and moderation practices. In addition, I've been highlighting the role of audiences and that the code of ethics should be made more user-friendly for audience members so that they are aware of their rights connected with news media's actions. This is something that Fox et al. (2023) too highlighted with their work by raising the profile of the notion that press councils need to consider their public-facing actions.

Lastly, from the standpoint of societal impact, a regulatory perspective informs suggestions to regulators. It would be important for news organisations to participate more actively when, for example, EU-level decisions are being made. The EU's new Digital Acts seem to be aimed more at platform companies, while news media organisations are left to interpret what applies to them. I believe it could be hard for news media organisations to understand all that is applicable to them when regarding the new acts - after all, it has even been hard for me as a researcher to reach some kind of understanding of the matter. It would be important also that audience members be informed more thoroughly about their rights relative to the platform companies since news consumption takes place increasingly on third-party platforms. For example, audience members' rights related to moderation decisions are something that should be clarified. For instance, how do EU regulators see moderation responsibilities being shared between platform companies and the organisations, such as news media organisations, that utilise these third-party platforms for their business?

I have now summarised the picture of the factors and practices in post-publication gatekeeping and have highlighted the perspectives of social interactionality, visibility, and regulations that shape gatekeeping post-publication. This is

the main contribution that the dissertation work has provided to theory and practice. I will next look at the limitations of this study and ponder directions for scholars' future work on (post-publication) gatekeeping.

## 5.2 Reflections on Limitations and Future Research

From looking at the future avenues for post-publication gatekeeping (and gatekeeping in general), I suggest on the basis of this study that more research is needed to map and understand the nature of post-publication gatekeeping and both the factors/practices and their relations to each other. By doing so, we could gain an even more holistic understanding of what post-publication gatekeeping constructs. This study was able to explore and add consideration of the factors and practices of social interactionality, visuality, and regulations. Still, the results call for future research for exploring what lies beyond that. Where could the revised framework for post-publication gatekeeping lead? In addition, practices that in Hermida's (2020) framework are described as spatial and temporal were examined mostly from the perspective of audiences. It should prove fruitful to look at the spatial and temporal practices from the angle of news media also. Offering an example, the study by Ai et al. (2022), which is the only study apart from Hermida's (2020) and the sub-studies of the dissertation project that has used the term 'post-publication gatekeeping' and the associated concept so far, utilised Hermida's framework for exploring not only audiences' views but also news editors' and how they took part in ranking news through the lens of post-publication gatekeeping.

This dissertation has also explored gatekeeping at the social institutions level (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Vos & Heinderyckx, 2015; Vos & Russell, 2019), by examining the gatekeeping connection with platform companies – Meta, with its Facebook and Instagram. In addition, the study looked at gatekeeping at the communication routines level (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Vos & Heinderyckx, 2015), in that it considered gatekeeping through different kinds of practices – social interactional and visual ones. However, future studies should focus on looking more thoroughly at how post-publication gatekeeping meshes with the idea of levels of analysis/influence offered by Shoemaker and Vos (2009) and Vos and Heinderyckx (2015), because this is unexplored territory that I was unable to delve into more thoroughly here.

Furthermore, in particular, we need more research on the concept and phenomenon of conversational gatekeeping and its four styles, as we need to understand the perspectives and behaviour of the human actors – audience members and journalists – who decide on the norms on news media's accounts. Also, as automatic content moderation lags in the context of small languages, such as Finnish, we need humans in the loop to keep news media's social media conversations safe and democratic. Because this study was only able to look at the Finnish context and a few Finnish newspapers and their audiences' actions on Face-

book and Instagram, more research, with different cultural contexts and platforms, is needed for a better understanding of conversational gatekeeping and phenomena related to it. For example, the rise of TikTok in news consumption (Newman et al., 2023) and TikTok's unique algorithm that brings visibility to accounts that the audience members are not even following raise questions about how this social media context that diverges sharply from Meta's platforms, Facebook and Instagram, shapes and influences (post-publication) gatekeeping and circulation of news items. In addition, novel platforms such as Bluesky and Meta's Threads are prospective new players among social media platforms. Therefore, building an academic understanding of their functions and gatekeeping logic would be much needed.

We need more understanding of gatekeeping in visual contexts too. This study was able to scratch the surface and look at Instagram, a multimodal platform, and how it could be regarded as a post-publication gatekeeping factor, alongside what visual practices are applied on that platform. The analysis found that visuality is built into the platform factor and that visual practices are not, however, fully enabled on Instagram in that the platform does not afford audience commenting via visuals beyond emojis/gifs. For example, Facebook, which could be regarded as a less visual platform than Instagram, does afford audience members to comment through photos and videos. Therefore, future studies should look at visual practices on platforms, such as Facebook, that afford comments inclusive of visuals also, and they should more generally consider the visual context beyond Finnish news media. In addition, it would be beneficial to see how ephemeral content – content that is consumed quickly or disappears after a certain amount of time (Anderson, 2015; Grainge, 2011) – is connected to post-publication gatekeeping or news-consumption practices in general. TikTok videos and Instagram stories and reels are great examples of ephemerality in the social media domain.

In addition, exploring journalism in social media channels through the multimodal or visual lens is important for future research for the simple reason that these studies are scarce (Bossio, 2021; Salonen et al., 2021). I wonder whether one reason in this is that applying new methods or methods beyond the most common ones in the field of journalism studies – such as content analysis, interviewing, and observation (Loosen & Schmidt, 2016) – feels too daring and therefore slows the adoption of versatile and 'new' methods. In my own case, I tried to apply Rose's (2016) framework of four sites of visual materialism at first, but, after months of trying, it turned out to be too difficult for letting me keep the focus on post-publication gatekeeping and keeping the framework. Therefore, I decided to take a less challenging route and follow the idea of visual interpretation (e.g., Müller, 2011) by analysing basic visual elements in the Instagram posts with the aid of some basic considerations, such as what is in the image and what meanings it presents. I hope that future studies are able to embed visual methods more deeply in their explorations of (post-publication) gatekeeping.

Furthermore, sub-study I utilised digital conversation analysis as a means of shedding light on the social interactional relationship between journalists and



social media audiences. Conversation analysis in general is a commonly applied method (for example, in language studies; see Schegloff, 2007), but its use seems scarce in the field of journalism studies, at least per the observations I made during the process of preparing for publication. When I went through esteemed journals commonly consulted in the field of journalism studies – such as *Digital Journalism*, *Journalism Studies*, and *Journalism Practice* – in 2021, I could not find any publications of a similar kind in those journals. Therefore, I hope for more research in the field of journalism studies that utilises and explores social media conversations through the lens of digital conversation analysis.

Thinking further about the methodology in conjunction with the limitations of this study, I see that from only looking at the Finnish context from the standpoint of commercial media, a few Finnish newspapers, and two Meta-owned platforms, I cannot make arguments that apply to larger contexts. Also, the interviews that I conducted reflected only the ideas and thoughts of a couple of news workers from three Finnish newspapers. In an ideal situation, the interview sample would have been larger and I would have been able to hear views also from other newspapers. In addition, I feel that the social media data that I was able to use merely scratched the surface. Again, in an ideal scenario, I could have interviewed audience members and heard their thoughts about social media consumption, the visuality of news, and other such topics. A computational or at least more quantitative approach to audiences and news media actions on several platforms would have provided greater ability to validate the work behind this dissertation. However, I feel that a more qualitative approach helped me to deepen my understanding of the phenomena and the power relation among news media, audiences, and social media platforms, which was the ultimate aim of the study. Another obstacle to a more holistic view of the news media–audience relationship might be that I should have looked at Finnish public service media’s social media accounts. This is something that I hope to pursue in the future.

In a further area for future research, scholars should delve more into the role of regulations in post-publication gatekeeping. In particular, understanding of how journalism ethics tie in with post-publication gatekeeping remains very limited. Even though probed for these, the interviewees in sub-study III did not disclose their innermost thoughts about the role of journalism ethics in their working practices. Instead, they highlighted the role of legislation and its influence on their working practices from the angle of post-publication gatekeeping. Such material but also greater understanding of journalism ethics, different national press councils, and their rulings on decision-making that can be viewed from the perspective of post-publication gatekeeping could shed light on the topic.

Beyond the changes in gatekeeping and to the associated processes that are influenced and shaped by post-publication factors and practices, journalism has been facing challenges as the digital news environment remains in flux. Whereas Chadwick (2013) described the current media landscape as a hybrid one where old and new media and media forms meet. I feel that there is also something

more to it. This study has demonstrated through empirical evidence how much data/analytics guides and directs decision-making and mediates the factors and practices in post-publication gatekeeping. Sub-study III points to the suggestion that we should talk rather more about a *data turn* than about an audience turn. I find that an audience turn (Costera Meijer, 2020) can be seen embedded in the data turn as audiences' actions become visible through their data traces. Also, 'data turn' is a broader term: it encompasses all kinds of data movements, e.g. flows of platform data. When looking at the situation today in December 2023, I feel that the term 'data turn' itself might soon need revising, in that matters are further complicated by generative AI, with artificial intelligence and language models now becoming the latest shapers of journalism and gatekeeping.

This is something that future studies should now focus on: figuring out the role of AI and language models in the processes of (post-publication) gatekeeping. Also, I feel that we would need to understand more fully how newspapers fit in with all the latest changes. As Heikkilä et al. (2023) and Tenor (2023) have noted, we know little about how print and digital news are doing in joint numbers, at least here in the Nordic region. I'm now, therefore, thinking along these lines: What is the future of newspapers in the AI era? The hybrid media system is getting even more hybrid, and the role and meaning of social media is growing. This conclusion is supported by the evidence that journalism has even more profoundly assimilated the logics of social media and platforms in general (e.g., Hågvar, 2019; Hartley et al., 2023). Therefore, some kind of adaptation to the changes is vital for newspapers. With these final remarks on my reflections, future research, and the limitations of this study, I move on to evaluating the success of the study design, in the next section.

### 5.3 Evaluation of the Study

I will conclude this dissertation by evaluating the study design so that the premises from which I conducted the research become transparent. I have already covered my positionality as a journalism researcher (in Section 1.1). Understanding one's position, how I see the field of journalism studies in the case of this study, is especially important in qualitative research as one looks at the research and study subjects from their perspective. Ideally, one should be as objective as possible when conducting research, but, as Tracy (2013, p. 229) notes, while we can take measures to reduce our biases, completely objective and bias-free research is impossible for any researcher. Therefore, I will now examine how the study was conducted with the aid of Tracy's (2013, pp. 230–246) *criteria for excellent qualitative research*. These eight criteria, capturing important elements for building research credibility for qualitatively or qualitatively oriented research, helped me to view and evaluate the different steps and decisions I took throughout the doctoral project's process.

The first criterion is *a worthy topic*: the topic of the research should be relevant, timely, significant, and interesting (Tracy, 2013, p. 231). I argue that a study

that looks at the power relations among news media, social media platforms, and audiences does reflect the current media landscape and the changes that it has experienced lately and, therefore, is timely and worthy of research. Also, this study has received outside funding from five different foundations, and I think this too reflects how outsiders, heads of foundations and external reviewers / other researchers, see the relevance of the project.

The second criterion, of *rich rigor*, refers to the manner in which the research is conducted: to it having been conducted by appropriate means, with due care and effort (Tracy, 2013, pp. 231–232). I believe that I have made my best effort, and employed due diligence, in every step of conducting this research. I collected enough data, of three kinds, to provide evidence of the concept and styles of conversational gatekeeping and of the meanings of datafication for news work and (post-publication) gatekeeping. My aim was to understand phenomena – factors and practices – connected to (post-publication) gatekeeping, and I believe that is what this study did. I also think I spent enough time with my datasets as I went through them countless times and spent at least a year performing each of the sub-studies. Completing sub-study I was a very bumpy road as I spent three years with the dataset, on and off, as life went on while it was under way.

*Sincerity*, the third criterion, refers to self-reflexivity and transparency of the study (Tracy, 2013, pp. 233–234). I will not go into greater depth with regard to self-reflexivity here, since I covered this facet of the project by discussing the researcher’s positionality, in Section 1.1. I also have already transparently, honestly, and openly addressed the activities that occurred during the research process, and I have acknowledged how sub-study I suffered on account of my health condition. Also, the global pandemic that shut us all inside our homes for nearly two years must have taken some toll. My health affected the completion of sub-study II also, with so many ups and downs taking place before the sub-studies were published. Retrospectively, I am happy that sub-study II ended up published later than was the initial plan, since *time* allowed me to really think deeply about Instagram as a multimodal platform and an avenue for post-publication gatekeeping, even though I did not manage to find a way to use Rose’s (2017) framework for visual analysis, as discussed earlier on. To be honest, I’m amazed that the first two sub-studies actually saw the light of day, since the frustration was at times unbearable as my body just couldn’t keep to the speed that I and my mind wanted it to. From that perspective, the third sub-study was a piece of cake: it was ‘in and out’ within a year, in a good way, as studies should be when there are no unnecessary obstacles along the way.

I want to mention also, again for the sake of transparency, that the first version of sub-study I was presented at the Future of Journalism conference in the autumn of 2019 in Cardiff, UK. This is an important piece of information with regard to the originality of the dissertation. In 2019, in my conference paper and presentation, I was already talking about conversational gatekeeping and the post-publication viewpoint to gatekeeping. This is noteworthy because Hermita’s excellent and very important piece on post-publication gatekeeping came out in a special issue of *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* in the spring

of 2020. I would dare to say that the two of us were after something similar at the same time. In retrospect, I am very happy that Hermida's study appeared before mine, since proving the value of looking at gatekeeping from a whole new perspective faced challenges in the journal's review process and in terms of conference presentations. Several times, I received feedback stating that I should change the theory or that I cannot look at gatekeeping that way. I am also happy that I kept my stubborn head and learned to make better arguments for the post-publication gatekeeping lens and for my studies, many times with the assistance of Hermida's (2020) study, since this enabled the sub-studies to get published and made the dissertation project possible to complete.

The fourth criterion is *credibility*. It reflects the study's dependability and trustworthiness (Tracy, 2013, pp. 235–236). Often triangulation is thought to bring credibility to a study, and if I look at my dissertation as a whole and all three sub-studies, the criterion of triangulation is met. I used multiple methods: several kinds of qualitative ones (content and iterative analysis and visual interpretation) as well as elements of quantitative research (tabulation of instances and descriptive statistics). Principles for intercoder reliability were followed in the first two sub-studies when coding was a collaborative effort. As I and the co-authors wanted to make sure we coded and understood post-publication gatekeeping in the same way, we coded parts of the dataset individually and then discussed our criteria and reached consensus for the coding.

*Resonance*, the fifth criterion, implies that, instead of trying to prove the generalisability of research through statistics, the researchers make sure that their research resonates through specifically relieving cases or study contexts (Tracy, 2013, p. 239). For the first two sub-studies, numerical evidence was added and presented, since this was something that the journals' reviewers requested. Pointing out the frequency of some phenomenon, conversational gatekeeping or others, might prove a given point; however, I believe what is more important in qualitative research is to present interesting cases and new phenomena whereby we can better understand and explain the setting – the digital news environment and especially post-publication gatekeeping in the case of this study. The first sub-study presented an example covering traces of hate speech and what a lack of conversational gatekeeping can mean for the digital news environment. Similarly, sub-study II presented four examples that together manifest the four styles of performing conversational gatekeeping.

The sixth criterion is making a *significant contribution* that is pursued by theoretical, conceptual, practical, and/or methodological means (Tracy, 2013, pp. 240–242). This dissertation has presented the concept of conversational gatekeeping and its four styles, in terms of the typology of conversational gatekeeping styles. It has also offered an extension to Hermida's (2020) post-publication gatekeeping framework by adding the regulatory factor. As for contributions to practice, the work has provided food for thought for newsrooms, especially those of Finnish newspapers and other commercial news providers. This was covered extensively in the chapter on the results and discussions. In addition, I believe the methodology was approached in a creative way: methods built one upon another

in the first two sub-studies, and they were used in supportive ways such that the methods in all of the sub-studies complement each other.

*Ethics* is the seventh criterion (Tracy, 2013, pp. 242–243). The associated angle was thoroughly examined in conjunction with the methodology; see Section 3.5 ('Research Integrity') for my broad-based ethical evaluation.

The eighth and last criterion is *meaningful coherence* (Tracy, 2013, pp. 245–246). It refers to the idea of the study achieving what it was supposed to achieve, by using relevant methods, and of the literature used being relevant, just as the research questions were. I would like to argue that this study achieved the intended aim of looking at the relations among news media, audiences, and social media platforms by exploring post-publication gatekeeping factors and practices. I also think that the multi-method approach was relevant and enabled the provision of multiple perspectives on post-publication gatekeeping, through different datasets. I believe that literature addressing the digital news environment, platforms, regulations, and audiences' position in the landscape provided a basis for solid understanding of the latest changes in journalism that have been brought on by the rise of social media platforms. These changes were looked at through the theoretical lens of (post-publication) gatekeeping. Lastly, I can regard the research questions as relevant because they were answered and because, through them, I was able to broaden the theoretical and practical understanding of post-publication gatekeeping and its relation to traditional gatekeeping.

## YHTEENVETO (SUMMARY IN FINNISH)

Tämä väitöskirja tarkastelee uutismedian, yleisöjen ja sosiaalisen median alustojen välistä vuorovaikutteista suhdetta portinvartijateorian (*gatekeeping theory*) valossa hyödyntäen julkaisun jälkeisen portinvartijuuden teoriaa (Hermida, 2020). Tutkimus siis tarkastelee sitä, mitä tapahtuu uutisille niiden julkaisemisen jälkeen, ja kuinka yleisöt ja uutismedia ovat vuorovaikutuksessa digitaalisessa uutisympäristössä.

Työ on artikkeliväitöskirja joka muodostuu kolmesta empiirisestä osatutkimuksesta. Tutkimukset käsittelevät julkaisun jälkeiseen portinvartijuuteen liittyviä tekijöitä ja käytäntöjä. Artikkelissa I tutkitaan suomalaisten sanomalehtien ja yleisöjen suhdetta ja sen vuorovaikutteisuutta Facebookissa. Artikkelissa II tarkastellaan Instagramin kontekstissa kotimaisten sanomalehtien ja yleisöjen suhdetta ja sen vuorovaikutteisuutta sekä visuaalisuuden merkitystä journalismissa sosiaalisessa mediassa. Artikkelissa III keskitytään suomalaisten sanomalehtien yleisödatan käyttöön ja merkitykseen toimituksellisessa päätöksenteossa.

Tutkimusmenetelmien näkökulmasta kokonaisuus on laadullisesti orientoitunut ja sen aineisto muodostuu Facebook- (n=180) ja Instagram-postauksista (n=894) ja niiden kommentteista sekä sanomalehtien työntekijöiden haastattelusta (n=9). Analyyseissä hyödynnettiin sisällönanalyysiä, digitaalista keskusteluanalyysiä, visuaalista tulkintaa, sekä kuvailevaa tilastoanalyysiä niin, että menetelmät täydensivät toisiaan. Facebook-aineisto on kerätty *Keskisuomalaisen*, *Kalevan*, *Sisä-Suomen Lehden* ja *Jämsän Seudun* Facebook-sivuilta marraskuun 2018 ja helmikuun 2019 välisen ajan julkaisuista. Instagram-aineisto muodostuu samojen lehtien kaikista postauksista huhtikuun 2019 ja maaliskuun 2020 ajanjaksolta. Haastatteluaineisto kerättiin *Keskisuomalaisen*, *Karjalaisen* ja *Helsingin Sanomien* toimituksista toukokuun ja elokuun 2022 aikana. Tutkimuksen kaikki osa-alueet ja vaiheet suoritettiin Jyväskylän yliopiston ja Tutkimuseettisen neuvottelukunnan (TENK) ohjeistukset huomioiden. Erityistä huolellisuutta kiinnitettiin sosiaalisen median aineistojen käsittelyyn ja niistä julkaistuihin aineistolainauksiin.

Työtä ohjasi tieteenfilosofiselta suuntaukselta sosiaalinen konstruktio- nismi. Siinä ymmärrys maailmasta rakentuu ihmisten välisessä päivittäisessä vuorovaikutuksessa (Burr, 2015) tai ihmisten ja elottomien osapuolien välillä verkostomaisesti (Latour, 2005). Tämä väitöstutkimus näkeekin portinvartijuuden rakentuvan yhdessä journalististen ja muiden tekijöiden kesken, jotka muovaa- vat uutisten tekoprosesseja. Julkaisun jälkeisen portinvartijuuden kautta voidaan vielä tarkemmin ajatella, että uutismedian lisäksi yleisöt ja algoritmiset alustat yhdessä rakentavat ymmärrystämme todellisuudesta.

Osatutkimuksissa on hyödynnetty laajasti portinvartijateorian kirjallisuutta aina teorian syntyajoilta 1940–1950-lukujen taitteesta 2020-luvulle saakka. Kirjal- lisuus tuo esiin teoriakentän kehittymisen yksittäisten toimittajien tai tuottajien päätöksenteon tarkastelusta, organisaatioiden, sosiaalisen median palveluiden ja yleisöjen toiminnan roolien havainnointiin (ks. esim. Lewin, 1947; White, 1950; Gans, 1979; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Singer, 2014; Vos & Heinderyckx, 2015; Wal- lace, 2018; Hermida, 2020). Nämä tutkimukset piirtävät kuvaa muun muassa

siitä, millainen asema uutismedialla on ollut viimeisen reilun 70 vuoden ajan portinvartijana eli päätöksentekijänä omiin sisältöihin ja kuinka tämä portinvartijuuden herruus on alkanut murentua internetin ja sosiaalisen median palveluiden kehityksen ja mukaan tulon myötä. Teoriakatsauksessa päästään aina Hermidan (2020) julkaisemaan ja minun suomentamaani julkaisun jälkeisen portinvartijuuden käsitteeseen (*post-publication gatekeeping*).

