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Relative Public Disconnection: Poverty and Media Use in the Media Welfare State

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A growing body of media research indicates systematic links between socioeconomic disadvantage, media use, and disconnection from the world of politics. This article examines media use and public (dis)connection among people who live in relative poverty. Focusing on the comparatively favorable conditions of the Norwegian "media welfare state," the article first sensitizes the concept of public connection to empirical research on the poverty segment and operationalizes this reconceptualization in the analysis of data from the Norwegian Monitor survey (N = 11,025). The article finds that the low-income demographic generally has a markedly weaker mediated public connection compared with more privileged strata—what we term *relative public disconnection*. Moreover, we nuance this picture, identifying five main types of public (dis)connection in the low-income segment, each associated with a distinct social profile. On this basis, the article discusses implications for media policy and critiques the key underlying notions of equality and informed citizenship.

Keywords: public connection, citizenship, poverty, multiple correspondence analysis, media use, media policy ideals

Although different strands of democratic theory emphasize the level and type of citizen participation differently for democracies to work properly (e.g., Habermas, 1996; Marshall, 1992; Putnam, 2000; Schudson, 1998; Schumpeter, 2008; Strömbäck, 2005), informed and active citizenship are important elements in most models of democracy—from republican, to liberal, to deliberative (Habermas, 1994).

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Media, as a source of news and information, is a key intermediary between citizens and the public sphere. Hence, citizens' media use constitutes a fundamental condition for their orientation toward the public and political world—their public connection (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2010). Nonetheless, public connection is socially skewed in most societies: The resourceful are better informed, connected, and engaged than the less resourceful.

A growing body of survey research from Europe and the United States documents systematic relationships between background resources, media use, and public connection (Couldry et al., 2010; Hovden, 2023; Hovden & Rosenlund, 2021; Lindell, 2022; Sivertsen, 2023). Likewise, large-scale qualitative research from a range of different national contexts (Couldry et al., 2010; Danielson, 2021; Nærland, 2019; Swart, Peters, & Broersma, 2019) shows how media use is embedded in everyday life conditions that, depending on various resources, allow for public (dis)connection. This research is important in evidencing the social structuring of mediated public connection and for reactualizing class as an explanatory factor. However, it predominantly attends to middle- and working-class strata, leaving those less advantaged out of the scope of inquiry.

Increasing socioeconomic inequality globally (Piketty, 2020), in Europe (Eurostat, 2018), and in Norway (Salvanes, 2017) renders it critical to attain knowledge of how economically disadvantaged citizens connect to the public through the media. Despite calls for attention from scholars and policymakers alike, the media practices and attitudes of this demographic remain something of a "black box." And whereas there is an emergent body of qualitative research on media use and citizenship in economically vulnerable demographics (e.g., Lindtner & Nærland, 2024), statistical research remains absent.

In response, this article focuses on the critical case of Norway, a Nordic "media welfare state" marked by far-reaching media policies facilitating widespread media access, relatively homogenous patterns of media use, and diverse media content (Syvertsen, Enli, Mjøs, & Moe, 2014, pp. 16–20). This Nordic media system departs from other types of media systems, such as the more deregulated, fragmented, and polarized U.S. media system (Jakobsson, Lindell, & Stiernstedt, 2024). Whereas class divisions remain relatively small in Norway (Hjellbrekke, Jarness, & Korsnes, 2015) and civic participation high (Enjolras & Strømsnes, 2018), poverty has increased in the past decades (Omholt, 2019). The case of Norway thus allows for insights into how and why inequality in public connection persist despite favorable conditions overall. In 2023, 11% of the Norwegian population belonged to low-income households according to the EU-60 standard (income below 60% of the median) and thus nominally live in relative poverty (Statistics Norway, 2023). In this article, we zoom in on this demographic to explore how socioeconomic disadvantage affects the possibilities for public connection.

We systematically explore patterns of relations and oppositions between indicators of public connection, resources, and personal traits. Here, we take inspiration from the cultural sociology and methodology of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and recent applications of his framework in media research (e.g., Hovden & Rosenlund, 2021; Lindell, 2022; Sivertsen, 2023). Although public (dis)connection, in principle, can be a matter of choice for individuals (e.g., Andersen, Toff, & Ytre-Arne, 2024), we direct attention toward how individuals' social position, in accordance with their possession of resources, can restrict or promote interest and orientation toward public issues, information, and forms of public participation.

Further, we reconceptualize the concept of public connection to sensitize it to survey research on the conditions of low-income citizens. We posit that public connection can be productively studied at two basic levels: as manifest public connection (mediated or nonmediated practices indicating explicit, observable interest or attention to political matters), and as latent public connection (mediated or nonmediated practices indicating potential for public connection).

To operationalize this approach, we use data from Norwegian Monitor, a nationally representative population survey (N = 11,025), with a large enough subsample of low-income individuals (N = 549) to allow meaningful statistical analyses and generalizable conclusions within this category. In the analysis, we unpack relationships between resources, media use, and public connection in the low-income strata through a three-step process. Employing multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), we first construct the Norwegian space of public connection based on the whole population sample. Second, we zoom in on the media practices and attitudes of low-income citizens and illuminate their subspace of public connection. In the third step, we employ cluster analysis to identify five socially distinct types of public connection in the low-income demographic, and how they entail both manifest and latent forms of public connection, as well as public disconnection.

Based on our findings, we critically discuss key underlying notions of the current media policy regimes of Nordic media welfare states and highlight how analytical efforts, such as the one presented in this study, can serve as a foundation for media policies better equipped to deal with poverty-induced disconnection. In this way, the article aims to contribute conceptual advancement, provide new empirical knowledge, add nuance to this critical demographic seldom studied before, and offer impetus to current discussions on media policy amid rising social inequality.

Latent and Manifest Public Connection

Public connection constitutes a baseline factor in functioning democracies and is inherent in all major theories of democracy (Couldry et al., 2010, pp. 8–10). To be publicly connected means to have a certain personal orientation toward issues of collective, public, or political interest—an orientation toward a public world where matters of common interest are addressed. This goes beyond issues related to electoral politics and politics in a more general sense (Couldry et al., 2010) and captures an orientation toward any of those issues affecting how we live together that require a common resolution.

Such orientations may be facilitated by nonmediated, physical, and social practices, such as everyday talk and discussions among people. However, it is increasingly a matter of citizens' media use, where various media may provide different paths to the public world. As premised in a still-growing body of empirical studies, this orientation is necessarily rooted in and enabled by everyday media use, habits, and practices (Kaun, 2012; Swart et al., 2019). Similarly, people's media repertoires (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006) and how these are composed by different genres (from news to TV series) and by different topics (from sports to international politics) must be seen as constitutive factors for such an orientation. In theories on mediatization, it is argued that there is a deep embeddedness, interdependence, and interconnectedness of the media in everyday life, blurring the lines between mediated and nonmediated reality (e.g., Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Although our

empirical focus is primarily on media practices and mediated public connection, we also include indicators of nonmediated public connection, since they can be interconnected with the mediated reality of individuals.

To operationalize the concept of public connection for empirical research, we suggest an analytical separation between, first, explicitly political, civic, and public orientations and—practices, and second, practices entailing a possibility for orientation toward the public world and—issues. Here, we posit that public connection can be productively studied at two basic levels: a manifest and a latent level of public connection. Although these levels are connected, such conceptual division is useful because it separates between orientations and actions with different chances of leading to real political consequences. Latent public connection is an important foundation for manifest public connection, while manifest public connection is more likely to produce real political consequences.

Manifest public connection captures explicit, observable public and political practices, such as voting, contacting politicians, expressing political attitudes, or participating in demonstrations. The manifest level may also include the consumption of political news and political debates and programs, and participation in mediated or online forms of political or civic discourse.

Latent public connection captures basic attitudes toward the public sphere, politics, and public institutions that may precondition manifest forms of public connection—a "pre-political" dimension (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). This may include individuals' interest in politics and attitudes toward public and political institutions, or public—but not explicitly political—practices (i.e., volunteering or interest in societal issues, social engagement and interaction). In mediated forms, latent public connection also includes the more ordinary practices and repertoires that may facilitate exposure to content of collective, public, or political interest (i.e., certain types of TV channels and content).

This operationalization can be hierarchically illustrated as a pyramid or iceberg (Figure 1), where the top part is the more manifest expressions of public connection, while underneath, there is a multitude of latent and often less explicitly political practices or attitudes, providing the foundation and prerequisites for manifest public connection practices, in either mediated or nonmediated forms. Also included in this model is the absence of such practices—public disconnection, positioned below.

