

# THE USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE SWEDISH ONLINE NEWSPAPER AFTONBLADET – A CASE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

During the past decades, many analogue media products have been transformed into digital services. The printed newspaper available online is an example of such a transformation. For many years this type of digitalization was merely a matter of the medium, basically not affecting the content. However, the digitalization has matured and resulted in the introduction of new, additional services extending the original product content.

For online newspapers this development has resulted in new features, such as article commenting, journalist blogs, Facebook-recommending of articles, and other additional services. Many of these services consist of a social add-on, and are connected to popular social media services. Some media companies have even built their own social media platforms.

This pre-study aims to give a comprehension of the social media concept and how it can be understood in the context of online newsmedia. A theoretical examination of this concept and its use is given in the Theory chapter, which also describes some central aspects of Jenkins' media convergence theory. In a more concrete part, a description is given of the social media use of the online newspaper *Aftonbladet*, Sweden's most visited online newspaper. These results are compared to the social media use of other major Swedish online newspapers.

Two interviews were made at *Aftonbladet* to acquire understanding of how the newspaper works with social media and to hear about its social media philosophy, strategy and experiences.

A process of media convergence could be recognized, and was well distinguished in a quotation, according to which *Aftonbladet* aims to become a meeting-place.

## INTRODUCTION

During the past decades, many analogue media products have been transformed into digital services. The newspaper is an example of such a transformation, as many printed newspapers also produce digital editions published online. For many years this type of digitalization was merely a matter of the medium, basically not affecting the content. However, during the past few years the digitalization has increasingly resulted in the introduction of new, additional services extending the original product content.

For online newspapers this development has lead to new features, such as article commenting, journalist blogs, Facebook-recommending of articles, and other additional services. Many of these additional services offer a social add-on to the core content, and are connected to different social media platforms. Some media companies have even built their own social media communities.

The concept of "social media" is not consistently defined. There are various ways to describe the concept, although a common definition of social media has not yet been established. Current definitions will be discussed in this paper, however, as a starting point the concept of social media will be understood in a technology oriented sense as *web-based applications, enabling many-to-many communication and online publishing*.

During the past few years “social media” have been a buzzword in the media industry. However, the absence of an agreed upon definition leads to a vagueness of the term. What is “social media” and how should it be conceived? Can this difficulty to define social media partly be understood by Jenkins’ idea of media convergence as a cultural process, not a technological end-point?

Many online newspapers apply social media related services, and use successful platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as supplementary media channels. Although, it is difficult to get an overview of how different social media services are used. The main question of this paper is: How do Swedish online newspapers use social media? Further, it will also be examined what social media philosophies and strategies the case *Aftonbladet* has, and what experiences have been drawn from the using of these services. A typical webpage of a Swedish online newspaper contains many social media related elements, such as references to external social media services and possibilities for readers to interact on their website (Figure 1).

