ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	LEARNING TO LOVE THE AUDIENCE: HOW JOURNALISTS AND NEWSROOMS ADJUST TO AUDIENCE INCLUSION AND ENGAGEMENT
	Karin Assmann, Doctor of Philosophy, 2019
Dissertation directed by:	Dr. Linda Steiner, Philip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland

This study examines how institutional change in the news industry, in particular empowerment and inclusion of the audience, affects journalists. How does minding the audience, interacting with readers or viewers and engaging with them at various stages of the news production process, make journalists feel about their jobs, themselves, their workplace and their audience? How might this outcome affect journalistic output? Answering these questions is a contribution to the discourse about the future of journalism practice in a hostile economic environment. Through in-depth interviews with 131 journalists and newsroom managers in four newsrooms, with 22 audience engagement editors in 20 newsrooms and with 15 consultants and audience analytics providers, as well as through observation in three newsrooms, I offer empirical data exploring the increasingly normalized practice of audience engagement in traditional newsrooms that are trying to find sustainable business models in a news industry marked by increasing corporate ownership and austerity

measures. interacting with audience members on social media platforms to in-person events.

I find that journalists, tasked by their editors and newsroom management to engage with the audience on social media platforms, often view audience engagement as an exercise solely meant to generate revenue. Poorly articulated and communicated strategies leave many journalists feeling cynical and burdened with labor that they consider to be part of a marketing or promotions department's responsibility. Women journalists in particular experience the demands of audience engagement as requiring literally dangerous exposure of their private lives to a frequently hostile public. This dynamic is compounded by journalists' awareness of the precarity of their position, a sentiment that easily slips into resentment toward newsroom management and owners.

For all stakeholders involved – journalists, industry consultants, newsrooms and scholars – I recommend seeking clearer definitions of all agents in the journalistic field. Implementing audience engagement strategies without agreement about the definition of "audience" and "engagement," or about the purpose and desired end of engagement, is counter-productive. Without a better understanding of what the audience means to journalists, editors, newsroom managers, publishers and owners, the search for new business models will not advance.

LEARNING TO LOVE THE AUDIENCE:
How Journalists and Newsrooms Adjust to Audience Inclusion and Engagement

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

For Ingrid.

Acknowledgements

There was a time when newspapers displayed their current edition in large glass boxes outside their editorial offices. Anyone who walked by could stop and read the paper for free. When passersby would stand, gazing into the display case of my hometown paper in Germany, they invariably blocked the entrance to the building. I used to like this arrangement. Until I started to work there. It was my dream job: an internship for the paper that had me writing about Ikebana exhibits, the local rabbit breeders association and the mayor's suspiciously frequent trips to faraway places. It was exciting, fun and rewarding; until the morning I arrived at work to find a couple blocking the entrance while reading one of my stories. It had never occurred to me that I would have an actual audience, people who might respond to or even criticize the job I had done. I snuck by, happy not to engage. This first encounter with "my" audience stuck with me, as I became a journalist and now, as a journalism scholar. Perhaps it sparked my interest in studying journalists' relationships with their audience.

So many people have paved the way for me during this process, and I am grateful for their patience, advice and support. I would like to thank Mackenzie Warren and Josh Awtry of the Gannett Company, who let me pitch my dissertation idea to a USA Today Network meeting of regional directors. Within hours Hollis R. Towns, Executive Director at the *Asbury Park Press* invited me into his newsroom, and I cannot thank him enough for his trust in me. Many thanks to *WRIC's* general manager Larry Cottrill and news director Shane Moreland of the Nexstar Media

Group for opening the doors to their newsroom on that snowy morning and for weeks thereafter. I would also like to thank Trif Alatzas, publisher and editor-in-chief of the Tribune Publishing Company's *The Baltimore Sun*, Managing Editor Sam Davis and then-Senior Editor Richard Martin for their patience, honesty, generosity and trust. To Ryan Kellett, Director of Audience at *The Washington Post*, my heartfelt thanks for making time, facilitating interesting interviews and always responding to my emails. The 131 journalists, editors and staff working for these four news organizations have inspired me. I am so grateful to them for offering up their time, for letting me watch them do their jobs and for patiently sitting with me for hours in conversation. You have my deep admiration and respect. Many thanks go to the 22 audience engagement editors and 15 consultants and engagement experts who opened up about their work and thoughts about the future of engaged journalism. Thank you!

The words "I couldn't have done it without you" come easy, but when it comes to my advisor and committee chair, Professor Linda Steiner, they don't quite hit the mark. In fact, I **wouldn't** have done it without her, and I certainly would not have finished. Her wisdom and expertise guided me, her honest edits more than nudged me across the finish line and her sense of humor reminded me to keep things in perspective. She has taught me so much: about writing less like a journalist and more like an academic, about being more critical of some and less critical of other things and how to tell the difference. How fortunate I was to have her on my side. Along with Professor Steiner, Professor Kalyani Chadha did more than serve on my committee. I am forever grateful for her guidance and advice that never failed to put

me back on track. She gave me the confidence to forge ahead and has led by example by collaborating and brainstorming about new research projects and ideas.

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Without the support of the academic community at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism and the University of Maryland, this dissertation would also not have been possible. The cheers and words of encouragement I received from Dean Lucy Dalglish, Associate Dean Rafael Lorente and from countless faculty members and staff made all the difference. A special thanks to Vanessa Nichols-Holmes and Clint Bucco for helping me navigate some tricky waters. Sarah Oates, who encouraged me as I began this journey and search for a dissertation topic, was instrumental in making this dissertation possible. I would also like to thank Kevin Klose, who didn't skip a beat when he saw an opportunity to introduce me to Marty Baron and pitch my dissertation to him. He became my neighbor in Knight Hall, when Knight Chair Dana Priest gave me the keys to her office. It became my second home and I am forever grateful for Dana's trust, advice and friendship and for bringing a sofa into the office.

This project has also brought new friendships. It has been a terrifying but fun and rewarding roller-coaster ride and I could not have wished for better partners than my cohort-sisters Katy June-Friesen and April Newton (along with our buddies Moira and Agnes) to be on it with. It does not end here, and I so look forward to consulting, working and sharing with them for years to come. You are literally baked into this dissertation. Prashanth Bhat, Alison Burns and Carole Lee have been wonderful colleagues and friends who have cheered me on along the way. I am especially grateful to two former Merrill College PhDs, Stine Eckert and Michael Koliska. Our current and future collaboration gave me a sense of purpose and more reason to get this paper done.

While new friendships helped move me forward, old friends gave me the support I needed: Hartmut Lerner, Ingrid and Ulf Röller, Beate and Rainer Schwarz, Christine Seemann, my sister Ute Kemp and her daughter Alicia, formed a tight community that was more important to me than they might know.

But of course, none of this would have ended well without my husband Brian and our daughter Emma. He has kept this whole thing going for many years, giving me the time and space to pursue my ambitions. Emma with her mantra: “Of course you can do it” never failed to lift me up. Thank you both for being. I so wish that my parents, whose relentless news consumption habits shaped me, were still among us. I am sure they, along with my sister Ingrid, would be pleased.

And finally, I’d like to thank the anonymous couple, standing at the corner of Louisen- and Ludwigstraße in Bad Homburg, Germany, for reading the paper that morning, many years ago.

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"I just risked my life for a network that tests my face with focus groups. I don't feel good."
Aaron Altman, *Broadcast News* (1987)

"I said, why do we have to tell the people what they need to hear? Why can't we just tell them what they want to hear?"
Ron Burgundy, *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues (*2013)

These lines, from two comedies about broadcast and cable television a generation apart, neatly stake out the territory this dissertation covers. It is about the world of print, online and television newsrooms, with journalists and managers who know they cannot afford to ignore their audiences, and who likewise believe that they cannot afford to let them take the lead. Journalism's currency is no longer limited to traditional normative values like objectivity, integrity and honesty. Almost as valuable, if not more so, are recognizability, social media ranking and a reporter's brand (Molyneux & Holton, 2015), the ability, that is, to sell their journalism to their audience.

"Of course, we don't pander to the audience," was an unsolicited assurance I frequently heard during my conversations with 131 journalists in four newspaper and television newsrooms and with 22 audience engagement editors at 20 news organizations across the United States. Their job, as many of these women and men explained, is to "meet the audience where it is," and to make sure their work was seen and read. It was, for the most part, not a question of vanity, but of survival. The fate of their organization in particular and the news media industry in general was a concern that permeated our discussions. These are not stubborn resisters of digital technology or veterans who cling to old routines. Instead, they are survivors of multiple lay-offs, fresh graduates of journalism schools, mid-career investigative reporters and old-timers embracing new routines and production schedules. They are expected to interact with readers and

viewers, to serve their communities and to keep an eye on the page views and engagement metrics of the stories they produce. They are also the workforce of an industry that is looking for a sustainable business model in an increasingly hostile economic and political environment.

Using a sociological approach to understand the effects of audience engagement on the newsroom and its workers, this dissertation identifies different modes of engagement, while also considering the prevailing political economy and the effects of engagement strategies on the balance of power within and in relation to the news organization.

The questions I set out to answer are: What audience engagement strategies are used in newsrooms and how are they incorporated into newsroom routines? How do journalists in newsrooms think about their audiences? Do they conceptualize them as peers, as sources, as co-producers, as commodities, as real, as imagined or as prospective readers and viewers? How do journalists in newsrooms using audience engagement strategies talk about the journalism they do and about their roles as journalists in light of their audience-facing work routines? How do they reconcile competing conceptualizations of their audience? Do the kind of audience engagement strategies they perform make a difference in how they talk about themselves, their roles and their audiences?

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On January 20, 2017 at 2.11 pm Eastern Standard Time, the first tweet in the name of freshly inaugurated President Trump appeared under the handle @POTUS. It linked to a Facebook page along with the announcement: "#InaugurationDay Speech"[1] and featured a cover photograph showing crowds holding the U.S. flag during, as it turned out, President Obama's

[1]Levy, D. (2017). Trump Administration Takes Over @POTUS Twitter Account, Uses Cover Photo From Obama's Inauguration. *Variety.com*. Retrieved from https://variety.com/2017/digital/news/trump-first-tweet-potus-obama-twitter-photo-1201965188/

2008 inauguration (Levy, 2017). Traditional channels, such as media organizations and his official website, www.whitehouse.gov, were circumvented. Instead, one social media platform was used to link to content on another. The image posted was not credited to a photographer or agency and showed no date. Donald Trump's inaugural act of political communication as U.S. President was less than 140 characters long and symbolizes the challenges that news media organizations face: Not only can sources create and post to their own communities and networks, but citizen and professional journalists alike have, for the most part, equal access to similar means of production and global distribution channels and with that equal access to government officials, activists and bots. It is a system in which news items can be delivered more directly than ever to and from readers, listeners and viewers. They can curate, comment, elevate or discredit each other on and off the news website, visible to publics in what has become an ambient news environment that can feel out of control. News organizations must make the case that their version of events brings added value to their audience and, most importantly, that they should be paid to produce it.

The industry-wide disruption caused in part by the diffusion of digital technology, has forced news organizations to reevaluate, to restructure and to redefine what they do and how they do it. New modes of dissemination and shrinking budgets have driven many journalists out of work or into newsroom positions that are far removed from what they originally considered journalistic work. At the same time, the audience is producing blogs, podcasts and images that are often indistinguishable from professional news media content. Interactive features on news websites, on social media and in comment sections have led to an omnipresence and visibility of audience feedback.

The ability to measure online audience behavior in new, more effective ways allows journalists, who see themselves as creators of a product for a singular audience, to tailor their product to audience preference. At the same time, this challenges their authority as gatekeepers who decide what is news and what not. Journalists are now urged to promote themselves and their work, to demonstrate that their product is being consumed in a way that merits investment by an array of counterparts, whether readers or viewers, news directors or publishers, a corporation, an advertiser, a sponsor or an investor. In the past, success was documented through imperfect rating systems, circulation numbers or focus groups, perhaps accompanied by praise from colleagues and superiors, a promotion or a raise. Audiences were heard, if at all, with great delay and little consequence. Today, reciprocity, interactivity and service are among the new journalistic norms and expectations (Holton, Lewis, & Coddington, 2016; Mellado & Vos, 2017; Usher, 2016).

What has occurred is a shift in the distribution of power in the news media ecology (Rosen, 2006). The focus of this dissertation is on the ways in which journalists and newsrooms are affected by the altered status of the audience, whose presence is now felt in almost all stages of the news production and distribution process. This presence is motivated, perceived, enacted and acted upon in different ways across news media organizations. Whether driven by cultural, economic, political or technological factors, one result has been what Loosen and Schmidt (2012) have described as the turn towards the audience and signifies the establishment of readers, listeners and viewers as participatory stakeholders in newsrooms across the United States. Their power and positions vary, as do the responses to this new configuration.

As I examine these responses to this "turn," executed in various fashions by journalists and newsrooms, I look at how journalists conceptualize their audience. I consider a wide range

of shifts in such conceptualizations: from passive to active consumers of news; from customers to participants and co-inhabitants of a public sphere where boundaries between journalists, sources and audiences blur and shift. These and other ways journalists conceptualize the *audience* can be discovered and investigated through observation and through interviews with journalists in newsrooms in which the audience has, in one way or another, become a part of the news productions process. I use the term "audience engagement" for anything journalists do that includes their audience. These interactions range from using web analytics that capture audience data all the way to personal encounters.

Audience engagement has become an integral tool in the survival kit of today's newsrooms. Reporters are expected to connect with their audiences in more ways than ever. Their activities cover a wide spectrum, ranging from metrics through online interaction on social media sites to phone calls, emails, events and personal encounters in coffee shops. Traditional methods of communication are being supplemented and deployed as tools for what looks like direct marketing campaigns, bringing journalism straight to the customer, in the hopes of winning over loyal, paying subscribers, one reader or viewer at a time. Some of the new revenue models that are being tested rest on niche audiences and on personal interaction with them (Villi & Picard, 2019). These models include ones that are advertisement- and subscription-based, transactional "pay-as-you-go" and crowdfunding. Chan-Olmsted and Wang (2019) include these models in a category they call "audience insights monetization" (p. 136).

While news organizations are searching for the new currencies of survival, a close look is warranted at the norms and practices that are taking hold, as well as the effect they are having on the newsroom. Particularly in the current political climate in which issues surrounding the lack of trust and credibility in the news media (Knight Foundation, 2018) are aligning with an

increased concentration of media ownership, lay-offs, attacks on the press (Edmonds, 2016; Grieco, 2018) and the use of big data, it is crucial to understand the effects these changes have on the audience-journalist relationship and on journalists' role perceptions.

This study offers qualitative empirical evidence of how audience engagement strategies are being routinized in the newsroom and how journalists tasked with operationalizing them are responding. It contributes to filling a gap in the literature identified by Evens, Raats, and von Rimscha (2017) about "organizational transformation" brought about by changing revenue models and journalists' norms, routines and practices. It also contributes to the scholarship investigating role conceptions and perceptions in light of a changing news ecosystem that is normalizing participatory audiences (Holton et al., 2016; Mellado, Hellmueller, & Weaver, 2016).

Solutions to the problem of revenue generation, suggested by consultants, providers of analytics tools and proponents of more inclusive reporting practices, are being adopted by newsrooms in different ways. While those founded on the premise of inclusivity and engagement have been studied (Belair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; J. L. Nelson, 2018b), newsrooms under corporate ownership that have adopted various forms of engagement warrant further investigation. Studies that focus on specific enactments, such as the use of web metrics (Anderson, 2011a; Petre, 2015; Tandoc, 2014), as well as work on best practices such as Jake Batsell's *Engaged Journalism* (2015) have addressed some of the issues surrounding journalists' responses to the demands of audience engagement.

This dissertation takes into consideration the spectrum of engagement strategies employed in each newsroom, and the effect of these practices on journalists that work for market driven news organizations. It builds on scholarship surrounding competing demands on

journalists to fulfill economic and professional objectives (J. L. Nelson & Tandoc, 2018). The newsrooms of the three newspapers and one television station I chose to study offer some geographic and demographic variation, although concentrated in the Mid-Atlantic region. The *Asbury Park Press,* located in Neptune, New Jersey, 60 miles south of New York City serves two suburban counties; *The Baltimore Sun* covers Baltimore City and Baltimore County, while *The Washington Post* is a large city and national paper. Finally, *WRIC* is one of three local television stations in Richmond, Virginia. *The Washington Post* is owned by Jeff Bezos' investment firm, Nash Holdings; the other three news organizations are owned by large media chains. *Asbury Park Press* is owned by Gannett, which leads in circulation and is second in number of papers owned, with Tribune Publishing[2] second behind Gannett in daily circulation numbers. Nexstar Media Group is the largest local television broadcaster in the United States (Abernathy, 2016; FreePress, 2019; Kern, 2019)

Although "engagement" has been used in the news media context for several years, there is still no agreement on the definition of the term, nor has consensus been reached on what "the audience" or "audiences" means, if this is even the correct term to use. And yet, corporations are implementing engagement strategies in dozens of newsrooms serving communities across the United States. Meanwhile, journalism schools are trying to prepare students for careers in audience engagement without much certainty about what that could mean.

The 2018 Tow Center for Digital Journalism's *Audience Revenue and Engagement* report reads like a roadmap for news organizations looking to diversify their sources of revenue by incorporating into their repertoires for instance, newsletters, emails and member in order to

[2] Tribune Publishing is the newspaper publishing half of what was formerly called Tronc. The other half, Tribune Media, was acquired by Nexstar during my stay in Richmond, making Nexstar the largest local television broadcaster.

create a membership model. Tow ends its list of findings by saying: “The two-way engagement between publication and audience required to sustain a successful membership strategy can initially feel uncomfortable for those who expect a clear boundary between newsroom staff and audience members. But culture change is possible” (Hansen & Goligoski, 2018).

In the following pages I outline the design of my examination of journalists’ arrangements with their readers and viewers, after a brief detour to explain how my research interest intersects with my professional life as a television journalist and to situate myself in this project.

In October 2017, two years into my career as a PhD student at the University of Maryland, yet still employed, albeit part-time, as correspondent for Spiegel TV, I travelled to New Jersey to meet with the subject of a story I had been researching for Spiegel TV. Diane Nilan, a filmmaker and advocate for homeless children, had been commissioned by a government agency to produce a video about families without stable homes. I was going to profile her as she visited and interviewed families. One of our stops was at the home of a single father of three who had only recently moved into the apartment. A reporter from the local paper, the Gannett-owned the *Asbury Park Press*, had written a story about him that prompted an outpouring of support in the community and, importantly, donations that allowed him to make a security deposit and move his family into a home. The article was prominently displayed, mounted and framed, on a wall in the living room. After our interview he mentioned that the reporter had written a follow-up story and that he was unable to get a copy because it was digital only and that he had hit the pay-wall on the newspaper’s site, app.com. Even more frustrating to him was the fact that he was again short on funds, since his truck needed repairs and he was now behind on his rent. His three children listened as he described how he had called the reporter,

asking him for another follow-up story. “I’d love to, but I can’t,” the reporter had replied. The second story had not “brought enough clicks” to warrant a third. He understood, the man said, and yet, this was his only chance to reach the community and ask for support. This encounter connects to my dissertation in two ways: the newspaper involved would become the first site of my field research, the *Asbury Park Press.* The dilemma for the reporter, who wanted to produce news stories with a positive impact but could not because measurable *audience* interest had waned, is part of the dynamic that I am exploring. What seemed remarkable to me at the time was the awareness both had of the transactional nature of their relationship.

Not long after that, I was on speakerphone, talking to a group of East Coast regional directors at Gannett, pitching my dissertation topic, hoping to hear back from one of them with an invitation to conduct my study in their newsroom. The connection to Gannett had come through the associate dean at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism. When the email inviting me to work at one of their newsrooms arrived, I was shocked to read that it was from the executive director of the *Asbury Park Press*. Three months after listening to the story about the unrequited pitch for a second follow-up piece on a family in need, I was heading back to New Jersey to begin my first newsroom embed at the very same paper.

My experience as a journalist has certainly fueled my interest in Journalism Studies in general and in the audience-journalist relationship in particular. As I entered the newsrooms and spoke at length with journalists for this study, my identity as a still-practicing journalist shaped my interactions with the interviewees. My background and contact information, including my LinkedIn profile, were shared with employees before I arrived. Introductions included mentions of my past and present work as a journalist. While helpful in building a rapport, it may also have hindered my research. “You know what I’m talking about,” while true, had to be followed by a

more emphatic than usual "no, please elaborate." Interviewees often seemed to assume that I was already familiar with their processes, since I was a fellow journalist. I had to remind myself often to take a step back and into my role as a researcher. This proved to be a valuable exercise since I found myself explicitly asking for more in-depth explanations and may have uncovered details and nuances that I assumed I knew, but that turned out to be surprisingly different from what I had expected.

Nonetheless, since my stay in the newsrooms had, to varying degrees, an ethnographic component that resembled journalistic reporting, I remained very aware of the line between identities that I was walking. It is my hope that my familiarity with my subjects' general work environments enhanced my insights and access and did not obscure my vision.

The core of this dissertation is the data that I collected, primarily in the form of in-depth interviews with journalists and staff in four newsrooms. I also conducted interviews with audience engagement editors in newsrooms across the United States, as well as with key informants, consultants specialized in bringing engagement strategies to newsrooms, including several providers of web-analytics.

In the following chapter (chapter 2) I review the literature around audiences, boundary and identity work. I investigate key terms and concepts used in this study: audiences, newsroom sociology, news workers, public journalism, newsroom innovation and audience engagement, discuss audience conceptualization as analog, digital, quantifiable and measurable audiences, tying this into the study's objective to understand how these newsrooms conceptualize their audiences and how this impacts their work and how they identify and feel about their work. This review includes a discussion of the political economy of news production with different audience conceptualizations and enactments in mind. An examination of literature about the real or

perhaps mythologized wall between editorial and marketing, and about the political economy of the audience as consumer, producer or *produser* (using the term of Axel Bruns), will lead into a discussion about participatory journalism.

This is followed by a section on the boundary work that is taking place in newsrooms and the literature on the impact of blogging, of different enactments of journalism that have defined and are redefining the boundaries of professional journalism within newsrooms. I then discuss literature concerned with identity work in newsrooms, which ties closely to the core of my dissertation, looking at how journalists and the labor and tasks they perform works towards or against normative identities. From this macro-perspective, I lead into a micro-approach discussing literature that looks at the social psychological aspects of changing newsroom roles. For a historical context I will discuss the emergence of the concept of public or civic journalism, as well as what I call the contemporary renaissance. It is a development from public through participatory to engaged journalism.

The final section of the literature review will discuss literature on how innovative practices have been adopted in newsrooms. Audience engagement in some of its enactments is facilitated or even made possible through technological innovation and digitization, so that some literature on digital innovation will be useful, particularly as it intersects with institutional theory.

Chapter 3 will explicate the qualitative methodology used in this dissertation. Methods included observation and in-depth interviews conducted both inside and outside of three newsrooms: *The Asbury Park Press,* a Gannett-owned print and online publication in New Jersey, the Tribune Publishing's *The Baltimore Sun* in Baltimore, MD, *The Washington Post* in Washington, D.C. owned by Jeff Bezos' Nash Holdings LLC and *WRIC*, a Nexstar-owned

television station in Richmond, VA. I will explain the rationale of the study's design, recruitment ethics and the grounded theory approach that I used throughout my research, particularly in my analysis of the interviews I conducted in newsrooms, in the field and on the phone between January 2018 and March 2019. I also discuss how this approach applies to the interviews conducted with key informants during that time period and to the interviews conducted in 2016 with audience engagement editors.

Chapter 4 offers an in-depth look at how audience engagement is defined and practiced based on 22 interviews with audience engagement editors in 20 newsrooms. These interviews and a renewed analysis will help set up a typology of audience engagement practices that will inform my newsroom observation and the questions posed to journalists and staffers. Defining and understanding the scope of "engagement" activities performed by newsroom members is one central goal, as is situating the role of audience engagement in news organizations across ownership and revenue models.

With a clearer definition of the engagement concept, chapter 5 is devoted to the insights gleaned from interviews with key informants with whom I discussed the business of engagement as well as the evolution of the practice of audience engagement and how they, in their work as consultants, understand what "audience" signifies. This chapter situates the current state of audience engagement in newsrooms from a perspective removed from those actively producing content in the newsrooms being studied. It will provide "ideal-types" of engagement, as envisioned by those consulting with and working for current practitioners in the newsroom. This chapter also provides a discussion of the findings, based on the themes discovered in the data. I address my research questions by focusing first on comparing engagement practices across newsrooms, followed by a discussion of how these affect newsroom routines, roles and role

perceptions. Next, I discuss how various stakeholders define and think about their audiences and how they speak about their journalism in relation to their audience. I compare the "ideal-types" discussed in the previous chapter with practices found during my research. This chapter offers a typology of engagement strategies in the newsrooms studied, taking into account factors such as ownership and revenue-models. It examines how the roles and role identities of journalists are impacted and whether or not professional boundaries are shifting and altering the way the news media selects and delivers the news.

In the final chapter I offer conclusions and recommendations, discuss the limitations of this study, and list suggestions for future work. With audience engagement promoted by newsrooms as one of the keys to regaining relevance for readers, to helping build audience trust and to generating revenue, the insights I provide to practitioners and newsroom managers about the risks and benefits of audience engagement are especially salient. The conclusions I draw from my findings provide newsroom managers with valuable insights about engagement strategies that work and how journalists respond to the routines this new digital labor practice might involve. Scholars will find a contribution to field theory and the political economy as I theorize about the audience as agents in the journalistic field and present recommendations about the political economy of the engaged journalism.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

On May 6, 2009, Senator John Kerry, member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation and chairman of the Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet, began a late afternoon hearing, "The Future of Journalism" with a warning. The landscape of the news media ecosystem was changing rapidly, he said, citing the decline of local newspapers, the surge of bloggers and the recent 83 percent drop in the price of newspaper stocks. He said he anticipate the same trend for the broadcast industry. His committee, Kerry explained, was had regulatory oversight of cable and satellite ownership, and as such was concerned over developments that threatened the well-being of civil society: "(H)ow the American people get their information, what the structure of ownership is, is of enormous interest to all of us, because it is the foundation of our democracy." He went on to ask: "Is this simply a normal transition in the marketplace? And will everything turn out just fine?" (Senate, 2010).

The committee had solicited statements from the heads of ratings firms, newspaper guilds, broadcasting and newspaper associations. They heard testimony from, among others, Steve Coll, former managing editor at *The Washington Post*, David Simon, former reporter at *The Baltimore Sun* and producer of the HBO show *The Wire,* Alberto Ibargüen, President of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and James Moroney III, Publisher of *The Dallas Morning News*. Marissa Mayer, at the time Vice President at Google and Arianna Huffington, then editor-in-chief of *The Huffington Post*, delivered statements as well. For nearly three hours, these stakeholders, with Mayer and Huffington representing tech and online news companies, themselves considered disruptors, and senators spoke about the precarious state of the industry. They criticized centralized media ownership and argued for solutions to the collapse of the

business model. The focus was on the political economy of the media system, on how technology had changed the way the news was produced, distributed and consumed and how it had effectively broken the advertisement-based revenue model. The complexity of the "newness," of how *audiences* were now being conceptualized in the "new media" (Bermejo, 2009) and the effect this was having on how the economics of journalism worked, was clearly articulated as a threat to democracy. In the ten years since, not much has changed for the better. The concentration of ownership in the news media market has accelerated, as have the proliferation and reach of social media platforms, affecting how journalists perform and think about their work, the institutions and people they work for.

This dissertation is about the relationship between journalists and their audiences, a relationship that is shaped and influenced by the political economy of media production and by the "the interplay of editorial, business, and technology in news organizations" (Lewis & Westlund, 2014, p. 19). As shifts within the field of journalism occur, the balance of power between journalists and their audiences does as well. How news organizations negotiate, define and operationalize this potential disempowerment of the journalist vis-à-vis the audience, determines how journalists feel about themselves as members of a community, a profession, an institution and as laborers. This chapter reviews literature around the main components of my analysis of the audience-journalist relationship: political economy, audience conceptualizations, the newsroom as an institution and a place of work and those that work in the newsroom. The journalists I spoke with for the purpose of this study, work for news organizations that conceptualize their audience in distinct ways. These are contingent upon a number of factors, such as their revenue models, the corporate missions, the way these are privileged and communicated, as well as the resources and attention allocated to engagement strategies, to their

audience and to their staff. These may align or conflict with the journalists' role perceptions and identities as members of the profession or as employees.

I begin this chapter with a brief overview of the political economy of communications, which lays the groundwork for the following discussion of five conceptualizations of the audience as, in turn, digital, quantified or imagined, as consumers, co-producers or participants. An understanding of these is important, since I argue that how journalists situate themselves in relation to their audience and within the chain of journalistic production, impacts how they feel about their work, their news organizations and the audience. It is also relevant to how news organizations place value on the relationship between journalists and their audience, assessed and measured in different ways. I then continue the discussion about the audience with an explication of various forms of participatory journalism. I discuss the impact of blogging and different enactments of journalism such as citizen and reciprocal journalism that have defined and are redefining the boundaries of the profession and the audience-journalist relationship. This is followed by an excursion into the history of public or civic journalism, the reform movement of the 1990s that is viewed as a prologue to participatory journalism (Schaffer, 2015). Current *engaged journalism* initiatives echo this movement and I connect the intentions and fate of public journalism with participatory practices and contemporary newsroom routines.

In the third section of this chapter, I explore the boundary work that is being done in newsrooms in response to the presence of the citizen competition. Interlopers like *WikiLeaks*, bloggers, and social media platforms push and blur the boundaries and force newsrooms to adjust. The next section narrows the focus on news workers and their identity work in the newsroom, which ties into the core of my dissertation by looking at how journalists' role conceptions and identities are affected when new practices and participants are introduced into

their routines as disruptive innovations. This includes a brief review of relevant literature around the social psychological aspects of changing newsroom roles.

With this study I hope to contribute to the scholarship that investigates journalistic norms and practices in a digital political economy in which audience currencies and, along with them, the value and status of journalists in the newsroom are shifting. I approach the current, market-driven media system as a field, i.e., "a structured system of institutions, organizations, and social roles (those of journalists) working to produce books, television, programs, magazines, and newspapers" (Neveu, 2005, p. 208), extending this enumeration to the production of digital news. Pierre Bourdieu employs his concept of fields as a "research tool" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 30) and defines it as "a field of forces and a field of struggles" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 44). He describes the field of journalism as being "dominated by commercial values," which in turn "affects the internal relations within the field (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 44). This struggle between Bourdieu-ian economic and cultural capital (Benson, 1999, p. 464) serves as a useful framework in this empirical study of how journalists adjust to competing forces within their field.

2.1. Political Economy of Communication

The talk of the current crisis in journalism is deceptive. It implies that it is unique, temporary and caused by specific events or technological innovations. Yet it is neither new nor exceptional (Breese, 2015, p. 45; Siles & Boczkowski, 2012, p. 1376). It is also not just about the transition from print to digital or the lack of trust in traditional news outlets. While these are certainly to blame, the "problem of journalism" in the United States is systemic and multi-dimensional. One dimension is the economic reality of media production.

There is rich scholarship on the political economy of communication (e.g., Bagdikian, 2004; Hardy, 2014; Innis, 2018; McChesney, 2003; Mosco, 2014; Schiller, 1991; Smythe, 1977),

on the impact of market-driven news production on news selection (McManus, 1995) and democracy (McChesney, 2015; McManus, 1994). One of the main, organizing ideas in the political economy of communication is that the systems that produce knowledge and media, in particular mass media and entertainment, are influenced by the distribution and application of wealth and power (McChesney as cited in Mosco, 2014, p. 138). Traditional news media organizations in the United States are "capitalist ventures" that operate for profit (Picard, 1989, p. 14). Smythe's concept of the audience as commodity is foundational to the idea of journalists (Smythe, 1977, 1981; Wittel, 2012, p. 322) as both producers of news content and as procurers of audience attention, captured and sold to advertisers (Picard, 1989). Currently, despite an overall decline in revenue and, for newspapers, an increase in subscriptions, commercial media, particularly television outlets, still largely rely on advertisement revenue (Barthel, 2017; Mitchell & Holcomb, 2014). The current model favors the mass audience, allowing news organizations to maximize their return on investment, particularly if the content is cheaply produced (McManus, 1994, p. 35).

News coverage by commercial outlets serves the propaganda needs of the system in power. It leans toward official sources for news selection and sourcing (Chomsky & Herman, 2002; Herman, 2000). In Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, the newsroom is biased toward the production of news that upholds the status quo, that is, by members of the profession loyal to their employers and to those that most resemble them (Gans, 1979; Herman & Chomsky, 2010). Hardt compares this ideological aspect of the U.S. press to "Soviet-style press with its specific goals of organising and propagandising the masses for the purposes of maximising socialisation in an effort to centralise political power through participation in the commercialisation of social differences to form a "consumer" culture" (Hardt, 1996).

Although the internet has drastically altered the ways in which both content and audience attention are procured and distributed, the current economic news media environment is reminiscent of that of the early 20th century, when press ownership was concentrated, partisan, profit-oriented, and considered damaging to democracy. It was seen as promoting the interests of the wealthy and powerful. In response, publishers introduced professional norms that they felt would help the press appear neutral, unbiased and beneficial to democracy (McChesney, 2003, p. 301). Scholars are increasingly focusing on the shift in the political economy of the current digital media environment, in which the professional norms that developed and evolved in an analog media context, are being challenged (e.g., Freedman, 2016; Fuchs, 2014; A. Phillips, Couldry, & Freedman, 2010; Usher, 2014, 2016; Witschge, Anderson, Domingo, & Hermida, 2016). Fuchs urges an update of Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model so that it would apply to online conditions, particularly to social media; he proposes an "Online Propaganda Model" to account for the new kinds of labor, social and power relations of the internet (Fuchs, 2014, p. 86). While Fuchs contributes the important concept of digital labor in his model, he does not stress the role of journalists and their journalistic labor. A number of scholars have studied the audience in the context of participatory and citizen journalism (e.g., Banks & Deuze, 2009; Bruns, 2008; Carpentier, 2016; Domingo et al., 2008; Franklin & Carlson, 2010), as well as the impact of participatory practices on the newsroom (Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Konieczna, Hatcher, & Moore, 2018; Peters & Broersma, 2013; Robinson, 2011b). In this dissertation, I hope to combine theorizing about the digital media environment's political economy, digital labor, participatory journalism and newsroom practice.

Castells, optimistic about the possibilities of technology, envisions an audience empowered by the internet (Castells & Cardoso, 2006), that is part of a networked society with

potential for political, economic and societal development (Castells, 2002, pp. 7-8). The power of social media is undeniable, as evidenced for instance by National Public Radio's Andy Carvin, who in 2011 curated tweets during the Arab Spring uprising. Carvin closely followed livestreams and tweets from citizen journalists and eye witnesses on the ground as events in Tunesia were unfolding. This was a new form of live coverage through social media. It was reporting from a distance, with journalists and citizens tweeting and posting live while Carvin was collecting and fact-checking out of his office in the United States (Carvin, 2012; Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014). The promise of this novel procedure, particularly for citizens in countries ruled by authoritarian regimes, was that the voices of those who are typically not heard would be amplified and find a wide audience and could escape political control. Yet as Shirky and others points out, the same, liberating technology can be used for political control and surveillance as well (Brown, 2015; Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtslund, & Sandoval, 2013; Shirky, 2008, 2011; Trottier, 2016). In newsrooms, the collection of data can similarly be used and abused. Both audience and journalist behavior during the news making, distribution and consumption process can be measured. How journalists interact with their audience, for example on Twitter, can produce a considerable amount of conflict and stress inside the newsroom (Chadha & Wells, 2016). As Carlson (2018) points out, this measurability makes the audience, and I would argue, the journalist as well, more commodifiable than before. In the political economy of digital communication the audience is both economic and social capital (Wang, 2018). Anderson suggests, in his ethnographic study of two newsrooms using audience analytics, that beyond viewing audiences as quantified, that is, in terms of their economic value, journalists talk about their audience as "creative, active participants" (Anderson, 2011a, p. 563). This may

in part be due to analytics providers' successful design of software that encourages journalists to accept and integrate audience metrics into their daily routines and norms (Petre, 2018).

While a significant amount of research has been done to study the effect of audience analytics on journalists and their editorial judgments (e.g., Batsell, 2015; Bunce, 2017; Hanusch & Tandoc, 2017; Petre, 2015; Tandoc, 2014a), little research examines the political economy of communication in audience-centered newsrooms. Usher calls for such research, specifically on the political economy of citizen journalism (Usher, 2017), especially in light of the push for *engaged journalism,* which includes a spectrum of audience-interaction ranging from quantified, metrics-based to in-person encounters between journalists and their audiences all the way to newsrooms open to the public. The goal of this dissertation is to contribute to conversations about how journalists tasked with practicing *engaged journalism* navigate audience access to and participation in the news production and distribution process and how this turn toward the audience relates to the political economy of the current media regime and to those that work in it.

I begin the following section with the audience in its digital, imagined, material or quantified forms and continue with a discussion of different iterations of participatory journalisms. The term has contested meanings, with stakeholders and my interviewees referring to their audience to community, citizens, publics, customers, clients or users, to name just a few. This dissertation is a query into how journalists adjust to audience inclusion. In order to understand this dynamic, it is necessary to grasp the ways in which the audience is conceptualized. I argue in this section that while in some ways the digital news environment has empowered the audience. While audience members are more visible and are afforded new opportunities for participation, they are also more vulnerable to exploitation as commodities and as free labor. This tension, between the audience as cultural and economic capital, is enacted in

the newsroom through a wide spectrum of participatory practices that can be summarized as "engagement."

2.2. The Audience

Digital journalism has brought fundamental changes to the news media ecosystem. For audiences it has meant the promise of increased agency, participation and access to and inclusion in the production, distribution and gatekeeping processes. To journalists, it has arguably brought more challenges than opportunities (McChesney, 2007; McChesney & Pickard, 2011; Robinson, 2015). Without a sustainable, long-term mechanism for monetizing the production and dissemination of news content, digital journalism's reach has not translated into the financial benefit news organizations had hoped for. Instead, the audience can and does compete with professional news producers on a variety of online sites. They can criticize news media organizations and the stories they publish on comment sections or on social media sites for all to see (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014; Post & Kepplinger, 2019).

As platforms such as Facebook and YouTube distribute news content and offer space for public discussion, they profit from advertisement placed alongside the free content that news organizations and users post. News organizations do so in the hopes of leading traffic to their own websites where the advertisement revenue stays with them. In this digital economy of news production and distribution, the power relations between all participating actors continue to shift. This is beginning to change, as news organizations experiment with a variety of revenue sources, including subscription, membership and crowdsourcing models (Cook & Sirkkunen, 2013; Hunter, 2015, 2016; Kaye & Quinn, 2010; Singer, 2018).

One important distinction between digital and analog news media production lies in the ability to quantify the audience in new and more sophisticated ways. No longer invisible, or

visible only to the marketing department, the readers and viewers on digital platforms, apps and websites actively and passively offer up information about their behavior, their habits and preferences, by clicking, sharing and registering on news sites and social media platforms. As they feed audience information systems that measure and collect their data, they are both empowered and further reduced to consumers (Anderson, 2011a). Their exposure allows for both advertisers and news organizations to identify them and to tailor content to individual preferences. Quantification thus makes room for a more audience-centered approach. It offers more, and more precise, data to inform both marketers and editors about their target audience, helping news organizations personalize and monetize their content. Yet it also challenges traditional notions of journalists as gatekeepers (Bruns, 2011, 2018; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Newsrooms can no longer claim ignorance about their audience's preferences or defer to reporters' and editors' news judgment to determine and satisfy the public's information needs (Carlson, 2018; Hanusch & Tandoc, 2017; Nguyen, 2013; Tandoc, 2014). They simply have too much data available that can and do inform their news selection and production processes. These data are part of one dimension in what Matt Carlson calls "measurable journalism" (Carlson, 2018). He describes "measurable journalism" as multi-dimensional, with the dimensions being: material (for example analytics software), organizational (vendors and staff that monitor metrics), practice (use of data, audience engagement), professional (response to the use of metrics, concerns about editorial autonomy), economic (changing revenue models to more data informed), consumption (personalized content), cultural (concern about "clickbait" and over-personalization of news) and public policy (privacy concerns) (p. 409). Carlson's "measurable journalism" is not limited to the dimension of audience analytics alone. For him, the term "encapsulates the cultural and material shift to digital platforms capable of providing real-time,

individualizable, quantitative data about audience consumption practices" (p. 409). It encompasses all aspects of journalistic practice that are, by virtue of being digital, measurable or affected by the quantification of its actors and activities, making it a cultural and not just a material shift. I would add to these dimensions the quantifiable engagement that journalists perform, which are equally measurable and can play an important role in the journalist's status and valuation of her labor. This framework illustrates the complexity of agency in the relationship between the quantifiable audience and journalists. In the following I discuss how the digital audience can be regarded as an economic and a cultural currency when digitally enabled participatory practices enter the newsroom.

