Transnational trigger constellations: Reconstructing the story behind the story

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Abstract

Understanding how the topics of news stories are socially constructed through journalistic practices is an important question for the study of journalism. We contribute to this strand of research by reconstructing the process of news making from the perspective of the journalists. The method used for this purpose is the comparative reconstruction of the 'biographies' of news stories by interviewing the authors of news stories. This was done during the same two weeks covering European news in 23 elite, popular and regional newspapers in six countries (Great Britain, France, Germany, Poland, Denmark and Austria). A cluster analysis identifies the complex constellations of different components that trigger European news making. Four trigger constellations co-exist that represent different sets of journalistic practices of news making. These transnational patterns of journalistic practices show that journalism is not only a professional community based on a common professional ideology, but that journalism is a transnational community of practice.

Keywords

Constructivism, Europe, gatekeeping, journalism culture, journalistic practice, news initiative, news values, sources, transnational communication

Explaining the reasons as to why certain topics are covered by journalists lies at the heart of journalism research. This study focuses on the very beginning of the news process and seeks to identify typical ways of how newspapers generate the topics for their news stories. Journalistic practices are reconstructed from the perspective of the journalists. The method used for this purpose is the comparative reconstruction of the 'biographies' of news stories by interviewing the authors of articles shortly after their publication: The

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journalists were asked to tell the stories behind their news stories. As journalistic practices vary between different media organizations and in different countries, this method was simultaneously applied during the same two weeks in different types of newspapers (national elite broadsheets, popular and regional newspapers) in six European countries.

The aim is to identify transnational patterns of European news making. Research has shown that differences between journalism cultures and media systems exist even within the common political, economic and cultural framework of European Union member states (Esser, 2008; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Hanitzsch et al., 2011). EU reporting is domesticated in various ways (AIM Research Consortium, 2007) and national public spheres show different patterns of Europeanization (Brüggemann and Kleinen-v. Königslöw, 2009). While this kind of research focusing on identifying and explaining the differences of journalistic cultures is fruitful and worthwhile, it also tends to cloud the common practices among journalists in different countries and news outlets. While the studies on the professional *ideology* of journalists have already highlighted that there is a common understanding of what journalism is about in western democracies (Deuze, 2005), the question of common *practices* is a road less travelled in terms of research. This is why this article seeks to identify the common ground among the journalists of *BILD, Ouest de France, The Times* and *Gazeta Wyborzska* and other daily papers in producing news about European affairs.

For the purposes of this article, *European* news making is defined as comprising both EU reporting and coverage about other EU member states. *News making* refers to the production of all genres of political news content published in daily newspapers including news reports, news analysis, interviews and commentary.

The article begins by elaborating the theoretical framework that guides the analysis. Drawing from different strands of journalism research, a model of four components which interact in constructing topics for newspaper articles is developed. The challenge for empirical research is discovering how the different components typically interact: What are the trigger constellations that produce European news? The reconstruction of the 'biography' of articles is based on interviews with the authors of selected articles and asking them: What triggered this particular news story? Why was it published at this particular time? After presenting the methodology of the study in more detail, the article discusses the empirical results. A cluster analysis reveals four trigger constellations that represent different sets of journalistic practices that shape European news making. The conclusion sums up the insights that this study offers for a better understanding of how European news making is initiated.

Conceptual framework: Developing a model of the micro-level of news construction

In order to develop a framework for analyzing the process of news making at the micro-level of journalistic practice, this study draws on two strands of research: news value theory and newsroom studies. Both strands of research originate from a concept of journalistic practice that is modeled on the wire-editor Mr Gates in the pioneering study by White (1950): the journalist is seen as someone who selects news stories for publication

according to certain criteria. Advances in theorizing journalism have put emphasis on news making as a social process of constructing the news under a set of influences. Consequently, the role of journalists goes beyond selecting events or news stories for publication. Doing journalism means constructing the news under the constraints of constellations of different factors.

In their ground-breaking article, Galtung and Ruge (1965) identified features of news making that in their view distort foreign coverage. According to Galtung and Ruge's model (1965: 71) journalists would choose to publish events that contain certain features and journalists would accentuate those aspects of events that satisfy these news factors. The studies in this tradition work from the assumption that the journalists' selection criteria are woven into their news stories. Consequently, most studies in this research tradition are based on content analysis and they have served to produce different lists of news factors that until today center pretty much around many of the factors included in the original lists from 1965 (Eilders, 2006). News value theory, therefore, has excelled at identifying key features of news content and answering the question: What is news? (O'Neill and Harcup, 2009).

