

# Childhood and Children's Retrospective Media Consumption Experiences

## *The case of Norway*

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### **Abstract**

The focus in this article is on childhood and consumer culture with a special view on children's media experiences retrospective. A historical perspective is applied as history provides an opportunity to reflect on changing processes within contemporary consumer culture, especially with a view on exploring how children grew up within a Norwegian context with the tradition of state regulated media. The following main research question is addressed: What are the dominant narratives on retrospective media experiences (radio and television)? The findings are based on a case study of adults reflecting on media consumption. Their experiences have been collected through focus group interviews as this approach can generate new insights into former experiences and contemporary childhood. The study shows that narratives on childhood in retrospective media experiences are influenced by both contemporary notions of childhood and the new media flow.

**Keywords:** regulation, radio and television experiences, Norway, childhood, media generations

### **Introduction**

This article is based on a Norwegian case study of adults reflecting on media consumption in their own childhood. Actor experiences and children's agency are examined through focus group interviews as this approach can generate new insights into earlier experiences. The following main research question is addressed: What are the dominant narratives in retrospective media experiences (radio and television)? In addition to this, a question on the passionate dimension has been addressed: When were passions and other strong feelings produced in relation to past media experiences?

In the next section I will present a more detailed review of previous research on childhood and media consumption, paying special attention to contextual perspectives in order to theoretically frame the study. This section also includes a description of the state-run public service broadcaster *Norsk Rikskringkasting* (NRK), with its restrictions and regulations that the respective generations experienced while growing up. This is followed by a presentation of the methodology and the basis of the analysis, which uses

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focus group interviews of the two generations in question. In the third section I will present and discuss the media experiences of the informants in their formative years. Concluding remarks then close the article.

## **Theoretical and contextual framework**

A study by Edmunds & Turner (2002) suggests that generations are defined both historically and culturally. The generational concept in media studies has been developed in particular by Göran Bolin (e.g. 2009, 2014, 2015). As David Buckingham (2006:4) adds, a generational perspective means focusing on the potential role of media and technology in the construction and self-construction of generations. We can expect to find differences in experiences as expressed by people who have grown up in different media and socio-political landscapes (Bolin, 2015: 253). In common with Bolin, an inter-generational analytical approach (relating different generations to each other – historically and culturally) is useful in order to capture the specificities of generational experiences.

Zukin et al. (2006) in *A New Engagement?* discuss the changing nature of generational differences. The authors of this book illuminate the social and political differences and show how social, cultural, and economic experiences have shaped and distinguished the outlooks and behaviour of different generations of adults in the United States (US) in the last 40 years. My analytical approach is also inter-generational, relating two generations to each other in the era of the Norwegian welfare state and broader changes in the structures of family life or in the welfare state institutions.

In this context, an interesting theoretical contribution to the discussion on children and media generations comes from Leena Alanen (2001: 129), who uses the notion of ‘generationing’. She interprets the constitution of generations as generational structuring, or generationing, by which generations (both children and adults) *interdependently* construct each other by purifying their distinctive sets of practices. Sharing practices and experiences in the process of generationing, generational belonging is part of the individual identity of the members of the media audience. Alanen takes the view that generation is a key concept in understanding childhood and youth as distinct phases of life, separated from adulthood, and the relationship between children and young people, and adults and young people. She argues that generation as a structural feature of society can be considered as similar to other macro-structural variables, such as gender, class and ethnicity. In this way, childhood and youth shape and are shaped by structural and intergenerational relationships. The form and content of these relationships vary over time and space.

Important to my study is that each generation produces and shares narratives on media experiences, and that these narratives are discussed in more depth. Within social studies of childhood, childhood is a relational phenomenon and relates to dynamics in intergenerational relationships: the relationship between children and adults. That is, children and young people are social-relational individuals and often engaged in interactions in which the meaning of childhood and youth are symbolically constructed. As Ingrid Volkmar (2006) helpfully has shown, different generations relate to media events differently since media memories across generations are diverse, and these need to be researched with thoroughness. All in all, it is necessary to explore the nature of different

components, where the cultural setting, time and space are crucial for understanding historical and cultural conditions and the context for innovation. Memory studies provide one option for looking at historical reception, or what people remember of history, e.g. the ways it is made useful in their lives or, in this study, in meaning-making processes.