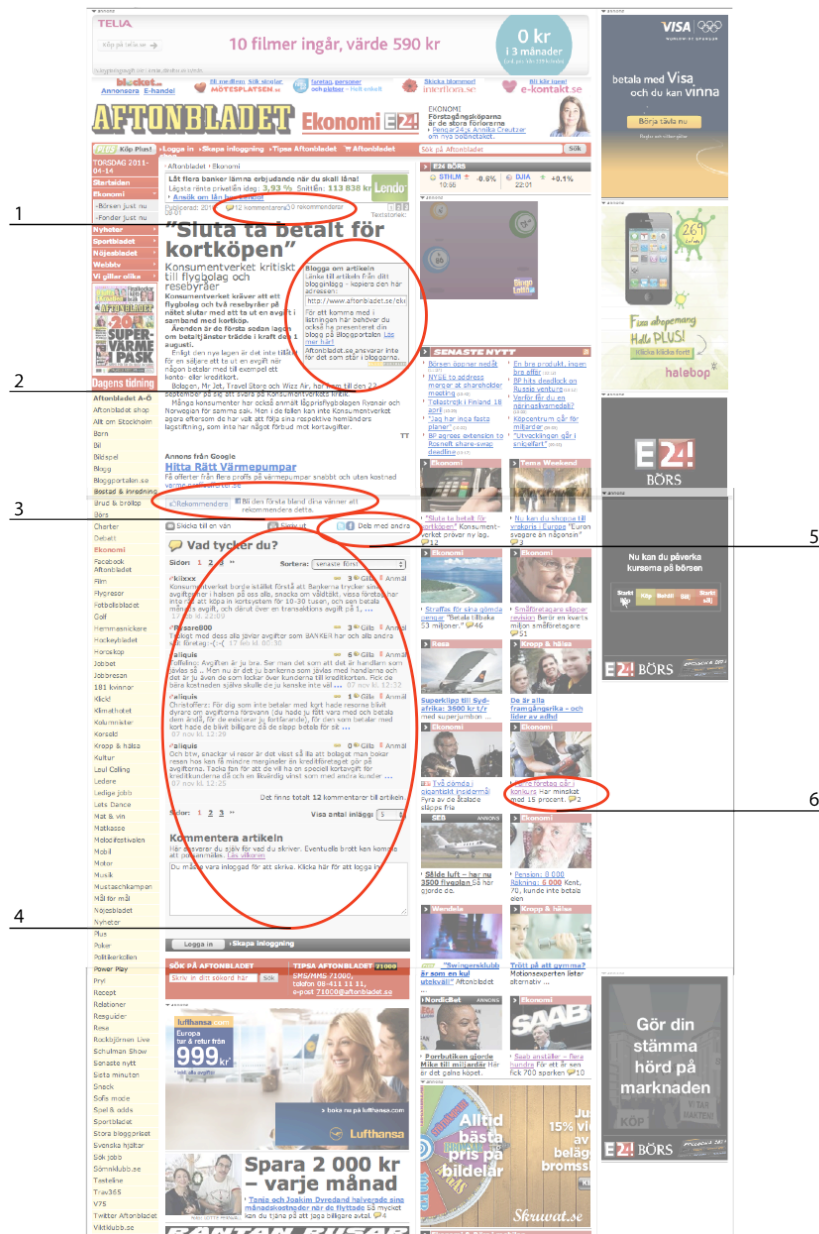


Figure 1: A typical Swedish online newspaper webpage contains most of the social media related elements marked in the screenshot (*Aftonbladet.se*, 2011).

The layouts and styles of the websites vary between the five Swedish online newspapers studied; however the social media related elements numbered from 1 to 5 in Figure 1 above are used by all of them.

1. The number of Facebook recommendations made to the articles is usually published. Articles that allow commenting sometimes also show the number of comments made to it next to the Facebook recommendation information.
2. Links to blog posts made about the articles are published in the article fields.
3. The online newspapers studied also use Facebook recommend buttons, by which readers using Facebook may easily share the article with their Facebook friends.
4. The newspapers use links for article sharing via external social media services e.g. Facebook or Twitter.
5. Some articles also allow for the reader to add a comment to the article, and to see other readers' comments.

Typical Swedish online newspaper webpages are further described in the Results chapter.

## METHOD

This paper is based on a case study and a condensed online survey conducted during the spring 2011, and literature on social media and media convergence.

*Aftonbladet.se* was chosen as a case study object, partly because it was the most visited Swedish online newspaper (Orvesto, 2010) and partly because of *Aftonbladet's* past record of being early in introducing new technology and services.

The case study work consisted of a review of the newspaper's social media related content both on and outside the website of the Swedish online newspaper *Aftonbladet.se*, and two interviews.

The first interview was held with the chief of the department for reader participation at *Aftonbladet*. This was done to acquire an understanding of the newspaper's view on reader participation and its social media philosophy, strategy and experiences. The second interview was held with a media analyst at *Aftonbladet* who was also interviewed about how the newspaper analyzes its social media related services.

A condensed online survey was conducted to attain an overview of the social media use in Swedish online newspapers. In the online survey five of the most visited free, Swedish online newspapers (in December 2010); *Aftonbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Expressen* and *Göteborgs-Posten* were mapped in terms of their social media use. This online survey was also carried out in order to find complementary findings to the case study.

The concept of social media is studied in the Theory chapter (the Social Media Concept), and in the Introduction a preliminary definition is presented as: "web-based applications, enabling many-to-many communication and online publishing". This technology-oriented definition is used as a working definition while conducting the study.

## Theory

### The Social Media concept

Currently there are different ways to understand the social media concept. When using the expression "social media" the concept is usually not defined at all, but simply used as an umbrella concept for different categories of web applications enabling online communication.

When referring to social media all of, or different combinations of these following phenomena may be intended: blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, forums/chat rooms, media sharing sites, podcasts, videocasts, livecasts/nowcasts, wikis, social news, social games, social bookmarking, collaborative project spaces, etc.

As mentioned in the introduction, there are various definitions of the concept social media, and additionally different people use the concept in different ways. This leads to a vagueness of the term: What is social media and what is not?

In this section different definitions of the social media concept will be presented, and discussed regarding their different underlying aspects.

### Different ways to Define Social Media

To define social media, the concept must be distinguished from and considered in relation to other media forms.

One way to define an occurrence is to give an ostensive definition, in which the concept is being explained by the use of ascribing examples. In these definitions of social media, Facebook, YouTube and blogs are typically being pointed out. These instances are well known, and at the time being they are also non-controversial and generally accepted examples of social media. These definitions may be sufficiently specific for everyday use. Although, even if these definitions and their examples do make sense to a certain audience in a certain situation, they do not clarify the meaning of the concept. Furthermore, the examples chosen to define the concept may change over time or even be closed down. Thus, such definitions are both culturally and temporally limited.

Intentional definitions specify the necessary conditions for the concept. The Merriam-Webster dictionary offers the following intentional definition of social media: "Forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and micro-blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (as videos)." This definition is generous and wide-ranging, although it is perhaps not obvious what is meant by the phrase "through which users create online communities".

From a different point of view, the concept of social media may also be explained by separately defining the composing terms "social" and "media". The interpretation of "media" may be customary, however, "social" can in this context refer either to *the situation*, or to *the effects* of social media. In the former sense the user is *being social*, whereas the latter sense implies that social media are being used to strengthen the social bounds of the users. The social media concept can therefore be understood as media supporting sustainability of social relations.

Although, this parting and separate specifying of the terms "social" and "media", would not give much precision to the meaning of the concept. Regarding the effects of social media, Hogan and Quan-Haase (2010), indicate another difficulty with this term-based definition: "Identifying the unique qualities of social media is challenging since all media have a social element."