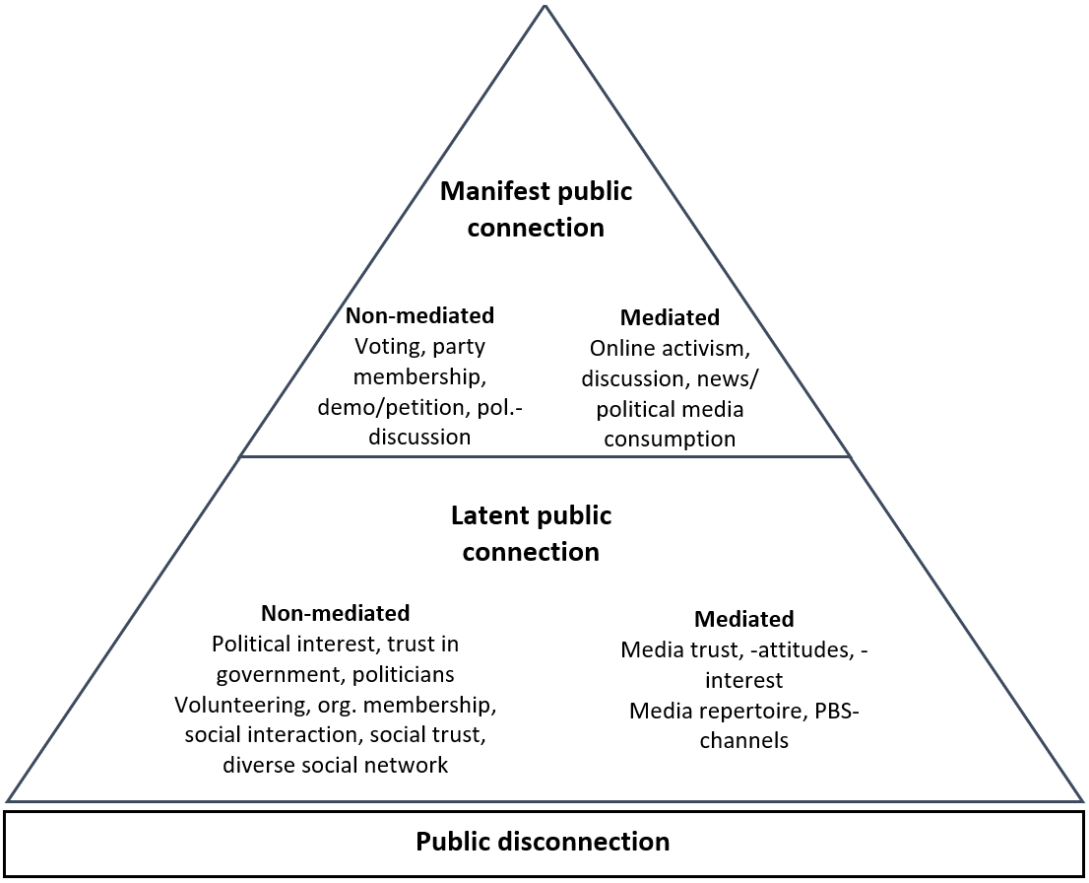

Figure 1. Latent and manifest public connection. Mediated and nonmediated forms.

This conceptualization has several advantages. First, by clarifying key components, it offers a productive starting point for identifying variables relevant to public connection. Second, it offers a framework for clarifying the scope of the empirical analysis. For instance, one may concentrate exclusively on nonmediated or mediated forms of public connection, or, alternatively, on manifest or latent expressions of public connection only, or even analyze all of these in combination. In our study, we primarily focus on mediated public connection (latent and manifest), but we also include indicators of nonmediated public connection. Last, our conceptualization invites combination with class analysis to explore how possession of or access to different forms of capital, and hence class position, shapes citizens' level and type of public connection.

Social Inequality and Public Connection: A Bourdieusian Approach

Public connection requires certain types of resources, like access to and knowledge and skills for interpreting information and forms of participation. It also requires certain values, motivations, and affinities for being informed and to participate in public discussion. Such resources are unevenly distributed in society. A key insight from the work of Pierre Bourdieu is that individuals' access to different forms of resources, in

terms of both composition and total volume, determines their position in a social hierarchy and hence their ability to influence their life situations (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu distinguished between several forms of capital that are distributed unequally in most societies: economic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Consequently, individuals' social position will shape their media practices and public connection, as argued by Hovden and Rosenlund (2021), Lindell and Hovden (2018), and Sivertsen and Hartley (2023). Primarily, we will investigate how differences in public connection vary with economic capital.

Our reason for focusing on economic disadvantage is pragmatic. Our objective is to explore media use and public connection within the poverty demographic—a demographic defined by economy. Consequently, to identify and zoom in on this demographic, we start by focusing on economic capital. However, we will also investigate other class-related factors, such as education, employment, and professional position, and characteristics, such as age, gender, and immigrant background.

Along with previous studies in Scandinavia, Hovden and Rosenlund (2021) find that central aspects of Norwegians' media use diverge along class lines, regarding both volume and forms of capital. The media use of the lower classes tends to be significantly less oriented toward political and international news. This demographic is also characterized by less usage of large national broadsheet newspapers and a lower preference for public service TV channels compared with the higher classes.

These findings suggest the continued relevance of Bourdieu's (1984) thesis on the homology between social classes and lifestyles, including media practices and public connection. Hitherto, missing in the literature is a particular focus on media practices and public connection among citizens in the lower spectrum of the social space, specifically those with low levels of economic capital. Hence, using a Bourdieusian methodological approach, we seek to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How is the Norwegian space of public connection structured regarding the strength and forms of public connection, possession of resources, and personal characteristics?

RQ2: How does the subspace of public connection for low-income citizens compare to the general space of public connection in Norway?

RQ3: How does public connection vary within the low-income strata regarding the strength and forms of public connection, possession of resources, and personal characteristics?

The Case of Norway

A set of country-specific features constitutes Norway as a "critical case" (Flyvbjerg, 2006) of strategic relevance for examining the interplay between social background, media use, and public connection. First, it represents an affluent welfare context known for comparatively small class divides (Hjellbrekke et al., 2015), although inequalities have risen over time (Geier & Grini, 2018), to a large extent driven by wealth accumulation and inheritance in families (Hansen & Toft, 2021). Additionally, the number of low-income citizens has slowly increased over the past 30 years (Omholt, 2019), and according to Statistics Norway (2023), 10.7% of the Norwegian population (N = 56,1000, students excluded) live in what

can be termed "relative poverty" (Townsend, 1979). This means that they have a perpetually poorer economy and less favorable living conditions than what is regarded as necessary or normal in Norway (Statistics Norway, 2023).

Second, Norway is, like its Nordic neighbors, a media welfare state (Syvertsen et al., 2014), in which far-reaching cultural policies are deployed to pursue various measures of access. These include extensive press subsidies, a publicly funded public broadcaster, efforts to make news available through public sponsorship, libraries, and a well-developed digital infrastructure (Syvertsen et al., 2014). Yet, as shown above, unfavorable class position remains a predictor of low use of connective media, such as news (Hovden & Rosenlund, 2021).

This combination of favorable conditions and persistent inequalities allows for insights of potential validity beyond the specific context of Norway. As a case, it lends itself first and foremost to countries sharing the same contextual features—in northwestern Europe and the Nordics in particular. In regions marked by greater inequalities, absolute poverty, and less functional media systems, the relevance is less obvious.

Data and Methods

To answer the research questions, we will analyze data from the Norwegian Monitor survey, which includes 11,025 respondents.[2] Generally, the Monitor data are considered representative of the Norwegian population over 15 years old (Hellevik, 2016), but we do find underrepresentation of certain social categories, e.g., immigrants (Online appendix[3]). To identify low-income citizens, we use the EU-60 standard, defining low-income as total personal income covering 60% or less of the median net income per consumer unit in the population. We further adjust this measure to the size of the household of the respondent.[4] By this measure, we identify 549 low-income respondents.

Public connection is operationalized with a broad set of indicators measuring manifest-, latent-, mediated-, and non-mediated public connection (full list in online appendix). These include, among others, (1) indicators of voting, political membership, and political demonstration (manifest nonmediated), (2) indicators of online petition, online and paper news consumption, interest in political media and newspaper

[2] To increase number of respondents, specifically low-income respondents, we merged three waves of the survey into one dataset and analyzed it as such (2017: N = 3,778, 2019: N = 3,710, 2021: N = 3,537

[3] https://docs.google.com/document/d/1s2rIoSRwEX7_bh7ILbpGp4f5ZzHVCPFAxJoVnVF6YmM/edit?usp=sharing

[4] Low-income individuals are identified as below 300,000 NOK for singles without children, below 400,000 NOK for single parents with one child, below 500,000 NOK for single parents with two or more children, below 400,000 NOK for couples without children, below 500,000 NOK for couples with one child, below 600,000 NOK for couples with two children; and below 700,000 NOK for couples with three or more children. Students are removed and considered temporary low-income individuals, while we are interested in a more persistent low-income situation. Additionally, we have excluded individuals with more than 100,000 NOK in bank savings.

content (manifest mediated), (3) indicators of political interest, organizational membership and volunteering, trust in government, prioritization of political issues, and contentment with politics (latent nonmediated), and (4) various indicators for ordinary media practices that may facilitate exposure to content of collective, public, or political interest (latent mediated), e.g., trust in, use of, and time spent on various media outlets; assessed democratic importance of independent public broadcasting; interest in different types of TV content; and most important news source.[5] As for personal characteristics projected onto the spaces, we will investigate how traits such as age, gender, employment, education, residential area, and immigrant background vary along with indicators of public connection and income.