2.2.1. The Empowered Audience

The ways in which the audience is conceptualized are evolving. The spectrum is wide: From mass audience to individual receivers who may be active in selecting media content (McQuail, 1997; Webster & Phalen, 1994) or who create a community and culture through shared communication practices (Carey, 2008). Even in more inclusive conceptualizations, the audience is generally viewed as interpreters of the information they receive. Here, measurement occurs after the fact and serves the audience only in that it informs journalists what next to deliver to their, hopefully receptive, customers in the next round of content delivery (Loosen & Schmidt, 2012). Advertisers benefit from captured audience habits and can target the promotion of their products accordingly.

Another perspective views the audience solely as a commodity. It relies heavily on measurement, as it serves the business interests of the news organization and advertisers (Ang, 2006; Kosterich & Napoli, 2016; Manzerolle & McGuigan, 2014; Smythe, 1977, 1981; Webster & Phalen, 1994). A third perspective more closely reflects the benefits of the current state of

audience quantification. It is that of the audience as members of an empowered network whose feedback (or lack thereof) sends important cues to reporters and editors and opens the door to forms of participation across a broad spectrum (Loosen & Schmidt, 2012; Singer, 2006b).

This visibility, created through quantification, elevates the importance of the audience in the eyes of news producers and opens doors to participatory practices ranging from citizen journalism, interaction in comment sections, and sharing and commenting about the news and a news organizations' content on social media platforms. The audience matters more: as a source of direct revenue in the form of subscribers, as a target for advertisers in search of "eyeballs" for their product placement, and as a network of recommenders. Making the audience visible in order to better know and sell (to), also means that the passive, because largely invisible, audience is now active. It delivers information about interests, behavior and news value and it becomes accessible as sources and producers of story ideas. This move from being an imagined audience, with editors and journalists selecting the news they felt was relevant to an audience they imagined to be mostly like themselves (Gans, 1979), to a very identifiable, digitally materialized audience*,* carried no real economic benefit for newsrooms. The reason for this lack of monetary advantage is that, after giving their news content away for free, news organizations ceded control to social media platforms that quickly became the sites on which news media consumers increasingly engage with content by liking (or disliking), sharing and commenting. They distort the very direct cues audience measurement tools provide journalists with on their organization's platforms. Third-party venues such as Facebook or Twitter block the unencumbered view that news producers had of their audience through direct measurement (Litt, 2012). Unreliable or manipulated metrics on social media sites (Herrman & Maheshwari, 2016) that are profiting from the audience*'s* attention (Herrman, 2016) and changes in algorithms that affect reach (Isaac,

2018) are just some of the problems publishers face. News producers now must seek and find the audience on platforms outside of their own domains. This provides digital audiences with more agency vis-à-vis news organizations and empowers them to construct pockets of communication and public spheres in which they participate mostly at will and that they contribute to shaping. The economic beneficiaries are, for the most part, social media platforms.

Some researchers advocate using a different label for the audience: users. This term would look, rather than at who the audience is and what it consumes, at what various audiences do with the news, that is, how it uses news media content (Ahva & Heikkilä, 2016). This is the approach some newsrooms are taking as well. Moving away from measuring page views, they are monitoring where their users first encountered their news content, whether on social media or on native websites, and are tracking how the content is being shared and commented on. The structure and use of social media allows the audience to reshape and construct the public sphere (Webster, 2014) by sharing, commenting and republishing content independent of the original producers. By adding their own content, they are emancipating themselves from the news media organizations.

2.2.2. Audience Currencies

Before overly romanticizing the empowerment of the audience, or user, it is important to remember that the audience always has value, either as a social or as economic currency: whether as a hypothetical or an imagined replica of the journalist (Gans, 1979), as a sample of audience members collected through letters to the editor, through surveys or focus groups or as a

dataset of users. The audience is constructed as a currency beneficial to news organizations and advertisers (Ettema & Whitney, 1994).

Monetization has always been the motivator for audience measurement (Batsell, 2015; Napoli, 2012a, 2012b) but the relationship of the editorial side of news organizations to its audience has fundamentally changed with the advent of digital journalism. This is not because the internet has brought an end to the commodification of the consumer of news. Instead, it is a consequence of marketplace realities. News organizations must find different ways to attract and retain paying customers. This effort translates into participation, interactivity and transparency. In fact, due to the availability of audience measurement tools, the internet can offer the same opportunities for acquiring advertisement revenue and has become a distribution platform functioning much like traditional mass communication media. This is true, regardless of the commitment model (subscription, pay-per-article, membership or sponsorship for individual project model) offered. They all require a quantified, measurable unit of currency, the audience, in order to determine the correct price of the products being sold (Bermejo, 2007). Yet this is far from an exact science. Recent scholarship has found that audience currencies used by newsrooms vary significantly based on what is being measured (Kosterich & Napoli, 2016; J. L. Nelson & Webster, 2016). In addition, newsroom analytics software is designed by companies with their own business models, biases and incentives in mind (Petre, 2015, 2018). Newsrooms can even tailor the products they use along editorial metrics of their choosing (T. Rosenstiel, personal communication, October 19, 2018), negating the notion of a value-free metric.

Far from being empowered, the audience, thus quantified, becomes an unwitting labor force, whose currency, a kind of "data commodity," consists of audience data that both news producers and advertisers capitalize on (Fuchs, 2015; Loosen & Schmidt, 2012; Manzerolle &

McGuigan, 2014). The illusion – for audiences – is that they are included and empowered. In fact, they may be both complicit in their own exploitation, as well as in the disenfranchisement of the journalist. The resolution of the tension between the belief that the audience has been liberated and empowered through digital technology on one hand and on the other that it is more subtly than ever being monitored and exploited as a commodity with purchasing power, will determine the outcome of the power struggle between consumers and producers of news media, as well as between distributers and advertisers.

The competition in digital journalism is no longer about content, but also, if not more, about attention. The question is which outlet can attract and keep enough (measurable) attention and whose attention can they attract and retain (Webster, 2014). It is no longer about exposure, but rather about identifying news consumption behavior through user metrics and flooding emerging audience niches with content without having to select or assign news value (Napoli, 2011; Napoli, Stonbely, McCollough, & Renninger, 2017; J. L. Nelson, 2018a). Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, this strategy is not just an attempt to secure the attention of a specialized audience with more information and expertise. It also creates distinct and isolated public spheres and closed information regimes that will advance news organizations' financial goals only if they succeed in converting enough of these small audience communities into loyal subscribers. It places a burden on newsrooms that will need to specialize and tailor coverage to an ever-growing number of special interest islands of news consumers that they must find online. Webster (2014) is optimistic: Since media organizations compete with each other, he asserts, they will efficiently compete in this "marketplace of attention" and make sure that the audience is offered a more diverse news diet. Some of their strategies in this competition include co-opting successful practices that audiences have been using, such as blogging, inviting readers, viewers and

listeners to share feedback and, essentially, co-produce content (Wall, 2015). The platforms and non-institutional sites that have been the testing ground for citizen journalism are spaces where audiences, journalists and social media platforms compete – for attention and for authority as agenda-setters and gatekeepers (Bruns, 2009, 2018; Bruns & Nuernbergk, 2019). In the following I look at these forms of participatory journalism and how they are being normalized and co-opted, making them an integral part of today's newsrooms.

2.2.3. Participatory Journalisms

With the internet came the possibility for audiences to take part in news production, in fact, to write and publish online. Participatory journalism includes a wide spectrum of practices that involve the gathering, production and dissemination of audio, visual and written materials by non-members of a professional community (Wall, 2015). In its ideal form this is a form of community building that occurs while news is being produced (Singer et al., 2011). Participatory media work, according to Carpentier and Dahlgren, fundamentally entails "power relationships that are (to some extent) egalitarian" (Carpentier & Dahlgren, 2014, p. 9). Before online news production, citizens were able to contribute by sending in, for example, their accounts of witnessing events, photographs and letters to the editor; yet the professional journalist always had the last word about whether or not the submissions met their standards (Usher, 2011, p. 265). Hyperlinks and multimedia content promised a fundamental change in audience-journalist relations (Domingo, 2008). In newsrooms, "user generated content" or UGC, meant mostly free content and the veneer of participation. The terminology in itself draws a line of demarcation betweeen the outsider, the user, and the professional using the content, giving it a proprietary note (Cottle in Wall, 2015). By the mid to late 2000s scholarly interest in participatory

journalism was intense (Borger, Van Hoof, Costera Meijer, & Sanders, 2013). It signified a reframing of news media production as a process in which many actors contribute, and not just as one part of a relationship, consisting of producers on one end and receivers on the other, but as co-producers (Robinson, 2011b). As blogs and independent media sites grew, evolving from home-made blogs to commercial micro-blogging sites like Twitter and platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, the practice took on a new dimension, bumping up against professional journalistic norms and revenue models (e.g., Groshek & Tandoc, 2017; Lowrey, 2006; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

Professional journalists, who often define their roles as essential to a healthy democracy, have not had an easy time adjusting to participatory practices that, ostensibly, could lead to a democratization of the process (Josephi, 2016; Lewis, 2012; Peters & Witschge, 2015). The expectation that interactivity might lead to civic engagement or democratization has not been met. In fact, as Peters and Witschge (2015), point out, the idea of interactivity and participation is often conflated with empowerment, especially when no distinction between user, as a source of income, and audience is clearly made. And yet, participatory journalism, often referred to as citizen journalism, dominated the discourse about the institution of journalism adjusting to new technological realities and possiblities. Participants were optimistically called *produsers*, a term coined by Axel Bruns, imagining the citizen journalist as both a producer and a user (Bruns, 2009). It promised to revolutionize gatekeeping and agenda-setting routines that were seen as stifling and unhelpful (Singer et al., 2011). While celebrated for its potential by some, it was seen as limited by others (Reich, 2008), or as another instance of audience labor being co-opted and exploited (Fuchs, 2015, 2018; Manzerolle & McGuigan, 2014). Journalists, some contend, are stubborn and merely use participatory practices to have citizens produce content for stories or to

help drive traffic (Borger et al., 2013). The burden of assimilation has always rested on those outside of the profession, the citizen journalists, who must adjust to journalists' norms and standards (Usher, 2011).

Yet citizen voices on the internet are now ubiquitous, with social media and micro-blogging sites a constant interactive stage for sending and receiving content (Hermida, 2010). Whether on third-party platforms or in the comment section of online newspapers, citizens can, if not produce and publish, certainly react to the news. Liking and sharing, as well contributing through comments that might add to an ongoing story, are more subtle forms of interaction. This iteration of participatory journalism, which Lewis, Holton, and Coddington (2013) call reciprocal journalism, ties into many of the engagement strategies newsrooms are practicing today. Page views, likes and shares, for example, are reciprocal acts, that incidentally also deliver data to analytics companies. To Lewis et al., these kinds of reciprocal exchanges through social media are community-building interactions that, along with other, participatory practices, establish a new ethic. Despite the tension between professional control and open participation, Lewis argues that a hybrid between journalists clinging to professional control and audiences is evolving. (Lewis, 2012, p. 836). Robinson (2011b) is less optimistic in light of journalists' resistance to too much participation and reciprocity that might force them to hand over some of their core professional activities to what they view as, essentially, amateurs.

As the idea of participatory practice is becoming normalized, the discourse and scholarship around it has focused on its normalization for the benefit of civic engagement (Kreiss & Brennen, 2016). Kreiss and Brennen suggest that this neglects the importance of professional values and ignores that the state or the institution of journalism should participate in shaping the public sphere. In their view, participation is normalized to such an extent that it has become a

journalistic norm. This, in turn, opens the door to a routinization of practices that work against the original purpose of inclusive, participatory, citizen journalism, namely, enabling informed citizen participation. Although it does foster bringing more voices into the field, not all participants have the same noble motivations and intentions to contribute to a conversation or dialogue. This is, in part, the argument Anderson and Revers (2018) make when they call participatory journalism "a cherished and utopian concept" that threatens "to become a dark and dystopian one" (p.1). Leaning on what Quandt (2018) calls "dark participation," they see the rise of disinformation, populism, racism and misogyny on the web as a consequence of the "participatory mindset" (p.3). Comment sections are only now being reopened by news organizations that can afford manual or automated curation, yet a parallel universe of quasi news-sites and Twitter bots has been created. This too is part of the audience-journalist relationship that the interviewees in this study contend with.

In this section I have argued that although the digital audience is technologically empowered to participate in news selection, production and distribution processes, it remains a currency used by news organizations. Newsrooms adopted a participatory culture that integrates aspects of participation and inclusion into journalists' work flows, thereby essentially co-opting into their routines what had previously been considered a threat to newsroom autonomy (Bruns & Nuernbergk, 2019; Carlsson & Nilsson, 2016; Chadha & Wells, 2016; Domingo et al., 2008). The flip side of this free rein of free speech, is the "dark side" of hate and online abuse. While in the past, editors could discard or ignore letters to the editor from imagined or actually "insane" readers (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002), digital journalists' responses to their audiences are more visible and, I would argue, more consequential. Weichert (2016) describes the barrage of hate mail that

German journalists are subjected to, predicting that digital participation is upending the notion of a deliberative, dialogic public sphere (p.2).

The idea of opening the news to the audience is not new. The public journalism movement of the 1990s, seen as a precursor of citizen journalism (Usher, 2011, p. 266) was initiated by journalists who were frustrated with what they saw as journalism's failure to fulfill its responsibility of empowering the public as citizens and participants in political life. One of their beliefs was that "citizens deserve a bigger place in the newspaper itself" and that newspapers "must orient themselves around citizens' concerns" (Charity, 1995, p. 10). In the following I describe this reform effort and how it connects to the current practices of audience inclusion in the newsroom.

2.2.4. Public Journalism

Even early proponents of public journalism acknowledge the difficulty of precisely defining their proposed reforms. Fouhy and Schaffer called it a series of "initiatives which make a deliberate attempt to reach out to citizens, to listen to them, and to have citizens listen and talk to each other" (Fouhy and Schaffer in Voakes, 1999, p. 757). Jay Rosen, considered one of the founders and long-time advocate for public journalism, offers five "ways of understanding" civic journalism: as an argument, an experiment, a movement, a debate and an adventure (Rosen, 1999, pp. 22-23). It rests on the idea that modern, post-Watergate journalism had become a fortress whose inhabitants did not treat the public as citizens and participants in political life, but instead reported about them as victims and passive protagonists (Rosen, 1999, p. 44). James Carey, writing in support of the movement, adds that an increasingly market-driven media model was adding to the alienation between the public and the press. Citing Ralf Dahrendorf, who warned that "liberty is often at risk" when economic motives trump politics (Carey, 1999, p. 52),

Carey describes an unhinged trio of powers that "constitute each other," the press, the public and politics (p.53). Relying less on official voices but on citizens, in fact, having citizens define what the story is, so the theory, would reignite the public's participation in democratic processes. Public journalism, according to Jay Rosen, is "a democratic art" (Rosen & Merritt, 1994).

Several hundred news organizations experimented with at least some of the strategies and ideology of the public journalism movement (Haas & Steiner, 2006). Massey and Haas, who studied the effectiveness of some of these efforts, describe public journalism as a "a behavior-change movement whose intermediate goal is to persuade journalists to change their traditional ways by adopting certain civic-life-friendly news work practices" (Massey & Haas, 2002, p. 563). Partly due to the lack of rigorous study, yet also due to the fact that only a limited number of news organizations had tried this approach beyond single projects, Massey and Haas concluded that journalists saw little difference between this and their traditional approach, and often dismissed it as just "another tool in the journalist's kit" (p. 576). They had not changed their attitudes toward the public after having enacted a more citizen-facing journalism. The effect on journalists in newsrooms that were trying to change the culture was equally unimpressive. Studying such an effort at the *St. Louis Dispatch,* Gade and Perry (2003) found that journalists felt neither empowered nor that they were producing a better newspaper.

Journalists, supporters of the movement contend, have a responsibility to repair the public's damaged trust in government and in news organizations (Haas & Steiner, 2006, p. 239). The news media's focus on horse-race politics, reliance on official voices and their lack of coverage from the vantage point of citizens, remain oft-repeated complaints that Jay Rosen, twenty years later, still identifies and posts on his blog (Rosen, 2019). They are also among the objections that contemporary advocates of *engaged journalism* cite as the gaps that their

approaches hope to fill (Chapter 5, this dissertation). Ferrucci (2017) argues that the internet and the emergence of new market models, by which he means digitally native non-profits ("DNNNs"), have brought to life a movement similar to public journalism that he calls public service journalism (Ferrucci, 2015). This is journalism dedicated to explicitly reporting as a public service, a mission reflected in the news stories they select.

Yet public journalism has drawn much criticism. Michael Schudson found finds that it was not as distinct from prevailing models of professional journalism. Although neither market-, nor advocacy-oriented, Schudson sees public journalism as an extension of the trustee model of journalism. According to this framework, journalists are in control of the news agenda, decide what citizens should know and set out to report and deliver it (Schudson, 1999, p. 120). It is a model that relies on the successful defense of its institutional norms and values, such as truth and objectivity, in order maintain its authority and status (Reese, 1990; Tuchman, 1972). In essence, it was seen as upholding the status quo and adding the element of citizen participation and listening as a marketing ploy (Hardt, 1999).

Much of the criticism of public journalism relates to the question of defining the public and the public sphere. Advocates of the reform, aligned with Jürgen Habermas' view of citizens as members of the public on equal footing (Habermas, 1962/1990), do not address the fact that citizens are not a monolithic mass, ignoring social inequalities that exist among the citizens they purportedly hope to empower (Fraser, 1990; Haas & Steiner, 2001). By ignoring the existence of other communities or public spheres, public journalism offers the same, if not less opportunity for deliberate democratic exchange than do those institutions they hope to reform. It did not catch on and by 2003 institutions like the Pew Center for Civic Journalism had ceased to exist. It remained wedded to an institutional framework and, importantly, did not succeed in changing

any of the norms and values that made up the professional journalistic framework they sought to change. And yet, some argue that the ideology of public journalism has evolved, in the digital age, into citizen and participatory journalism (Overholser, 2016; Schaffer, 2015) and has been integrated into some newsrooms (Witt, 2004). Some predicted that digitally empowered audiences would soon, through new forms of digital participation, be able to fulfill public journalism's goals of engaging citizens, realize deliberative democracy through communication and create an institutionalized public journalism online (Nip, 2006, 2010).

This brings us back to the starting point: an empowered audience, citizens, publics and participants, knocking on the newsroom's door. In the following section I discuss the ways in which the boundaries of professional journalism are being defined and defended and altered, for example through changes in newsroom routines and practices, structures and relationships brought on, in part through technological innovation. How journalists conceptualize their professional roles and identities in light of and vis-à-vis outsiders, is at the heart of this dissertation.

2.3. Journalism – Boundaries of Professional Journalism

Defining professional journalism is an increasingly complicated task. When *WikiLeaks* posted the first piece of leaked data on its site, the technology outlet *Wired* posted a brief article, "User Generated Smoking Guns." In it, the author calls the platform "a user editable leaks site" that wanted to be "the Wikipedia of leaked documents" (Norton, 2007). Ten months later, *WikiLeaks* posted a secret manual for the U.S. military detention facility on Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Again, *Wired* reported on this, calling *WikiLeaks* "anonymous open-government activists" (Singel, 2007). By 2010 *WikiLeaks* had posted dozens of documents and videos, one of them showing Reuters news agency staff as they were being targeted and killed by U.S. forces, with

the voices of the Apache helicopter pilots and crew clearly audible (WikiLeaks, 2010). By then, *Wired* was no longer describing the site, but focused instead on the content that had been leaked. In a 2010 article in *The New York Times*, reporter Charlie Savage noticed that the site was "taking steps to position itself more squarely as a news organization," hoping to benefit from First Amendment protections (Savage, 2010). Discourse in traditional news media outlets placed *WikiLeaks* outside of the boundaries of professional journalism (Coddington, 2014a), citing, among other reasons, that it made no discernable effort to filter and make sense of the documents released. "[F]or some it is lauded as the future of investigative journalism; it has been described as the world's first stateless news organization," writes The Guardian (Fildes, 2010). In 2015 editors of the *WikiLeaks* site call their organization "part of a 'healthy, vibrant and inquisitive journalistic media'" (as cited in Eldridge, 2016). Currently the editors call it "a multi-national media organization and associated library" and Julian Assange its "publisher." They list media and journalism awards the organization has won, referring to "WikiLeaks, its publisher and its journalists" (WikiLeaks, 2019). Twelve years after his site's launch and seven years after beginning his public hide-out in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was arrested and very publicly dragged into a police vehicle (Welna, 2019). He was quickly sentenced to a 50-week prison term for violating the terms of his bail. A few days later, Germany's *Der Spiegel* magazine published an interview with Kristinn Hrafnsson, now officially Assange's successor and self-proclaimed editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks. Asked whether he considers Assange a journalist or an activist Hrafnsson responded: Both. He added: "If you are a journalist and you are not fighting for information freedom, for accountability and transparency, then you are not a journalist in my eyes" (Knobbe & Sontheimer, 2019).

While *WikiLeaks* conjures up a host of issues ranging from sexual assault to national (in)security and surveillance, it serves here to illustrate the boundaries of professional journalism, where they are porous and how they are evoked to gain entry into the field. In the following I outline the boundaries of professional journalism, perceived territorial threats and institutional responses. Since I argue that audience inclusion challenges professional boundaries, understanding the ways in which journalists and the institutions for which they work perceive this incursion and how they respond, will shed light on how this affects their role conception and perception.

2.3.1. Boundaries

The debate over what journalism is, whether a practice, an ideology or a profession, is ongoing and goes beyond the conceptualization of the journalist as someone who transmits information, giving readers and viewers what they need to know (Deuze, 2005). Zelizer (1993) suggests that journalism, rather than a profession with sharp contours of practice, is more adequately described as an "interpretive community" that is shaped by the narrative of its members about itself. Bourdieu describes the journalistic field as one circumscribed by members who agree on a "dominant vision" of what it means to belong (Bourdieu, 2005). Recognition by in-groups, for example by professional associations, is a way to achieve membership and to increase cultural capital. Once inducted, journalists defend the archetypical visions of their profession, as evidenced by the way in which members of the news media have reacted to fictional depictions of their profession (Koliska & Eckert, 2014; Steiner, Guo, McCaffrey, & Hills, 2012). Maintaining the boundaries of one's field is an ideological act and serves to protect professional authority and status (Gieryn, 1983). The list of media awards and accolades found on the *Wikileaks* site is a not too subtle hint that the publisher understood the cultural signals

needed to breach the boundaries of journalism. In this case and in many ways, it did not suffice. Even though the platform is useful to news organizations that lack access and resources for investigative journalism, it was not been enough to gain access to the inner circle of professional journalism (Coddington, 2014a).

Many of the prevailing values and norms of professional journalism are rooted in analog news production practices, yet digital production routines are shifting the boundaries, creating new lines of demarcation between those that belong and those on the outside (Lewis, 2012; Singer, 2015). In some cases, as illustrated by Hellmueller, Vos, and Poepsel (2013), occupational norms are being replaced. Having found in a survey of US newspaper journalists that transparency was, as Singer (2010) had predicted, replacing objectivity as a professional norm, they explain that this represents a shift in cultural captial. Transparency in particular, serves as a trust-building strategy, which is perhaps a necessary precursor to the audience's blind faith that objectivity both exists and is practiced. Transparency is also an expectation that is more easily fulfilled in a digital environment: clickable links to social media accounts, email and personal websites create a sense of proximity, another attribute that is crossing into the realm of occupational norms. Digital journalism, according to Singer (2010), privileges new norms that are in conflict with the old, although they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Proximity to the audience, for instance, competes with the norm of keeping a neutral distance. Similarly, the speed at which audiences expect to be informed may stand in the way of accurate reporting. While these new norms may build trust and attract readers, they come at the expense of autonomy (Singer, 2010).

The territory that journalists are so vehemently defending today was staked out during a wave of professionalization at the turn of the last century (Schudson, 2001; Waisbord, 2013).

Establishing barriers of entry that require a specialized education, a membership fee of sorts, serves to increase the cultural and economic capital of a profession. Most of the norms that arose out of this era remain, some still with formal criteria for acceptance into the corps of professional journalists covering a beat (the White House, Congress, the State Department, particularly for foreign correspondents, state houses and police departments for instance). Even without an official credential, working within the professional boundary presumes adherence to conventions, rules (Schudson, 2011), and agreed upon principles. Values such as objectivity, immediacy, accuracy, relevance, independence and autonomy (Deuze, 2005; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Schudson, 2001; Waisbord, 2013) persist within the ideological frame of professional journalism. They help vet and legitimize would-be members. Articulated norms give sense and meaning to those who call themselves "journalists" (Hanitzsch, 2007). Actors who participate in the field compete for the status as independent gatherers and distributors of information (Robinson, 2015) and conform to established norms in order to, in their view, legitimately perform the roles of gatekeepers and agenda-setters for public discourse (Singer, 2006a). While acknowledgment of their status by those outside of the field is certainly important, acceptance by other journalists, by their editors and by their sources (e.g., Breed, 1955; Sigelman, 1973; White, 1950; Revers, 2014) plays a significant role as well. In addition, adhering to professional standards and role conceptions is valued by journalists who might otherwise feel pressured by their organization to prioritize other values for the sake of profitability (Pollard, 1995). Weaver et al. (2007), for example, found that journalists who felt that they were autonomous, reported higher job satisfaction. In short, belonging to an in-group defined by professional values is more fulfilling. Yet these are conflicting sources of legitimization and status: individual, institutional and societal. As the latter, in the shape of the

audience, claims more authority from journalists, role conceptions and norms are bound to shift. What appears to matter is how this threat takes shape and how it is managed in the newsroom.

The preceding has been an explication of communicative practices that serve as boundary markers (Singer, 2015) for professional and would-be journalists. A different line of demarcation runs along what journalists colloquially call 'the wall' or 'the divide between church and state' (Carlson, 2014; Coddington, 2015), which aligns with the institutional norm of independence. Producing newspapers has never been free, publishing digitally is no different. The myth of commercial news products that are editorially independent is just that, a myth. Whether newspaper barons or advertisers, the push to please the bank has always been a factor in the newsroom (Carlson, 2014). Coddington says the boundary work that journalists do to reinforce this wall is largely rhetorical (p. 68) and contends that journalists tend to agree that the wall should exist. Most news organizations house their marketing departments on a different floor or area of the building, separated from the journalists. Yet the ways in which this boundary between editorial and marketing is being breached, have become more subtle and complex in a digital environment. Native advertising, for example, produced in-house by the promotions department and by journalists, may signal "that the discourse on journalistic independence and autonomy is changing from within," altering the contours of the wall between the editorial and the business sides of the newsroom (Ferrer Conill, 2016, p. 912).

2.3.2. Threats to Autonomy

Two perceived threats to journalistic autonomy with respect to the relationship between journalists and their audience can be categorized as editorial and existential. First, the editorial threat is the fear that the audience has become as adept, if not more, at fulfilling the primary, defining function of the newsroom, information gathering. The case of *WikiLeaks* is as an apt,

albeit extreme, case study of such "interloper media," in the shape of a group that claims professional belonging and challenges the boundaries of the journalistic field (Eldridge, 2014b). Such interlopers could be activists like the researchers behind Bell¿ngcat (2019), a group that has used crowdsourcing and geolocation to investigate the downing of MH17 in the Ukraine (Toler, 2018). These groups represent a kind of outsourcing of skills that are, according to the institutional myth, unique to members of the profession. Concerns with these organizations are over legality, verification, credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 2004) and autonomy from external influence and freedom to define their own professional norms (Singer, 2007). Yet interloper media can also be an "ancillary" organization, that is, a company that provides professional service or training, web analytics, data visualization or content management systems for instance (Eldridge, 2014a, 2014b; Lowrey, Sherrill, & Broussard, 2019). As laid-off journalists search for new opportunities and foundations invest in alternative journalistic enterprises, there is no dearth of real and perceived threats to journalistic authority and exclusivity coming from these new ventures. In fact, start-up news outlets invoke many of the same professional norms and values that traditional outlets aim to protect, providing opportunities for innovation (Usher & Carlson, 2015). Much like bloggers, they perform and fulfill some of the functions of professional journalists, or add know-how to normative practices, thereby blurring the line that separates professional and non-professional actors. Initially welcomed into the fold as a new form of journalism, bloggers were quickly viewed more critically as it became apparent that not all practitioners adhered to what was considered normative behavior. Yet many of them, eager to belong, adjusted and were found to value standards such as accuracy and immediacy (Gil de Zúniga et al., 2011). As more traditional journalists write their own blogs and news outlets emulate or incorporate them on their websites, bloggers, while seen as more opinionated than

factual, continue to assume many of the dominant professional standards, in some cases becoming the watchdogs of non-journalist bloggers. They redefine and police both sides of the shifting boundary between professional and non-professional online journalism (Robinson, 2006). With time, practices normalize, particularly when paired with technology or innovations that are useful (Coddington, 2014b; Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012; Singer, 2005). Chadwick and Collister (2014) illustrate how news organizations' strategic use of erstwhile interloper media, in this case *The Guardian*'s liveblogging as part of their Snowden coverage, are just that: a strategy for reinforcing journalistic authority through co-optation of the interloper medium. As Usher (2017) points out, commercial media organizations continue to have more leverage and structural advantages, essentially swallowing up innovative entrants into the field. While such outsiders may initially pose a threat to professional journalists before their practices are co-opted, they also tend to professionalize and institutionalize (Lowrey, 2012). In fact, right-wing bloggers like Pamela Geller, Alex Jones and Andrew Breitbart are examples of right-wing interlopers who, since they do not adhere to norms such as accuracy and verification, were not co-opted. Instead, they professionalize and compete over agenda-setting authority and the public sphere with professional journalists (Meraz, 2013). In addition, alternative media, even if not in direct competition as news sources, can influence the news selection authority of professional outlets, illustrated in Abel and Barthel's (2013) work showing how the comedy show *Saturday Night Live* influenced the framing of vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin in traditional news coverage.

Many of the ideal-type markers of professional legitimacy have been challenged in the digital, networked news environment (Anderson, 2013). Social media challenge journalists' sense of authority, especially since the affordances of the internet allow non-journalists to verify

and fact-check their new work (Deuze, 2008a, 2008b; Hermida, 2012b). Digital news work also brings with it new tools that require methods and skilled workers outside of the traditional norm. Journalists specializing, for example, in data scraping and visualization broaden the definition of what it means to be a journalist in the newsroom (Usher, 2016).

A different kind of interactivity, that is, actual interaction in comment sections or social media apps and through more removed digital analytics tools, makes visible in an immediate and often unfiltered way the impact the journalist's work is having and how the audience is responding to their content. Big data, a toolkit with great potential and seen as a window into the world of the *audience*, leading the way to more interactivity and participatory journalism, was reluctantly admitted into the newsroom by traditional reporters (Domingo, 2008). Although interactivity has been dismissed by some as nothing more than a marketing ploy, it has become routinized and the *audience* has emerged as an active participant, along with sources, reporters and editors (Robinson, 2011b). Along with interactivity and *audience* monitoring, social media platforms are part of the news reporting, production and distribution process. The repurposing of news articles for placement on social media platforms, free-for-all, un-moderated comment sections and sharing functionalities, usually by journalists who have not reported or written the story themselves, alienate journalists and mean a loss of control and monopoly over information, as well as opportunities for redrawing the lines of normative practice (Lewis, 2012; Robinson, 2007, 2015; Singer, 2008, 2010).

In her 2006 study, Singer contends that journalists are beginning to evaluate audience participation in a different way and that they are "taking steps toward reshaping their gatekeeping role to accommodate the interactive nature of the Internet" (Singer, 2006b). The audience as potential gatekeeper and co-definer of news-worthiness is a recurring theme.

Shoemaker and Vos argue that online news delivery has allowed audiences to shape their input by selecting which content they prefer. The audience channel, as they put it, has also meant that old notions of gatekeeping should be revisited and updated (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The introduction of web analytics, that is, the ability to track reader behavior and interaction with a news story in real time, is one of the most impactful changes in the news industry. Five years after Singer's study, Anderson finds that "a new level of responsiveness to the agenda of the audience is becoming built into the DNA of contemporary news work" (Anderson, 2011b, p. 529).

The discussion of gatekeeping and audience inclusion can be viewed as a debate about power and entitlement. Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, in *The News Gap,* use the language of the marketplace to describe news producer and consumer relations (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013). They begin their book with the analogy of a bakery that should adjust to changing demand for some of its products. They convincingly show how the suppliers of news, as do those bakers, are effectively ignoring demand. Boczkowski and Mitchelstein found that in diverse markets, the gap between what journalists deemed important and newsworthy and what their audience deemed interesting and newsworthy was surprisingly large and widespread regardless of location and media culture. In some ways, their findings mirror the assumptions underlying the news value criteria that came after Galtung and Ruge (1965), for example of Gans and his differentiation between "important" and "interesting" stories (Gans, 1979) in that the polarization of assigned relevance has only increased. Bozckowski and Mitchelstein note that newsrooms with more technological resources appear to have a smaller "gap" between supply and demand. While *The News Gap* helps to gain an understanding of the discrepancy between editorial value and reader attention, it raises many questions about how newsrooms are looking to bridge this

gap. Boczkowski writes that "it is not only sources but also algorithms what make the news, as witnessed by the adoption of tools such as Google Analytics, Chartbeat and in-house systems inside news organizations …" (Boczkowski, 2014, p. 3).

While watching circulation numbers and studying reader habits for marketing purposes, common in print newsrooms, digital platforms have enabled a kind of passive audience interaction that is both a threat and an opportunity for journalists. It is passive in that audience input does not go beyond interacting with the news product. Audience analytics platforms offer no comment sections. What analytics tools produce is audience data with high economic value and data that can inform journalists' news selection. Newsroom management, on the other hand, can use this data to direct editorial decisions. It is a temptation for all; and while it represents a shift in how journalists view their audiences, it also represents a loss of autonomy (Anderson, 2011a). Scholarship has focused quite a bit on the evolution and impact of metrics on editorial decision-making (Jenner & Tandoc, 2013; Tandoc, 2014; Tandoc, Hellmueller, & Vos, 2013; Tandoc & Thomas, 2014). A number of researchers have been looking at the evolution of audience engagement measurement tools (Jenner & Tandoc, 2013; Napoli, 2011; Schaudt & Carpenter, 2009; Webster, Phalen, & Liddy, 2006). Whereas Usher, in her analysis of the New York Times, finds that management's push for the use of web metrics has not been equally received and acted upon in all newsrooms (Usher, 2014b), Vu sees a pattern. Vu's analysis of 318 gatekeepers supports the need for an inclusion of audience in the understanding of the gatekeeping process. Vu finds that news editors who attach economic value to higher readership, will actively allow for the audience input measured through web metrics to become part of their news value decision-making (Vu, 2014), although they do not perceive themselves as being influenced by audience input through web metrics.

Instead of viewing audience inclusion through web analytics either only as a threat to the gatekeeping autonomy of journalists or as empowerment of the audience, it may be more helpful to see if there is either an unconscious acceptance of metric success as a news value or as an overt use on the part of executives to use web metrics as a means to influence coverage to meet the economic demands. In other words, is measurable audience approval becoming a professional norm, holding cultural capital, or is it a managerial tool with economic capital? This would enhance analyses of the use of metrics in the newsroom. The concept of "engagement" that Napoli and others refer to as elusive could be defined more clearly. Napoli speaks both of asymmetries in participation, so what is being measured is not necessarily representative of the audience (Napoli, 2011), and of research indicating that audience opinion and data gained from online discussions have been used by network executives "to influence the creative direction of an individual program" (Ross, 2009). While early work on the impact of metrics on newsroom decision-making was focused on journalists' acceptance of metrics and on the more obvious, direct effect that saw journalists producing "clickbait," (e.g., Petre, 2015; Tandoc, 2014; Usher, 2013; Vu, 2014) that is, viewing the audience as economic capital only, recent work is taking a more nuanced look at the role of audience analytics in the newsroom (e.g., Arenberg & Lowrey, 2019; Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2019; Lawrence, Radcliffe, & Schmidt, 2018; Petre, 2018; Powers, 2018; Thurman, 2018; Vos, Eichholz, & Karaliova, 2018; Zamith, 2018). Petre's (2018) work on the influence of analytics providers on shaping journalists' routines and attitudes toward using metrics by, for instance, aligning themselves with institutional norms, stands out.

This section has provided an overview of the threats to professional authority and automony through interloper media and various forms of participatory and interactive practices, including analytics. The ways in which news organizations respond to these forms of audience

inclusion affects the role perceptions of journalists, addressing the research questions I pose in this dissertation. In the following section I discuss how the introduction of audience engagement strategies and staff is an institutional response to the threat posed by thte audience, that allows journalists to maintain professional boundaries. This leads into a final section on how audience inclusion affects journalists as members both of institutions and of a profession.

2.3.3. Institutional response

In response to the troubled relationship between journalists and their audiences, as evidenced by the decline in readership and revenue (Barthel, 2017; Edmonds, 2016), locating and recruiting new users is the top priority for news organizations. Journalism has become not just market-driven (Fuchs, 2018; Herman & Chomsky, 2010), but attention-driven as well, with journalists competing for their audience's attention and arguably, audiences doing the same (Fengler & Ruß-Mohl, 2008; Webster, 2014). Once found, they need to use the industry term, to be "engaged." The terms "engagement" and "social journalism" have become synonymous with efforts to connect journalists with their audience. Practicing "engaged journalism" was described by newsroom workers in more than two dozen newsrooms studied in 2012 and 2013, as hard labor that many felt forced to do (Batsell, 2015). Downsizing and the fear of losing their jobs, had reporters tweeting and communicating with their readers online, something they felt was not within their traditional reporting duties (Batsell, 2015). Petre (2015) suggests that *audience* inclusion was perceived as a burden by journalists but that they also appreciated and cared about metrics as measures of their success and as valuable insights. The need for a more sophisticated and fitting set of metrics, more suited to the needs of newsrooms, was

proposed in a study examining newsroom use of metrics, advancing the idea that no "one-size-fits-all" set of analytics exists for newsrooms (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016). Organizations like American Press Institute (API) offer audience research and strategies for engagement that align closely with the editorial goals of the publishers. Its mission statement reads: "The American Press Institute advances an innovative and sustainable news industry by helping publishers understand and engage audiences, grow revenue, improve public-service journalism, and succeed at organizational change" (API, 2019). This is not an offer to revolutionize the news industry but to help news organizations regain control of their professional autonomy with a focus on revenue. API is one of several organizations devoted to newsroom training and consulting with audience engagement at its core. Its professional values tick all the boxes: editorial freedom, public service and financial independence.

They wish to maintain in control over what and how they produce the news, even in light of this rapprochement with their audience, remains a constant (Črnič & Vobič, 2013). Since Batsell's study of engagement practices in newsrooms, most newsrooms have installed teams—some budgets allow only for one team member—dedicated exclusively to what is referred to as "audience." When researcher and engagement editor Julia Haslanger interviewed these "social journalists," as she calls the journalists who work with audiences, she found a variety of job titles: "audience engagement editor," "community engagement strategist," "social media editor" as well as "audience development/growth" staff. She also encountered reporters, editors and digital producers fulfilling this job. She calls this a new "breed of journalism" requiring social skills and involving offline and online social events and communication skill, as well as the ability to recognize and make

use of audience feedback (Haslanger, 2016).