To continue elaborating the idea of social media in terms of their effects, Grossberg, Wartella and Whitney (1998, p.238) stated the need to discuss the contribution of a media consumer's impact on a products actual use and effects. They raise the question "to what degree the intended use of a product determines its actual use and effects (...), what is the contribution of the consumer in determining the actual use and effects on media products?". This question is of relevance also when studying social media products. The definition of social media may be understood either by its technological affordances, or by how the media is actually being used. The term affordance is here understood as an environment that allows an individual to perform a certain action.

Blogs are a typical social media form (normally included in different definitions of social media) that can be used to exemplify this question. The blog technology offers a “sender” the opportunity to publish content for an “audience”. The audience is also enabled to post comments, which are published and available for the same audience. The technology thereby offers the possibility of a public discussion in the comments field; meaning many-to-many communication. In other words, the blog’s intended use is social. However, a blog not allowing commenting is essentially a monologue being published online. Hence, the “social” opportunities offered by the media technology are not being used and the effect is a non-social medium.

Similarly, Hogan and Quan-Haase (2010) refer to the concept of (social) affordances to emphasize the importance of user behavior. In the following quote affordances and user behavior are discussed to show that there are grey zones between what is social media and one-to-one media:

Social media combines features of one-way media and two-way media. Like one-way media, information is broadcast from one source to a (potentially unknown) audience. But like two-way media, individuals can react and respond to this communication through the same channels.

Hence, certain features of IM make it a social medium in the same way that certain features of social network sites make them one-to-one media (e.g., private conversations and chats).

Within what we generally speaking refer to as social media, there are different levels of openness, ranging from forums that are open to join for anyone online to blogs used as private diaries written and read by one and the same person. In between these poles, there are semi-public alternatives such as sites that require registration/membership, thereby creating a group of people that may be large and anonymous but still not totally open. User-defined groups are being created on many social networking sites, when a user adds friends to his/her profile and thereby creates a closed network. In these user-defined group situations there are still options to narrow down the level of openness, by creating closed groups or private conversations between only few members.

The cultural and temporal limitations of ostensive definitions were mentioned earlier. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) highlight that a definition of social media should be functional also for forthcoming applications, and suggest a definition of the social media concept explained in terms of web 2.0 and User Generated Content:

In our view (...) Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.

Based on the definitions and discussions above it can be concluded that generally, in social media – as opposed to traditional media (print, radio and television) – social media technologies enable communication between many senders and many receivers of information (many-to-many communication). Furthermore, the social media content is typically produced by its users and published online. However, despite the affordances social media may also be used in a private, closed manner.

## Media convergence

The idea of media convergence was probably first introduced in 1983, by Pool. Over two decades later Jenkins (2006) published “Convergence Culture”, in which he gives different examples of how media convergence affects the relations between media producers and consumers.

The digital revolution paradigm, as described by Negroponte, presumed that new media would replace old media. Instead, Jenkins’ convergence paradigm assumes that old and new media will interact in ever more complex ways. (Jenkins, 2006)

Jenkins refers to Pool's description of the convergence process as a force of change within the media industries. Pool meant that differences in various media forms had been political and not technological, and predicted "a period of prolonged transition, during which the various media systems competed and collaborated, searching for stability (...)". (Jenkins, 2006, p.11)

Jenkins (2006) also refers to Pool's prediction of us being in an age of media transition, marked by tactical decisions and competing interests, but mostly by unclear directions and unpredictable outcomes.

According to the convergence theory, the function and status of old media are shifted by the introduction of new technologies. Further Jenkins summarizes by claiming that media convergence alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences. According to Jenkins, convergence refers to a process, not an end point and involves both a change in the way media is produced and the way media is consumed. (Jenkins, 2006)

Jenkins also introduces the concept of "affective economies" (Jenkins, 2006, p.20). In the logic of these economies "the ideal consumer is active, emotionally engaged, and socially networked". Today this is seen in many ways online, when companies encourage bloggers and users of social networking sites to spread their messages and campaigns by using different incentives.

Jenkins ideas on media convergence were published in 2006, but even though online newspapers have been under constant development ever since, the above theories about media convergence, media transition and affective economies still seem topical. This observation was predicted in Jenkins description of the indeterminacy of the convergence process (Jenkins, 2006, p.16): "Don't expect the uncertainties surrounding convergence to be resolved anytime soon. We are entering an era of prolonged transition and transformation in the way media operates."

## RESULTS

In this chapter the results are presented in several subsections. First, a typical page layout in a Swedish online newspaper will be described. This first section is followed by an overview of the social media use in the Swedish online newspapers studied. Then follows the main section, in which the social media use of *Aftonbladet* is described. Lastly, some of *Aftonbladet's* strategies and experiences are presented.

### Typical page layouts in Swedish online newspapers

Layout in online newspapers is in many ways similar to the layout in traditional, printed newspapers. Although, as opposed to printed newspapers, most news article pages online present their stories in a single column of text (Outing and Ruel, 2004), and so did all the five Swedish newspapers studied in this paper.