Culture is, broadly speaking, regarded as a shared system of meanings that is learned, revised, maintained and defined in the context of people's interactions (Gullestad 1992). This definition, concurring with other definitions within social studies of childhood, points to the importance of the process of meaning making among peers (Corsaro, 2015; James & James, 2004; James & James, 2008; Montgomery & Woodhead, 2003). Culture is, therefore, not considered to be stable, but rather is fluid with socially generated patterns of meanings that change over time. Furthermore, specific forms of consumer culture and notions of childhood are embedded in differing national and regional contexts (Buckingham, 2011; Cook, 2009; Pugh, 2009). Drawing on the work of Viviana Zelizer, who emphasizes the active role of children in different consumer practices (which can be extended to child media experiences), the focus is on constructions of patterns of meaning (Zelizer 2002).

Children's agency implies that they themselves are involved in the creation of the premises for their actions and are not merely reduced, for example, to objects of adults' intentions behind radio and television programmes. Bearing this perspective in mind, it is argued that we need to change our focus from what children are or ought to be consuming and instead look at how children practice consumerism or at how they are *media users*. For the case study presented here, this means listening to adults' accounts of their experiences of media products (radio and television) in their childhoods, in the 1950s and the early 1970s.

A similar study, conducted by Göran Bolin, discusses an interesting point about children's media consumption and memories. He analysed a number of focus group interviews with Swedish and Estonian media users tentatively belonging to four generations. In his analysis of these interviews, he suggests that passion and nostalgia are produced in relation to childhood memories and also in the borderland of shared intergenerational experience (Bolin 2014, 2015). My study, however, is more limited, with a focus only on radio and television memories. Nevertheless, in accordance with Bolin, I will highlight one component of the generational experience that is strongly related to media, namely, the intimate and often passionate relations that are produced. What sort of passionate relationship was developed in relation to media technologies and content from one's own formative childhood and youth? Bolin defines passion as a dialectic concept that not only refers to the joyful desire from and intense emotional connection to cherished objects but also includes its dialectic opposite in the form of suffering. Therefore, passion/strong feelings as a component in the formation of past media experiences will also be discussed.

To sum up, a historical perspective is applied because history provides the possibility to reflect on changing processes within two generations growing up. By analysing how adults make sense of the events they have experienced in the past, it is possible to gain a fuller understanding of how history is shaped by individual children's experiences and structures, such as family, environment, child institutions and cultural, economic and political factors, which together shape children's media experiences.

### *Context and components*

Looking back in the aftermath of World War II in Scandinavia, in Norway for this case, a strongly regulated market policy resulted in modest levels of consumption. With the advent of the American Marshall Plan in the 1950s,<sup>1</sup> it became increasingly evident that Norwegian society was changing rapidly, although rationing and other restrictions that remained in place after the war led to reduced levels of consumption in the following years. Some products, such as those popular with children including chocolates and sweets, were only distributed on a limited scale until 1950. Furthermore, car sales were limited until 1960. Thus, the ideal consumer was someone who aimed to save money and spend it frugally. Norway stands out from many other Western countries and consumer societies in having a tradition of relatively more restriction on consumerism (Korsvold 2012, 2013). Nevertheless, in a post-war climate economic growth was essential: industry had priority as the main modernizing force.

Television officially arrived in Norway in 1960 when the state-owned public service NRK opened its first broadcast station in Oslo. The first regular public service television broadcasts started in 1960. They did not include advertisements and the transmission time was limited. In according to Enli et al. (2013), Norway identified with the alternative paths chosen in other countries, ending with a late introduction of television which was framed as a continuation of radio's universal nation-building project and the belief in a public broadcaster. The absence of discussion of alternatives to NRK's television, with neither private ownership nor commercials, was unlike other countries. In addition, the public service institution was acting as an agent of enlightenment and nation building.

The prospect of television was exciting for the Norwegian population, including children. However, the new technology was an ongoing topic of discussion in the Scandinavian media. According to Strandgaard Jensen (2010, 2013), adults wanted to control and supervise children's consumption of various cultural products. Children were in various contexts the objects of the adults' agenda – they were the adults' child-raising projects. Rollwagen (2016) also explored this question in Canada: Who spoke for children as television consumers, and what did they say? She noted that children, as symbols of innocence and the nation's future, were often at the centre of the media debates and, not at least, that children were perceived as innocent and with plasticity. Rollwagen suggests that, in Canada, concerns about children's television consumption were connected to nationalist anxieties, fears that American cultural content would overwhelm and influence Canadian children. For Norway, a representative from the Christian Democrats in the Parliament of the late 1950s, who himself had watched US television, was concerned about dumbing-down and brutalization. This representative also characterized the medium as an extremely dangerous instrument from which no home could protect itself (Enli et al., 2013, p. 214). Nevertheless, in the coming period the public broadcaster NRK became a prominent tool for Norwegian language, culture and enlightenment.