News value studies have been criticized, however, for not being able to describe how and explain why articles on certain topics are produced (O'Neill and Harcup, 2009; Staab, 1990). The first criticism is methodological and points out that journalistic decision-making is not analyzed in studies that conduct content analysis only. News factors describe features of the outcome of news making but not necessarily the criteria that guide everyday editorial decision-making. Studies that conduct newsroom observation find indications that journalists make use of much broader and simpler heuristics, such as the typifications identified by Tuchman (1973) or the 'journalistic gut feeling' identified by Schultz (2007). A second criticism is epistemological and points out that the events from which journalists are supposed to select only exist as social constructions by journalists and other actors who turn occurrences into news events (Molotch and Lester, 1974). A third criticism is empirical and points out that there are many factors that influence news making other than the features of the events that are covered.

The latter two arguments follow from newsroom studies that were developed out of the gatekeeping tradition. About 20 years after the pioneering gatekeeping study by White (1950) there was an important turn from seeing journalistic practice as being merely the selection of events towards conceptualizing journalism as a set of practices of news making (e.g. Tuchman, 1973; Tunstall, 1971). These studies viewed news not as a representation of events selected for publication, but as 'a practical accomplishment' (Fishman, 1997[1982]). This view follows Walter Gieber's logic of defining news as what 'newspapermen' make it (1965). Many of these studies follow constructivist logic and regard events, messages and news as social constructions.[1] For news content, journalists contribute to the definition of 'what constitutes an event, where events can be found, and how events can be told as stories' (Fishman, 1997[1982]: 211)

Today's gatekeeping research is beyond regarding journalism as simply opening a gate for news flowing to the audience: 'In fact, gatekeeping in mass communication can be seen as the overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed, and is not just a series of "in" and "out" decisions' (Shoemaker et al., 2001: 234). Gatekeeping research has outgrown its original metaphor and has developed into a

more complex theory of different levels of influence on news construction (Preston, 2009; Reese, 2001; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

In one of the few studies on news values that go beyond content analysis, the newsworthiness of a topic as determined by journalists and members of the audience in focus group discussions was unable to predict what becomes news:

> News is a social artifact, the product, the output of journalistic routines that is made available to the audience […] newsworthiness is a cognitive concept, a mental judgment made by individual people […] what people – even journalists – think is newsworthy is not necessarily what becomes news. (Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006)

Therefore, in order to explain what becomes news, lists of news factors have to be contextualized by drawing on the different spheres of influence that have been identified by research in the gatekeeping tradition. Source strategies (Sigal, 1973) and the organizational context including the editorial policy of the newsroom (Breed, 1955) have been identified as relevant factors that influence decision-making about news items.

Drawing on the literature discussed above, the following model identifies four components that characterize news making at the micro-level and guides the empirical reconstruction of how the ideas for articles are generated.

1. The *occurrence*: The starting point of the process of news making is that something happens, inside or outside the newsroom. Some stories neatly follow the pattern of an external 'event' being discovered and reported, but not all articles deal with 'events'. They might start within the newsroom with a brainstorming of the editors who decide: 'Let us do a story on … / an interview with …'
2. The *trigger sources*: As outside and inside-the-newsroom occurrences will interact to inspire articles there will almost always be some kind of information getting into the newsroom in order to spark news making. In the context of this model 'sources' denotes only the source of the information that triggered the process of news making and not all kinds of sources used by the journalists in order to gather information on a topic.[2]
3. The *evaluation*: The decision-makers within the newsroom interpret the incoming information as being newsworthy. Newsworthiness is the result of the journalists being able to ascribe news factors to the occurrence that make it 'fit to print'.
4. The *editorial context*: As resources (number of journalists available, time, news hole at this particular day, etc.) are limited and other factors such as editorial policy and individual interests of journalists in certain kinds of topics intervene, only part of the potentially newsworthy occurrences are actually covered. The editorial context decides whether or not article initiatives are finally turned into articles.

The model separates four components of news making analytically yet does not assume a linear development from events to coverage. On the contrary, we assume multiple interactions between the different components, such as editorial contexts influencing

what kind of evaluations matter and which occurrences of news making journalists are searching for. The four components are broad categories. Therefore, the first question for the empirical analysis is to classify what kind of occurrences, trigger sources, evaluations and editorial contexts the journalists identify as being relevant for writing the respective article. Specific combinations of the four components form trigger constellations: typical ways of how news items are constructed through journalistic practices. The second research question therefore aims to identify typical trigger constellations.

Research design

The study assumes that journalistic practice is structured by the way journalists interpret their work, among other factors. Therefore, their perspective is relevant for understanding journalism: what do the authors of articles perceive as the relevant starting point of, and factors that influence, the development of a particular news story? In order to avoid imposing the researchers' framework onto the interpretations of the journalists, the study relies on open questions and derives the categories for the subsequent quantitative analysis inductively from the responses provided by the journalists.