The webpages of the online newspapers studied are with few exceptions much alike in terms of layout and elements included. All the studied webpages consist of the following main elements: A header with the name of the newspaper, an article field, a navigation field, links to other articles/content, advertisements, and a footer in which at least the name of the legally responsible publisher and contact information to the newspaper are always given. The main pages and the article pages look much the same. Although, on the main pages the "article field" is rather a link field, consisting of article headlines with short introductions and often also images which link to the page of the full article.

Some articles offer links to related content such as articles, web-TV clips or blog posts or tweets made about them. These links are naturally placed within the article field, and to the right of or below the article text.

Despite the resemblances between the five online newspapers, two different layout styles could be distinguished among these five online newspapers. Two of the newspapers (*Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*) both so-called evening papers, use very little white space as seen in Figure 2.

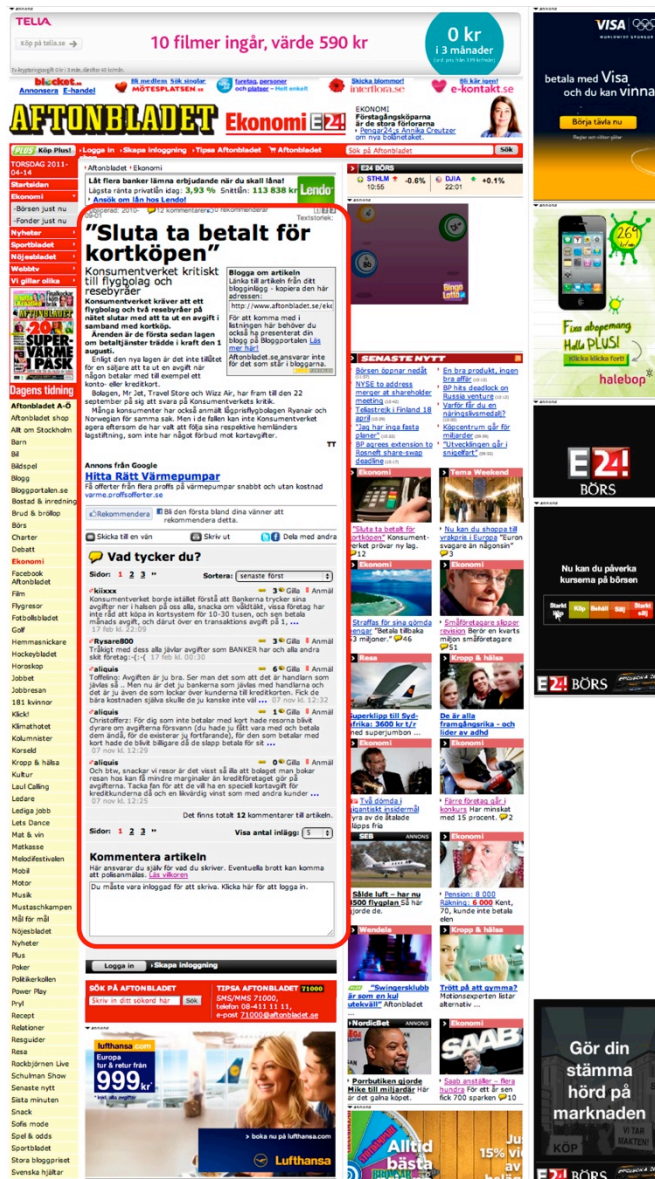


Figure 2: Article page layout in the Swedish online newspaper Aftonbladet (Aftonbladet.se, 2011). The red rounded rectangular marks the article field.

On the contrary, all the three other studied online newspapers (*Dagens Nyheter*, *Göteborgs-Posten* and *Svenska Dagbladet*) and so-called morning papers, use noticeably more blank space between their different page elements (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Article page layout in the Swedish online newspaper Dagens Nyheter (DN.se, 2011). The red rounded rectangular marks the article field.

The placements of the navigation fields also differ between online newspapers. The so-called evening-papers have a navigation field to the left, whereas the so-called morning-papers' navigation fields are placed horizontally on the top of the pages. Further, the placements of the advertisements in relation to headers, footers and internal links varied slightly among the five newspapers. However, all newspapers studied had advertisements above, below and to the right of their article fields.

## Social Media Use in the Main Online Newspapers

A comparison of the studied online newspapers' uses of social media related features, shows that all five newspapers offers buttons for sharing articles via Facebook. Even though email is not regarded as a social media in this paper, it may be interesting to see for comparison that all five studied newspapers offer a button for sharing content via email. Content sharing is also offered for social media services such as Twitter, the social bookmarking service del.icio.us and the Swedish link sharing website Pusha.

*Expressen* offers a long list of possibilities for sharing and/or bookmarking the article. Besides the options seen in Table 1, *Expressen* is alone among the five newspapers to offer links to Bloggy, Digg, FriendFeed, Google Bookmark, MySpace, Reddit and StumbleUpon.



Table 1: Different possibilities for the newspaper consumers, for sharing and saving article content.

Online newspaper	Share by email	Share on Facebook	Share on Twitter	Share on Pusha	Add to del.icio.us
Aftonbladet.se	X	X	X		
Expressen.se	X	X	X	X	X
DN.se	X	X	X	X	X
SVD.se	X	X	X		
GP.se	X	X		X	

All five newspapers also offer article commenting of some of their content. Some allow anonymous commenting whereas others demand some form of registering in order to use the service.