My participants experienced changes whilst growing up in a time that was still characterized by restrictions and regulations, and the levels of consumerism were relatively low compared to the more extensive consumerism of the present day, which is characterized by liberalization and a profusion of media. This was reflected in the focus group interview or emerged as content that was mentioned and discussed during the focus

group interview: 'We grew up with only one channel!' as Elisabeth (born 1969) states. Television's late establishment, and the fact that Norway chose a one-channel system, testifies to its status as among one of the least densely populated and least wealthy countries of Europe of that time. (Enli et al., 2013: 215).

Accordingly, the knowledge gained from the focus group interviews is interwoven with large social formations in society's structures. Thus, past societies emerged through the analysed narratives, specifically Norwegian society in the 1950s and 1960s, and in the 1970s, as the change in the media landscape from listening to radio to watching TV becomes clearly visible. In analysing the experiences, I use narrative analyses, which refers to a family of methods for interpreting texts that have a storied form in common. Here, a dialogic/performance analysis was preferred because it is a rather broad and varied interpretive approach where context and components are interwoven. It integrates how talk among speakers interactively produces and performs as narrative. Furthermore, this approach requires a close reading of context; the investigator becomes an active presence in the text, and the context becomes important as well (Riessman 2008: 105-106). The next section will examine the methodology for this case study in more detail.

## Methodology

All kinds of methodological frameworks are based on particular epistemological assumptions, and on theories of knowledge that seek to inform how we can know the world. They represent different ways of asking what the research will be about. In my case, this is a phenomenological study of adults reflecting on radio and television experiences in their own childhood. Children, past and present, have experiences that differ from adults' and cultures of their own (Mintz 2006). Furthermore, adults cannot completely control children's imaginative use of cultural products. In this respect, it is most important to focus on agency within the research field of children as consumers (Buckingham 2011; Buckingham & Tingstad 2010; Cook 2004, 2009) when analysing narrated memories of media experiences in the past. As Vestad (2014) explored in her study of children's subject positions, it is how particular concepts of 'the child' contribute to different knowledge production. The specific ways of talking addressed in her work are both sociological with regard to aspects of child and childhood and, more important, the specific ways of talking about experiences in everyday life from the perspective of children. Here, I explore how children as actors seek meaning and how adults look back on their own childhood, especially in terms of how time and space and the material culture of children are interwoven, components that are also discussed by Ning Coninck-Smith & Marta Gutman and in their introduction to *Designing Modern Childhoods* (Coninck-Smith & Gutman 2008). Components that are interwoven in the analysed material (i.e. time, space, generation) are all situated in their particular way.

### *Focus group interviews*

Information relating to the study participants' experiences was collected through focus group interviews.<sup>2</sup> This method has several traits in common with qualitative group interviews, but contrasts with ordinary group interviews is that there is a high degree

of interaction between the interviewers and participants (Halkier & Gjerpe 2010). The interviewer decides the theme, and data are primarily generated through interactive participation between participants and the person conducting the interview (*ibid.*). Thus, focus group interviews are characterized by a combination of group collaboration and a research-driven focus on the topic in question. This combination also makes focus group interviews especially well-suited for generating empirical data where the creation of meaning and the formation of meaning are main goals. The production of patterns of meanings in narratives, evaluations and interpretations provided by members of the group are in focus. Experiences linked to certain memories of the radio, especially a radio programme for very young children, yielded the most common associations and led to the greatest intensity of joy in the first focus group interview: All the members started singing the signature tune of this programme. The same intensity of common memories was linked to a particular puppet figure in children's television (the bear Colargol) in the 1970s, at a time when the informants were around five or six years old. When referring to this passion, the informant Jonny (born 1969) stated: 'I also remember those things I was afraid of, and they were amazing things that frightened me, for example, the puppet figure or the bear Colargol. I ran into the kitchen; it was so frightening with the bear Colargol.' Mette too, and especially Elisabeth (born 1970), had the same experiences with this figure from children's television: 'I remember one time he was taken as a prisoner by a circus (...). It was highly dramatic. I was really scared by Colargol. So he was – actually – a little bit frightening to me too.' Common for both generations, the focus group interviews triggered strong memories of childhood's media experiences and, in common with Bolin's studies produced passion and strong feelings.