Lisäksi väitöskirjan teoriapohja muodostuu alustayhteiskunnan (*platform society*, van Dijck ym., 2018) ja yleisökäänteeseen (*the audience turn*, Costera Meijer, 2020) muutoksia tutkivasta kirjallisuudesta. Sosiaalisen median alustojen asema ja rooli yhteiskunnassa on kasvanut entisestään viime vuosina: alustat läpileikkaavat niin sosiaalisia, taloudellisia, kulttuurisia, poliittisia kuin taloudellisiakin yhteiskunnan rakenteita. Utisten ja uutismedian kohdalla tämä tarkoittaa sitä, että uutissisältöjä tarjotaan ja niitä kulutetaan yhä enemmän erilaisten sosiaalisen median alustojen kautta. Yleisökäänteeseen puolestaan nostaa esiin yleisöjen aseman nousun uutisten tuotannossa ja jakelussa – yleisöjen liikkeitä ja mielipiteitä kuunnellaan ja hyödynnetään yhä enemmän, kun kilpailu yleisöistä muidenkin kuin uutissisältöjen tuottajien kanssa käy kiihtyneenä. Uutismedian yleisösuhdetta on kuvattu ennen internetin nousua ylhäältä alaspäin tapahtuvaksi. Keskusteluyhteys toimitusten ja yleisöjen välillä oli aiemmin, ennen internetin syntyä, heikompi uutismedian autoritaarisen aseman vuoksi, mutta nykyään yleisöjen muuttuneen ja korostuneen roolin vuoksi suhdetta on kuvattu enemmänkin alhaalta ylöspäin tapahtuvaksi (esim. Nelson, 2021). Nykyistä journalismia on kuvattu myös enemmän vuorovaikutteiseksi suhteeksi uutismedian ja yleisöjen välillä (esim. Marchionni, 2013).

Datafikaatio (*datafication*) ja sisällön moderointi (*content moderation*) ovat myös tähän työhön vahvasti kiinnittyviä ilmiöitä. Datafikaatio kuvaa sitä, kuinka yleisöjen, uutisten kuluttajien liikkeitä on saatettu mitattavaan muotoon ja tämä määrällisesti mitattava yleisödata on yksi uutistoimitusten tärkeimpiä työkaluja. Uutismedian tekemä yleisökommenttien sisällön moderointi on laajentunut verkkosivuilta uutismedian käyttämiin sosiaalisen media tileihin, mikä on osittain monimutkaistanut moderointia koskevia kysymyksiä niin käytännön tasolla kuin eettisen harkinnan osalta. Teoriapohjassa käsitelläänkin myös laajemmin journalismin etiikan kysymyksiä sekä lain näkökulmaa uutisorganisaatioiden nykyiseen toimintakenttään. Lain näkökulmasta käsitellään erityisesti tietosuojasetuksen (GDPR) ja Euroopan Unionin digisäädösten (*Digital Acts*) vaikutusta mediakentälle. Viimeisenä nostan esiin visuaalisuuden näkökulman. Väitöskirjaa läpileikkaava ajatus visuaalisuuden nousevasta vallasta ja sen roolista myös portinvartijuudessa, johtuen visuaalisten toimintojen kasvavasta asemasta sosiaalisen median alustoille (Highfield, 2019).

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on ymmärtää uutismedian, yleisöjen ja sosiaalisen media alustojen välistä suhdetta digitaalisessa uutisympäristössä suomalaisten sanomalehtien kontekstissa. Tutkimus tarkastelee erilaisia tekijöitä ja käytänteitä jotka muovaavat portinvartijuutta julkaisemisen jälkeen ja kysyy seuraavanlaiset tutkimuskysymykset:

TK1: Minkälaisia julkaisun jälkeiseen portinvartijuuteen kytkeytyviä vuorovaikutuskäytänteitä yleisöjen ja uutismedian välillä on havaittavissa uutismedian sosiaalisen median tileillä?

TK2: Miten visuaalisuus kytkeytyy julkaisun jälkeisen portinvartijuuden tekijöihin ja käytänteisiin?

TK3: Kuinka lainsäädäntö ja journalismin etiikkaa kytkeytyvät julkaisun jälkeisen portinvartijuuden tekijöihin ja käytänteisiin?

Tutkimustehtävän ja -kysymyksen valossa tämä väitöstutkimus tuottaa tieteellisiä ja teoreettisia kontribuutioita sekä suosituksia ja huomioita uutismediakentälle ja yhteiskunnan tasolle. Tämän väitöskirjatutkimuksen perusteella esitän, että nykyisessä digitaalisessa uutisympäristössä tulisi puhua *jaetusta portinvartijuuden vallasta* sekä *julkaisun jälkeisestä portinvartijuudesta*. Tutkimukseni osoittaa, ettei uutismedia ole enää ainoa portinvartija digitaalisessa uutisympäristössä, vaan se jakaa portinvartijuuden valtaa iteratiivisessa vuorovaikutuksessa sosiaalisen median alustojen ja yleisöjen kanssa. Uutisia ja portinvartijuutta muovaavat julkaisemisen jälkeen useat erilaiset tekijät (*factors*), kuten yleisöt, sosiaalisen median alustat, regulaatio (laki ja etiikka), sekä erilaiset käytännöt (*practices*) kuten esimerkiksi vuorovaikutuskäytännöt (*social interactional practices*). Näin ollen tämä tutkimus validoi empiirisesti Hermidan (2020) julkaisun jälkeisen portinvartijuuden teoriakehikkoa (*post-publication gatekeeping framework*) sekä muokkaa että laajentaa sitä lisäämällä regulaation yhdeksi prosessiin vaikuttavaksi tekijäksi ja esittelee uusia vuorovaikutukseen ja visuaalisuuteen liittyviä käytäntöjä portinvartijuuden kontekstissa.

Suurimpana yksittäisenä teoreettisena kontribuutiona väitöstutkimuksen osatutkimus I esitteli vuorovaikutuksellisen portinvartijuuden (*conversational gatekeeping*) käsitteen. Käsite kuvaa sitä miten uutismedia/journalistit ja yleisöt normittavat uutismedian sosiaalisen median tileillä käytyjä keskusteluja ja samalla neuvottelevat minkälainen sisältö ja toiminta on hyväksyttävää ja toivottua. Portinvartijuus siis kohdistuu uutismedian sosiaalisen median kanavissa käytyihin keskusteluihin, mutta lisäksi portinvartijuutta muovataan keskustelujen ja vuorovaikutuksen avulla.

Tutkimuksen tulokset nostavat esiin myös käytännön suosituksia ja huomioita, erityisesti vuorovaikutuksen, visuaalisuuden sekä lain ja etiikan näkökulmista. Väitöstutkimukseni esittää, että uutismedioilla ja yleisöillä on molemmilla mahdollisuus vuorovaikutuksen keinoin huolehtia sosiaalisen median keskusteluista niin, että keskustelu olisi rakentavaa ja negatiivisuus vähäisempää. Näin ollen vihapuheelle ja muulle negatiiviselle keskustelulle jäisi vähemmän tilaa. Uutismedioilla on erityinen valta ja vastuu siinä, millaisia keskustelunavauksia se saattaa julkiseen yhteiskunnalliseen keskusteluun. Tasapainoilu sananvapauden ja median julkaisemisen vapauden välillä vaatii toimituksissa harkintaa, sillä sosiaaliseen mediaan kaikille avoimeksi avatut keskustelut vaativat uutismedialta kykyä ja resurssia seurata ja mahdollisuuksien ja tilanteen mukaan kykyä moderoida keskusteluja. Suomessa media-alan eettinen itsesääntely, Journalistin ohjeet, velvoittavat mediatoimijoita vähintäänkin jälkimoderoimaan sellaisia kommentteja, jotka loukkaavat ihmisarvoa tai yksityisyyden suojaa. Moderointi



ja siihen käytetty harkinta on tärkeää myös sen vuoksi, että uutismedia vallanpitäjänä on yksi merkittävä toimija demokraattisessa yhteiskunnassa. Mahdollistamalla yhteiskunnallisten keskustelujen käymistä tärkeistä uutisaiheista uutismedia mahdollistaa myös demokratian toteutumista. Sosiaalisen median ja siellä käytävien keskustelujen vähälle huomiolle jättäminen voi myös koitua mainehaitaksi kyseiselle uutismedialle. Onkin tärkeää, että uutismedia ja keskusteluihin osallistuvat yleisöt ottavat yhdessä osaa keskustelujen normittamiseen ja mode-roimiseen.

Väitöstutkimukseni havainnoi myös, että tutkittavien sanomalehtien vuoropuhelu, vuorovaikutus sosiaalisen median yleisöjensä kanssa oli vähäistä. Tutkituilla sanomalehdillä on Suomen mittapuulla kuitenkin hyvät seuraaja- eli yleisömäärät, joten potentiaalia yleisösuhteen kehittämiseen on olemassa. Yleisösuhdetta voidaankin luonnehtia tällä hetkellä aika yksisuuntaiseksi, enemmänkin yleisöstä kumpuavaksi suhteeksi, joka harvoin saa vastakaikua. Tämä on merkityksellistä senkin vuoksi, että kaikkia ihmisiä, niin journalisteja kuin yleisöjäkin tarvitaan, jotta sosiaalisen median keskustelut pysyisivät eettisinä ja toisia kunnioittavina. Automaattinen, konepohjainen moderointi ei ole vielä kovin tehokasta ja laadukasta suomen kielen kaltaisessa pienessä kieliryhmässä, joten moderointia koskeva päätöksenteko nojaa pitkälti ihmistoimijoihin.

Visuaalisuuden näkökulmasta väitöstutkimukseni esittää huomion siitä, että visuaalisuuden merkitys on korostunut sosiaaliseen mediaan tuotettavissa uutisissä ja uutismedian kannattaisi kiinnittää entistä enemmän huomiota sisältöjensä visuaaliseen muotokieleeseen, kuten osissa toimituksissa onkin jo tehty esimerkiksi kehittämällä visuaalisia tarinankerronnan muotoja. Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkasteltu Instagram ei esimerkiksi mahdollista julkaisujen tekoa muuten kuin visuaalisessa muodossa: valokuvana, kuvana tai videona. Julkaisujen kommentointi on puolestaan päinvastaisessa asemassa, sillä Instagramin syötteen (*feed*) julkaisuihin ei ole mahdollista kommentoida kuvilla ja videoilla. Alusta mahdollistaa kommentoinnin ainoastaan tekstimuotoisesti ja emoji- ja gifien avulla. Uutismedialla onkin enemmän käytännön valtaa siinä, minkälaiset visuaaliset sisällöt sen Instagram-tilillä kiertävät ja minkälaisia keskustelunavauksia se tekee myös visuaalisesta näkökulmasta. Tutkimus teki havainnon myös siitä, että tällä visuaalisuuteen nojaavalla alustalla uutismedia julkaisee enemmän pehmeitä, kevyitä uutisia. Yleisöt kuitenkin vuorovaikuttivat tasaisesti sekä pehmeiden, kevyempien uutisten että kovimpien, yhteiskunnallisesti merkittävimpien aiheiden kanssa. Uutismedialle siis huomioksi: yleisöt vaikuttavat kaipaavan myös ”oikeita” uutisia Instagramissa.

Visuaalisuuden näkökulmasta laajempaan huomiona haluan nostaa esiin kaupallisen median ja Yleisradion välisen asetelman. Kaupallinen media halusi rajoittaa kilpailullisista syistä julkisen palvelun median, Ylen, tuottaman tekstisisällön määrää lainsäädännön keinoin (Parkkinen, 2022). Ylen sisältöjen tuotantoa rajoittava laki astui voimaan 2022 ja sen myötä Yle on alkanut tuottaa uutisiaan enenevässä määrin audiovisuaalisina sisältöinä. Uutisia kulutetaan globaalisti yhä enemmän visuaalisessa muodossa (Newman et al., 2023), minkä vuoksi he-

rää kysymys siitä, tekivätkö kaupalliset mediatoimijat itselleen karhunpalveluksen. Kaupallisen median, tässä tapauksessa sanomalehtien, on tärkeää herätä siihen todellisuuteen, jossa audiovisuaaliset sisällöt vaikuttavat kasvattavan asemaansa. Säilyttääkseen yleisönsä sanomalehtien olisi tärkeää pysyä kehityksen mukana.

Väitöstutkimukseni teki havaintoja myös lain ja etiikan näkökulmista. Keskeisimpänä nostan esiin, että uutismedioiden olisi tärkeää seurata EU:n digisäädösten kehitystä ja sovellettavuutta omalla toimintakentällään. Esimerkiksi EU:n uudet digilait ottavat kantaa somealustojen moderointiin. Uutismediatoimijoiden onkin hyvä seurata tarkasti, minkälaisia linjauksia lähiaikoina tehdään moderointivastuiden suhteen. Mistä alustoilla tapahtuvasta toiminnasta vastaavat jatkossa uutismediat omien sometiliensä käyttäjinä ja ylläpitäjinä ja mistä ovat vastuussa alustapalvelut? Uutismedioita ei ole osallistettu juurikaan uusien digilakien suunnitteluvaiheessa. Tutkimukseni perusteella ehdotan, että mediatoimijoita olisi hyvä osallistaa enemmän EU-tason päätöksentekoon, varsinkin kun on kyse niitä läheisesti koskevista asioista. Nyt mediakenttä joutuu esimerkiksi pohtimaan lakimiesten avulla, kuinka mikäkin uusi säädös ja laki koskee median toimikenttää.

Nykyisestä EU-lainsäädännöstä on ollut myös selkeää hyötyä mediakentälle. Nykyinen tietosuoja-asetus on mahdollistanut sen, että Pohjoismaiset mediatoimijat ovat alkaneet neuvotella korvauksia tuottamistaan sisällöistään, jotka kiertävät sosiaalisen median alustoilla. Nämä keskustelut ovat pian alkamassa myös Suomessa, joten suomalaisten mediatoimijoiden on tärkeää seurata ja osallistua mahdollisiin neuvotteluihin koskien omien sisältöjensä rahallista kompensatiota. Kanadassa ja Australiassa Googlen ja Metan journalistiselle medialle maksamat kompensatiot ovat jo todellisuutta. Lisäksi samat alustapalvelut ovat jo vuosien ajan tarjonneet erilaisia koulutuksia mediatoimijoille useissa maissa. Onkin tärkeää keskustella myös mediatoimijoiden riippumattomuudesta ja journalismin autonomiasta, sillä erilaiset koulutukset ja tukiohjelmat antavat alustayhtiöille valtaa suhteessa uutistoimituksiin: alustayhtiöt voivat koulutustensa kautta ohjata journalismia haluaamaansa suuntaan.

Lain ja etiikan näkökulmasta tämä tutkimus haluaa herätellä toimituksia pohtimaan rajanvetoa niiden välillä. Kysyttäessä tutkimukseen osallistuneiden ajatuksia journalismin etiikasta puhe kääntyi automaattisesti lain, lähinnä tietosuoja-asetuksen näkökulmiin. Toimitusten olisikin hyvä selkeyttää sitä, mitkä kysymykset ja päätöksen nojaavat journalismin etiikkaan ja journalistisiin arvoihin ja mitkä lainsäädäntöön. Viimeisenä etiikan näkökulman huomiona nostan esiin, että tällä väitöskirjatyöllä on ollut vaikutusta myös journalismin etiikan saralla, sillä sen tuloksia koskien journalismin toimintaa sosiaalisen media alustoilla on hyödynnetty Journalistin ohjeiden päivittäistyössä (2023–2024). Työ on siis pystynyt jalkauttamaan konkreettisia kehitysehdotuksia suoraan journalismin etiikan ytimeen.

Jatkotutkimusehdotuksena väitöstutkimukseni suosittaa tutkijoita tarkastelemaan julkaisun jälkeisen portinvartijuuden tekijöitä ja käytänteitä ja laajenta-

maan teoriakenttää niin, että temporaalisesta näkökulmasta saataisiin vielä hollisempi käsitys. Lisäksi tulevien tutkimusten tulisi pyrkiä rakentamaan laajempaa ymmärrystä siitä, miten julkaisun jälkeinen portinvartijuus ja perinteinen portinvartijuus ovat yhteydessä toisiinsa. Vuorovaikutuksellinen portinvartijuus kaipaa sekin lisää tutkimusta: ilmiötä olisi tarpeellista tarkastella esimerkiksi uudemmilla sosiaalisen median alustoilla kuten TikTokissa ja Threadsissa sekä erilaisissa kulttuurisissa konteksteissa. Tulevien tutkimusten olisi tärkeää selvittää myös tarkemmin visuaalisuuden merkitystä niin portinvartijuuden näkökulmista kuin yleisestikin uutisten kuluttamisessa ja tuottamisessa. Lisäksi EU:n lainsäädännön ja journalismin etiikan kysymykset ovat keskeisessä asemassa säätelemässä journalismin tulevaisuuden toimintaa digitaalisessa uutisympäristössä ja ovat sen vuoksi tärkeitä jatkotutkimuskohteita.

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLES

### I

#### CONVERSATIONAL GATEKEEPING – SOCIAL INTERACTIONAL PRACTICES OF POST-PUBLICATION GATEKEEPING ON NEWSPAPERS' FACEBOOK PAGES

by

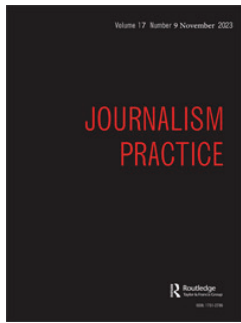
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Margareta Salonen, Margarethe Olbertz-Siitonen, Turo Uskali & Salla-Maaria Laaksonen

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## ABSTRACT

Digital platforms, such as social media networks, have become intertwined in the news ecosystem, leading news media to lose their role as the sole gatekeeper in the public space. This development has given an active voice to audiences and turned journalism more into conversations between journalists and their audiences. The starting observation for this article was that alongside journalists, platforms and audiences play a part in the gatekeeping process that takes place post-publication, and therefore we need to gain a better understanding of this triadic relationship. Furthermore, as conversations are one of the main functions of social media platforms, more understanding of the role of social interaction in post-publication gatekeeping is needed. After analysing posts ( $N = 180$ ) and their comments on Finnish newspapers’ Facebook pages utilising content and digital conversation analysis, we extend the traditional gatekeeping theory to post-publication practices of gatekeeping and finally suggest the concept of conversational gatekeeping. The concept explains how through social interaction journalists and social media audiences are able to build mutual understanding and create norms as well as decide on the content and action that is appropriate or wanted in the public news space formed on the particular online platform.


## KEYWORDS

Conversational gatekeeping; digital conversation analysis; Facebook; gatekeeping; newspapers; post-publication gatekeeping; social interaction; social media

## Introduction

Journalists’ possibilities to interact with their audiences have multiplied in recent years. Since the journalism reform that took place along with the rise of Web 2.0., audiences have gained greater importance and journalism is now increasingly seen as a dialogue—*journalism-as-a-conversation* (Marchionni 2013). Consequently, the premises of gatekeeping theory have been challenged. In the current social media era, news media and their social media audiences can engage in conversations online to build mutual

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understanding and decide interactively what kind of content is accurate and acceptable for news media's social media accounts. In this article, we introduce the concept of *conversational gatekeeping* to account for this interactional process. Drawing on qualitative content analysis of 180 Facebook posts (by four Finnish newspapers) and digital conversation analysis of three exemplary cases (posts), we demonstrate how journalists and their audiences together shape and negotiate news items after they have been published.

In the digital era, news organisations are no longer gatekeepers in the traditional sense as they cannot fully decide which items are in or out of the public sphere (Welbers and Opgenhaffen 2018; Vos 2020). The news ecosystem is constituted through various platforms of which social media are one (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018), and in this platformed news ecosystem the news organisations have lost control over their products (Nielsen and Ganter 2018). Due to platformisation and digitalisation, audiences now play a role in gatekeeping processes by affecting the visibility of a news item (Singer 2014), for example, and algorithmic platforms and technology companies influence the process through their settings and decisions (Wallace 2018; Vos and Russell 2019). Consequently, gatekeeping research has turned to exploring *post-publication gatekeeping* (Hermida 2020): gatekeeping as the processes and practices taking place post-publication, especially on social media.

In the pre-Internet era journalism has been described by some (e.g., Marchionni 2013) more as a top-down process where professional journalists, officials, and elites merely informed citizens. However, it can be argued that this has not entirely been the case. When media was still analogue, "letters to the editor" served as a conversational forum (and it still does) in most of the printed media. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the great potential of 'citizen journalism' was emphasised by many journalism scholars to trigger conversations especially in the local and regional media (Franklin 2006). This was also the case in Finland where several research projects facilitated on-the-spot town hall meetings. However, the results remained modest (Heikkilä 2001; Kuneilius 2001).

Consequently, the relationship of journalists with their audiences has been important to them even before the rise of the Internet. Yet, the ways to connect with audiences have multiplied and the relationship has become more complex as audiences are more present in the digital news ecosystem. That is why for example Marchionni (2013) calls for a theory of conversational news, i.e., audience participation in commenting on the news after its release. She further claims that clear conceptual and operational definitions are missing even though there is a plethora of audience-centred literature that is concerned with conversation. Thus, there is a need for research that focuses on conversational aspects of the news—in participatory journalism and in the post-publication environment.

One main function of social media is the conversations they afford and make publicly visible (Kavada 2015). As journalism is increasingly turning into conversations (Marchionni 2013), understanding social interactional processes between journalists and their audiences on social media can help to develop a better understanding of the conversational side of news and news engagement. While (digital) journalism has engaged with several other subfields (Ahva and Steensen 2020; Steensen and Westlund 2021) there is a lack of studies on social interactional relationships. Thus, we argue that the field benefits from a method such as conversation analysis (CA) that explores how mutual understanding is achieved through interaction between conversationalists (in this case journalists and

their audiences) and specifically looks at the logic and function of conversation (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974).

The focus on social interaction is particularly warranted in studies of platformed journalism, where interaction and conversations between the news media and audiences increasingly take place through the social media platforms and news media have become dependent on platforms' policies and affordances (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018, 61). When mediated by a platform, none of the participants can fully decide the premises of the conversation, as the affordances shaping it are dictated by the platform company. Furthermore, some aspects of conversations could be seen as problematic to the news media. After news media have opened their gates and posted on social media, audiences could be offering unwanted conversational practices such as hate speech or altering news stories and therefore perhaps spreading mis- or disinformation. This is an issue of gatekeeping, as news media are to some extent responsible also for the actions and content that take place post-publication on their social media accounts (Finnish Council for Mass Media 2017).

In this paper we introduce the novel concept of *conversational gatekeeping* to theorise the conversations between news media and their audiences on social media platforms. By building on the premises of digital conversation analysis, we see this as a process of social interaction, and thus a mechanism through which journalists and audiences build mutual understanding. Conversational gatekeeping is intertwined with interactants' orientations to technology and describes the phenomenon of social interactional relations between journalists and their social media audiences as practices of post-publication gatekeeping. Our conceptualisation is based on a combination of previous theory and current empirical findings. More precisely, we present conversational gatekeeping as a conceptual starting point and through empirical analysis, we show how this concept is played out through two complex and overlapping dimensions—*gatekeeping of conversations* and *gatekeeping through conversation*, that jointly explain how norms and mutual understanding are being built and how conversations are being looked after on newspapers' Facebook pages.