On their starting pages, two of the newspapers studied; *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* publish a “Facebook like box” with a link to the newspapers’ Facebook pages, a like button and the text: “x (the number of people) like this”. Both these two newspapers also display a box showing Facebook interaction around their content. This box contains a selection of the newspapers’ article headlines, together with the number of people having shared these articles on Facebook. For readers being logged in to Facebook while visiting the online newspaper, the box is personalized and shows content that has been shared by the readers’ Facebook friends.

All five newspapers studied, publish links to blog posts written about their articles. These links are published together with the articles, and are placed in boxes next to or beneath the article text.

Table 2 shows which of the studied newspapers allow article comments, use the “Facebook like box” and the box showing Facebook interaction around their content, and offer links to tweets and blog posts made about their articles.

Table 2: An overview of which online newspapers use different social media related features on their websites.

Online newspaper	Comment	Facebook like box	Facebook interaction	Links to tweets	Links to blogs
Aftonbladet.se	X	X	X		X
Expressen.se	X	X	X		X
DN.se	X				X
SVD.se	X			X	X
GP.se	X				X

During visits of the studied websites in March and April 2011, two of the newspapers; *Göteborgs-Posten* and *Dagens Nyheter*, also allowed anonymous recommendation of articles. In both newspapers, the number of article recommendations was being summarized and displayed for each article. However, during visits in April 2011, it seemed this feature was rarely used on both *Göteborgs-Posten* and *Dagens Nyheter*. In the end of the month, this feature had been deleted at *Dagens Nyheter*, and on the article pages of *Göteborgs-Posten* it was still hardly used.

### Social Media Use of *Aftonbladet*

The media product *Aftonbladet* may be divided into four major parts: a printed newspaper, an online newspaper (*Aftonbladet.se*), a community called “Aftonbladet Snack”, and a blog service called “Aftonbladet Blogg”. The newspaper also has Facebook pages, one main page and several

separate pages for its different editorial departments such as sports, culture, fashion and entertainment.

Twitter is used by some of the newspaper's employees, more or less officially representing *Aftonbladet*. However, these activities are solely based on individual initiators and the newspaper has no main *Aftonbladet* account. Therefore, Twitter activities are not included in this case study. The original intention of this study was also to look at *Aftonbladet's* own community Snack. However since this service appears to be phased out it will only be briefly mentioned. (Hjalmarsson, 2011).

### Description of the social media use on *Aftonbladet.se*

A typical Swedish online newspaper webpage was described in the Introduction, and a screenshot of such webpage was seen in Figure 1. The screenshot showed an article page of *Aftonbladet* and different social media related elements were marked. In the following description the mentioned elements are further described.

Above the headline of each article on *Aftonbladet.se*, the number of Facebook recommendations made to it is being showed. Articles that allow commenting also show the number of comments made to it next to the Facebook recommendation information. The number of Facebook recommendations made to the article is also presented below it, and next to this, a Facebook recommend button is placed. Below the articles there are also links for sharing the content via Facebook, Twitter or email, and a button for printing the article. Most articles also allow for the reader to add a comment to the article, and to see other readers' comments.

On *Aftonbladet.se* links to articles are basically boxes with an image, a headline and a one-sentence description, as seen in Figure 4. These links also contain the newspaper's comment logo and the number of comments made to the article. This is considered a social media related feature, since the reader participation is highlighted.



Figure 4. Links to articles on *Aftonbladet.se* show the number of comments made to them (*Aftonbladet.se*, 2011).

### Article commenting

Most of the articles on *Aftonbladet.se* allow reader commenting. The article commenting feature is placed in a box below the article. The comments are published in a thread, visible for all page visitors. However, in order to add a comment the user has to register with an email address.

Each comment made has a permalink button that gives a link to the comment, a "like" button next to a number of "likes" made to the post, and a button for reporting the comment. All comments are post-moderated by the external company Interaktiv Säkerhet (Swedish for Interactive Safety), who also monitor reported comments. It is also possible for *Aftonbladet* to go in editorially and follow discussions which are considered to risk causing trouble, and delete remarks which are believed to spoil the discussion or break against the rules. But the absolute majority of the moderation is done by Interaktiv Säkerhet, and most comments are not deleted.

According to Hjalmarsson (2011) they have “self-evident rules such as one is not allowed to degrade ethnic groups, threat anyone, and so on. But we also try to keep the discussions on a reasonable level, (...) that one criticizes opinions and not people. (...) When we are active and show that it is not okay, it gets better. That is something we really invest in.”

In spring 2011 about 6000-7000 comments were made daily on the website. (Hjalmarsson, 2011)

The box for article commenting seen in Figure 5 is placed below the article. A field with the *Aftonbladet* comment logo and a text saying “What do you think?”. Then the actual reader comments follow. Below the comments there is a new headline saying “Comment the article” followed by a field in which the reader may write to add a comment.



Figure 5. The screen shot shows the graphic user interface for the commenting feature on *Aftonbladet.se* (2011). The header says “What do you think?”.

### Cover-It-Live

*Aftonbladet* has introduced a so-called “cover-it-live” service, in which a journalist or reporter follows a story or a course of events and the readers are invited to participate by asking questions or making comments. This service has become huge and Hjalmarsson (2011) says that it can be used in different ways; users can be invited to chat with experts, interact with reporters or the service may be used as a tool for referencing.