Our main method of analysis is MCA, a nonlinear method for identifying the structure of data (Blasius, Lebaron, Le Roux, & Schmitz, 2020). This technique applies to a relational understanding of the social world, identifying and modeling differences and similarities between individuals and their characteristics. It is a technique in which variables, categories, or values may be conceptualized as clouds of points within a geometric social space, providing the mean positions of the active variables, categories, or values (Hjellbrekke, 2019). Previous MCA-based media studies in Scandinavia have, by constructing social spaces based on capital indicators, shown a general pattern of systematic links between social class (capital volume and composition) and everyday media use (Hovden & Rosenlund, 2021; Lindell & Hovden, 2018; Sivertsen, 2023). Instead of replicating this procedure, we will start by constructing the space of public connection with inspiration from Hovden and Rosenlund (2021), Purhonen, Leguina, and Heikkilä (2021), and Sivertsen (2023) using indicators of public connection as active variables. This will help us understand how public connection is composed relative to our theoretical conceptualization of manifest and latent public connection, and how public connection is shaped, using personal traits as characterizing elements. Such a formally constructed map of the space of public connection allows us to interpret nonlinear relations between multiple indicators of public connection, class position, and other personal characteristics. This is important because class differences in certain forms of cultural activities have been found to be slight, while other factors have a stronger influence on certain cultural divides (Hovden & Rosenlund, 2021).

First, we construct the space of public connection for the population sample (N = 11,025), using the public connection indicators as active categorical variables (114 variables).[6] Subsequently, we use the same procedure for the low-income citizens (N = 549, 110 variables). This facilitates a much closer investigation of the relationships between public connection and personal characteristics among low-income

[5] By including a variety of indicators of everyday media practices in the analyses we maintain an open and inductive approach to what mediated public connection may constitute, and how it relates to non-mediated public connection. Although this makes the analyses somewhat unbalanced (triangle-shape of cloud of individuals in appendix figure 1 and 2) we argue that the analyses highlight important empirical divisions in the forms and levels of public connection in different social strata.

[6] Some original active variables/categories were redefined as supplementary due to low frequency in the data (threshold 5%), being obvious outliers, or having a particularly high contribution to an axis which may overshadow the contribution from other variables/categories. To highlight important oppositions, categories with a relative contribution (Cos2) of less than 0.2 are omitted from the graphic presentation but are still active in the construction of the space. For the same purpose, some of the active variables' negative values (i.e., voted = 1/not voted = 0) are included as supplemental variables and included in the graphic presentation.

citizens than has been conducted previously, to our knowledge. Onto the two spaces, we project indicators for personal characteristics and social position as supplementary variables, allowing us to inspect how personal characteristics, on average, are positioned in the space of public connection.

The analyses identify several axes representing the important polarities in the data. For the general space (Figure 2), the first two axes contribute to a total of 64.6% of the variance (Axis 1 = 42.6% and Axis 2 = 22%. Benzécri's modified rate. Appendix Table 1). From Axis 2 to Axis 3 in both spaces, there is a marked reduction in variance contribution (13.4% and 13.1%), leading us to concentrate the analyses on Axis 1 and 2 [7]. In the subspace for the low-income respondents (Figure 3), the first two axes contribute 61% of the variance. We interpret the oppositions on the axes using the statistical output (online appendix) and identify the variables and categories contributing the most to the axes—the higher the percentage contribution, the more important the category is for interpreting the axis.[8]

Last, for the low-income respondents, we investigate the cloud of individuals projected onto the same space and apply a hierarchical agglomerate clustering analysis (HAC). When the HAC is applied, the axes are defined as the variables used for clustering the individuals, and each individual's factor coordinate becomes a value on a variable. Individuals with the strongest similarities in factor coordinates are the ones most likely to be grouped together in a cluster (Hjellbrekke, 2019, p. 82). This analysis permits a detailed investigation of homogeneity and heterogeneity structures to identify patterns of dispersion around the mean positions of the active categories (Hjellbrekke, 2019). This allows us to investigate potential subtypes of public (dis)connection and personal traits characterizing such types. The MCA and HAC are performed using the Coheris Analytics SPAD software.

The General Space of Public Connection

In the following section, we will construct the general space of public connection and investigate how it is structured regarding the strength and forms of public connection, possession of resources, and personal characteristics (RQ1). In Figure 2, we display the categories' mean positions in the space along the first two axes. Indicators of nonmediated public connection are marked in black, indicators of mediated public connection are blue, and supplemental categories are red.

Influenced by our focus on mediated public connection and indicators of media practices and attitudes, we find that such indicators contribute the most to the variance on Axis 1 (horizontally), along with a few indicators of political contentment and government trust. We interpret this axis mainly as a media practice axis, illustrating oppositions to practices and opinions concerning media channels, formats, and content. Focusing on the indicators with high contribution, on the far-left side, we find interest for Norwegian

[7] Although at a lower rate, Axis 3 seems to have a substantial contribution in both spaces, suggesting an axis based on gender in the first space and age in the second space.

[8] Categories with a contribution higher than the average are to be included in the set of explanatory points. The critical value for the explanatory points is found by 1/K, i.e. 1 divided by the number of categories in the row variable. Variables with a cumulated contribution from categories >1/Q are the most important variables in the analysis (Hjellbrekke, 2019).

niche TV channels concerned with movies, series, sports, and news (Max, TV2 Zebra, FEM, TV2 Sport, TV3, TV2 Nyhetskanalen). Further toward the center, we find TV as the main news source, watching TV for more than an hour a day, watching public and commercial broadcast channels (NRK, TV2), and interest in reading tabloid newspapers (VG, Dagbladet). On the right side of the center, we find contentment with politics, the use of streaming services (HBO, Netflix, NRK), and online newspapers as the main source of news, as well as indicators of high trust in newspapers, in commercial and public broadcasters, and in government. Last, in the top-right corner, we find the indicator for deeming the public broadcaster NRK as societally important, alongside interest in cultural content in newspapers.

A central opposition on this axis seems to be between traditional media practices, such as linear TV consumption, and a more modern digital media repertoire as well as more trust in broadcasting and newspapers. This resonates well with similar analyses in Finland (Purhonen et al., 2021) and Denmark (Sivertsen, 2023). The interpretation of Axis 1 as an opposition between traditional and modern media practices is also supported by the positioning of life-phase indicators, with pensioners positioned to the left, and the youngest (15–24 years old), along with students, positioned to the right, indicating generational differences in media use (Hovden & Rosenlund, 2021).

On Axis 2, the variables contributing the most to the orientation of the axis are deeming NRK to be societally important; interest in cultural news; high trust in public broadcasting (NRK, TV2), newspapers, and in local government and politicians; interest in cultural and political news; consumption of political and cultural media content and news; and high political interest. This leads us to interpret Axis 2 as a public connection strength axis, separating strong and weak public connection and trust in media and government. In the bottom section, we find few active indicators of public connection overall, except the indicator for weekly or less online news consumption. However, we also find negative responses to some of the public connection indicators here (included as supplemental indicators). In the top section, we find most indicators of public connection, both manifest and latent, mediated and nonmediated. These include, for example, interest in cultural news, deeming NRK to be societally important, consumption of business news and governmental information, high trust in government, public broadcast channels, and newspapers, contentment with politics, high political interest, and interest in various cultural, civic, societal, and political content on TV and in newspapers.

From the positions of the social characteristics, including indicators of class (economic and cultural capital), we find the space of public connection to be characterized by a hierarchical class structure, with less income and education at the bottom, and higher income in the top section. The positions of most income categories, categories for the lower levels of education, employment status and professional positions, and categories for place of residency are far enough from the barycenter to allow for a substantial interpretation of their position as influenced by the indicators of public connection.[9] Categories of low income, temporary unemployment, skilled or unskilled labor, social security use, and varying employment are in the lower

[9] In Spad, the "distance to origin" test-value is a measurement of the standard deviation from origo (the axes' zero point). When the value/distance is higher than 2 standard deviations, the category typically has a statistically significant position outside of the axis' zero point, using a 5% threshold. This interpretation is supported by output from v-tests of the categories' standard deviations along the axes.

section, while high wages, higher education, and leading professional positions are in the top section. We also find categories of age and gender to be positioned differently, with increasing age as we go upward in the space, and men positioned higher than women. Urban residency is positioned in the top section, while less urban and rural residency is positioned further down.

Toward the bottom, we also find our main category of interest: the low-income category (in bold red), which leads us to interpret this group's mean position as being in an area of significantly weaker public connection than the general population. This position is also supported by descriptive statistics (Table 1), which show fewer positive responses from low-income citizens on most indicators of public connection compared with the population sample, particularly among those aged 40 years and over. However, as we will turn to next, by opening the "black box" of public connection among low-income citizens, we will illustrate a much more complex and diverse state of public connection for this group.