Empirically, we examine four Finnish newspapers' Facebook pages and the social interactional relationship between the newspapers and their social media audiences on the third-party platform. Facebook is still the most important social media platform for news, across all markets (Newman et al. 2020). It is also the most used social media platform among Finnish newspapers (Simola 2019) and the social media platform where Finns consume news the most (Newman et al. 2020). Our data consists of 180 Facebook posts and their comments published by the newspapers between November 2018 and February 2019.

Against this backdrop, the paper asks:

RQ1: How is post-publication gatekeeping intertwined with journalist-audience conversations on Finnish newspapers' Facebook pages?

RQ2: How do journalists and their audiences build mutual understanding on Finnish newspapers' Facebook pages?

Over the following pages, we explore gatekeeping theory and look at how audiences, algorithmic platforms, and journalism ethics have shaped the digital era of news. Second, we discuss digital conversation analysis as the approach utilised in the current research.

Third, we introduce our data and analysis. Fourth, in the findings section, we propose *conversational gatekeeping* and its two dimensions and provide empirical findings for it. We conclude by discussing possible implications as well as practical and ethical issues that newspapers should consider in their social media activities in light of the proposed concept of *conversational gatekeeping*.

## Gatekeeping in the Digital Era

In the traditional sense, gatekeeping is the journalistic process of selecting, writing, editing, scheduling, and making other decisions concerning news production that have an impact on how reality is presented to the public (Shoemaker, Vos, and Reese 2009, 73). As gatekeeping is one of the foundational theories in journalism studies, its modernisation is pivotal for the field to remain up to date. As Shoemaker and Vos (2009, 130) state: “The challenge is for scholars to think creatively about applying the theory to a changing world and to adapt research methodology that keeps pace.”

The theory has transformed notably since Lewin’s (1947) notions of “gates” in the field of social psychology and White’s (1950) introduction of “Mr. Gates”; a study about a wire editor of a morning newspaper and his editorial gatekeeping decisions. The transformation of the theory has been underscored e.g., by Shoemaker, Vos, and Reese (2009), who provide an overview of the developments from the subjective perspective (White 1950) to the organisational level (Gans 1979), and on the impact of gender (Bleske 1991) and race (Heider 2000) on gatekeeping. Further, technological changes led to a new line of gatekeeping research, as is shown by Berkowitz (1990), who examined the gatekeeping processes of local television news, or Abbott and Brassfield (1989) who compared print and electronic media. In more recent years, gatekeeping has been applied to various kinds of online research, for example into user-generated visibility via media websites (Singer 2014), the rise of news events on social media (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013), social media editors’ impact on news diffusion (Welbers and Opgenhaffen 2018), and visual gatekeeping practices focusing on the roles of non-professionals and professionals (Pantti 2015).

Gatekeeping can also be viewed from the perspective of *pre- and post-publication practices*, the latter in particular emphasising the audiences’ role in the gatekeeping process. The more traditional gatekeeping research (e.g., White 1950; Abbott and Brassfield 1989) has looked at the processes of gatekeeping before news items enter circulation, i.e., pre-publication practices of gatekeeping. More recently, research (e.g., Bruns 2005, 2018; Singer 2014) has turned to the processes and factors that take place after a news item has been released—in this case, we can talk of post-publication practices of gatekeeping. Hermida (2020) introduced his idea of post-publication gatekeeping, where the interplay of *publics, platforms, paraphernalia, and practices* in the circulation of news are all part of the factors that shape the news. Our current study makes the same notion as his (2020, 1), namely that when talking about “how issues and topics rise to prominence and gain attention following publication in a digital hybrid media ecosystem,” we address post-publication gatekeeping. In addition, Bro and Wallberg (2015, 95–98) introduce *three models of journalistic gatekeeping*: first, the process of information (a linear process of information transmission, e.g., White 1950), second, the process of communication (a non-linear communication process where sources, journalists, and audiences interact,

e.g., Bruns 2005, 2018), and third, the process of elimination where journalists have lost their role as gatekeepers (news media is no longer needed as the prime intermediary between sources and audiences). The current study adds to the list of research that sees gatekeeping as the process of communication. However, this study focuses on post-publication gatekeeping.

### ***Users' Rising Role as Gatekeepers***

Digitalisation has created new ways for audiences to participate in the hybrid news ecosystem where old and new media meet. Social media has created opportunities for audiences to interact with each other and with journalists. The gatekeeping process in the current open media environment involves more participants than in the old media environment, as platforms give audiences the ability to comment and share what journalists have regarded as newsworthy (e.g., Singer 2014). Or, as Shoemaker and Vos (2009, 124) present it: "... we must conceptualize readers having their own gate, and they send news items to others in the audience when the interaction between newsworthiness and personal relevance is strong enough." The users' role in the gatekeeping process is also emphasised by Shaw (2012, 367) who describes, in the context of political news blogs, the *centralized and decentralized mechanisms of gatekeeping* as decision processes that are formed together among users online: in decision processes users jointly "establish, negotiate, enforce, and adapt boundaries, norms, and standards that constitute the site."

We extend the understanding of post-publication practices of gatekeeping conceptually by proposing the concept of *conversational gatekeeping*: a concept that sees gatekeeping as the process of communication—social interaction—between journalists and their audiences on a respective platform where affordances of the platform interact with conversations that take place post-publication. Namely gatekeeping materialising as and in interaction between audiences and news media. Conversational gatekeeping adds to some previous studies that we categorise into post-publication gatekeeping studies: Bruns's (2005, 2018) *gatewatching*, where users (and more recently journalists) keep watch on important and interesting content and publicise it online; Singer's (2014) *secondary gatekeeping*, where users can upgrade or downgrade the visibility of a news item online; and to Vos's (2020) *gatebouncing*, where already circulating news items can be marked as illegitimate and bounced back through the online gates by journalists and users. And lastly, to Hermida's (2020) framework where the 4P's (publics, platforms, paraphernalia and practices) interplay in the circulation of news, in the post-publication environment.

The aforementioned concepts highlight the audiences' growing role in gatekeeping processes and emphasise the significance of post-publication practices of gatekeeping. However, none of these works takes an explicit focus on conversation and social interaction, which are our main premise. As audience participation in contemporary gatekeeping practices is increasing, more research on communication practices between journalists and audiences from the current time and platforms is needed. Or as Bro and Wallberg (2015, 102–103) formulate when talking about their three models of journalistic gatekeeping (of which the model of communication is one): "... they can help highlight, inspire and suggest future research into the ways in which gatekeeping has evolved over space and time." Further, in this paper, our novel concept addresses the call of Reese and



Shoemaker (2016, 407): “new media configurations must be identified and their emergence accounted for, even as they may prove elusive and transitory.”

### ***Platformed Gatekeeping and Journalism Ethics***

Conversational gatekeeping is a social and communicative process, but still deeply embedded in the technological and professional context in which it takes place. Wallace (2018) models digital gatekeeping as a combination of different kinds of gatekeepers and their mechanisms: journalists, individual amateurs, strategic professionals, and algorithms. Similarly, Hermida (2020) emphasised the technological context by placing platforms as one central element of post-publication gatekeeping. The mediating role of platforms introduces “invisible gatekeepers” to the process of post-publication gatekeeping: third-party platforms’ algorithms have a central yet invisible part in the gatekeeping process. They affect news items’ visibility on the platform (e.g., Zamith 2019; Hermida 2020). Yet, their code is proprietary and undisclosed, and frequently changes, bringing volatility to the platformed news ecosystem. For example, in 2018 the Facebook algorithm was updated to prioritise “meaningful interaction” over organic reach, which essentially lowered the visibility of news media content (Boyd 2019) and urged news organisations to seek ways to foster conversations with their Facebook audiences. What is notable is that not only news, but also the conversations that take place between media and their audiences are technologically mediated by the social media platforms.

Another form of algorithmic gatekeeping is the removal of inappropriate content from the platform, which typically works as a combination of automated moderation and human flagging (Caplan 2018; Gillespie 2018). The competencies of both algorithmic and human moderation have raised public concerns particularly in smaller language contexts (e.g., Mansikka 2019). For example, hateful, discriminatory language is considered unacceptable but it still flows somewhat freely on platforms, especially in small languages, as algorithms struggle to read the cultural and linguistic contexts (Caplan 2018). As a consequence, moderation responsibilities on the textual level often rely on users and their reports (Roberts 2016). This further accentuates the role of audiences on news organisations’ social media sites. Thus, the actions of humans/audiences are increasingly important in defining what content is prominent and favoured—or allowed to stay on platforms in the first place.

Finally, the emergence of the conversational audiences on news media’s social media sites also poses new questions of media ethics and responsibility. The public’s expectation towards journalists has not changed: trust and transparency are still expected (e.g., Karlsson, Clerwall, and Nord 2017). Despite the novel digital context, news media are still required to follow the principles of good journalistic practice and ethical guidelines. In Finland, those are enforced by the media’s self-regulation council, the Finnish Council for Mass Media. The council (Finnish Council for Mass Media 2021) has instructed news media that, if needed, essential factual errors need to be corrected without delay on the Internet. Further, the council has made a ruling that when operating on social media sites, news media must follow the same guidelines as on other discussion forums maintained by them, and further, even though comment threads are not editorial material, content created by the audience needs to be monitored and the media has the obligation to remove content that insults human dignity and privacy (Finnish Council for

Mass Media 2017). Thus, keeping social media sites of news media clean and accurate is a complex question that brings together gatekeeping, media self-regulation, and media ethics.

While audiences do not have any specific ethical guidelines, they also end up having responsibilities as citizens and audience members on news media's sites and platforms; through their communication style, they shape the language and content shared on the platforms. The concept of *conversational gatekeeping* looks at journalists' and audiences' social interaction and pinpoints the importance of humans in constructing joint norms and common rules of the news forum. If shared norms are missing, individuals may orient to their own norms. As conversations are one of the main functions of social media (Kavada 2015), the norms and platform ethics are formulated through conversations, often on the respective platform, in interaction shaped by the affordances of the platform. This makes the triadic relationship between platforms, media organisations and audiences intriguing also from the viewpoint of journalism ethics.

## Digital Conversation Analysis

Recent work calls for a clearer conceptualisation of "journalism-as-a-conversation," reflecting current developments in the way news is covered and increasingly becoming democratised (Marchionni 2013). This gives support to more research that investigates actual practices of interactive journalism and news-related conversations online in order to be able to advance theory building. Accordingly, the approach this paper draws on is conversation analysis (CA). Classic CA starts out from the assumption that each turn provides the grounds for the next one, and that each next turn exhibits an understanding of the previous one. This enables participants to monitor and adjust the understanding of their contributions on a turn-by-turn basis and is therefore seen as the central building block for the accomplishment of interaction and of intersubjectivity in particular. Although it has been largely utilised in the study of direct, face-to-face interaction, the malleability of CA allows for its application to all sorts of set-ups (including technology-mediated and online). Giles et al. (2015, 48) even advocate CA as an approach that is "perhaps most equipped to deal with" the specifics of online interaction. Indeed, a growing number of conversation analytic studies look into human interaction in the context of digital technologies (e.g., Moore 2015; Arminen, Licoppe, and Spagnolli 2016), and some have specifically studied (chat-)interaction on Facebook (Meredith and Stokoe 2014; Farina 2018).

While contemporary CA-research is increasingly interested in video- and text-based interaction, the focus on technology-mediation is not all that new. Schegloff's (1968) classic study on openings of telephone calls is a good example of how technological affordances may surface in interaction. Schegloff (1968) noted that an appropriate understanding of opening sequences in telephone calls must include the ringing of the phone as a first-pair part of a so-called summons-answer adjacency pair. Adjacency pairs constitute sequences of two turns, which are bound to each other by conditional relevance, i.e., the first turn (such as a question or a summons) builds a strong expectation for a certain next (such as an answer). If the second does not occur, it is treated as "officially absent" (Schegloff 1968, 1083) leading to corrective actions, such as repeats of the first item. Similar to face-to-face interaction, where a summons might include some form of an address term, the summons/ringing of the phone fulfils the function



of an availability check in phone calls. In other words, in phone calls the technical device itself plays a pivotal role for participants in the organisation of opening sequences. In this paper, we approach newspapers' opening posts on Facebook as a form of *digital summons*, designed to invite others to contribute to the topic at hand.

Excessively, talk today takes place in online environments, and some of the traditional concepts and findings of CA cannot be readily applied to what people do when interacting asynchronously on different social platforms. The aforementioned adjacency, for example, can be missing entirely from online talk, which poses questions with regard to interactivity. According to Giles et al. (2015, 48), "discussion thread turns are not, technically, conversational, only *conversation-like*" (emphasis in the original), because they do not rely on immediacy. In line with such and similar challenges and a genuine interest in the affordances of technology in interaction a new strand of CA, "digital CA," is beginning to emerge and is increasingly applied to the rigorous study of online talk (see, for example, Giles et al. 2015; Meredith 2017). While digital CA appears similar to CA in a number of details, digital CA explicitly takes the technological embeddedness of talk in various online environments into consideration, i.e., analysis approaches online talk as being tied to the respective social platform in use (see, e.g., Giles et al. 2015). Similarly, in this study we engage in an analysis that follows the principles of CA and at the same time takes into account the data's specific digital context (such as reliance on written interaction and orientations to public visibility of individual contributions/turns), whenever it becomes observably relevant to the participants.

## Data and Analysis

The dataset consists of 180 Facebook posts and their comments made by four Finnish newspapers during November 2018 and February 2019. The posts were produced by journalists from the newspapers as part of a research project: in the second phase of the project (Lauk, Salonen, and Koski 2019) all four newsrooms tested three types of posting strategies and two interactional strategies that were based on the results of the first phase of the project (Lauk, Salonen, and Sormanen 2018), and on previous practices (Mayer et al. 2016). Conversation analysis was used as a basis to create interactional strategies for the newsrooms in the second phase. During the experiments in the second phase, journalists were asked to make notes on whether they moderated (hid or deleted audience comments) or increased interaction by some means on the posts they made. Therefore, if a newspaper's Facebook post was moderated during the test period, there is additional evidence of it.

The dataset for the project was gathered in the form of screenshots during February 2019. Any excerpts of the material presented in this paper have been translated from Finnish to English by the authors. By way of translation, we are able to better protect the anonymity of the audience members taking part in discussions. For the same reason, the names of the conversationalists have been changed. The newspapers have given their informed consent to the research.

In the first step, we reviewed the 180 Facebook opening posts ("summons") and their comments, drawing on (theory and data-driven) qualitative content analysis (Silverman 2011; Tracy 2013). The purpose of this initial inspection was to get a sense of the dataset at hand, which enabled us to organise the data into smaller sections and to

locate interactional instances that contained gatekeeping or elements of its secondary practices in a post-publication social media environment. As such instances, we treated audience members' or newspapers' visible orientations to opening posts and comments that indicated the news content, its presentation, or public reception were treated as either problematic or acceptable. In addition, these post-publication gatekeeping practices needed to have an observable connection with the news item shared on the platform, without exiting Facebook. To grasp a better understanding of what occurs in the light of gatekeeping after the news item is posted, we formed a tabulation (frequency of instances, Silverman 2011, 66–67) of the 180 Facebook posts: 31 posts clearly indicate practices of post-publication gatekeeping. Of these 31 posts, 19 had instances of conversations that handled what is appropriate or wanted content for the forum, and 17 covered misunderstandings, reassurances, and factual errors that were visible through the forum. In addition, we noted three posts that were not addressed in terms of normative conventions of the forum, even though one of the three posts had been moderated by the newspaper. All three posts were news covering immigration. Later we will discuss further the *deviant case* that is seen to be an essential ingredient in CA: A case that disconfirms the developing analysis, which already recognises the normative status of the rule or pattern under-identification, but at the same demonstrates participants' normative goals (Edwards 2006).

In a second step, in order to provide a detailed account of these instances in the data set, we narrowed down three exemplary cases for closer inspection that clearly exhibited post-publication gatekeeping practices or a lack of them, and analysed the posts using digital conversation analysis (Giles et al. 2015). This choice allowed us to trace the threads (and their interactional constituents) as they unfold moment-by-moment, and to conduct a fine-grained, genuinely qualitative analysis of participants' visible orientations to the content and representation of opening posts and comments.

In line with a conversation analytic understanding of the role of single instances for an adequate, empirically-based understanding of social interaction, we argue that the three cases provide comprehensive insight into what is actually possible in terms of (conversational) gatekeeping practices on social media. In other words, we follow Psathas' (1995, 50) assertion that further cases essentially would not add to the credibility of our analysis and findings, and ultimately of our conceptualisation of conversational gatekeeping.

As we will demonstrate further below, among the pivotal practices that emerged during the analysis were activities that mark previous contributions as problematic in terms of social norms and journalistic facts. We treated these instances as relevant for the study's purposes because they provide a window into the interactional relationship (including post-publication gatekeeping practices) between audience members as well as between audience members and journalists.

## Findings: Conversational Gatekeeping

Content analysis revealed that of 180 posts 31 had signs of post-publication gatekeeping practices that occurred in conversations between audience members and journalists. Further, the empirical findings revealed two kinds of dimensions of gatekeeping that occurred through their social interaction. Of the 31, 19 posts demonstrated characteristics of what we call *gatekeeping of conversations*, and 17 posts *gatekeeping*

**Table 1.** Occurrences of conversational gatekeeping on newspapers' Facebook posts.

Newspaper	Total number of Facebook posts	Posts with conversational gatekeeping	Posts with gatekeeping of conversations	Posts with gatekeeping through conversation
NP1	60	13	7	8
NP2	68	7	5	3
NP2	25	7	5	3
NP4	27	4	2	3
Total	180	31	19	17

*through conversation* (see Table 1.). The former dimension means that journalists and audiences can gatekeep their conversations; build their own norms by determining what is appropriate or wanted content or action for the online forum. The latter dimension means journalists and audiences can act as gatekeepers in online settings through conversations; give prominence to misunderstandings, reassurances, and factual errors that are in need of repair, assurance, or correction. These two dimensions are also dynamically interconnected, as gatekeeping of conversations and gatekeeping through conversations can occasionally occur at the same time—an example of this is provided in Post 2 and Extract 3 later in this section. Together the dimensions form the novel concept of *conversational gatekeeping* (see Table 2).

From a conversation analytic perspective, the concept of conversational gatekeeping is intertwined with the phenomena of repair and correction: repair is seen as a mechanism by which interlocutors confront trouble or problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding (Schegloff 2007, 100), and correction is a class of repair that includes an actual error (Meredith and Stokoe 2014, 186). Jefferson's (1974) study considers small errors in natural talk, occurring both in production of speech and in meaningful interaction. She also introduces two domains of error: "production errors—that is, errors in the production of a coherent utterance, or interactional errors—that is, errors in speaking "appropriately" for the recipients of the talk and for the occasion of the exchange" (Meredith and Stokoe 2014, 186). This notion of error and repair is important in the context of our study, where expectations of adherence to certain social online norms may surface in posts that treat previous contributions as inappropriate or otherwise problematic. This is also encouraged or enforced by the self-regulation practices, as the Finnish Council for Mass Media (2021) suggests that factual errors should be remedied by the news media on social media. In addition, our findings show instances of repairs and errors (corrections) by viewing self- and other-initiated self- and other-repairs (see Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977, 364–365; Schegloff 2007, 101–106). Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) talk about self and other repair/correction, depending on who does the repair: the speaker themselves or another participant. They conceptualise "that which the repair addresses as the 'repairable' or the 'trouble source'" (1977, 363). Repair/correction can be either self-initiated or other-initiated; the one who repairs is not automatically the one who initiated the repair operation. As Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977, 364) explain, "... both self-repair and other-repair (and failure as well) can be, and sometimes are, arrived at from either of the (for conversation) exclusive types of repair initiation: SELF-initiation of repair (i.e., by speaker of the trouble source) and OTHER-initiation of repair (i.e., by any party other than speaker of the trouble source)."

**Table 2.** Dimensions of conversational gatekeeping.

Conversational gatekeeping	
Gatekeeping of conversations	Gatekeeping through conversation
Journalists and audiences gatekeep their conversations and build their own norms by determining what is appropriate or wanted content or action for the online forum. > conversations are the target of gatekeeping.	Journalists and audiences act as gatekeepers in online settings through conversations. By participating, they give prominence to issues (for example misunderstandings, reassurances, and factual errors) that are in need of repair, assurance, or correction. > conversations are the means for gatekeeping

### Exemplary Cases

In the current study, we consider the first turn—the opening of the conversation and news media’s Facebook gates—as a summons. Furthermore, the interlocutor of the newspaper is unknown because multiple journalists of a given newsroom are able to post and comment via the company’s Facebook account. Nevertheless, the newspaper’s actions in a post are considered a unit; no individual journalists are singled out.

*Post 1:* Our first example looks at a post covering a news article concerning the local church council elections. The post has two main comments made by audience members and one sub-comment by the newspaper. This post exemplifies the dimension of *gatekeeping through conversations* where errors and misunderstandings are treated as problematic and in need of repair.

### Appendix 1 - Posts

#### Post 1

##### Summons 1

Status message:

In the parish elections, more people voted than the previous time. The headmaster of Äänekoski High School, Jaana Tani, received the most votes.



News headline:

**Jaana Tani received the largest number of votes in the parish of Äänekoski**

**Extract 1.**

Main comment:

Tom (Nov 19, 2018. 9:56):  
I wonder where these numbers 25 and 13 come from. There are only 27 seats in the council. The numbers are more likely 17 and 10.

Sub-comment:

Newspaper (Nov 19, 2019. 10:22):  
Thank you, Tom! We apologize for the mistake, we will correct these numbers to the story!

In Extract one, an audience member claims that the referenced news article has a factual error. The article is located on the newspaper's website and, therefore, the trouble source cannot be seen on the post: the problem is made visible through the platform. In this case, by making other-initiated other-repair, the audience member, Tom, is now acting as a *gatekeeper through conversation*, giving priority to the accuracy of news. Indeed, it is interesting here that Tom does not react to the news itself, but his response to the summons displays an orientation to the correctness of the content before it may become a topic for further conversation. Tom's actions thus also resemble what Vos (2020, 92) calls gatebouncing: news items in circulation can be bounced back through the gate due to fact-checking outcomes. The newspaper responds to Tom's comment by thanking him and by promising to make a correction. By doing so, the journalist's actions resemble acknowledgement of an actual error leading to other-initiated self-repair. However, there is no evidence of the promised correction as the trouble source was located on the newspaper's website, and, therefore, it is not visible to social media audiences whether the correction was ever made. The newspaper has therefore fulfilled its duty to some extent: admitted the error and promised to correct it, as per the ethical guidelines of the Finnish Council for Mass Media (2017, 2021).