As we are interested in identifying transnational patterns of news making rather than the specifics of doing journalism in a particular country, we chose Europe as a case study for reconstructing article biographies. The advantage of focusing on Europe is to conduct the study within a setting that provides for some degree of variation in media systems and journalism cultures while at the same time providing for a common political, cultural and economic framework that makes common patterns of news making possible. By focusing on European rather than domestic coverage we also provide for common points of reference for news making in terms of the events of EU policy making as well as in terms of occurrences in the different EU member states that may be relevant for journalists from different neighboring countries.

Therefore, Europe serves as a case in two ways. First, the study deals with articles about Europe (in the double sense of articles about the EU, its institutions and policies; and about other EU countries). Second, the study analyzes newspapers from a sample of six EU countries including new and old, big and small, EU-phobic and integration-friendly member states (Great Britain, France, Germany, Poland, Denmark, Austria). Furthermore, different types of newspapers may also vary in the way European articles are generated. Therefore, the study has sampled articles from two leading elite newspapers in each country (in order to include newspapers with different kinds of political bias), one high circulation regional newspaper and a popular newspaper (see Table 1 for the sample).

The trigger reconstruction method used for this study consists of structured qualitative interviews with the authors of newspaper articles shortly after their publication (see Mc Manus, 1997[1994], and Reich, 2009, for similar approaches).[3] The strength of this method is the establishment of a link to a concrete professional practice, i.e. writing the respective article, rather than asking abstract questions about journalistic practices. The approach generates answers following the logic of journalists. This poses a challenge to research as the practitioners' categories of newsworthiness are more diverse and less precise and systematic than deductively generated categories.

Table 1. The sample.

	National newspaper	N	Regional newspaper	N	Popular newspaper	N
D	*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*	10	*Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*	8	*Bild*	2
	Süddeutsche Zeitung	7				
F	*Le Monde*	9	*Ouest France*	8	*Le Parisien*	9
	Le Figaro	11				
GB	*The Times*	8	–	–	*Daily Express*	3
	Financial Times	9				
PL	*Gazeta Wyborcza*	8	*Dziennik Zachodni*	7	*Fakt*	8
	Rzeczpospolita	10				
DK	*Politiken*	8	*Jydske Vestkysten*	8	*Ekstra Bladet*	8
	Berlingske Tidende	8				
A	*Die Presse*	8	*Kleine Zeitung*	9	*Kronenzeitung*	3
	Der Standard	7				

Note: N = 176. Article biographies as reconstructed in interviews with the authors (81 interviews conducted with editors and 94 with foreign correspondents; one missing value on this variable; regional newspapers from GB are missing as different large regional newspapers failed to have a single article about the EU or on other European countries within the sampling period, 13–30 October 2008).

The study began by sampling the articles to be reconstructed and then identified their respective authors. In order to keep the sampling for the different papers comparable, it was conducted in the same two weeks in October 2008 by a team of six researchers each responsible for contacting the journalists in one country. All researchers were thoroughly trained in order to enhance the reliability of the data collection. All articles needed to provide the name or at least an abbreviation identifying the author. Half of the articles were concerned with EU politics and the other half with covering the matters of individual EU member states. The articles were to include a broad range of different topics and genres (news, analysis, commentary, interviews) so that a broad sample covering the whole range of European topics could be created. To reach out to journalists from 23 different news outlets, this study relied on telephone interviews designed to be conducted within 30 minutes. The trigger method was successful in that it was possible to identify and contact the authors of the articles that were sampled. About half of the authors turned out to be foreign correspondents and the other half were working as editors from the newsroom. Almost all journalists agreed to be interviewed and they were willing and able to tell us how the respective articles came into being. Each interview was recorded and a protocol of each interview was written. A computer-assisted qualitative content analysis was conducted to inductively identify the categories for the following quantitative content analysis. For the quantitative analysis two coders were trained and reached a satisfactory level of inter-coder reliability for all relevant variables (Holsti values for the variables used in this article: occurrences 0.90; trigger sources 0.87; evaluations 0.81; editorial context 0.81).

Reconstructing the story behind the story

The first and qualitative part of the analysis aimed to identify typical values for the different components of a trigger constellation: i.e. what kind of occurrences, trigger sources, evaluations, editorial contexts are relevant in the view of the journalists.

Two general findings should not go unmentioned before going into the details about what kind of components matter for European news making. First, the responses of the journalists interviewed supported the assumption that constellations of different conditions trigger coverage: journalists did not give merely one reason why they published an article, but a whole set of explanations that can be grouped into our framework of occurrences, trigger sources, evaluations and editorial contexts.