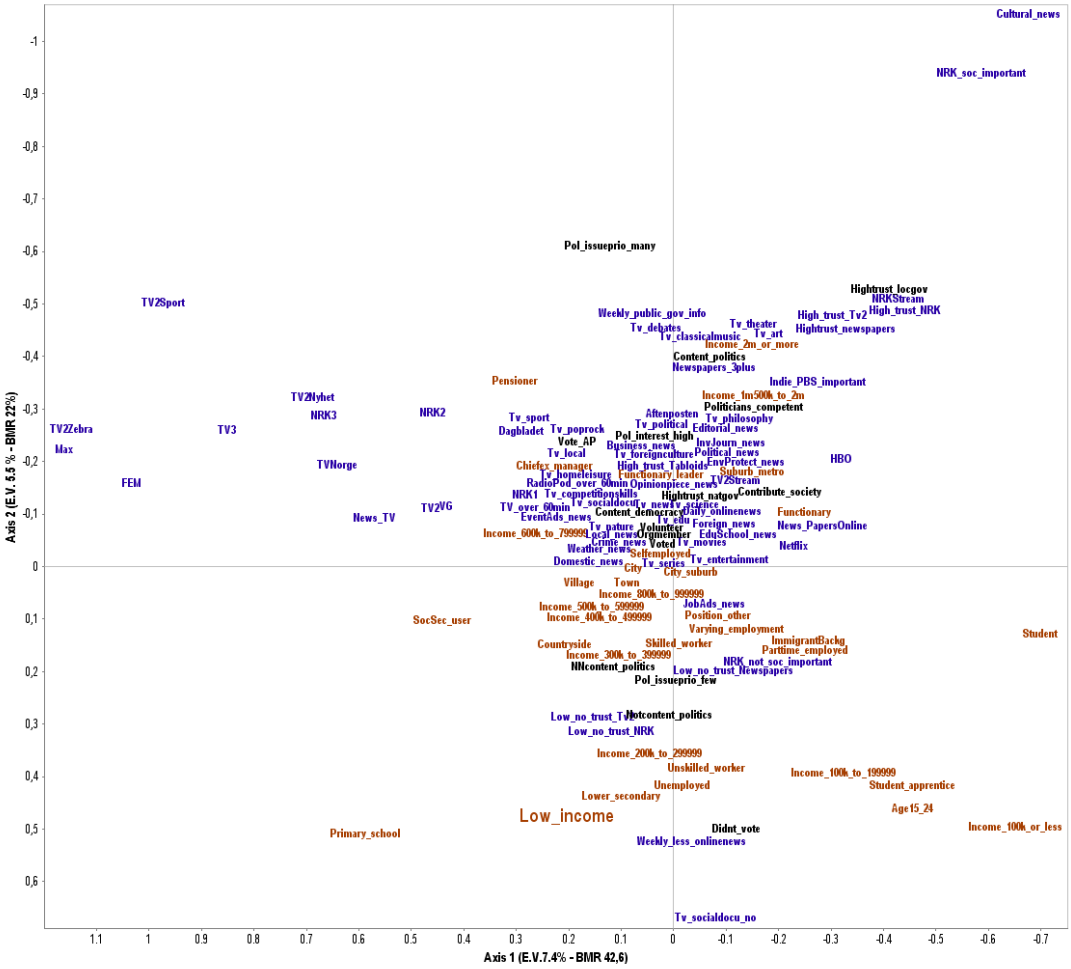

Figure 2. Space of public connection, population sample. Cloud of categories.

Table 1. Indicators of Public Connection. Population Sample and Low-income Segment.

Nonmediated public connection				
Variable	**Age (*P*.value)**	**Pop.sample %**	**Low-income %**	**Diff.**
Voted	15–39	83	80	−3
	40+(***)	95	87	−8
Partymember	15–39	15	20	5
	40+	17	18	1
DemoPetition	15–39(*)	15	8	−7
	40+	7	3	−4
Promote_issue_likely	15–39	12	9	−3
	40+(**)	12	6	−6
Pol_interest_high	15–39	57	49	−8
	40+(**)	12	6	−6
Orgmember	15–39	72	67	−5
	40+(***)	81	71	−10
Volunteer	15–39	49	50	1
	40+(***)	55	44	−11
Contribute_society	15–39	68	64	−4
	40+(***)	58	47	−11
Hightrust_natgov.	15–39(***)	76	57	−19
	40+(***)	79	53	−26
Hightrust_locgov	15–39(***)	40	19	−21
	40+(***)	36	20	−16
Politicians_competent	15–39	33	31	−2
	40+(***)	41	26	−15
Content_politics	15–39(***)	30	17	−13
	40+(***)	40	21	−19
Content_democracy	15–39(***)	84	65	−19
	40+(***)	87	67	−20

Mediated public connection				
Variable	**Age (*P*.value)**	**Pop.sample %**	**Low-income %**	**Diff.**
Onlinepetition	15–39(*)	16	10	−6
	40+(**)	9	4	−5
Daily_onlinenews	15–39(***)	82	67	−15
	40+(***)	81	61	−20
Tv_news	15–39	83	79	−4
	40+(***)	95	88	−7
Tv_debates	15–39	22	19	−3
	40+	30	27	−3
Tv_political	15–39(***)	62	50	−12
	40+(***)	81	68	−13
Newspapers_3plus	15–39(***)	35	22	−13
	40+(***)	38	22	−16
High_trust_NRK	15–39(***)	56	31	−25
	40+(***)	51	30	−21
High_trust_TV2	15–39(***)	55	31	−24
	40+(***)	51	30	−21
High_trust_Newspapers	15–39(***)	53	32	−21
	40+(***)	49	33	−16
High_trust_Tabloids	15–39	29	22	−7
	40+	19	18	−1
Indie_PBS_important	15–39(***)	62	45	−17
	40+(***)	60	45	−15
NRK_soc_important	15–39(***)	27	13	−14
	40+(***)	28	13	−15
TV_over_60min	15–39	56	57	1
	40+	72	71	−1
RadioPod_over_60min	15–39	72	71	−1
	40+	22	21	−1
Newspapers_over_60min	15–39	4	6	2
	40+	14	14	0

Chi-sq: *** $p < 0.001 = 0.1$/** $p < 0.01 = 1$/* $p < 0.05 = 5\%$ likelihood of random variation.

The Space of Public Connection for the Low-Income Group

We will now inspect the internal variation between low-income citizens regarding public connection—how the space of public connection for low-income citizens is structured, and how it compares to the general space of public connection (RQ2).

As displayed in Figure 3, we find this subspace to resemble the general space of public connection. Axis 1 denotes media practices, differentiating between traditional media practices on the left side and

somewhat more modern and digital media practices on the right side. On the left side, we find indicators for interest in national/international niche and linear TV channels, commercial and public broadcast channels, TV as main news source, and watching TV for 1 hour or more a day. On the right side, we find indicators of streaming services and online newspapers as the main source of news, as well as willingness to contribute to society. We do find less rightward dispersion from the center on Axis 1 compared with the space for the general population sample. Additionally, the BMR for Axis 1 is somewhat smaller (37.7%) compared with the space for the population sample (42.6%). Overall, this indicates a higher prevalence of traditional and linear media practices in the low-income segment.

Similar to the population sample, on Axis 2, there is a clear vertical opposition between strong (top) and weak public connection (bottom). In the top section, we find high trust in public broadcasters, newspapers, and local government; party membership; high political interest; and interest in political and cultural media content. In the bottom section, we find a few active indicators for public connection overall, but we find indicators of less frequent online news consumption and less frequently searching for information from government.

As for the social characteristics, the position of the youngest age category (15–24), immigrant background, varying employment, type of paid position, residential area, and cultural capital (primary, lower secondary, and higher university/college education) are far enough from the barycenter to allow for a substantial interpretation of their position as influenced by the indicators of public connection.[10] The categories for the youngest, persons with immigrant background, the variously employed, unskilled workers, the self-employed, rural residents, and persons with primary and lower secondary education, are all in positions characterized by weaker public connection. The same goes for several income categories, indicating that different levels of income within the low-income group do not create strong hierarchical oppositions regarding public connection. Individuals living in a metropolitan city, temporary unemployed individuals, functionaries, and individuals with higher education are placed in more strongly publicly connected positions. Here, it seems that the traditional hierarchical structure of work positions is less relevant for the structure of public connection within the low-income group. Regarding educational level, the positions of these categories follow a more traditional hierarchical structure from primary education in the bottom section and higher education in the upper section of the space, indicating a covariation between educational level and public connection strength, also within the low-income group. Hence, the level of cultural capital seems to make a difference regarding public connection within the low-income segment.