This institutional response to what I consider a disruptive innovation (Christensen, 1997; Gilbert & Bower, 2002; Küng, 2001, 2015; Schmidt & Druehl, 2008; Sterling, 2008). that is, the emergence of the audience as an actor in the journalistic process, represents a significant change in journalistic practice. The audience is now embedded in the newsroom, materializing on a metrics dashboard or intermediated through a staff member. Audience *engagement* is labor that is expected from journalists, albeit to varying degrees. I argue that this addition of editors and along with them a new class of editors, tasked with audience engagement and content distribution on social media platforms, as well as the requirement of journalists to perform these tasks, contributes to a more explicit market orientation of news organizations. In addition, it introduces into the journalist's role conception a decidedly economic function that violates the "wall of separation between church and state" (Bagdikian cited in Coddington, 2015). Without the ability to quantify, measure and thereby make visible the audience, this shift would not be possible. Human intervention, in the form of editors who negotiate the space between journalistic production and marketing, hides from plain view this significant change in the relationship between the editorial and business side. Rather than strengthen the authority of news editors, it places it into the hands of intermediaries, social media and engagement editors, who monitor the audience, but who also interpret the computational output of audience behavior and preference and translate it into a message that becomes a news value.

The introduction of innovative technology and practices that involve audience participation, such as the inclusion of metrics and the resulting response, is a change that journalists have resisted more vehemently than other newsroom adjustments. This holds

particularly true for innovations that are perceived as undermining journalistic or professional autonomy (Ekdale, Singer, Tully, & Harmsen, 2015). Many newsrooms are hiring engagement editors whose job it is to translate the news about audience feedback and report it back to the newsroom. Not only do they repurpose already produced content and make it "snackable" on social media platforms, but they also coach journalists, help them, to use their term, to "brand" themselves, so they can enter into a new kind of relationship with their audiences. This new class of news workers serves as an intermediary between the marketing and the editorial world, bringing "the numbers," that is, quantified audience feedback, to the content producers and negotiating with them how to serve the audience's needs without compromising professional boundaries. Their titles change, as does the scope of their duties, but the new class of news workers with job titles such as digital editors, social media editors or audience engagement editors has become an important intermediary between the audience, the marketing department, editors and reporters and self-identify as journalists (Assmann & Diakopoulos, 2017).

Yet another response to the disruption that digital audiences present is the institutionalization of the use of social media platforms in news work. Using, for example, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and Instagram for self-branding, sourcing and self-promotion, is now an assumed ingredient of journalistic labor (Pavlik, 2000). Surrounded by ambient news, both audience and journalists have moved to social media platforms (Hermida, 2010, 2012a). Although research does not show consensus over the usefulness of platforms such as Twitter, in particular in newsrooms in which some journalists are more proficient in the use of social media than others (Chadha & Wells, 2016), some research has shown that when journalists use social media they do so in ways that support

professional norms (Lasorsa et al., 2012).

In summary, I have argued here that audience inclusion, as a disruptive practice, has been integrated into news work in ways that enable journalists to maintain professional authority and autonomy, either through assimilation or by installing a new class of newsroom employees as change agents. Nonetheless, much of the audience work is now being performed by journalists themselves. In the next section I look at journalistic role conceptions and professional identity in the context of institutional theory. I ask how audience inclusion as a disruptive practice affects the status and role perception of the professional journalist.

2.4. The Journalist, the Audience and the Newsroom

Whether journalists like it or not, the audience has claimed a spot in the newsroom. This dissertation aims to understand how journalists respond to this addition to their institution and to the routines and interactions this entails. As outlined above, interactions encompass the range of participatory and interactive possibilities that are digitally available, include web analytics. They also include personal encounters. Holton, Lewis, and Coddington categorize the latter as forms of "reciprocal" journalism, that is, exchanges that are in one way or another mutually beneficial: direct, one-on-one, indirect exchanges within and in front of community members for their benefit and continual exchanges (Holton et al., 2016). Using results from a 2014 survey of U.S. newspaper editors and journalists, they sought to determine whether and how the types of interactions journalists had with their audience affected the journalists' role conceptions (Holton et al., 2016). In the broadest terms and based on Weaver et al. (2007), the four categories of role conception are: disseminator, adversary, interpreter-investigator, and populist mobilizer (Beam, Weaver, & Brownlee, 2009; Weaver et al., 2007). Holton et al. expand these to the monitorial

"public service" role, the populist mobilizer who sets a political agenda and advocates for change, the loyal supporter of government policy and the entertainment role, providing advice and concerned with finding stories that attract large audiences (Holton et al., 2016, pp. 4-5). Their findings suggested that journalists who understood their roles to be in the entertainment and loyal support category were more likely to favor digital audience interaction on social media or other platforms. Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc (2018) distinguish between normative (imposed), cognitive (personal value-based), practiced (based on actual output) and narrated (what journalists say they do) roles (p. 440). They argue that new technology and routines affect how these are enacted and defined. The way journalists conceptualize their roles and the ways in which they enact them, rarely coincides (Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015; Mellado et al., 2016). Therefore, it is particularly interesting to further study the relationship between the kind of interactions journalists have with their audience and how they define their mission. Perhaps digital interaction is favored by journalists whose role conception includes rapid, viral dissemination of their method or the attraction of a large audience. Many other factors are involved in shaping journalists' role conceptions. Especially in an industry that is under duress, professional and institutional identity can be shaped by ownership and market-orientation of the news organization. Prioritizing, for example, audience metrics as having high cultural or economic capital, will affect how journalists define their roles (Bunce, 2017). In the following section I discuss literature on identity work in the newsroom, both on a socio-psychological level and through the lens of institutional theory.

2.4.1. Institutional Theory and Conflict

Some of the changes that news organizations are implementing as they search for new sources of revenue and for ways to attract and keep a loyal audience, run counter to

processes and arrangements that define journalists' core professional values and identities. Shifts in the news media industry bring with them profound changes in the institutional culture of the profession (Singer et al., 2011) and are ongoing. The circumscription of journalism as a profession invokes a variety of boundaries - of space and place, of practice and power, symbolically and real (Carlson & Lewis, 2015). When asked to locate themselves within the spectrum of their own profession, journalists are often asked to define journalism. The response frequently becomes a list of activities they perform, as if responding not to "what is journalism," but to "what do journalists do" (Ryfe, 2016, p. 664). The profession is, despite an abundance of journalism schools, one that is not formally codified. Newsrooms train young reporters on the job and the initiation into the profession largely occurs informally. Perhaps this is why reporters, when asked to change the way they perform their duties are particularly resistant to new procedures and processes, for instance giving up their beats (Gade & Perry, 2003; Ryfe, 2009), as they are initiated into the practice in almost ritualistic ways. Routines, professional practices and boundary markers, are what journalists who are facing technological challenges and change have internalized and that provide a self-identity that is hard to alter, particularly after a certain age (Nikunen, 2014).

News media organizations are cultural institutions whose participants (both within and outside of the organization) share common values and expectations. They are also discrete organizations that adhere to common institutional norms and practices. Analyses of the state of contemporary journalism conceive of the industry crisis as multi-dimensional. It is economic, professional and cultural, the latter referring to the lack of trust audiences have in the profession (Nielsen, 2016). Technology has given rise to

institutional disruption that includes practice, content, organizational, intra-institutional, as well as inter-institutional changes (Pavlik, 2000).

The narrative of institutional change in journalism is a political process in which both external pressures, economic forces, as well as normative factors, norms and professional standards, as well as the affordances and realities of journalistic practice, work in concert, yet at times compete with one other (DiMaggio, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The empowerment of previously neglected embedded agents, as is the case with audiences whose interests and engagement are now being measured and who participate in news production, opens up the possibility for institutional entrepreneurs to affect previous institutional arrangements (DiMaggio, 1988). Yet efforts to bring change to institutions tend to create a paradox in that the more they aspire to change, the more they retreat to familiar patterns and continue to assimilate to other members of the profession and similar organizations out of, uncertainty, regulatory pressure or professional ethos.

The current crisis in the news media industry mirrors this paradox. The failure of organizations to adapt, when analyzed through the lens of DiMaggio and Powell's early work, could be interpreted as the inability to allow for innovation due to an insecurity-fueled adherence to standards of professionalism that don't allow for boundaries to be crossed. Fear as barrier to the successful diffusion of innovation is a theme in newsroom studies (Ekdale et al., 2015). Yet the internet, according to DiMaggio et al., should not just be studied with an eye on its negative effects, for example on equality and political participation, but with respect to organizational culture, because it allows for so many levels and forms of interaction: "reciprocal interaction, broadcasting, individual reference-searching, group discussion, person/machine interaction" (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman,

& Robinson, 2001, p. 308). Social structures, Castells writes, will be altered through a new, networked culture. He goes so far as to compare the societal impact of the affordances of the internet and its multimedia possibilities with the impact of the alphabet, creating new forms of identity and inequality while also creating new forms of decentralized, social organization. These affordances of interactivity have made the internet an institution that imposes itself on the media institutions working with and within it (Castells, 1996, 2002). In Castells' framework, McLuhan's "medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1975) becomes "the network is the message." It is no longer about the constraints of a restrictive distribution process that is expensive to maintain and invites economic dependencies, exerting more pressure to conform on news organizations. Instead, the network is the free-for-all equalizer, opening the door for institutional entrepreneurs, empowered embedded agents, to bring institutional change.

This approach redefines the role of the journalist in a networked institution that includes, incorporates and validates participants whose participation runs counter to professional standards that lend identity to the journalist. Anyone can now be a journalist. These are the kind of contradictions that emerge out of institutional arrangements that in turn allow for actors within the institution to serve as change agents (Seo & Creed, 2002). Garud, Hardy, and Maguire (2007) address the concept of institutional entrepreneurs, agents within organizations that try to affect change by transforming institutional arrangements or creating new ones. Similar to Boyles' findings about intrapreneurs, units within news organizations that serve as labs or innovation hubs that disrupt from within (Boyles, 2016), Garud looks at institutional entrepreneurship, that is, actors within organizations that have cultural or economic capital and transform the institution from

inside (Garud et al., 2007). Institutional theory, building on DiMaggio and Powell's notion of institutions that work to prevent change and toward assimilation to industry and professional norms, contradicts the concept of entrepreneurship that rests on change and the capacity and arrangements that enable it (Garud et al., 2007). Arguably, the agents (here: participatory *audiences* revealing institutional contradictions) are actors that can take on the skills and can inhabit the social spaces of the institutional actors that are inherent and part of the contradictions. They can "take on the meanings" of journalists (Fligstein, 1997). Perhaps a reverse dynamic takes place as well, with journalists accepting the change brought about by including audience engagement in their practice while conversely assuming some of the audience's institutional roles and skills. Specifically, they are becoming one of them, members of communities who, although reporting about the audience, are just like them.

Wahl-Jorgensen, whose work showing the disdain that editors of letters-to-the-editor sections feel toward their readers (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002) revealed the divide between journalists and the letter-writers, has begun to look at changes in attitudes and practices as economic pressures are leading to institutional change. The inclusion of the audience has led to more emotional expressions in journalism. Having a point of view and distancing oneself from the professional dogma of "objectivity" are seen as a consequence of this shift within the news industry toward including the audience (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). The networked nature of social media provides more "connectedness" through shared emotions and, ultimately shared practice (Papacharissi, 2016). I hope to understand, through this qualitative, empirical study, if and how journalists adjust their norms, practices and role identities to the audience. In this final section I consider the literature on

newsroom sociology, taking the discussion from a larger institutional framework within which journalists identity work is performed to the workplace itself.

2.4.2. Into the Newsroom

Whether virtual or literal, newsrooms are spaces of professional communality that consists of institutional arrangements. They are workplaces that in many ways resemble the theater stage that Erving Goffman uses as a metaphor for places of human interaction (Goffman, 1959). Self-categorization and presentation for the sake of maintaining status and control are particularly relevant and prevalent in a work situation in which the output that is produced is visible, literally, to an audience whose reaction is measured quantitatively and who can comment, like and share it. But it is also measured and assessed internally, providing for a particularly, at least potentially, stressful process of comparison and categorization of performance. In this case, it is mediated by external measurements of success (page views, time spent on site, page referrals, social media platforms etc.) by analytics tools and translated into an internal valuation system, leading to categorization, even further alienating the individual from her own self-categorization.

When assessing the outcome of new arrangements, it is important to measure the level of cognitive and emotional commitment to the institution (Voronov & Vince, 2012), keeping in mind that agents outside of the formal constraints of the organization (as in the news industry's case, participatory audiences) may feel conflicting commitments, leading to behavior that both disrupts and maintains institutional arrangements. This dialectic may be found at work among journalists as well who may feel high emotional and cognitive commitment to the professional ethos of journalism but experience conflicting emotions about changing institutional arrangements that edge them out of their traditional roles or

alter their status within newsroom and professional hierarchies. Yet change in the newsroom is often initiated by members of the organization who, facing the loss of their job and status, have been forced to redefine what their professional identity entails. The process of change agent creation within newsrooms is likely paved with emotional adjustments of status within the institutional framework. Despite their demotion or marginalization, it may be precisely these actors who are forced to redefine their roles and navigate their changing status, who affect change (Seo, Bartunek, & Barrett, 2010; Seo & Creed, 2002).

Breed describes the formation of in- and out groups in newsrooms, with social control mechanisms exercised by editors, for instance by "cutting one's story" or "withholding friendly comment by an executive" when journalists do not write and report in according to their editor's wishes (Breed, 1955, p. 332). This serves as a signal to comply with overarching institutional norms. During crises in a given profession, there is much introspection, reflection and discussion about standards and, as is the case with contemporary journalism, about the culture dominating and guiding it. Particularly in news organizations that are more market oriented, the journalistic culture tends to follow the will of the audience. Cultural meanings such as "objectivity" and "serving the public good" have less value than does pleasing the readers or viewers (Hanitzsch 2007). Status that is acquired through socialization into a culture of journalism that values these, less populist goals, no longer holds.

A similar loss in status is not uncommon in newsrooms that not only measure audience engagement but also perform journalistic work in a different way. Anderson's discussion about the effects of computational journalism on both newsroom culture and

standards of what "good journalism" is, illustrates the deep impact that the digital shift in news production and the assessment of individual output has on reporters. The use of algorithms to both curate what the audience reads, along with criteria that their behavior online dictates and what the reporter's assignment is, changes the dynamics of these workplaces (Anderson, 2012).

The assumption that there is a correlation between journalists' ideas about what audiences want and what they in fact engage with correlate is false. Boczkowski and Mitchelstein show that the gap between news producers and consumers is wide (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013). Their study is a striking and exhaustive testament to the dissonance between the self-categorization of members of an entire profession and the desired function of those it is supposed to serve. Once members of this in- group, the news workers, cross over to the other, the audience side, the rift will begin to show in the newsroom as well. Gans, in his ethnography of newsrooms at CBS, NBC, Newsweek and TIME, offered many convincing illustrations of the stark gap between audience and news producer and how the knowledge of increased appeal and higher ratings, affected the behavior among reporters who have been "voted up" by the audience (Gans, 1979). Gans examined the news organization as a whole in study of how news was being selected in various newsrooms. Whereas Breed, for instance, focuses on how publishers controlled what was reported on and what not (Breed, 1955), Gans approaches the newsroom taking a wider view (Reese, 2009, p. 280). This more encompassing view shows how identifying with one's work and organization plays a large role in self-categorization and affective commitment. A disconnect between self-categorization and status, as would be the case if a new valuation of performance and status were introduced (audience favor and page

views, for example), will negatively affect commitment and loyalty to one's place of employment (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Once reporters, who formerly epitomized what made the news organization proud and who enhanced its reputation, comprehend and internalize that these categories are no longer valued, their social identity suffers. This problem is experienced equally by reporters who personally experienced the status loss and newer entrants into the field, who may have become journalists with the expectation, supported, for example, by journalism educators, of enjoying a higher status. Particularly in workplaces with a highly skilled, white-collar work force, such a disruption of social identity weakens feelings of loyalty towards the employer (Alvesson, 2000). Emotional reactions that impact loyalty and motivation are not solely grounded in biological responses, such as fear or anger, but socially (Kemper, 1987), suggesting that a shift in power and status within the organization can lead to emotional outcomes, such as shame and embarrassment or pride and satisfaction, depending on the nature of the change in status. This further reinforces the effects of the shift in power and status and, as a possible subject for further research in the newsroom context, may impact news selection choices as well. While studies have shown that journalists and editors adjust their selection of news topics based on web analytics and that this may effect notions of professional autonomy and judgment (e.g., Anderson, 2011a; Jenner & Tandoc, 2013; Lee, Lewis, & Powers, 2012; Usher, 2013; Vu, 2014), more work is required to investigate how producing news stories with high audience metrics impacts the journalist's self-identity and status in the newsroom.

Of course, a positive impact can likely be felt by members of the organization who are in the middle: those who embrace the new valuation system, adapt to it and do not

perceive themselves as losing out in any way. Lower-status members may even be able to enhance their status as they compare favorably to otherwise- higher status members who are perceived as inflexible. A new dimension is created against which to compare oneself and other out-group members to (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Arguably, the group's perception of changed roles and identities will have an impact on the behavior of members of the newsroom towards those who have been demoted by a loss in audience favor, that is, fewer page views. The identities of these "reputation builders" are particularly salient and set within the organization (Turner, 1978), likely leading to higher levels of stress once this role can no longer be fulfilled. Loyalty towards the organization and, more importantly, the occupation overall and the professional standards that have been attached to status derived from compliance with these standards, will be affected, with formerly high-status reporters feeling less authentic and motivated as their identity-salience and role identity adjust or conflict (Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Reid, Epstein, & Benson, 1994; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). The possibility of an increasingly fractured workplace becomes real, as status and power become redefined and mechanisms of self-verification shift alliances (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992) and change the ways in which news stories are selected and produced. If the loss of status is linked to the external identity and status of the organization (reputation), it will be closely tied to personal identity, blurring the lines between role and personal identity (Hitlin, 2003). Professional values and norms that are established through a profession or a definition of success that are industry-specific are powerful in establishing role identities. Social identity, identity of self, role-identity and personality are processes that are often conflated but do intersect in a context in which identity of role and self are defined by

social identity derived from organizational status (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Hogg, Abrams, Otten, & Hinkle, 2004; Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003).

The field of journalism and its institutional arrangements around professional norms and expectations were juxtaposed in the discussion above against the mechanisms of role- and self-identity that are at play within news organizations when journalists are confronted with change. Potential outcomes are dissatisfaction, loss of commitment, depression or role adaption. From a management perspective, how *audience* inclusion, a potentially disruptive addition to the newsroom, is introduced, made sense of and incentivized, is crucial. Evans (2016) urges further research into how journalists make sense of the changes that new technology and related processes bring from an organizational communication perspective (p. 280). Doing so will help answer questions about how innovations in practice, such as audience inclusion in all of its enactments, affect journalists' role conceptions. Kreiss and Brennen (2016) argue that "innovation is ideological in that it plays into normative assumptions about the civic role of journalism in society" (Kreiss and Brennan in Evans, 2016, p. 5). Therefore, newsroom innovation that has journalists engaging with the audience as one of its defining enactments, its impact on their role conceptualization on an institutional and professional level is significant.

I have argued here that including audience members as participants in news work has a profound effect on how journalists situate themselves as members of their newsroom, as employees, as members of a profession and field. Returning to the perspective of field theory, I argue that both the audience*'s* and the journalist's cultural and economic capital are experiencing a fundamental shift as audience engagement is becoming routinized in the newsroom.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This dissertation employs ethnographic methods, participant observation and in-depth interviews in four newsrooms, as well as telephone interviews with journalists, editors, newsroom managers and professionals outside of the physical newsroom, such as web analytics providers and engagement consultants. A grounded theory approach guided the inquiry, resulting in voluminous rich qualitative data that allowed me to take the insights gathered from conversations with industry consultants into my on-site interviews in one newsroom, which in turn informed my inquiry and approach in the next. In this chapter I explain in detail my methodology. After stating my research questions, explain my rationale for choosing qualitative methods, specifically ethnography, participant observation. I then acknowledge the grounded theory approach that I have taken in my data collection and analysis. I follow with a detailed account of my recruitment efforts for all newsrooms and interviewees, including key informants and audience engagement editors that were not part of the newsrooms I visited. I then outline my rationale for conducting semi-structured interviews, followed by an explanation for my choice of key informants and case studies. I then briefly outline my strategy for collecting data, including field notes and visuals and end by listing the equipment I used to capture and analyze the data.

3.2. Research Questions

Every methodological choice is guided by the questions the researcher sets out to answer (C. Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992, p. 2). The goal of my research is to understand not just which audience engagement strategies journalists use, but the meaning of these for journalists; I am interested in what journalists say about the effects of these practices on the institutional

arrangements that prevail in their workplaces. Qualitative research, much like any professional field, in this case the journalistic field, that it sets out to study, has many meanings and interpretations. An agreed upon definition is that in using qualitative methods researchers turn "the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self" in an effort to "make sense of or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). In this sense, this study lends itself to qualitative methods including ethnography, participant observation, interviews, note-taking and recordings. I seek to answer questions about meaning-making and interpretation. They are:

- **What are the audience engagement strategies in the newsroom and how are they incorporated into newsroom routines?**
- **How do these seem to affect journalists' roles and their role conceptions?**
- **How do journalists in the newsrooms that use audience engagement strategies conceptualize, at least verbally, their audiences?**
- **How do journalists in newsrooms that use audience engagement strategies talk about the journalism they do and about their roles as journalists, vis-à-vis the audience?**
- **Does the kind of audience engagement strategy they perform (mediated, computational or through engagement/social media editors or unmediated through direct contact, etc.) make a difference in how they talk about themselves, their roles and their audiences?**

I began by asking people what the engagement practices in the newsrooms visited are, acknowledging that not everyone agrees on the definition of the terms "audience engagement"

and “audience first.” So while this is a question that assumes a more categorical approach to qualitative inquiry, I employ a dialectic way of thinking about my data collection and the data itself, taking part in a conversation with the data, as it contributes to answering questions that follow and emerge (Freeman, 2016).

Freeman, in her categorization of ways of thinking about qualitative data, identifies purpose, strategies and foci of analysis along five modes: categorical, narrative, dialectical, political and diagrammatical. She acknowledges that they are distinct, but in conversation with one another (Freeman, 2016, pp. 10-11). Narrative thinking and dialectical analysis are appropriate for this study. Narrative thinking highlights “the unique voice and meaning-making process of individuals and groups.” The focus of dialectical analysis is “to uncover inherent tensions that are believed to exist in humans and societies and put these in dialogue with one another for transformational purposes” (Freeman, 2016, p. 11). Both align and connect with my research. Finally, I employ categorical thinking as I aim to discover categories and criteria along which the data can be organized and analyzed.

Naturalistic inquiry, that is, observing phenomenon in their natural setting, in their context (Hoepfl, 1997) is also important for this project. As a foreign journalist, reporting from the United States for a German television program that favors long-form, documentary and magazine pieces over short news stories, I was already leaning toward an ethnographic approach. Producing a television documentary also entails purposeful interviews and observation. It requires immersion into an environment and seeking the kind of proximity with one’s subjects as well. Yet it differs from research ethnographies in important ways. As a researcher, I am not “telling a story,” as I am not constructing one reality, but acknowledge that there are many. In addition, unlike documentary work, ethnographic work often requires, as was the case for this

project, participant anonymity. In addition, maintaining what Patton (1990) describes as a neutral yet understanding and empathetic stance is not only ethical but also most effective in developing the kind of knowledge we seek through this qualitative methodology.

3.3. Qualitative Research

3.3.1. Ethnography and Participant Observation

Ethnography is the methodology of choice in an ever-growing number of fields (Lareau, 2018). Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) describe it as a compromise between a pragmatic and philosophical approach as it favors exploring social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses. In addition, it works with unstructured data, a small number of cases and entails leads to "analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions" (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, pp. 248-249). With this understanding, ethnography is appropriate for a qualitative study of several newsrooms. It allows for the experience and analysis of the social and cultural meanings of interactions among actors and between the researcher and the object(s) of her study (Tedlock, 2000). The ethnographer's own identity comes into play and allows her own experiences and meanings to enter into the process and "allow(s) both self and other to appear together within a single narrative that carries a multiplicity of dialoguing voices" (Tedlock, 2000, p. 471).

Robinson and Metzler (2016) summarize the historical development of newsroom ethnographies from Tuchman (1978), Gans (1979) and Fishman (1988) to Boczkowski (2005); Paulussen, Greens, and Vandenbrande (2011); Robinson (2011a); Usher (2014b) and more

recent studies taking the researcher into the newsroom.[3] They indicate that more recent ethnographies examining the effects of digitized news work have shown that the challenge for ethnographers lies precisely in capturing the digitized, invisible communication ubiquitous in today's newsroom (Reich & Barnoy, 2016; Robinson & Metzler, 2016). Ethnographers aim to interpret the webs of meaning and produce "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the individuals and groups they study. To achieve this, the researcher needs a significant level of access. The digitization of the newsroom has complicated this task. In online newsrooms the boundaries between the virtual and the real worlds are blurred. This creates opportunities and challenges for researchers (Jordan, 2009). Additional layers of discourse, taking place on digital platforms such as email, text messages and a variety of social media platforms that are used both for the dissemination of the news content and for internal communication, may not be as readily available to the ethnographer. In fact, they may not be visible at all, unless, for example, the researcher explicitly and successfully requests access to internal communication channels like Slack or email.

Other barriers, such as time and access, can be circumvented with some flexibility. "Hybrid ethnographies," for example, a term used by Usher (2016) to describe field research that combines observation, document and data collection with interviews, can be conducted during shorter time periods. This can be especially useful when attempting to visit multiple sites with different levels of access. In the newsrooms visited for this dissertation research, a significant amount of audience interaction takes place on social media platforms with reporters curating

[3] Boczkowski, according to Robinson, set the standard for newroom ethnographies, yet his work has been followed "a few years later by several other notable ethnographic studies by a group of young scholars studying media sociology in some form, including (but not limited to) Mark Deuze, David Domingo, C.W. Anderson, Lucas Graves, Nikki Usher, Alfred Hermida, Jane Singer, Thomas Cottle, Emma Hemmingway, Sue Robinson and others as well as the two aforementioned edited volumes collecting their various work by Domingo and Paterson." (Robinson & Metzler, 2016, pp. 801-802)

their outward facing personas. These virtual social and professional interactions are akin to those among players in online gaming communities (Gabriels, 2014) and can have the same meanings as offline interactions. Both virtual and real-life interactions are social constructs and produce artifacts that reflect the organizational culture within which they were produced and are a crucial part of the study (Hall, 1975). Ideally, access to these digital interactions would be as readily obtained as those that occur offline. My research design did not take this level of access for granted, since it assumes a level of confidentiality that I was aware could not be reliably achieved. Since my focus is on ways in which journalists interact with their audiences and how they speak about this relationship, and as much of this interaction takes place on social media platforms, I made an effort to observe and to ask for copies or evidence of these interactions.

Some journalists had apparently wanted to share internal communication with me, but the fear of inadvertently revealing proprietary information often prevented them from doing so. The changing landscape of media ownership is not only a driving force behind engagement strategies, it has also changed the way policies around data protection are handled by news organizations, further complicating access for researchers (Puijk, 2008). Since I offered anonymity to all participants, in particular to those offering to forward internal documents, the value of this data is limited to that of enhancing observation and informing follow-up questions. Reich and Barnoy's (2016) notion of reconstructing production practices provides a helpful strategy. This entails asking interviewees to reconstruct the production of news content, in a sense reenacting the process that, since it can no longer be observed. Where I became aware of an activity of audience engagement or a relevant policy or managerial decision that was not available to me as a piece of data, I used interviews and follow-up questions to learn about these interactions and about the

motives for and effect of the communication and decisions. I requested that interviewees show me their interaction, either by email or on social media.

The newsroom as a space and place of occupation has changed and has become multiple sites of cultural practice outside of the boundaries of the analog (Cottle, 2000). Nonetheless, participant observation on the site of the physical newsroom continues to be relevant. I argue that, although the affordances of digital media production and consumption have brought much potential for work outside of the confines of the actual newsroom, this has not translated into empty office spaces, with news workers reporting, writing and posting exclusively on their digital devices in coffee shops or from home. While some downtown offices are relocating to larger, warehouse style spaces (Usher, 2014a), the newsrooms I visited were by no means empty. Instead they are places of communication and organization. They serve as important anchors and technology hubs (Usher, 2014a). They house video production units with equipment and edit bays that serve many desks and are therefore appropriately headquartered at a central location. In addition, these newsrooms are communication centers for audience engagement efforts and breaking news desks.

Observing journalists and staff in the newsroom setting, as well while reporting in the field, for example at school board meetings or during early morning stand-ups, provided me with additional and qualitatively different opportunities for both data collection and analysis (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011) than interviews alone. Especially as someone known to the participants as a "colleague," these observational trips became social interactions that avoided the participant-researcher divide. I left each newsroom for breaks that lasted from one day to one week. In each instance, after my return, the situational identity of all participants, myself included, was reassessed and at times addressed (M. V. Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000). My absence had

given all participants time to reflect, perhaps to speak to each other about the questions that I had asked. Similarly, the break had given me an opportunity to reflect from a distance before returning. Although not becoming a member of the newsroom as such, my "situation" played a role in securing support from those who could be considered collaborators or key informants, facilitating my research (M. Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011). This was the case in the three newsrooms in which I was able to both observe and interview participants. It helped me overcome the "blind spot" in newsroom ethnography that keeps managerial decisions out of the researcher's view (Curran, 1990). Cottle, citing Curran, acknowledges this limitation but adds that at least "the method, if applied to various professional and corporate strata and drawing on as many sources of data as one can muster, will leave the approach with at least one eye fully open" (Cottle, 2007, p. 7). I made every effort to do collect and include as much data from as many sources as possible and left each newsroom with a range of data that allowed me to triangulate and create as complete a picture as possible (Denzin, 2017). Included in this data is all computer mediated communication that was made available to me or that was openly accessible, for example social media posts, emails and reports, as well as organizational charts, metrics and promotional materials. Field notes written during interviews and while observing news meetings and during casual conversations, along with recordings of interviews and meetings completed the corpus.

3.3.2. Grounded Theory

Using a grounded theory approach while triangulating the already available data, enabled me to bring structure and direction into the analysis that began with the first day in the field. The constant comparative method suggested in Glaser and Strauss' (1967) Grounded Theory approach aims at discovering themes and generating theory. Applied to work in the field, it

"permits the field worker quite literally to write a prescription so that other outsiders could get along in the observed sphere of life and action," increasing credibility and confidence in the outcome (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 226-227). Because the approach requires immediate attending to transcriptions and field notes at the end of every day, I typed notes taken by hand during interviews, meetings and during periods of observation. As I typed the notes I began analyzing, writing memos and adding or adjusting the questions for the next day. The following is an explanation of the overall recruitment protocol, data collection and analysis, and details for each of the categories and newsrooms studied.

3.4. Recruitment

The University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the scope and proposed protocol for this project, granting it exempt status. I also obtained approval for the interviews with audience engagement editors as a separate project. Anonymity was offered to all participants and in all but one case, *The Washington Post,* the majority of interviewees in the newsrooms accepted that offer and requested anonymity. Key informants did not. I have elected to anonymize all newsroom participants.

My choice of newsrooms was determined by a variety of factors: limits on time and budget had me looking at newsrooms I could reach by car and that allowed me to continue to work part-time as a journalist. Finding newsrooms that were open to having a researcher come in to observe and interview staff was the major challenge. My goal was to find both newsrooms that are part of a corporate chain and ones that are privately-owned. With these constraints I turned to the network at the University of Maryland's Merrill College, as described in detail below. The outcome of my search was a selection of Mid-Atlantic region newsrooms that represented both

large, small and medium size cities, some with more suburban populations and, in the case of *The Washington Post*, a national audience as well.

The sampling of interviewees within the organizations is purposive (Howard, 2002). All newsrooms left it up to me to approach interviewees, that is, news directors and managing editors did not suggest anybody. In most cases management seemed very interested in allowing access and promoted cooperation. I recruited participants by word-of-mouth once I arrived in the newsroom. In the case of *The Asbury Park Press, The Baltimore Sun* and *WRIC* an email was sent to the staff, based on information about the project that I had provided. The editors shared the introductory emails with me. My goal was to speak with as many individuals as possible across beats, gender, age, function and status, in order to capture similarities and differences. Access to *The Washington Post* was more complicated, as I will outline below. The following are brief accounts of access, recruitment and research protocols and experiences for the newsrooms, engagement editors and key informants I observed and interviewed. They are a testament to the power of networks.

3.4.1. The Asbury Park Press

Through its alumni network, the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism maintains good relations with USA Today and Gannett. The Associate Dean connected me with Gannett's Senior Director of News Strategy and with the VP Project Management and Market Engagement. They invited me to present my proposal during a conference call with their regional directors who had been advised through an email about the general trajectory of my research. Less than an hour after my brief presentation, I was contacted by the New Jersey Regional Editor and VP of News/Asbury Park Press. We arranged for a 2 – 3 week "embed" in the newsroom. I was there from January 8 – 12, 2018 and again from January

16 – 24, 2018. During the intervening three days I spoke informally by phone with some interviewees.

I rented a small apartment that was a 15-minute drive from the editorial office in Neptune, New Jersey. Upon I arrival, I was given a brief tour and assigned a desk near the front of the newsroom, with my back to the news director's assistant and in view of his mostly open door. I was given a visitor pass that allowed me to enter the building and newsroom at any hour. I was told when the morning meeting would begin and was introduced to those attending the first meeting that day. Periods of observation were interrupted with formal interviews that I recorded. While the first interviews took place at the journalists' desks, I moved them to one of the designated quiet rooms. These are small rooms with large windows facing the newsroom. Interviews were recorded with explicit consent.

Recruitment of interviewees was difficult at first, especially among the editors-- who had little time but also seemed reluctant to be interviewed. One editor spoke at length with me in an informal conversation; when I asked if I could turn the recorder on or if we could sit down again another day, she said she had no time and everything she had just told me was not to be used. During my stay, a two-year APP investigation into police corruption was coming to an end so I decided to extend my stay to observe the publication of a story that had caused some irritation because it was tying up too many resources, according to the news director. By this time, I had become quite familiar with the people and processes and was tempted to extend my stay even further, but the cost of staying in New Jersey was prohibitive. I left the *Asbury Park Press* with ample data and the feeling that saturation point had been reached.

3.4.2. WRIC

After initial efforts to gain access to a local television station failed, I emailed (due to a misunderstanding) the news director of a Nexstar-owned station Richmond, Virginia. After making some calls to "corporate" he forwarded a "Job Shadow Waiver" that I signed. Less than three weeks after my first request I was scheduled to spend 12 days at the station. Again, I booked an apartment. When I arrived in December 2018 a snowstorm had just hit the region. The newsroom was not fully staffed as a consequence and weather dominated the news coverage for days. Staff members were very open, having been briefed by the news director in an email on which I was copied:

> (Karin will be) … spending time in our newsroom, observing and speaking with various staff members, etc. Her focus is audience engagement with Digital/Social media.
>
> Please make yourself available if Karin has questions for you. She will probably also go out in the field with a few of you as well.

The around-the-clock schedule of this newsroom was very challenging. On some days I spent 16 – 18 hours there so that I could speak with the morning- and night-side staff. Interviews were conducted at reporters' desks, in the studio and behind closed doors. I was joined several reporters in the field and joined the statehouse reporter in her downtown office. One member of the newsroom made a point of meeting me outside the office, at a downtown café. There was no reluctance at all. Even reporters who said they were too busy to talk, made time for an interview. The impression I had was that curiosity about the content of the interview and a desire to be heard and recorded began to take hold. The invitation to the office Christmas party, extended to me by reporters, producers, the news director and the general manager, was a turning point.

3.4.3. The Baltimore Sun

The Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of *The Baltimore Sun* is a member of Merrill College's Board of Visitors. I attended a luncheon with him and when he showed interest in my dissertation topic, I decided to formally request permission to observe and conduct interviews at the *Sun*. He granted me two days in the newsroom in late January 2019 with a possibility to extend for a day. The reception in this newsroom was organized and facilitated by one of the editors tasked by the publisher with organizing my visit. The security measures the *Sun* had implemented since the shooting at the offices of their Annapolis paper *The Capital Gazette*, meant that I would enter in the morning and not leave until late at night, since leaving and reentering was cumbersome. It did afford me many opportunities for interviews and observation. I randomly selected interviewees at first. My day began with the morning meeting during which I was introduced to the editors present. I began by approaching reporters and editors. Several former students who worked in the newsroom were able to guide me and sped up the process of finding a wide variety of people to speak with.

One week later I spent several hours with the *Sun'*s state house reporters in Annapolis and returned for another long day at the newsroom in Baltimore. Most of the interviews took place either in quiet rooms or out of earshot of other reporters. Although this was to improve the quality of the audio recordings, in all newsrooms it became a way to signal and ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Follow-up interviews were conducted over the phone in the weeks following the visit. The newsroom visits were January 24, 25, 31 (Annapolis) and February 1, 2019. The last telephone interview was completed on March 15, 2019. The limits on time and access at this paper made a full ethnographic study impossible. Nonetheless, the

experiences and data gained from the two previous case studies led to a highly focused and productive effort.

3.4.4. The Washington Post

In August 2017 I sent a one-page proposal to Ryan Kellett, Director of Audience and Engagement at *The Washington Post.*[4] We had communicated a year earlier when he connected me with two audience engagement editors at the *Post* for another study. My proposal was rejected, but in November 2017 I was introduced to *The Washington Post's* Editor-in-Chief Marty Baron at an International Center for Journalists dinner. After I explained my project and my previous efforts, as well as my work for a *Washington Post* investigative reporter, he asked me to send an email with my proposal. He forwarded it to the *Post*'s communication team, and it became clear that newsroom visits with the kind of access necessary to conduct ethnographic research would not be possible. He did support interviews in the newsroom but left it up to his communications staff to whom I had sent a list of suggestions for interviewees. After several weeks I was given a schedule with half-hour time slots and a list of five journalists whom they had selected, including Ryan Kellett and one based in Germany. The interviews were scheduled for January 30, 2018. Three took place in a glassed-in, so-called "huddle room" and two on the telephone. A year later I reached out to Ryan Kellett again. He organized four more interviews. The remaining three were arranged by me. One in the newsroom, one by telephone following a recommendation and one, in December 29, 2017, following a personal introduction. The last interview was completed on March 8, 2019.

[4] The job titles of many participants changed during the course of my research. Often, they are descriptive job titles.

Table 1: Overview of Newsrooms

	Asbury Park Press	The Baltimore Sun	The Washington Post	WRIC	Total
Interviews	**40**	**31**	**12**	**48**	**131**
men	23	15	8	27	73
women	17	16	4	21	58
Age[a]	23 - 70	23 - 69	25 - 62	23 - 69	23 - 70
Median Age	42	44	34	31	35
Interview Length/mins[b]	13 – 103	20 - 79	22 – 95	10 – 196	10 - 196
Interview time/mins	2124	1404	568	2083	6169
Time in newsroom	Jan 10 - 24, 2018[c]	Jan 24 – 25, 30 & Feb 1, 2019[c]	Jan 30, 2018 Jan 17, 2019[d]	Dec 10 - 21, 2018	
Location	Neptune, NJ	Baltimore, MD	Washington, DC	Richmond, VA	
Ownership	Gannett	Tribune Publishing	Nash Holdings	Nexstar	

[1] Eight interviewees preferred not to give their age.
[b] Interview lengths listed here are recorded, sit-down interviews and do not include meetings, informal interviews
[c] This does not include follow-up phone calls
[d] Time spent in the newsroom only for interviews. Some interviews were conducted earlier, several later, not in the

newsroom and/or on the phone

3.4.5. Key Informants

I based my selection of key informants on research that I done about engagement initiatives and newsroom partnerships with consultants. In addition, I learned through my interviews with engagement editors about individuals and companies that had conducted workshops in newsrooms. I had met several of potential participants in August 2016 when I attended a Poynter event about the future of audience engagement[5] and again a month later during the ONA[6] conference in Denver. During the Journalism Interactive conference at the University of Maryland, I was able to meet several individuals who I considered instrumental. I followed up with them and asked for recommendations.