Second, the analysis also showed that, to some degree, the reasons for journalists' professional practices are not readily available discursively: some rules are engrained in practices without the journalists being fully able to identify and reflect these rules. This is a prime example of what Giddens calls 'practical consciousness' (1986[1984]: 375) and what Bourdieu (1998[1994]) describes as the 'practical sense' or 'feel for the game' that actors within a field have acquired without being fully able to give a precise account of the rules of the game. Newsroom studies have observed the same phenomenon coined by Ida Shultz as the 'journalistic gut feeling': 'a seemingly self-evident and self-explaining sense of newsworthiness' (2007). This phenomenon leads to different discursive strategies for avoiding to give precise justifications of newsworthiness. Some editors stressed the contingency of news making: 'There is no recipe for producing news. It was not obvious that this topic would end up as editorial. There is no straight way into the newspaper' (Correspondent, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*). Other journalists emphasized the subjectivity of their decisions, following the tradition of 'Mr. Gates' in the very first gatekeeper study: 'It's just a question of choice and subjective opinion, some subjects interest some people more than others, other correspondents might have written other stories that day' (Correspondent of *The Times*). Another type of response was to discard the question about why the particular item had been reported: 'It was obvious that I had to write something about this. You wouldn't even ask such a question' (Correspondent, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*).

To illustrate how constellations of trigger components interact, we now take a closer look at a particular news story and reconstruct it following the analytical model developed above. A Danish ski fan, apparently as a joke, applied for EU subsidies to prepare a ski slope on the island of Bornholm which is famous for its warm climate. The Danish Ministry of Agriculture, the public authority responsible for the distribution of regional EU subsidies, decided to grant the money for the ski slope. This can now be regarded as a set of occurrences outside the newsroom that might trigger activity inside the newsroom *if* information about it gets into the newsroom and is evaluated as being newsworthy. As is the case for all construction work conducted with financial support from the EU, a sign at the construction site indicated that the EU had co-financed this venture. A friend of a reporter working with *Ekstra Bladet* saw the EU sign at the ski slope. This is the stage where incoming information has to be evaluated as a potential news item. In spite of the fact that *Ekstra Bladet* does not usually cover EU affairs on a continuous basis, this occurrence could easily be turned into a newspaper story as it provided a

perfect fit with one of the common story lines: 'That approach is part of *Ekstra Bladet's* identity, asking the question "what is the tax payer's money being spent on?"' (Editor, *Ekstra Bladet*).

While this theme is a narrative that apparently fits well into news reporting for many journalists, it was specifically relevant for *Ekstra Bladet* since the newspaper began to research other projects that had been funded by EU money in Denmark and published several articles on this topic, including two editorials. This phenomenon was quite common in our sample and might be coined as a snowball effect: one article triggers other articles. And those articles are not triggered by the events that they report but in terms of fit to the preceding articles. Another example of this is found in the Austrian daily *Die Presse* which also took up the topic of the Danish ski slope. Below this news story, *Die Presse* featured an interview with the EU Commissioner for Regional Affairs, Danuta Hübner, who demands improved control of the distribution of EU subsidies. This interview was arranged months ago, but now, together with the ski slope, there was space for the Commissioner's interview as well.

The case of the ski slope – while being a news story that is not representative of news making beyond the EU – shows another general phenomenon relevant for how news making is initiated: the ski slope travelled the European newspaper landscape, providing a prime example of international inter-media agenda-setting. The German *BILD* re-reported the story without bothering to mention the source (*Ekstra Bladet*) the following day. *Die Presse* obtained the story from the French news agency *AFP* and published it four days later. More newspapers, such as the German *Die Welt* and the Austrian regional newspaper *Kleine Zeitung,* reported the story the following week.

Typical values of trigger components

So far, the model of four different trigger components (occurrence, trigger source, evaluation, editorial context) was illustrated without providing a structured overview of the different values that each component can typically have, drawing on the interview responses gathered. From a longer list of values drawn up inductively during the qualitative exploration of the interviews, we now discuss only those kinds of trigger components that occurred most frequently in our sample (see Table 2 for an overview).[4]

Component 1: Occurrences – institutional politics as trigger of European news

The content analysis of the interviews identified four kinds of occurrences that proved to be relevant across all of the newspapers within our sample.[5] The most important in quantitative terms is institutional politics, defined as all official acts of the political process and the proceedings of public administrations (elections, meetings of government bodies, official speeches, administrative decisions, etc.). Occurrences of this kind constitute the dominant theme of European articles across newspaper types and countries. For articles about other EU countries, 'national elections are the bread and butter of the foreign correspondent' (Correspondent, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*). For EU

Table 2. The share of different kinds of trigger components.

