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Journalism, Audiences, and News Experience

Irene Costera Meijer

INTRODUCTION

Audiences have become a force to reckon with in journalism. The digitalization of journalism moved the practice of news consumption—or its more active-sounding alternative, news use (Picone, 2017)—from the margins to the center of professional and scholarly attention. First of all, the business model of digital-born news media depends largely on audience engagement (Battell, 2015). For news organizations aiming to optimize their readability and usability, user metrics offer crucial information as well (Webster, 2014). Second, it has become increasingly common for journalists to use these newly available data for measuring their own professional performance (Anderson, 2011; Tandoc, 2014). Third, audiences have become crucial in terms of revenues. In 2000, for instance, advertisers were the main source of income for Dutch newspapers, whereas by 2016 the revenue coming from subscribers had gone up to 78 percent (Stand van de Nieuwsmedia, 2017). Fourth, audiences have become ever more important for public news media to justify public funding (Cushion, 2012). Public service media also increasingly latch on to the idea that the value of their programs and services cannot be established by merely looking at their content. Just as important is how users experience their value (Lowe, 2010). Finally, the changes brought about by the digitalization of journalism have stimulated scholarly inquiry (Lewis & Westlund, 2015). Taken together, these new digital devices, platforms, sources, and their implications for news use have needed to be made sense of. As a result of these various, interrelated developments, audiences and users have grown more and more important as a point of reference in journalism.

This chapter will address not only how users matter to journalism, but also why and how journalism matters to its users: the other spectrum of the audience turn in journalism studies. While the first part will explain why and how audiences and users of journalism changed from a marginal topic into a crucial concern, the second part will explore why and how taking people's news use seriously may demand the integration of a turn to experience in journalism studies. As claimed by Alfred Hermida (2012), the digitalization of journalism enabled news to evolve from a genre of information into a social experience. To make sense of this particular experience of journalism, the concept of news consumption or even news use may be too narrow to capture how users engage with news, how they pay attention to it, how much time they spend with it, and which social and informative functions it fulfills in their lives (cf. Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015). The chapter will focus on the main analytical concepts used to study

audiences in journalism and how they can be refined and extended by amplifying the field of journalism studies with insights and theories from neighboring disciplines.

AUDIENCE STUDIES: OUT OF THE MARGINS AND INTO THE CENTER OF JOURNALISM SCHOLARSHIP?

Why did it take so long before audiences and users were taken seriously in journalism studies? Three interrelated reasons may explain the marginal importance attached to audiences by journalism scholars and practitioners. The first reason is that those in journalism studies, as the field's name suggests, are supposed to study journalism, its content, and its professional practices. Opening up the various founding disciplines to include audience studies turned out to be—and still is—a considerable challenge. This is illustrated by the newsroom-centricity (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2009) of the five explanatory frames of journalism scholarship identified by Zelizer (2004). Taking audiences seriously within these disciplines has required some radical rethinking.

For sociology, it demanded, as Domingo, Masip, and Costera Meijer (2015, p. 53) argued, three complementary moves: “dissociating news practices from specific theoretical categories, overcoming the disciplinary divide between the analysis of news production and news consumption, and problematizing normative principles of journalism.” Changes in journalism as a professional practice cannot be understood without also studying changing user practices of news.

For linguistics, a user angle meant developing a more inclusive scholarly approach of storytelling and narrativity, adding the study of people's user habits and experiences of particular texts, images, or genres to the more common microanalytical focus on news content (Bird & Dardenne, 1988; Conboy, 2013; Knobloch, Patzig, Mende, & Hastall, 2004).

In terms of history, attention to changing user practices of news and journalism should be added to the discipline's more common focus on narrating the history of particular news organizations or journalists.

From the angle of political science, paying attention to audiences as political citizens required a broader conceptualization of journalism, with the inclusion of infotainment (Thussu, 2008) and an analysis of the role of emotions in rational deliberations (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). To understand audiences, a critical reflection was needed on assumptions about publics (Coleman & Ross, 2010); politics (Van Zoonen, 2005); citizenship (Dahlgren, 1995); and actual versus estimated news use (Prior, 2009). Instead of emphasizing how journalism *should* matter in a democratic society or focusing on effects and public opinion, political communication has been encouraged to further explore the extent to which users actually rely on journalism to make important political decisions and engage in everyday life (Blumler & Coleman, 2015; Coleman & Moss, 2016; Firmstone & Coleman, 2014; Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2017).