[10] Footnote 7

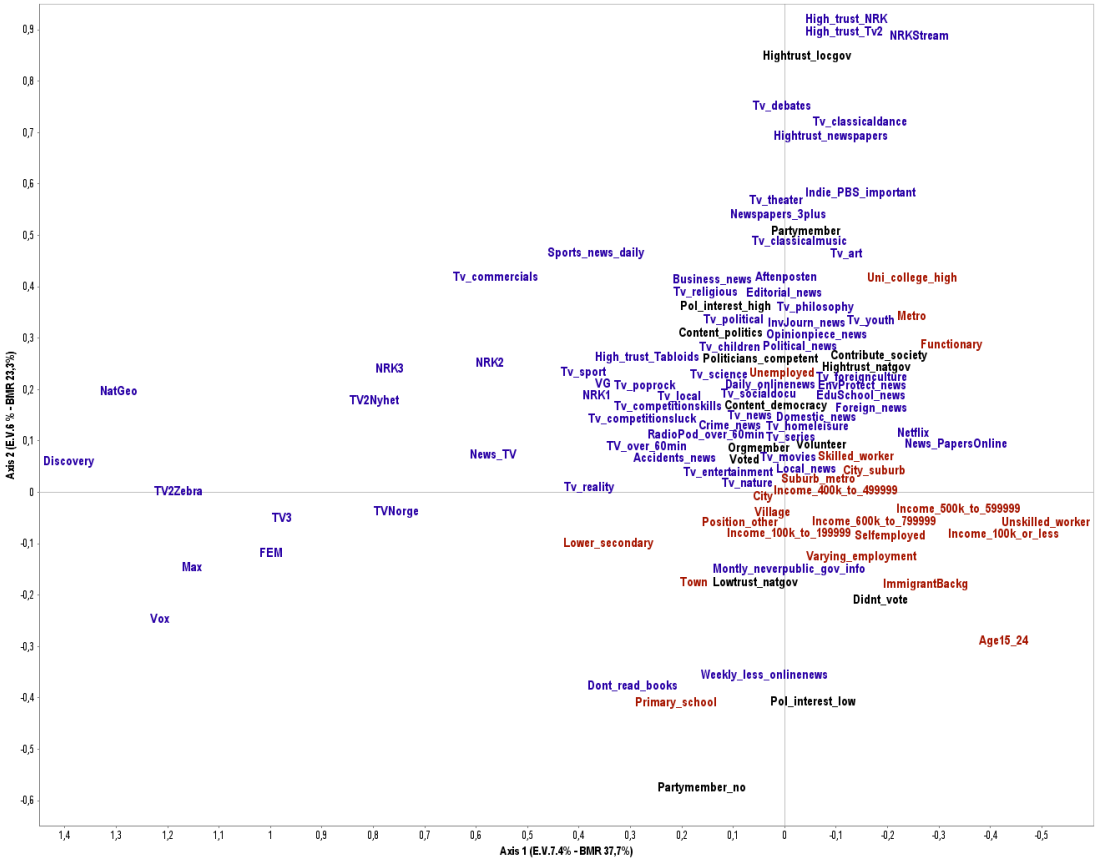

Figure 3. Subspace of public connection, low-income respondents. Cloud of categories.

What we have illustrated is that although the low-income segment, as a uniform category in the general space of public connection, has its mean position in an area characterized by very weak public connection, such a uniform category and its position, conceals a wide variation of degrees and forms of public connection. To further investigate the diversity of such a microcosm (RQ3), we conduct a clustering analysis (HAC) to see how the low-income respondents are positioned in this subspace of public connection (Appendix Figure 2). Do specific subgroups of low-income respondents cluster together in certain positions, and do such groups have common identifiable traits? From the HAC, we retain five clusters, representing five distinct groups of low-income respondents with different types of media practices and public connection.[11] In Table 2, we listed the most significant characteristics of the respondents in these clusters, both by their responses to questions measuring public connection and their social characteristics.

[11] Adding more clusters did not provide much more relevant information (Dendrogram Appendix Figure 3).

Table 2. Clusters. Active Variables (N = >5 and P.Value < 0.001). Supplementary Variables (P.Value < 0.05).

Cluster	**Variable** (*P*.value)	**% in cluster**	**% in sample**
1 **(10.9%)**	Cultural_news(***)	78.3	10.9
	NRK_soc_important(***)	80.0	12.6
	Promote_issue_Likely(***)	48.3	7.1
	Onlinepetition(***)	41.7	6.0
	Indie_PBS_important(***)	96.7	44.6
	Sport_news(***)	40.0	5.8
	Hightrust_newspapers(***)	80.0	32.4
	High_trust_NRK(***)	76.7	30.6
	High_trust_Tv2(***)	76.7	30.6
	NRKStream(***)	58.3	20.2
	Hightrust_locgov(***)	51.7	19.7
	HBO(***)	28.3	11.8
	Netflix(***)	60.0	38.3
	Metro(**)	**30.0**	**17.9**
	Age25_39(*)	**38.3**	**26.6**
2 **(17.3%)**	High_trust_NRK(***)	63.2	30.6
	High_trust_Tv2(***)	63.2	30.6
	NRKStream(***)	47.4	20.2
	News_PapersOnline(***)	54.7	27.9
	Indie_PBS_important(***)	72.6	44.6
	Vote_MDG(***)	18.9	5.1
	Daily_onlinenews(***)	87.4	63.8
	Tv_science(***)	91.6	71.4
	Netflix(***)	60.0	38.3
	Newspapers_3plus(***)	41.1	21.9
	Contribute_society(***)	73.7	53.2
	Pol_interest_high(***)	74.7	54.6
	Vote_R(***)	18.9	7.8
	InvJourn_news(***)	80.0	63.0
	Hightrust_locgov(***)	33.7	19.7
	Hightrust_newspapers(***)	48.4	32.4
	Tv_edu(***)	70.5	54.8
	Foreign_news(***)	89.5	76.7
	Age25_39(***)	**44.2**	**26.6**
	Temp_Unemployed(***)	**17.9**	**7.8**
	Functionary(*)	**9.5**	**4.0**
	Village(*)	**23.2**	**15.5**

Cluster	Variable (*P*.value)	% in cluster	% in sample
	Tv_political	90.8	60.8
	Tv_local	90.0	62.3
	Tv_religious	44.2	18.6
	Tv_philosophy	76.7	47.0
	Tv_foreignculture	94.2	69.0
	Tv_art	64.2	37.0
	Tv_classicaldance	38.3	17.5
	Tv_socialdocu	96.7	78.1
	NRK2	73.3	48.6
	Political_news	85.8	63.2
	Editorial_news	74.2	50.1
	Tv_classicalmusic	50.8	28.8
	Opinionpiece_news	80.8	59.9
	Tv_theater	45.0	25.1
	Tv_news	98.3	84.7
	Domestic_news	97.5	83.2
	Tv_competitionskills	80.0	59.6
	Foreign_news	93.3	76.7
3	Tv_homeleisure	79.2	59.6
	News_TV	36.7	19.5
(21.9%)	InvJourn_news	81.7	63.0
	Orgmember	86.7	69.6
	NRK1	85.8	69.6
	Hightrust_natgov	72.5	54.6
	Business_news	64.2	46.4
	Aftenposten	35.0	20.2
	Dagbladet	40.8	25.3
	Tv_debates	38.3	23.5
	Tv_nature	89.2	75.6
	Content_democracy	81.7	66.5
	Local_news	98.3	89.3
	Content_politics	33.3	19.7
	Tv_sport	57.5	41.7
	VG	44.2	29.5
	EduSchool_news	79.2	65.4
	Pensioner(***)	**47.5**	**20.6**
	Age60plus(***)	**58.3**	**30.2**
	Income_200k_to_299999(**)	**50.0**	**40.1**
	Countryside(*)	**37.5**	**29.1**

Cluster	Variable (*P*.value)	% in cluster	% in sample
4 (28.2%)	Weekly_less_onlinenews	46.5	34.4
	Montly_neverpublic_gov_info	88.4	81.2
	Dont_read_books	23.9	17.1
	Age15_24(**)	**20.0**	**12.4**
	Age25_39(**)	**36.1**	**26.6**
	ImmigrantBackg(*)	**15.5**	**10.0**
5 (21.7%)	TV2Zebra	79.8	26.6
	FEM	83.2	32.6
	TV3	86.6	35.3
	Max	80.7	27.3
	Vox	63.9	20.2
	Discovery	68.1	18.4
	NatGeo	63.0	18.6
	AnimalPlanet	53.8	15.3
	TVNorge	91.6	47.0
	TV2Nyhet	84.0	41.0
	TV2	93.3	57.4
	TV2Livsstil	43.7	14.6
	Eurosport	35.3	10.9
	NRK3	65.5	33.0
	NRK2	80.7	48.6
	BBCWorld	33.6	10.9
	TV2Sport	41.2	16.2
	NRK1	92.4	69.6
	TV_over_60min	88.2	65.8
	Vote_FRP	24.4	8.9
	Tv_poprock	53.8	37.5
	SocSec_user(***)	**38.7**	**22.8**
	Age40_59(***)	**47.9**	**30.8**
	Male(***)	**55.5**	**40.6**
	Not_employed(***)	**63.0**	**48.5**

In Cluster 1 (top-right position. 10.9%), we find a particular overrepresentation of interest in cultural news, deeming NRK to be societally important and deeming independent public broadcasting important, high trust in newspapers, in public broadcasting, and in local government, and use of streaming services. This is a cluster of high-trusting and digitally connected respondents—a group we call the digitally connected. Among these, respondents living in metropolitan areas and between the ages of 25 and 39 are overrepresented.