1 Occurrences		2 Trigger sources	
Institutionalized politics	38%	News agencies	21%
Political communication	15%	Government officials	21%
Happenings	24%	Other actors	10%
Editorial initiative	22%	First hand observations	9%
		Other media reports	35%
Other occurrences	2%	Other sources	4%
Total	219		131
3 Evaluations		**4 Editorial context**	
Timeliness	18%	Individual preferences	5%
Importance/Relevance	13%	Editorial policies	18%
Must-publish-issue	12%	Editorial space	30%
Proximity	10%	Newspaper composition	26%
Reader's interest	9%		
Prominence/Elite	5%		
Continuity	5%		
Routine agenda item	4%		
Nose for news	4%		
Other evaluations	20%	Other editorial contexts	16%
Total	324		116

Note: N = 176 article biographies; percentages: average share across countries; total: number of responses in the respective category (multiple responses were possible, therefore percentages do not total 100%).

politics, the prime events are the summits involving the heads of governments. These occurrences automatically trigger articles, regardless of whether any important outcomes emerge: 'If there is a European summit and Angela Merkel and all the others are there, we write about it, no matter what they do' (Correspondent, *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*). While institutional politics is the dominant occurrence that triggers news making, we also find that happenings are a relevant trigger of news. With this term, we follow a distinction by Scannell (1999) who differentiated between 'happenings' (things that happen to us such as an earthquake or a plane crash) and 'events' (things that we make happen). For this study the code 'happenings' denotes all occurrences that are not the result of the policy process and output of the EU institutions and the EU member states. Examples of happenings within our sampling period are the death of Jörg Haider and the war in Georgia.

Every fifth occurrence leading to an article originated in editorial initiative rather than from outside the newsroom (understood not as a spatial term but as an organizational unit). A correspondent or one of the editors came up with a proposal for an article. This does not mean that the journalists are able to set the media agenda purely 'al gusto'. The journalists have to be able to connect their article to occurrences outside of the newsroom. This connection is established in order to justify its newsworthiness towards the audience. The amount of editorial initiative shows how news making does not only flow from events that happen and have to be reported. Many story lines evolve from creative

brainstorming in editorial meetings. This is part of the everyday practice in newsrooms where journalists have to face the question of how to fill the newspaper with interesting stories.

Component 2: Trigger sources – other media reports as the main source of inspiration

In order to trigger articles, some piece of information must get into the newsroom. Inferring from our interviews, this typically happens in five different ways. The dominant way is by other media reports. On average, more than a third of all instances for which the journalists clearly identified how the information got into his or her hands, it was by following the reports of other media. This is an interesting insight about the degree of self-reflexivity of the European media system. This confirms findings on high levels of co-orientation among journalists in Germany (Reinemann, 2004). The case study of the aforementioned ski slope in Bornholm is also an example of the importance of transnational inter-media agenda-setting. Reports by other media send a signal that 'this is a topic suited for publication'. The following statement reveals this circular logic of judging newsworthiness. The item was deemed newsworthy because 'it was something that was in the news' (Correspondent, *The Times*). Other media reports played a more important role than news agencies and activities by officials (including all sorts of government bodies and their spokespeople).

As compared to the actors of institutional politics, all other actors (for example, lobbyists, civil society agents, individuals, other journalists) only play a minor role in the process of news initiative. The practices of searching for occurrences from the field of institutionalized politics and relying on elite sources show how state actors and officials remain the 'primary definers' of news (Hall et al., 1978). First-hand observations of the journalists were of only minor importance as a source for initiating European coverage. This is in line with findings from a case study on domestic news sources in Israel: 'News reporting has little to do with firsthand experience' (Reich, 2009: 186).

Component 3: Evaluations – buzzwords and news factors

Journalists' justifications relating to the newsworthiness of their articles were very diverse (hence the high number of 'other evaluations' in Table 2). From the six groups of news factors that Eilders (2006) lists as being confirmed by a number of studies (relevance/reach; damage/controversy/aggression/conflict; elite persons/prominence; continuity; proximity; elite nation) all except for elite nation are within the top 14 items mentioned by journalists in our interviews. However, only proximity and relevance are among the top five issues mentioned by journalists. Apart from the established news factors, journalists were using many broad and vague concepts: being in the 'interest of the readers' was frequently mentioned. Another answer as to why a topic was published was for the journalist to stress that it was out of the question *not* to publish something on this topic (we coded this as 'must-publish-issue'). Other

items mentioned in the interviews are 'routine agenda items' (something is covered as part of a routine which follows the schedule of institutionalized politics) and a 'nose for news' (the equivalent of the 'gut feeling' in the study of Schulz, 2007). Therefore, our study shows that news factors do matter, but even more often journalists refer to much broader heuristics.