And, lastly, the fifth explanatory frame of journalism, the domain of ethics, also traditionally dominated by an emphasis on news content and professional procedures in journalism, required some fundamental rethinking. Adding an audience perspective should lead to the inclusion of moral issues involved in news use and news participation (cf. Silverstone, 2007; Tester, 2001).

MEASURING AUDIENCES: FROM REACH TO ENGAGEMENT

A second explanation for the arm's-length approach to audiences may, paradoxically, be the way scholars and news organizations do pay attention to them: via audience measurements. This argument also needs further clarification. Everyone agrees that audiences are essential to journalism.

After all, without readers, listeners, or viewers, news organizations have neither an income nor a good reason to exist. But taking a closer look at several core measurement concepts allows a deeper understanding of the reluctance of journalism professionals and scholars to reckon with them.

News reach, which is measured through newspaper circulation, ratings, and market shares, was primarily the concern of marketing departments (Balnaves, O'Regan, & Goldsmith, 2011; Bourdon & Méadel, 2011). Because responsiveness towards news reach figures was expected to result in a popularization and sensationalization of news, this was felt as an undermining of editorial autonomy and the quality of journalists' work (cf. Phillips, Couldry, & Freedman, 2010; Strömbäck, Karlsson, & Hopmann, 2012; Vettehen, Zhou, Kleemans, d'Haenens, & Lin, 2012).

News exposure (Cottle, 2000; Price & Zaller, 1993) emphasized the democratic relevance of having access to public interest news. Exposure to news is usually measured by self-reporting in survey research. Prominent examples of large-scale, representative studies providing regular updates about the "state of news use" include US research by the Pew Research Center, and, more recently, international comparative research by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Such reports are used to make comparisons over time or between regions or demographics. However, taking them as a reflection of news consumption risks ignoring that these figures may be impeded by overreporting. Young people (18–35), as argued by Markus Prior (2009), overestimate their news use by a factor of 8, and even older people (over 55) overestimate their news consumption by a factor of 2. Apparently, this is not caused by respondents' motivation to misrepresent or provide superficial answers. "Satisficing and social desirability bias do not explain overreporting. Instead, imperfect recall coupled with the use of flawed inference rules causes inflated self-reports" (Prior, 2009, p. 904).

Moreover, combining the figures for news reach with news exposure uncovered a contradiction. In surveys people report preferring important information, while ratings, shares, and circulation figures show they are actually opting for popular—junk—news (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013; Welbers, Van Atteveldt, Kleinnijenhuis, Ruigrok, & Schaper, 2016).

Studying *news repertoires* became an answer to two developments enabled by the digitalization of journalism: the fragmentation and the increased autonomy of audiences (Napoli, 2011). First, whereas news reach and news exposure were built around a passive conception of the audience, today's audiences are actively composing their own assemblages of news sources (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006). By paying attention to the selection of news by users themselves, audiences for the first time became recognized as subjects of news use who have an active share in putting together their personal news menu. In the words of Kim Schröder, users look for what they find worthwhile in the news supermarket and then put it into their shopping cart (Schröder & Larsen, 2010; Schröder, 2015). In addition, the explosion of new possibilities for news use (including additional TV channels, delayed viewing, websites, social media, mobile devices, etc.) has led to audiences' diffusion over many different news outlets. Complementary measures were therefore needed to capture the audiences of "smaller" outlets.

The introduction of news repertoires that map the collection of media that people (regularly) use also signaled a major shift in the news landscape: from a business model ruled by product supply and advertising revenues to an economy ruled by user attention. Webster and Ksiazek (2012) suggested that this news ecology (Lowrey, 2012), which also includes social media, provides a surplus of news that exceeds people's limited amount of time and attention. Journalism scholars became concerned that the battle for the attention of the public would lead to further audience fragmentation. This could in turn result in filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011) and echo chambers (Flaxman, Goel, & Rao, 2016) that shield users from alternative viewpoints (Stroud & Muddiman, 2013), potentially leading to social polarization (Tewksbury, 2005; Webster, 2010). However, research—including Flaxman et al. (2016) and the Reuters Institute for the Study of

Journalism's *Digital News Report 2017*—suggests that users of social media, news aggregators, and search engines tend to be exposed to a wider variety of sources than non-users.