Cluster 2 (partly overlapping Cluster 1. Lower right side subspace position. 17%) is similar to Cluster 1, with an overrepresentation of individuals with high trust in newspapers, in public broadcasting,

and in local government, and of individuals using streaming services. In addition, we find a more news-oriented, science- and education-oriented, and politically interested segment here. This is a cluster of highly trusting, digitally, and politically connected individuals—a group we call the politically connected. This group is overrepresented by 25–39-year-olds, temporary unemployed people, functionaries, and village residents. This group is also overrepresented by persons willing to vote for the communist Red Party or the environmentalist Green Party, suggesting a more active and radical stance on politics.

Cluster 3 (partly overlapping Clusters 1 and 2. More centered subspace position. 22%) is characterized by interest in various TV content and in most types of news, reading different types of newspapers, contentment with democracy and politics, and by high trust in national government. This cluster seems to be more oriented toward traditional TV and news consumption, constituting a group we call the traditionally connected. These are more often older individuals (60+) and pensioners, individuals with an income between 200,000 and 300,000 NOK, and individuals living in the countryside. They are also overrepresented by people voting for the agrarian Centre Party.

Cluster 4 (bottom right position. 28%) is a more clearly disconnected segment, with fewer indicators of public connection, not reading books, seldom consuming online news, or searching for governmental information—a group we call the disconnected. This group is overrepresented by individuals under 39 years of age and by individuals with an immigrant background.

Last, Cluster 5 (center left position. 22%) is less publicly connected, at least considered by the measures for interest in politics and news. They are more interested in niche TV channels but also in public broadcasters and watch TV for an hour or more daily. We call this group the narrowly connected. These are often social security users and not in paid employment, between 40 and 59 years old, more often men, and overrepresented by respondents voting for the populist right-wing Progress Party.

In our previously suggested pyramid model for operationalizing public (dis)connection, we positioned the clusters as follows in Figure 4. The first three clusters are positioned in an area of manifest public connection, although not toward the top, as the connected ones among low-income respondents on average have a weaker connection than the connected ones in the general sample. The narrowly connected are positioned in the area of latent public connection, and the disconnected in the area of public disconnection.

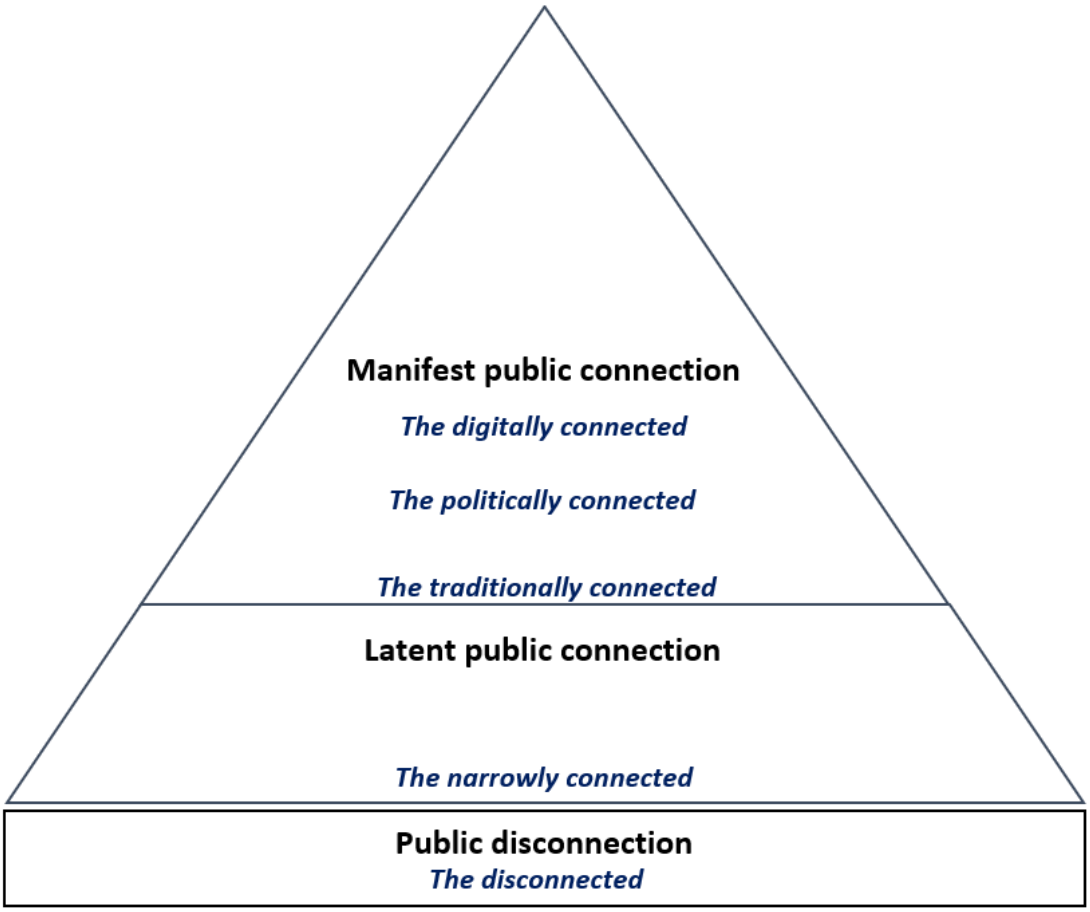

Figure 4. Low-income subgroups in model for public connection.

Discussion and Conclusion: Relative Disconnection in the Media Welfare State

This article started from the basic premise that we need to know more about how economically disadvantaged citizens connect to the public and political world through their use of the media. Focusing on the critical case of Norway, we pursued this ambition through the analysis of nationally representative survey data.

What emerges as a significant (yet not unexpected) finding is that the low-income demographic, on average, has a much weaker public connection than the more privileged demographics. As such, our study has illustrated the persistent relevance of class and resource possession for the understanding of social inequality in media practices and public connection. Despite the favorable conditions of the Nordic media welfare state, with an abundance of free or low-cost media, we find large and class-based differences in the levels and forms of public connection among citizens.

We term this disparity *relative public disconnection.* Analogous with Townsend's (1979) notion of "relative poverty," in which poverty is defined as people's lack of means to participate in society on the same level as other members of society, our analysis of public connection in Norway invites a similar relative understanding. Whereas public disconnection is very rarely absolute (i.e., no mediated connection beyond one's private sphere), we find systematic class-based disparities. The critical consequence of such disparities is that impoverished citizens have fewer possibilities for civic agency and democratic participation than other members of society. Moreover, such a relative view of public disconnection illuminates the state of affairs in the Norwegian context vis-à-vis less affluent contexts. Whereas we have documented systematic disparities, we have also highlighted that a majority of respondents in the low-income strata have media practices that entail either manifest connections to the public sphere or latent connections that suggest potential for such. Our findings thus suggest that most (in relative measures) impoverished citizens in Norway have at least a minimum level of public connection. This may very well not be the case in countries where poverty is absolute, digital divides are stark, and media systems are nonexistent or nonfunctional. In contrast to Norway, public disconnection in such countries is more likely to be absolute.

Our study offers further complexity to the relative disconnectedness of low-income citizens. As shown in the cluster analysis, there is considerable variation in the types and strengths of public connection. The digitally and politically connected (10 and 17%) exhibit media practices indicative of relatively strong and manifest public connection. Moreover, the traditionally connected (22%) exhibit media and news practices that entail latent yet distinct possibilities for connecting to the public and political spheres. This is significant: It counters dominant framings of the precariat as inherently disconnected and secluded from the world of politics. However, the prevalence of being narrowly connected (22%) and disconnected (28%), in particular, suggests a critically weak public connection among low-income citizens.

As such, our study offers important lessons for policymaking. We argue that sociological investigations of the kind we have carried out are key to designing more targeted and effective policy interventions. Through our cluster analysis, we identified particular demographics for which public connection is critically weak. Young, unemployed immigrants (the disconnected) emerge as one such demographic, whereas middle-aged men receiving social assistance benefits in rural areas (the narrowly connected) emerge as another. A media policy—and social policy—committed to its own mandate of securing the full citizenry the opportunity to be informed citizens, must target such demographics with measures sensitized to their specific conditions and needs.