I also decided to contact key informants from the three metrics providers all newsrooms used: Social News Desk, ComScore and Chartbeat. The Chartbeat contact came from the member of a newsroom; ComScore was being introduced at *WRIC* during my stay there and I was able to connect through the representative there; Social News Desk is a company used by *WRIC* and popular among television stations. All interviews were conducted via phone, recorded and transcribed. They occurred between October 19, 2018 and January 15, 2019.

3.4.6. Audience Engagement Editors

Participants for this qualitative, interview-based study were selected using the search term "audience engagement editor" on the largest social network platform for professionals: LinkedIn (Premium). The filters applied limited the search to "audience engagement editor" as being the current job listed on the LinkedIn member's profile, the location to the United States

[5] https://www.poynter.org/tech-tools/2016/as-user-participation-turns-10-media-leaders-discuss-the-future-of-audience-engagement/
[6] Online News Association

and to industry categories associated with the news media: “online media, writing and editing, newspapers, media production and publishing.” This yielded 55 results. Members working for specialized outlets were filtered out to avoid including editors whose engagement activities are geared toward specialized audiences (such as sport or fashion), rather than a general audience. Of the 30 members contacted, 17 agreed to be interviewed. Respondents were asked to recommend other audience engagement editors. By snowball sampling, recruitment was extended and allowed for inclusion of professionals who were not on LinkedIn with the exact title used, but who were known as such, fell within the parameters of the job description. Since the position of audience engagement editors is rather new and dynamic, this opened the potential sample up to social structures and inside knowledge known only to the practitioners (Noy, 2008). This added five more participants; two recommendations were in the original list of interviewees.

The 22 participants worked for 20 different news organizations. In two cases, two participants worked for the same organization. One participant had moved to a new job but was still performing some of the functions. In another case, both participants worked for the same news organization, but one was in charge of audience engagement with the video content of the outlet. Five of the 20 outlets are part of the Gannett Corporation. The geographic spread skews slightly to the East Coast with news organizations in: California (one), Iowa (one), Montana (one), Arizona (one), Tennessee (one), Florida (two), South Carolina (one) Philadelphia (two), Maryland (one), New York (four), Massachusetts (one), Texas (one) and Washington, D.C. (two). One outlet, not listed here, is digital only. Participants worked for a mix of local and national outlets, one national radio outlet and one local investigative news organization. One of the interviewees does not currently work in television but had until recently. She spoke about her experiences working for the national broadcast TV program for which she was the audience

engagement editor, as well as for her current employer, a national newspaper. Her representation of two outlets is not reflected in the count of participants.

The semi-structured interviews were recorded. Prior to recording the call, the participants were asked for consent. All agreed. Of the 22 participants, 16 preferred that they and/or their outlet remain unnamed. Whether or not participants wanted to be named was not relevant to the job they were being interviewed about, but a reflection either of their status within their news organization or of the level of comfort they had in giving information that may be deemed proprietary. With such a large number of participants preferring anonymity, identifying those who did not object to being named may have distracted from the subject under study. Therefore, all participants remain anonymous. I conducted the interviews between March 28, 2016 and September 27, 2016 and transcribed them immediately following each interview.

3.5. Interviews

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews in all newsrooms, as well as in the field and on the phone when necessary, which I consider the foundation of the data necessary to answer my research questions. I interviewed reporters covering diverse beats, their editors, social media team members, and executive editors. I also interviewed various staff and members of marketing and promotions teams. I was given a variety of documents, organigrams, reports and emails sent to and from staff.

Interviews produced knowledge (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998) about newsroom members' practices and attitudes . Both researchers and journalists are members of the "interview society" (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997) who accept interviews as a reliable and valid routine in constructing knowledge. Interviews conducted for this study were open-ended and were led along a series of questions that served as a framework. These interviews were recorded as were

some that were conducted in the field. Yet many were ethnographic and informal interviews that occurred as part of the observation in the newsroom or on assignment with a reporter. Spontaneous group interviews also took place when, for example, a question at the end of a meeting, compelled the participants to remain seated and discuss the question I had posed, sometimes for more than an hour. These unintended focus group-style interactions are included in the data not as focus groups but as part of the interview data acquired during the process of participant observation.

3.6. Key Informants

Key informant interviews serve several important purposes: They help "develop a definition of the dimensions involved … discover boundaries of communities … identify extremes … [and] increase knowledge of the problem" (Tremblay, 1957, p. 692). Key informant interviews can be used to collect information in a relatively short amount of time from experts with access to inside or expert knowledge in a field (Marshall, 1996). In this case, speaking with 14 members of organizations that specialized in providing training and reporting for newsrooms and communities, with an emphasis on *audience* engagement. This included providers of newsroom metrics and engagement tools, or what Lowrey, Sherill and Broussard call ancillary organizations that play a role in newsroom innovation (Lowrey et al., 2019); this allowed me to outline an ideal-type of *audience*-journalist relations and to understand the language and expectation around audience engagement in newsrooms. Some of the key informants, as representatives of for-profit consultants or companies selling audience engagement expertise or software, likely had an interest in promoting their products. ComScore and Chartbeat, for example, are interested in selling their services to newsrooms, as is Hearken. Others, for example Solutions Journalism, are interested in spreading a practice that they believe in. I don't consider

this to be a hindrance, since I was aware of this potential "bias" before contacting them (Marshall, 1996; Tremblay, 1957). In order to provide data beyond the level of anecdotal observation, at least 10 – 15 participants are considered necessary to provide reliable data that goes beyond anecdotes (Kvale, 2008). I was well within this bracket with 12 interviewees at *The Washington Post* and 14 key informants.

3.7. Case Studies

Some of the most compelling studies of the changes and dynamics in newsrooms have been comparative case studies: Boczkowski (2004); Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013); García-Avilés, Kaltenbrunner, and Meier (2014); Quandt (2008); Singer (2004), to name a few. Rather than viewing the case study as a phenomenon with such distinct features that its study would yield no generalizable knowledge, a more useful frame is to understand individual media organizations as complex collections of subsections that can be used as exemplars (Stake, 2000). The careful and thorough analysis of one case can result in a coherent and convincing study that serves as *pas pro toto* and leads to research initiatives aimed at replication or refinement of what otherwise might be considered no more than an interesting example of no consequence. Comparing case studies of newsrooms that have a sufficient number of attributes and circumstances in common around one question or phenomenon, in this case the enactment of audience engagement strategies, could reveal patterns in structure and process and lead to further, more focused research questions.

"Where to begin looking depends on the research question, but where to focus or stop action cannot be determined ahead of time" (Merriam, 1998, p. 97). I conducted interviews with 131 members of 4 newsrooms, 22 engagement editors and 14 key informants in the area of audience engagement. I stopped interviewing when I was certain that the saturation point had

been reached. Yet newsrooms are active, living organisms. Since my first visit with the *Asbury Park Press* in January 2018, there has been another round of lay-offs and several participants no longer work there. A week before I arrived in Richmond, *WRIC's* corporate owner, the Nexstar Media Group, announced its purchase of Tribune Media, leaving the staff wondering if they or Tribune's Channel 6, their competitor, ahead of them in the Richmond market, would soon be sold. One producer told me she was leaving, and a reporter has since been hired. A *Baltimore Sun* editor told me during the interview that he was being recruited by another paper and was going to take the offer. My inclination is to follow-up and revisit with every newsroom and with every reporter, producer, editor and manager that I had met.

3.8. Data Collection and Analysis

3.8.1. Field Notes and Transcription:

Notes taken during the stays were reviewed, typed and annotated as soon as possible after each day. Late nights and early mornings made this difficult at times, but every effort was made to stay up to date.

3.8.2. Visuals

When possible and with permission of the participants I took pictures with my smartphone. Some information was shared with me on a screen (individual Chartbeat metrics, for example) and I took pictures of these. I also collected screenshots of interactions that interviewees referred to.

3.8.3. Technology

Interviews on site were recorded using the audio recorder and a lavalier microphone on my smartphone. I had a back-up phone and used it in several instances. After every interview I copied the files to my computer and at the end of each day transferred all the files to an external hard-drive as a back-up. Meetings were also recorded with one of the smartphones. All calls were made using Skype or FaceTime and Ecamm, a recording application for use with these applications. To transcribe the interviews, I used both Trint and Otter.ai, two tools that automatically transcribe voice recordings. I imported the timestamped transcripts into the qualitative data analysis software tool MaxQDA where I relinked them with the audiofiles. This allows for easy reference back to the original audio file while coding. Before exporting the transcripts out of the automated transcription tool, I reviewed and edited them, adding names and formatting. This, much like transcribing the interviews myself, is like a first pass and I found myself writing memos. Field notes and documents were also included in the MaxQDA document system. I began by aligning general codes with the main areas arising out of my research questions and continued with open, axial and selective coding. Using qualitative data analysis software allows for coding of documents, texts, transcripts, photographs, videos and audio files within one content management system. This makes it easy to query a code across the different types of data.

In the following chapter I examine the roles of audience engagement editors, how they define their roles as intermediaries between the newsroom and the audience. In chapter 5 I outline how key informants define engagement and how they construct ideal-types for the newsroom. Chapter 6, I describe how the journalists I spoke with and observed conceptualize

their audiences and their roles given the engagement strategies they have chosen or have been tasked with.

Chapter 4: Engagement Editors

For many news organizations the path to the digital future has been, and perhaps remains, long and painful. Audience members continue to embrace the tools that allow them to choose when and where they access news content online. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and search engines like Google have captured their attention. (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). While news organizations were initially enthusiastic about the possibilities of online publishing, they soon realized that they were losing out on the audience's changing habits. (Herrman, 2016). Advertisers who have taken their business to online news sites, now battle an increasing use of ad-blockers (Deloitte, 2017; GoogleTrends, 2016; Statista, 2019). Social media platforms are alternative "one-stop-shop" venues of opportunity for advertisers. Yet while social media platforms have been successful at selling audience data and advertisement, news organizations do not benefit from this arrangement.(Moses, 2018). Advertisers and audience members respectively, can monetize and access personalized news feeds, with Facebook being the current platform of choice (Facebook, 2018; O'Reilly, 2015; Statista, 2017).

Audience members have become visible as they consume news media online. They surrender user data with every scroll and click, and participate by liking, sharing, or commenting, audience members have become more easily measurable entities with potential as sources of revenue for advertisers and social media platforms. Yet the latter are still trying to figure things out. News consumers are simultaneously more elusive and more quantifiable, their behavior and preferences more transparent to the professional producers of news content who are looking for new ways to connect and to form a committed relationship with them. In many traditional newsrooms the "digital first" and "mobile first" modes are still contested and the divides

between homepage and social, between users and producers and between newsrooms and audiences still exists (Batsell, 2015; Luengo, 2016). Even in exclusively digital newsrooms, the relationship between reporters and their audiences is not always clear. The space in between is where audience engagement editors reside.

This chapter presents is an in-depth look at audience engagement based on semi-structured interviews with 22 engagement editors in 20 U.S. newsrooms. It explores how they position themselves and the implications of this activity for journalism practice. My goal is to situate audience engagement editors and their function in the news production ecosystem. What role do they play in the institutional re-arrangements that newsrooms are making to adapt to digital and audience innovations? These considerations are addressed by the following questions:

- What are the responsibilities and roles of audience engagement editors?
- How do audience engagement editors conceptualize journalism and their role in it?
- How do audience engagement editors define audience engagement?

The 22 interviewees cover a vast spectrum of job responsibilities. Some are team members in organizations that are purposefully crafting engagement strategies, while others oversee a fleet of engagement editors and participate in setting strategies. A third group are the only ones within their organization charged with "doing engagement." Job titles varied, although all participants had called themselves "audience engagement editor" on LinkedIn. In some cases, titles were still being negotiated or had just changed. With few exceptions, all of the 11 women and 11 men had previously worked as reporters, writers, copy editors or editors. Only two interviewees had started their careers in community engagement and had not written or reported beforehand.

Table 2: Audience Engagement Editors

Position	Gender	Time in this position[7]	Previous job
Editor for Internet and Audience	m	4	Writer
Senior Engagement Editor	w	3	Digital content editor
Editorial and Opinion Director	m	3	Reporter
Audience Engagement Editor	m	1	Reporter
Opinion and Engagement Editor	m	2	Reporter, community editor
Audience Engagement Editor	m	1.5	Sports editor
Audience Producer	w	1	Online community manager
Opinions Editor, Columnist and Engagement editor	m	9	Reporter, editor, photographer
Audience Engagement Editor	m	1	Editor, freelancer
Audience Engagement Editor	w	2	Copy editor
Editor for Social	w	1	Producer (TV), community editor
Audience Engagement Editor	m	0.5	Freelance writer
Audience Engagement Editor	w	0.5	Web producer, page designer
Audience Engagement Editor	w	1	Copy editor, editor
Social media and audience engagement editor	w	1	Sports page designer and editor
Audience Producer	w	3	Editor
Senior Social Media Editor	m	3	Copy writer
Executive Editor and Vice President for News and Engagement	w	2	Online Editor
Director of Audience Engagement	m	3	Reporter, online producer
Audience Engagement Editor	w	2	Reporter
Audience and Social Media Editor	w	0.5	Copy editor
Community Editor	m	2	Reporter, editor, photographer

[7] Time (in years) in the position and at the time the interview was conducted. Titles and responsibilities have since changed for several interviewees. Some have changed positions or affiliation altogether since 2016.

4.1. Findings

A theme common to all was the significant and noticeable impact of newsroom restructuring: re-organization, downsizing and a shortage of staff were mentioned by almost all of the interviewees when they described how and why they became audience engagement editors. Their jobs had either been created as part of a recent re-organization or they had moved into the job because their original job, for example as copy editor, had become obsolete. A number of comments, often framed humorously, dealt with how the hierarchies and structures as well as titles and the scope of their responsibilities were in constant flux. Several respondents were originally or still were opinion page editors and saw their move into or creation of the job "audience engagement editor" as a natural extension of op-ed work, because both involve proximity to audiences that reporters had not typically experienced or sought.

4.1.1. Roles, Tools, and Tasks of Audience Engagement Editors

Audience engagement editors work in a place they refer to as "social." All but two were physically located in the middle of the newsroom; and they spoke about how fortunate they were to be in a strategically important location that allowed them to decide, as stories were being assigned and filed, which to "move to social," meaning onto a social media platform such as Facebook. Although not all interviewees actually do this themselves, audience engagement on social media looked the same in all newsrooms: The editor or engagement team members post re-packaged, shorter versions of the newspaper's (print or online) content on a social media platform. They fashion a headline that will be more searchable according to the search engine optimization (SEO) tool they use. In some cases, they select a tidbit of content out of an article

that they think is “more shareable” or “snackable” and post it on various social media platform accounts that belong to their news organization’s “brand.”

Only a few participants actually pitch stories, yet all of them attend numerous editorial conferences to either find out what stories are being planned and what they could use and post on social media platforms or to make suggestions about additional content such as videos, photo galleries or legal documents. They all report back to the newsroom about how the content is performing along metrics, either through an email round up, a dashboard displayed in the newsroom or on monitors throughout the office. Several interviewees made it a point to emphasize that metrics were not the end, but the means, or guide toward an end. The audience Engagement Editor for one national newspaper said: “The strategy is not about baiting the audience for metrics sake, but testing what does resonate, or dropping things that don’t and finding ways to make things work.”

While the overall goal of engagement was always described in terms that denote personal contact, interactivity, service, and community, the location where this is done is “on social.” Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, Reddit and LinkedIn were the main platforms, with Facebook by far the most frequently used. Homepages were deemed less important in some cases, with the agreed upon wisdom that: “We have to go where the audiences are.” Related, comments on the homepages were regarded as problematic by all participants. Some called the commenters “mean” and the comment section where “engagement … is about clean up.” Adding a Facebook widget, i.e., requiring identification of commenters, is deemed helpful, but Facebook as a platform makes curating both easier and less necessary because Facebook commenters tended to be more civil than commenters on their sites.

The efforts of these editors are always informed by metrics. The list of analytics tools used by the 22 participants and their newsrooms is long. Chartbeat, Omniture, Google Trends and Analytics, Facebook Insights as well as Twitter Analytics are the most frequently mentioned platforms. Every audience engagement editor mentioned using at least one analytics tool, with Chartbeat and Omniture and Google Analytics mentioned by half of the interviewees. Whether the editors do it themselves or have a team they work with or oversee, posting journalistic content on social media is the core function of every audience engagement editor. All editors use metrics to learn how well content was being received and to monitor what topics are trending.

> And then it just becomes like constantly monitoring throughout the day what trends and then something can start bubbling up at any moment, so I am a multi-tasker by nature and kind of just click around a lot of the day and so seeing what's bubbling up and if we need to put something on ice that we're doing because something has really strong potential to do well on our site and then doing that and then pitching more to editors and I think our newsroom is really flexible when good story opportunities come up so it's a continuous process during the day.
>
> Audience Engagement Editor for video content, national newspaper

Only one engagement editor, working for a regional investigative reporting group, makes it a point not to share the results with reporters, saying it "incentivizes weird things."

But despite the quantification and open availability of metrics on screens and dashboards, audience engagement editors are also engaging reporters in their effort to explain why it is necessary to follow the metrics of audience interaction with their journalism, no matter what these insights might bring. They are, in a sense, messengers of industry news:

> One of the things that analytics makes very stark is that the things that we thought were introductory journalism—like crime reports, anything that's a little bit tawdry—you can watch the needle move and we can literally now watch the needle move on traffic to the story and you know, you can let that lead you to disdain for the people who are you readers, who are your customers. But the fact of the matter is, I don't think that digital readers prefer that kind of content any more or less. I think it was always there, now we

> can measure it. That's where we kind of get people to get over themselves, is part of the challenge.
>
> Audience Engagement Editor, large regional newspaper group in the South

> I serve as kind of the translator between my boss who is in charge of all the digital stuff and then the editors in the newsrooms to sort of say, no we are not just looking at this one metric, we're looking at the bigger picture and we are trying to find people to read your content." (Audience Engagement Editor, large national newspaper)

Activities engagement editors mentioned as part of their job covered a broad spectrum from "updating news," "re-writing" and "content distribution," all activities serving the broader purpose of gathering, editing and disseminating news, to activities that were less geared toward the audience, but more toward journalists in the newsroom. More than half of the interviewees mentioned "building the journalists' brands" and "building the brand," as well as "contributing tools for engagement" and "deciding what works," indicating that audience engagement editors, while performing editorial functions that bring information to audiences that they monitor and target, are also very focused on marketing. They help journalists learn how to "sell" themselves, how to create their own brands and how to place their content into the social news media ecosystem themselves.

Engagement editors with more seniority, who are alone, or who work in smaller newsrooms are also responsible for speaking with vendors and for planning which digital tools will be used. Three newsrooms had received training by API and/or Poynter and/or the Knight Foundation. One is working with Knight Foundation grant money to improve audience engagement efforts. Yet another had received specific coaching from an external consultant specialized in audience engagement strategies for newsrooms who would come in to advise the newsroom.

Just over half of the participants spoke about the importance of building the news organization's brand or reporters' individual brands and that their job as audience engagement editors was to work towards this goal.

> With certain newsroom journalists we're trying to build up their brands and one of the ways that we do that is by making sure that we have a plan for promoting their new work whether it's a podcast or a new mobile kind of news summary for millennials and we put a little bit of promotion money into making sure that that gets promoted in social media and reaches as many people as possible.
>
> Audience Engagement Editor, Gannett publication

The promotion of individual journalists, whether through paid promotion (although one interviewee had just noticed that it was visible to users when a promotion had been paid for on Facebook and decided not to do it anymore) or by publishing their stories on social media in a strategic way, was often explained as being for the greater (organizational) good:

> How do we create high social performers in each newsroom who can then be on a wider community to share best practices so that we can continue to rollout, share those practices and figure out where the wins are and replicate them across the network?
>
> Former Audience Engagement Editor, network TV
> Currently with a large national newspaper

Other tools that editors employed were online surveys, asking readers to send in pictures or comments or, although not as frequently, planning an RLE (real life event) that attracts attention. One editor has posted information on Facebook to start a story, that is, asked a question about something and read the comments that came in, sourced and found a story there. It is common practice to find story ideas and sources, using what the editors see, hear, and read on social media platforms. They are members of community Facebook groups or join groups with specific interests and monitor them, hoping to find stories for a particular beat. One editor has reached out to someone who posted information about her involvement in an incident, brought that person in and pitched the story to editors who wrote a story about her case.

Part of the engagement efforts clearly involved customer monitoring, not for journalistic purposes, such as sourcing, but in order to maximize distribution. Interviewees frequently stated that all efforts clearly served the ultimate purpose of making money through subscription or advertisement. One editor recalled meeting with the marketing and advertisement side of his organization as often as he did with the editorial side. Another mentioned coordinating with the advertisement department when developing new editorial products. A third editor said that posting on Facebook used to be the responsibility of the marketing department before audience engagement editors were introduced on the newsroom side.

Several interviewees said that they wished that audience engagement was part of the conversation earlier than it is now. They would like to be able to involve audiences earlier, either as sources or in order to prime them. The ideal entry point for audience engagement editor involvement, one editor explained, was when the story is conceived. Currently, the earliest they intervene is during the meeting in which the story is discussed, reminding reporters and editors to think about engagement, which means delivering content for them to share online in order to promote the journalism.

4.1.2. Journalistic Identity

Twenty-one of the 22 audience engagement editors interviewed responded affirmatively to the question about whether they personally identify as a journalist. The single exception, the Audience Engagement Editor for an investigative non-profit, called himself "a facilitator of journalism." He added: "I still sort of have the idea in my mind that the journalist is the one doing the digging and the one doing the writing so it's a weird . . . it breaks my heart to say no."

On the other end of the spectrum, one participant called the question "somewhat of an insult" since to her it seemed obvious that her role was that of a journalist. Some of the responses

revealed that being a journalist entailed having an input on news selection, storytelling, and the ability to pass editorial judgment:

> Yes. I think part of that has to be a reflection of the content you produce and I think we're definitely now getting to a point where I have more of an input on content that can live natively so whether we are trying to tell a discreet story on Facebook or Instagram, it requires a sense of editorial judgment. I think you have to be a journalist to get that through.
>
> Engagement Strategist, national business magazine

When defining journalism, the terms most frequently used were "gathering information," "editorial judgment," "help people understand," "trust," "writing" and "ethics." Some responses expanded the traditional role of the journalist to include the search for an audience. An Audience Engagement and Opinion Editor for a West Coast daily paper said: "I think a big part of what journalists do now is try to figure out who our audience is and try to reach them," The editor of internet and audience at a national daily was more direct: "I sell stories, I trade in news stories"

For some interviewees, particularly those who had come from the opinion section, from other newsroom departments or who had been reporters and writers, their past credentials extended into this news position. Once a journalist, always a journalist. They felt that they had learned how to judge what was newsworthy for an audience they were seeking on social media platforms and frequently mentioned that the ability to decide what was news was an important part of their job. One respondent gave an example of a story she was making "snackable for social" by finding the nugget about five paragraphs down in the original article. It was a quote that spoke to millennials; it became the headline on their social media accounts and generated the traffic that the original article had not. One sentiment echoed by many interviewees, was the responsibility to inform:

> I don't write or report ever and I still consider myself a journalist and I think it's because what I see my job as is to get news and information to people and to learn news and information from people. That's the point of everything that we're doing here,

> whether you're a reporter here or an audience editor or community, you focus primarily on building communities, like the whole reason we do any of it is because we think it's important for people to be informed about their world and for us to be able to have the best information that we can to provide that to people and so you know, that's journalistic.
>
> Audience Engagement Editor, national newspaper

The theme of sharing journalistic practices, by exposing and spreading the reporters' journalism on a social media platform, was repeated throughout. In fact, the goal in all newsrooms, with some much closer to it than others, was to educate the reporters so that they could one day be their own audience engagement editors. One newsroom with a particularly large staff tasked with engagement, had divided their teams up: The participant interviewed was on the "embedded audience team" that interacted with individual reporters and focused on particular projects most closely. While others strategize or handle specific social media platforms that they became specialized in, these editors are hands-on coaches for reporters and editors, akin to personal trainers. The participant describes the work this team does as follows:

> So you might work with one reporter and they are really comfortable on Facebook, so you might say with that reporter, "Okay, we're going to go all in on the Facebook platform for you, let's talk about Facebook live, let's talk about how you are using followers, let's talk about how you are using comments and we're going to go 100% in on building your community on this platform.
>
> Audience Engagement Editor, national daily newspaper

Coaching, training reporters and editors literally through specialized programs or in one-on-one meetings was part of the duties of most every editor interviewed. That not every reporter was on board all the time was mentioned as well:

> I think there's still a lot of you know, people here that like to do what they are interested in and they think clickbait and they think cat videos and they think Kardashians and they don't want any part of it. It has taken me kind of two years to figure this out, but the conversations I am starting to have now or trying to have now is how did it impact people, did they stay on your story for a long time, not just how many pages did it get or how many users looked at it but maybe 1,000 people read it but those thousand people stayed on for five minutes so … that's awesome.
>
> Audience Engagement Editor, only person tasked with engagement

4.1.3. Defining and Engaging Audiences

Although part of their title, the term all had the most difficulty defining was the term "engagement." It was most commonly described using words like "relationships," "listening," "conversation," "loyalty" and "community" and as "using feedback from audience," "involving the audience," "answer questions." One editor distinguished between looking at engagement "through the growth editor filter" and looking at "true engagement." The growth editor was interested in clicks, whereas her, preferred view of "true engagement" involved something she called "conversational journalism": "And that is having a one-to-one discussion maybe on messaging apps and bots or whatever or a many-way with discussion in communities, on comments or whatever, but I think it's really truly having a discussion with our audience" (Audience Engagement Editor, national newspaper).

Five of these interviewees worked for news organizations that are part of the Gannett group and all interviewees in this group spoke about engagement and their audiences in terms that aligned with "Picasso," the framework that their parent company had introduced (Gannett, 2015a). Picasso was a project initiated by a group of Gannett journalists in 2013 at the *USA Today* headquarters in Northern Virginia. Two of the audience engagement editors interviewed for this chapter were part of the Picasso working group. An editor in one of the newsrooms visited for this dissertation was as well.

> Picasso was conceived to identify core competencies needed for a modern newsroom and build them into the DNA of Gannett journalists. It is about designing newsrooms for the challenges of 2014 and beyond. As newsroom leaders, we must be flexible enough to adapt as conditions change, yet never compromise on our values, which are often expressed through our watchdog work. Picasso is intended as a framework for you to make those adaptations again and again. (Gannett, 2015b)

"Audience targeting," "metrics," "community connectors" and "marketing" are described as the pillars for news work.

When participants were asked to define audiences in general and theirs in particular answers ranged from "people" to "anyone," but often circled around audience members as sources. Some interviewees spoke about strategically priming social media users by asking them questions or by soliciting information, both to generate curiosity about a topic and to learn of any useful sources in that particular community. In general, the respondents were not particularly choosy but also very general and all-inclusive, to the point of being unspecific: "[Our audience] is primarily determined by our print circulation area, the areas where we circulate and anybody in there that's interested in the kind of things that we have covered" (Audience Engagement Editor, newspaper group in the South).

> Anyone with a digital device. … We don't just write for the people who are at your city council meeting or who live in that town. We write for Google and I don't mean Google bots, I mean for anyone with access to a phone or a computer. Anyone who is searching for a thing can find your thing.
>
> Audience and Opinion Editor, West Coast daily newspaper

"This is a question we ask ourselves every day. Right now, we are very interested in our local audience" (Audience Engagement Editor, newspaper group in a large metropolitan area).

Others defined their audience strictly along demographics: gender, location, platform and took a more pragmatic approach: "Well, we have statistics … as far as demographics go. Online versus the radio our audience is younger and female, predominately more female than men. Younger than our radio audience" (Audience Engagement Editor, radio network).

Four interviewees, Gannett employees, mentioned that they kept in mind "personas," archetypical readers or audience members who had been determined as target consumers for

whom they were producing content. One editor reported that photographs of different personas were hanging on the newsroom wall.[8]

4.2. Discussion

Audience engagement editors, in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities, are beholden to more than one master. All interviewees spoke about ways in which they serve the journalists in their newsrooms. They inform research and help to promote journalists' content and themselves, their "brands" and credibility as journalists. They serve the audience by providing a link into the newsroom and bringing news topics to the attention of journalists. On the other hand, they serve their news organization, specifically the marketing department, by monitoring and measuring customer behavior.

Although praised as a form of *rapprochement* and reconciliation between the alienated camps inside and outside of the newsroom, as a return to local and social reporting, much of what is happening is a computer-mediated image campaign. The language of marketing, very present in the conversations with 22 audience engagement editors, specifically the term "branding," indicates that the job of audience engagement editor is to facilitate presentation and impression management of journalists and of the organizational brand.

Audience interaction is being performed via web metrics that are being translated to journalists as impactful and working towards a greater goal. Both the technological innovation (web metrics) and the innovation in newsroom practice (tending to the audience) is being mediated by news workers who self-identify and present as journalists. They are change agents

[8] Gannett has identified four target audience segments that their newsrooms focus on: In the Know, Family Forward, Take Action and Know the Score. The Gannett newsroom visited for this dissertation, the *Asbury Park Press,* the segments Family Forward and Know the Score were targeted. (See Appendices 1 and 2)

who possess enough of the characteristics of the journalists they are coaching and, in the cases examined, have internalized their continued belonging to this professional group so much so that they are convincing representatives of the group they are promoting. Monetizing engagement, that is, bringing in revenue if more people read their news product, is never explicitly talked about, but it is the implicit reality behind the jargon of "engagement," of "listening" and caring.

Calling the definitions of "engagement" rhetorical would be an overstatement, yet they are effective in promoting the image that news organizations are trying—and must—sell in order to remain viable. It is the image of a partner to an audience that is increasingly being sought in small, local communities. During events and in conversations on social media commenting threads, audience engagement editors explain the journalism that their organizations are producing. Just as they are "selling" engagement to the journalists, they are "selling" journalism to audiences. By doing so they help journalists maintain professional boundaries, since all of this is being done in the name of journalism.

They facilitate journalists' adoption of innovation in technology and practice. Search engine optimization, analytics dashboards and other tools, are explained and introduced by audience engagement editors, along with an explanation of the virtues of using these tools, even if skeptical journalists might find them distracting to their mission. A reminder that they and the strategies employed to engage audiences are "for the greater good" of the organization, as well as for the promotion of journalism in general and their stories in particular, serves as an effective strategy to affect institutional change.

Listening to the men and women who are doing this job reveals the thin line they are toeing between the world of marketing and the world of journalism. Fueled by the pressures of online media's attention economy, institutional change is happening in newsrooms. Audience

engagement editors are working in the domain in which this economy resides: on social media platforms and on their outlet's website. It is where traditional journalism and their new audiences meet and provides audience engagement editors a unique position to help define journalism to both sides of this equation.

Engagement editors serve as liaisons for publishers and respective marketing departments by delivering and explaining the message of audience metrics and customer service to the workforce. Their marketing efforts take on properties of public relations: They indirectly sell the idea of journalism as well as content directly to audiences and they sell the audience's voices to journalists. The case studies conducted for this dissertation will take a closer look at this dynamic and add to an understanding of the influence that both narratives have on journalists.

High on the list of all engagement editors described in this chapter, was the desire for acceptance across the newsroom. Achieving the kind of change in newsroom culture that Hansen and Goligoski (2018) call for in their guide for audience revenue and engagement, is an often stated goal. It is also what their news directors, publishers and editors-in-chief require. Many have been coached or follow consultants specialized in engagement in the newsroom context. These are influencers in a movement to change the culture and practice of journalism.

The following chapter will situate the current state of audience engagement in newsrooms from a perspective removed from those actively producing content in the newsroom. It will provide "ideal-types" of engagement as conceptualized by experts and newsroom consultants representing and promoting various schools of thought and solutions to the problem of "engagement."

Chapter 5: Engagement Prophets

This chapter examines the landscape of engagement as defined and enacted by 15 engagement consultants. The first section provides background on the interviewees and their organizations' roles in the field. Section two, the main section, examines how the interviewees define terms used in the discourse about engagement, in particular the terms *engagement* and *audience*. The third section discusses the key informants' critiques of legacy newsroom practices in the context of the audience-journalist relationship and the role(s) of audiences in the newsroom. In section four I examine the ideals and goals for engaged journalism and audience inclusion as expressed by the interviewees. The last section offers a summary and analysis of these findings.

The goal of this chapter is to situate approaches to audience engagement in the current news media environment from the perspective of consultants and members of the engagement industry. This perspective is removed from those producing news stories and managing newsrooms. Instead, these are views from the vantage points of observers and advocates of audience engagement who have worked with newsrooms in the United States and abroad. Their insights provide an overview of some of the underlying issues and trends in the field. Understanding some of the key concepts and concerns raised by these key informants helps put into context the observations and findings at the core of this dissertation. Before I could analyze the effects of audience engagement on journalists in the newsrooms studied here, I needed to understand how engaged journalism is practiced, imagined and brought to newsrooms by these advocates and company representatives.

5.1. Key Informants on Engagement

The 15 interviewees chosen for this chapter are representatives of organizations and companies that have developed strategies and tools currently deployed in newsrooms, including in the newsrooms that are part of this study. They specialize in engagement strategies for journalists, work as consultants and promote various models of audience inclusion in the news media production process.

Table 3: Key Informant Interviews

Name	Organization	Position
Nancy Beall	comScore	Senior VP local media team
Andrew DeVigal	Agora Journalism Center	Associate Director
Cole Goins	Poynter	Adjunct/Consultant
Andrew Haeg	Groundsource	Founder and Director
Andrea Hart	City Bureau	Director Community Engagement
Joy Mayer	Trusting News and Gather	Director
Samantha McCann	Solutions Journalism Network	Vice President
Jill Nicholson	Chartbeat	Director of Customer Education
Simon Nyi	People Powered Publishing	Consultant
Mike Rispoli	News Voices	Director
Tom Rosenstiel	American Press Institute	Executive Director
Josh Stearns	Democracy Fund	Program Director
Talia Stroud	Center for Media Engagement	Director
Bridget Thoreson	Hearken	Engagement Consultant
Kim Wilson	Social News Desk	Founder/President

Interviews were conducted between October 19, 2018 and April 3, 2019 and ranged in length from 24 – 69 minutes with a median length of 43 minutes.

Some interviewees are members and leaders of organizations that use audience and community-based approaches in their work with newsrooms, others facilitate and fund the production of news stories. *Hearken*, for example, is a for-profit company that is hired by legacy and non-legacy news organizations as they search for ways to include their audience in the journalism they produce. *Hearken* offers a platform that newsrooms can deploy on their websites or through social media. It is a tool through which they can ask readers about their interests, questions they might have or stories they would like the news organization to cover. News stories are then selected based on answers received.

Others, for instance the non-profit *City Bureau*, function more like a newsroom. *City Bureau* trains community members to report, offers fellowships to journalists and opens up its newsroom on Chicago's South Side to anyone interested in participating. Local and national media outlets publish the articles their reporters produce. It is an effort to educate the public about journalism and to provide coverage to areas underrepresented by traditional news media outlets.

Joy Mayer, the *Trusting News Project*'s program director, is a coach and consultant for newsrooms looking for ways to build trust among readers. This project is one example of the network that has grown around many of the efforts these key informants represent. *Trusting News* partners with *The Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute*, a research center housed at the University of Missouri, funded through an endowment from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, and with *The American Press Institute (API),* whose executive director, Tom Rosenstiel, is among the key informants interviewed for this chapter as well. *API* also publishes research and develops tools for newsrooms searching for an "engagement metric" that is,

according to Rosenstiel, tailored to the journalistic and economic goals of each customer. Andrew DeVigal, the associate director of the University of Oregon's *Agora Journalism Center*, is the co-founder of *Gather*, along with Joy Mayer. *Agora* is grant funded and offers opportunities for funded projects to promote civic engagement, often in collaboration with other funders, for example the Robert Bosch Foundation out of Germany. They consider themselves a "gathering place for innovation in communication" ("Home," 2019). *Gather* is also grant funded, with three major supporters: *The Knight Foundation, Democracy Fund* and *The News Integrity Initiative* based at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism in New York. *Gather* is both a platform through which journalists, engagement editors, researchers and activists connect, for instance through social media channels, and an initiator of projects that promoted engaged journalism in newsrooms. The *Democracy Fund* is a self-described "bipartisan foundation established by eBay founder and philanthropist Pierre Omidyar to help ensure that the American people come first in our democracy" ("About Us," 2019). The *Fund* invests in projects, among others, that promote local news and civic participation. Its program director is another key informant, Josh Stearns. The *Center for Media Engagement*, run by Talia Stroud at the University of Texas in Austin, is also a grantee of the *Democracy Fund.* Although interviewees were not chosen based on snowball sampling, some recommended participants who were already on my list. Their interconnectedness seems to show that there is an active, connected community of advocates and funders in this area. They form a network of former journalists, researchers and scholars that are often connected to a University and to each other through University networks. Audience engagement editors previously interviewed (Chapter 4), mentioned consultants and organizations, for example Joy Mayer and *API*, because they were working with their newsrooms to develop engagement strategies. Beginning with this short list, the purposive

sample grew to include individuals and organizations that were recommended and who appeared at conferences and panels. It was therefore not surprising that this small sample of engaged journalism advocates and consultants were connected and that they were oftentimes funded by the same organizations.

To broaden the perspective, I also spoke with representatives from companies that provide newsrooms with measurement tools: *Chartbeat*, *comScore*, and *Social News Desk* were in use in the newsrooms visited, while *API's* engagement metrics toolset was not. All but three interviewees had previously worked as journalists, some referring to their experiences in the news media industry as having informed or motivated their views about the need for audience engagement.

I understand these key informants and the organizations they represent as ancillaries that function, at least potentially, as innovators bringing change to newsroom practices and culture (Lowrey et al., 2019, p. 2) by offering alternative conceptualizations of *engagement*, *audiences* and journalists' relationships with them. They shape the discourse, provide examples of news reporting that differ from the traditional model and develop tools for newsrooms.

5.2 Defining Engagement

Audience engagement practices cover a spectrum ranging from the collection and analysis of web metrics, to posting and interacting on social media platforms and face-to-face meetings at planned events. The term audience, in fact, both singular and plural, is contested and relates to the preferred economic and editorial models. Even in newsrooms with engagement strategies in place, the term audience engagement remains elusive. How news organizations define engagement depends on a variety of factors. Their revenue models, how they envision their role as civic institutions, and consequently how they define their audience plays a role. An

organization that focuses on advertisement revenue, for instance, will define engagement in terms of measurable audience presence and attention, since this is what is sold to advertisers. By contrast, if the goal is to attract loyal readers who will subscribe to the publication, engagement strategies will be different, with the focus on fostering relationships that go beyond the transactional.

5.2.1. Engagement Metrics

A theme that cuts across several interviews is the emphasis on framing engagement as a form of relationship-building. Interviewees working for companies that provide analytics and audience data lean towards relationships mediated by technology such as analytics tools or platforms. *Social News Desk*'s Kim Wilson, for example, describes engagement as "interactions that our clients, our newsrooms, get through social media." She is referring not to comments but to likes and shares, that is, to quantitative data. While not strictly one-way, the emphasis is on capturing data about audience behavior in response to a news item that has already been created and distributed, as opposed to informing news selection and production. Wilson understands *Social News Desk* as a pass-through tool between viewers and newsroom managers, allowing the latter to more quickly know what the former cares about.