In March 2011 cover-it-live sessions were held to report news from Fukushima in Japan (Figure 6). In this case, a reporter followed news from and about Fukushima while reporting on these in a live chat. Meanwhile users could ask questions, or share information and links.



Figure 6. This screen shot shows an ongoing cover-it-live session on Aftonbladet.se. This time the session covered the uncertain situation in Fukushima, Japan, after the triple catastrophe in March 2011.

### Live debates

In March 2011 Aftonbladet introduced “Debate-live”, a service similar to cover-it-live described above. Weekdays at 3 pm a topic is raised for discussion, and the readers are encouraged to participate with questions and comments. The matters discussed in the live debates are connected to articles reporting on or discussing some current issue.

A live debate may consist of a debate between experts with different standpoints; in these cases a moderator lifts the users’ questions and comments on the discussion during the debate. Alternatively, the readers are invited to discuss a topic together with an invited guest or expert and thus more actively contribute to the discussion.

The live debates also enable article commenting, and the commenting discussions around these debate issues are often extensive.

The look of the live debate feature can be seen in Figure 7 below.



Figure 7. The screen shot shows a live debate open to the readers, on Aftonbladet.se (2011).

## Facebook pages

The *Aftonbladet* Facebook page was created in the summer 2010 and has an increasing amount of people liking it (13781 on April 19, 2011). *Aftonbladet* also holds Facebook pages for some of its different editorial departments. Figure 8 shows the *Aftonbladet* Facebook page.



Figure 8. The *Aftonbladet* Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/aftonbladet](http://www.facebook.com/aftonbladet), 2011).

Wall postings made by *Aftonbladet* usually consist of a question connected to an article link to *Aftonbladet.se*. The link comprises a header, an image and a short text describing the news article (Figure 8 and Figure 9). *Aftonbladet* typically posted content on the Facebook page twice a day during weekdays. Comments and likes made to these postings varied.



Figure 9. A typical post made by *Aftonbladet*, on its Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/aftonbladet](http://www.facebook.com/aftonbladet), 2011).

Wall posts were also made by page visitors, however these were intermittent and their content varied. Overall, non-editorial postings consisted of possible news topics, event recommendations and questions about *Aftonbladet's* digital services.

## Superlive

Superlive is a way to present large events live, and was introduced by *Aftonbladet* in early 2010. During 2010 it was used to follow the wedding of Sweden's Crown Princess Victoria, the Idol finale, the Nobel banquet, the election and other major events. During Superlive events the whole website is topped with live TV, chats, Twitter feeds, cover-it-live coverage and much interactivity. Superlive may be described as an extended version of Cover-it-live, described

above. The interactive aspect of Superlive is emphasized by Hjalmarsson (2011): “Much focus is put on live feeling and contact with our readers”.

### Aftonbladet Snack and Aftonbladet Blogg

*Aftonbladet* also has a community called Snack, and a blog service called “Aftonbladet Blogg”. The community “Aftonbladet Snack” was introduced in the spring 2008, with the goal to aggregate user generated content from *Aftonbladet*’s blogs, its forum and video-service Mitt Klipp. The ambition of the community was to create stronger bonds to the readers and make them more participatory. (Widell, 2008)

The community offers the possibility for its users to create a profile page, to discuss, and to share photo/video content. In the spring 2009 registering became mandatory for users who want to make comments to articles on *Aftonbladet.se*, or blog by using the newspaper’s blog service “Aftonbladet Blogg”.

The blog service offers the general public to create and run a blog. But the blogs are also used as an editorial tool for reporters, chroniclers and invited guest bloggers. Most of the blog service’s web traffic occurs in the latter category. (Hjalmarsson, 2011)

### *Aftonbladet*’s social media philosophy, strategy and experiences

The two interviews at *Aftonbladet* provided information about the social media related services described above, but also gave information about the discussions, ideas and experiences within the newspaper. These insights are presented in this section, starting with what are considered to be the most interesting findings.

### The role of *Aftonbladet*

The most important verification of the influence of social media on *Aftonbladet* is shown by the way the newspaper thinks of its role as an online newspaper (Hjalmarsson, 2011): “*Aftonbladet* wants to be a meeting place, it could be in terms of comments or cover-it-live coverage (...) The whole experience builds on interactivity and communion.”

Apart from the community Snack, *Aftonbladet* has also had a video sharing service called Mitt Klipp (Swedish for My Clip), though this service was closed down in the beginning of 2011 due to low traffic and a remodeling (Hjalmarsson, 2011). *Aftonbladet* has used community-like services but have started to let go of them, because “it is not the role of *Aftonbladet* to directly compete with Facebook and YouTube.” Instead, the newspaper focuses on the discussion on the website around its journalism.

At *Aftonbladet* discussions are being held about the importance of being mentioned on Facebook, if people spend much time there and it is believed that much will be centered around social media, but without knowing exactly how. It has been questioned how much they should do outside their own site: “We want people to come to us, but have to some extent needed to change our approach.” (Hjalmarsson, 2011)

### Successful social media services

In general *Aftonbladet* uses social media to drive traffic, to get reader contact and to strengthen the brand (Hjalmarsson, 2011).

Regarding successful social media services, the article commenting has exceeded the expectations. The goal for 2010 was to get one million comments, but this number was extensively surpassed and has continued to show considerable growth.