Moreover, our study raises more fundamental questions about media and social policy. The first concerns the underlying principles of equality. The current policy regime in the Nordic media welfare states is aligned with "resourcism" (Rawls, 1971) in that it is set up to secure equal provisions of goods to all citizens—that is, access to media and technology, in this case. Yet, as we have shown, even in this context of the abundance of free or low-cost media, some socio-demographics remain disconnected. Following Amartya Sen's (1979) critique of resourcism in his seminal lecture "Equality of what?" we argue that the equal provision of media goods alone clearly does not guarantee equality of either outcomes or opportunity. In line with Sen's (1979) reasoning—and what later became known as the capabilities approach—we argue that equal possibilities for public connection are a question not only of access to media and technology but crucially of what people are *able to do* with these resources. As we have shown, the two critical demographics—the

disconnected and the narrowly connected—are characterized by markedly lower levels of both economic and cultural capital, which in turn suggests limited opportunities to make meaningful use of the media goods on offer. A more radical, yet fairer, media policy and social policy should start by recognizing the significance of such highly varying abilities to convert media goods into public connection, and as we have already suggested, target critical demographics with measures sensitized to their specific conditions and needs.

The second question concerns policy aims. Our separation between manifest-, latent-, and dis-connection offers an empirical starting point for discussions about what normative expectations we have of economically disadvantaged citizens. Whereas we maintain that *dis*connection is not good for neither citizens nor society, a considerable proportion of our respondents (the traditionally connected and partly the narrowly connected) have media practices that entail *potential* for manifest public connection—what we have called *latent* public connection. This suggests a "dormant" form of public connection that can be activated if needed—say, in the wake of a societal crisis. Should we expect disadvantaged citizens to be manifestly connected as implied in well-established citizenship ideals such as that of "the informed" citizen (Schudson, 1998)? Or is latent public connection a more realistic expectation, as implied in more recent "realist" ideals such as "distributed readiness citizenship" (Moe, 2020)? Clarifying such expectations is, we argue, fundamental to the identification of policy aims that commit to the normative core of citizen ideals, yet crucially, are also feasible in practice.

Our study of poverty and public connection provides a starting point for future research into this critical yet understudied demographic. By introducing and operationalizing the framework of manifest and latent public connection, and the notion of relative public (dis)connection, we provide conceptual tools for an understanding of public connection that is both more nuanced and more sensitive to specific (national) contexts. Importantly, our study has also highlighted particularly precarious groups within the poverty demographic—young migrants in particular. This suggests a need for future studies attentive to how not only economy, education, and gender matter for public connection, but also other intersecting factors such as ethnicity, disability, and age. Such studies should be complemented with qualitative efforts exploring the nature and consequences of intersectional marginalization as it plays out in the lived life of poverty.

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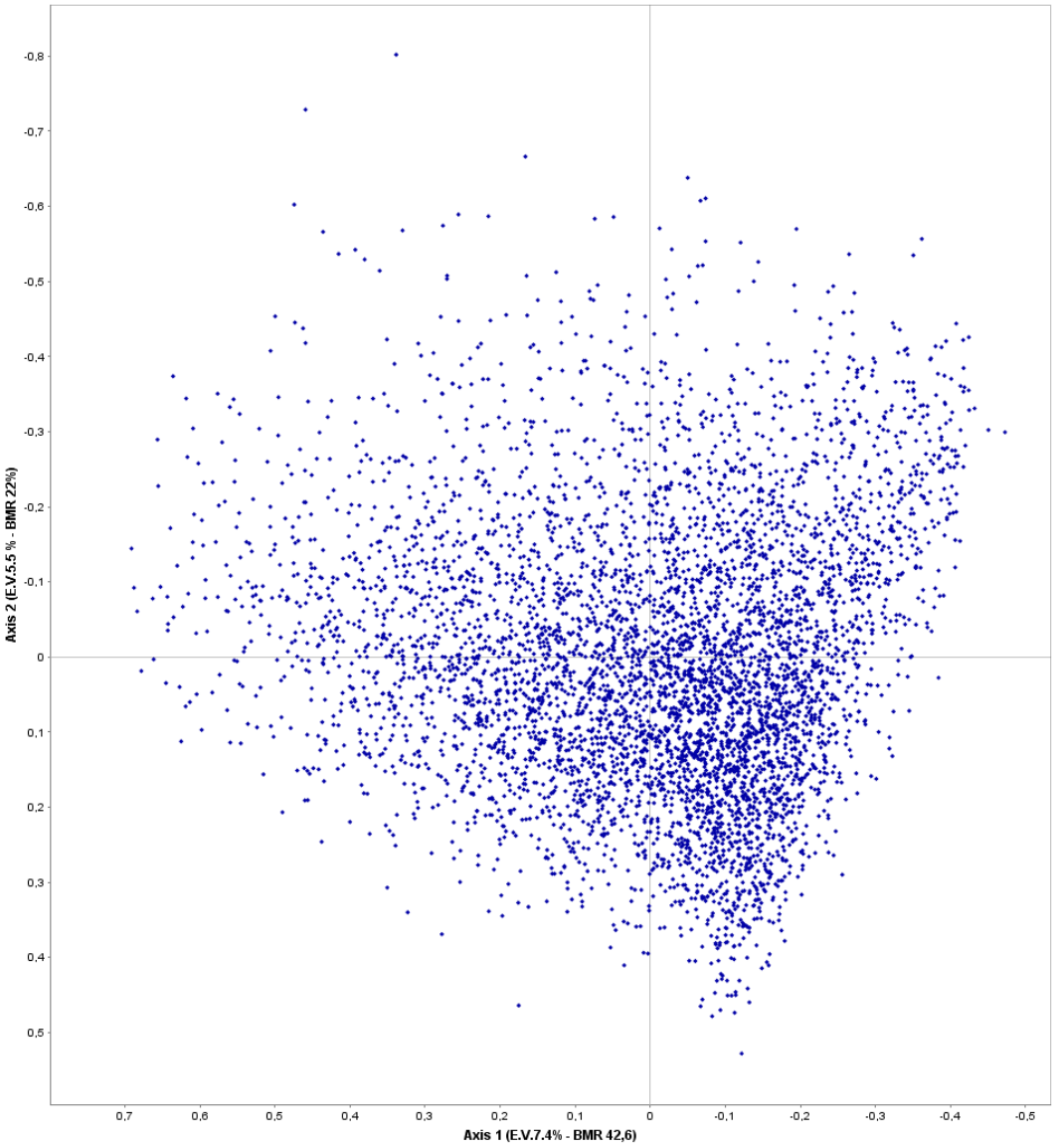
Appendix Table 1. Contribution of the First Five Axes in the MCA.

Axis	Variance of the axis (eigenvalue)	% of explained variance	Cumulated % of explained variance	Benzécri's modified rates (%)
		Population sample		
1	0.044	7.4	7.4	42.6
2	0.033	5.5	12.9	22.0
3	0.027	4.5	17.4	13.4
4	0.017	2.9	20.4	4.3
5	0.016	2.8	23.1	3.6
		Low-income category		
1	0.049	7.6	7.6	39.1
2	0.039	6.1	13.8	23.5
3	0.031	4.8	18.6	13.1
4	0.022	3.5	22.1	5.8
5	0.019	3.0	25.1	3.7

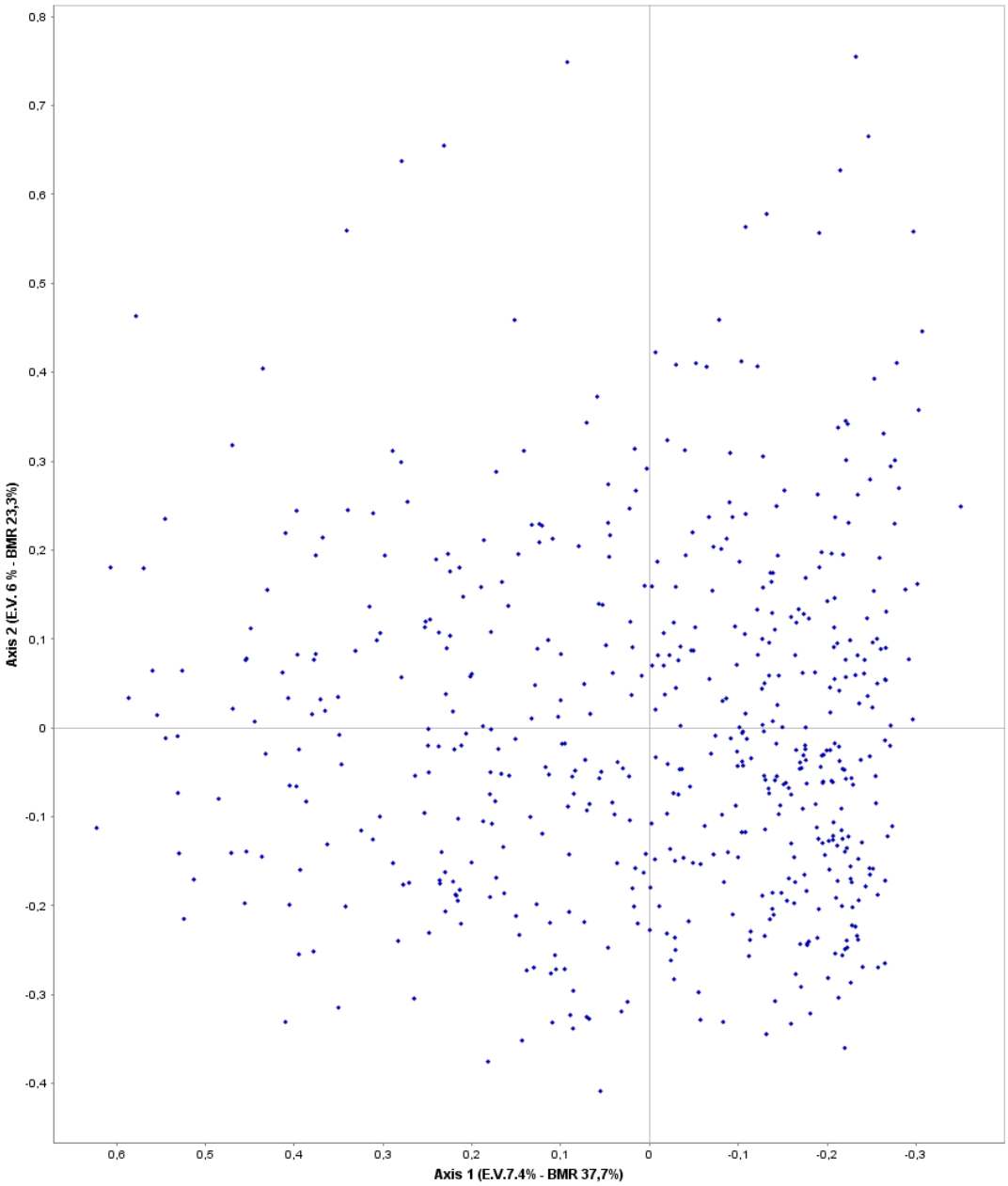
Appendix Table 2. Output from HAC.