Digitalization also enabled news organizations to precisely monitor—often in real time—the activities of online audiences, termed *audience engagement* (Batsell, 2015). Audience engagement, as a recent prism for looking at news use, is being measured through a broad array of metrics, which include clicks, shares, comments, time spent, likes, and return visits (Napoli, 2011). Batsell (2015, p. 7), defined engaged journalism as “the degree to which a news organization actively considers and interacts with its audience in furtherance of its journalistic and financial mission.” Although he included in his definition a “journalistic mission,” which calls up positive associations with engaged citizenship, Harcup and O’Neill (2017) pointed out that strategies to increase news engagement such as clickbait are aimed at making news more clickable and shareable and thus profitable, rather than more interesting. What distinguishes audience engagement metrics from previous measures is that they are taken seriously by journalists themselves. Most newsrooms have large screens informing journalists live through programs such as Chartbeat or Google Analytics about people’s actual news use. Journalists feel obliged, if not encouraged, to pay attention to these metrics because they want their stories to do well, both personally and as an indicator of professional capital. As a consequence, these audience metrics affect journalists’ news selection and headline choices (Anderson, 2011; Vu, 2014); news placement (Lee, Lewis, & Powers, 2014); and subsequent reporting (Welbers et al., 2016). Editors even select and de-select news items based on the web traffic they generate (Tandoc, 2014).

The use of audience engagement figures has led to concerns about the influence of Google, YouTube, and Facebook on news access and news availability (d’Haenens, Trappel, & Sousa, 2018; Madrigal, 2017). Dominating the advertising market, these global players leave less and less room for news media to compete. The pluriformity of the news landscape is also challenged by being in the hands of just a few organizations and their growing expertise with attention-grabbing practices. Poell and Van Dijck (2014) suggest that the business model of the attention economy poses major moral and political concerns because it leads ultimately to prioritizing lower-level goals (holding people’s attention and keeping them distracted) rather than higher-level goals (adding to informed citizenship or quality of life). As a former Facebook employee warned: “How can you solve complex problems such as climate change or extremism if two billion people are constantly being manipulated by Facebook? Before you can tackle a problem, you must be able to pay attention to it” (Williams, 2017).

THE NEWS GAP

None of these four measurements—news reach, news exposure, news repertoires, and audience engagement—were designed or supposed to lead to an impoverishment of the quality of journalism. Yet as journalism scholars have pointed out repeatedly, as soon as these audience metrics are used as a point of departure for practicing journalism, this will endanger the quality of journalism and thus the vitality of democratic systems (Nguyen, 2013; Tandoc & Thomas, 2015). Audience measurement figures point to a gap between what users seemingly want from journalism (the “nice to know” or so-called “soft” news) and what they actually need to know in order to function properly as citizens (“hard” or public interest news), which was described by Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013) as the news gap. This gap between what journalists and scholars consider important and what audiences supposedly desire creates a painful dilemma. It leaves news organizations with two options: surviving by lowering their standards and providing more “popular” (trivial, remarkable, and dramatic) news or risk dying by upholding quality public interest

journalism that will merely interest a niche market. Ultimately, each option would jeopardize journalism's broad informative function in democratic societies. This chapter aims to describe how this dilemma can be dismantled by taking news experiences seriously.

BEYOND THE NEWS GAP: THE TURN TO EXPERIENCE

What the dilemma of the news gap assumes is that taking responsibility for informed citizenship will often mean privileging hard news over soft news, substance over style, word over image, expository prose over soundbite, black-and-white over color photography (cf. Zelizer, 2000). In this vein, Prior (2003, p. 149) emphasized: "[T]here is only very limited evidence that viewers actually learn from soft news. The positive consequences of soft news for the political process remain to be demonstrated." Remarkably, though, this pattern of reasoning has been criticized since the 1990s (e.g., Dahlgren & Sparks, 1992; Gans, 1974, 2008; Sparks & Tulloch, 2000). A common factor in critical analyses of the news gap is that they do not deny the value of ratings, shares, circulation figures, surveys, people's opinions, or self-reports for measuring news consumption, but their accuracy in reflecting people's news preferences or appreciation of journalism. Instead these analyses aim to capture the variety and layeredness of people's *experiences* of journalism.

A groundbreaking study was carried out by Buckingham (2000), who used 42 small-group discussions generating more than 35 hours of talk with teenagers about news from the US and UK. His study showed how young people were becoming less interested in news. However, he suggested, the widening gap between users' interests and professional news selection should not be lamented, but taken on as a challenge. Journalism should reinvent itself to remain a vital force in "The Making of Citizens." Buckingham (2000, p. viii) argued for a rethinking of what scholars and journalists meant by "politics."

Young people today are postmodern citizens—cynical, distracted, no longer possessed of the civic virtues and responsibilities of older generations. For them, conventional politics is merely an irrelevance; the personal has become political, the private has become the public, entertainment has become education.