### *Participants*

The advantage of using networks in focus groups is that the participants in the network know each other, and can therefore elaborate on each other's perspectives due to common perceptions and experiences (Barbour & Flick 2007: 66-68). In my two focus group interviews, I chose to interview academics (each interview had four subjects) from my social network. They had previous knowledge of reflecting upon children and childhood. The first focus group had four subjects born between 1952 and 1961 (one male, three females), the second had four subjects born around 1970 (one male, three females). The focus group subjects were born in different parts of Norway but at the time the interviews were conducted, they all lived in a city in central Norway. Finally, the participants spoke from a particular position of power when it came to pedagogical or sociological knowledge. In other words, I operated with key subjects in the sense that the interviewees had knowledge and a rather reflective approach to the selected topics.

Nevertheless, the participants were not necessarily similar subjects, rather they formed a small strategic cross-section that is the opposite of a representative sample. Thus, there was variation within a more or less homogenous group. The objective was to look for patterns of meanings in the sample of variations under examination. In this way, an attempt was made to follow the recommendation of Trost & Jeremiassen, who state: 'one should ensure that the sample is as heterogeneous as possible within a relatively high degree of homogeneity' (Trost & Jeremiassen 2010: 148-149).

### *Interview guide*

My short interview guide had open questions designed to shed light on the broad research question referring to how children are construed as consumers, from a retrospective point of view. The guide was intended to form a frame for questions that were of interest in highlighting the theme, but at the same time, be open for the group's contributions to media experiences. Radio and television experiences were highlighted and, considering the informants, these constituted an important part of popular culture in their childhood. The categorization of the experiences was also given priority during the interview. In common with other researchers who have studied children's experiences of popular culture, I emphasized precisely the specific, perceived experiences and the interpretations of these (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh 2002).<sup>3</sup>

### *Researcher's role as moderator*

I used an experienced-based interview during which the individual actors were encouraged to recall their own experiences. The aim of my role as a leader and active participant during the focus group interview was to grasp particularly relevant points within each participant's story and encourage interaction in the group. The role meant that it was impossible to be a neutral observer, nor was that the intention. Adopting a flexible position within an interview and at the same time remaining aware of processes taking place within the group can be a pragmatic way of dealing with this process. As an interviewer, I therefore had an active role (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Hence, in this regard I was also an actor who contributed my perceptions and experiences of popular culture, especially in the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. Nevertheless, the informants were still the primary focus. Their perceptions and experiences form the basis of the analysis. The concrete experiences were prioritized in the analysis, especially in cases where members of the focus groups had the possibility to inspire each other and comment upon each other's experiences.

### *Analysis of narratives*

During the analysis, categories were developed on the basis of the collected material and how the recollections were analysed from a cultural understanding to facilitate the identification of patterns of meanings. However, adult's experiences and accessing children's perspectives retrospectively may present a number of challenges. The experiences comprise both experiences *in* the past and experiences *from* the past. In this regard, there are some complex methodological problems to deal with but due to space constraints, these will not be examined in depth in this article. Nevertheless, as historian Lisa Jacobson states, although they are adult reminiscences shaded by the passage of time, autobiographies and oral histories allow for more expansive commentary and reflection than most surveys. Furthermore, more traditional sources also enhance our sense of children as agents of historical change (Jacobson 2004). Here, it is necessary to consider the diversity of the various sources. The passage of time, as Jacobson mentions, allows us to reflect on continuity and change by listening to the voices of actors and their accounts of their life experiences (as media experiences) in the past. Therefore, once again, concurring with Jacobson, I will move away from a model of consumer passivity

and instead explore the meanings that are reflected in the experiences. For this purpose, focus group interviews provide relatively deep insights into the concept of children's activities, for example, enabling reflection on different media experiences among informants looking back in time. For both generations of participants in the focus group it was obvious how this method inspired the memory of a different media technology in their childhood, creating complex meaning making.

### **Children's media experiences: memories of radio and television programmes**

I will now analyse and discuss the memories collected through focus group interviews more in depth. As a point of departure, I searched for dominant narratives on media experiences and examined how meaning-making processes take place. By analysing how historical actors make sense of the events they have experienced, such as being together with siblings and family members and sharing emotional moments, it will be possible to gain a broader picture of how history is shaped both by the actors' experiences and their structures. Here, it may be more appropriate to talk about history as the representations of pastness, as Freund & Quilici (1996) suggest. The authors argue that in order to examine these representations we should also pay attention to the ways in which they are articulated.