Nancy Beall, Senior Vice President with the analytics firm *comScore*, relates engagement for the television news segment to "people getting their news." As providers of big data about audience demographics and behavior, *comScore* promises to deliver "a complete, unduplicated view of audiences across platforms to understand consumption patterns and evaluate media" ("Media Ratings," 2019). Helping media companies, as Beall puts it, "to make it easier for clients to tell a story," is seen in this framework as providing a data set that editors can use to understand who interacts with news media content and how content is being received. The goal

is to better target news content to a population of interest to advertisers. Both Beall and Wilson emphasize their clients' abilities to generate revenue with the information about audience interactions and characteristics that their tools measure.

The analytics firm *Chartbeat* has been making an effort to connect audience data with editorial and business goals. On a site listing the "most engaging stories" of the year, *Chartbeat* defines these as stories "with the most Total Engaged Time — the total amount of time visitors spent actively reading pages" ("Stories," 2019); each story "represents a solid bond between readers and the content that engages them" ("Intro," 2019). While focused on relationships materialized as data, this company has been reframing its mission as both revenue and reader-relationship driven. Former journalist and now director of customer relations for *Chartbeat*, Jill Nicholson explains: "When we're just looking at page views, we are missing the human component of this equation. These are not numbers, they are people." This insight and reminder that page views are, after all, generated by humans, may be a response to the skepticism many journalists express toward the reliance on metrics. This framing reconnects the quantified audience to something journalists can relate to: readers and subscribers. *Chartbeat* seems to be making an effort to redefine page views as signifying future, at least potential, revenue, addressing more directly publishers' concerns and interest in engaging with their audience. It speaks to the conceptualization of the audience both as readers and as paying customers. When Nicholson describes measuring engagement as an editorial process following the initial publication of a news story and as a response to page views or the lack thereof. This includes going back to a story after it has been posted, tracking it through *Chartbeat*, changing its position on the website or changing the headline, and rethinking the way it was reported and edited. The end is to increase revenue by producing loyal customers.

> Our data science has shown there's a distinct correlation between the amount of time someone spends, and the number of pages they read while they're there, and the chance that that reader will begin to come back and build that loyalty habit. So, I would definitely think about the marriage of engagement and recirculation, and how that leads to good user experiences.
>
> Jill Nicholson, *Chartbeat*

Not surprisingly, analytics providers define engagement as a more transactional relationship, with the initial publication of a news story as the starting point and data as a necessary piece of information and first step to fulfill the organization's mission. Tom Rosenstiel's *API* takes a similar approach yet builds on the idea of collecting a variety of data points and creating what he compares to a consumer price index. He says metrics such as those collected by *Chartbeat* and other analytics providers do not give a full picture and need correction by including other data that are tagged according to what Rosenstiel calls "journalistic characteristics." These data are, according to Rosenstiel "the sorts of things that are in editors' heads about stories and we turn that into structured data through our tagging." In addition, the *API* dashboard can be tailored to a newsroom and its specific engagement goals. *API's* proprietary software "Metrics for News" takes into account the different goals and revenue models, for example subscription, newsletter- or donation-driven and builds a unique system for each client. Engagement, in this model, is multi-faceted and incorporates, for instance, reader surveys, social media and monitoring trending news with the news organization's business goals in mind.

5.2.2. Qualitative Engagement

While interviewees who were not connected to an analytics firm do not dismiss the use of analytics and certainly embrace the need for sustainable business models, the audience-newsroom relationships they envision are more qualitative than quantitative. Instead of

beginning with a story and measuring how the audience reacts, the starting point for engaged journalism is audience members and their expressed interest in specific coverage. The *Agora Journalism Center* and *Gather's* Andrew DeVigal calls this "flipping the script." He explains the benefits of this audience-first approach:

> There's an incentive for digital news to do more engaged journalism and to connect with their audiences because they can create better journalism. Another notion is the fact that they can get more clicks. They get more eyeballs on their content, there's a transactional value there.
>
> Andrew DeVigal, *Agora Journalism Center*

Showing newsrooms that doing engaged journalism will lead to better journalism is, according to DeVigal, the best way to win traditional newsrooms over. It would, in his view, enable them to pursue goals beyond generating revenue.

Josh Stearns, program director at *Democracy Fund,* a key funder of engagement projects, describes engagement as a spectrum of activities ranging from the use of metrics "all the way up to the Center for Investigative Reporting hosting plays about pollution and strawberry fields and farm worker community organizer meetings." Newsrooms and journalists often lack the time and resources to engage on the more creative end of this spectrum. Personal encounters for the sake of relationship-building rarely fit into the daily schedule of a reporter who is tasked with filing several stories a day. Stearns' organization has devised a "systems map" that visualizes the landscape of stakeholders and their roles in a healthy democracy ("Local News and Participation," 2019). The map reveals what Stearns calls "feedback loops" between stakeholders in the news ecosystem that, when disrupted, isolate newsrooms from their communities. Stearns conceptualizes engagement as a way to repair and rebuild this broken relationship. He recognizes the signs of an emerging "idealized version of a different kind of relationship, a rebuilt social contract between newsrooms and communities."

5.2.3. Redefining the Audience

For most interviewees, talking about engagement requires a redefinition and in some cases rejection of the term audience. To many it problematically connotes a relationship that positions one party, the audience, as a customer but not as equal participant and thus does not align with their vision of engaged journalism. *City Bureau*'s Andrea Hart is skeptical of the term audience: "The assumption is, it's very passive, and very unidirectional …(and) wrapped up in the term audiences are these very false terms and assumptions around concepts like objectivity and impartiality." Instead, she uses the term "communities." Moreover, she defines engagement as listening and, sometimes, not turning a conversation into a news story:

> I think it's being involved consistently enough and understanding the community or working with it well enough to know when you can facilitate a productive conversation that can translate into good, quality journalism or other things or other information getting spread, and when you can't.
>
> Andrea Hart, *City Bureau*

Engagement, in this model, does not perpetuate existing power structures and behaviors in which the journalist is in control. The journalist should instead at times assumes a passive, receiving role and cede control to the community. Ideally, Hart says, it should develop in ways similar to how "matriarchies evolve as a result of reactions to dominance where there's more of a collective doing the work and listening and less urgency around action and more around listening and understanding."

How agency plays out in the relationship between journalists and their communities is a dominant theme. For Joy Mayer engagement turns on who sets the agenda:

> For me engagement is only really happening if (journalists) are listening and responding, not just talking. Saying "what do you think?" at the end of a Facebook post does not equal an engagement strategy and unless newsrooms are saying, "how do we know if this is actually what people want," and unless there's a seat at the agenda-setting table for the people, for your audience, and for people who are listening well to your audience, then I'm not sure engagement is really happening.

Hearken's Bridget Thoreson connects engagement with finding ways to let the audience set the agenda as well. The *Hearken* model involves newsrooms asking their readers, viewers, and listeners questions through a platform called the Engagement Management System. Thoreson describes it as a three-stage process in which journalists ask for feedback, receive a response and then "showcase the value of that feedback," which is where she says traditional newsrooms often fail. Turning these interactions with audiences into not just a two-way relationship, but into a feedback loop, is key.

Most interviewees said that listening and understanding the community's needs is a central goal of engagement and not selling analytics tools. To facilitate and automate the feedback loop, some employ technological solutions. Andrew Haeg, who says he has "helped build a tribe around the engagement space" over the past 15 years, has developed a platform enabling "newsrooms to engage their audiences in two-way conversations that lead to lasting relationships, deeper loyalty and trust, as well as better content coming grounded in the community experience." Besides reporting and collecting their sources' names and numbers for stories, journalists create a database of readers who enter into a dialogue through Haeg's text messaging service, *Groundsource*. It is another variation of the listening stations in *Hearken's* model, fostering dialogue that is meant to ensure that journalists become part of the community.

For Simon Nyi listening is the prerequisite for "meeting information needs"-- his definition of engagement. Nyi wonders why listening, knowing what is happening in the community, is not a standard journalistic practice. To him, listening is a core concept in journalism, the prerequisite for doing reporting. He asks: "Should we even be calling it something separate from just

journalism? Should we be instead just thinking about it as a particular set of practices or particular way of doing things that can make journalism better?"

News Voices director Mike Rispoli agrees that part of the reporting process, meeting with "sources," is essentially meeting with the community members for whom reporters are working in the first place. When meeting with local people, he says, journalists should:

> … sit down with them, without just trying to get information out of them, when you're just listening to them, yes, it's helping you as a reporter, but it's also helping you build a different relationship with them. And so that's really what we try to do, is to is to get people invested in one another.
>
> Mike Rispoli, *News Voices*

The quest for relationship-building as part of the journalistic process is reflected in *News Voices'* declared mission "to build power with communities so residents have a stronger voice in how local journalism can be revived, strengthened and transformed" ("About News Voices," 2019).

Empowerment is also a theme for several interviewees. A video on *Solution Journalism*'s website shows Karina Hernandez, a student at City University of New York's Graduate School of Journalism, explaining that *Solutions Journalism's* impact on communities is "just reporting on issues and just empowering them, just letting them know that there is a solution to all these problems" ("Solutions Journalism," 2019). Samantha McCann, Vice President of *Solutions Journalism Network* explains that the goal is to train journalists how to report about people's responses to problems, and that their notion of audience engagement is "intertwined with solutions journalism, … (with) bringing communities together … serving and creating news and journalism that is of use and of interest and about the audience."

Solutions Journalism Network suggests that the focus of reporting should not be on the actions of those in power, or exclusively on the impact of public policy, but should instead begin with reporters looking at responses to problems. For example, although uncovering corruption or

unfair housing practices has news value, this group promotes reporting about people and their efforts to find solutions and to highlight positive initiatives aimed toward solving the problem. Some consider this advocacy journalism, yet most relevant to the discussion at hand is the underlying assumption that engagement in the news production context refers to the enactment of a relationship in which journalists provide a service benefitting an audience that is otherwise not in a position of power. Journalists empower their audiences, according to this framework, by working directly for their audiences.

Most of the key informants framed journalism as an institution serving an audience that is conceptualized as communities with information needs and with rights. In fact, several interviewees point out that the term *constituent* is a more appropriate term than *audience.* Both Nyi and Rispoli speak about working with constituencies to support local news, for example. DeVigal sees engaged journalism as "giving voice to the public." The tenor in these and other comments is a perceived duality of purpose: informational and civic needs that can be met by employing various forms of qualitative, engaged journalism. Although they do accept metrics as one tool for measuring success, particularly when meeting revenue goals, engagement as relationship work, with one partner in the relationship coming from the newsroom and the other member of the public, the community, a constituent, is a shared theme.

5.2.3. Summary

In summary, interviewees working for organizations producing analytics tools to measure engagement, adhere to a transactional definition of the journalist-audience relationship, with a main focus on revenue goals. However, not only do they recognize the limits of framing the relationship solely in quantitative terms, with the audience either reduced to data or to potential

customers, they are also interested in measures of engagement that incorporate values more native to both the newsroom and to the audience as members of communities.

Interviewees not in the metrics business acknowledge the usefulness of web analytics, yet primarily as a service provided by ancillaries that help provide evidence for the success of their engaged journalism concept in producing revenue. Their qualitative conceptualizations envision relationships between journalists and their audience as personal relationships, quite literally in many cases. Listening, entering into a dialogue and sharing power is the verbiage used to describe what in some cases takes the shape of news production and distribution partnerships. The underlying assumption for these interviewees is that, in its current state, the journalist-audience relationship needs improvement, if not radical change. In the following section I briefly outline the key informants' critiques of the *status quo*, followed by a synthesis of their visions for a future with engaged newsrooms and how this might translate into the newsrooms that exist today.

5.3 Critique of the status quo

Inherent in their definitions of engagement and audience are the interviewees' critiques of the *status quo* in traditional newsrooms. All cite as primary motivation for their involvement with audience engagement the need to repair or reinvent journalism's business model. Ironically, some of the solutions they have drafted require very labor-intensive interventions. Journalists working in newsrooms hollowed by lay-offs and budget cuts rarely have the time or resources that would be necessary to carry out the audience engagement strategies proposed by external consultants. That is, the prevailing business models they are hoping to reform, are themselves creating barriers that prevent journalists from changing the ways in which they engage with their communities.

5.3.4. Resisting change

Talia Stroud describes the situation many news organizations find themselves in as a never-ending spiral of budget cuts that curtail the organizations' abilities to produce high quality journalism, leading to a decline in readership which necessitates further cuts and so forth. Joy Mayer is concerned about newsrooms that, faced with austerity measures, are not adjusting their coverage to more narrow audiences and to niche markets. Along with other interviewees, she continues to see journalists as resisting the use of analytics. She believes that they fear it will lead them to produce clickbait and that they could lose editorial control. Simon Nyi explains that newsrooms' tendency to define metrics in a traditional way, for example, as pageviews, social media reach or Nielsen ratings, contributes to journalists' resistance to the use of these metrics in the newsroom. He describes newsrooms as often viewing their audience as monolithic, as a commodified, homogenous mass, with journalists continuing to exercise traditional hegemonic power over them. "When we think about the sort of traditional news organization, we think about someone telling you what you need to know, instead of coming from a position of asking you: what do you need to know?"

When Mike Rispoli describes traditional newsrooms, he speaks of their longing for a return to an outdated model of journalism that "has not been good for a lot of people for a long time," referring to the under- and misrepresentation of minorities in news media coverage.

> Go back 50 years to the Kerner commission, where they said news coverage is creating and furthering and fueling stereotypes to communities of color and newsrooms are primarily white men. I don't think that that's terribly different now. Some things have changed, but not a ton.
>
> Mike Rispoli, *News Voices*

Change, says Rispoli, would require facing up to the distrust and uneven power relations of the past and present. Yet newsrooms today are not reflections of the communities that they cover. To

ensure a healthy and productive relationship between journalists and those they cover, according to Rispoli, news organizations will have to recognize this imbalance and make an effort to hire more journalists who represent their communities.

5.3.5. Reporters out of touch

The interviewees' criticism of traditional newsrooms mostly centers around the uneven distribution of power, with journalists perceived as arrogant. Journalists perpetuate, as Andrea Hart puts it, "a hero narrative" that she describes as the unrealistic notion that any journalist works on his or her own to produce complex news stories. Coverage, Samantha McCann adds, is too often focused on the aberration, on an exceptional event that is not indicative of the norm that would be helpful to understand. Traditional news organizations, she says, magnify stereotypes about social issues, rather than help their communities understand larger issues like public health or education.

The tendency to sensationalize and oversimplify issues is only facilitated by the use of user generated content like cell phone video. Josh Stearns sees this kind of community engagement, seen in television newsrooms, as exploitative and extractive. The complaint about journalists being interested only in communities when they have something to gain from covering them, is echoed by Mike Rispoli:

> A lot of times, what we hear is, the only time I've ever met a reporter is when they've shown up for when there was a shooting. Or, the only time I met a reporter was when they needed something from me and that type of transactional and extractive relationship, that is how people view the media, you know, big M-media to kind of lump it all together. But, but that's, that's not terribly inaccurate.
>
> Mike Rispoli, *News Voices*

At the same time, Rispoli asserts, journalists are reluctant to foster close relationships with community members, fearing they may appear biased in their coverage to other readers. Why, he

wonders, are they not afraid of losing editorial independence when they cultivate relationships with people in power?

Overall, the interviewees described traditional journalists as being estranged from and out of touch with their communities. The 2016 election was mentioned by some as a wake-up call, revealing a need for better reporting with less horse-race cover and more inclusion of diverse voices. Joy Mayer has noticed a disconnect in pre-election coverage. Multi-page, in-depth explainers published a few days before the election, overwhelm audience members who struggle to find what is important for them to know. Journalists, she finds, are slow to adapt to the rapidly changing information needs and consumption habits of their audiences. At the same time, Mayer says, journalists continue to believe that they are more similar to their audiences than they actually are. Many of these criticisms are not new. In fact, critique of horse-race election coverage was a topic four decades ago, during the 1976 Presidential election and before (Broh, 1980; Sigelman & Bullock, 1991) and it was certainly a key criticism of public journalism advocates (Rosen & Merritt, 1994). Perhaps the engaged journalism movement as described by the participants represents the revival of public journalism, except that it occurs in a digital environment with more concentrated ownership structures and less resources. Only a few interviewees drew the connection between what they conceptualize as engaged journalism and public journalism. Andrew DeVigal, for instance, calls his vision of social journalism "what public journalism has evolved to today." Andrew Haeg calls it "an outgrowth of public journalism" that became "outmoded" and evolved into crowdsourcing and now focuses on listening to readers with the realization that, as he puts it, "this responsiveness is also something that's really powerful from a business standpoint. It's gone from something you do for the sake of democracy to something that is much more aligned with the economic health of the

organization." Talia Stroud calls public journalism "something like a second cousin" to the current engaged journalism movement. The key difference, according to Stroud, is similar to Haeg's argument, in that she points to the need to compensate for lost advertisement revenue, as part of engaged journalism's mission.

While interviewees took care to note that their criticisms of traditional journalism are not blanket generalizations and that many newsrooms are trying, despite the financial constraints, to make changes, the tenor of their assessment of traditional newsrooms was similar. The slow response to the collapse of the business model and adherence to old relationship models that exclude community concerns, has interviewees calling for a radical change, a "flipping of the script,", as Andrew DeVigal calls it. To summarize, interviewees not in the analytics business believe that many traditional newsrooms are not adequately meeting their communities' information needs. Journalists lack the time and resources and too often sensationalize and misrepresent important issues and communities. As a consequence, audience members lose trust in these institutions, perpetuating a cycle Talia Stroud calls a downward spiral. In the following section, I outline the key informants' suggestions for a better, engaged journalism.

5.4 Engaged Journalism

Guided by their perceived shortcomings of news media organizations and newsrooms, the key informants propose various models that address issues of power, culture, coverage and economics. Their suggestions are not exhaustive but represent a sample of approaches that are being tested in communities and newsrooms around the country. Rather than explicate the details of each model, I focus here on their visions for the future of a more engaged journalism along issues they consider problematic: power, culture, coverage and economics.

5.4.1. Power

Many interviewees share the common goal of redistributing power, by taking power away from journalists and giving it to their communities. They speak about empathy, trust and representation when describing the necessary change in these relationships. Andrea Hart and her fellow *City Bureau* founders are motivated by what she identifies as systemic problems in the way the news media has been covering minority communities in the south and west sides of Chicago.. Their vision is diversity and equity in newsrooms, adequate coverage of the community, leading to sustainable business models that elevate the needs of communities above those of journalists. Instead of trying to save journalists, Hart recommends, "we should be saving journalism." Opening up the newsroom and partnering with community members as witnesses, reporters and co-producers means to empower those who are not professional journalists, to focus on the institution and not on those traditionally in power. Community members as active participants means giving them a seat at the table where decisions about news value and selection are made.

As much as the narrative is about empowering the audience, repairing the perceived loss of agency that journalists experience is a core aspiration. Joy Mayer speaks about journalists feeling powerless when faced with loss of credibility and trust and hopes to find ways for them to understand how they can regain it. Similarly, the applications that *Hearken* and *Groundsource* have developed are initiatives that envision engaged journalists outfitted with tools to reactivate and perhaps reshape these relationships. Tom Rosenstiel's experience has been that journalists, who had become resigned to the alienation between themselves and their readers, were pleasantly surprised about the feedback to their efforts and were less cynical about the audience.

As the interviewees paint pictures of a broken system but also of their hopes for repairing it, the kind and extent of emotional work this will require are apparent. Audiences feeling under- and misrepresented, communities feeling left out and some journalists who, as Mike Rispoli describes it, are afraid of going to events because they anticipate being yelled at by members of the community, will require more than analytics and tools for texting and fielding questions. Understanding how journalists undertake the emotional labor of engagement is therefore vital to finding and operationalizing the solutions key engagement informants espouse.

5.4.2. Culture

Engaged journalism, with a recalibration of the balance of power as described above, would require a shift not just in journalistic norms and practices and business models, but importantly a shift in culture. Many of these rearrangements are already occurring. As mentioned above, funding models through foundations or non-profit structures are behind most of the efforts discussed by the key informants. Some operate as news outlets others work in non-profit and commercially-owned newsrooms to affect change. Mike Rispoli, with the non-profit *Free Press*, is convinced that, whether owned by a corporation or operating as a non-profit, news organizations can only make a meaningful change if there is a meaningful shift in newsroom culture. And yet, this kind of move toward more inclusive journalism, is best achieved by newsrooms that are publicly funded. Their community-based revenue models, for example the membership model, is considered more compatible with community and audience-centered reporting.

Commercially owned newsrooms are where proponents of engaged journalism are hoping to win over hearts and minds of journalists. Lacking buy-in from management, Andrew DeVigal and Talia Stroud agree, the necessary changes will not occur. Tom Rosenstiel is tired of the

clichés about night shift editors, older employees or union members resenting change and added tasks. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that some habits must be broken, particularly around the use of metrics. News leaders, Rosenstiel contends, should reframe innovative practices, like the use of data. Rather than treating them as a change for the worse, they should promote them as tools that will improve the profession and help them as journalists.

> There's a lot of culture change that has to happen in the newsroom, you have to make your news people think that data is their friends, you know, and their future, not something that will, you know, turn them into pandering fools.
> So they have to understand how data works, it has to be presented in a way that makes sense, they have to make sure that it aligns, that the metrics they're using aligns with what really works and also to what extent does it align with their journalistic mission or not.
>
> Tom Rosenstiel, *American Press Institute*

Audience engagement editors, as discussed in chapter 4, often function as change agents in newsrooms. They are the analytics decoders who translate audience data that intersects with marketing, sales and promotions departments' needs, and deliver it to the newsroom. While they carry much of the burden of this "reeducation," without explicit and well-articulated guidance from management, the necessary shift will be difficult to achieve.

In addition, *Hearken*'s Thoreson recommends finding and using early adopters and influencers to change the newsroom culture. In the end, Jill Nicholson finds, the persuasive power of analytics will help speed up this process. For instance, engagement editors can use *Chartbeat* and other analytics tools to pinpoint weaknesses in a reporter's writing style.

> We have tools that will show you what particular part of an article is causing people to leave the page. And, you know, I definitely think what some of the reporters that we work with start to realize is, you know, they may have writing habits that just really aren't connecting with their audience.
>
> Jill Nicholson, *Chartbeat*

5.4.3. Coverage

Engaged journalism, as envisioned by the interviewees who do not work in the analytics industry, differs from traditional journalism not merely in how stories are covered. The most significant change would likely be its effect on news selection, particularly in local newsrooms. *City Bureau*'s Andrea Hart cites her personal bias for local outlets: she lacks confidence in national news organizations, fearing that they "can't do this kind of engagement work authentically." Since story selection begins with reporters who are informed about the needs of the community they live in, engaged journalism is in fact local and, as Hart calls it, "place based."

Improving political coverage on a national level, says Andrew Haeg, would take journalists into the community, so "you're not stuck in the White House briefing room, and being like: I'm the proxy for the audience here. My job is to sit here and listen to Sarah Sanders. That's just not a good use of my time." Instead of reporting politicians' policy statements, coverage would focus on stories about the effects of those policies. News coverage would be broader, *Hearken*'s Bridget Thoreson explains, since ideas would not come from government officials or from a select group within the newsroom. Josh Stearns refers to *WBEZ*'s Curious City in Chicago, a project initiated and driven by *Hearken*'s model, as an example for engaged journalism's effectiveness in both finding stories in the broader community and generating readership outside of the traditional, usual audience. The project invites audience members to ask questions, to let the news *WBEZ* know what they were curious about. The community then votes for stories that they would like the station to investigate and cover. The project was successful in engaging community members who submitted hundreds of questions and produced several

accountability stories (Wenzel, 2017).

The *Solutions Journalism Network* states on its website that it promotes reporting that is *"*character-driven, but focuses in-depth on a response to a problem and how the response works in meaningful detail" ("Solutions Journalism," 2019). This kind of focus, Samantha McCann suggests, serves as an antidote to the current negative coverage in the daily press, by telling the stories of problems being solved. The *Solutions Journalism Network* post stories produced with their toolkit on their site. One example is an NBC News story titled: "#FreeBlackMamas works to bail black mothers out of jail in time for Mother's Day" ("Storytracker," 2019). The operative question journalist looking for story ideas should ask is: "Who's doing it better."

Beyond influencing a journalist's style, and driving news selection, Tom Rosenstiel sees journalists, when informed by analytics, adjusting their story formats: "The narrative, the story as the atomic unit of news is too limited" and will be enhanced or replaced by shorter pieces, graphics, interactives and follow-up coverage, all in the hopes of creating coverage that audiences will pay for. One of *API's* case studies featured on its website describes how the *Virginian-Pilot* in Norfolk, VA used the approach advocated by Rosenstiel and was able to better identify niche markets and audience segments, learn what their preferences were and adjust coverage. After 18 months of trying different approaches, they found older, affluent community members, as well as young military officers to whom they tailored "consumer-oriented" coverage that included retail and fine dining (Qui, 2019).

5.4.4. Business model

During the 2018 People-Powered Publishing Conference, a gathering of journalists, civic leaders and engagement advocates, co-organizer Simon Nyi noticed that participants had been focusing more on business goals:

> I think that there's a conversation in the air right now about the business side of engagement. Can this be a path forward to sustainability for news? And if we think about this, as the goal is to serve a community or serve the public, then the question becomes: how do we square that with the demands of the business side of the news or can we say, hey, this is the sensible thing to do from a business perspective.
>
> Simon Nyi, *Consultant*

Once initiatives like *Hearken, City Bureau* and *Solutions Journalism* leave the start-up phase, they need to make the business case for their approach. Many have received funding based on arguments about inclusivity, diversity and civic engagement. Yet the goal is not just to change the culture in news organizations, but to help them generate revenue with their journalism. Joy Mayer criticizes traditional media organizations for not recognizing that revenue from mass audiences was a thing of the past. Revenue models as varied as the niche audiences whose information needs are being met through newsletters, personalized news delivery systems, subscriptions or membership models, are the hope for future sustainability, she says.
Tom Rosenstiel's appeal is for to news organization to become more open to data, to inform the decisions and strategies necessary. Learning what readers want is just the first part of this equation. Next, they must learn how audiences want the news to be delivered and importantly, whether they will pay for it.

> The other part of being audience-centric is understanding that our publishing model isn't the general store, the department story anymore. You actually have to create franchises that people say: Oh, I want to read the Bugle, because they're really good at this.
>
> Tom Rosenstiel, *API*

News organizations so motivated would focus on news that they knew their audiences were interested in and willing to pay for, finding in the data who their "quality audiences" are. Kim Wilson, director of *Social News Desk*, believes that journalists benefit from using data. It helps them make better editorial decisions and it helps them to understand how their work contributes to the financial health of their organization. For some this may be too direct a connection. Yet all interviewees agree that the connection between the kind of journalism they aspire to - engaged, inclusive and community- and audience-driven - must connect with a new business model or models. Whether based on measured audience behavior or on personal relationships, the spectrum of engagement possibilities, seems to translate to an almost analogous spectrum of revenue streams. Mike Rispoli finds that journalist-audience relationships based on just on page views or "clicks" are weak and do not lead to the kind of loyalty leading to subscription or membership. In any case, journalists and engaged journalism proponents are more preoccupied than ever with turning the relationships they cultivate with their audiences and communities, into sources of revenue. For now, Rispoli says, it is not yet clear how long newsrooms will try to hold on to existing models or if more community- and audience-oriented work will lead to something completely new.

5.5 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to gain an understanding of how *engagement* and the *audience* are conceptualized by people working on audience engagement and engaged journalism projects. No matter what the approach, that is, whether focused on analytics and quantitative audience data or on personal interactions between journalists and their communities, *relationship* is the operative word.

Those providing analytics to newsrooms, while in the business of gathering and visualizing data about audience behavior, spoke about the value of this data in terms of its potential to improve or alter the relationships between journalists and their audience. These interviewees whose clients are news organizations (and not the news organizations' readers, listeners and viewers) see audiences in the context of their value as paying customers and emphasize the need to understand both demographics and news consumption habits. Consequently, their motivations, although phrased as promoting loyalty and engagement that could suggest the same kind of community building sentiment their clients hope for, are revenue driven. They leave it up to their clients to make the connections and form actual relationships with the audience.

Although the initiators of *City Bureau* and many of the interviewees who have worked on engaged journalism projects for several years, object to this commodification and transactional style of journalism, they appreciate the power and utility of audience analytics. While their idea of the nature of the journalist-audience relationship is based on qualitative, personal interactions that foster strong ties, the use of analytics in support of their economic goals, has become more accepted. Rather than seeing it as falling prey to clickbait, they see it as a tool that helps understand their community or, even more significantly, their constituency. More importantly, they recognize that for any initiative to stand on its own or to become accepted and adopted by traditional news organizations, it must make a convincing case for economic viability and sustainability.

I argue that the key informants interviewed for this chapter bridge a gap that exists in the spectrum of what is defined as audience engagement. This spectrum spans economically motivated initiatives that conceptualize audience members as consumers and commodities, to

programs that view readers and viewers as community members whose information needs must be met. These are two fundamentally different approaches, both defined as audience engagement and implemented in various ways in newsrooms across the United States. Conceptualizing the audience not just as commodities or consumers, but as constituencies, with every newsroom "up for election" on a regular basis, is a significant power shift in favor of the audience. Whether in combination with audience data and more responsive, conversational methods, whether seen as citizens and community members that need to be served and newsrooms performing a public service, or as customers whose needs are met so that they return as loyal clients, the direct marketing aspect of this relationship is a reality that the ancillary organizations the interviewees work for, and with, help to understand. According to them, *engaged journalism* in traditional newsrooms requires the right combination of resources, management and journalists performing emotional labor in close proximity to their audience.

In the following chapter I discuss how journalists and managers at the *Asbury Park Press, The Baltimore Sun, WRIC* and *The Washington Post* have adapted to this turn to the audience and what helps and hinders their efforts to engage. Keeping in mind the ideal-types of engaged journalism that the key informants interviewed in this chapter represent, as well as the extent to which their initiatives are being integrated into these newsrooms, I explore how journalists conceptualize their roles and their audience in response to these developments.

Chapter 6: Findings

The journalists interviewed for this dissertation work in four newsrooms. I was able to spend time, observe and conduct in-depth interviews in three of them: The *Asbury Park Press, The Baltimore Sun* and *WRIC*. The fourth newsroom, *The Washington Post,* was open to me only for the purpose of conducting interviews, without any real opportunity for meaningful observation. In this chapter I present the findings of this field work along my research questions. It is organized thematically into sections that correspond to these questions. This approach avoids repetition and comparisons that do not address the research questions. Because the chapter is not organized by individual newsrooms I begin with an overview of each newsroom, giving context to the thematic findings.

I next describe the engagement practices in the newsrooms and how they are integrated into newsroom routines like reporting, finding stories and sources. Next, I present findings about how journalists identify, recognize and talk about their audience. I then discuss journalists' role conceptions, including whether they align (or not) with those aggregated from the Worlds of Journalism Study[9] (Holton et al., 2016, pp. 4-5) and referenced in Engagement Editors (chapter 2) of this dissertation. This also addresses the last research question about the effect of particular engagement strategies on journalists' role perceptions vis-à-vis the audience and other stakeholders.

Below I describe the newsroom environments, with as much detail as available and relevant, for all four newsrooms visited. Some aspects of these descriptions will come up again

[9]The Worlds of Journalism Study is an ongoing academic effort to document and study the state of journalism worldwide. Data is collected in collaboration with scholars across the globe. http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/

or will be referenced later. The purpose in the following is to communicate the physical set-up of the newsrooms as much as the workplace atmosphere, and to provide background information about the news operation and routines.

6.1. The Asbury Park Press (Gannett Co., Inc.)[10]

Number of Interviews: 40 (see Table 4)

Like many regional newspapers, the editorial offices of the *Asbury Park Press* (*APP*), are housed in a large office building. The *APP* occupies the first floor of a building just off of the Garden State Parkway in Neptune, New Jersey, an hour's drive south of New York City. In the lobby, guarded by one security guard, hangs the first and only sign identifying the space as the offices of the *Asbury Park Press*. A security card is needed to open the glass door leading into the office space.[11] The newsroom is to the left, while the marketing and promotions departments are to the right. The two sides are separated by a common kitchen and break area.

Every weekday begins with a 8.30 a.m. meeting with reporters and editors gathering at the front of the newsroom.[12] The Engagement Editor leads the meeting. She reviews the page view totals and details for stories from the previous day and discusses what may have accounted for the results. Journalists on rotation that week are expected to be present; some call in. They begin their story pitches with the number of page views their last story or stories had. Mounted on the wall behind the Engagement Editor are five monitors that display analytics for the *Asbury Park Press* and other Gannett and regional publications. The monitor on the right side was,

[10] Behind every publication's name I have added who owned the news organization during my stay.
[11] I was given a key card marked "visitor" on the day of my arrival, allowing me to enter the building at all hours for the duration of my stay.
[12] On some days ten reporters and editors took part in the meeting, some called in. Reporters are assigned to teams, so they alternative weeks during which they are on more frontline duty. There is also a 10 a.m. meeting and an additional 10.30 a.m. meeting every other Wednesday for long-term planning.

during my stay there, always tuned to the FOX cable news channel and the monitor on the left to a local television station. The wall underneath the monitors is a long whiteboard. Editors write tips for possible videos, stories in progress for the morning and afternoon, live news events and planned events for journalists to meet with readers on the board, erasing and editing and adding to the lists during the course of the day. There is also a space on the board headed "Live Events/Insider/Engagement" for planned encounters with journalists and the public. Subscribers, or "insiders," receive discounts or special invitations for the events that could be anything from "meet a journalist" to receiving tax filing advice from one of the business reporters. In 2018 these events generated $ 250,000 in revenue (Interview with *APP*'s Customer Experience Director). Underneath this list is a quote: "BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY." It is signed: "HOLLIS R. TOWNS (BUT ACTUALLY MALCOM X)."

Just to the right of the quote is a running tally of daily page views. The Engagement Editor writes the monthly page view goals on the board and underneath she lists the numbers reached each day. She uses a green marker when the goal has been met or exceeded and a red marker when the page views are below the target number. Every morning the total number of pages views for the website, app.com, from the previous day is added to the list. Clipped on a tall board on the far right are two large paper mock-ups of a newspaper with the headline: "News Benefits." Each is a detailed description of the target audience. During my stay these were "Family Forward" and "Know the Score." The demographics, interests, news media consumption and buying habits of specific groups are used as reference points. Family Forward, for instance, "skews older Millennial & Gen X," is "73% employed" and "50% with child present in home." The "Family Forward" audience, according to this schematic, focuses on parenting, safety, health and fitness (Appendix 1). Members of the "Know the Score"

demographic, on the other hand, love sports, want to advance their careers and want to "sound informed on my industry & community" (Appendix 2). When pitching a story or when discussing how to structure it, frequent reference is made to these two groups. Story ideas are assessed by if and how they would appeal to either target audience or if a certain emphasis should be placed at the beginning of the news piece, to attract audience members.

The newsroom is a large, open area with rows of desks separated by low dividers, making it easy for reporters to communicate directly with each other. They do not use the Slack messenger for internal communication, despite some journalists' efforts to introduce the platform. Email is the preferred electronic method for inter-office communication and is most often mentioned. Reporters interact with each other frequently. Editors walk around and check in with the journalists, sometimes spending up to thirty minutes talking to them about a story and how they might improve the page views.

Members of the digital team sit at the front of the newsroom. Social media, engagement editors, digital producers and editors or coaches, as they are called at the *APP*, are grouped together on one side with desks closest to the monitors on the wall. Behind them are four rows of desks, not assigned by beats, although the breaking news reporters sit together in one section with the Opinion Editor and his assistant in the far corner of that section. From his desk he has a view of the entire newsroom, including the glass front office of Executive Editor Hollis Towns on near the entrance of the newsroom. Behind the Opinion Editor's seat are rows of empty desks, with only one small area occupied by staff photographers. The office space wraps around and connects to the marketing and promotions area, but it is mostly empty. Only one corner is

occupied by the Regional Copy Desk Editor, a position that had effectively been eliminated when copy editing was outsourced to Gannett's Design Studio in Phoenix a few years ago.[13]

[13] He has since been offered and accepted a buy-out.

Table 4: Asbury Park Press

Job Title/Position	Age	Gender	Interview Length/Minutes
Executive Editor	n/a	m	93
Senior Content Strategist, News	58	m	64
Accountability Coach	56	m	24
Director of Audience	31	m	32
Regional Audience Analyst	42	m	67
Strategy Analyst	62	w	82
Features Editor	70	m	61
Digital Innovator/Planner	n/a	w	47
Regional Features Content Strategist	n/a	w	99
Engagement Editor	25	w	30
Visual Strategist	49	w	21
Digital Producer	27	w	40
Sports Editor	n/a	w	28
Regional Producer	61	m	23
Regional Copy Desk Editor	62	m	103
Editorial Assistant	n/a	w	13

Staff Writer, Watchdog/Investigations	36	w	99
Staff Writer, Local News	31	w	65
Staff Writer, Transportation/Local	28	m	66
Staff Writer, Immigration	25	w	100
Staff Writer, Local News	30	w	36
Staff Writer, Local News	56	w	49
Staff Writer, Local News	35	m	52
Staff Writer, Local News, Sports	44	m	48
Staff Writer, State House	52	m	75
Staff Writer, Local News	32	m	38
Staff Writer, Local News	33	m	46
Staff Writer, Local News	34	w	40
Staff Writer, Watchdog/Investigations	52	m	63
Staff Writer, Court/Legal Affairs	59	w	57
Staff Writer, Business/Consumer	47	m	40
Regional Web Producer	29	m	58
Staff Writer, Local News	42	m	80
Staff Writer, Local News	n/a	m	74
Business Reporter	52	m	62
Breaking News Reporter	23	w	36
Breaking News Reporter	27	m	30
Photo Editor	49	w	21
Visual Journalist	28	m	27
Visual Journalist	48	m	35

The paper covers two counties with a total population of just over 1.2 million. The reporters refer to Monmouth and Ocean Counties as “red counties,” “pro-law enforcement,” and “very Republican.” Donald Trump won both counties in the 2016 Presidential election; Hillary Clinton received 55% of the state’s votes ("New Jersey Results," 2017). During my stay at the *APP*, the Republican governor Chris Christie left office and a top story was the inauguration of the new governor, the Democrat Phil Murphy. During that time reporters often remarked that their two counties were outliers in a blue State.

At the time of my visit the *Asbury Park Press* had approximately 60 newsroom employees, including the Executive Editor. Almost every interviewee at some point mentioned the fact that the company had downsized and that those who were still in the newsroom had been forced to resign and reapply for their jobs. This had come in the wake of Gannett’s restructuring and separation from its broadcasting arm TEGNA and the *APP,* one of Gannett’s 92 local U.S. newspapers, rebranded under the USA Today Network (Reuters, 2015). At least one current *APP* employee had been part of the 2013 group that worked on the USA Today Network’s Picasso project that became known as “Newsroom of the Future” (Gannett, 2015a). The mission was to “identify core competencies needed for a modern newsroom and build them into the DNA of Gannett journalists” (Gannett, 2015b). One year later, on August 5, 2014 Executive Editor Towns published a letter directed at *APP* readers, explaining that the paper was restructuring and making “dramatic changes” that he listed as: “Hiring new reporters to cover the community better …. establish better relationships with you, our readers … putting more resources into digital … flattening the management structure to be more nimble …” and that “the stories they write will be based on what you read and click on” (Towns, 2014). He ended the article summarizing the new approach:

> More than ever, our reporters are being asked to connect with you by being out in the community, listening, tweeting and holding conversations with you in local coffee shops and delis. We are going to take a stand and help the community to solve problems, like we are doing with the Asbury Park public schools and our commitment to reporting on the scourge of heroin addiction. We'll host events, too, with special perks for APP subscribers, like we did last weekend with Sleep-Con, partnering with PC Richard to help residents buy better mattresses so they can get a good night's sleep. (Towns, 2014)

The reporters and staff he rehired, Towns explained to me, "are on board" with the new direction. What he suggests in the letter, that is, listening, meeting readers in person and on social media in order to hold conversations and solve community problems with their journalists' reporting, sounds like the kind of engaged journalism many key informants interviewed for the preceding chapter envision; although likely without the very direct advertisement for the local mattress supplier. How the journalists working at the *Asbury Park Press* put the promises Towns made in his 2014 letter into practice and how these practices affect them, is what I aim to unravel.