As the factual error is not visible on the post, there is nothing to correct on Facebook. However, by engaging in the conversation the news media observably takes responsibility, and in a way contributes to building trust with its audience via social interaction. The audience member draws on the affordances of the digital environment by using the public page to make visible to others that the numbers in the news article are possibly faulty: through his comment, he is acting as a *conversational gatekeeper*. By the journalist's promise to make a correction, it is made visible that the audience member and the journalist are agreeing there has been an error. With the admission and by building mutual understanding the journalist observably acknowledges the audience member as a gatekeeper. This post demonstrates that an audience member can initiate and participate in the *gatekeeping process through conversation*. Also, by other-initiation of repair, the news media was given the opportunity to correct its error.

In cases where no actual error is made, news media can clarify or repair misunderstandings, as happens in the following post that continues to exemplify the dimension of *gatekeeping through conversation* (Post 2, thread Y). The latter part of the following post also introduces the dimension of *gatekeeping of conversations* (Post 2, thread X).



*Post 2:* Our second example looks at a post concerning the newspaper's news about a plan to install landscape lighting on a local bridge. The post had a total of 40 comments of which most formed into two sub-comment threads (Y and X) that had 25 sub-comments combined.

## Post 2

### Summons 2

Status message:

Äänekoski Bridge will have landscape lighting. How does it look?



News headline:

There will be new landscape lighting on Äänekoski Bridge

### Extract 2 (Comment Thread Y)

Main comment:

Mary (Nov 22, 2018. 17:02):

I believe this is the new bridge on Highway 4, that is passed over when bypassing the centre of Äänekoski. The lighting is beautiful.

Sub-comment 1:

Newspaper (Nov 22, 2018. 17:25):

Äänekoski Bridge is in the centre of Äänekoski, on the road leading to Suolahti. There are also plans for impressive lighting for the new bridge on Highway 4.

*(Sub-comments 2, 3, and 4 are not included, they are though explained later)*

Sub-comment 5:

Ryan (Nov 22, 2018. 21:05):

So this is the Hiski Bridge?

Sub-comment 6:

Newspaper (Nov 22, 2018. 21:36):

Yes. Its official name is Äänekoski Bridge. The new bridge on Highway 4 on the other hand is called Tärttämäki Bridge.

## Sub-comment 7:

Ryan (Nov 22, 2018. 21:47):  
So I did still recognise right 😊

*(Seven more sub-comments follow)*

In the main comment (thread Y), Mary states that the bridge in the post (summons) is the bridge nearby Highway 4. She also responds to the question (“How does it look?”) in the summons: “The lighting is beautiful,” thereby explicitly engaging in conversation with the newspaper. Mary’s comment treats the summons as a trouble source: by stating where she believes the bridge is situated, she implies that the post does not clearly reveal the location, which is therefore in need of a clarification. The first sub-comment is a reply made by the newspaper treating Mary’s comment in turn as a trouble source: “Äänekoski Bridge is in the centre of Äänekoski, on the road leading to Suolahti. There are also plans for impressive lighting for the new bridge on Highway 4” (Äänekoski and Suolahti are small neighbouring towns). In the comment the journalist is making other-initiated self-repair: they are attending to the summons and Mary’s comment with a clarification. The next three sub-comments of the comment thread constitute another topic that we will return to later. The fifth sub-comment is made by Ryan, asking: “So this is the Hiski Bridge?” With this question format, he is also treating the newspaper’s summons (and perhaps the journalist’s comment, see first sub-comment) as a trouble source. The journalist then produces the sixth sub-comment by replying: “Yes. Its official name is Äänekoski Bridge. The new bridge on Highway 4 on the other hand is called Tärttämäki Bridge.” Again, with this comment, the journalist makes other-initiated self-repair, providing additional information that treats the summons as possibly incomplete (and therefore acknowledging the source of the audience’s problems to locate the bridge). With the seventh comment, Ryan accepts the journalist’s explanation by confirming that he indeed recognised the bridge in the picture (in the summons).

Other-initiated self-repair not only gives the news media the opportunity to correct errors (as in Post 1), but it also makes visible if the news media’s actions are treated as problematic. These aforementioned examples point out occasional needs for repairs—clarifications of summons or problematic comments. They also show that through conversation the audience may become a *conversational gatekeeper*. It could be even argued that the audience members and journalists are “educating” one another as they are working towards achieving mutual understanding.

The next example is another comment thread (X) in Post 2. This thread introduces and demonstrates how journalists and audience members may perform *gatekeeping of conversations* by creating norms for the forum. By engaging in meta-communicative practices, conversationalists may not only display expectations of certain standards for their interaction, but also maintain them.

**Extract 3 (Comment Thread X)**

## Main comment:

John (Nov 22, 2018. 18:25):  
It is good to have landscape lighting in a county where the unemployment rate is 21%!!!  
Should something else than "landscape lighting" of millions be done?  
I mean really?  
Just asking?

## Sub-comment 1:

David (Nov 22, 2018. 23:49):  
How is unemployment connected to the lighting of the bridge? It looks the same whether you are unemployed or employed. The attitude 'progress is shit' is shit.

## Sub-comment 2:

Newspaper (Nov 23, 2018. 11:12):  
John, let's keep the commenting at the appropriate level! The opinion will surely come clear without powerful wordings and going to a personal level.

## Sub-comment 3:

John (Nov 23, 2018. 11:13):  
So, if a troll goes around here giving idiotic comments while living under parents' roof and says something like 'shit is shit' stuff.  
Then we are no longer at the "appropriate" level.

## Sub-comment 4:

Newspaper (Nov 23, 2018. 11:20):  
The use of vulgar words is not appropriate. This goes to all conversationalists on our pages.

## Sub-comment 5:

John (Nov 23, 2018. 11:22):  
So, why do you only say this to me?!?!?  
Say it to all who use them!!  
FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!!  
Is there a student working there this week?? A trainee number 2?

## Sub-comment 6:

David (Nov 23, 2018. 11:43):  
John millions of euros? Are you in the business, or how such an estimation? Is the contentedness of the town an extra investment? Can't wait to hear more?



## Sub-comment 7:

John (Nov 23, 2018. 11:45):  
Oh sorry.  
I didn't know you live under the bridge. So sorry about that. So just enjoy!

## Sub-comment 8:

David (Nov 23, 2018. 11:57):  
An illustration with a caption: The unemployment rate of the town of Äänekoski was 12,8 at the end of August.

*(Three more sub-comments follow)*

Comment thread X is opened by John, an audience member who takes part in conversations in both threads (Y and X) of Post 2. In fact, the three missing sub-comments in Extract 2 were made by John. The content of the comments in thread Y is similar to the ones from thread X presented next. In this comment thread's opening post John states that the county has an unemployment rate of 21%, and he continues by questioning the priority given to landscape lighting. This prompts a response (in the form of a sub-comment) by another audience member, David, who counters that unemployment rate and lighting are unconnected: "How is unemployment connected to the lighting of the bridge? It looks the same whether you are unemployed or employed. The attitude 'progress is shit' is shit." With this comment David's actions resemble self-initiated other-repair, treating John's contribution as unrelated to the summons, and he even dismisses it as "shit." He thereby establishes what kind of conversation topic or even opinion is appropriate in response to the post; he is initiating *gatekeeping of the conversation*.

Later on, the journalist submits a comment (sub-comment two) that directly addresses John: "John, let's keep the commenting on an appropriate level! The opinion will surely become clear without powerful wordings and going to a personal level." This comment indicates that the journalist is treating something John has said as problematic, as a "social" trouble source. According to the newspaper's notes which they provided to us, this discussion was moderated, and one comment was removed. Neither we nor other social media users any longer have access to this deletion, which is an interesting feature of this kind of text-based mediated interaction, leaving gaps in an ongoing public conversation that may become visible in seemingly unrelated contributions or—like in this case—disconnected scolding. Considering that some comments are kept, and others deleted, the newspaper has powerful rights (or opportunities) to gatekeep the content, to moderate or even delete it. In this sense, journalists also act as traditional gatekeepers in the light of post-publication gatekeeping.

In the third sub-comment, John expands the newspaper's comment, not only providing an account for appropriateness in this context, but also treating David as the troll. This prompts another sub-comment (4) by the journalist, which can be seen as self-initiated self-repair: they stress that this etiquette applies to all participants, thereby repairing a possible understanding of singling out John. By initiating other-repair (sub-comment 2) and self-repair (sub-comment 4), the newspaper is creating norms for its forum in terms of how interactants are expected to behave. The comment thread initiated the

need for some ground rules on behalf of the newspaper, and by commenting the journalist is engaging in *gatekeeping of conversations*.

The fifth sub-comment by John shows a clear understanding of being a subject of discrimination. He is drawing on several resources of written online talk to indicate emotions, e.g., capital letters and exaggerated use of punctuation marks (Farina 2018). By this way of expression, John shows that he is not accepting the attempted repair by the journalist. Indeed, the journalist's actions lead to more problematic talk. This seems to indicate that when news media performs conversational gatekeeping, directly blaming individuals might be detrimental to the course of the interaction since this could give the conversationalist more reason to counter. In the subsequent six comments, David and John continue the discussion over the unemployment rate. In sub-comment 8, David provides an illustration that shows that the unemployment rate according to officials was 12.8 per cent. By doing so, David returns to John's main comment performing self-initiated other-repair by correcting a factual error, i.e., he is *gatekeeping through conversation*.

In this comment thread, the newspaper and its audience were jointly gatekeeping the news content in conversations and repairing the ways the interaction was unfolding between the conversationalists, i.e., in terms of appropriateness. These joint gatekeeping practices made visible (social) trouble sources, and with other-repair, the newspaper and the audience were creating and reinforcing social norms for their forum. Extract 3 also demonstrates that the two dimensions of gatekeeping can overlap. In the next example, we illustrate how the audience is starting to develop norms for themselves as journalists and the so-called invisible gatekeepers are "missing."

*Post 3:* Our third example looks at a newspaper's post covering an armed robbery. The post has a total of 23 comments, 21 main comments, and 2 sub-comments. We consider this instance as *a deviant case*, i.e., a case that seems to disconfirm the developing analysis that has already formed an initial understanding of a normative pattern, but at the same time it exhibits features that may yet support previous analysis (Edwards 2006). We have shown earlier, in Posts 1 and 2, how journalists and audiences interactively do gatekeeping through self- and other-repair—we regard the phenomenon that has emerged in our analysis as *conversational gatekeeping*. However, we have also observed in our data that the audience's norm building may unfold in a manner that is against this normative pattern. Closer inspection of such instances reveals that conversational gatekeeping is not occurring, nor does the platform, the invisible gatekeeper, notably moderate the flow of the conversation. At the same time, the non-normative behaviour forms its own pattern that unveils the conversationalists' joint performance and reinforcement of hate speech.

In Post 3 all the responses are affirmative by nature and they can be seen as clear replies to the summons. The conversation that is unfolding in the main comments is concerned with the crime suspect who was presented textually and visually in the summons. However, the focus is on the background of the suspect and all the comments contain slur words. We provide two extracts from the main thread to demonstrate how the use of slur words forms social interactional behaviour that is non-normative and harmful to societal discussion.

### Post 3

#### Summons 3

Status message:

An aggravated theft, where a sales clerk was threatened with a sharp weapon, occurred in Turku on Christmas Day, says the south-west police department asking for tips on the suspect.



News headline:

**A bearded man robbed cigarettes from a market by threatening with a sharp weapon, the police is seeking tips – see the photo**

*The face of the person in the image has been blurred for ethical reasons.*

#### Extract 4

Main comment 1:

Bruce (Dec 26, 2018. 10:13)  
You'll probably find him in the nearest refugee center. [Comment had 28 likes.]

Main comment 2:

Steve (Dec 26, 2018. 10:16)  
Look at that, that's Niilo from Utsjoki. [Niilo is a traditional Finnish name for a man and Utsjoki a county in northern parts of Finland, in Lapland. The comment had two likes and two laughing emoticons].

Main comment 3:

Dan (Dec 26, 2018. 10:16)  
Were you surprised ... ? [The comment had three likes].

Main comment 4:

Miles (Dec 26, 2018. 10:18)  
A man?

## Main comment 5:

George (Dec 26, 2018. 10:23)  
 Did he speak Savonian or Arabic?  
 [Comment has been written in Savonian dialect that is used mostly in Eastern parts of Finland, and the comment had 5 likes.]  
 [Next to the comment is an image of a book cover that says a black-bearded man causes stir. The book cover has also an illustration of a black-bearded man talking on phone and stroking his beard.]

*(Five main comments follow)*

The first main comment states “You’ll probably find him in the nearest refugee centre.” This answer to the summons (eliciting 28 likes) seems to set the tone for the conversation as all the following comments display the non-normativity that reinforces hate speech—aggressive or hostile talk towards different groups of people e.g., based on ethnic background, gender, or age (Pöyhtäri, Haara, and Raittila 2013, 26). The main comments 2–4 make a joke of the man’s ethnic background, question if the person is a man, and contemplate whether people are really surprised about the case. The main Comment, 5, is a combination of text and image. The comment states “Did he speak Savonian or Arabic?” which refers to the language that the person might speak (Savonian is a Finnish dialect). In the image attached to the comment, there is a book cover that says a black-bearded man causes a stir. Thus, the comment thread displays a hate speech competition of sorts, where elements of satire are picked up and reiterated by the users, which creates a new norm for interaction in this context.

In Extract 5, the first two comments affirm the flow of hate speech: in Comment 11 James uses the demeaning word “blackamoor,” and in Comment 12 Andrew states the man should be sent back to where he is from as soon as he is caught.

### Extract 5

## Main comment 11:

James (Dec 26, 2018. 11:53)  
 Christmas peace doesn’t really matter for these blackamoors ... well, they don’t respect anything else either.  
 [Comment had two likes.]

## Main comment 12:

Andrew (Dec 26, 2018. 12:42)  
 Back where he came from as soon as he gets caught. [Comment had one like.]

## Main comment 13:

Brian (Dec 26, 2018. 12:55)  
 Points for publishing a clear image for once. It could have been easy to add something else besides the bearded man into the description, but that would probably be considered as discrimination.

*(Six main comments and two sub-comments follow)*

Even though there is no clear evidence of other- or self-repairs that indicate conversational gatekeeping in Post 3, Brian's actions resemble *prospective repair*. In Extract 5, in the main Comment 13, he replies to the summons by stating "Points for publishing a clear image for once. It could have been easy to add something else besides the bearded man into the description, but that would probably be considered as discrimination." His statement is controversial as he claims that more description could have been given, but that this would have been possibly perceived as discriminatory. In a way, his comment resembles self-initiated self-repair as he projects that his contribution might be recognised as hate speech; he thus does a pre-emptive move, prospective repair, anticipating trouble. However, the audience does not treat his comment as a trouble source, but as socially acceptable. The use of slur words and hate speech continues in the following comments. Brian's actions can perhaps be seen to opening the floor for hate speech as a "norm" for conversationalists.

Post 3 has not been moderated by the newspaper according to the notes they provided to us. Nor has the platform, the invisible gatekeeper, deleted comments that clearly are derogatory by nature. In addition, the conversationalists have been fuelled by each other's comments and allowed hate speech to flow freely—no one attempted to repair the talk. Thus, this post indicates why conversational gatekeeping can be an important element for constructing and reinforcing interactional norms in Facebook commenting. If nothing (neither human actors nor algorithms) interrupts, the non-normative behaviour might flourish freely in discussions related to the news. Algorithms struggle to read the cultural and linguistic contexts and there is also an evident lack of human moderators who could fill this gap on behalf of the platform (Roberts 2016; Caplan 2018; Mansikka 2019). It is therefore often left to journalists and audiences to negotiate what kind of behaviour and conversations are socially acceptable related to news in the light of societal discussion—in other words to employ conversational gatekeeping.

## Conclusion

180 posts and their comments on four Finnish newspapers' Facebook sites were analysed using content analysis and digital conversations analysis to understand how gatekeeping is intertwined with audience participation in post-publication practices and how journalists and their Facebook audiences build mutual understanding. Through our empirical findings we demonstrated that gatekeeping is negotiated in the post-publication environment in social interaction, in conversations among journalists and social media audiences. Together—in conversations—they build mutual understanding and create norms as well as decide on the content and action that is appropriate or wanted in the public news space formed on the respective online platform. We call this concept and interactional phenomenon *conversational gatekeeping*. As our empirical analysis showed, the concept is formulated through two dimensions—*gatekeeping of conversations* and *gatekeeping through conversation*—that are dynamically interconnected but occasionally occur at the same time. The former dimension explains how norms over behaviour and shared content are constructed among journalists and their audiences. The latter dimension explains how journalists and their audiences in conversations seek to repair misunderstandings and errors that occur on the forum. This means that in

conversations they together frame the journalistic and ethical “gates” that define what kind of news and discussion over news is considered appropriate on that particular forum.

On a theoretical level, conversational gatekeeping belongs with discussion of post-publication gatekeeping, that is, what occurs when the news item is already in circulation (Hermida 2020). Bro and Wallberg (2015) presented a three-way model of gatekeeping where the second model sees gatekeeping as a non-linear process of communication that is aimed to ensure communication between private citizens, authoritative decision-makers and journalists. Our study contributes to their theory-building by introducing a communicative view of gatekeeping that looks at the communication practices of journalists and their audiences. By adopting this view, we demonstrated the active role and potential power of communicating audiences in gatekeeping processes. Furthermore, we would like to highlight that it is important to recognise these online communication practices as new media configurations that need to be identified and examined (Reese and Shoemaker 2016).

Our empirical findings demonstrate the importance of journalists’ presence on their Facebook pages’ conversations. Algorithms struggle to remove inappropriate content in small languages (Caplan 2018) for which our findings on Post 3 provide support: Extracts 4 and 5 have signs of hate speech that were left unnoticed by both algorithmic and human moderators. Further, the absence of journalists’ actions inadvertently supported the non-normative behaviour of the audiences and, in this case, resulted in a long thread of discriminatory comments. This demonstrates the importance of journalists’ presence in conversations so that they can guide the conversations and take part in the norm building. Further, without journalists’ presence, the traditional gatekeepers are missing from the post-publication environment. Thus, we need human parties—journalists and audience members—to understand the given contexts, to create the norms and boundaries for their forum, and to ensure that discussions on public online spaces are democratic. As Bruns (2018, 355) highlights: algorithmification is not always the solution for everything in the context of news on social media. However, we acknowledge that the platform context is affecting the conversational gatekeeping and its dimension through the logics of the newsfeed algorithm: posts favoured by the algorithm will be shown to more users and they may gain more comments. Therefore, in the future, it would be beneficial to find ways to research the influence of algorithms on the mechanisms of conversational gatekeeping.

Our empirical findings also highlight that norms are created and reinforced—built collectively—in public news spaces as journalists and audiences jointly in conversations negotiate the rules for the respective platform (see Post 2, Extract 3). A previous study by Shaw (2012) also points out how users form norms in decision processes. The study’s applicability to other contexts has been suggested (Wallace 2018, 278) even though Shaw studied only (homogeneous) data from a political blog. Our current study is based on heterogeneous public pages that are administered by news media, which provide several kinds of news topics for audiences to discuss. By introducing the concept of conversational gatekeeping, we also hope to provide a basis for an understanding that is empirically more approachable, and that highlights the interactive aspect of a new kind of gatekeeping also in the light of norm-building.

With respect to methodology, our study contributes to the new wave of digital CA studies (e.g., Meredith and Stokoe 2014; Farina 2018) that are reforming the ways



conversation analysis can be applied in the context of social media. In the current study, we drew on CA's concept of repair to inspect the post-publication gatekeeping practices of news media and their audiences for the very first time. By analysing three posts in detail, we were able to show how conversational gatekeeping is enacted on Facebook. For future studies, we suggest that more cases, involving different social media platforms and international comparison, should be investigated in order to better understand the phenomenon and concept of conversational gatekeeping.

Apart from the theoretical and methodological contributions, our study has practical implications for newsrooms. The way posts, summons, are designed makes a difference to the audience: the topic of the post should be carefully considered by journalists to a given situation so that the gates are not left open to hate speech, while ensuring too that freedom of speech and of the press are not jeopardised. In addition, if audiences request clarifications concerning a particular piece of news, it might be beneficial for newsrooms to edit the posts and through conversational practices to build mutual understanding with their online audiences (see Post 2, Extract 2). When journalists engage in conversational gatekeeping, it might be advisable not to directly blame individuals for their "bad manners" as this could provoke more negative talk (see Post 2, Extract 3). Furthermore, essential factual errors should be corrected (see Post 1, Extract 1) as the Finnish Council for Mass Media (2021) advises so that the news remains accurate.

Finally, we raise ethical questions concerning news media's social media activities and look at the future of the concept. When considering content moderation on third-party platforms, such as Facebook, where should the line be drawn by moderation—how much gatekeeping is necessary? Conversational gatekeeping could bring us more answers to the question if more research and larger data sets were applied. The concept could help researchers and media organisations to better understand audiences' viewpoints and which kinds of settings and topics need more guidance on behalf of media and platform companies, especially in smaller languages and different cultural contexts. Indeed, future research is needed to further develop the concept and it would be interesting to discern different styles of conversational gatekeeping and how they unfold. Further, as platforms continue to triumph in contemporary society, we need to better evaluate arising new ethical issues brought by digitalisation: all human members of the platform society—audiences and journalists in the frontline—have a central position to construct ethical gates for the digital spaces.