#### *The 1950s and 1960s generation*

The two generations belong to two cohorts, witnessing different collective events and both living through broader economic, cultural, or political shifts, which distinguish them from each other. The first generation grew up within an expanding welfare state, though with more restrictions on consumptions and with parents less affluent, at least within a chronological comparison to the next generation. The values and behaviour of this generation reflect what they learned along the way, from parents, peers, schools, media, and from the trends that have framed these interactions. Moreover, this generation was influenced by state-run radio, the Norwegian public service radio, and then through the public state-run television channel. In practice, this meant that the informants listened to the same radio programmes, all broadcast by NRK, and that from the early 1960s they watched the same television programmes on the only television channel available, also run by NRK.

#### *Memories of radio programmes*

A radio programme called *Barnetimen for de minste* [Children's Hour for the Little Ones], aimed at the youngest children, was first broadcast in 1947. The idea behind the programme came from Australian radio, specifically from a programme that was originally called *Nursery School on the Air* (Bache-Wiik 1999: 107). The programme was well framed within NRK's close relation to the state and the radio's universal nation-building project as well as in key values of enlightenment and universality.

All of the participants related to *Barnetimen for de minste*, and it was the act of listening to the radio, generally with brothers and sisters or other children, that they remembered clearly. They all remembered the signature tune for one of the programme's

narrators, and focused on recalling a specific mood. *Barnetimen for de minste* structured everyday life for children and adults alike. It was transmitted at a time when children and most mothers spent the greater part of the day at home, as was also the case for the study participants. Radio ratings for the 1950s showed a huge response. Research has documented that 80 per cent of the target group for the programme listened to the broadcasts (ibid.). The programme was therefore an activity that not only structured everyday life but also created a collective or shared memory for children living in Norway in the 1950s and 1960s.

One informant, Jan (born 1952), pointed out how the programme became part of generationing, both between children and between children and adults. His mother made a list of who should sit closest to the radio when the programme was on. The list was followed to the letter and no deviations were permitted. Jan's recollection shows how children as actors create meaning in the consumption of media products:

There were three siblings in our family, and on the calendar at home there was a list of who would sit next to the radio, in the armchair closest to the radio, and hence who could have the Cola bottle that we were given, and also the bag of peanuts we were given, on the shelf that the radio was on. So every third week we each got to sit there, and could have the peanuts in the Cola bottle, right up to the top. So *Lørdagsbarnetimen* [Children's Hour on Saturday], and for that matter also *Barnetimen for de minste*, were extremely important events.

In addition, Jan's recollection also uncovers a strong emotional involvement, shared among the three siblings in his family. For slightly older children there was *Lørdagsbarnetimen*, one of the biggest media successes in Norwegian radio's history. Studies have shown that on any given Saturday in 1953, 94 per cent of all children in the country listened to the programme. All in all, 47 per cent of all adults over 16 years of age had listened to *Lørdagsbarnetimen* as a child (ibid. 106-107). Thus, listening to the programme was a shared experience for children who grew up in Norway in the 1950s and 1960s, and the experience might have led to the creation of collective memories. Both radio programmes, *Lørdagsbarnetimen* and *Barnetimen for de minste*, later became virtual cult products.<sup>4</sup>

The constructed narratives showed at least how important the media activity was for the children's everyday lives. Consumption of media took place in a social setting, in this case in a family context, and as mentioned above, it was situated and created opinions and facilitated the formation of meanings against a background of social interaction where children were the principal actors.

In both content and form, distortions or exaggerations of fact also shape the perceptions of one's experiences. By simply looking at the form and content of the informants' narratives, we can ascertain their subjectivity, and the role of the passions and strong feelings that are produced. The development of cultural processes incorporates the manner of narration, including the words, concepts and metaphors used to convey the actors' meaning making.

Among the participants in the first focus group interview, we find clear early memories linked to television, such as the first time they watched television. Passion and strong feelings, or the intimate and passionate relation, in this case to the introduction of new media technology, were clearly visible. The interviewer (born 1952) recalls the first

memories of television, which was when the American president John F. Kennedy was buried in 1963. Her family did not own a television, so together with her three siblings she watched television at a neighbour's house:

I have a very clear recollection of the first time I watched TV. It was when John F. Kennedy was buried, and we sat at a neighbour's house. The screen was grey, and I also remember that I sat on a bench in a row with others, arranged as it would have been sitting in the cinema, with the adults in front and the children at the back. The sombre broadcast was enhanced by the fact that the room had been made light-proof. The reason was that it was generally accepted that television images were best viewed in a darkened room.