Component 4: Editorial context – all the news that fits into the news hole

Apart from interpreting perceived events as newsworthy, journalists also frequently evoke a different sort of reason for the publication of a particular news story on a particular day: editorial context. The most important reason from this category is editorial space available for that kind of coverage on the respective day. This item was mentioned in 40 out of 176 interviews. It is first a function of other news stories available that day. As Schultz (2007: 203) observes, newsworthiness is a question of how a particular story is positioned in relation to other stories of the day. Second, the space that is generally available for EU or foreign coverage varies greatly between newspapers and is a result of editorial policies.

The second issue of importance across newspaper type and country is the composition of the newspaper coverage. This concept is mentioned in the list of news values by Galtung and Ruge (1965). Composition in this context does not concern the structure of the individual article, but the fit with the other articles on the respective page and in the entire issue of a newspaper, as well as the total coverage of a specific topic in different issues of the newspaper. Coverage follows established meta-narratives that ask for certain articles in a certain chronology. Therefore, the likeliness of a particular topic being published is very much dependent on the prior coverage of the topic. For example, a correspondent from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* explained: 'It was time to publish a background piece about the sympathies and antipathies among the European prime ministers and presidents giving a backstage glimpse of what goes on at the European summit.' Another important context was editorial policy. Newsroom policies go beyond favoring a certain political party and include preferences for certain kinds of topics: '*Le Monde* is much more interested in German domestic affairs than *Le Figaro*' (Correspondent, *Le Monde*). Preferences of the authors also play a role in choosing a topic but these preferences are mentioned much less frequent than editorial policy as a decisive factor.

Four trigger constellations of European news making

This general pattern of doing European journalism does not yet provide the answer to our second research question of how specific types of occurrences frequently go together with certain sources, evaluations and editorial contexts. A cluster analysis was performed to identify and characterize groups of articles that share similar biographies. The analysis led to a four-cluster solution in which every article is included in one of the four clusters.[6] Each cluster can be characterized by a specific combination of types of

Table 3. Four clusters of typical article biographies.

	Cluster	1	2	3	4	Total
	Variables	Routine record-keeping	Editorial agenda-setting	Elite sound bites	Monitoring a mediated world	
Occurrences	Institutionalized politics	0.91	0.59	0.13	0.00	0.48
	Political communication	0.00	0.12	0.91	0.08	0.18
	Happenings	0.15	0.10	0.00	0.92	0.28
	Editorial initiative	0.04	0.51	0.30	0.10	0.27
Trigger sources	News agencies	0.35	0.09	0.13	0.08	0.16
	Government officials	0.09	0.25	0.13	0.05	0.15
	Other actors	0.00	0.13	0.09	0.05	0.07
	First hand observations	0.13	0.01	0.17	0.00	0.06
	Other media reports	0.13	0.19	0.26	0.59	0.27
Evaluations	Timeliness	0.72	0.15	0.39	0.23	0.35
	Importance/ Relevance	0.35	0.25	0.04	0.13	0.22
	Reader's interest	0.09	0.25	0.04	0.13	0.15
	Routine agenda item	0.24	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.09
	Proximity	0.20	0.25	0.09	0.13	0.19
	Must-publish-issue	0.26	0.13	0.39	0.18	0.21
	Prominence/Elite	0.02	0.04	0.43	0.10	0.10
	Continuity	0.07	0.18	0.00	0.03	0.09
	Nose for news	0.04	0.12	0.13	0.03	0.08
Editorial contexts	Editorial space	0.26	0.22	0.22	0.21	0.23
	Newspaper composition	0.26	0.19	0.09	0.13	0.18
	Author's preference	0.02	0.09	0.00	0.03	0.05
	Editorial policy	0.07	0.10	0.00	0.15	0.09
	N	46	68	23	39	176
	%	26.1	38.6	13.1	22.2	100

Note: Table 3 shows the mean value of the variables' presence within the respective cluster: 1.0 would indicate that all articles in the cluster share the presence of the variable (as all variables are dichotomous with 1 indicating their presence).

trigger components. Table 3 shows the variables included in the cluster analysis and their prominence within each cluster. In the following, the four clusters are interpreted based on the values provided in the table.