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## II

### **POST-PUBLICATION GATEKEEPING PRACTICES: EXPLORING CONVERSATIONAL AND VISUAL GATEKEEPING ON FINNISH NEWSPAPERS' INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS**

by

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# Post-publication gatekeeping practices

*Exploring conversational and visual gatekeeping on Finnish newspapers' Instagram accounts*

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## ABSTRACT

News media share gatekeeping power with social media platforms and audiences in the digital news environment. This means news media is no longer the sole gatekeeper when gatekeeping is viewed post-publication, that is after news content has been published and entered circulation. In this study, we approach interacting and commenting on social media as post-publication gatekeeping practices. This means gatekeeping materialises as and in social interaction, as conversational gatekeeping. We engaged in a quantitative and qualitative analysis of Instagram posts and comments on Finnish newspapers' Instagram accounts during a period of one year (April 2019–March 2020) to explore how conversational gatekeeping emerges in the increasingly visual and multimodal social media environment. We contribute to the emerging stream of post-publication gatekeeping research by showing how multimodal Instagram content initiated four different styles of performing conversational gatekeeping: affirmative, critical, corrective, and invitational styles. Our typology helps to understand the social interactional relationship between news media and their audiences in general, as well as the micro-level practices of post-publication gatekeeping in particular.

**KEYWORDS:** post-publication gatekeeping, conversational gatekeeping, visual gatekeeping, social interaction, Instagram, newspapers

## Introduction

It has been argued that journalism is living the so-called *audience turn*, which means more power is given to audience preferences in the newsrooms (Costera Meijer, 2020). The audience turn also introduces audiences as actors in the gatekeeping process. This means power over news is shared between news media (the traditional gatekeepers) that publish the content, social media platforms that disseminate the content and afford interactions and conversations related to the content, and audiences who interact with the content (Karlsson et al., 2022; Salonen et al., 2022). In particular, the technological architecture of social media affords audiences to take part in the process of gatekeeping *after* news content has been published and entered circulation. This temporally defined part of gatekeeping has been recently discussed as *post-publication gatekeeping* (Hermida, 2020; Salonen et al., 2022). It is a process taking place in the digital news environment that is formed around a diverse constellation of platforms and technologies. Most notably, due to their growing role in news dissemination, social media platforms are central forums for post-publication gatekeeping and related interactional practices such as commenting, sharing, and liking news content on social media.

To account for these changes, gatekeeping theory, which has for several decades aimed to explain how news turns out to be like it does (Vos, 2015), has begun to reform. Concepts such as digital gatekeeping (Bro & Wallberg, 2015; Wallace, 2018), gatewatching (Bruns, 2005, 2018), and post-publication gatekeeping (Hermida, 2020; Salonen et al., 2022) have emerged to highlight the active role of both digital technology and the audiences in the gatekeeping process. These existing studies have done predominantly conceptual work to understand the different factors that shape gatekeeping as it moves into digital environments. Yet, we know little about post-publication gatekeeping practices that take place on a micro-level when audiences use their gatekeeping power. We know that traditional gatekeeping can be viewed as a non-linear process of communication in which audiences and news sources interact (e.g., Bro & Wallberg, 2015), but we argue that there is a need to understand how post-publication gatekeeping happens through social interaction on digital platforms, that is, in conversations between audiences and journalists: What kinds of content triggers audiences' gatekeeping actions? What are these actions like (see also Salonen et al., 2022)? And how do platform-specific genres such as images or videos spark these conversations?

Apart from the growing role of interacting audiences, another prominent trend introduced by social media is the predominance of visual platform-specific genres (e.g., Highfield, 2019; Leaver et al., 2020) that challenge news media to consider their visual practices when disseminating news on social media (Gynnild, 2019). One such platform is the photo- and video-sharing platform Instagram, which has gained increasing prominence as a news platform during the past years (Newman et al., 2022). Instagram has been the focus of several recent studies that have, for example, looked at aspects of news media's use of Instagram Stories

(Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2019), journalistic norms and practices on Instagram (Hermida & Mellado, 2020), journalistic boundaries on Instagram (Maares & Hanusch, 2020), media coverage of Covid-19 on Instagram (Mellado et al., 2021), and the news production and content on Instagram channels directed towards younger audiences (Hendrickx, 2021). Yet, as Bossio (2021) has pointed out, scholarship on journalism and social media is only beginning to explore the intersections of journalistic practices and visual cultures of Instagram, as well as the emerging practices of news distribution and reception on the platform. Therefore, there is a need for holistic, multimodal research that not only looks at the textual content (see also Salonen et al., 2021), that is, conversations and interactions on the platform, but also the visuals and their functions in news media–audience interaction and post-publication gatekeeping practices on Instagram. In particular, there is very little research on how audience members contribute to and consume visuals post-publication (cf. Schwalbe et al., 2015), or what kinds of conversational interaction they elicit.

To address this gap, we explore two main characteristics of social media: social interaction and visuality through the theoretical lens of post-publication gatekeeping (Hermida, 2020; Salonen et al., 2022). We use Instagram as an example of a visual social media platform that is part of the digital news environment where interactional post-publication gatekeeping practices (such as commenting) take place. On Instagram, visual content shared by the news media works as triggers for conversations, and the conversations, in turn, might affect journalists' actions on the platform and contribute to the prominence of the news on that platform through the algorithms. While the interactional nature of gatekeeping processes has been acknowledged in many theoretical accounts (e.g., Bro & Wallberg, 2015), only a few studies (e.g., Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013) have empirically explored how the process unfolds as social interaction and conversations. To study post-publication gatekeeping practices, we adopt the concept of *conversational gatekeeping*, proposed by Salonen and colleagues (2022), and view gatekeeping as something materialising as and in social interaction. We aim to contribute to the emerging theories of post-publication gatekeeping by showing how different kinds of conversational gatekeeping practices emerge on a micro-level in the multimodal context of Instagram. Empirically, we do this by exploring local and regional Finnish newspapers' Instagram posts and comments and the interactional relationship between news media and their audiences during a period of one year (April 2019–March 2020).

This article proceeds as follows. First, we discuss the development of gatekeeping theory, particularly its recent streams that seek to understand forms of gatekeeping that take place post-publication in the digital news environment. After that, we introduce our research questions, present our data, and explain how the analysis was conducted. We answer our two main research questions in the Findings section by, first, showing what kinds of interaction newspaper content has received on Instagram, and second, describing the social interactional post-publication gatekeeping practices performed by news media and their audiences on newspapers' Instagram accounts. The article concludes with



a discussion of the theoretical and practical contributions by highlighting our main finding of the typology of conversational gatekeeping styles: affirmative, critical, corrective, and invitational styles.

## Chameleonic gatekeeping theory in the digital era

Gatekeeping theory can be regarded as the true chameleon of media and communication studies. The theory was born in 1947 when social psychologist Lewin created a model to study changes in the selection and distribution of food items. In 1950, his apprentice, White, applied the framework in the context of journalism as he studied the news selection process of a wire editor, “Mr. Gates”. The theory has transformed throughout the past decades, but gatekeeping can still be defined as “the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009: 1).

The growing significance of the digital news media environment, however, has had significant consequences on gatekeeping mechanisms and the development of the theory. News organisations have lost their control as traditional gatekeepers in the digital news environment, as they can no longer solely decide which items are in or out of the public sphere (Salonen et al., 2022; Welbers & Opgenhafen, 2018). Furthermore, user interactions shape and are being shaped by the socioeconomic and technocultural practices of the current platform society (van Dijck et al., 2018). The technologically specific ways of publishing and accessing news are changing news production and distribution (e.g., Lamot et al., 2022), and the entire activity of news consumption takes place in a complex material and technological constellation of different gadgets and platforms (Hermida, 2020). Algorithmically driven platform companies – Alphabet (Google), Meta (Facebook), Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon – provide the infrastructure for the Western platform society, and the platforms share power over content circulation with their users. News organisations, which also operate on platforms as users, must thus grant the ultimate power over news media content to the platforms.

Indeed, in the hybrid media system – a complex combination of older and newer media forms (Chadwick, 2013) – the power game over news is played between news organisations that *publish* the content, audiences or users who *share* and *interact with* the content, and algorithmic platforms that *spread* the content (Karlsson et al., 2022; Salonen et al., 2022). Scholars have aimed to understand this power play by theorising how the process of gatekeeping has changed in the digital era. Bro and Wallberg (2015) argued that the introduction of new technologies and the increasing influence of external actors have transformed the principles of gatekeeping in the digital era. Wallace (2018) described the triadic relationship between platforms, news organisations, and audiences in their *digital gatekeeping model* that looks at gatekeeping from the viewpoint of four different actors: journalists, individual amateurs, strategic professionals, and algorithms. The four actors follow their own logics, but they work simultaneously and iteratively. These studies highlight how audiences and platforms influence news media’s journalistic decision-making process in the digital news

environment. Having the algorithmic infrastructures of digital platforms and their datafied audiences in mind when preparing the news, news media are influenced by external factors when making gatekeeping decisions.

## **F/actors and practices of post-publication gatekeeping**

The fact that social media platforms have endowed multiple actors and factors with the ability to shape and influence gatekeeping processes – also beyond the moment of publication – has raised scholarly interest in the temporal aspects of gatekeeping. There is an emerging line of post-publication gatekeeping studies that looks at the factors that shape and practices that take place *after* news is published and enters circulation in the digital news environment (see Ai et al., 2022; Hermida, 2020; Salonen et al., 2022, 2023). The new line is rooted in Hermida’s (2020) post-publication gatekeeping framework of four factors – publics, platforms, paraphernalia, and practices – that shape gatekeeping processes and through which gatekeeping can be viewed post-publication. “Publics” refers to the audiences of news, reaching from citizens to politicians, businesspeople, and journalists themselves. “Platforms” refers to the big platform companies such as Google, Meta, and Twitter. “Paraphernalia” refers to the materiality of gatekeeping, such as mobile devices and operating systems. Finally, “practices” refers to social (spatial and temporal) practices around how users engage with the news: News is consumed on a bus or while lying in bed, for example. This framework was extended by Salonen and colleagues (2023), who added the factor of regulations – laws and journalism ethics. They argued that post-publication gatekeeping takes place in a datafied news environment where laws of the country (e.g., Finland) or region (e.g., European Union) and journalistic self-regulation (e.g., press councils) influence the gatekeeping process after news is published.

A few empirical studies have explored post-publication gatekeeping practices as they unfold in online interactions (Ai et al., 2022; Salonen et al., 2022, 2023). Ai and colleagues (2022) used the lens of post-publication gatekeeping to empirically understand the interactional practices of news editors and users in news rankings (i.e., how prominent the news item is from the viewpoint of news editors or users). Theoretically, they highlighted the role of news editors who, in addition to users, can be seen to have a pivotal role in the post-publication gatekeeping practices when advocating the centrality of a news item after its publication. Furthermore, highlighting the social interactional nature of post-publication gatekeeping and its practices, Salonen and colleagues (2022) focused on the social process of norm negotiation between journalists and audiences in the context of Facebook conversations and introduced the concept of *conversational gatekeeping*. They see the social media posts made by news media as digital summons, or a kind of trigger, that invites audiences to interaction and conversations. Furthermore, they see gatekeeping materialising as and in social interaction: Journalists and audiences negotiate and create conversational norms jointly as well as define what kind of content is deemed appropriate on a platform or news media profile.

Some earlier studies can also be considered as post-publication gatekeeping



studies, although they do not explicitly use the term and the theoretical aims have not initially been focused on the temporal aspect (e.g., Barzilai-Nahon, 2008; Bruns 2005, 2018; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Singer, 2014). These studies also highlight the social interactional relation between users and audiences and journalistic actors in the digital news environment, and acknowledge that these interactions can influence the process of gatekeeping. Several scholars have introduced related concepts to understand the interactional and networked nature of gatekeeping on social media. Concepts such as gatewatching (Bruns, 2005, 2018) and secondary gatekeeping (Singer, 2014) describe users' role and power in curating the prominence and visibility of news items online through interactions such as commenting, liking, and sharing news. As one of the earliest accounts, Barzilai-Nahon (2008) proposed a theoretical concept of network gatekeeping to identify the processes and mechanisms behind gatekeeping, as well as the networked relationships between the different stakeholders participating in gatekeeping. Similar ideas were empirically explored by Meraz and Papacharissi (2013), with their concept of networked gatekeeping. They described networked gatekeeping as a joint process where the elite and crowds determine the relevance of information by means of conversational practices such as mentioning and retweeting on Twitter. These two concepts put forth by Barzilai-Nahon (2008) and Meraz and Papacharissi (2013) share the central idea of gatekeeping as a networked process in which several actors are involved and which takes place in the networked environment of social media. Finally, a few studies have discussed the potential of users to mark problematic content online as a gatekeeping practice. Vos (2020) argued that journalists, as well as other networked actors (such as audiences), can serve as gatebouncers by seeking and marking illegitimate pieces of information online. Singer (2023) conceptualised fact-checking as retroactive gatekeeping, conducted by fact-checkers who essentially gatekeep false content after a news item has already entered circulation.

Finally, one factor that has gained less attention in terms of post-publication gatekeeping is the increasingly visual modalities of online communication. On several social media platforms, the triggers for potential conversations are often visuals. Previous studies have discussed the visual aspects of gatekeeping – that is, visual gatekeeping that looks at the visuals chosen for publication and their circulation, but predominantly with a focus on more traditional pre-publication gatekeeping. For example, de Smaele and colleagues (2017) looked at individual decision-making over visuals, Pantti (2015) studied the role of non-professionals in the use of visual sources, and Pantti and Sirén (2015) examined journalists' attitudes toward the use of non-professional images and verification of amateur images.

In addition to these more traditional pre-publication visual gatekeeping studies, there is a study that has looked at visual gatekeeping taking place post-publication. Schwalbe and colleagues (2015) discussed visual gatekeeping and how visual editors' gatekeeping functions are now partly shared with amateurs. That is, legacy media still perform traditional (pre-publication) gatekeeping functions by selecting, presenting, and disseminating images captured by professionals, but images are also disseminated (post-publication) by citizen journalists and audiences. Schwalbe

and colleagues (2015) further described that circulating images are often verified and curated by gatecheckers, mainly legacy media journalists who check amateur content; however, active audiences can also sometimes perform gatechecking functions. By commenting and challenging the accuracy of the shared image, for example, they also perform post-publication gatekeeping practices. This gatechecker function in a visual news environment resembles Bruns's (2005, 2018) gatewatching and Vos's (2020) gatebouncing, which both highlight the social interactional relationship between journalists, audiences, and news items.

To conclude, this literature review has shown that reconfiguration of the over-70-year-old gatekeeping theory has been inevitable, but perhaps also a survival mechanism for one of the oldest theories in journalism studies. Over ten years ago, Shoemaker and Vos (2009: 130) articulated their concerns about the survival of the theory and the related methodology: "It makes little sense to study a changing media landscape with methods developed to study printed newspapers in the pre-computer era". With this study, we aim to contribute to Shoemaker and Vos's call and take part in reconfiguring what we know so far about post-publication gatekeeping practices of journalists and their audiences, particularly when they take place in and through conversations on digital platforms (Salonen et al., 2022). Overall, post-publication gatekeeping theory has not often been applied empirically (cf. Ai et al., 2022; Salonen et al., 2022, 2023) and is in need of future studies (Singer, 2023). Furthermore, there is a lack of studies that cover post-publication practices related to visual gatekeeping. Apart from the study by Schwalbe and colleagues (2015), this line of research has received limited attention. We seek to fill these gaps and set out to explore how post-publication gatekeeping plays out in the interactive and visual social media environment of Instagram by empirically studying two local and two regional Finnish newspapers' Instagram accounts. Based on this background, we ask the following research questions:

- RQ1. How does post-publication gatekeeping emerge in interactions in response to the posts made by the newspapers on Instagram?
- RQ2. What kinds of post-publication gatekeeping practices can be identified in conversations between newspapers and audiences, and how are these practices related to the visual content on newspapers' Instagram accounts?

## Methods and materials

Our empirical analysis focuses on the feed posts and comments on four Finnish local and regional newspapers' Instagram accounts that were published during a twelve-month timeframe from April 2019 to March 2020. These four newspapers were selected within the scope of a larger research project that investigated Facebook practices of local and regional newspapers in Finland (see Lauk et al., 2018, 2019). The project included an action-oriented setting, which included interviews and collaboration workshops with the participating newspapers. The

newspapers were selected so that they varied in size, resources, and scope, covered three different regions, and represented three different media conglomerates at the time of research. In compliance with the Association of Internet Researchers guidelines, we have kept individual online users' quoted comments and post examples anonymous, to protect online users as much as possible.

The data was extracted using the Meta-owned CrowdTangle platform (CrowdTangle Team, 2020), which only gives access to regular feed posts. The historical post and interaction data was stored and analysed in a spreadsheet. In total, the data contained 894 posts (405 from the regional newspaper *Keskisuomalainen*; 339 from the regional newspaper *Kaleva*; 111 from the local newspaper *Jämsän Seutu*; and 39 from the local newspaper *Sisä-Suomen Lehti*). For each post, the data included the account name, follower count, timestamp, type, number of likes, number of comments, number of total interactions, URL to the original post, photo id, and description text. For the purposes of this study, we conceptualised all the newspapers' Instagram feed posts as conversational triggers for post-publication gatekeeping. Further, any activity of the news media in a social media environment exposes their content to the external factors of gatekeeping, including the algorithms and affordances of the platform.

The content analysis proceeded in three phases. First, to generate an overview of the data and differences between the studied newspapers, we explored news topics and interaction statistics in our data and applied Silverman's (2011) categorisation and tabulation of instances. During this stage, the data was accessed using the spreadsheet format, as well as a smartphone that could be used to assess the post as it would be commonly viewed. The unit of analysis was the entire post, that is, both the visual and the text. A visual is defined as a still photo, video, or image that has been posted on the newspaper's Instagram account. For the purposes of this study, we translated some of the posts and comments to English (see Figures 1–4). The first author went through all 894 posts and categorised the news topic (e.g., Politics, Sports – see the Appendix for the full codebook) of each post. Topic categories were created by adopting and adapting a scale built in a previous study (Lauk et al., 2018). If the post was considered to represent more than one topic, the most prominent was selected based on the combination of textual and visual content. Hashtags were also used to fix the categories. Finally, to provide numerical evidence about the interaction activity, descriptive statistics such as the average interaction rate per each category and newspaper were calculated using the numerical data on interactions (see Table 1).

As our main focus was on gatekeeping as a process of social interaction, we focused on those posts that had any comments ( $n = 352$ ). From these posts, we marked all posts where the newspaper or other Instagram users had engaged in post-publication gatekeeping practices by commenting on the post. When identifying post-publication gatekeeping practices, we followed the conceptualisation of conversational gatekeeping by Salonen and colleagues (2022) and considered the original post by the news media as the digital summons – the trigger that opens the conversation – and the subsequent comments as responses to the call that the news media had made. As discussed in research

on digital conversations, they are conversations regardless of their conversation-like nature, that is, they might be short and asynchronous (Giles et al., 2015). Therefore, conversational gatekeeping was considered to be present if there were follow-up comments concerning the content, framing or publication value of the original post, or the actual news published on the newspaper's website, that is, conversations/comments were gatekept or they were means for gatekeeping. These comments could, for example, support ("Thank you for a well-written story!") or criticise ("Aren't there any other landscapes in Jyväskylä [a city] than this restaurant at the station 😊") newspaper choices. After this phase, 42 posts were marked as indicative of conversational gatekeeping, which means every eighth of all the posts that had comments.

In the second phase, we engaged in an exploratory, qualitative analysis of the subset of 42 posts and their comments. First, we together read through all 42 posts and their comments to confirm they indeed met the criteria. Next, with an iterative approach (Tracy, 2018), we alternated between data and theory. We each separately analysed every post by writing notes about observed interaction between the newspapers and audience members and listing preliminary dimensions of conversational gatekeeping present in the data, considering whether the action was performed by the news media or by audience members, whether the focus of the action was related to the content on Instagram or elsewhere in the newspaper's products. Second, using these dimensions, we worked together to generate a classification that would effectively explain the social interactional practices present in our data while adequately covering its complexity. The analysis of the posts that triggered conversations and their comments resulted in a typology of four styles of conversational gatekeeping: affirmative, critical, corrective, and invitational styles (see Table 1). The styles represent the variety of post-publication gatekeeping practices that takes place between audiences and news media. The first two styles were used by audiences only, the corrective style by both audiences and news media, and the invitational style by news media only. These categories were allowed to overlap.

In the third phase, we aimed to understand how visibility is connected to the different styles of conversational gatekeeping. First, we again analysed the subset of 42 posts and marked whether the identified conversational gatekeeping was targeted to the textual content, visual content, or the full story. Next, the first author conducted a more detailed analysis of the 23 posts that were indicative of conversational gatekeeping related to the visuals. During this stage, our interest was targeted to the role of the visual content in conversational gatekeeping, that is, what aspects of the image were targeted in audience comments or in the original post made by the news media. For example, audience members commented, "Where has this picture been taken from" and "Where around Oulu [a city] is it [the photo]?" These comments were considered to directly relate to the visual content. During the analysis, we also paid attention to the content and aesthetics of the images (e.g., Müller, 2011) by asking 1) What is in the image? 2) What meanings are present in the image? and 3) What larger social contexts are present in the image?

Notably, the number of analysed posts was smaller in the latter parts of the study when we applied more qualitative methods to understand the different styles and the role of visuality in conversational gatekeeping. The nature of qualitative research is to understand the phenomenon rather than to provide heavy numeric evidence. This supports the idea that smaller datasets also matter, and in particular, they can be useful for developing concepts and theories. Furthermore, as Reese and Shoemaker (2016: 407) pointed out: “New media configurations must be identified and their emergence accounted for, even as they may prove elusive and transitory”. We therefore maintain that sometimes studying these configurations closely requires a focus on the details rather than quantities.

## Findings: News media–audience interaction and news topics

The first part of our analysis aimed to give an overview of the post-publication gatekeeping activities based on news media–audience interaction in our data (see RQ1). All posts in our data had received some interactions, but interaction levels were very low. The majority of posts ( $n = 542$ ) had no comments. On average, a single post in the full dataset ( $N = 894$ ) received 119.4 interactions, of which 117.9 were likes and 1.5 comments (see Table 1). The distribution of interaction, however, varies highly per newspaper; the smaller local newspapers publish less frequently on Instagram, and they also clearly receive less interaction on average than the larger regional newspapers (see Table 1).

When looking at the social interaction taking place in the posts’ comments, it is evident that the newspapers or their journalists seldomly take part in the conversations – one of the local newspapers, *Jämsän Seutu*, making an exception. All posts where news media had commented were included in the 42 posts that were indicative of conversational gatekeeping. Even within these, there are only a handful of comments made by the newspapers, and these are mainly in connection to either an ongoing competition or asking what is in the picture (a publication strategy that one local newspaper employs).