After consolidation			
Cluster	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Inertia**
1	60	10.929	0.056
2	95	17.304	0.066
3	120	21.858	0.081
4	155	28.233	0.079
5	119	21.676	0.099
Overall	549	100.000	0.382

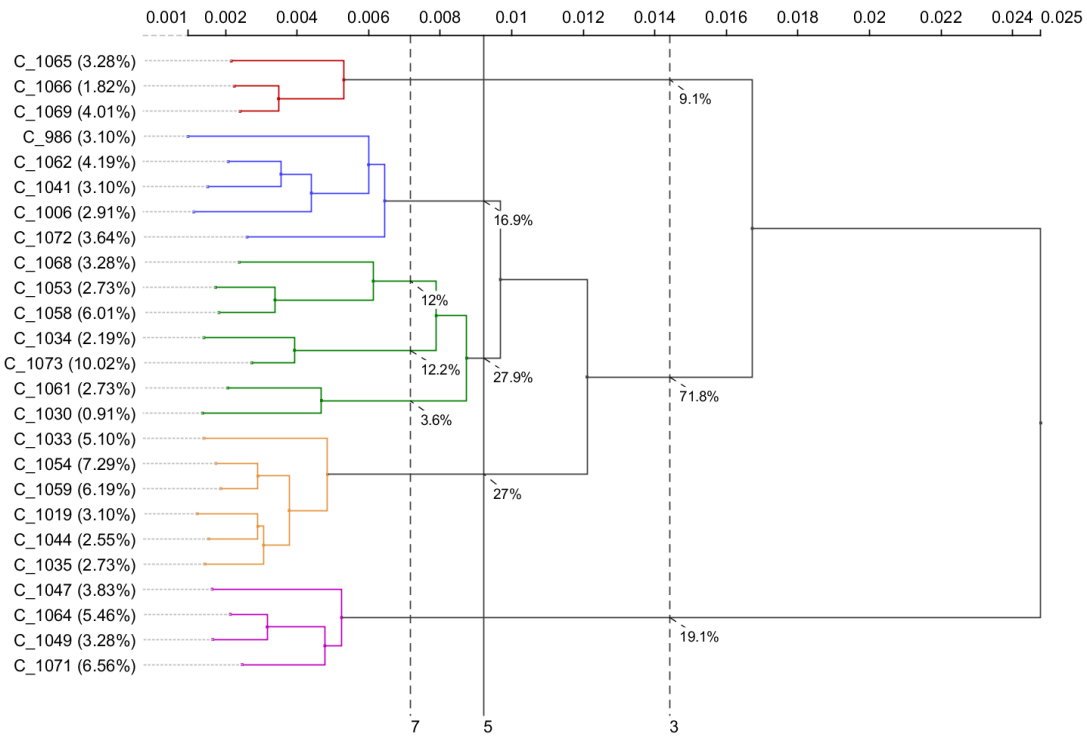
Quality indicators	
Within cluster variance	0.382
Between cluster variance	0.083
Between variance rate (η^2)	17.797
Calinski-Harabasz (pseudo-F) criterion	29.443
Davies-Bouldin's index	3.163



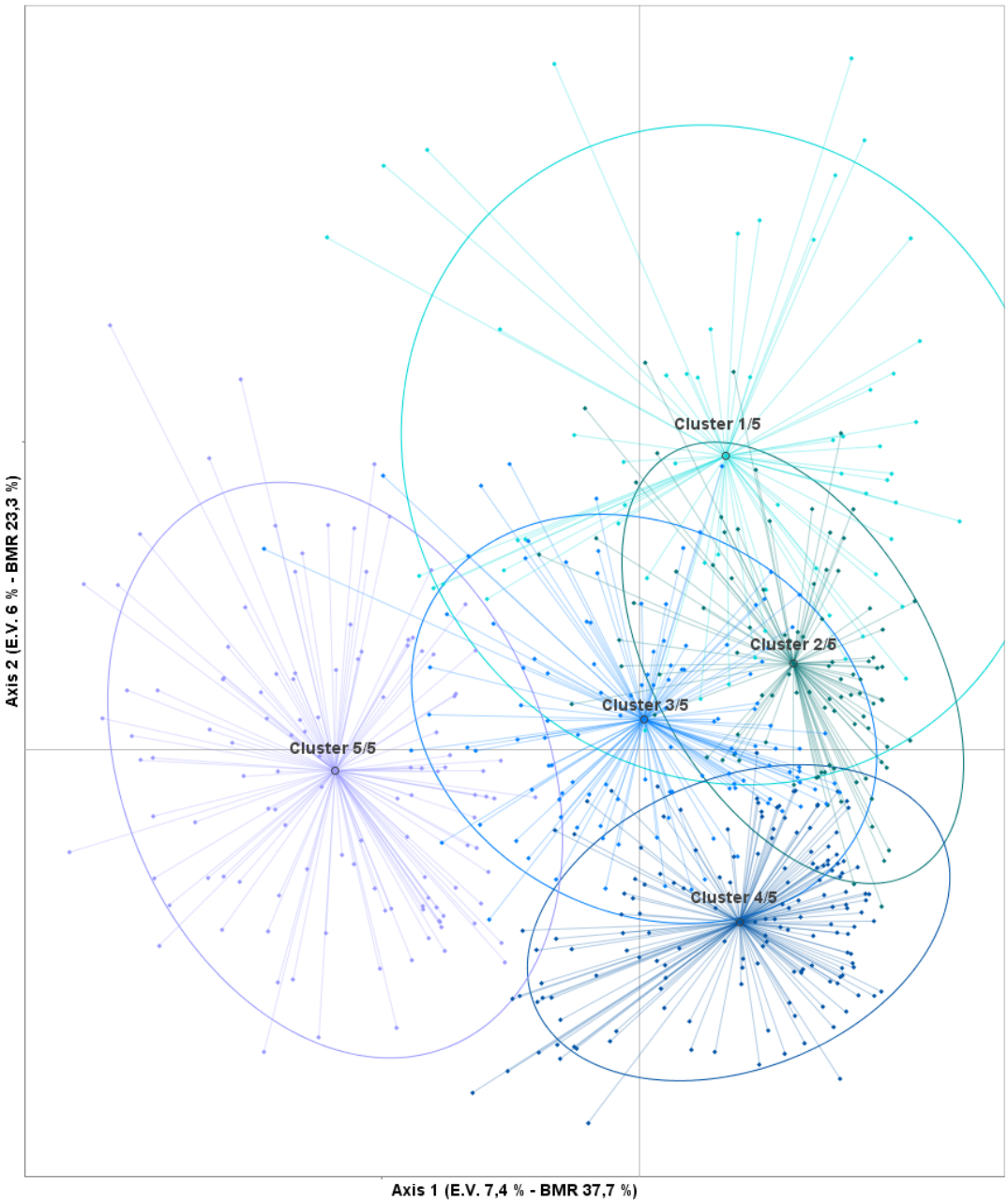
Appendix Figure 1. Space of public connection, population sample. Cloud of individuals.



Appendix Figure 2. Space of public connection, low-income respondents. Cloud of individuals.



Appendix Figure 3. Dendrogram (HAC). Clusters identified.



Appendix Figure 4. Cluster analysis (HAC).