Cluster 1: Routine record-keeping

The first cluster includes articles that deal with occurrences in the field of institutionalized politics which are routinely considered by the journalists as being timely, important and relevant. This routine coverage does not evolve from editorial deliberations about news values or individual reflections about newsworthiness. Some journalists interviewed even refused to elaborate on the reasons for the newsworthiness of events such as EU summits or national elections. The respective topic simply had to be covered. Information about these kinds of pre-scheduled political events typically flows from news agencies and sometimes also from the first-hand observations of journalists who are routinely sent to attend these events. While there is no doubt that journalists will report something on these kind of events, the particular angle from which the occurrence is covered and its length are influenced by considerations about newspaper composition: the topic must fit with what was previously reported in the paper and what is already scheduled for the current issue. Approximately every fourth article within the sample fitted into this model of news making.

Cluster 2: Editorial agenda-setting

The second cluster combines an occurrence in the field of institutionalized politics with editorial initiative to cover a certain story: article ideas are generated within the newsroom, but they are also loosely connected to the world of institutionalized politics. Sources relaying relevant information for inspiring this type of article are government officials but also – more often than within the other clusters – other actors (e.g. from civil society, colleagues from other media). Non-political-elite actors seem to get a chance to trigger news particularly if their contributions fit with ideas and preferences within the newsroom. Topic ideas are justified as being newsworthy by referring to the news value *proximity* and by evoking the readers' interest in the topic. The fact that this cluster comprises almost 40 percent of the sample is evidence of the active role that the newsroom plays in generating rather than only selecting stories for publication. In contrast to the first cluster, these kinds of stories are not considered as being of such great importance and timeliness that they will have a reserved space in the paper. They make it into the newspaper, if there is enough space and they are shaped both by the individual author's preferences and newsroom policy.

Cluster 3: Elite sound bites

A third cluster is characterized by an occurrence coded as political communication. These 'sound bites' are often found in other media or collected by the reporters themselves in interviews or by attending press conferences. The bites of political communication stem from people that are interpreted as being as prominent or important. Here, we have a clear-cut example of the value of news value theory. The interpretation of people as being prominent or being part of the elite enhances the perceived newsworthiness of the story – partly to the degree that the story is regarded as a must-publish-issue by the journalists. Timeliness is another feature that is attributed to the public utterances of elite

actors. This type of story is generated on a day-to-day basis rather than the pre-scheduled political events from cluster 1. With a share of 13 percent of the articles in the sample, it seems to be a part of everyday journalistic practice, but to a smaller degree than the other trigger constellations.

Cluster 4: Monitoring a mediated world

The fourth cluster deals with occurrences which are not the result of political decision-making within the formal political process of the EU or its member states. They have been coded as happenings in our analysis and relate to a wider understanding of what political coverage is about. This understanding goes beyond routinely following the institutionalized political process (as in cluster 1) and reports about issues from the wider realm of political coverage; for example a report of an attack on the writer of a book about the Italian mafia or reports about historical topics and occurrences that might be labeled as soft news. Information about these happenings is often gathered by routinely scanning other media coverage. Journalists use other media to define what happens outside of the field of routine political coverage. Coverage of other media indicates the news value and political relevance of occurrences that might otherwise go unnoticed. Editorial policy and the authors' preferences play a role in deciding to write about this kind of issue.

Discussion and conclusions: Journalism as a transnational community of practice

The conceptual part of this article argued (a) for looking at transnational news making as a process that goes beyond selecting events for publication, (b) for developing a perspective on new construction that contextualizes the ideas of news value theory by drawing on the literature from the gatekeeping tradition, and (c) for searching for constellations of different components that interact to trigger news making. A model for analytically reconstructing the news process at the micro-level has been developed that consists of four components: (1) occurrences; (2) trigger sources; (3) evaluations; and (4) editorial contexts.

The following transnational pattern of news making evolved. (1) Frequently, articles are triggered by occurrences in the field of institutional politics. Also, a substantial number of articles were not triggered by occurrences outside the newsroom, but by the creative initiatives of reporters and editors who came up with ideas for articles that are only indirectly related to current events outside the newsroom. (2) The trigger information often got into the newsroom by monitoring the coverage of other media or by the communicative activities of politicians and officials. This finding confirms prior research on inter-media agenda-setting and co-orientation among journalists as well as the elite-centeredness of journalistic production. (3) The news judgment of the journalists seems to be based on general heuristics that partly reflect established news factors but also show that many issues are not subject to a conscious check of their news value. (4) Newsworthy news is published if editorial space and the other resources necessary for producing the article are readily available. Preferences of the individual journalists and

the media outlet (editorial policy) also play a role in ranking certain topics and actors higher or lower on the news agenda.