The most frequent news topics in the full dataset were Entertainment and lifestyle and Sports. The news topics that raised the most interaction on average, in terms of likes and comments, in the full data were Traffic, History, and Weather (see Table 2a). When looking at the subset of commented posts ( $n = 352$ ), the topics with a relatively larger share of commented posts were Traffic, Weather, and Urban, with Nature, Politics, and Business receiving most comments on average (see Table 2b). These are all topics closely related to the audiences’ everyday lives or events in the region. Most notably, the two most common topics in the full dataset did not stand out in terms of received comments or likes. The topic that received the most comments on average was Promotion, with a clear margin to any other topic. This category contained non-news-related posts such as newspaper advertisements, offers, or promotions of events and competitions. By looking at the most commented posts, it is obvious the competitions in particular raised the average number of comments.

**TABLE 1** Number of posts and followers, total number of interactions (likes and comments), and average likes, comments, and interactions per post, by newspaper

Newspaper	N	Followers (March 2020)	Interactions (sum: likes and comments)	Likes (average)	Comments (average)	Interactions (average)
Jämsän Seutu (local)	111	1,229	9,818	85.5	2.9	88.5
Sisä-Suomen Lehti (local)	39	1,231	1,600	40.8	0.2	41.0
Kaleva (regional)	339	11,565	47,462	139.2	0.8	140.0
Keskisuomalainen (regional)	405	7,026	47,853	116.3	1.9	118.2
<b>Full dataset</b>	<b>894</b>	<b>21,051</b>	<b>106,733</b>	<b>117.9</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>119.4</b>

**Comments:** Data was collected from four Finnish newspapers' (*Jämsän Seutu*, *Sisä-Suomen Lehti*, *Kaleva*, and *Keskisuomalainen*) Instagram accounts from April 2019 to March 2020.

**TABLE 2A** All posts by topic and average number of interactions

Topic	Number of posts (N)	Number of interactions (average)
Traffic	10	164.7
History	64	154.94
Weather	7	147.29
Sports	119	138.66
Nature	67	138.33
Urban	55	136.42
Business	67	123.15
Officials	16	121.13
Health	22	116.45
Entertainment and lifestyle	258	115.43
Education	48	113.67
Politics	32	92.38
Science	12	90.42
Culture	42	77.1
Promotion	72	76.4
Crime	3	56.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>894</b>	<b>119.44</b>

**TABLE 2B** All commented posts by topic

Topic	Number of posts (n)	Number of comments (average)
Promotion	18	34.89
Nature	24	3.00
Politics	17	2.76
Business	31	2.58
Traffic	6	2.50
Urban	31	2.35
Science	3	2.33
Officials	7	2.29
Sports	45	2.27
History	25	2.16
Weather	4	2.00
Entertainment and lifestyle	102	1.92
Health	8	1.88
Education	20	1.60
Culture	11	1.36
Crime	0	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>3.84</b>



## Findings: Conversational gatekeeping styles and their visibility

The second part of our analysis focused on the subset of posts indicative of conversational gatekeeping ( $n = 42$ ). We aimed to identify specific styles of post-publication gatekeeping practices news media and audiences engaged in conversations in the context of visual social media (see RQ2). Based on our analysis of the posts and comments, we identified four different styles through which the audiences and news media performed conversational gatekeeping: affirmative, critical, corrective, and invitational styles (see Table 3). In this section, we explain the interactional gatekeeping relationship between audiences and news media and the role of visuals in connection to each style.

**TABLE 3** Typology of conversational gatekeeping styles and their explanations

Conversational gatekeeping style	Explanation
Affirmative (A)	Audience members affirm that the content (story or visuals) posted by the news media is pleasing and acceptable.
Critical (A)	Audience members criticise content, actions, or framings the news media have made.
Corrective (A/NM)	Either audience members or news media attempt to correct a factual error or inquire about something that is not clear to them or has been framed in a manner that raises questions.
Invitational (NM)	News media invite audience members to participate and interact with the post or their products.

Comments: The letters (A = audience; NM = news media) stand for the party the style was used by.

### Affirmative style

Fifteen posts in our filtered sample were indicative of forms of affirmative conversational gatekeeping. This style refers to the audience members' affirmative reaction to the post: to the content, the action of publishing the post, or the connotations it provides for the viewer. Affirmative style thus reflects an agreement or general positive reaction towards the content by audiences. The affirmation was directed either to elements visible on Instagram or to elements present in the story on the newspaper's website. In several examples, an audience member's comment was expressing their gratitude for publishing the story, either by praising the story or the visuals from the audience position, or giving thanks for the published story from the position of the interviewee. These comments, particularly when given by audience members, indicate that the commenter read the original story, either by following the profile link on Instagram or through

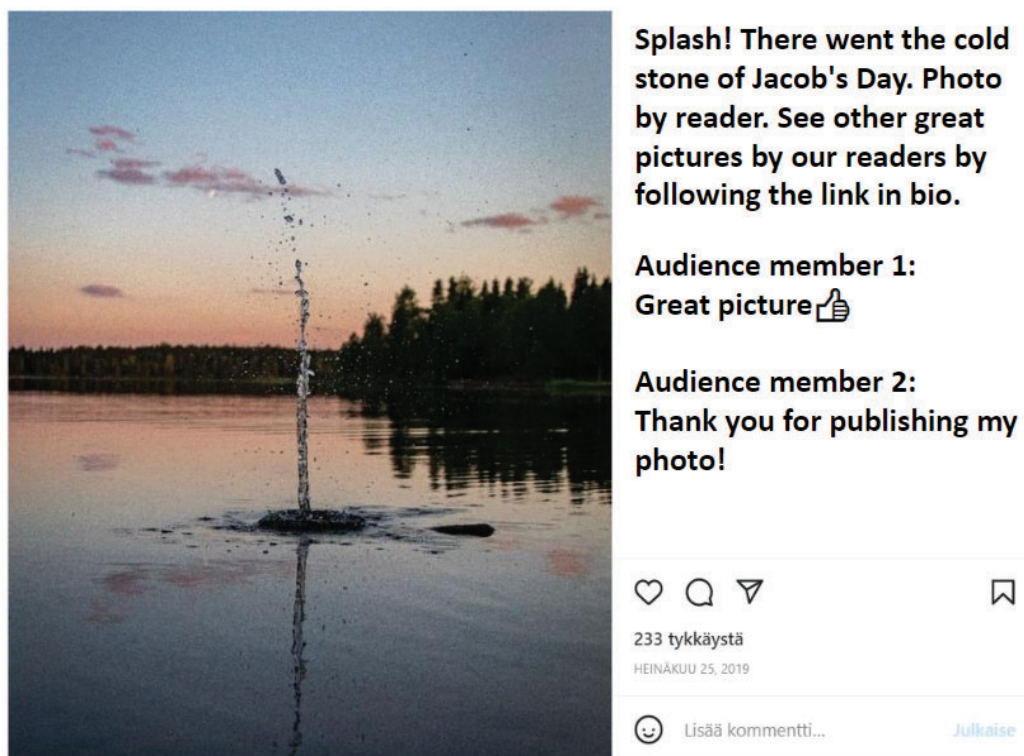


other paths. As post-publication gatekeeping practices, the comments indicating affirmative style support the gatekeeping decisions made by the news media, that is, they signal that the news media is acting correctly and meeting audience expectations. Therefore, they can potentially shape news media's gatekeeping decisions in the future.

In most of the posts, the affirmative style was clearly related to the visual elements of the post, for example, through simple supportive comments such as, "A great photo 👍", "I love this picture", "Lovely footage ❤️", and "It is always a pleasure to see old photos 😊". In some examples, the attention focused on the person who took the photo: a commenter thanking the photographer or an audience member thanking the newspaper for publishing their photo (see Figure 1). It is difficult to say if these supportive comments are expressing a stance towards the objects in the photo or aesthetic pleasure elicited by the photo. Nevertheless, they are affirmative, as they indicate support towards the gatekeeping decisions made by the news media.

The visuals in these posts typically presented nature or various positive events, such as celebrations. For example, Figure 1 shows a photo sent by a reader where a stone has been cast into a lake on Jacob's Day, 25 July, when the warm summer season is thought to end in Finland.

**FIGURE 1** Example of a post and comments indicative of the affirmative style of conversational gatekeeping



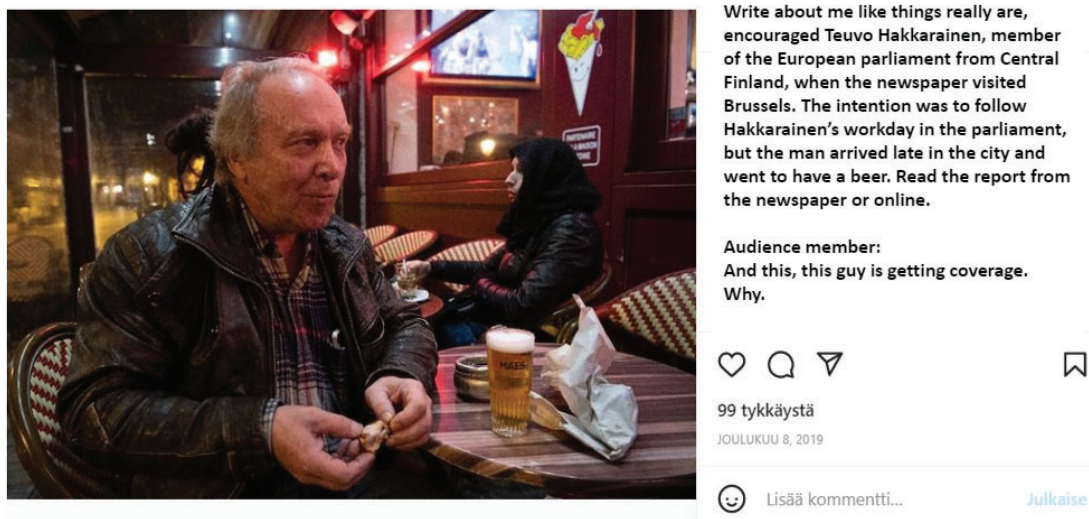
**Comments:** The post was originally in Finnish and has been translated for the purposes of this study.

## Critical style

Fourteen posts in our filtered sample were indicative of forms of critical conversational gatekeeping. This style was performed by audiences to criticise published content or other actions of the newspaper on Instagram. The criticism targeted the items in the posts, the framing of the topic, visuals, or the access to the news story advertised in the post. From the perspective of post-publication gatekeeping, audiences are guarding the newspapers' gates by trying to affect the traditional gatekeeping process: what comes through the news media's gates and also how it is framed. By expressing their discontent, audience members disagree with the editorial decisions made by journalists by commenting on Instagram.

In some cases, the criticism was targeted to the topic of the news, for instance, why certain people were given publicity, or why the newspaper promoted an unrecommended activity (e.g., ice skating under debatable weather conditions). Figure 2 shows an example where the audience members criticised why a Finnish member of the European Parliament was given media coverage. The particular member, Teuvo Hakkarainen, is a controversial figure in Finnish politics because of his constant involvement in minor personal scandals. The photo, along with its textual framing, primes such reading: The politician is depicted as being late and having a beer, while the original plan was to follow his workday as a member of the European Parliament. In other cases, the criticism was targeted on the framing of the news; for example, one news piece mentioned only the male soldiers and left out the homefront women. In another post, the target of gatekeeping was the frequent, repetitive use of a specific building to illustrate the city centre.

**FIGURE 2** Example of a post and a comment indicative of the critical style of conversational gatekeeping



Comments: The post was originally in Finnish and has been translated for the purposes of this study.

One specific gatekeeping issue that was the target of criticism was access. Half of all the posts categorised to represent the critical style dealt with accessing the news content. The access was criticised by audience members from three viewpoints: First, audiences were unable to access the content online or in print as non-subscribers, that is, they hit a paywall; second, they did not know how to access the story; and third, the link to the story was not in the bio as promoted in the post.

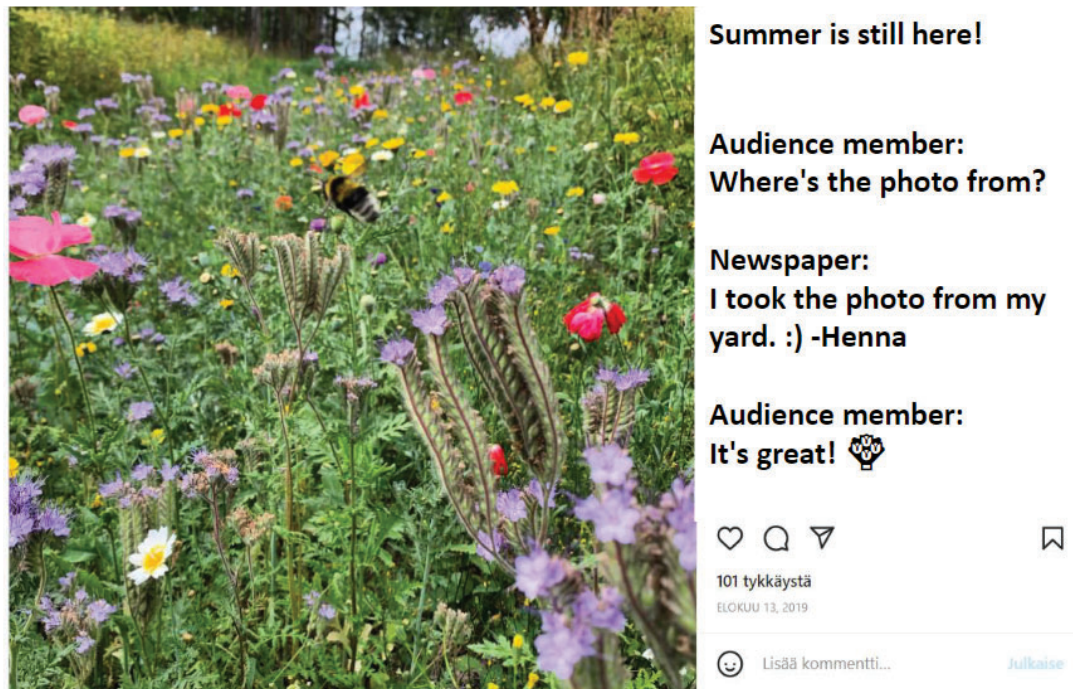
In the posts that criticised access to the content, it is clearly seen that issues also arise due to the hybrid nature of the media system: Old and new communication channels are intertwined as some of the newspapers promoted their print content online, but a print story promoted on social media is not necessarily available to all reached by the post. This shows that diverse channels and confusion about them can encourage audiences to “talk out loud” about news media’s gatekeeping decisions.

Finally, visuals related to the critical style did not have any specific topic, and altogether, visuals seemed to have a minor role in raising criticism. Only a few posts were clearly related to the visual elements, and they dealt with coverage: individuals presented or not presented in the images and the repetitive use of illustration. None of the posts that criticised access to the news content were related to visual elements. This means visuals did not seem to play a major role in the practices that make audiences criticise accessing the content.

### **Corrective style**

Twelve posts in our filtered sample were indicative of forms of corrective conversational gatekeeping. This style refers to both audience members’ and news media’s attempts to correct something or inquire about unclear issues. Corrective style thus alludes to unclarity in the actions or choices made by the news media or audience members in the post or in the comments. Typically, the unclarity has been solely expressed by the audience members: They engage in conversational gatekeeping to correct the information or add missing information on the news or posts made by news media. Typically, audience members pinpoint instances where the news is inaccurate. For example, one of the newspapers communicated that a grocery store chain opens their doors regionally early in the morning specifically for groups at high-risk for Covid-19. An audience member attempted to correct the headline by saying that the action is nationwide. Audience members also present inquiries and clarification requests; for example, some audience members are keen to know the location of the news story or photo (see Figure 3). The replies to inquiries or corrections were made by both audience members and the journalists.

**FIGURE 3** Example of a post and comments indicative of the corrective style of conversational gatekeeping



Comments: The post was originally in Finnish and has been translated for the purposes of this study.

The newspapers were not very keen on replying to audiences' inquiries. Only in two of the posts in our dataset did news media reply to audience members' corrective moves. Figure 3 shows an example in which the journalist replies to an inquiry about the location in the photo. In the other example, a journalist commented that they have updated a missing hyperlink to the bio. There were also instances in which the details highlighted by audiences in their corrective comments were obviously corrected in the post, but there is no indication or acknowledgement of such editing. Post-publication gatekeeping thus took place but remained undisclosed by the media.

In some of the posts, the corrective style was clearly related to the visual elements of the post. The visuals in these posts did not have any specific topic. In these posts, post-publication gatekeeping practices did not focus on specific corrections, but rather on inquiries that asked for background information about the photos. For example, an audience member questioned the photo by wondering how the photo is black and white in the year of 1989.



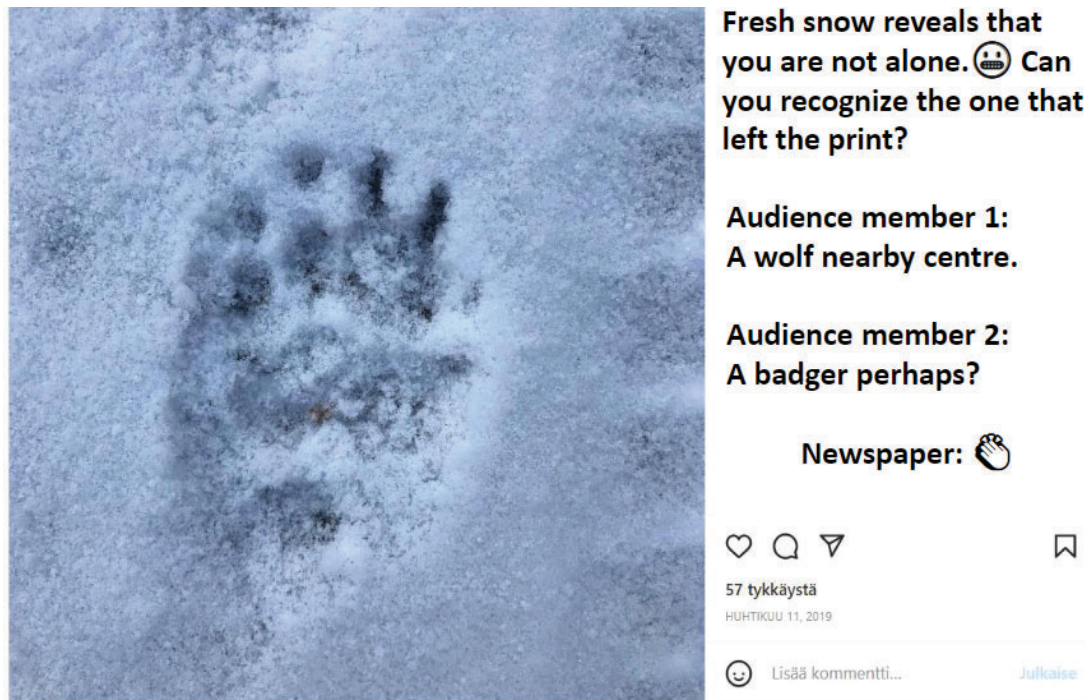
## Invitational style

Eight posts in our filtered sample were indicative of the invitational style of conversational gatekeeping. This style differs from the others as it is initiated purely by the news media, not by audiences. It is also an exceptional style as the majority of the posts were native posts, that is, content produced solely for Instagram. In this style, news media used the post pronouncedly as an invitation for their audiences to interact with the post – as a “digital summons” (Salonen et al., 2022) – typically by posing a question to encourage people to comment and interact with the post, for example, by asking what is in the photo. The news media are thus inviting audience members to participate in the post-publication gatekeeping. We consider the invitational style to represent gatekeeping, as it results in both news media and their audience engaging in social media news production after the news item has been published on Instagram.

There were two kinds of strategies the newspapers used in the invitational style. First, newspapers used native posts to attract interaction on their Instagram account. Second, newspapers presented invitations to their audiences with the aim of directing traffic to their news sites, outside Instagram – a typical social media strategy of monetisation, as newspapers do not gain direct revenues from social media platforms. The former strategy was typically used by the local newspapers and the latter by one of the regional newspapers.

The invitational style is also exceptional regarding the visual aspect: All the posts in this style were related to visual elements. As mentioned earlier, almost all the posts were native posts, which indicates that the photos had been taken purely for Instagram. As in the affirmative style, the nature topic was again prominent, often accompanied by written questions: “Guess what is in the photo?” or “Where has this photo been taken?” For example, a local newspaper posted a photo of a pawprint on snow and wrote: “The new snow discovers you are not alone. 🐾 Do you recognise who has left the pawprint?” (see Figure 4). This post engaged the audience to guess whether the animal was a wolf, a bear, or a badger. The newspapers replied with emojis and indicated the correct answer to be a badger. In another post, a regional newspaper posted an old photograph of people in a heated outdoor swimming pool with the text, “Help us and tell who are the people in the old photos (of the newspaper) and when have they been taken. Link in the bio”. The chosen wording asks audience members to interact on Instagram but also directs them to the news website, thus indicating a combination of both strategies mentioned above.

**FIGURE 4** Example of a post and comments indicative of the invitational style of conversational gatekeeping



**Comments:** The post was originally in Finnish and has been translated for the purposes of this study.

## Discussion and conclusion

We have explored how post-publication gatekeeping practices emerge at the intersection of textual and visual news content and audience comments posted on four Finnish newspapers' Instagram accounts. This study continues the rich line of studies that has explored practices such as commenting, liking, and sharing news content on social media (see Bruns, 2005, 2018; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Singer, 2014), but we based our inquiry specifically on the theoretical premises of post-publication gatekeeping and conversational gatekeeping (Hermida 2020; Salonen et al., 2022). We used quantitative and qualitative analyses as well as visual analysis of Instagram data to describe the nature of the interaction between news media and their audiences as well as the social interactional practices that took place post-publication on newspapers' Instagram posts and comments. Based on the empirical analysis, we developed a typology of four conversational gatekeeping styles: affirmative, critical, corrective, and invitational styles. With these styles, we contribute by advancing the theories of post-publication gatekeeping and conversational gatekeeping (Hermida, 2020; Salonen et al., 2022; Singer, 2023), and we add to the limited literature that has explored the post-publication gatekeeping phenomenon empirically (cf. Ai et al., 2022; Salonen et al., 2022, 2023). Our typology of conversational gatekeeping

styles sheds light on the ways that news media and audiences interact with each other in connection to news media's Instagram posts, and, in particular, how the conversations related to the posts illustrate post-publication gatekeeping practices. We showed how audiences hold post-publication gatekeeping power by affirming or criticising the news content on Instagram and how news media and audiences have the power to correct news-related content on Instagram. News media also have the invitational power to make audiences part of social media news production through conversations, as they directly ask their audiences to interact with their posts.