6.2. The Baltimore Sun (Tribune Publishing Company)

Number of Interviews: 31 (see Table 5)

Six months after the move out of its downtown headquarters, the new *The Baltimore Sun* newsroom still feels unfamiliar to many of its employees. Five of their colleagues at the *Capital Gazette,* a subsidiary of the Baltimore Sun Media Group in Annapolis, were killed in June 2018; and although the relocation of the *Sun* newsroom to their printing plant off of a highway leading into town, was not related to the shooting, it changed how the employees felt about coming to work. They now must pass through a security check-point as they enter the large parking lot in front of the industrial building. Visitors must wait until a call is made and a personal pick-up at the back door and an escort into the newsroom are arranged. Some spoke about avoiding walking

in front of the large window front, others that they were easily startled when they hear a loud noise. A security guard walks through the newsroom several times a day.

Table 5: The Baltimore Sun

Job Title/Position	Age	Gender	Interview Length/Minutes
Night Content Production Manager	69	m	28
Senior Editor of Analytics and Digital Products	27	w	38
Reporter	34	w	50
Political Editor	50	w	30
Editorial Writer	44	w	20
Editorial Page Editor	43	m	32
Editor	59	m	31
Director of Content for News	44	w	56
General Assignment Reporter (Night)	30	w	50
Writing Coach and Enterprise Editor	53	w	50
Director of Content Enterprise for and Investigations	63	w	60
Senior Editor Breaking News	28	w	34
Community Coordinator	23	w	72

City Hall Reporter	32	m	20
Reporter Investigative and Enterprise	62	w	35
Community Editor	58	m	22
Features Reporter	40	m	33
Crime Reporter	35	m	48
Deputy Features Editor	45	m	39
City Cops Reporter	33	m	72
Education Reporter	63	w	46
City Hall Reporter	38	m	42
City Hall Reporter	40	w	48
Marketing Director	53	w	40
Senior Editor, Criminal Justice	51	m	73
Managing Editor	59	m	53
Environment Reporter	34	m	46
Content Editor/Audience, Interactives/Data	n/a	m	79
Reporter, Education	23	w	33
Publisher/Editor-In-Chief	52	m	78

Reporter, Poverty and Social Services	39	w	46

The lease for the old downtown building had expired and for publisher and editor-in-chief Trif Alatzas that was an opportunity for a fresh start. In an interview about the move, Alatzas spoke about the need to adjust to the "new and different ways the news is gathered, and advertisement sold. … We need more opportunities for people to be more mobile, and to be able to plug in and play when they sit down," he said (Marbella, 2018). Ironically, the way into this modern workplace leads through a giant hall of roaring printing presses.

Once inside it looks much like any newsroom, except in a hangar, with exposed ventilation pipes leading up and along the high ceilings. Alatzas, as publisher, sits in an office at the end of a long hallway, out of sight of the newsroom. The director of marketing and communications is in the office next to him. On a whiteboard that hangs on Alatzas' office wall is a handwritten list. It reads: "4 things" and underneath, "Public service mission, digital subscription, audience, vibrant product." Alatzas says that he likes "to keep things simple" for the reporters and that as long as the stories his reporters produce tick one of these boxes, he is satisfied.

In 2011 *The Baltimore Sun* decided to offer digital subscriptions. The move, Alatzas says, prompted others in the business to predict that this marked the beginning of the end for the paper. But in the newsroom, he says, his announcement to begin charging for digital subscriptions earned a round of applause. He describes their current revenue model as mostly subscription and advertisement based. If an audience member does not subscribe, then fulfilling the public service mission, attracting "eyeballs" and creating what he calls a "vibrant product," that is appealing and interesting, serves the brand. He says that he often reminds his reporters of these priorities.

After 8 p.m. Alatzas likes to wander into the newsroom and sit in the middle of the "oculus." This is what they call the center piece of the newsroom, a circular arrangement of desks. High above the oculus television sets hang in a circle, almost too high for anyone to comfortably watch. The Chartbeat and Tweetdeck screens are on display on several monitors. Other are tuned to local and national news channels that are constantly on, but with the sound turned off. In the middle of the room is the "emerging news desk." Some call it the breaking news desk, but "emerging" is supposed to indicate that they are watching and feeling the pulse of the community, ready to grab any story as it emerges, just before it breaks so they can do the breaking, according to an interview with one of the editors. The seating arrangement at *The Baltimore Sun* has reporters stationed close to their editors, with some seating areas and desks noticeably more crowded than others. The editor overseeing the crime beat, for instance, has up to seven reporters to manage, while the political editor does not.[14]

The first meeting of the day is at 10 a.m. Unlike morning meetings at the *APP,* only editors attend. It is also a much more hierarchical and formal set-up than at the *APP*. The managing editor sits at the head of a long conference table with the 27-year old Senior Editor of Analytics and Digital Products seated closest to him. He opens the meeting and asks her to go over the metrics of the past day and hours, explaining which stories worked, which did not, sometimes suggesting what may have been the problem if a story did not receive as many page views as anticipated. As she reads off the numbers the managing editor takes notes, asks a few questions and calls on one editor after the next to pitch and update ongoing projects. The atmosphere is subdued, serious and voices so low they are sometimes difficult to understand. The

[14] During my brief stay at *The Baltimore Sun* the criminal justice editor was recruited by another newsroom and accepted the offer.

morning meeting, according to the managing editor, is as much about stories for the website, as it is about stories that will appear in print, which are discussed in more detail during the 3 p.m. meeting, again with the editors.

The Senior Editor of Analytics spends much of her time meeting with editors. She sits with them at one of the high tables in the large lounge area separating the newsroom from the marketing department. I often found her speaking with editors as they were looking at the charts and tables displayed on her laptop. While she keeps track of metrics, a three-person team is in charge of social media. Their title, community coordinator, seem to indicate that the *Sun* is sensitive to the need to engage communities, although titles seem to fluctuate and add to confusion rather than clarify what the purpose or goal of community work is. One member of the newsroom spearheads community listening initiatives. *Sun* has Recently, the *Sun* hired *Hearken* to develop and launch community listening projects (see chapter 5). They are currently working on their second project with them (Campbell, 2019). The two reporters with an office at the state house in Annapolis. They generally work out of that office but come into the Baltimore newsroom on occasion. I spent several hours in their one-room newsroom as well and one of the state house reporters spent the next day at the newsroom in Baltimore.

Newsroom members had met several weeks prior to my visit to discuss issues of shared concern. The lack of diversity was one such issue. A diversity committee was immediately formed and is currently working on recommendations. Several interviewees brought up their concerns about diversity in connection with the call for community engagement, pointing out that it is hard for community members in a majority black city to trust and engage with a newsroom that is majority white. Several hoped that new hires would help bring more journalists of color into the newsroom. At the time of my visit nobody had been hired yet. The *Sun* covers

Baltimore City and Baltimore County. Several interviewees pointed out that covering two areas with very different populations, Baltimore City, with a majority African American population (*2010 Census*, 2010) and Baltimore County with a majority white population, (*2010 Census*, 2010) makes it difficult to prioritize and serve community needs.

Another topic that came up frequently during interviews was ownership. In 1986 *The Baltimore Sun* was acquired by the Times-Mirror Company, which was sold to the Tribune Company in 2000. In 2014 *The Baltimore Sun* and the Tribune Company's other newspaper holdings were transferred to Tribune Publishing was, briefly, called Tronc. A number of interviewees sarcastically referred not just to the name but to corporate ownership of newspapers in general. Currently 135 *Sun* employees are members of the Washington-Baltimore News Guild ("Baltimore Sun," 2019).

6.3. WRIC (Nexstar Media Group)

Number of Interviews: 48 (see Table 6)

Richmond's ABC affiliate, *WRIC Channel 8,* has changed hands three times in the last three decades. It was owned by Nationwide Communications until the early 1990s, then by Young Broadcasting, followed by Media General and, since 2016, by the Nexstar Media Group. While general manager Larry Cottrill and news director Shane Moreland are relatively new at the station – Cottrill arrived in Richmond in February 2017, Moreland in September 2017 - the marketing and promotions leadership have been with *WRIC* for much longer. Although still mostly funded through local advertisement, the market is changing. With fewer money being spent for ads on their broadcast, they are trying to find ways to make money with digital products. Yet this requires a cultural shift that has not been easy. The focus is on the broadcast,

but reporters and producers are making it part of their routines to write for the website. The digital team consists of a Digital Manager and two Digital Content Producers. Moreland tries to lead by example. He is visibly excited about new ideas and products and frequently turns his head to shout a question in the direction of his voice activated assistant, Alexa, tuning into the news updates his anchors produce for the platform.

Located in Chesterfield County, just off a parkway about half an hour southwest of downtown Richmond, the station is tucked away between a hotel and an office building. Inside the one-story building is a sprawling space with a large studio, a suite of offices and cubicles for marketing and promotions staff and a large newsroom as its centerpiece. The assignment editor and several digital producers sit at a desk, much like a counter, elevated and overlooking the room below where producers, reporters and anchors sit. To the right and left are small, mostly windowless offices. Edit bays are on one side and on the other is a conference room for pitch meetings, a shared office for the sports anchors and the news director's office facing the front, with a view to the outside.

It is a 24/7 newsroom with five blocks of airtime on weekdays and four on Saturdays and Sundays.[15] The nighttime producers, fresh college graduates, are on duty until 7 a.m. Two morning-side reporters come in around 3 a.m. and are sent out to do live shots for the first show of the day. They are off duty after the noon show ends, around 2 p.m. and sometimes attend the second pitch meeting of the day at 3 p.m., but often leave beforehand. By then, the second shift

[15] Good Morning Richmond from 4:30 a.m. to 7 a.m., 8News at 9 from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m., 8News at Noon from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m., WRIC Evening News from 5: 00 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. and 8News at 11 from 11:00 p.m. to 11.30 p.m. on weekdays. On weekends: Good Morning Richmond Weekend Edition from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m., Good Morning Richmond Weekend Edition 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., 8News at 6 from 6:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. and 8News at 11 from 11:00 p.m. to 11:30 p.m.

has arrived. An evening producer comes in to cover the last and latest shows. There is one investigative reporter who is not in this general pool. Her desk is closest to the row of edit bays and faces the newsroom. She always works with a photographer, usually the same one. This is considered a rare privilege, a remnant of a past where resources permitted sending two paid employees out to cover a story. The other reporters generally go out alone as Multimedia Journalists (MMJs). Although they are all very skilled at setting up their tripods and lights, connecting the microphones and performing stand-ups, almost all interviewees in this position voiced concern about having to go out alone with all of the gear, especially early in the morning when it is still dark. Safety was the primary concern, but also the inconvenience of finding parking and having to carry heavy gear from a lot to the stand-up location. On one day during my stay, a reporter wanted to film his live shot from a street near the station and not in the exact neighborhood in question, arguing that the shot would be so tight and non-descript, no matter where he was, nobody would be able to recognize the location, nor was anything actually happening there. The news director declined, and the reporter drove 40 minutes each way for a quick live shot. The reason, I was told, for going through so much trouble, was to satisfy the viewer demand for evidence that reporters actually go to where the action is.

The reporters edit their packages, although a video editor on staff edits pieces that are not produced by reporters. The workflow in general is as follows: reporters pitch and are assigned a story; producers find and pitch stories and provide some assistance with research. The reporters drive themselves to the location, shoot b-roll, interviews and themselves doing a stand-up. They return with the package, edit and write the copy that producers and anchors weigh in on and edit. When the copy is cleared, the reporters record their voice-over and add it to the package. Either the package is aired, or they go out to the location and their stand-up is dialed in live, with their

package.

The first meeting is at 9.30 a.m. It is run by the producers who sit at the front end of a conference table in a small, windowless room, their laptops connect to a monitor on the wall so all attending can see how the assignments being arranged. This is a meeting for producers and reporters who decide what stories to run during the day. The digital manager, whose desk is in front of the conference room, generally attends. He stands at the door, a bit like an eavesdropper. At times he will mention that something is trending on social media or that something his team posted was doing well. *WRIC* has a reporter based at the state house in Richmond. She has a desk in the media center and rarely comes into the newsroom. Her workflow is the same, although she is at the remote location. I spent time with her at her office in downtown Richmond as well.

Table 6: WRIC

Job Title/Position	Age	Gender	Interview Length/Minutes
Reporter	27	m	80
Web Producer	30	m	28
Producer	28	w	21
Host, sponsored content program	34	w	21
Reporter	25	w	56
Director Digital Sales	33	m	41
Director	41	m	12
Producer	24	w	10
Reporter	24	m	37
Executive Assistant	69	w	25
Assignment Editor	45	w	15
Anchor	36	w	60

Digital Content Producer	24	w	56
Local Sales Manager	59	m	21
Digital Content Producer	29	m	33
Director Creative Services	45	m	85
Photographer/Engineer	45	m	26
Reporter and Anchor	34	w	53
Weekend Sports Anchor	44	m	34
Chief Meteorologist	60	m	67
Anchor	53	m	59
Anchor	30	w	26
Head producer	28	w	46
Investigative Reporter	42	w	37
Reporter	31	m	39
Reporter	51	w	27
Producer	27	m	35
General Manager	50	m	43
Creative Producer	28	w	17
Meteorologist	46	m	40
Meteorologist	n/a	w	35
Production Manager	54	m	35
Producer	25	m	52
Anchor	47	m	44
Sports Anchor	25	w	33
Reporter	25	m	40
Chief Photographer	52	m	42
Video Editor	35	m	14
Political Reporter	25	w	39

News Director	55	m	196
Reporter	24	w	35
Producer	24	w	20
Photographer/Video Editor	29	m	22
Reporter	29	w	39
Master Controller	23	w	24
Meteorologist	31	m	48
Producer	24	w	70
Digital Manager	30	m	145

WRIC seems to be stuck in third place. The Nexstar Media Group's competitors, WTVR CBS 6 News and NBC12 have higher ratings and consistently score higher on social media engagement. News Director Shane Moreland knows this because he very regularly checks an app, Social Rank,[16] on his phone. It shows ranking, share of engagement and volume of engagement for all news media providers in markets across the United States. When asked how these numbers are calculated, neither Moreland nor the other newsroom members who use the app were sure. Most suspected that it was related to how many friends, likes or shares the *WRIC* Facebook page had on that day. The app also ranks anchors with an engagement score. *WRIC* currently had two reporters listed under the top 20 in early May: One in 15th place, her colleague ranks 16th. In May 2019 the newsroom participated in a company-wide webinar on social media that could be followed on Twitter (#Nexstarsocial). The days following the webinar I noticed more posts on Facebook and Twitter from *WRIC* journalists. It appears to be a concerted effort to

[16] The app is part of Social News Desk, the social media tracker developed for the television market. An interview with President of Social News Desk was conducted for chapter 5.

boost visibility and engagement on social media. [17] One of the anchors was asked to deliver a presentation about her Instagram account, since she has more than 21,000 followers on that platform. Yet the focus seems to be more on Facebook and Twitter, judging by the numerous memes, dog and cat pictures reporters began posting there using #Nexstarsocial and according to interviewees I asked about this. One said that suddenly everyone was talking about Facebook and Twitter, as if it they had just discovered the platforms. She wrote: "Nexstar is a bit slow with social. Other stations have been making a lot of money with website traffic."

During my visit at the station the reporters and producers seemed uncertain about how web analytics should fit into their routines and how important they are or should be. There is a Chartbeat monitor on the wall, but it sits up high, behind the digital team, and is too far away for anyone to casually look at. The news team at *WRIC* is more accustomed to using Nielsen ratings as a measure of their success. Adjusting to social media and using tools like Chartbeat does not seem to come naturally. They also do not think it is relevant to them. Yet I only once observed a member of the newsroom check the Nielsen ratings that are posted on the wall in front of the news director's office every day. When I asked interviewees if they checked the ratings, they either said that they did not know where they were posted or that they only checked on occasion.

During my visit there was a day-long training with a representative from comScore, an analytics company that Nexstar had contracted to provide audience data, primarily for the marketing and promotions departments, but the news director and general manager attended as well. Their hope was that comScore could deliver more targeted audience data and replace

[17] These rankings fluctuate, but this change was remarkable: On May 13, 2019 two *WRIC* reporters ranked 15 and 16 and a third, who had left the station several weeks earlier, ranked 22. On May 16, 2019, a few days after the Nexstarsocial webinar, the rankings changed dramatically: On *WRIC* anchor ranked 5th, the former reporter moved from 22nd to 7th place, another anchor was in 9th a reporter in 10th and a meteorologist was in 13th place. The station remained in 3rd place.

Nielsen. The news director was fascinated with the amount of detail comScore was able to provide, but disappointed when he learned that reliable results took at least one week to arrive. This was not the overnight rating system that he had hoped would replace Nielsen. He was particularly interested in finding data that could show a change in viewer interest since he had hired a young African American anchor and asked the comScore representative to produce a chart showing ratings before, during and after she had started. There was a slight upward trend.

Branding is often mentioned at *WRIC,* although interviewees also spoke about the fact that the station is known for its weather coverage. One of their brand names is "Storm Tracker 8," while the main station slogan is "News Where You Live." News director Moreland says he thinks the slogan is too soft and does not reflect the advocacy role that he believes the station should project. He is pushing the "storm tracker image" and is still hoping to change the main slogan to his favorite: "News 8 Takes Action." He has, in fact, renamed the investigative unit from "8 News Investigates" to "8 News Takes Action." Ratings did go up and *WRIC* was, for several days, in second position during the first week of my stay. A heavy snowstorm had just hit the area and it appeared that area viewers were indeed tuning in to Channel 8 for weather updates.

6.4. The Washington Post (Nash Holdings LLC)[18]

Number of Interviews: 12 (See Table 7)

In December 2015 *The Washington Post* moved into the 7th and 8th floors of a new building off Franklin Square in Washington, D.C. It felt good, several reporters told me, to

[18] In 2013 Amazon founder Jeff Bezos purchased *The Washington Post* for $ 250 million from the Graham family. Nash Holdings LLC is Bezos' personal investment firm.

suddenly not have to worry so much about resources, since Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos had purchased the news organization two years earlier. It is one of many investments that Bezos holds, although the *Post* is the only one in his personal investment portfolio, Nash Holdings LLC ("Bezosexpeditions," 2019; Crunchbase, 2019; Desjardins, 2019).

The move into the new office space was explained to the newspaper's readers as a fresh start and an acknowledgement that times, technology and with them the news organization, were changing. "This facility is made for a media and technology company," *Washington Post* publisher Frederick J. Ryan Jr. said in a video produced by the organization, introducing the new office space to their audience (Achenbach, 2015). In the same video, Executive Editor Martin Baron explains: "Where do most people get their information? They get it from digital platforms, and typically now a smartphone. So, we have to think that way. We have to recognize how people are getting news and information" (Achenbach, 2015).

Table 7: The Washington Post

Job Title/Position	Age	Gender	Interview Length/Minutes
Beat Reporter/Blogger	62	w	95
Foreign Correspondent	25	m	55
Audience Editor/ Former Comments Editor	25	m	70
Metro Reporter	33	w	48
National Security Editor	56	m	32
National Reporter	40	m	22
Deputy Weather Editor	34	w	41
Audience Editor	37	m	40

Director of Audience	31	m	32
National Political Correspondent	30	m	35
Metro Reporter	28	m	45
Podcast Host	34	w	53

The office space covers two floors. The "hub," is something of a control center, with screens showing metrics and television channels. The ceiling between the floors has been removed, giving it a cathedral feeling. During my visit, I was briefly shown around and could not observe much of the work in progress. I conducted six of the seven newsroom interviews in a small, glassed-in room with a whiteboard and a phone. I was able to conduct one interview in the interviewee's office. The remaining five took place over the phone (4) or at the interviewee's home (1). The interviews that I was officially granted were chosen by *The Washington Post*. Each represents an innovative audience engagement effort. One interviewee produces her own podcast, another used apps during the German election, allowing him to communicate directly with readers and another used crowdsourcing for his reporting. I include them and the other interviews with the caveat that they do not represent, in my view, the average audience engagement effort of journalists working for the *Post.* Instead they are examples of exemplary and successful initiatives. Three interviews that I organized myself give me reason to believe that there are more nuanced aspects to audience engagement work that is done by journalists whose beats or projects might not lend themselves to such interesting experiments. Nonetheless, they do illustrate the possibilities in a financially stable newsroom whose mission explicitly includes merging technology and design with journalism.

Below I present my findings along the research questions and themes. As the preceding descriptions illustrate, the newsrooms studied here differ in ownership, medium, direction and

culture. Yet they are also similar in many ways. My goal is to identify the common themes and the differences. I begin with an explication of the range of engagement practices found in the newsrooms and how they are part of the news production routines.

6.5. Engagement Practices in the Newsroom

How do you engage with your audience? Asking a journalist at the *Asbury Park Press*, *The Baltimore Sun, WRIC* or *The Washington Post* this question solicits a wide range of responses. Some name the social media platform they mostly use. Others question the meaning of the term, or list how their manager wants them to engage. The assumption at the outset of this study was that there is a broad spectrum of engagement practices, ranging from observing and responding to metrics, interacting on Facebook and in comment sections, responding to emails and phone calls, all the way to personal interactions. The assumption proved to be correct, the ways in which each engagement practice is operationalized and motivated, differed.

Yet while all journalists, by their own definition, engage with the audience, only in one newsroom, the *Asbury Park Press,* do journalists have a clear understanding of their management's definition of audience engagement. The answer to the question if their organization had a clearly articulated and communicated engagement strategy, was in most cases, no. Even at *The Baltimore Sun*, where the editor-in-chief had written his four priorities on the board, only some members of the leadership team knew all four, could name them correctly or identified them as part of a strategy. At the *APP* the question never came up, since the executive editor, the engagement team and the content coaches would refer to engagement goals in terms of page views so often that it practically defined the way the journalists did their work.

Whether or not they felt that it was the correct way to engage with their audience, is another issue that will be addressed later.

Next I look at what journalists in the newsroom do when they say that they engage with the audience. Using web analytics, engaging on social media platforms, through blogs or messaging services, branding, as well as in-person encounters and communication via e-mail, phone calls and letters, are included. In this section I also explain which newsroom practices are considered adjustments to the needs of the audience and to audience engagement.

6.5.1. Defining Engagement

A *Washington Post* Audience Editor tries to capture the diverse meanings of engagement by dividing the "world of audience" into three buckets: Analytics, "understanding your audience in a big data way," followed by "the traditional audience that is on social media," and third, engagement reporting, which is "adding your audience to your reporting to better reflect their concerns in your coverage." When asked to define engagement, responses fall into one or more of these three buckets. Some journalists focus on the "big data" aspect and gauge successful engagement by the number of page views their stories have. Others define it by which social media platform they are using to communicate with their audience. A third group stresses that their community and their sources are also their audience. They use engagement strategies to help them do their job as journalists. Some define audience engagement as a combination of all of these.

Interaction is the concept interviewees in all newsrooms most frequently evoke when speaking about engagement. Most say that it entails some form of "back and forth" between themselves and their audience. They add to their definition an explanation of the desired outcome or reason for interacting. Quite often that is related to distributing their work and to

making sure that their work is being read. An editor at *The Washington Post* had a broad definition: "I simply define engagement as trying to get your work as visible as possible to a wider audience, and to some extent, interacting with that audience when the opportunity arises." This, he adds, is necessary for the economic well-being of the organization. However, many interviewees define engagement as something they are required to do, often linking measurable audience engagement to job security. A young reporter at the *APP* said: "Audience interaction is necessary to achieve the metrics that we are supposed to achieve. And I think metrics are definitely valuable, if we want to keep our jobs."

In fact, metrics and revenue dominate the culture at the *Asbury Park Press*. Visible upon entry into the newsroom is a tall whiteboard with a list of the "franchise players of the week." Next to each name is the number of page views the reporter's stories had that week. Here, the connection between reporting and writing a news story, audience engagement, reach and advertisement revenue is very explicit.

> Newspapers are working really hard to understand their audiences so that they can deliver content written in a way that resonates with a bigger group of people so that the advertising team can then go sell it. So, the longer I write that general top story that says, you know, that city council is cutting the budget that nobody clicked on, well, I'm just writing my obituary.
>
> Hollis R. Towns, Executive Editor
> *Asbury Park Press*

WRIC's news director is blunt about what he expects from his reporters: "If they're a reporter who's just putting together just a bunch of feature stories that they feel good about because it's journalism but it's not engaging and building our ratings then they are not going to be here." Similar to the *APP,* the Richmond television station wants reporters to produce stories in ways that motivate viewers to tune in and remain loyal to their broadcast and to go to their website. They also expect their reporters and anchors to interact with their audience on social

media, in order to increase visibility and attract new viewers. Engagement, in short, is a term applied to the content and presentation of a news story, as well as to what journalists are expected to do to promote their work.

When speaking about engagement, interviewees frequently associate the term with the success and well-being of their organization, but not everyone ties it directly to economic success. While in some newsrooms, defining engagement tends to lead to a conversation about metrics and revenue, in others it is discussed more broadly and conceptualized as an exchange, a dialogue or reciprocal relationship. To a reporter and anchor at *WRIC* engagement means seeing "who is responding to me and interested in what I'm posting, and then also who I'm responding back to." A *Baltimore Sun* editorial writer who is critical of the frequency with which revenue is associated with engagement, edits letters to the editor. She considers this aspect of her job a form of audience engagement.

> I think audience engagement is important because you hear what people are saying. I like to know. It means people are reading us, even if it's something I don't agree with, they are reading us. It lets you know that people are out there.
>
> Editorial Writer, *The Baltimore Sun*

A young reporter at *WRIC* agrees that, no matter how negative it is, hearing from his audience is a welcome sign of life:

> You know, journalists are one of the few people where we want both negative and positive comments. We may not like it, but it still fuels the fire. One of my favorite quotes is, I think it was from Kanye West, I think it was his: you're not famous until you have haters.
>
> Reporter, *WRIC*

This theme resonates with other interviewees who see engagement as a way to attract attention, to help journalists make themselves seen and heard on social media, that is, outside of the regular channels. An editor at *The Baltimore Sun*, asked how he engages with the audience, describes a

whole palette of activities. Yet he was not sure which of these "count" as audience interaction: means:

> I mean, obviously, I respond to emails, but we do some community outreach, for example, we're taking a group of journalists down to Towson University, actually, February 13, and then we'll be going down to Morgan to just sort of talk to the kids. But as far as like, when you say, audience interaction, what do you mean, I mean I answer the newsroom tip line sometimes.
>
> Editor, *The Baltimore Sun*

He goes on to equate engagement with maintaining contact to sources and having lunch with PR people. When asked about engagement strategies in the newsroom, he says that engagement is about using metrics to select or deselect stories, that is, keeping track of what people are interested in (or not) and informing him about how to adjust the content to increase audience interest. Since he also works on the emerging news desk, he uses social media as well.

On a practical level, engagement is defined by the journalists interviewed in terms of the kind of engagement they practiced or preferred. That can be through web analytics, on social media or other platforms, such as texting apps and on comment sections, and personal contact through email, phone calls or face to face encounters. Next, I describe how the journalists in the four newsrooms engage with their audiences and how it affects their work.

6.5.1.1. Web analytics

Web analytics plays a role in every newsroom that was part of this study. Yet the numbers seemed to carry a different weight in each of the workplaces. To be clear, the audience engagement teams cared very much about metrics and, as described in Engagement Editors (chapter 4), their job is often to translate for and explain to journalists what the numbers mean both in editorial and economic contexts. The differences lie in the way web analytics are framed and how they are embedded in work routines. For instance, where high numbers are

communicated as being linked to higher revenue in one newsroom, they are understood as helpful indicators of audience interest or taste in another. Often these are slight nuances and in one newsroom, *The Baltimore Sun*, a shift from one frame to another seems underway. Yet I would argue that these differences are significant, because they affect the way journalists feel about their work and about their audience.

Audience analytics, or metrics, enter the newsroom during morning meetings. At the *Asbury Park Press*, the reporters begin by saying what their page view numbers were and offer up ideas how they could "massage" the story to receive "give it a boost." On the first day of my stay at the *APP*, the Executive Editor said, as he was leaving a meeting: "If it doesn't get at least 3000, put a bullet in it." These metrics have a physical presence in this newsroom. Besides watching the monitors on the walls, every reporter has the analytics tool, *Chartbeat* on their computer and checked them regularly. Whenever I asked about a particular story, I was given an explanation of why the story did not do well and what could be done to fix it. The regional copy desk editor said: "A lot of reporters here are doing anything they can to keep their jobs, and if the company says that you have to make your metrics to keep your job, then you do it."

There was a sense of urgency about keeping numbers up at the *Asbury Park Press*. It was a topic during every meeting and reporters were commended when they thought of new ways to ensure that they maintained a high score. For instance, one reporter who had written an article that he knew would bring many page views, scheduled its release during his vacation time. During a newsroom meeting, leadership praised him for figuring out a way to keep his numbers constant. When he returned, he explained that he had made sure to write an article on a subject and with a headline that was a sure hit. At the time, marijuana legalization was a hot topic and

through previous research he knew that using the word “weed” in the headline would get more views than “marijuana” or “pot.”

When asked about the significance of the quote “By any means necessary” underneath the Chartbeat monitors and page views of the month, a senior member of the newsroom explained that Towns had been “a little facetious” that day, but that he was under tremendous pressure to produce higher numbers and that they had just been told to increase page views by 5% each month.

> We want to make sure that we're meeting our goals that the corporation is requiring or recommending 5% a month, each month compound every month is kind of a stretch, because it's assuming that you're going to have bigger and better news every single month. And anyone in this business will know that news goes in cycles.
>
> Senior Content Strategist News, *Asbury Park Press*

Several reporters said that they found it helpful to see what worked with the audience and what didn’t by observing web traffic and by playing around with headlines. But they acknowledged that the system was not fair. Reporters on crime and breaking news, for instance, knew that they would have higher numbers compared to colleagues who covered the city council meetings that Hollis, during the interview, had equated with “writing your own obituary.” The Senior Content Strategist, an investigative journalist himself, tries to “even out” the field*:* “We can do some things proactively, such as watchdog investigations, or look for that type of unique content. But that's not something you can do consistently. The only thing that really moves the needle is breaking news.” For reporters who are not on breaking news or investigative stories, but must make their quota, it can be disheartening. One local news reporter said about her situation:

> The sad part of metrics as you work really hard on something you think is going to be great and then you just get completely deflated when you realize that say you put it out at the same time, just like quadruple homicide and it's just gone. You know, they'll never be able to really get that kind of interest because something else eats away at the audience for it. So that's kind of the disheartening part of metrics. Sometimes you feel like you're hitting your head against the wall.
>
> Local news staff writer, *Asbury Park Press*

Journalists at *The Washington Post*, with its large hub and the oversized monitors displaying web traffic, showed the least interest in their numbers. Those I interviewed at the recommendation of the *Post* were bloggers, Twitter celebrities, podcasters and newsletter writers. They all said that they took no particular interest in web analytics. One even said that he wasn't even sure how to find those numbers. One of the reporters I interviewed outside of the newsroom, who writes a popular blog, says she declines when editors offer to show her the metrics. She knows her numbers are good. One reason for this nonchalant attitude could certainly be the status of these interviewees and the abundance of *Post* resources. Perhaps meeting with journalists on less popular beats would shed more light. The National Security Editor, whose beat does not attract a huge audience, appreciates the "bells and whistles and algorithms" of the metrics apparatus because "it maximizes the impact of the stories and makes the *Post* a successful news organization which in turn allows us to do the work that we do, because if we weren't successful, we wouldn't be doing this kind of work."

Journalists at *WRIC* showed little interest in web traffic. Virtually no attention was paid to the web analytics monitor. In fact, only when a particular news item spiked, as it did while I was there, did reporters look at the screen. In this case it was the video of a man using a blowtorch to clear his driveway after the snowstorm that had reporters shaking their head at how these stories became viral. It was apparent through comments about analytics like "I don't really know what it

means," that this form of audience measurement was unfamiliar to most journalists. The *WRIC* reporters are more interested in social media platforms than in their website, although they are being asked to produce stories for the site. Their attitudes are slowly changing. The news director repeats his "digital first" mantra and reporters turn their scripts into web stories. Another development is motivating them to change: the two rival stations, ahead of them in ratings, also rank much higher in social media engagement. Several journalists bemoaned the fact that the competition's web presence was more professional and modern than theirs.

The Baltimore Sun seems to be in transition as well. Its modern newsroom is set up for digital production. The morning and afternoon meetings begin with a metrics read-out, but the editors serve as a buffer between the raw numbers and the reporters. The editors are the ones who negotiate with the managing editor and the emerging news team about the news value of an item that is trending. It is left up to the reporters to look up their numbers. Compared to the metrics-driven *APP* newsroom, this newsroom seems to have a more positive attitude about web analytics.

> I get a similar feeling looking at the Chartbeat and seeing my name up there, seeing something that I spent time on, or thought was important go high up on the Chartbeat - it's a similar feeling to when I first started, and I'd have a story on the front page.
>
> Reporter, *The Baltimore Sun*

Although the audience's lack of interest sometimes puzzles him, he prefers analytics over engaging in comment section.[19]

> The trolls that choose to comment, we can't really make our decisions based on what they're saying. And the numbers say something different: there are tons of people who are reading it and not posting a nasty comment or posting a

[19] *The Baltimore Sun* disabled its comment section in August 2018.

comment at all.

Reporter, *The Baltimore Sun*

Most interviewees seem to enjoy comparing their news judgment with what they saw on Chartbeat and did not take it personally.

> I pay attention to Chartbeat when I have a story that I care about going live. That first day I keep an eye on it with the hope that it's at the top and it is being read. And that's a good feeling. And if it's not, you're like, "Damn, man. That's a great story."
>
> Reporter, *The Baltimore Sun*

The Director of News Content, who sits at the center of the emerging news "oculus," says that she keeps a birds-eye view of Chartbeat: If a story is interesting and timely and "hits all of the marks" for her and does well, "it makes me even happier."

The differences between *The Baltimore Sun* and the *Asbury Park Press* are obvious. Instead of the daily public recitation of metrics, the leaderboard and the frequent reminders that page views are essential for economic survival, the *Sun*'s editors are a buffer between reporters and the numbers. Publisher and editor-in-chief Alatzas tries, according to one reporter close to him, to shield the newsroom from possibly unsettling news. When an advertiser is lost, for instance, he won't pass the news along so as not to unsettle his staff. But times are changing. While some interviewees mentioned that page views were discussed during their performance reviews, other have not had that experience. So far, the union has resisted, but rumors have begun to spread, as one reporter said:

> What's been communicated to me is that I will be judged on the number of clicks I get every year, I guess that would be audience engagement, I don't think they consider like, you know, the number of emails you get in response to a story or that kind of thing as audience engagement? I don't think it's really articulated.
>
> Reporter, *The Baltimore Sun*

It seems as though tools like Chartbeat don't only measure how the audience engages with specific stories. They can also function as tools for social control in the newsroom. Newsroom management can choose to expose or to protect reporters from audience analytics; they can draw a direct narrative line from metric success to economic well-being. Yet most of the journalists in the four newsrooms visited named a social media platform as method of choice for engaging with their audience. Next, I examine what I am calling platformed engagement.

6.5.1.2. Platformed

The term platform, as it is applied here, refers to third-party applications that journalists use to interact with the audience. These are generally commercial social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Reddit. In fact, the expression "on social" or "to socialize [something]" in reference to a news story was ubiquitous in all newsrooms visited. The four newsrooms use social media platforms in distinct ways. First, each newsroom seems to have a dominant platform. When asked how they engage with their audience, journalists often answer with the name of a social media application first. At the *APP* it is Facebook, *The Baltimore Sun* journalists use Twitter, *WRIC* and *The Washington Post* use several different services. Second, a distinction should also be made between the use of social media tools for news gathering, distribution or branding. All newsrooms have official accounts. Some, for instance, *The Washington Post,* have so many followers that journalists have to "pitch to social" in order to have their news story posted on the official account.[20] All use Twitter and Facebook and have Instagram and Reddit accounts as well.

[20] *The Washington Post* Twitter account has 13.7 million followers. The main *Washington Post* Facebook account has approx. 6.3 million followers and is only one of several accounts the *Post* has on the platform.

For the journalists at the *Asbury Park Press* Facebook is part of a routine that the digital team has prescribed. It is part of the engagement protocol that is enforced by the Digital Director who follows all reporters on Facebook. She receives notifications on her phone every time a reporter posts on Facebook. All reporters are urged to join Facebook groups in the counties they cover. Some reporters spoke about being in so many groups that it didn't feel right. The groups often discourage reporters from posting, especially if it is clearly a post linking to app.com. Several journalists mentioned a colleague who was kicked out of Facebook groups because members noticed that she was in nearly twenty groups and felt she was abusing them to promote her journalism. It is a fine line that journalists are aware of and sensitive to. Some showed and expressed discomfort with the way they were pushing their stories on Facebook but acknowledged that they had no choice.

> A lot of people hate on the socialization stuff and I get it. But at the same time, this is how people get their news. And we really don't have a lot of choice, you know, we kind of have to use Facebook. And I think people have said that people don't like it, and don't like, you know, spamming groups and like shoving it down people's throats, but at the same time, if it's not on Facebook, I don't know, are you going to get enough views?
>
> Staff writer, local news
> *Asbury Park Press*

One reporter showed me emails she received from the Digital Director, recommending that she try some strategies to increase her page views, including posting more on Facebook. The Digital Director was keeping track of Facebook posts and frequently checked her phone for notifications during the day. "Back when Twitter was hot," one reporter said, "we used to have to tweet at least ten times a day. And they kept track of it, and they'd say, you are not tweeting enough." He went on to explain that reporters would laugh it off and just randomly tweet links. By the time Twitter was no longer "hot," they had figured out creative ways to attract attention to their

content on Twitter. The Digital Director insisted that Facebook interactions were not being formally tracked and recorded. The only way to reconstruct a reporter's history on the platform is to download the reporter's entire Facebook activity log, which includes personal interactions and posts, but this does not appear to be happening.

"Socializing" on Facebook also means interacting with readers directly in the comment sections. Readers can comment on the app.com website, as long as they log into Facebook. This has somewhat reduced, according to a member of the digital team, the number of abusive comments, since readers could not comment anonymously. *APP* reporters are encouraged to interact with readers on Facebook. Asked if he enjoyed doing this, one reporter said: "It depends on the Facebook group. Monmouth County is a cesspool of hatred. I don't go on there unless I have to." [21]

There was a palpable feeling of apprehension when reporters would "go in there," meaning entering the communicative space they called "social." On the other hand, many reporters acknowledged that it was also useful:

> I mean, it's also good because you get feedback. And you kind of can determine what people are interested in, what you want to write based on their reactions, and based on just trolling their groups … that helps to kind of see where the conversations are going in terms of coverage, and what's best and how people want to read their news.
>
> Staff writer, local news
> *Asbury Park Press*

One of the investigative reporters said that his plan for the new year was to improve his social media skills so he can better "dig up stories. That's my brand as a journalist." He was part of an

[21] He is referring to a Facebook group called Monmouth County News, that is moderated by Monmouth County community members. https://www.facebook.com/groups/monmouthnews/

investigative team that was just completing and publishing an investigative story they had been working on for two years. "Protecting the Shield" was a series about New Jersey police officers who were not being held accountable for corruption and misconduct.[22] The team had been given a five-page guide written by the digital team leader on the project, giving them sample responses for angry Facebook commenters, some explaining why the *Asbury Park Press* had investigated these cases and how this was part of their journalistic mission. One response to an anticipated exchange was to explain why they do not cover other stories:

> **Comment:** Why don't you investigate the Clintons/BLM/liberal abuses first?
>
> **Response:** [other readers may jump in to call this a deflection, so if there is pushback, no need to get in the middle of it. Otherwise...]
>
> Thank you for your comment. As a local news site, we look at issues that affect the local communities and do not delve into national issues. Many other news sites cover national topics, but our mission here is to examine local topics that will help you make better decisions about your local government and tax dollars.
>
> Protecting the Shield: Social Media Playbook
> *Asbury Park Press*

On the day the series launched, reporters spent hours bent over their computers and laptops, responding to readers on Facebook. This interactivity has become routinized and an unquestioned part of their jobs. Defending journalism, explaining to readers what their process and rationale for reporting stories is, was something several journalists said they appreciated about social media.