Beyond identifying the most frequent kinds of trigger components, the study sought for patterns of how they typically combine. Four trigger constellations of European news making were identified that can be labeled as: (1) routine record-keeping; (2) editorial agenda-setting; (3) elite sound bites; and (4) monitoring a mediated world. Each cluster hints at relevant aspects of European news making. The first cluster shows how routinely following the policy process is an important part of journalistic practice. The second cluster stresses the importance of creative processes within the newsroom to generate articles rather than just selecting the news. The third cluster reveals how journalism is also about being the mouthpiece of politicians, and finally the fourth cluster stresses how co-orientation among different media determines what is covered about topics that go beyond the core of political reporting.

It is interesting to note the co-existence of these four trigger constellations as they differ on two important dimensions: the editorial activity involved and the definition of the realm of political coverage. Some practices (cluster: routine record-keeping and elite sound bites) represent the passive role of journalism which allows itself to be guided by politics, while other trigger constellations (cluster: editorial agenda-setting and monitoring a mediated world) draw our attention to the role that the media have in actively defining what becomes news. Connected to this divide is the different understanding of what political coverage is supposed to cover: following the routines of politics and the statements of politicians versus including other issues of (perceived) political relevance. Models of news making will have to account for this diversity of news making that co-exists within different news outlets.[7] With the identification of these clusters, the study was able to provide evidence for our theoretical claim that different components interact in typical ways to trigger news.

Methodologically, the trigger reconstruction method has proven to be feasible and might be applied to contexts beyond those of European articles. The study has shown that the four trigger constellations represent journalistic practices that occur across different kinds of news outlets in countries with different media cultures. Extending the method to other countries, media types and fields of journalism is by all means worthwhile as the concrete kinds of trigger components identified by this article might not apply to domestic coverage as much as to European coverage. National coverage might rely less on second-hand observations than foreign coverage and it might be less focused on officials (the latter is shown in a content analysis by Koopmans, 2010). Empirical evidence from other studies shows, however, that phenomena such as reliance on other media (Reinemann, 2004), the use of secondary material rather than first-hand information (Reich, 2009) and reliance on official sources (Bennett, 1990) are important in national coverage as well. The general findings of this study might therefore be valid for cases beyond European coverage.

The study showed that transnational patterns of news making are already in place in European newsrooms. It is interesting to note that most research (as summarized in a recent review article) comes to the conclusion that 'there is no such thing as "European journalism"' (Örnebring, 2009) due to the dominance of nationally oriented journalism cultures and media systems. When looking at the process of constructing European

articles, however, we do find patterns of journalistic practices that are shared across borders. Journalism turns out to be more than a community based on a common professional ideology. Journalism is a transnational community of practice. One important transnational link that connects national media discourses and helps to explain these transnational patterns is the mutual observation of different media across national borders. The news story about the ski slope in Bornholm has illustrated the importance of mutual observation in connecting different media. The ski slope developed into a news story with a transnational biography. This phenomenon emphasizes the need for researching processes of transnational inter-media agenda-setting as one important element that connects media across borders and generates transnational patterns of news construction.

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Notes

1. Social constructivism regards the world as we see it and as it is represented in the news as the result of a process of social construction of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). It neither advocates the view that there is no 'reality' beyond our constructions, nor does it assume that 'reality' is constructed by arbitrary acts of isolated individuals.
2. Elaborating on an idea by McManus (1997[1994]), Reich (2006) divides the process of news making into two phases: news discovery and news gathering. Reich shows that each phase is characterized by specific patterns of journalist–source relationships with sources taking the lead in the first phase, when the topics of articles are generated, and reporters taking over the control in the second phase.
3. Reich's (2009) 'reconstruction interviews' (and also the approach of McManus, 1994) are based on the same idea: to let journalists reconstruct the biographies of individual articles. In contrast to our study, Reich conducts face-to-face interviews with journalists on 15 articles per author. By doing this, he succeeds in reconstructing a higher number of articles but he is not able to interview a high number authors working with different kinds of newspapers in different countries.
4. While the sampling procedure (as presented above) does not provide for claims to have generated a sample that is statistically representative, we do nevertheless claim that the sample represents the diversity of the European newspaper market in the selected countries as well as a broad range of different kinds of articles concerning various political topics. Therefore, the frequencies reported below can be plausibly expected to help identify *typical* journalistic practices.
5. Definitions and a more comprehensive description of all the categories used in the content analysis are provided in the coding book that can be obtained from the author of the study.
6. A hierarchical cluster analysis with the Ward method was carried out to identify suitable

cluster solutions. Using the so-called elbow criterion, a four-cluster solution was chosen that also proved to lead to plausibly interpretable groups of cases. Cluster solutions with two, five or six clusters were not equally interpretable.

7. We can expect country differences and outlet specific differences as to the frequency of the clusters but, as argued above, the focus of this article is to define the common denominators of transnational news making.

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