Methodological considerations on the passage of time through the use of narrative analysis raise at least two important questions: When analysed as narratives, did the informants' accounts reflect stereotypical images rather than popular cultural experiences? Or were their stories rather founded on imagined representations of the past, instead of genuinely reflecting on cultural experiences? Here the historian David Lowenthal (1985) points out how our imagined representations of the past are often transformed into 'a foreign country'. The imagined representations of a former childhood survive, he states, and the past is sometimes given meaning in light of the time in which the narrator is living, i.e. the circumstances of the narrator's point in time in the present. For example, the contemporary media flow generation and the new concepts of childhood will have some degree of impact. This was also contrasted by the informants in reference to younger generations, who rather communicate in a different way, within a broad media landscape.

When the informants of the first focus group grew up, they were the first generation to spend time in front of the television. As had been the case with Norwegian radio, there was only one channel that broadcast programmes. This was also the case for the next generation as well, though with broader changes in the structure of family life and welfare state institutions more generally.

### *The 1970s generation*

This generation came of age in an inherited welfare state that was economically, culturally, socially, and politically well established, with more affluent inhabitants. Throughout their childhoods, they witnessed the continuous growth of the welfare state, with an extended access to educational and social services, changes in family life and child institutions, and last but not least, changes in technology and communications. In addition, they experienced a weakening of traditional norms and values, with a new upbringing amidst a more international and interconnected world. Further, the second generation in this study, born around 1970, was born into a media landscape where not only the cinema, telephone and radio were present, but the medium of television as well. However, in 1970, only 20 per cent of the population had access to television, varying from approximately 30 per cent in the capital of Norway to 14 per cent in the northern part of the country (Dahl et al. 1999). In analysing the memories, my focus continues to be on identifying when passion and strong feelings appear.

*Memories of television programmes*

It is obvious from the focus group interviews that television was the most important medium for this generation when they were young. Whilst the phenomenon of watching television for the first time was clearly visible in the oldest generation of the focus group informants, it was absent in the youngest generation. As one female informant put it: 'The TV was turned on every day so it was not that special. Watching TV had already been taken for granted.' Or as others said: 'I don't know what my first TV memory was.' Nonetheless, some memories consist of technological passions, as Mette illustrates: 'I looked at the back of the television and thought: Is it possible to look back there; what is going on behind it? Sometimes I did that – I didn't tell anybody that I researched the back of the TV.' She tried to get her body as close to the back of the apparatus as possible, simply trying to understand its functioning. She continues with the topic of her media fascination:

We had to turn on the TV before the beginning of the programme, to warm it up (...): To press the bottom, and then wait. 'It's coming soon' I can remember the adults always said. We were sitting there, the whole family, waiting; first came a tiny light, then in a paler color and bigger light spread all over the screen. Often the screen was not sharp, so then we had to give it a moment, or better hit the box (i.e. the TV apparatus), in order to make the picture clear again. I don't remember all the programmes. Instead I remember much more how we tried to be ready to watch Children's TV, those few minutes the programme lasted. That was from only 18.00-18.20 or 18.25 in the afternoon (...).

Watching television was an important part of everyday life, with passions and strong feelings for both the technology and content. As Elisabeth illustrates: 'I could sit there for a while, for it was really that much fun. Stars that we didn't know. Or stars that we already knew. Only hanging out. Sitting there. It was amazing!' Another informant tells about her feelings in this way: 'I was sitting there, in front of the screen, listening to *Ratata*, and imaged that I was an actor in a film.'

In this study, both generations entered into an historical process where some media technology was already present, while other technologies arrived during their childhood. The second generation experienced the arrival of cassette tape recorders during their formative years. A prominent feature was the introduction of the cassette tape recorder, making it possible to produce mix tapes of favorite songs from the radio and television. 'We bought a cassette recorder. I remember, we were sitting there and singing, we were singing along, over and over again,' as one female respondent put it.

Making music mix tapes was a practice that peaked between the late 1970s and early 1990s, up until the point when burning CDs instead became widespread. The labour put into producing a mix tape, either for oneself or a friend, for example, obviously produced a cultural value that was bound to the individual (Bolin 2015). Jonny was fascinated by the content of a programme for older children that followed Children's TV, the youth programme *Flimra*: 'It was... it was the stars standing there, with long hair, a little bit frightening, accompanied with spooky sounds or the like.' Jonny remembers mix-taping from this and other programmes: 'I had an older brother and an even older brother-in-law playing music. I inherited all his music instruments after him, and in the same way also the music. (...).'