In no other newsroom were journalists asked to promote their stories on Facebook as vigorously as were the reporters of the *Asbury Park Press.* The other newsrooms utilize social media platforms as well, but in different ways. *The Washington Post*, for example, has a channel

[22] https://www.app.com/story/news/investigations/watchdog/shield/2018/01/22/protecting-shield-what-you-need-know/1044451001/

on the gaming platform Twitch.[23] The editor in charge of this platform sees it as a way to introduce and bring in young, in this case mostly male, readers. He interviews *Post* journalists, talks about current news, and plays video games with politicians. The comment section on the right of the screen is very active and the editor includes comments and questions from viewers. Users on the channel have asked him why *The Washington Post* does not have a "pay to subscribe" button on their channel. "They are anywhere from 13 to 25 to 30 [years old]. This audience is trained to pay for content," he says. The editor believes that audience engagement should lead news organizations into these social spaces that are less conventional like Reddit, Twitch and YouTube. His reasons are not just economic considerations: "I think journalists should go deeper and go into these places where a lot of people are being misinformed and talk to people, earn their trust back. Because the people there are just not inclined to trust the media."

Aside from special projects like these, *The Washington Post* leaves it up to the individual reporter to decide which platforms they want to use. A local reporter says she uses Twitter as her "outward facing social media." She regularly receives abusive messages and often makes them public:

> I don't think people really understand the kind of verbal abuse that some journalists get. And I think it's particularly true for women journalists, journalists of color and LGBTQ journalists, and I'm all three. So, I feel like I get a lot of it in a lot of different ways. And I just wanted other readers and people to know, and when I started doing it, you know, other journalists would respond to me, like, Oh, yeah, we get that too, or I got an email like that last week. And I think that kind of conversation, just to have it in sort of public view is really good and really powerful. And I think it's, you know, it's also a signal that like, hey, I'm a person.
>
> Metro reporter, *The Washington Post*

[23] https://www.twitch.tv/washingtonpost Twitch is owned by Amazon.com, whose founder and CEO, Jeff Bezos, purchased *The Washington Post* through his investment firm Nash Holdings.

For others at the *Post,* Twitter is a powerful reporting and branding tool. One reporter, who used Twitter to crowdsource a major investigation into a public figure, says that to him, using Twitter is audience engagement.[24] He also uses Twitter to brand himself as an authority in his field. Another innovative social media project at the *Post* involved using the messaging app WhatsApp (owned by Facebook) to solicit feedback from readers who were following their Berlin correspondent's election coverage in 2017. He not only integrated questions and responses in his coverage, but the *Post* also created maps to show readers how far-reaching the social media interactions had been.

Not many newsrooms have as many resources or digital support as does *The Washington Post.* There are three digital content producers at *WRIC* whose job includes monitoring social media and posting stories on the station's website. Compared to the well-laid out social media roll-out plan at the *APP,* their effort seems somewhat manic at times. The Digital Manager is clearly frustrated and overwhelmed. "The algorithm keeps changing," he says and describes several instances where years old content keeps resurfacing on Facebook with hundreds of likes and shares and "great investigative reporting" that gets no attention on Facebook, "maybe because we posted it at the wrong time."

In May 2019 Nexstar organized a webinar to help their local television stations improve their social media strategy. Much of the webinar was dedicated to encouraging and educating reporters to use social media. The focus was on Facebook. Reporters have been using Facebook live in the field, reporting breaking news before they go on the air and the evening anchors go on

[24] The reporter, David Fahrenthold, does not object to being identified. He won the 2017 Pulitzer prize for National Reporting for his coverage of Donald Trump's businesses.

Facebook live half an hour before their show begins. Their evening producer searches for stories on social media and comes up with a trending question that he has the anchors ask viewers a question. But he says about Facebook:

> It's a terrible site. I don't get that same feeling out of Twitter, because I already know Twitter is a cesspool of people and opinions. But Facebook, it tricks you into thinking that this is community. But really, they're just this big corporation selling all your personal information.
>
> Evening producer, *WRIC*

Ironically, a question he had the anchors ask on Facebook live one evening was: "How much $ would you need to leave Facebook?" The discussion turned into: "How much would you pay for a monthly subscription to Facebook?" This symbolizes the complicated relationship that members of this newsroom have with social media. In a news medium in which Nielsen ratings and well-staffed promotions departments traditionally took care of outward-facing communication, and where anchors and reporters faced a passive, silent audience, their adjustment to the interactive nature of social media has been slow. While some complain that their competitors, Channel 6 and Channel 12, have more than double the number of Facebook followers than *WRIC,* the reporters are not thrilled about Nexstar and their news director's call for more social media engagement initiatives. An investigative reporter says that "the news director asked me to share a little bit about my personality, engage with the audience and let them know that I am not working all the time. But that just seems like more work." She has noticed that talking about ongoing investigations on social media can be helpful: "It gives you a more contacts, more 'dishy' stories, gives you other things to be looking into. Because these people have tips and ideas for you." Her colleague, an anchor and meteorologist, is frustrated with Facebook live:

> Most of it is just about me being female. Comments like "you're hot" or dumb questions about the forecast. I'm giving the forecast. I'm telling you how much snow it's going to be. Here is literally a map of Virginia, showing how much snow we're expecting and people, hundreds, hundreds of comments come in asking 'How about Colonial Heights?' It's frustrating. Maybe they just want to be acknowledged, probably they want to hear you say their comment out loud.
>
> Anchor/Meteorologist, *WRIC*

One of the younger anchors takes Facebook and Facebook live very seriously. She was sent on assignment to cover a double murder. While the photographer was getting some footage of the police barrier, she positioned herself in the middle of the blocked road, pulled out her phone and spoke into its camera, as if doing a live stand-up for the evening broadcast. It is part of her professional portfolio that she hopes to expand:

> I wish that I had more followers because at a certain point, I know employers, future employers will look and see what my presence is like, how many followers I have, how well am I engaging with people. But it also just takes time. I mean, it's taken me three and a half years to get almost 2500 likes so it's could take me another, you know, however many years to double that, who knows, it's just a matter of, are people interested in what I'm posting, in what I'm saying.
>
> Reporter/Anchor, *WIRC*

At *The Baltimore Sun,* Facebook is either mentioned in reference to the paper's own Facebook site, although one editor talked about having recently joined a neighborhood page, just to see what was happening in the area, or it is mentioned in connection with Facebook live. The two statehouse reporters have a weekly Facebook live show that they air either out of the Baltimore newsroom or sitting in their rather lived-in looking office at the State House in Annapolis. While there is not much disagreement or even discourse about Facebook, Twitter is another story. Publisher Alatzas and his has been trying to impress on his reporters that only 2 – 4 percent of traffic to their site, that is, traffic that can produce revenue, comes from Twitter. He has recently

learned this and told me that he hopes that some of the reporters who have a large following on Twitter put their energies elsewhere. One reporter in question is notorious in the newsroom and when asked about Twitter, almost every journalist either glances over to him or at some point mentions him. Altazas does not want him or any other reporter to break news on Twitter, before the *Sun* has a chance to report it. For this breaking news reporter that might be too late. His competition is the audience and other journalists on Twitter. He considers himself an expert on this platform and so gives advice to colleagues who he thinks "fail to convey their story in the best way possible" on that platform. He'd rather edit someone's tweet before retweeting an ineffective message: "On Twitter, you are seeking retweets. And you do want reader engagement and if you're not putting your best foot forward, like, what's the point." He rejects the idea that Twitter is a "cesspool." On the contrary, he contends that the Twitter audience is a fair representation of the community. They are, to paraphrase his analogy, the three citizens who go to the city council meeting to complain about something and who end up in the paper because they showed up. One of his colleagues disagrees:

> Who do we know that is on Twitter? In my family, like, no one else is on Twitter. A lot of Twitter is people who are in the media or politics or activist type people. And I don't think that truly reflects the community.
>
> Reporter, *The Baltimore Sun*

The ongoing debate at *The Baltimore Sun* is about the value of engagement tools like Twitter. Is it useful for reputation management and branding or should they use other platforms that could bring more paying customers to their site? The reporters in the room may have a high status on Twitter due to their high follower numbers; but the narrative in the newsroom is that they are perhaps grandstanding, schooling others, and wasting resources for a non-journalistic activity or one that does not enhance the newsroom's bottom line. This weakens their status. As illustrated

in this section, social media platforms are considered part of all newsroom's audience engagement strategies. They can be deployed as distribution platforms for news stories or as reputation managers. In all cases they represent the journalists' status vis-à-vis the audience and help enhance the news organizations brand. Increasingly, journalists are asked to brand themselves as part of an overall audience engagement strategy.

6.5.1.3. Branding

The journalist as a brand is nothing new. Many journalists have become celebrities by virtue of their beat, interviews they have conducted or because they became fixtures in households as evening anchors. Today, journalists are being asked to develop a brand. For some this happens organically, again, because their beat places them into the spotlight; but for others it is something they have to work on. Many of the journalists interviewed were trying to turn their work into a brand. They recognized that it could be helpful in their reporting and it might elevate their status both inside the newsroom and in the community.

Almost all of the women who spoke about this topic were conflicted. They were concerned about their privacy and safety. Very few men were. Several months after my visit at the *Asbury Park Press*, one of the reporters contacted me. The young woman had been selected as one of the reporters the paper wanted to promote. Her boss suggested that a video showing pictures of her with some personal information about her hobbies or her family and her narration, would be filmed and linked on app.com. She was not alone, she said, with her discomfort about the proposal. She had been stalked in the past and did not want to give anyone more information about herself than necessary. She also did not feel this was part of her job as a journalist. After a brief email exchange, she was excused from the project. She had an uneasy feeling-- as if not agreeing to this branding effort, had harmed her career in some way.

Others at the *APP* were more comfortable with the idea, including some women. "I probably shouldn't admit this," one reporter told me, "but I post glossy pictures of myself on Facebook because I know that helps me with my brand and page views." While many made a point of either staying off Facebook or other social media sites, other than for work, she did not mind mixing the two.

A reporter at *WRIC* relished the idea of "curating" a persona on Twitter and recently asked: "What is your favorite burner on the stove. Mine is the far-right burner." His account "blew up" and he decided that part of his brand was to be more positive and fun: "You have to know your audience and you know we live in this world where all we're seeing is negativity and strange news. People want a break from it." His colleague, a sports anchor, has other branding goals:

> So, one of my goals was to, this sounds silly, but get this little blue checkmark, that means you're verified. So, I've achieved that on Twitter actually, recently, which is awesome. You know, I feel like my follower number has increased. And I've just been working really hard to post more and post things of value, you know, you don't want to post selfies all the time, you want to post content.
>
> Sports Anchor, *WRIC*

Then the anchor reads a response from a viewer to one of her tweets: "They said: 'Love the red dresses' and I just said thank you!" Another reporter told me that she had bought the iPhone X because it had a better camera. She is over forty years old and feeling pressure to keep up with the younger reporters. She has the highest number of Facebook followers in the newsroom, but she is also the only reporter who has been with the station for several years and considered a local with strong community connections.[25]

[25] In May 2019 she left the station to work in public relations.

One of the crime reporters at *The Baltimore Sun* considers branding a kind of "long game" to convince the audience that you are a trusted expert:

> If you can brand yourself, I think a lot of people who are in their 20s and 30s appreciate branded journalists in a way that maybe older folks didn't. And I also think that Twitter is a venue where you can humanize yourself in a way that makes people feel like they know you a bit more than just the byline on the top of an objective new story.
>
> Reporter, *The Baltimore Sun*

In every newsroom there was at least one reporter whose "brand" had grown organically and was rooted in a personal passion or interest. One woman reporter at the *APP* is in a band; one of the older former copy editors at the *Sun* has a blog on language; a *Post* reporter was one of the first bloggers for the paper and has a large following. The meteorologists at *WRIC* brand themselves and work hard to be present in their communities by appearing, for example, at schools to explain the weather. One of them is the rare man who expressed concerns about his family's safety when he gets too close to the audience:

> My viewers know very little about my family, because having a 14-year old daughter, I have to be mindful of what's out there, you know. Yes, I want to believe that 100% of my audience is good and faithful. And probably 99% are, but I don't know them. All right? So, if that 1% is, you know, dangerous to my daughter, I got to be very careful about that.
>
> Meteorologist, *WRIC*

Branding at *WRIC* is often tied to a beat or an area of expertise. Before the current news director arrived, the station had everyone declare a "franchise" that they wanted to claim as their own. One reporter talked about how she had just made her Instagram profile public:

> I'm getting a bunch of follow requests from people who are clearly viewers, I don't know who these people are. I don't have anything to hide, I'm not doing anything bad. Like, okay, I like to drink wine when I'm not at work. And I have a boyfriend of five years. Like, it's not a secret.
>
> Reporter, *WRIC*

While most spoke about the value of branding for their organization or as something they were being asked to do, some recognized that the work they were putting in, for example, when they appeared on television early in the morning to talk about their area of expertise, was not financially compensated.

> That's my time. That's not like, I'm not paid to do it. I don't get time off for work to do it. I mean, like, I'm at a TV station at five o'clock in the morning, on a Saturday, that means I've sacrificed my Friday night to do that, and like some of my Saturday to do that. So that's because I believe in having that connection with the public or whatever. So yeah, I mean, I do feel that it's important.
>
> Editor, *The Baltimore Sun*

6.5.1.4. Personal Encounters

Whether for branding or reporting purposes, journalists in the age of digital audience engagement frequently meet their readers or viewers in person. Some journalists took issue with the idea that what they did as part of their reporting was anything but audience engagement. Especially television reporters seemed to feel that being visible on television was already direct and personal. The *WRIC* evening producer explained that making phone calls, emailing sources and answering the main phone line was his contribution to the station's audience engagement efforts. The anchors and meteorologists at the station regularly attend charity events and other community events that they incorporate into the news program. News director Moreland wants all the reporters to be more active in the community, but several mentioned that they felt that they were being asked to do work their promotions department should be doing.

At the *Asbury Park Press* a Customer Experience Director schedules events for the newsroom. "Insiders," the term Gannett uses for subscribers, can attend events like workshops or

panel discussions for free or at discounted prices. They can tour the newsroom or, as was the case during my stay, spend several hours with business reporters and ask them questions about how to file their taxes. Journalists involved in these kinds of events were generally pleased with the opportunity to talk to readers. Compared to how they spoke about online exchanges with their audience, these encounters were well received. One year, the Customer Experience Director said, the paper made $250,000 with events.

Reporters covering specific counties are also encouraged to go into the community. One journalist who covers a predominantly Jewish county scheduled a meet-and-greet at a coffee shop. Approximately ten members of the community came to tell her what they thought she should be covering. “Do you read the *Asbury Park Press*?” she asked. When they all said no, the meeting turned to fake news and had her explaining why the *APP* was a legitimate and important news source. In the end, her goal had been accomplished: she had made connections, found several story ideas, and felt that she had rooted herself more firmly in the community and branded herself as a trusted journalist.

But while these and other purposefully organized events in the name of audience engagement are appreciated and bring some money in, several journalists at the *APP* thought that it was ironic they were being pushed out to meet the audience, while editors were telling them not to waste their time at school board or city council meetings. I joined one reporter at such a meeting and although it lasted well beyond the hour that she had scheduled for it, she left pleased because she connected with a number of people who gave her story ideas. She wanted to be recognized not just by the school board members, but by community members that she thinks might be influencers and important for future stories.

While all newsrooms had some form of community engagement where journalists would meet with community members, most seemed more promotional in nature and intent. Only at *The Baltimore Sun* efforts to initiate community engagement events as journalistic projects are being made. The editor heading up these initiatives that include giving school children cameras to document their daily lives and asking the community questions about what they would like to see covered, attended workshops and conferences with some of the key informants interviewed in chapter 5 (Engagement Prophets). She returned to the newsroom from these meetings full of ideas and described how exhausting it was to try to bring this different, innovative approach to engagement into a newsroom that is focused on reporting and engagement efforts understandably geared specifically to recruiting subscribers. She said: "I see my role is like, trying to see the special stuff that people will remember trying to let people know, out there that we care."

6.5.2. Newsroom Practices

At times it is difficult to ascertain whether routines and practices in the newsroom have changed as part of the digitization of the news production process or as part of efforts to accommodate and include the audience. As described in chapter 4 about audience engagement editors, all news organizations I studied have hired people to manage many of the practices outlined in the sections above. They are audience or engagement editors, digital managers, digital content editors, community editors or social media editors, to name a few of the often-changing titles. As I have argued in chapter 4, they serve as intermediaries between journalists and management. Sometimes they do the extra work that journalists would have to do, in order to make their stories publishable and "snackable" on social media platforms.

And yet, the audience enters into the routines of journalists, if not directly, then in the changed duties and routines. In some newsrooms, for example at *WRIC,* a short-staffed digital

team means that journalists take over many of the tasks that their colleagues at *The Washington Post* leave to their embedded audience team. And yet, audience engagement, even at the well-endowed *Post*, is no longer outsourced, but has become routine. When asked what has changed in their newsroom, the regional copy desk editor at the *APP* said: "People don't go out as much. Watch the desks. They come in like bankers and go out like bankers." The new generation of reporters, he argues, does not need to leave the office to keep their numbers up. Yet my observation was that reporters were able to go out and report, although they reported that they were discouraged from doing so. Toward the end of my stay at the *APP* I met with the journalist mentioned in the introduction. He had written a story about a homeless family and had told the father of the household that he could not write any more follow-ups, because it did not generate enough clicks. As it turned out, he was consistently on the top of the metrics leaderboard, in third place during my last week there; and when we met, he explained what he thinks is the secret of his success: He does not work out of the main office. His argument is that new routines in the newsroom stifle his creativity. He avoids a culture that prioritizes metrics. The following describes some of the changes in how the news is produced in the age of digital audience engagement.

6.5.2.1. Finding, pitching, crafting stories

The most obvious accommodation to the audience happens at the *Asbury Park Press.* According to the Regional Audience Analyst:

> One of the key things was when we set up that you know, reconfigured that morning meeting and asking them to bring their numbers to the meeting. It just made everybody in the room more aware of their metrics, and more aware of the expectation is you're writing stuff that is actually tailored for audience and they're actually going to it.
>
> Regional Audience Analyst, *Asbury Park Press*

He is part of a digital team that tracks local sites and sends emails to reporters, telling them what is trending on social media. He functions as a constant dispatcher who is not their editor, but an editorial authority nonetheless. Several times during my visit, reporters commented that they are not sure why, but they had just been told that they should be covering something else instead of what they were planning to do.

Story pitches and criteria for news selection at the *APP* follow a clear template: will the story interest the "Family Forward" or the "Know the Score" audience? On numerous occasions a reporter would explain why the story would hit that target audience or how they were going to tell the story, in order to appeal to, for example, the concerns of a mother of two, getting her kids ready for school in the morning. This leads to another, significant change in the production process: stories are structured and written in ways that are considered more palatable for the target audience. For instance, the paper likes to begin a health story with the headline: "Five things you can do to protect your family," i.e., to start with an actual list of these five things. This is considered a smart, audience-facing way to construct the news story. With an engagement time of 28 minutes on the *Chartbeat* dashboard considered a success, there is an expressed requirement to tell shorter stories with the most important information as high up and as concise as possible. In addition to that, making them what Executive Editor Towns calls "sticky" changes the story construction as well. Stickiness, to him, means keeping the audience attention on the page long enough for them to see another headline, click on another story and maybe even another.

> We try to create content that has a degree of stickiness, you know, polls or things that get multiple page views, things that require you to make multiple clicks, because the longer you stay on the site, the better it is for us.

Hollis R. Towns, Executive Editor
Asbury Park Press

Newsrooms that do not face the extent of the financial pressures that the *Asbury Park Press* is experiencing have a different approach to pitching. The metro editor at the *Washington Post* says that she never brings up the audience, but that her editor is "very web oriented" anyway, so that questions about who might be most interested in her story and how she could expand her readership through her writing, comes up in conversation. On the other hand, at the *Post* a new layer of authority for stories to be published on the paper's social media sites, has emerged. "Pitching to social" means journalists make their case to a team that decides which story is worthy of being promoted, for instance, on the company's Facebook, Twitter or Instagram pages. This pitch is often made by the editor and not by the individual journalist. Reporters at *The Baltimore Sun* resist the pressures to adjust their content and style to what editors tell them is what audiences want. One journalist spoke about the engagement team asking him to adjust the way he writes his stories:

> I think our audience engagement team has ideas about more engaging headlines and things and they also have ideas about the packaging of stories. Sometimes they'll say, you know, you wrote this long story, we really could use something that is more like, digestible. I'll hear it out. And if they insist, I'll do it.
>
> Reporter, *The Baltimore Sun*

At the *APP* adjusting content to meet audience demand has meant, according to one journalist, that certain stories just don't happen anymore. She was told not to do "single person stories" anymore and no more Hurricane Sandy stories, because an audience simply no longer exists for this. One way journalists adjust to what some consider a loss of editorial autonomy, is to focus on a nice topic that they can claim as their own and cover, at least once a month. The *APP*

reporter who is also in a band combines her community engagement as a musician with her job and writes a story about the music scene once a month.

In most newsrooms, journalists were trying to find ways to assert their authority in selecting the news. Often that would lead to more community-based stories. A *Baltimore Sun* reporter wants to avoid covering or producing trending stories and found a story about neighborhoods that had laws on the books prohibiting black people from living there on the Nextdoor listserv:

> It's an interesting story about a neighborhood but that's not something that like, Oh, it's trending, so we need to like throw it up online. But it's like an interesting community conflict. So, I definitely think we need to be monitoring social media, I just don't think we should always like rush to get something up because it's on social media.
>
> Reporter, *The Baltimore Sun*

6.5.2.2. Reporting, Publishing, Promoting

The impact of social media platforms and networks, as well as digital technologies, on news reporting is significant and well established. Newsrooms making audience engagement a priority make use of technology to report, publish and promote their work. They try to add opportunities for interaction and participation where possible. While many journalists are on board and use audience-inclusive strategies to their advantage, some feel distracted. Nearly every journalist interviewed used Twitter, Facebook or other networks to find stories and to report. A metro reporter at the *Sun* is enthusiastic about how quickly he can find videos, quotes, pictures and contacts on Twitter when he covers a breaking news story. This is neither new, nor does it signify a different attitude toward the audience or appreciation of user-generated content, yet it is an example of the degree of routinization this practice has reached. *The Washington Post's*

David Fahrenthold took his network of readers a step further: he activated his Twitter followers to report the story for him and celebrated their input, by making their journalistic efforts part of his story. He published pictures of his notebooks on Twitter, giving readers a behind-the-scenes look at the process of reporting and publishing a story. Other journalists make similar use of the collective power of the audience in their reporting, although with different touches. A statehouse reporter at the *Sun,* for instance, uses Twitter and the outrage of the crowd as a tool to pressure government officials:

> If people aren't giving you documents, you can grandstand about it [on Twitter]. There's no real function in the newspaper to do that. I mean we can write a story about somebody not giving us documents, but you can also just dance around on Twitter for a while and beat your chest and then you get your way. That helps me be a better journalist, getting the information.
>
> State house reporter, *The Baltimore Sun*

Interactivity and multi-media elements such as videos or Facebook Live have already become a standard practice that newsrooms have adopted in the hopes of increasing audience engagement. The *APP* hired a video journalist as a visual coach (formerly known as editor). She helps reporters become more video-savvy, shows them how to film and edit and how to decide when video would be appropriate or how to craft a video out of stock footage. She also helps keep the reporters' and editors' enthusiasm about the newfound visual medium at bay. During the first morning meeting I attended at the *APP* reporters were being dispatched to cover the funeral of a victim in a high-profile murder case. They were planning to use Facebook for a live stand-up from outside the funeral home because they were not allowed to film inside. She vigorously opposed the plan. Even for television, she said, that would be ethically questionable and simply not necessary.

Using Facebook Live to broadcast from inside the newsroom is another example of how news organizations have included the audience. These sessions amount to regular office hours that any audience member can attend. Sometimes it is a way for reporters find stories and sources. Reporters at the *Sun*, for example, received a tip during one of their weekly Facebook Live shows. A commenter made a remark indicating he had information about a young black man who died in police custody. The editor, who was monitoring audience comments during the event, alerted the reporter to the remark. He contacted the audience member after the event and was able to access information and documentation that broke the story. It became a headline story with *The Baltimore Sun* breaking the news ahead of the competition. "I knew right away it was a story," the reporter who had been on Facebook Live when the tip came in, said, reclaiming his authority as the journalist whose instincts guide the news selection process. Reporters at the *Sun* talk about Facebook Live sessions as "fun events," but also as something that not everyone gets to do. They give the reporters greater visibility, a form of celebrity status in the newsroom.

By contrast, reporters and anchors at *WRIC* are used to being visible to their audience. Facebook Live, as described above, is used almost like a gimmick, something to do to attract the audience, but also another, potentially burdensome task. The reporter who stood in the middle of the street at the crime scene to produce a video for Facebook was not the reporter who walked down the street and chatted with neighbors. The one sound-bite that all stations were able to get from an affected neighbor was made possible because the crime reporter from the competing station knew someone in the community, recognized her and called her over. The *WRIC* reporter knows that doing stand-ups as promos for the upcoming news takes away valuable reporting time.

Some journalists appreciate the opportunity to give their audience a behind-the-scenes look. The reader becomes a spectator who can accompany the journalist throughout the news production process. A *Baltimore Sun* reporter:

> We're tweeting, they can see what we're doing all day. Every press conference we're taking a picture, we're putting up quotes from people throughout the day, the stories are updated multiple times, you can see four or five updates to it, you can see it being written basically.
>
> Reporter, *The Baltimore Sun*

The practice of continuously editing and updating the story to maximize audience reach and engagement is ubiquitous at the *Asbury Park Press.* The Accountability Coach often wanders over to the reporter's desk, asking if he had seen the numbers for his story and then discussing what can be "massaged" to make it "stick." Sometimes that means restructuring a story or replacing the lede with an interactive feature.

> My understanding is, it's interacting with the audience. You're running a story and as questions arise, anticipating the needs etcetera, you find more opportunities to get them to either play a role in the story, whether it's a poll or it could be a questionnaire. You know, it could be jumping into the comments and say, no, you know, we don't hate cops, you know, we think cops are, you know, sliced bread.
>
> Accountability Coach, *Asbury Park Press*

Although all of the newsrooms continued to publish print editions or, in the case of *WRIC* produced their traditional broadcast and published print and video online, deadlines have been adjusted to the beat of audience attention. Many journalists, especially those who had spent the majority of their careers working for print-only publications, appreciate the fact that they are not required to abide by deadlines, but can push a story out when it works best. The dominant

attitude was that if it helped stories find an audience, then they are happy to adjust deadlines accordingly.

One of the Enterprise Editors at *The Baltimore Sun* explained: "Wednesday is the new Sunday." This is because the site has the most visitors on Wednesday mornings:

> We should put our best work online as much as possible on Wednesday morning. And if it's not ready by Wednesday, then maybe on Thursday morning but certainly what we did in the past--which was perfect it until five o'clock on a Friday afternoon and then kind of drop it into an online abyss over the weekend. Because we're thinking it's for the Sunday paper. That doesn't make any sense.
>
> Enterprise Editor, *The Baltimore Sun*

The *APP's* Regional Audience Analyst withholds stories when he thinks the best moment to post it is yet to come:

> That's another thing that we've really focused in on in the last year is, you know, you got to get this thing out in the morning. Because if you're going to post it after lunch, we're just going to save it for tomorrow morning. Because our audience just drops out.
>
> Regional Audience Analyst, *Asbury Park Press*

WRIC reporters are now required to rewrite their stories after they have aired and post them as web stories on the station's site. Some digital producers bemoaned the fact that reporters, who write scripts in capital letters, lacked the skills they needed to write an actual news story. They said they tried to be vigilant and anticipate when a reporter would be crafting an online piece, so they could intervene and make sure at least punctuation and spelling were correct. One reporter at the station wanted to make sure his web stories found enough of an audience to make the write-up of his package worth his while. He is one of few reporters there who monitors Chartbeat to find the right time to post:

> There is so much of a push for web nowadays, ratings itself, I don't really see them. But the metrics, it's right behind me. I can see if there's a live user engagement going on at this time. That's when I should post my stuff. Oh, there's not as much here, I'll wait like an hour or two and then I'll post.
>
> Reporter, *WRIC*

The hands-on approach that other organizations are taking has been, according to one reporter, standard at the *Asbury Park Press.* He says that posting his stories not just on the app.com site, but also in Facebook groups has made him aware of audience members and communities that he never thought might be interested in a given topic.

> It gives you another dimension in terms of looking at your audience looking at audience growth looking at people who might be interested in your story that you didn't know they were interested in your story. A lot of times I will lead the story to other places because you're learning there's other sources connected or who have some sort of interest in it.
>
> Reporter, *Asbury Park Press*

6.5.3. Discussion

In the preceding sections I aimed to answer the first two research questions: What are the audience engagement strategies in the newsroom and how are they incorporated into newsroom routines. Many work routines described above might appear to be nothing more than adjustments to digital production processes. Although this is accurate, they also reflect a shift in newsroom culture that is, I argue, due to an amplified orientation toward an audience that has more choice and that can interact and participate in ways analog audiences were not. Engaging these audiences is the declared goal of all of the newsrooms in this study.

Identifying reasons for the shift in newsroom cultures, is complicated by the uncertainty over what audience engagement is. I return to the three "audience buckets" that the *Washington Post* audience editor, cited at the beginning of this section, offered. He conceptualized the

audience as data, as participants in social media networks, and as participants in the reporting process. In fact, as the preceding findings show, it is in these three categories that engagement takes. Newsroom management, editors and journalists touch upon these "buckets" in different ways. They prioritize them differently, assigning them more or less economic or cultural capital, depending in large part on how their organization is resourced and how it tries to monetize its news production. The news organizations in this study are recalibrating their revenue models. Yet they are in different stages of this process.

The *Asbury Park Press* is focused on reach and on serving an audience segment that the Gannett corporation has identified as valuable. According to Executive Editor Towns, showing advertisers that Gannett news products can attract "eyeballs" and that they can make them "stick" is the *APP's* goal. A monthly five percent increase in page views, or eyeballs, is the benchmark Towns has been given from headquarters. Some journalists talked about conference calls with corporate that they could hear through the walls, with "Hollis getting yelled at about numbers." Adding to that, news reports about possible take-overs of the company by, for example, Digital First, leaves employees always aware of the precariousness of their situation. The print edition of the paper is, according to a night editor tasked with editing copy for the next day's paper, "purposely left to die in front of our eyes." With this shift entirely away from print, the organization is making a commitment to digital advertisement revenue and subscription.

To return to the "audience buckets" analogy, engaging *APP* audiences means putting an emphasis on audience data. The omnipresence of metrics and numbers in the newsroom, as stories are pitched, reported, published and maximized for reach after they have already been posted, as well as physically present on monitors and whiteboards, sets a tone and sends a message. Community events and coffee shop encounters notwithstanding, the message is that the

reporter's mission is to help the company make money. The emphasis here is on the outcome of their journalism in economic terms, not on the process of including the audience in their reporting. Equating successful audience engagement with metric success assigns those activities that lead to more page views high economic capital. In a newsroom like the *APP* this also amounts to high cultural capital. The journalist on the leaderboard is safe, has done a good job. It may seem ironic that the journalist who chooses not to work in the newsroom, in order to escape what he describes as the toxic corporate culture, has consistently high page views. Yet he uses his time outside of the newsroom to connect with the community he is reporting about. Although their revenue model still leans on advertisement, *WRIC* newsroom culture resembles the *APP's.* Management also frames the need for journalists to brand themselves and to publish their stories online, as necessary change to ensure survival of the station. One employee repeatedly spoke to me about how she had researched the income of Nexstar's CEO and was appalled when she found the figure $19 million. How could it be, she wondered, that $30,000 - $34,000 was the starting income for *WRIC* newsroom employees when he was making so much money?

Neither Nielsen ratings nor web metrics currently play a large role at *WRIC*. With the introduction of comScore, that will likely change. For now, employees with many followers on social media platforms enjoy a higher status and are openly commended by the news director. High social capital in this newsroom is clearly linked to engagement with the audience on social media. This is not surprising in a medium in which on-air performance, recognizability and celebrity status have always brought both economic and cultural capital. The difference is that the digitally empowered audience has more channels to vote the journalist and the media outlet

up or down. This newsroom is certainly sensitive to this, as evidenced by their frequent consultation of the Social Rankings app without knowing how the numbers are generated.[26]

The Baltimore Sun is making the transition to digital subscriptions. Publisher and editor-in-chief Alatzas, according to several employees, is trying hard to shield the newsroom from disheartening financial news. Losing an advertiser, for example, is not something he wants to share. He prioritizes journalistic content, even if he continues to build the digital team and encourages his reporters to work on getting higher engagement numbers. In fact, he has recently purchased the Metrics for News kit that Tom Rosenstiel's American Press Institute has developed. Rosenstiel was a participant in the key informant interviews in chapter 5, Engagement Prophets. A reporter told me that they have a new dashboard with different data points than visible on Chartbeat: "It shows views, but also where does views are coming from, whether they include subscribers, whether people subscribe from a story, how long they spent on the story." Chartbeat and other applications can also show where traffic is coming from, but it appears that the *Sun* is focusing on fostering relationships with readers around specific content. This coincides with the impression that in the *Sun's* newsroom, journalists were trying to find the right balance between using metrics, engaging on social media and utilizing the affordances of the digital environment to incorporate audience engagement strategies into their reporting. Again, the other newsrooms did this as well, but the *Sun* leadership was able to deemphasize the role of metrics for journalists doing their work and to emphasize both the social media and the reporting audience "bucket."

[26] Incidentally, since first writing how *WRIC* reporters and anchors were ranked on the app for an earlier section in this chapter, their position on this list have dramatically changed. This either means that their high rankings were a direct result of the webinar that had them posting pictures of themselves with puppies or that the ranking system is seriously flawed.

Although I was not able to observe how newsroom management and journalists at *The Washington Post* were negotiating audience engagement routines and requirements, the interviewees chosen, give a good indication of what the paper is trying to accomplish. Each interviewee represented perhaps an ideal-type of successful engagement. As such, it appears that the future holds a large palette of niche audiences that are manageable by journalists who are, in sense, focusing in on a beat, becoming subject matter experts, thereby satisfying many of the branding requirements, without stepping outside of their normal news reporting routines.

To summarize, newsrooms can conceptualize their audiences in different ways: as data, as members of a social network or as part of the journalistic process. Some achieve a balance, but to a large extent, the way in which management frames and "sells" audience engagement activities to their employees, makes a big difference.

In the following sections I will discuss how the journalists at the *APP,* the *Sun,* the *Post* and *WRIC* view their audiences and how they conceptualize their own roles in this configuration.

6.6. Who is your audience?

Answering the question "Who is your audience?" was a challenge for many interviewees. Responses fell into one of several categories: some interviewees did not know who their audience was and had not thought about it; others said the audience was the demographic that recent audience research had identified as their audience; a third group based their view of the audience on who they interacted with on Facebook, Twitter or the comment section. The *APP* reporters quite consistently identified the demographics in the "Family Forward" and "Know the Score" categories. Exceptions were reporters with specific beats: The *WRIC* investigative reporter defines her audience by the station's reach, but also by audience members who reach out to her. *The Washington Post* metro reporter tries to write for two audiences: his DC readership

and readers as far away as California. He imagines them to be a "mix of older, civically engaged African Americans in the city and then older people of all races and then you have some younger, more politically aware who are trying to stay up to date on the affairs of their city." The source for his assessment is the comment section under his stories. A *WRIC* reporter says that she receives "unsolicited pop-ups with Facebook analytics" so she knows that her fans are 35 – 50- year old men. She says she hopes that is not based on the fact that she is a woman but instead on the fact that younger generations are not as interested in consuming local news. The tension between being asked to brand themselves, to present themselves as people with distinct personalities and the weariness of too much proximity and the associated dangers that go along with an active online presence, was present in all newsrooms.

The education blogger at the *Post* says her audience are people loyal to her beat. Identifying their audience as loyal to a beat seemed reserved for journalists at the *Post* and the *Sun,* where the beat structure is still intact. Especially the *Post* seems to be focusing on the potential of cultivating specialized audiences and it sounds promising and, especially for the reporters, gratifying. But an editorial writer at the *Sun* made an interesting counter-point: She fears that audience members are being cut out, because they are not "clicking on the right stuff." She is African-American in a newsroom where lack of diversity in the organization is a huge topic. It suggests, in both the *Post* and the *Sun's* case, that journalists see – and perhaps want to see - the audience that they most identify with, whether along identity or interests.

Many interviewees were simply speculating about who their audience is. "Some younger, some older," was one guess. Another reporter said he simply looked at the demographics of his Facebook followers. One reporter at *WRIC* clearly had roots in the community. Her neighborhood happens to be her beat, she has a child in school there and it is apparent in the

pitch meetings that her story ideas come from her home turf. The *Washington Post* political reporter imagines that his readers are also his sources, primarily because they do provide him with story ideas and tips.

All newsrooms had one thing in common: the super fan. Whether it is a frequent caller from a jail in North Dakota or a woman who brings cupcakes into the newsroom, several reporters in each newsroom had a hyper-loyal audience member story to tell. Although quaint, these stories were often accompanied by stories mocking readers or viewers. At *The Baltimore Sun* it was the emerging news editor who made fun of readers calling into ask about the outcome of a sporting event. A producer at *WRIC* has a customer service attitude towards callers: "We get 20 calls a day, 20 people who want to weigh in on the product, and you know, that half those calls are nuts, but it's still answering the phone and being nice or telling people certain things." An editor at the *Sun* is less generous:

> And this guy went on in a rage for about 20 minutes, and not all readers you want to engage with. I didn't quite bring myself to say, if you hate our fucking newspaper so much, why are you still subscribing to it? And I think probably we have a handful of subscribers who buy the paper because they like being angry and we'll take their money for that reason.
>
> Editor, *The Baltimore Sun*

The somewhat sobering impression is that although tremendous amounts of data about audience behavior flows into the newsroom, journalists remain in the dark about who their audience actually is. Imaginary audience members they conjure up are either representations of who they encounter on social media platforms or an aggregate of demographics and categories that their management has told them about. Journalists who attend community meetings or who interact with their community appear more likely to have a clearer sense of who their audience might be.

6.7. Being Journalists

The editorial writer at the *Asbury Park Press* is worried. He was asked by his Executive Editor to stop running the letters to the editor online. This, the writer feared, would discourage letter writers who were becoming "more and more intelligent." He thought cutting out the letters was a misguided effort to engage the community. "The only way people can comment now is on Facebook. It just signals to me that they want to shut down the institutional voice." The cultural change afoot in the newsroom feels to some like an attack on their core mission and on the institution of journalism. But perhaps how journalists conceptualize that core mission is changing as well.

Embedded in the findings in the preceding sections, although about engagement practices and newsroom routines, are clues about journalistic role conceptions in each of the four newsrooms. The interviewees also spoke directly about journalism and how they try to live by and up to certain norms. The findings show that journalists perform many tasks for the purpose of engaging with the audience. Some of these tasks may blur the boundaries of what has been considered normative journalistic practice. Maybe extending these boundaries to include audience engagement practices, even if they fall outside the current normative framework, is called for. A look at journalists' attitudes about their changing profession in light of the changes that are taking place in their workplace, is useful. Using the definitions that Holton et al. derived from the World of Journalism Study (2016, pp. 4-5), I offer an overview of the prevailing attitudes at *The Asbury Park Press, The Baltimore Sun, The Washington Post* and *WRIC.*

6.7.1. Role Conceptions

The four role conceptions of journalists that Holton et al. list are public service, populist mobilizer, loyal support and entertainment.[27] Although there are certainly news organizations in the United State that provide fertile ground for journalists who believe their role includes supporting the government in power, none of the newsrooms included in this study fall into that category. Most of the journalists saw themselves either as classical public service journalists or fell into the rather broad category of "entertainment." In fact, most understood that attracting an audience and providing a service, are increasingly necessary for the sake of job security. At least one journalist could be considered a populist mobilizer, although her cause is not political, but instead aimed at more inclusive journalism.