The first part of our analysis gave insights into Instagram as a platform for post-publication gatekeeping. First, when it comes to posts' news topics, as we do not know the pool of news stories from which the Instagram posts were selected, we cannot investigate the traditional pre-publication gatekeeping and the selection process that led specific topics to be highlighted on Instagram. However, what is visible to us – and relevant from the post-publication viewpoint – is the content that ended up being posted on Instagram; thus, we know which kinds of calls and conversation triggers the newspapers have made. In our data, the content of the posts made by the newspapers was highly focused on soft news, such as Sports and Entertainment and lifestyle. However, the news topics with which audiences interacted were more evenly soft and hard news, and the posts that received the most interaction were related to the everyday lives of the audiences. Our findings somewhat align with Ai and colleagues (2022), who put forth the notion that news editors were keener on circulating soft news content and that audiences were keen to interact with hard news content. Furthermore, some previous studies (e.g., Hendrickx, 2021; Maares & Hanusch, 2020) have promoted the notion that Instagram is a prominent platform for softer forms of news.

Second, our interaction analysis showed that there was not much social interaction by either of the parties. Most of the newspapers in this study were not actively taking part in conversations with their audiences, with one local newspaper making an exception. Therefore, post-publication gatekeeping practices were mostly left to audience members. Salonen and colleagues (2022) noted that news media hands over some of their gatekeeping power to audiences when the news media do not actively take part in conversations and consequently the norm-building on the online forum. We make the same observation here, especially with regard to the two bigger newspapers that seemed to be more focused on directing audiences outside Instagram than following what is actually taking place on the forum. As the Instagram platform does not allow adding links directly to feed posts, links must be added to the user's profile bio or stories. Therefore, Instagram does not conveniently support directing audiences outside the platform but rather invites the news media to work natively on the platform. This, in fact, seems to apply more generally for newer social media platforms used for news, such as TikTok: Instead of supporting linking news published elsewhere, they invite news media to follow the native vernacular of the platform (e.g., Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022). As a consequence, news media need to develop novel practices to share their news or innovate new kinds of content forms to generate interaction.

Furthermore, all interest received by a post on Instagram increases its probability of being shown to users (Mosseri, 2021). Therefore, conversational gatekeeping practices, regardless of the style, all contribute to the visibility of the posts. In this respect, the invitational style is also portrayed as a reasonable social media strategy to increase interaction, and through that, visibility. We argue, however, that from the perspective of gatekeeping theory, the micro-level practice of audience commenting carries meaning beyond metrics. With their post-publication gatekeeping practices, audiences are not only informing the newsrooms about what is important content or not (affirmative and critical styles) and what kind of content potentially needs to be corrected or revised (corrective style), which has been earlier recognised as the gatewatching or gatebouncing functions (Bruns, 2005, 2018; Vos, 2020), but that news media and audiences are also jointly creating meanings around these posts. In a way, conversational gatekeeping could be considered a process in which the audiences join in forming the final journalistic product, entailing that journalists also take part in the process (see also Bruns, 2005, 2018).

This study also contributes to the research on visual gatekeeping (e.g., Pantti, 2015; Pantti & Sirén, 2015; Schwalbe et al., 2015) by connecting the concepts of visual gatekeeping and post-publication gatekeeping and showing how visuals are part of the current post-publication gatekeeping environment. As our dataset for this aspect is relatively small, our findings cannot be generalised. However, our qualitative analysis suggests that audience members directed their attention to visuals, especially in affirmative and invitational styles. These two styles can be regarded as more positive styles compared with the critical and corrective styles. Also, the news topics in both styles were softer: Most posts in affirmative and invitational styles were nature-related or covered positive events such as celebrations. As a practical implication, we suggest that invitational style in combination with positive news topics is an easy way for news media to foster audience interaction. Likewise, invitational gatekeeping is also a powerful way to perform visual gatekeeping: News media can decide with which kinds of visuals they invite audiences to interact. On Instagram, only news media has visual gatekeeping power, as platform design does not allow users to publish images in the post comments – they can only comment with text and emojis. The only way for audiences to influence visual gatekeeping in the post-publication gatekeeping environment of Instagram is via conversational gatekeeping. This brings forward the need to study visual forms of conversational gatekeeping on other platforms, for example, Facebook, that allow news audiences to comment with visuals.

Finally, from a methodological perspective, our study contributes to the stream of multimodal research on social media and Instagram (e.g., Salonen et al., 2021; Highfield & Leaver, 2016). Social media research has highly focused on textual content (Highfield & Leaver, 2016), and there is a lack of research on news commenting and on the interactional relationship between news media and audiences in the context of Instagram and visual aspects. Our combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyse social media data has also ensured our aim to understand our data holistically from text to visuals.



Our findings revealed that visual content also played a role in conversational gatekeeping, which suggests that a multimodal approach to platforms and interactions taking place on them is important. Therefore, we encourage future research to develop mixed-methods settings to understand interactional patterns on social media platforms as forms of gatekeeping, and preferably to do so in a multimodal way. National and global comparison is one direction where future studies of conversational gatekeeping and its styles could focus next. Furthermore, we hope future research continues to empirically and theoretically explore post-publication gatekeeping across news contexts, formats, and platforms. Especially the complexity of the digital news environment and different platform features make it increasingly ambiguous to define what counts as a news publication in the first place, and thus, what practices related to news take place *post*-publication. That is something where social media studies in the field of journalism research should focus next.

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# Appendix

## Codebook for Instagram news

Category/ News topic	Explanation
Entertainment and lifestyle	feel-good stories, reality TV, celebrities, social media influencers, family stories, human-interest, pets and animals, food topics, free time activities, readers' photos, home & living
Nature	flora, forest, nature animals
Urban	city festival, events and celebrations, local architecture, local clubs, street art, city industries
Culture	music performances, festivals, different (foreign) cultures, artwork and exhibitions, theatre performances, literature
Business	entrepreneur stories, customer stories, stories of products, farm business, career stories, work life stories
Crime	scam, theft, brake in, mass shootings, copyright infringement
Officials	police, government announcements, military topics, firefighters
Health	Covid-19, home exercising, diseases, training, (mental) health issues
Education	A-levels, high-school courses, student life (such as dance ball, get-together activities, student housing), school bullying, stories of local universities, preschool stories

Promotion	newspapers' self-promotions (e.g., subscription offers), promotion of sports events, streaming services, or newspapers' live music shows/podcasts, promotion of the company's staff, competitions (native and not native in IG), newspaper's publication during public holidays, newspaper's seasonal greetings
Sports	professional athletes, motor sports, sports clubs, ice hockey (local clubs), historical sports topics (e.g., former Olympic winners), harness racing, junior leagues, local sports events, e-sports
Science	scientific experts, science events, technology stories
Traffic	parking and driving instructions, bicycle routes maintenance, road safety
Politics	citizen activism, stories covering politicians' lives, strikes, human rights topics, demonstrations, elections
Weather	snow conditions in the region, weather predictions
History	nostalgic photos (usually black and white photos of local area), people, events, vehicles and life in different decades, Finnish war history, museums, historical/archaeological findings

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### III

## POST-PUBLICATION GATEKEEPING FACTORS AND PRACTICES: DATA, PLATFORMS, AND REGULATIONS IN NEWS WORK.

by

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Article

## Post-Publication Gatekeeping Factors and Practices: Data, Platforms, and Regulations in News Work

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### Abstract

The gatekeeping literature has turned to look at the factors and practices that shape gatekeeping in the post-publication environment, i.e., after news has entered circulation. This article adds to the discussion and argues that news workers share gatekeeping power in the post-publication environment with audiences, platforms, and regulations. Further, this study extends the post-publication gatekeeping framework and considers it in the context of datafication. The article aims to broadly understand how (audience) data is part of editorial decision-making in news media from news workers' perceptions. The current study was conducted by interviewing news workers from three Finnish news organisations. The interview data was analysed utilising qualitative iterative content analysis. Our analysis revealed that the use of (audience) data in news organisations increasingly shapes news workers' journalistic decision-making processes. We found that news workers were ambivalent toward data (use) and that their reliance on platform data depended on the particular platform. Furthermore, when interviewed about journalism ethics, news workers only connected it with legislative issues, such as General Data Protection Regulation. Lastly, we could see that regulatory factors of data, i.e., legislation and media self-regulation, have power over news production and distribution. This study reflects how journalism (research) is shifting from an audience-centric view to a data-driven one, i.e., it is experiencing a *data turn*.

### Keywords

audiences; datafication; gatekeeping; news workers; platforms; regulations

### Issue

This article is part of the issue “A Datafied Society: Data Power, Infrastructures, and Regulations” edited by Raul Ferrer-Conill (University of Stavanger / Karlstad University), Helle Sjøvaag (University of Stavanger), and Ragnhild Kr. Olsen (Oslo Metropolitan University).

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### 1. Introduction

The growing use of audience data in newsrooms has impacted the power dynamics between news organisations, platforms, and audiences. The “digital trinity” of datafication, algorithmisation, and platformisation (Latzer, 2021) has led to a situation where journalists hold less gatekeeping power, i.e., a growing number of players have gained influence over news distribution, circulation, and the business itself (Salonen et al., 2022; Seuri & Ikäheimo, 2022). Through their digital footprints, such as interacting with news on social media, audiences are influencing editorial decision-making (Tandoc

& Vos, 2016), and, in turn, social media platforms' algorithms tangle with news distribution and visibility, affecting the way news is shown to audiences (van Dijck et al., 2018). Algorithmic platforms and their users have entered the news ecosystem and currently intertwine with news processes, especially in the post-publication context, i.e., after news has entered circulation (Hermida, 2020; Salonen et al., 2022).

In this study, we examine datafied news work from the perspective of post-publication gatekeeping. Our aim is to broadly understand how (audience) data is part of editorial decision-making in news media from news workers' perceptions. More specifically, we contribute



to the literature by discussing what role regulations play in the datafied news environment. From the viewpoint of media accountability, news media consider and reflect the external control (such as laws of the country/region), the internal control (such as journalistic values, ethics, and press councils) as well as audiences and other members of civil society (Eberwein et al., 2019) when deciding what is newsworthy to publish. In the current study, we focus on media regulation from a twofold perspective: Firstly, legislation in the European Union, for example, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), ensures and controls users, media organisations, and platform companies' rights over data (Meier & Trappel, 2022); and secondly, news organisations consider media self-regulation in editorial decision-making processes. This study addresses the suggestion of Porlezza and Eberwein (2022), Seuri and Ikäheimo (2022), and Seuri et al. (2022) that media regulation (the external control) and self-regulation (the internal control) should be investigated in the era of datafication.

Datafication is, in this study, understood as digital media's capacity to turn all human action and interaction into measurable digital traces (Breiter & Hepp, 2018). Essentially, knowledge of user characteristics and behaviours has become the main currency in the current media ecosystem (Ohlsson & Facht, 2017): In the process of datafication, (individual) data is monetised for its business potential (Coudry & Yu, 2018). Power over audience data is exercised by those with access to databases and expertise in processing and data mining (Andrejevic, 2014), such as news media and platform companies. Through digital profiling, platform companies can define which content users are exposed to and predict their (future) behaviour. News media depend on these infrastructural services as platform companies have developed considerable market and gatekeeping power (Meier & Trappel, 2022).

Ownership and control over news-related audience data have become complex, and therefore, it is important to understand how news media utilise and make decisions concerning data. In this research, we highlight the (potential) role of audience data from self and/or third-party-governed platforms in news workers' editorial decision-making. We do this by reflecting news workers' perceptions of their datafied working practices through the lens of post-publication gatekeeping theory, which looks at the factors that shape news after its publication. The current study adds to previous research on post-publication factors, practices, and the environment itself (Hermida, 2020; Salonen et al., 2022). Further, this study connects regulatory factors (legislation and media self-regulation) theoretically to the post-publication gatekeeping framework (Hermida, 2020) and provides evidence by applying the suggested extended framework empirically. Finally, this study takes a stance on the well-needed discussion of regulatory factors in the era of datafication.

## 2. Theoretical Framework of (Post-Publication) Gatekeeping in the Context of Datafied News Environment

In the 2020s, the context where news circulates is increasingly digital and datafied. Datafication of news has meant, for example, that newsrooms' editorial decisions are increasingly data-oriented (Vu, 2014). Datafication has also impacted economic models in journalism and challenged journalistic autonomy (Hanusch, 2017). This has led to the datafication of the digital news environment, and hence, the gatekeeping processes have also changed. Gatekeeping has been defined as "the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day" (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 1). The definition still holds up even though the theory has transformed considerably since its birth in the 1940s (Vos, 2019). This section first introduces gatekeeping theory in the digital age, then reviews studies focused on post-publication gatekeeping, and finally, discusses the role of regulations as a post-publication gatekeeping factor in datafied news work.

The digital news environment has brought changes to the ways gatekeeping theory has been utilised and developed for research in the past. In 1989, Abbott and Brassfield (1989) compared print and electronic media, and in 1990, Berkowitz (1990) studied the gatekeeping processes of local television news. More recently, the theory has been applied to online contexts. These studies have looked at the rise of news events on social media (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013), user-generated visibility on media websites (Singer, 2014), visual gatekeeping practices (Pantti, 2015), and social media editors' impact on news diffusion (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2018), for example. Gatekeeping has also been researched from the viewpoint of data and metrics. Tandoc (2014) pointed out how web analytics is changing the gatekeeping process after decades of journalists paying little attention to audience opinion in their decision-making. Consequently, information gained from (audience) data is part of the journalistic gatekeeping process. Nowadays, the question is not about whether data affects newsroom decision-making but, rather, how much. Further, the theory field has started to turn towards the post-publication viewpoint, i.e., the context where news is constantly circulated in the datafied digital news environment.

Some previous studies have looked at the post-publication side of gatekeeping, even though they do not specifically talk about post-publication gatekeeping. Singer (2014) introduced the term secondary gatekeeping, which refers to how users can up or downgrade the visibility of an online news item, while Bruns (2018) talks about how users and journalists can act as gatewatchers to/of information that is relevant to be distributed further online. Wallace (2018), in turn, points out different types of digital gatekeepers in contemporary society: journalists, individual amateurs, strategic professionals,



and algorithms. These studies can be categorised as post-publication gatekeeping studies because they look at the gatekeeping factors (e.g., audiences/users and platforms) and practices (e.g., users' ability to up or downgrade or gatewatch) in the environment after news has been published.

Post-publication gatekeeping specifically has been previously researched by Hermida (2020) and Salonen et al. (2022). Salonen et al. (2022) introduced the concept of conversational gatekeeping, highlighting the social interactional nature of gatekeeping in the post-publication context. Further, they see gatekeeping materialising as and in social interaction: Journalists and audiences negotiate and create the conversational norms together and decide on the accepted content for the particular online platform. Further, Hermida (2020) introduced the framework of four factors (4Ps)—publics, platforms, paraphernalia, and practices—through which post-publication gatekeeping can be viewed and which shape the processes of gatekeeping. Publics refers to the news audiences, reaching from the members of the public to politicians, businesspeople, and journalists themselves. Platforms concern the platform giants such as Google, Meta, and Twitter. Paraphernalia refers to the materiality of gatekeeping, such as mobile devices, smart speakers, and software. Practices refers to social (spatial and temporal) practices around how users engage with the news; for example, whether the news is consumed on a bus or while lying in bed.

In their study, Hermida (2020, p. 16) calls for studies that consider digital metrics' influence on editorial decision-making by considering "how all or some of the four Ps impact flows of news and information post-publication." Specifically, regulation issues related to gatekeeping are under-researched even though regulation increasingly shapes the formation of news. With the term regulations, we refer to the legislative factors, i.e., laws of the country and/or region, and to the self-regulatory factors, namely, journalistic values and ethics. Academics have called for collective regulation of data-driven systems (Steedman et al., 2020). In the EU, legislation (the GDPR and several digital acts, for example) ensures and controls users, media companies, and platform companies' rights over data (Meier & Trappel, 2022). For example, some European data protection authorities have found the use of US-based Google Analytics unlawful due to the increased risk of being in breach of the GDPR that regulates the use of personal data (Roosa et al., 2022). These new digital laws will challenge platform companies' data monopolies, and as a result, companies such as Meta have threatened to withdraw from the EU market (Burgess, 2022). The new regulations will also affect data collected by third parties and used by the media. As a result, audiences may gain more control over their data, and the monetisation model of platforms and media companies could be undermined.

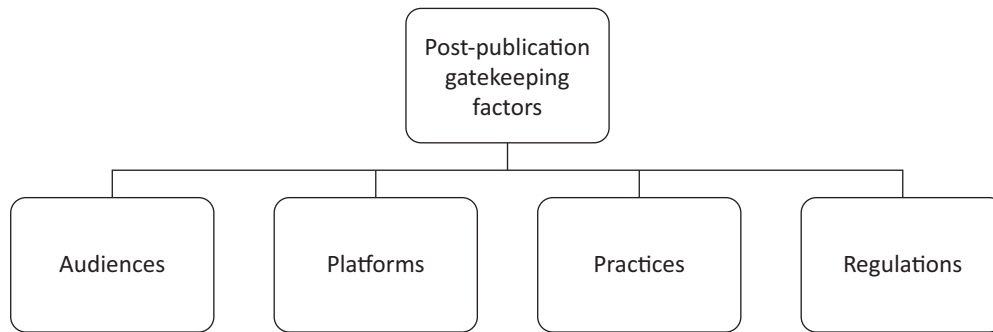
Further, Seuri et al. (2022) discuss the new gatekeeping regime and highlight the role and need to regulate

platform giants and big media companies. In their future scenarios for the platform society, Seuri et al. (2022) see that regulation is needed to gain positive outcomes for the information environment and to counterbalance the network effects that create platform monopolies. Furthermore, Aral (2020) has called for structural reform: Data flows between platforms should be enforced to ensure sustainable interoperability between platforms. This means that user data and actions should no longer be monopolised by platform companies. The Digital Services Act is designed to combat this in the EU, which could mean that in the future, news companies will have better access to databases collected by platform companies.

From the viewpoint of media accountability and journalism ethics, news media are currently trying to balance the journalistic ethos of reporting what the audience needs to know and the data-driven view of what the audience wants to know (Hanusch, 2017). This notion raises ethical questions as the journalistic field also has its norms and ethics on which editorial decisions are based. In Finland, the context of our empirical study, the Finnish press council governs journalistic (self-regulation) guidelines and processes complaints related to them. In relation to media accountability, the press council is an important part of the journalistic institution and has been designed to oversee the media's responsibility to society, citizens, and the journalistic institution itself (Eberwein et al., 2019). However, in digital journalism driven by datafication and algorithms, there is still a lack of normative standards and regulations across Europe (Porlezza & Eberwein, 2022). Journalism scholars (e.g., Porlezza & Eberwein, 2022; Rydenfelt et al., 2022) have argued that journalistic self-regulation needs to be adapted to the era of datafication, news automation, and personalisation.

From these theoretical premises, we answer Hermida's call to apply the framework of the 4Ps (publics, platforms, paraphernalia, and practices) and tackle the question of digital metrics' connectedness to editorial decision-making. Thus, we propose the framework of "Post-publication gatekeeping factors in datafied news work" (Figure 1) that has been built on the premises of the 4Ps and the previous theoretical discussion of regulations and datafication of journalism. In the extended framework, we add the factor of regulations, i.e., legislation and self-regulation, to extend the 4Ps framework and see that all this is taking place in the context of a datafied news environment.

In this study, we use the term audiences instead of publics as it is more descriptive in depicting the people for whom the news is created. Further, we see that the factor of platforms includes all kinds of platforms used by the news media, self-governed and third-party governed. Furthermore, we see that the factor of paraphernalia—the materiality of the object—is omnipresent in the factor of platforms, as platforms are technological constellations. Therefore, this study considers paraphernalia (e.g., software) as embedded in the platform factor.



**Figure 1.** Post-publication gatekeeping factors in datafied news work.

By practices, we refer to the concept beyond audiences’ social practices and include all kinds of journalistic practices that news workers can perform during their daily working routines. Thus, in this study, we have adapted from Hermida’s (2020) study, the factors of audiences, platforms and practices, and added the factor of regulations.

Against this background, this study asks:

RQ: How do news workers perceive the datafied factors of audiences, platforms, and regulations, and how do these factors shape their working practices from the viewpoint of post-publication gatekeeping?

### 3. Methods and Materials

The material for the study was gathered by interviewing Finnish news workers ( $N = 9$ ). Finland makes for a particularly interesting research context concerning audience data use because news reach and trust in news media are generally high (Newman et al., 2022). In global comparison, Finns trust news sites to use their personal data fairly more than people in other Western countries (Newman et al., 2022). This context may also be reflected in news workers’ attitudes toward data use. We adopted a qualitative approach to comprehend news workers’ perceptions and understandings of data-related issues and practices and interviewed nine news workers from three Finnish newspaper organisations. The first organi-

sation is a large national daily newspaper, and the other two are sizable regional newspapers, both publishing the largest newspaper in their geographical area in terms of circulation.

Our study participants are personnel who deal with data-related questions in their everyday work in news organisations. Their views on data use in news organisations vary somewhat based on their titles, as some worked in content production roles (e.g., social media manager) while others had more managerial tasks (e.g., head of technological development). Importantly, however, all were experts in how their organisation utilises audience data. Hence, we refer to them collectively as news workers. Seven participants identified as male, one as female, and one as non-binary. Participants’ job titles and years of experience can be found in Table 1.

The interviewees were selected for the study by peer recommendations within the organisations. Prior to the interviews, the participants were informed about the research project and the interview themes. They were also asked to review and approve a consent form guaranteeing the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation and the confidentiality of the interview material. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author via Zoom and face-to-face between May and August of 2022. On average, interviews lasted 96 minutes (a total of 866 minutes). The interview themes were: (a) Collection and use of data from news media sites, (b) collection and use of data from social media

**Table 1.** Interviewees’ job titles and work experience in years.

Interviewee	Work title	Years of experience
NW1	Producer	15
NW2	Manager	20
NW3	Lead Developer	2,5
NW4	Social Media Producer	6
NW5	Head of Business Development	8
NW6	Web Manager	12
NW7	Web Analyst	20
NW8	Head of News	13
NW9	Head of Technological Development	10

platforms, (c) ethics and responsibility in data collection and use, (d) news media's approach to social media platforms, (e) news media's approach to legislation dealing with news content and data practices, and (f) moderation of news content and discussions.