Being together with one's family and being inspired by the content of a programme created strong feelings, and this is clearly visible as a main narrative. The informant Mette was only six years old in 1974 when the Swedish pop group ABBA won the Eurovision Song Contest with its hit 'Waterloo'. The new hit from ABBA, 'I do I do I do I do I do I do' was their first major hit after 'Waterloo', released in 1975. Mette says:

ABBA was the greatest of the greatest. After they had won the Eurovision Song Contest, my parents bought an album. Then they had a party at home. I woke up in the night hearing the song from ABBA: 'I do I do I do I do I do I do'. I can remember I got out of bed, sat on the edge of the stairs, a stairway with about four or five steps. I thought I was in heaven! (laughing). The next day, I can remember, I started collecting ABBA photos. My grandparents were bakers, so I could get hold of different types of boxes. One of the biggest boxes was folded together and I wrote ABBA on the top, with huge, wonderful letters. I collected all my ABBA photos in there, more than two thousand photos. (...). The end of the 1970s was the greatest ABBA period for me.

In this case study, the representations had a basis in the particular period of time, in the question and in the informants' experiences of the past. Hence, the main narrative and imagined representations were fuelled by both fact and fiction, or the memories contained facts but also contained distortions or exaggerations of facts. Nevertheless, it is necessary to analyse these particular elements in the narratives (i.e. distortions and exaggerations) as components in the formation of past experiences when they appear, in order to understand children as media users. Narrative forms and narrative elements such as anecdotes or jokes are of interest because they can be a source of important information on media experiences within the consumer culture that the informants were a part of and they created. In this case, it shows above all, passions and other strong feelings.

## Discussion

This discussion is brief of necessity, and it will be limited to narratives where generational similarities and differences emerge from the interviews.

Shared experiences together with other siblings and the family were extremely important, and this is where passions and other strong feelings were produced. A common experience for all the informants was that they spent large parts of the day outdoors all year round. All of the participants stated they operated within a large area away from home (i.e. they had a large radius of action), including during their pre-school years. The registered rate of employment among women in Norway was low, and a minority of the children attended pre-school (Korsvold 2011).<sup>5</sup> Consequently, together with other children, participants were able to play up to a long distance away from home during their pre-school years. The outdoor activities generally lasted several hours at a time. Still, the dominant adult view of children was the longstanding Nordic ideal that children belonged to their families and the best place for them to enjoy 'free' or unstructured play with their peers would be in an outdoor environment close to their home (Korsvold 2016). In this situation, retrospectively speaking, watching television with their families on a daily basis and according to a particular schedule was a kind of 'break' and a fascination in its own right.

First, as expected, the participants' earliest memories were linked to radio and television programmes for children. This was reflected in the focus group interviews, or in content that was mentioned and discussed during each focus group interview. In this connection, NRK's role as a public information service that included children was clearly visible. Media experiences like the popular radio product *Barnetimen for de minste* were shared experiences for children who grew up in Norway in the 1950s and 1960s, and this experience might have led to the creation of collective memories. The same was true for the 1970s generation, where collective memories were created from the popular TV product *Barne-TV* which NRK regulated and financed under its purview as a public broadcaster.

Secondly, and contrary to expectations, children as consumers and customers in a market existed in the early 1960s, in spite of state regulations and restrictions and even though they had only one public service broadcaster which did not allow advertising. During different periods, political concern was expressed that commercialization would threaten factual and educational programming, religion and culture, especially in programmes for children.

Nevertheless, there were spin-off products from television series, such as those from the *Pernille* series for very young children from 1961, which also dated from the pioneering days of television and which was the only one of its kind *Pernilleboken* [The Pernille Book] in 1968] (Hake 2006). Books and recordings of famous radio voices soon became available on the market, serving as an extension of the listening experiences of young children and as a continuation of the radio culture designed for children, although such spin-off products and merchandising were not yet widespread and evidence of this is their absence in the interviews. It is, though, a paradox that young television viewers were significant consumers, such as of the product *Barnetimegodt/Fjernsynsgodt* [television-time sweets], in spite of state regulation and control over advertising (and merchandising) on the screen. On this point, Bauman (2007) claims that consumerism is linked to fascination and feelings. Not only is consumption connected to certain feelings, but also specifically to the experience of fascination.