Public Service

"Holding people accountable, informing the readers about the important issues that affect them, the laws and what our lawmakers are doing. It's like, it's the real stuff of journalism," one of *The Baltimore Sun* reporters said. The sentiment was echoed by many, especially young reporters. Most of them have undergraduate or graduate degrees in journalism. A reporter on the investigative beat at *WRIC*, while not spelling out her role conception, revealed how she felt about audience priorities. Watching the metrics on the story about a man using a blow torch to

[27]**Public service journalist**: "monitor and scrutinize political leaders, provide information people need to make political decisions, monitor and scrutinize business, let people express their views, report things as they are, provide analysis of current affairs, be an adversary of the government."
Entertainment: "provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience; provide entertainment and relaxation; provide advice, orientation, and direction for daily life"
Populist Mobilizer: "influence public opinion, set the political agenda, advocate for social change."
Loyal Support: "support government policy, convey a positive image of political leadership, support national development" (Holton et al., 2016, pp. 4-5)

clear his driveway go up, she said: “You know there could be a prison break any day and people are watching this. It’s depressing sometimes.”

A common theme was the desire to teach their audience something. Reporters not covering politics, or who do not work on stories that lend themselves to investigative stories, saw themselves as educators. A *WRIC* sports anchor said: “If someone walks away and is like, I learned something new tonight, you know, about this team, or this player or such and such, then I'm fulfilled.” *The Washington Post’s* political reporter has similar but slightly loftier goals: “I'm interested in impact and the degree to which readers know, I mean nothing necessarily concrete, no statistics or numbers, as much as a sense that it's helping people think through complex issues.”

Sitting in the “oculus” at *The Baltimore Sun* on any given night, the editor in charge makes decisions that draw the boundaries around her definition of the paper’s role. She wonders if she should have posted a story from the night before about a man who was arrested for shooting a gun in a dispute over a parking spot.

> Okay, everybody in the market has that brief, you know, because it's, you know, interesting and newsy. We need things like that to help cover the news and it drives audience. But then we also have to have great enterprise stories in the pipeline. What we're doing, you know, we're holding people accountable. And we're doing journalism, you know, stories that people can't get anywhere else in the market.
>
> Emerging News Desk Editor, *The Baltimore Sun*

The tension between maximizing audience reach and upholding the classic public service role of journalism is reflected in her explanation of how she decides what to post on the *Sun’s* site. Like many of her colleagues, she does not fall neatly into either the public service or the entertainment category. There was a sense that, no matter how journalists spoke about their roles or about journalistic values, “they had to do what they had to do” to stay afloat. A reporter at the *APP*,

talked about the investigative project that had just been launched. In the past, she said, nobody would think to self-promote their journalism. But that had changed: “We should be celebrating it, that we're still doing investigative journalism during this time, with all the cutbacks, and then that we're willing to dedicate that kind of resources to it.” One of the lead journalists on that investigative story summarizes the dichotomy: “We’re mass communicators. It is our duty to serve the public. And so, if they're not receiving it, then that that's not effective journalism. So, we need to concern ourselves with whether we're being read.” The attitude that the best intentions of being a hard-hitting, watchdog journalist, were not worth much, if nobody was reading their work, or paying for it, was pervasive. The concern about working for a struggling industry and what part they as journalists could play in helping it survive, was a common theme. So much so that, I argue, participation in the monetization of journalism is becoming a role that is quickly becoming normalized in these newsrooms.

There were a few voices, at least one in every newsroom, who took exception to the domination of the “entertainment” role to help finance public service journalism. The *Baltimore Sun* editor who had taken part in workshops on engaged journalism, might fall into the populist mobilizer category. Her hope is not to advocate for political change, but to change how revenue considerations are drowning out other voices. Her role conception involves equal representation of all members of the community: “I feel like it’s all about keeping us afloat, that it’s all about revenue. And I'm probably more about just trying to reach more pockets that might have been disenfranchised and trying to bring more voices into the paper.”

To summarize, the journalists in these four newsrooms do not fall squarely into one category or the other. Although they have all been socialized into advancing ideas about watchdog journalism and being an authority with special access to knowledge that their audience

might not have, the realities of the state of industry are forcing them to prioritize other values, such as reaching as many audience members as possible. *The Baltimore Sun* is making a concerted effort, by posting, for example, the "4 things," but both the fact that not many journalists know what these four priorities are, and that the second item on the list is "digital subscriptions" seem significant and illustrates how the role conception that journalists like to identify with, providing a public service, is being edged out by other priorities.

Chapter 7: Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

In this dissertation I have examined how U.S. newsrooms integrate audience engagement strategies into their news production routines and how the journalists who work in these newsrooms are adjusting to the realities of audience inclusion. Through interviews with 131 journalists and newsroom managers in four newsrooms, with 22 audience engagement editors in 20 newsrooms and with 15 consultants and audience analytics providers, as well as through observation in three of the four newsrooms, I explored this emerging practice as it affects journalists' routines and practices as well as their attitudes toward the audience as they perform the labor of engagement in a digital media environment's political economy.

In this chapter I summarize key findings and offer conclusions and recommendations. Journalists will find insights into how the various ways in which they interact with their audience, that is, through analytics, Twitter, Facebook or in person, affects the way they think about this aspect of newswork they are increasingly asked to perform. Newsroom managers may find that differences in how they frame audience engagement labor and how the extent to which they inform and include journalists in the process will enhance, or not, their efforts. Finally, to scholars interested in how audience engagement beyond news analytics impacts the journalistic fields and its agents, particularly in the current political economy of the news media, I offer insights about this, I argue, new iteration of participatory journalism. I also address limitations of this work and make suggestions for future research.

7.1. Overview of Findings and Conclusion

Since 2016, when I first began looking into an emerging genre of news workers called engagement editors, audience engagement has established itself in the mainstream vocabulary and most likely in every newsroom in the United States. Engagement has become a buzzword, a must-have necessity for any newsroom that is looking to replace or supplement an advertisement-based revenue model with one that can evolve with the changing news consumption habits of its audience. Yet, newsrooms have yet to agree on a definition of the term. As news organizations increasingly invest in audience engagement strategies, it is crucial for them to understand what can realistically be expected of these strategies, how effective they are and how they affect the journalists working in newsrooms that are, henceforth, more audience-oriented than ever. I contribute with this dissertation to the latter aspect of this evolving audience-journalist dynamic. This study provides substantive empirical data from four U.S. newsrooms that adds to the growing body of literature on newsroom sociology examining the effects of engagement strategies on the attitudes, practices and professional values of journalists in traditional newsrooms. It advances efforts to chart the scope of engagement activities that newsroom managers are tasking their employees with. While many scholars have focused on the impact of web analytics, I include the entire spectrum of engagement activities, beginning with analytics and ending with in-person journalist-audience encounters. I was thereby able to examine how journalists feel not just about specific activities and changes in routine, but about the audience, which has become embedded in their field in new ways. I contribute to literature using a field theory approach, conceptualizing the audience and market forces, such as increased corporate ownership in an environment of decreasing advertisement revenue, as actors with heightened economic capital in the journalistic field.

The findings described in the preceding chapter address my research questions and shed light on institutional arrangements and conflicts that emerge in newsrooms that require journalists to engage with their audience. Indeed, a broad spectrum of engagement strategies are employed in these news organizations, but, again, there is little agreement over how to define and limit the scope of engagement practices. I found that audience engagement was predominantly seen by journalists and management as an activity that contributes to the economic survival and well-being of the news organization; less frequently did they see audience engagement as an activity that enhances or improves journalism. Journalists and management both often see audience engagement as a compromise, as something that keeps journalists from doing what journalists should be doing or want to be doing, that is, fulfilling the classic normative roles of journalists that journalism schools reinforce, for example providing a public service or investigating corruption in government. In newsrooms that manage to frame engagement strategies as better ways to tell a story or as a way to improve one's work, however, journalists are more open to experimenting with new formats that would include the audience, for example crowdsourcing or using Facebook Live. Many journalists understand that some of the changes in storytelling, in the design, presentation or scheduling of stories may increase the exposure their work receives and enhances their ability to fulfill their desired roles as journalists. Others see little difference between engaging with sources and engaging with readers and remain reluctant to try new formats.

How the audience is conceptualized is contingent upon how audience engagement is practiced. The more anonymous the audience remains, that is, quantified and appearing as a mere number or "time on story" on a dashboard, the more likely journalists are to talk about their audience as an almost detached entity, with less emotion and less resentment about, for example,

readers' lack of interest and engagement. At the same time, engagement strategies that are reduced to increasing page views, are also perceived as being ordered from above and not something that occurs organically and voluntarily. Journalists who become obsessed with the numbers, as they themselves say, rarely speak about their audience as a community; instead they take what I would call a "gamified" approach that centers on competition with colleagues or, more frequently, gaining status and praise from editors and management.

Notable are various forms of personal interaction, on social media or during organized events, that journalists are tasked with. Face-to-face interaction comes, not surprisingly, closest to the conceptualization of the audience as community. Interaction in comment sections or on Facebook and Twitter are more problematic and lead to journalists talking more critically about audience members. This is where they are often personally attacked and where they have to perform the most emotional labor--an activity many are also most unprepared for. Noticeable in all newsrooms is how many journalists feel and indeed often are, left alone. The labor they perform at the behest of the institution they work for, takes place in a grey area, where help and intervention are only provided when they actively request it. Personal interaction with audiences seems like an editorial no-man's land, off of the institutional platform, where journalists perform quasi-professional work, but on a level that to many, especially to women, is wrought with emotional pressure and danger.

At the same time, some journalists feel at home on social media and do well without institutional intervention. They don't necessarily agree with their editors and managers about the best way to handle their professional presence on third party platforms. This is an area of conflict where clear rules are needed. This grey area is also where I found conflict around the issue of using audience analytics as part of performance reviews. In newsrooms with a strong union

presence, this question is still being negotiated and journalists maintain a sense of empowerment and agency. At *The Baltimore Sun*, for example, ongoing conversations about this also illustrate that journalists differentiate between engagement activities that management is asking them to perform and audience interaction they **want** to perform because they consider it beneficial to their work as journalists.

My final research question asked about the extent to which the various types of engagement journalists practiced (for example, in-person, on social media platforms, or negotiated through social media or engagement editors) affect the way they talk about themselves, their roles and their audience. I found that what matters most is not **how** they engage, but **why** they engage with their audience. Journalists seem to feel more open to interacting with their audience and more satisfied with their own roles when left to choose how they connect with their readers or viewers and when the choice they make is not perceived as having been influenced by their superiors or by engagement editors. That is, when they feel autonomous and free to do as they see fit, they express higher job satisfaction. Those journalists who stood out in their independence, some choosing to work outside of the newsroom, others defiantly tweeting against their editor's wishes, not only had more engagement expressed as page views, but also spoke about themselves and their roles in a more positive way. They felt that they were doing the right thing and, importantly, were better serving their audience. It should be noted that they were also journalists covering beats like crime that naturally bring higher engagement and social media following.

The theme of feeling independent and autonomous, rendering unimportant how they connect, as long as it is on their terms, is, I argue, significant. I found this attitude in younger journalists who saw themselves as transient and not wedded to the community, the news outlet or

the market they are working in. They were also much more open to using personal branding and more willing to experiment with engagement strategies. This aligns in some ways with Molyneux, Lewis, and Holton (2018), who distinguish between journalists who are more "company oriented" and those who are "self-made"; the latter consider professional branding a natural extension of personal branding strategies that they pursue independent of their place of employment, acting more like freelancers. Journalistic autonomy seems to be focused, I argue, on independence from management. Journalists resent what they often perceive as being slaves to an anonymous corporate entity. This trend complicates efforts by traditional newsrooms to implement the ideals presented by the key informants in chapter 5, who equate successful engaged journalism with connecting to a community and developing relationships with audience members as members of that community. Some journalists are marketing themselves as brands detached from their corporate employers, which may benefit the individual journalists as they become known as knowledge sources and experts but might not fulfill the revenue goals set by their news organizations. One case in point is the *Sun* reporter who insists on tweeting, coming dangerously close to revealing too much information before his paper can publish the story, and whose tweets don't bring enough readers to the *Sun*'s site for it to be, according to his boss, worth the time he is investing in this kind of engagement.

This also illustrates the importance of more clearly defining what is meant by "the audience" when journalists, newsroom managers and scholars talk about audience engagement. Do they envisage audience members situated in a physical space, a town, a county, participants in a specific political debate, a community of people who share an interest in a topic, for example foreign policy or national security versus an audience conceptualized as customers relevant to revenue? Or is the reference to potential subscribers to a product, regardless of who writes the

stories and who asks the questions? These different conceptualizations of the audience are not spelled out in the newsroom, causing conflict and job dissatisfaction among journalists who think they are not meeting their own professional goals and expectations. This lack of clarity may also account for the difficulty that some newsrooms have when they introduce initiatives like those offered by newsroom consultant *Hearken* that promote and facility community involvement in news production beginning with the first story pitch. At the *Sun,* for example, *Hearken* had been introduced and implemented, but only a few journalists were aware and invested in the process. In the following discussion I take a closer look at some of the theoretical and practical implications of my findings.

7.1.1. Newsroom Practice: Participation, Branding, Boundaries

Although, in theory, the digital audience is technologically empowered to participate in news selection, production and distribution processes, news organizations continue to view the audience as a currency. In a media system not publicly financed, but based on advertisement revenue, this is not surprising. Yet the notion of audience members literally participating in news production, is one that traditional newsrooms have yet to embrace in a way that goes beyond co-opting or using user-generated content or running letters to the editor. Indeed, newsrooms have adopted a culture of inclusion, in the sense that features such as surveys or questions posed to the audience are now part of the design and workflow, in effect incorporating into their routines what had previously been considered a threat to newsroom autonomy (Bruns & Nuernbergk, 2019; Carlsson & Nilsson, 2016; Chadha & Wells, 2016; Domingo et al., 2008). I would argue that normalizing such inclusionary measures without changing the conceptualization of the

audience from customer and consumer to community member, negates the effect of these measures or, at least reduces them to a marketing strategy

In fact, in the newsrooms I studied here, such efforts are mostly viewed as features designed to capture the audience for the sake of increasing engagement numbers and revenue. In some cases, notably at *The Washington Post*, these participatory features are also used to enhance reporting. Outside of several such concerted efforts to enlist audience help, either for data collection or sourcing, journalists for the most part seem to accept participatory features as ways to solicit audience attention to increase page views and attract advertisers. Alternatively, and increasingly so, newsrooms emphasize the importance of capturing and converting audience attention into subscriptions. No matter which revenue model is pursued, journalists are acutely aware that their work, from reporting all the way to distribution, is designed to generate revenue. Participatory elements are therefore only rarely understood as democratizing elements.

Although the narrative around meeting audience needs and providing a public service, remains commonplace, observation and in-depth interviews show that journalists understand these tasks that allow for more participation as just that: they are tasks that they are being asked to perform outside of the journalistic norms and practices that were once considered normal. This does not mean that they resent their audience, although reference to what Quandt (2018) calls dark participation is made when, for example, at least among themselves, journalists call comment sections "cesspools of hate." Instead, there seems to be a feeling of solidarity, of being in the same boat with the general audience, who are, just like journalists, struggling with changing work places and overwhelming choices for news delivery. If there is an "us vs. them" feeling, it is no longer what Gans (1979) or Wahl-Jorgensen (2002), for example, described, with journalists and their news organizations being "us" and the audience "them." Today, I argue,

journalists identify more as employees of corporate entities and view the call to include the audience as something they are being told by bosses to do.

Yet when it comes to personal branding which is, arguably, part of every newsroom's engagement strategy, journalists enter into a grey area that can evolve and extend into what Molyneux et al. (2018) write about as the freelancer mode. This is the area where journalists feel most in touch with their audience, even more understood and appreciated as they go online to discuss stories and events. The question for every journalist is: Who do they serve when they brand themselves as journalists working for a particular news organization? One of the interviewees at *WRIC* has recently transferred to a new station. He deleted the Twitter account associated with his Nexstar employer and is, essentially, starting his branding campaign from scratch. Others talked about taking their followers from one station to the next, building a following that is not, it appears, interested in the news but in the personality of the reporter or anchor. This too is a form of participation, forced on some, for instance *APP* journalists who must "socialize" their work on Facebook, or pursued as personal branding and promotion on Instagram and Twitter, for others.

Including the audience has therefore become a normative practice as journalists recognize and accept their roles in the marketing dynamics at play. Newsrooms with leaders that frame audience engagement as part of a larger strategy leading to a sustainable business model because it allows journalists to improve their journalism and better serve their audience, seem to foster not only a better work environment, but also see journalists focusing more on audience participation and inclusion as a means to improve their work and to more effectively perform other normative roles such as public service or watchdog journalism.

7.1.2. Public Journalism 2.0 meets the Business of News

One of the critiques of the public journalism movement of the 1980s and 90s was that it relied on the maintenance of institutional norms and values (Reese, 1990); critic accused it of being simply another version of trustee journalism (Schudson, 1999) and regarded the notion of including citizens in the news-making process was merely part of a marketing scheme (Hardt, 1999). Most damaging, perhaps, was the criticism that public journalism projects were not successful in generating profit, or subscriptions and were, even if profit-oriented, not profitable (Haas & Steiner, 2006). Although the movement has been declared dead, audience engagement routines in newsrooms like Gannett's *Asbury Park Press* resemble those promoted by supporters of public journalism. Listening to the audience, for instance, is at least a narrative that the publication promotes. In many ways Gannett papers and other traditional newsrooms are practicing a form of public journalism 2.0, in an environment that is more corporate owned, resource poor and understaffed. Audience analytics might seem like a convenient shortcut to learning what readers want, particularly in newsrooms that are so understaffed that journalists are discouraged from spending time at school board or city council meetings. Ironically, these newsrooms also encourage their reporters to attend organized events that seem more like publicity appearances and do, in fact, generate income. At Gannett's *APP*, the addition of web metrics has, I would argue, perverted the idea of listening to audience needs, since the focus for journalists, that is, the incentivization of "doing engaged journalism" is to reach a maximum number of page views. This quantified or measured audience is only better "understood" or listened to because its behavior is more efficiently monitored. I would argue that this is not the kind of listening that proponents of public journalism or its contemporary predecessors mean.

Juxtaposed to this actual existing audience engagement in traditional newsrooms are focused efforts, mostly non-profit, practiced in small, local newsrooms, that are promoted by consultants like *API* and organizations featured in chapter 5 of this dissertation. Their aims and critiques of the status quo closely resemble those of the public journalism movement, a finding that aligns with research on news non-profits (Konieczna & Robinson, 2014; Nee, 2013). These community-building news production efforts enter into traditional newsrooms as innovations that are contracted in. It is almost as if innovation around engagement is being outsourced and introduced in the newsroom, in the hopes of converting others to this new mindset and culture. The problem with this approach is that these attempts to innovate the ways in which journalists interact with and conceptualize the audience, are often relegated to the status of "special projects", easily overlooked and easily terminated, should they not take or show measurable monetary impact. Without widespread institutional support and communicated commitment, newsroom supporters often burn out or give up, frustrated.

Meaningful audience interaction is time and labor intensive. It means treating readers and viewers like members of a community, as a public with whom conversations that are not easily or immediately monetized. Journalists, I argue, understand this contradiction that newsroom management is asking them to ignore: engaging with the audience for business' sake on one hand and interacting as part of their journalistic practice on the other. Journalists navigate this contradiction by managing their own professional identities, either by branding themselves on social media or by building a loyal readership on their publication's site. This practice is being routinized in most newsrooms, as the interviews with journalists and audience engagement editors suggest. One consequence of this normalization of journalists' self-promotion is the de-institutionalization of professional identity. Journalists are seeking shelter from their newsroom's

constraints and are voluntarily decoupling from the institution that they increasingly see as driven by corporate greed. They are cultivating a following that is manageable and with which they can grow relationships that can lead to the kind of loyal readership that newsrooms crave. Working with a small, niche audience, that is, segmenting their audience, has been deemed more successful in creating readership communities (J. L. Nelson, 2018a). Yet while a newsroom like *The Washington Post* and other, well-funded organizations or non-profits, can afford to launch such experiments, newsrooms struggling to survive risk losing out. The lower-cost alternative is to ask journalists to self-promote and cultivate a following on social media platforms that likely will not lead to subscriptions or advertisement revenue. They also create an extra-institutional community of journalists and their followers or niche audiences. I emphasize here once more, that this kind of freelance-like self-branding, is particularly wrought with danger for women journalists. Newsrooms do not offer sufficient guidance or protection, as a significant number of interviewees suggest.

What emerges is a trend to incorporate not just the language of marketing, but also strategic concepts and practices used in marketing and promotions. The audience engagement editors I interviewed for this dissertation spoke about their increasing proximity to the marketing department of their news organization. Several considered the "wall" between the editorial and business side to be an unnecessary anachronism. Only one said that he considered his collaboration with the business office too close to still identify as a journalist. Designing "news products" and "content" that attracts readers and retains them as paying customers has become normalized as a journalistic practice. In fact, on a small scale, journalists that post and self-brand on social media platforms do just that: they design their tweets and posts to meet audience member's needs or interests. This, in my view, is one of the more immediate effects of audience

inclusion in the news production process. While engaged journalism may be the next generation's version of public journalism, adapted to a digital news economy, the ways in which journalists engage the public, *qua* audience, are more than ever contingent on the prevailing political economy of the news industry.

McManus' (1994) warning about market-driven journalism, is particularly relevant today, not just for the television industry. When Singer (2018) and Witschge and Harbers (2018) write about the emergence of entrepreneurial journalism they refer to start-ups and freelancers. Vos and Singer (2016), in their examination of journalist's discourse about entrepreneurial journalism, found that thinking and working like an entrepreneur was considered "not only acceptable but even vital for "survival" in a digital age." (p. 13). In addition, they conclude that the roles of journalist and business leader are merging, albeit in their study's context this applies to journalists that become publishers of their start-up companies. Leaning on these findings, I argue that entrepreneurial journalism has taken hold as a normative practice in newsrooms. Self-branding and marketing practices are performed by journalists both employed and working as freelancers who view their audience as customers. This is a far cry from the conceptualization of the audience as a community and I contend that traditional newsrooms, despite their efforts to hire consultants like *API, Hearken* or others, are confined by the market-driven field. But do journalists consider their engagement practices empowering or do they feel that the audience has taken control of editorial roles?

7.1.3. Identities and Roles: Empowered or Disenfranchised?

The case studies in this dissertation were conducted in newsrooms at various stages in the process of adopting audience engagement strategies. They also differed in how much emphasis

newsroom managers placed on audience metrics, with the *APP* at one extreme, *WRIC* at the other and *The Baltimore Sun* in the middle of the spectrum. The *Sun* just began working on community building projects through *Hearken* and is establishing a culture around audience analytics with a team of editors serving as a buffer between the audience engagement director and the journalists. *The Washington Post*, of course, allows for a more individual approach, giving journalists more freedom to choose the kind of engagement and exposure to analytics they preferred. These different approaches impact the way in which journalists perceive their own autonomy and how they conceptualize the audience, particular as agents either competing or collaborating with them in their field.

Even employees of large news organizations feel uncertain about the future and speak about how precarious the job situation is for themselves and for journalists in general. Their economic capital is shrinking as the audience is increasingly conceptualized as empowered customers on whose approval and payment they depend. Faced with uncertainty about the future of their industry, journalists are open to trying new strategies that promise to bring some stability to the industry. While editors do not abandon or discredit the value of watchdog journalism, they are, for newsrooms struggling with decreasing resources, considered special projects, luxuries in times of cost-cuts and lay-offs. Unless these stories also yield the desired metric results, be that page views, subscriptions or high-value industry awards, they will continue to lose their value as cultural capital in the newsroom.

Many journalists transition easily into the role of marketers when it comes to promoting their work online. They are, after all, used to finding and engaging with sources on social media. To many it feels like a necessary and almost logical extension of their work; some consider it an improvement, liberating even and a form of democratization of the news gathering, reporting and

distribution process. Yet I would argue that it offers journalists a false sense of proximity and control. While the audience becomes an active participant, this "audience labor," that is, the free work that users on social media platforms are performing, creates a "data commodity" that consists of the quantified audience information needed to inform both news producers and advertisers (Fuchs, 2015; Loosen & Schmidt, 2012; Manzerolle & McGuigan, 2014). This creates the illusion – for audiences – that they are included and empowered. Journalists, as my findings show, are keenly aware of their loss of power both as employees and as participants in the relationship with their audience. In fact, audience members and journalists may be complicit in each other's exploitation and disenfranchisement. The resolution of this tension between the belief that the audience has been liberated and empowered through digital technology on one hand and that it is more subtly than ever being monitored and exploited as a commodity with purchasing power, will determine the outcome of the power struggles between the consumers and producers of news media, as well between journalists and their employers.

7.1.4. Who's in Charge?

Although the data in this study supports research that shows the potential for social control in the newsroom through metric and social media performance (e.g. Bunce, 2017; Chadha and Wells, 2016; Petre, 2015), my observation and interviews only showed some support for the notion that journalists feel validated through metric success (Usher, 2013). Many see audience responses on Twitter or engagement metrics on *Chartbeat* as confirmation that their editorial judgment was correct, yet often connect this success with how it could help enhance their status in the newsroom. Unexpected success or failure, in terms of low engagement is

explained away, unless it serves as proof that the journalist was right to pursue the story, although her editors were against it.

In other words, this study is also about journalists staying in control as they take on new roles that give the audience more visibility and economic capital. Yet it is not about control in their relationship with their audience, but instead about autonomy vis-à-vis management. Audience engagement in all of its iterations, is much less accepted and has a negative effect on journalists' role perceptions as independent and autonomous, if it is lived and framed as a promotional activity, that is, as a necessary performance to help the bottom line. Yet instead of feeling disenfranchised by the audience, journalists turn their dissatisfaction toward management who they perceive as being either inefficient, as out of touch with social media needs, or as being too much under the influence of their corporate owners.

Unlike the journalists who edited the "letters to the editor" section, whom Wahl-Jorgensen (2002) found were disdainful toward letter writers, the journalists interviewed for this dissertation, appreciate personal interaction with audience members, unless it is abusive. One remarkable finding is that very few interviewees have a clear idea about who their audience is or is supposed to be. The audience, in other words, is visible or explicitly perceived as audience members only when journalists interact directly with them. The more personal the contact, the better. That is, journalists felt most appreciative of audience engagement activities that involved personal contact, for example face-to-face encounters. I would argue that these interactions are most like journalist-source interactions, that is, they most resemble what journalists do when they report a story. Again, in newsrooms financially stretched, where reporting in the field is being discouraged, this kind of personal audience engagement is difficult to justify and would be

impossible to scale. This suggests that the kind of audience engagement currently at work in traditional newsrooms does not conceptualize the audience as a community. Bringing to scale the engaged journalism concepts that non-profits and organizations such as *Solutions Journalism, Groundsource* or *Hearken* suggest, may bring a cultural shift to these newsrooms if success with these platforms elevate journalists' status and economic capital in the newsroom. As long as engagement journalism initiatives allow for interaction with audience members on terms that most closely resembles the journalist-source relationship, journalists are likely to accept the shifting power relations and still feel in control. Audience segmentation around a project, a geographic area or a beat, while in reality an acceptance of marketing dynamics into the editorial process, allows for journalists to retain their sense of autonomy and control.

7.2. Summary and Recommendations

This research contributes to work on newsroom sociology in that it looks at how institutional arrangements and journalistic autonomy are affected when the audience is included at various stages of the news production process. It also contributes to literature on boundary work as it relates to audience participation. Finally, it adds to a growing body of literature about the application of audience engagement strategies in the newsroom. Much of the research in this field has focused on non-profit newsrooms or on non-traditional news organizations that have as their organizing idea some form of community journalism (J. L. Nelson, 2017). In this dissertation I have explored how non-profits and consultants, as well as suppliers of engagement measurement tools, conceptualize the audience and construct an ideal audience-journalist relationship (see chapter 5) that they hope to promote. These engagement consultants are trying to gain entry into traditional newsrooms and to normalize audience engagement as they understand it.

The approach of these companies strongly resembles that of the public journalism movement in the late 1990s. Their proponents sought to reform journalism by relying more on citizen voices and agendas than on public spokespersons. In fact, many of the complaints voiced by engagement consultants today about journalistic norms and routines are the same issues that were raised over twenty-five years ago. The public journalism movement represented a condemnation of journalists who were seen as out of touch with their communities. This new generation of public journalism goes by many names: for example, solutions journalism, public service journalism (Ferrucci, 2017), social journalism, or simply engaged journalism. And it is represented by a host of efforts and organizations that seek to shift the focus from a journalist- to an audience-centric practice.

However, with the rise of the audience engagement editor came the rise of audience analytics, or metrics, as a tool to measure and monetize audience attention in the newsroom. Important research on audience engagement has focused on the impact of metrics on the newsroom (Anderson, 2011a; Petre, 2015; Tandoc, 2014). I take a broader approach by juxtaposing the community-focused audience engagement strategies proposed by key informants (see chapter 5) with the audience engagement strategies currently used in for-profit newsrooms. During my newsroom visits, it quickly became apparent that the definition of audience engagement is not only elusive but also leads to institutional conflicts and significant dissatisfaction among journalists when it is not clearly defined. I argue that it matters how audience engagement in framed and, importantly, if it is defined as an activity that will boost revenue or as one that will improve or enhance the journalist's work. When news directors or editors-in-chief frame audience engagement as a data-driven method to attract customers, it becomes difficult for reporters to conceptualize their audience as anything but a commodity.

Unless the community-oriented engagement proposals are framed as something other than projects that will improve the journalistic project, they are bound to fail.

It also matters which platforms journalists use to interact with their audience and how they use them. While their role conceptualization does not seem to be affected by what tools they use, it is affected by how they use it. When reporters use Facebook Live, for instance, to reproduce, using this third-party platform, an interactive experience with their audience that is identical or similar to a "real" journalistic interaction, their professional autonomy is at least perceived as intact. Journalists who use social media platforms to interact with their audience, for example by branding themselves on Twitter or Facebook, perceive this to be a purely promotional and performative act and are acutely aware of the need to project authenticity. Journalistic autonomy as a norm extends to the journalists' freedom to choose where and how to engage with their audience. Leaving this up to the journalist makes audience engagement much more effective. It creates the perception for everyone, including the journalists, that journalists control the message and the relationship.

This perception becomes particularly important in newsrooms in which the journalist's economic capital is shrinking, while the audience's economic and cultural capital is growing. When high page view numbers elevate a journalist's status in the newsroom, without his or her associating these high numbers with journalistic performance, but instead by having "gamed" the system by timing a post or tweaking a "listicle," this represents a loss of control and professional autonomy. When the newsroom environment brings constant reminders of the increasingly uneven power relationship, with the journalists on the losing side, it becomes difficult for the journalist to maintain the kind of morale and enthusiasm necessary to perform the job. The question becomes: who is in control? And the answer becomes: not the journalists.

In newsrooms with sufficient resources to allow for more time consuming, in-depth beat and niche reporting, journalists feel less alienated and more in touch with their audience. In fact, it seems as if the push to engage with their audiences has led, for example, the *Washington Post* reporters to create very specialized audiences that they identify with. One could say that they are islands of innovative engagement practice that can thrive because they are uncontested. The *Post* tries to create a spirit of experimentation and seems not to apply the same kind of pressure on the reporters as do the other news organizations where the introduction of more community-oriented engagement projects has been difficult.

I argue in conclusion, that rather than framing audience engagement as an either-or proposition, that is, metrics on one hand and community-oriented engagement on the other, a more holistic approach should be taken, giving the journalist greater autonomy in choosing how to engage with the audience and in fact, in choosing how to define what audience engagement means. While many newsrooms are redesigning how they tell news stories to better meet audience interests and needs, more work should be done to do so, beginning with editorial and budget meetings. Asking why a particular story is being covered to begin with, followed by how which audience would be concerned, can be a conversation more explicitly anchored into the process. Ideally, journalists who are invested in the communities they report about, will bring expert knowledge to inform news selection. In short, editorial control over news selection must shift in favor of journalists in the field. While *Hearken* and other efforts would like the equivalent of direct democracy in assigning news value, by asking the audience what they would like journalists to report about, another step could be to take measures necessary for journalists to interact with their audience more effectively. Messaging apps may be a tool, especially for

attracting younger audiences yet making time and space for reporters to personally interact with their communities are as well.

Going forward it would be useful for newsrooms if audience interaction was explicitly included as a normative value and as a skill taught to journalists, either formally in journalism schools or on the job. Making the ability to identify and connect with an audience a job requirement would more than likely improve the quality of journalists' reporting. Since many lament the fact that they are given less time to do reporting in the field, emphasizing the need to connect with their community as prerequisite is a convenient way for them to reclaim this lost opportunity. I urge newsrooms to rethink their staffing policies when it comes to audience engagement. Much like reporting, audience engagement is an activity that can come with verbal abuse and physical peril, both offline and off. Rather than succumbing to the temptation of excluding women from this work, news organizations must find ways to ensure the safety of their women employees. Keeping editors on staff who can provide a buffer both from abusive audience members and from the negative pressure of audience analytics, is a promising strategy. Audience engagement means intense interaction with audience and community members. As it becomes an expected and routinized practice, the expectation of civilized discourse should be more vigorously communicated to the public as a normative value that is part of the journalistic field as well.

7.3. Limitations

This study is in no way representative of all journalists' experiences with audience engagement. It is, at best, a snapshot. Since my stay at the *Asbury Park Press*, that paper has seen significant changes in staff and leadership. Gannett, and with it the *APP,* is facing a possible

take-over, which will likely be the end of the huge newspaper network. While I was conducting research at *WRIC* in Richmond, Nexstar purchased Tribune Media, the current owner of *WRIC's* competitor, Channel 6. One of these stations will likely be sold as a consequence. A few weeks after my visit with *The Baltimore Sun* Trif Alatzas hired *American Press Institute's* Media Metrics and has continued experimenting with *Hearken.* These are significant changes that do appear in the analysis in this dissertation, again, because they preceded my data collection. Had I been present in the newsroom when both *Hearken* and *API* were being launched, I could have observed the effect of these explicit audience engagement efforts introduced by outside agents. A further limitation is the uneven experience in terms of time and access that I had. The brief interview visits at *The Washington Post* do not allow for deeply meaningful comparisons between it and the other publications. Had I been able to spend time to observe how the *Post*'s engagement teams interact with reporters and editors on various beats, I would have been able to ascertain differences and similarities for example between reporters covering less "popular" beats and those covering beats that always have high audience interest. At the *Post* I interviewed mostly journalists that editors and the communications department suggested, presumably because their engagement efforts were particularly successful. Since I have also concluded that the availability of resources plays a large role in the success and in the acceptance by journalists of audience engagement strategies, it would be helpful to compare the other newsrooms with *The Washington Post,* that is, with a newsroom that is, by all accounts, well funded and supportive of engagement efforts due to their relative financial stability. Therefore, access equal in time and length to the access I had to the other newsrooms, would have been beneficial. Finally, without full access to the Facebook communications at the *Asbury Park Press* and other archived social media interactions, an important data set that would allow for deeper analysis is missing. Rather

than relying mainly on interviewees' comments about how they interact with their audience on Facebook and other platforms, access to all interactions would have allowed me to compare their perceptions of the nature and quality of their interactions with the actual content.

7.4. Future Research

Journalists are being tasked with adopting participatory practices with little guidance or with only need-based intervention and protection from abusive audience members. Future work could investigate how, as norms and professional values are adjusting to additional audience inclusion, journalists are being protected against emotional and possibly physical abuse. Studies providing empirical evidence of this "dark" side should be tackled.

Another area for future research is how journalists, whether in the short term or long term, are renegotiating, avoiding, or resisting audience engagement strategies that are imposed either by outside consultants or by inside leadership. Does it matter who or what the source of the strategies are? Who is successful in resisting such impositions, in terms of gender and age, to name two demographic categories that may be relevant? Given that newsroom management seems to make audience inclusion efforts competitive, thus pitting individual journalists against one another, down the road will this change newsroom dynamics? Or will journalists band together to discuss which strategies, if any, they will collaboratively reform and accommodate? And importantly, are journalists resisting or subverting good strategies? That is, in their efforts to restore control, status and autonomy, are they throwing out the baby with the dirty bath water?

Meanwhile, I have presented the new generation of audience inclusion efforts as particular to for-profit news organizations. But, of course, non-profit outlets must worry about revenue as much or even more, since they have little or no advertising revenue, and may go very

directly to audiences for financial support. So, do non-profit newsrooms have different or the same strategies, or none at all. What are Pro Publica or National Public Radio, to name just a couple, doing about audience inclusion these days? What about European news organizations based on the public service model?

Audience inclusion strategies are presumably emerging as a broad approach for newsrooms to embrace, or not. Whether this constitutes a rich, coherent, useful philosophy remains to be seen, and, more to the point, whether this saves individual news organizations or journalism as a whole remains to be seen…and researched.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Family Forward

Family Forward

WHO THEY ARE

- **Skews older Millennial & Gen X** (mean age of 42), however 30% are age 50+
- **Skews more educated**, with 54% college degree or higher
- 73% **employed**
- 50% with child present in home
- Average income $78K
- **Most diverse segment** – 55% White, 18% Black/AA

KEY TYPES OF NEWS SOUGHT

- **Health & Wellness**
- **Personal Finance**
- **Business & Finance News**
- **Jobs & Career**
- **Human Interest**
- **Crime & Safety**
- **Events**
- **Travel**
- **Entertainment & Celebs**
- **Movies, TV & Music**
- **Fashion & Style**
- **Tech**

DEVICES/DIGITAL CONTENT THEY PREFER

- Skew much higher on usage of **smartphones, iPad/tablets**, game consoles, streaming devices
- Family Forward audience prefers to **watch videos, look at visuals, read headlines**

NEWS BENEFITS

- Be a **better parent**
- Manage my **money**
- Make good **financial decisions**
- Keep me & my family **safe, healthy & fit**
- Advance my **career**

SOCIAL MEDIA THEY PREFER

- **Facebook**
- **Instagram**
- **LinkedIn**
- **YouTube**

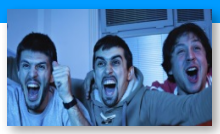
SITES THEY FREQUENTLY VISIT

facebook · Instagram · YouTube · Google news · LinkedIn · Mic · FOX · USA TODAY · Forbes · FORTUNE · QUARTZ · People · POPSUGAR.

Source: The *Asbury Park Press*

Appendix 2: Know the Score

Know the Score



WHO THEY ARE

- 37% Millennial & 31% Gen X
- **Skews male**, BUT **40% are women**
- **Skews more educated** (60% college degree or higher)
- 76% employed
- 40% w/ child present in home
- Average income $79K

KEY TYPES OF NEWS SOUGHT

- **Sports**
- **Business & Finance News**
- **Restaurants, Bars, Nightlife**
- **Entertainment News**
- **Automotive News**
- **Popular Culture**
- **Arts & Culture**
- **Human Interest**
- **Events**
- **Technology**

SOCIAL MEDIA THEY PREFER

- **Instagram**
- **Twitter**
- **LinkedIn**

DEVICES/DIGITAL CONTENT THEY PREFER

- Skew much higher on usage of **smartphones, iPad/tablets**, game consoles, streaming devices
- Know The Score audience prefers to **watch videos, look at visuals, read headlines**

NEWS BENEFITS

- Fuel **passion** for my sports teams
- Know what's happening in **leagues & teams**
- Advance my **career**
- **Sound informed** on **my industry & community**
- **Connect** regarding interesting news
- Know what's happening in the **business world**
- **Commute** easily
- Make good **business decisions**

SITES THEY FREQUENTLY VISIT

ESPN twitter Forbes
Instagram B/R LinkedIn
FOX VICE The Atlantic
FORTUNE theguardian
QUARTZ

Source: The *Asbury Park Press*

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