Hjalmarsson (2011) says that it is obvious that *Aftonbladet* has a lot of discussion on the site, but that the quality of it could always be debated and it could be questioned if they should work more with them or in a different manner.

A focus group project conducted by *Aftonbladet* showed that people want to know what others think, even those not taking part in the discussion. Although the focus groups also showed that too much fussiness is detrimental for the experience.

### Mass media and personal contacts

Twitter was not mentioned in the description of *Aftonbladet's* social media use earlier in this chapter, due to the newspaper's lack of a general strategy for Twitter accounts. Some editorial departments at *Aftonbladet* as well as some employees use Twitter. However, these accounts are based on individual initiatives and can be regarded as external from the newspaper. "We have estimated that *Aftonbladet's* readers are primarily on Facebook, while Twitter is more narrow." says Hjalmarsson (2011).

Further, Hjalmarsson (2011) highlighted one of the challenges for a mass media company entering the social media arena, where both one-to-one and many-to-many conversations take place in parallel: "When working with mass media you say something that is heard by many. Coming from there it is not possible to start talking personally with everyone; instead we have to find a middle way. At the moment Facebook works rather well for us, but if we start having five million readers there....".

*Aftonbladet's* ambition with Facebook is to really be present and not just use the page as a show window. People ask general questions in the article comments, and an increasing amount of questions are expected to come from Facebook. (Hjalmarsson, 2011)

### Analysis and development

The analytics department at *Aftonbladet* follows how the use of different parts of the website change over time. It also studies which types of articles generate comments, how the amount of comments are distributed over the time, and what happens when different services are repositioned on the website, or a major redesign is made. It is also examined what the readers think about the interactive features. The service *Facebook Insights* provides information about how the fans act on Facebook, e.g. the share interacting with a certain post. The social media monitoring tool *Meltwater Buzz* is used to get a review of how *Aftonbladet* and its products are being mentioned in social media. (Liljebo, 2011)

Regarding the fast changes in technology- and user developments, *Aftonbladet* tries to keep up with what happens, but still have some long-term thinking around how they wish to work. The situation is that we do not know how things will develop, but we work from how things are at the moment with reservation for that in two years it can be completely different. Much is uncertain as behavioral patterns change quickly for media consumption and online activities. Furthermore, the constant introduction of new devices for media use also makes predictions complex. For instance, Hjalmarsson says: "When I started at *Aftonbladet* everyone said, during five-six years, that "next year, the mobile will come!", but nothing happened. Now, almost ten years later we have a huge increase on mobile. But sometimes things go twice as fast as you'd expected."

Generally, *Aftonbladet* has gone from testing things and seeing how they turn out, towards a more structured way of working with new projects, e.g. with orderly descriptions of aims. Prior

to the iPad-introductions of Sportbladet (the sports section) and Klick (light entertainment) they used test groups in the shape of closed Facebook groups for pilot users.

### Media convergence

Until recently, *Aftonbladet's* online and printed editions were owned by two different corporations, but in 2010 these merged. Within the company, *Aftonbladet* is now seen as *one* product published on different platforms. It has been an ongoing process for a long time, but reached an end-point when the company moved to new premises in the end of 2010. Today people working with different publishing channels share the same working spaces. (Hjalmarsson, 2011).

## DISCUSSION

### The newspapers' social media use

There are evidently different ways for online newspapers (and other websites) to use social media. Overall there are many similarities in the social media use of the five online newspapers studied, e.g. all enable article commenting to some extent. One way to categorize the social media use of *Aftonbladet* and the other four newspapers studied is to consider the practice in terms of internal/external use and referencing.

*Internal social media use* includes social media features integrated on the *Aftonbladet* website. Article commenting and live chats with readers used in "cover-it-live" sessions are both examples of internal social media use.

*External social media references* include features on the *Aftonbladet* website which refer to external platforms or services. This category includes the use of the Facebook recommend button, an ad showing the amount of people liking *Aftonbladet's* Facebook page, links to article related blog posts, and finally the possibility to share an article via Facebook and Twitter.

*External social media activities* refer to activities outside the newspaper's own domains, such as *Aftonbladet's* activities on Facebook and Twitter.

The purpose of *Aftonbladet's* internal social media features are to add value for present *Aftonbladet* website visitors, whereas both the external activity categories mentioned aim to reach audiences outside its own site, and drive traffic to *Aftonbladet.se*.

### Media convergence

Jenkins' ideas on media convergence were published in 2006. Although online newspapers have been under constant development ever since, Jenkins' theories about media convergence, media transition and affective economies are still topical.

According to Jenkins, media convergence refers to a process, not an end point and involves both a change in the way media are produced and the way media are consumed. Regarding the convergence of online and print with *Aftonbladet* as a case, the newspaper seems to have found a new and functioning form both for the production and consumption. The newspaper is now seen as one product, published in different media channels.

As described in the Theory chapter, Jenkins' convergence paradigm assumes that old and new media will interact in ever more complex ways. Social media are clearly part of online media, but may yet, at least partially be considered as "new" media. The *Aftonbladet* product could then be studied as a case affected by the convergence of online and social media. Then, compared to the



convergence of print and web, this “new” convergence process would be in a much earlier state. The uncertainties, unclear directions and different social media related projects tested by *Aftonbladet* (described in the Results chapter) could then be explained by Jenkins theories of media convergence.