The interview material was analysed using qualitative iterative content analysis (Tracy, 2018). This method combines and alternates between deductive and inductive research approaches, i.e., it iteratively combines data and previous theory. This method was chosen because it "focuses on more narrow aspects of the data that have potential to extend specific theories or address practical problems" (Tracy, 2018, p. 63). In this study, the post-publication gatekeeping theory was used to gain an understanding of the current data-related practices and perceptions of news workers. At the same time, the qualitative data provided empirical evidence to support the proposed extension of Hermida's (2020) theory. Further, the iterative approach brought forward news workers' practices related to data use.

The interview material was analysed and coded by the first author. In the first round of analysis, the material was read and viewed in light of *what* was present. This reading highlighted the salience of the post-publication gatekeeping environment. Thus, throughout the following rounds of coding, the interviews were reflected in the light of the post-publication gatekeeping theory to ensure that all the factors based on previous literature (audiences, platforms, and regulations) were taken into account in the analysis. In addition, to ensure that all material discussing data-related practices was thoroughly reviewed, the parts mentioning data generally were coded as a fifth category. By doing so, the authors gained a comprehensive understanding of the interview material and advanced their conception of how post-publication gatekeeping factors are connected to data use in news media. In the final phase of the analysis, the authors jointly evaluated the fit between the formulated categories and coded content through a discussion on data excerpts relating to post-publication gatekeeping factors and different kinds of data-related practices evident in the interview data.

#### 4. Findings: Post-Publication Gatekeeping Factors and Practices

In this section, we examine our data through the lenses of post-publication gatekeeping factors and practices in datafied news work, as Hermida (2020) suggested. We apply the extended framework previously suggested in the theory section (see Figure 1) to our empirical data. In the following, we analyse and provide empirical evidence of how news workers perceive the datafied factors of audiences, platforms, and regulations and how these factors may shape their working practices. First, we explain the significant and ambivalent role of audience data in journalistic decision-making processes; second, we open up the news workers' perspectives about

self- and third-party governed platforms they use in their organisations; and third, we highlight the pivotal role that regulations (legislation and media self-regulation) play in news workers' decision-making processes.

##### 4.1. Audience Factor and its Related Practices

News media workers' emphasis on audience data varied among organisations and individuals. This highlights the ambivalent attitudes toward data practices in news media. For some, audience data significantly impacted their decision-making processes, which the following excerpt illustrates:

We base decisions less and less on emotions and feelings....Whether it's about planning journalism—what kinds of stories we want to make—or business decisions or designing our website—what kinds of functions we want to place there. In both cases, data is used diligently. (NW5)

However, not all interviewees put as much emphasis on audience data. They felt they had a responsibility to society to tell the most important news, no matter what metrics indicated, i.e., journalistic values guided their decision-making regarding the news. Audience data could guide the form of news stories, but newsworthiness and the story's content were news workers' decisions. In contradiction, some understood audience data as a means to emphasise particular kinds of content. For example, one interviewee said that they closely follow their audiences' actions by age group: "We follow what kind of content interests different aged audiences so that we can produce better content and are able to offer our subscribers the content they wish for" (NW9).

Interviewees' perceptions of audience data were indeed ambivalent: They were uncertain about how much data should and does affect their decisions and actions. Thoughts and perceptions about the influence of audience data also varied throughout the interviews, as news workers seemed to be weighing what they could say about data. Illustratively, one interviewee raised critical views of their sites' audience data use and presumed that it was unreliable regarding age, gender, and reading time statistics: "Reading time analytics is so unreliable that we can't base any decisions on it" (NW8). Later the same interviewee described that they could still partly rely on their (audience) data in cases such as planning the front page. They further described that analytics was understood as helping them to make decisions regarding their publication format or content:

We've got new kinds of formats such as live broadcasting and radio shows, and as the number of staff stays the same, we need to let go of something. This is how long-term analytics can help us decide which [formats/content] are not so important for us to do. (NW8)

Data-driven news culture was also visible in organisations' ways of testing news headlines and how different kinds of headlines allured their audiences. Some had even predicted, for example, how particular headlines performed for different aged audiences.

The origins of the data also mattered. Most importantly, the data of social media audiences raised concerns. Some saw a difference between the use of social media data and data that was collected from the organisation's sites—audience data guides more social media activities than activities on their own sites. They described this as a way to keep journalistic decision-making in their hands. In addition, audience data was utilised to compare different social media platforms' performance. As one participant observed, "It's interesting to compare how the same video performs and interests on TikTok and Instagram and what kinds of audiences it allures" (NW4).

Also, audience data is considered when practices relating to paywalls are decided upon. News media aims to increasingly understand their audiences' movements on platforms and ways to monetise them. In our study, interviewees from all three organisations said they employ hard paywalls. While the previous literature considers a "hard paywall" to be "no access to content without subscription" (Myllylahti, 2014) or that they "allow no free content" (Pickard & Williams, 2014), our interviewees seemed to connect hard paywalls to granting access to content that is only available to subscribers. Thus, they distinguished between some content that is freely accessible to all and clear-cut content that is unreachable unless readers subscribe. With that in mind, in this study, we use the concept of a "hard paywall," as our interviewees presented it. Further, in our study, the number of news stories placed behind the paywall varied between organisations. The first newspaper distributes a large amount of free content as they see access to accurate information as their journalistic responsibility in building a democratic society. The two other newspapers had a different approach to paywall practices, and most of their content was behind a paywall. They further described how the content is usually distributed for free in situations when the news originates from the Finnish News Agency (STT) or deals with global, national, or local security:

All the stories that we produce are primarily behind the hard paywall no matter where one enters the story, from social media or elsewhere....For free of charge, we offer things such as our columns, STT news, and for example, national instructions during Covid-19. (NW8)

The above-mentioned factors become apparent through newsroom practices—such as the paywall example illustrates—and manifest the central role of audience data in news workers' decision-making processes. The interviewees' statements reflect the contradictory

views of audience data's role in news work. The ambivalence and uncertainty toward audience data were also visible inside single organisations: Interviewees from the same news organisation shared strikingly different views on the impact of audience data in their decision-making processes. In addition, the statements portray how audience data is a post-publication factor that shapes new workers' decision-making which makes it an issue of (post-publication) gatekeeping—what kind of content news workers publish or should publish, and how they frame their journalistic content.

#### 4.2. Platform Factor and Its Related Practices

News organisations use a range of platforms to reach their audiences and distribute their content. Each platform has its unique mechanisms, and many are guided by algorithmic recommendations. When platforms were looked at through the lens of (post-publication) gatekeeping, the question of governance became evident—how much decision-making power the platforms afford to news workers. The interviewees described how organisations employed three different kinds of platform systems: self-governed, third-party governed, or a mix of these. On a self-governed platform (e.g., company websites and applications), the news organisations are fully in charge of the published content (what and when) and in control of dataflows (collection, storage, and handling; e.g., self-made analytics tool). From the viewpoint of paraphernalia, the materiality of technological objects is embedded in the platforms' software. That is, power over platforms is tied to the software being used: If a news organisation owns the software, it has more power to manage the platform it operates on. An effective way to gain control over data is to develop one's own analytics tools for the news organisation, as one interviewee states:

It's a platform we've developed for GDPR reasons. Because if we used another [third-party] platform, the data would go just somewhere....We've protected [the data] so that people can reply anonymously, and those answers are not connected to any other information within the organisation. (NW3)

Self-governed platforms were understood as means to control data, but third-party governed platforms were seen as governed by the technology giants. This means that news media have little power over the affordances that guide the use of the latter ones. The most often mentioned platforms were Google and Meta and their products: Google Analytics for following newsroom metrics; Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tiktok for social media activities. Interviewees from each organisation described how much traffic in news organisations' sites originates from social media platforms. They were unified in that the main function of social media is to promote journalistic content, i.e., making their brand known.

However, understandings of platform governance varied. Some interviewees stated that they are not particularly utilising social media (data) since the organisation prioritises its own products, whereas some organisations put much effort into social media publishing. News workers also pay attention to the vernaculars of the platform. As one interviewee states: “We bring it [the news story] in a format that is easy to understand, e.g., to Instagram. So that it also supports visual storytelling. And that’s also shareable” (NW4). This highlights how the platforms’ affordances guide journalistic decisions. Interestingly though, some interviewees also highlighted social media as a tool for building a democratic society: “We fulfil our democratic duty by reaching young readers and by sharing trustworthy information with them about the regional elections. Social media has, in this way, a pure journalistic and noble purpose to serve democracy” (NW1).

As governance of platforms proved important, it also raised concerns about data reliability. This was particularly evident in the context of social media platforms. In some situations, social media companies’ data (e.g., Meta’s demographics) were deemed more trustworthy than the data of news organisations’ platforms, as this type of data was harder to collect from their own sites in a trustworthy manner. As one interviewee explains: “I trust age distribution [data] more on social media because I know that knowing their users is their [platforms’] main business” (NW8). Further, the reliance between social media platforms varied as one interviewee explains: “Google Analytics offers its own view about the visitors, but when you compare that to social media [Meta’s user data], it’s good to remember that the [Google] data only gives some ideas” (NW7). Data reliability was also deemed important when news organisations use platforms that are a mix of self—and third-party governed platforms. For example, news organisations have built their tools on top of Google’s infrastructure. As one interviewee explains:

Within our conglomerate, we’ve previously used a company which has built us analytics [tools]....They have utilised the data that comes through Google Analytics....But now we use an external company that tries to identify problems related to data reliability....They have found errors and problems in data collection and are now helping us fix them. (NW8)

The role of the platform factor becomes even more evident in news organisations’ moderation practices. News organisations seem to consider what the platforms afford them to do, i.e., do news workers need to moderate comments or does the platform or another service provider do it for them? The level of content moderation differed between newspapers. In the first news organisation, moderation for their website and Meta’s social media platforms was bought as an outside service and was conducted by humans and machine learning

software. Occasionally news workers moderate by themselves, e.g., on TikTok. News workers from the second news organisation said they had outsourced their website moderation, but they moderate their social media comments as part of their daily practices. News workers from the third news organisation explained that they do not currently use website commenting and that they rely solely on social media commenting in audience interaction. Social media moderation was seen as part of their daily practices: “Journalists who work online are in charge of social media moderation. You go there systematically to check the comments, but because you do that besides all other tasks, you can’t fully concentrate on it” (NW8).

The above-mentioned practices demonstrate that news workers base their decisions on platform data and vernaculars to some degree. Platforms can thus be seen as a post-publication gatekeeping factor that is a part of their decision-making process when deciding what to publish. Further, from the interviewees, it became evident that there is a hierarchy of trust towards different platforms. Organisations (and individuals inside them) value them differently based on the trustworthiness of the particular platform and its data practices.

#### 4.3. Regulatory Factor and Its Related Practices

As our theory-based extension to Hermida’s (2020) post-publication gatekeeping framework suggests, regulatory factors are part of the decision-making process of news workers, i.e., post-publication gatekeeping factors. The interviewees described how GDPR has extensively shaped their work practices. However, they gave considerably less attention to the aspects of journalism ethics and media self-regulation, which can also be regarded as part of post-publication gatekeeping. In the interviews, we asked direct questions, such as “how ethical and responsible do you think you are in your work.” In these situations, none of the interviewees mentioned the journalistic guidelines, the ethical codebook for mass media set by the Finnish press council, but rather discussed the effects of GDPR on their work. This is notable because media self-regulation often takes place *after* the news is published, for example, when a story needs revising based on feedback from sources. Hence, the press council also has a pivotal role in the media self-regulation process as it oversees how news media follow the journalistic guidelines *after* a news item has been published. The interviewees’ focus on GDPR, on the other hand, suggests that the law is an effective regulatory tool and part of news workers’ everyday work. This is illustrated by the following quote from an organisation that received feedback concerning the use of Google Forms from their audiences: “Yes, I feel we’re [ethical]. Earlier, we might have collected something through Google Forms but then gave up on it as it raises questions about data protection....[The] GDPR becoming effective was a turning point here” (NW2).



The quote also demonstrates that some audience members were concerned about regulatory issues. Furthermore, interviewees described how following GDPR has affected their working routines and increased audiences' rights over their data. This can be interpreted as a means for audiences to become part of the gatekeeping process. GDPR allows them to withhold the release of their personal data even after it has been handed over to news organisations and used, for example, in audience metrics. However, not all audience members seem to be equally aware of their rights, as one participant explains:

Users can ask us to empty all their data from our records...These requests might come once or twice a week. They are usually people who work in the IT field, experts that are interested in data. An average user isn't usually so interested in their data as long as it's in somewhat good hands. (NW5)

While interviewees brought up the theme of GDPR and how it has shaped news media work, they also described that GDPR and related legal issues were not their areas of responsibility. They repeated that GDPR was something that they did not need to be responsible for because their organisation has specific professionals for GDPR and legal matters. As one participant explains: "I'm not sure how to answer except that GDPR has brought along strictness...These sorts of issues are not our team's responsibility. I don't work with these issues" (NW2). This is noteworthy given that our interviewees were the ones that are dealing with data-related issues in their daily work.

Regulation's shaping of practices can further be exemplified through cookies that also shape the consumption of news after its publication. Due to GDPR, audience members can refuse to share their cookie data with news organisations and third parties who have made agreements with the organisations. Some interviewees believed that data will be regulated increasingly in the future and that regulation will bring changes to data use, both to social media companies and to news organisations themselves. They were worried about the demise of third-party cookies. This would make it difficult to access audience data and would thus challenge media organisations' business logic: "Google will close its support to third-party cookies, which means operating them will become more difficult...Also, in Finland, they [data protection officers] regulate the way we and other publishers operate now and in the future" (NW7).

At the same time, interviewees were after stricter regulation for the major platforms such as Google and Meta. They called for compensation for news content they had created, which now circulates for free on social media platforms in the post-publication context: "Many working in the industry hope that Google and Facebook would share their revenue with us, just as has happened in Australia and France in the past" (NW7). Interviewees hoped that future regulation would help their businesses, for example, news media could have

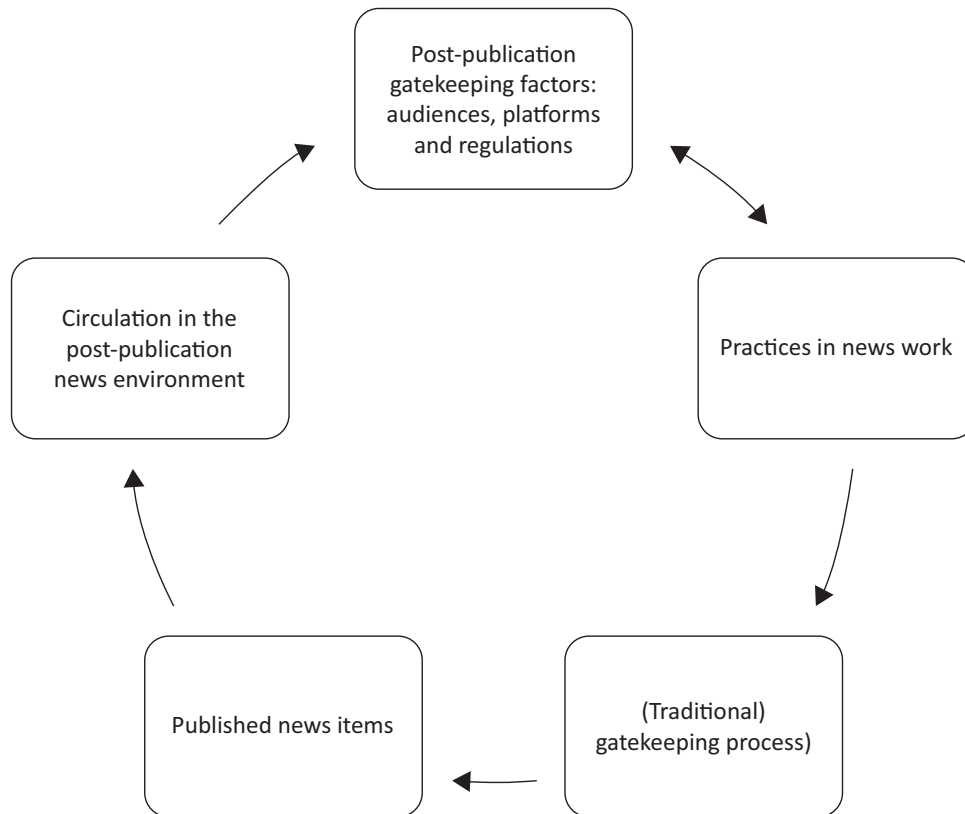
access to cross-platform data to see how their audiences migrate across their own and third-party platforms. At the moment, due to regulation and social media platforms' unwillingness to share their user data, news media organisations base their decisions on a single social media platform or their own platforms' data flows. This further demonstrates the gatekeeping power that these social media giants and regulations possess over news organisations.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

In the previous section, we have demonstrated how the post-publication factors of audiences, platforms, and regulations, as well as their intertwined practices, iteratively shape news workers' editorial decision-making processes in datafied news work. We have highlighted the role of regulatory factors in the current (post-publication) gatekeeping processes and extended the framework of "Post-publication gatekeeping" by Hermida (2020) to include regulatory factors and practices in datafied news work. Our empirical findings support previous studies (e.g., Hermida, 2020; Salonen et al., 2022; Seuri & Ikäheimo, 2022) claiming that gatekeeping power is shared between multiple (f)actors in the current datafied news environment. To illustrate how the factors and practices are situated in the traditional journalistic gatekeeping process, we present Figure 2.

The figure illustrates how post-publication gatekeeping factors and practices iteratively shape the traditional journalistic gatekeeping process, which includes all the culling and crafting of information that takes place in newsrooms before a news item is published. After the news item has been published, it circulates in the datafied news environment. From there on, the news item interacts with audiences, platforms, and regulatory gatekeeping factors. These create new practices and shape traditional journalistic gatekeeping in news organisations. For example, the audience factor is present in the ways audience data guide decision-making over news headlines. The platform factor is present, for example, in cases where social media metrics guide what kind of content is published on a particular platform. Further, regulatory factors outline how audience data can be utilised. For example, audiences have the right to withdraw their data from news organisations' databases. These kinds of withdrawals shape audience metrics and can, therefore, also shape decision-making processes. For future studies, we recommend that researchers apply the suggested framework empirically to validate it further and more extensively map the factors and practices that shape post-publication gatekeeping processes in the datafied news environment.

The current study further contributes theoretically to the field of journalistic gatekeeping studies—it brings together the previous discussions of gatekeeping factors (e.g., Salonen et al., 2022; Wallace, 2018) and practices (e.g., Bruns, 2018; Singer, 2014) that shape the



**Figure 2.** (Post-publication) gatekeeping processes in datafied news work.

production and distribution of news. Furthermore, the study answers previous research's (Aral, 2020; Porlezza & Eberwein, 2022; Seuri et al., 2022) call to examine regulations in the datafied New Gatekeeping Regime. We have done this by not only suggesting the extension of regulatory factors to Hermida's (2020) framework but also by unravelling the news workers' contradicting perceptions concerning legal and ethical matters of their work. Our findings somewhat align with previous research (e.g., Ekström et al., 2022; Rydenfelt et al., 2022) on how news workers work with data; its use is negotiated with other, often journalistically-driven values. However, our study participants highlighted aspects of the law (i.e., the GDPR) more than media self-regulation, even when asked about the ethics of news work. It is noteworthy that while the Finnish press council is highly valued among news workers in Finland, it was not discussed in the interviews. This could be due to uncertainty arising from datafied news work. Several of our participants stated that they were unsure how data is used and that other non-editorial personnel might be better equipped to discuss legal aspects of their work. Data and knowledge were understood as being "out there."

Further, part of this confusion between law and ethics could be explained by the idea that the law (GDPR) limits the misuse of data collection and use and, therefore, forces more ethical approaches. Ethics is written into the GDPR, at least at the minimum. As the EU's new set of Digital Acts comes into force, the European

media market will face changes in business practices and models (Newman et al., 2022). These changes may also impact the future of media self-regulation. It is, therefore, crucial for news organisations to prepare for these changes and consider ethical aspects when planning their future. The interconnected nature of legislation and media self-regulation should also be the focus of further research.

Furthermore, our study confirmed that web analytics and the knowledge generated through audience data shape the journalistic gatekeeping process (cf. Tandoc, 2014), evident in practices such as personalising headlines and decisions relating to the front page. This supports the idea that journalism is shifting from an audience-centric view to a data-driven one, i.e., journalism (research) is experiencing a *data turn*. This is also connected to reliance on data and platforms. In our empirical data, the significant role of data processing technologies and, most notably, the various third-party actors who provide these technologies sheds light on what the digital trinity of algorithmisation, datafication, and platformisation (Latzer, 2021) looks like in everyday news work and how it informs the understanding of not only the audiences but also that of news workers concerning newsworthiness. This was visible in our findings, for example, as reliance on social media data.

However, reliance on data raises some critical concerns. First, our focus on news media organisations and their everyday working practices shows that the

understanding of the audience generated through data does not always reflect reality. This mirrors recent critical data and media research arguments on how knowledge created through data is, in fact, often ambiguous (Pink et al., 2018). Consequently, datafication may produce a fundamental misfit between data-generated understanding of an individual and their own experience (Talvitie-Lamberg et al., 2022)—to which the data double concept also refers (see e.g., Ruckenstein, 2014). Second, and as our study demonstrated, there is an ambivalence in how the news workers spoke of their data use, even inside a single organisation. This illustrates the controversial role of audience data in news work. News workers aim to base their decisions on platform metrics, but the knowledge of audiences is highly dependent on the (single) platform-generated data and the particular data processing tools (Aral, 2020). This means that journalistic decision-making becomes increasingly dependent on the platforms and their data processing practices. Further, this could lead to an undesirable situation where third parties are given too much power over journalistic decision-making (Salonen et al., 2022).

The knowledge of how data is used and exploited across different units in news organisations is fragmented. With further overall discussion on data-related practices, news organisations could form a less ambivalent relationship with the data they possess. As our results indicate, a move in this direction seems salient, given that audience data increasingly guides decision-making and newsworthiness in the news media. Therefore, involving news workers from different units and positions in discussions on data use and its regulatory aspects would help create a more holistic understanding of data and give individual news workers confidence in managing their responsibilities and expertise. We have begun to unravel this topic but also recognise the limitation of the size and nature of our dataset. Therefore, we invite future scholars to dig deeper into the ambivalence of data use in news workers' daily practices.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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