Clearly, the informants' memories that particularly linked children and media experiences warranted analysis in the light of the structure and content of their childhood and the historical changes that took place. This includes any anecdotes or jokes that form the central narrative in this study. Or as Bolin (2015) puts it, one realizes that one's own experiences of past media forms cannot be shared by younger generations, and especially one's own children. Referring to Gumpert & Cathcart (1985), Bolin also claims that we tend to read the world through the lens of the media experiences we have had in our youth. For example, those born into the age of radio perceive the world differently than those born into the age of television, and the experiences expressed by adults who have grown up in different media landscapes are different. The specificities of the generational experiences are obvious, and within this chronological comparison the context, above the changes in the welfare state, forms different generational experiences.

The theoretical contribution of this study is to highlight the identification of patterns of meanings in narratives from two media generations and how generationing is taking place. It is especially related to how both children and adults interdependently construct each other with the help of their distinctive sets of practices.

## **Concluding remarks: cultural context and narrative elements**

Allison Pugh discusses the meaning-making processes of consumerism and how children develop social systems of consumerism that are filled with specific meanings. These systems are developing and changing continually since media experiences are part of children's everyday lives (Pugh 2009). This article has presented an analysis of retrospective media experiences from the media landscape at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The approach has been a dialogic/performance analysis as it allows a rather broad and varied interpretive approach, and the ambition has been to elaborate on how passions and strong feelings in relation to past media experiences are produced.

The case study is situated within the fields of both childhood studies and memory studies, using oral history to retrieve the experiences of children in the past. All in all, the narrator's memories were analysed as reconstructions of the past and, at the same time, represent the narrator's own understanding of the present. The manner in which the members of the focus groups narrated the cultural processes in the time span between the narrator's time (the present) and the time referred to (the time recollected) is of great interest. Narratives of the past were put through the present time's filter, i.e. society at the time of the interview, and reflect what can be characterized as imaginary representations of what was found in the past. In this regard, the research questions that I asked, what I omitted and my preconceptions were also decisive for the production of knowledge. Furthermore, both the interviewer and the focus group participants were influenced by the language used and the time that the narratives on childhood related to. Nonetheless, it was the adults' reflections and the manner of their retrospective reflections that counted, yet both the moderator and the participants supported the production of knowledge when childhood's media experiences in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were recapitulated. Another focus group interview with media experiences from the 1980s and 1990s and the beginning of new platform changes (or as commentary on the intangible nature of contemporary digital media) will provide even more insight.

Memories are part of the creation and formation of culture and society through the manner in which they are narrated. In this way, collective memories are continually produced for society in the future. Narrated experiences and perceptions should be interpreted within the specific cultural context that children and childhood are a part of. For Norway, from its introduction in 1960, television was perceived as a continuation of radio and the public service broadcaster turned out to be an extreme powerful actor for both generations. In other words, memories are situated in a specific national and local context. Furthermore, the informants only represent themselves, yet they disseminate knowledge, insight and connections from a time that was shared by a large number of Norwegian children. Still, the participants' memories are not representative of the population of children at the present time, rather, they can be seen as memories that may have been shared by others and, in this sense, are recognizable.

## **Notes**

1. The Marshall Plan, which was operational in the post-war period 1948-1952, was the United States' primary programme for rebuilding and creating stronger economic foundations for the countries of Western Europe.
2. Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) granted permission for the interview survey to be conducted. The research project was registered with the Data Protection Office for Research which gave

permission to process personal information. The informants' consent to participate was acquired, based on written information on the research and an interview guide. To ensure anonymity, the informants' names are changed.

3. The concept of popular culture is used here as a collective term for different cultural products, expressions, and areas that had widespread distribution and were popular in their time, such as games and toys, books and cartoon series, and radio and television programmes (Edwards 2000).
4. Later, in 2009, only 8 per cent of the target age group for *Lørdagsbarnetimen* (Saturday television for children between 3 and 11 years of age) listened to this radio programme. Interestingly, for adults over 60 years it was more than 50 per cent (NRK 2010).
5. In 1950, 26 per cent of all Norwegian women aged 15 years or more were registered as employed, but by 1960, the percentage had fallen to 24 per cent. The percentage of children attending pre-school institutions was approx. 2 per cent in the 1950s and 1960s, and at the end of the 1970s was still less than 30 per cent. Up until 1997, the obligatory age for starting in compulsory school in Norway was seven years old (Korsvold 2011).

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