Jenkins states that an age of media transition is mainly characterized by unclear directions and unpredictable outcomes (2006). This claim is supported by the case study described in the Results chapter: *Aftonbladet* has formed and re-formed goals for its social media use. This was most distinctly seen in the newspaper’s policy regarding its community services. Only a few years after the introductions of the video sharing and community services are being phased out. A reason is that the newspaper has accepted that it cannot surpass Facebook in its chase for readers on the Swedish market. The unclear directions typical for transition have been replaced by a distinction of the newspaper’s strengths. The discussion taking place on the *Aftonbladet* website around its journalism, is identified to be the big thing at the newspaper. This identification appears to be a reconsideration of what the *Aftonbladet* product should be, and not be. This turn appears to be an important step in the converging process of finding a new order.

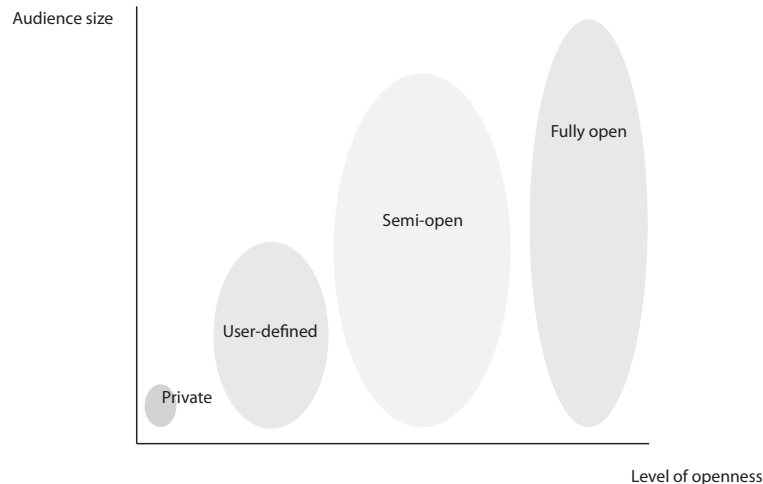
In Jenkins’ concept of affective economies the ideal consumer is “active, emotionally engaged, and socially networked”. *Aftonbladet*’s social media use and particularly its aim to be a *meeting place* and deliver an experience built on interactivity and communion, is very much in line with Jenkins’ idea of affective economies.

One objective of this paper was to test if the difficulty to define social media could partly be understood by Jenkins’ idea of media convergence. Having understood *Aftonbladet*’s social media use as a convergence process, social media itself may also be analyzed in terms of media convergence. Social media *per se* is based on media convergence, as the concept combines different features of web services, taking these one step further. Social media contain different combinations of elements such as emails, chats, forums, and content publishing. If social media would be in the middle of a convergence process, the difficulties to define the concept might be partly explained thereby. As was shown above, Jenkins’ media convergence theories worked well when analyzing the development of *Aftonbladet*, from print to web, and then from web to social media. However, it is believed that the wide range of different properties of and ways of using social media is what complicates the search for a clear definition.

## Social media and openness

The variety of openness in social media use was mentioned in the Theory chapter, and is illustrated in Graph 1 below. Different levels of openness could be defined based on the availability of the communicational situation:

- 1) Fully open social media services are open for everyone to view and join. Article commenting allowed without any registration is one example of a fully open social media service.
- 2) Semi-open social media services are open for all registered users to view and join, e.g. *Aftonbladet*’s article commenting service, Facebook, Wikipedia, YouTube and Second Life.
- 3) Limited openness refers to used-defined openness, which is the case e.g. when privacy levels of Facebook accounts are defined by the users, thereby limiting their information sharing.
- 4) Private social media services are e.g. MSN chats, or private blogs.



*Graph 1. Different categories of social media may be depicted in a graph according to their level of openness and audience size.*

There is broad variation in social media use, and therefore the marked areas in the graph showing the four openness levels described above, illustrate different spans of openness and audience size.

## Definitions

In the Theory chapter it was concluded that “Social media technologies enable communication between many senders and many receivers of information (many-to-many communication). Furthermore, the social media content is typically produced by its users and published online.”

As new forms of social media services and applications are to be expected, the complexity of the social media landscape will probably grow. Thus, Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2011) request for a definition that also supports forthcoming forms of social media is highly relevant.

Open, technology-oriented definitions are related with some difficulties, which were discussed in the theory chapter. However, the main difficulty when defining social media is the versatility of social media platforms, making the media both open (as in public), and closed (meaning private) depending on the user behavior. In other words social media enable both one-to-one and many-to-many interaction. The duality of social media as described by Hogan and Quan-Haase (2010) was summarized in the Theory chapter. Regarding social media as both one-way and two-way communication, the concept can be understood both in terms of affordability and the users choice to ultimately determine whether the use is social or non-social.

These grey-zones surrounding the social aspect of social media will remain and may have to be accepted, as it would be unpractical to customarily differ between e.g. social, less social and non-social uses of social media. Hence, it is suggested that a technology-based definition is to be preferred to a definition based on use. The conclusion is that generally in social media – as opposed to traditional media – the technology supports many-to-many communication, and the content is typically produced by the users and published online.

The uniqueness of social media lies in its ability to be both open and closed, both mass media and personal media.

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