Meanwhile, Carey (1989) developed his ritual model of communication, emphasizing that news not only transmits information but is also situated—symbolically and spatiotemporally—within people's everyday life. Subsequent ethnographic research has shown how hard it was to make clear functional as well as conceptual distinctions between soft and hard news, human interest or popular news, and public interest or quality news (Costera Meijer, 2007). From an audience perspective, as suggested by Bird (2000, p. 216), relevant news may not merely refer to its important content:

Much of the news that readers and viewers are exposed to is either ignored or forgotten almost immediately; relevant news consists of stories that are memorable, and that take on a life of their own outside the immediate context of the newspaper or television broadcast.

If important news stories are presented to the audience in an engaging manner, Bird concluded, people would pay attention to them. In a similar vein, MacDonald (2000) argued that television news, by taking a personal angle, could engage viewers with serious issues. Gripsrud (2000) emphasized how from a ritual perspective—and thus in terms of instilling a sense of community, identity, shared conditions, values, and understandings among people—"it takes, if not

all sorts, then at least many sorts of journalism to make a democratic media system work as it should” (p. 299).

A second issue associated with the tension between public interest information and popular news is that it may inadvertently lead to a narrowing down of public interest information to news facts about the public sphere, electoral politics, and government policies, while ignoring other informative genres (Harrington, 2008; Riegert, 2007; Van Zoonen, 2005). Dahlgren and Sparks (1992, pp. 18–19) unpacked one of the premises of journalism studies by emphasizing that journalism is part of popular culture rather than separate from it. They encouraged journalism to become

sensitive to and acknowledge such aspects as the multiple subjectivities of everyday life, the protean purposes and diverse pleasures which people can associate with journalism, the processes by which audiences become communities of publics, the polysemy of texts . . . and the particular ways of knowing associated with narrative.

Finally, even when taking an essential distinction between soft and hard news for granted, the dominant assumption that audiences are mainly interested in “popular” news has been reconsidered. While it is certainly true that news users are attracted to “soft” news, as shown by clicks, time spent, and so on, this cannot be taken as proof that they are less interested in public affairs news. Indeed, quantitative and qualitative research suggests that many news users—including younger generations—prefer important news about societal issues provided that it is understandable, easily accessible, and well told (Rosenstiel et al., 2007; Van der Wurff & Schönbach, 2014; Newman et al., 2018). Similarly, if journalism is unsuccessful in promoting political engagement among citizens, it can be blamed on the lack of attempt “to explain a story’s context, meaning or significance,” which leads Lewis (2006, p. 315) to propose “to reconceive news by focusing on what it is useful for people to know.”

In spite of the fundamental criticism of the conceptual and functional foundations of the “news gap,” described above, it continues to resonate. One explanation is that user metrics such as clicks or time spent are taken as reflections of people’s interests and preferences (Tenenboim & Cohen, 2015; Welbers et al., 2016). However, user practices, when studied from a qualitative angle, appear to be much more complex, layered, and even paradoxical than can be revealed by the figures themselves (Balnaves et al., 2011; Bourdon & Méadel, 2011; Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015; Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018, 2019).

A second explanation is the common instrumental vision of journalism within journalism studies. Key to the assessment of the value of journalism (in all its varieties) is how news is involved in bringing about citizenship, be it political, social, or cultural citizenship; public connection; or civic engagement. To understand more fully the value of journalism for users and audiences, it may be important not to restrict its importance a priori to its instrumental, civic, and social value. One of the founding fathers of journalism studies, John Dewey (1934), argued for widening scholarly horizons. If academics want to make better sense of people’s experiences, he suggested they should employ an expressive rather than an instrumental approach to news stories (Jensen, 2002). Such an expressive approach analyzes what journalism triggers in its users in terms of affect, as well as in terms of pragmatic and cognitive deliberations. How do people actually experience the news they listen to, view, or read? The second part of this chapter will address this expressive approach in journalism studies. Not because it is more important than the instrumental approach, but because the expressive route may provide scholars with additional theories, concepts, and insights about what journalism and news actually evoke in people.

AN EXPRESSIVE APPROACH TO JOURNALISM

As explained, the conventional way out of the news gap is either providing more “trivial” news or holding on to traditional standards of quality news. Instead, it may be more fruitful to explore alternative normative standards for excellent journalism by approaching journalistic quality from a user’s perspective. When is journalism experienced as worth people’s while (Schröder & Larsen, 2010; Schröder, 2015) or valuable (Costera Meijer, 2013a; Costera Meijer & Bijleveld, 2016)? When does journalism spark an excellent experience? As news use continues to evolve and take on new forms, choosing news experience as point of departure may allow for a wider range of dimensions to be taken into account, not only the cognitive and informational but also the affective, ethical, material, sensory, and aesthetic.

Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) were among the first researchers to seriously consider an expressive angle to media, culminating in the development of Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory. This theory holds that individuals choose to use a particular medium or genre by looking at the gratifications they expect to gain from it (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Ruggiero, 2000). U&G research has identified many gratifications over the years by employing the classic two-step methodological approach of focus groups followed by surveys. Sundar and Limperos (2013) observed however that U&G researchers have recently tended to dispense with the use of focus groups. By relying heavily on standardized questionnaires and broad categories (e.g., information seeking) scholars risk “missing the nuanced gratifications obtained from newer media” (p. 504). Sundar and Limperos criticized the implicit equation of the main gratification factor of news—the need for information and surveillance—with keeping up with important events and incidents occurring in one’s immediate surroundings. For instance, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp created new affordances regarding journalism. People do no longer have to actively seek news but can leisurely wait until it finds them.

NEW CONCEPTS AND EXPLANATORY FRAMES FOR JOURNALISM STUDIES

Recently, additional explanatory prisms developed in information studies, media studies, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) studies, narrative studies, entertainment studies, cultural studies, and literary criticism have shed light on the value of news from an expressive point of view. Most of them share a phenomenological or pragmatist approach which tries to understand news use itself as experience, phenomenon, or practice.

Information Studies

The turn to experience developed in *information studies* made sense of the difference between *feeling* informed, which refers to people’s experience of information, and *being* informed, which generally refers to the content of the media message (Bruce, Davis, Hughes, Partridge, & Stoodley, 2014). This approach provides new insights into the distinction between what users recognize as journalism or as news, relating to information as genre, and what they appreciate as informative, relating to the situatedness of the information experience. The relevance of reckoning with people’s own informational worlds—where they live and how they live, including their concerns, needs, and interests—is, for instance, illustrated by the media experiences of residents of urban “problem neighborhoods” (Costera Meijer, 2013b; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). Residents do recognize news stories about their area that focus on violent youth, crime, poverty, bad

health, and other “multi-ethnic” problems as belonging to the genre of journalism. However, they tend to experience them as neither realistic nor informative but as something “the media” do to the people (Lievrouw, 2009, p. 313). The dominant employment by journalists of the “problem frame” (Altheide, 1997), even in positive news, adds to residents’ feelings of isolation and stigmatization. The problem frame used in news stories about these neighborhoods also impacted residents’ direct, personal experience of their environment. Residents explained how it became increasingly hard to distinguish mediated reality from face-to-face reality, especially for those who had moved in recently (Costera Meijer, 2013b). Unlike journalism scholars’ assumption that direct experience with an issue will be experienced as more truthful than mediated experience (Zucker, 1978), most residents blamed the news media for them losing touch with reality.

Media Studies

The second prism—*media studies*—invites a closer look at the apparatus, platforms, and devices and the commercial and algorithmic logics that mediate and shape the experience of journalism (Courtois, Mechant, Paulussen, & De Marez, 2012; Poell & Van Dijck, 2014). How can scholars investigate the materiality, the look and feel of the device, the platform, or media as part of the news experience? According to Ytre-Arne (2011, pp. 457–458), the concept of media experience, in particular when compared to media consumption, provides a subtler understanding of the “flesh and blood” of the different media platforms and devices. Approaching news media in this vein as material objects, showed how—despite being similar in content—informants’ senses, perceptions, and feelings of the material form and the sensory and aesthetic appearance of print and online news could differ fundamentally: “A print newspaper is considered as an object completed, finished in itself whereas an online newspaper is a service provided by Web 2.0” (Fortunati, Taipale, & Farinosi, 2015, pp. 835–836). In its physical dimensions, reading a print newspaper represented an experiential continuum, whereas the online reading experience proved to be much more fragmented, because users could only see the main page on the screen. Moreover, the differences in the materiality of these two objects impact news users’ feeling of news: a print newspaper had a stronger sensory appeal—“pleasantness”—than the online newspaper, which generated “a sensation of coldness” (Fortunati et al., 2015, p. 841). In other words, users’ sensory experience of the material objects was found to be part of their experience of news, and this ranged from the distinctive shape, materiality, and tactility of the medium to how they experienced the weight or temperature of a newspaper, tablet, smartphone, and so on (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2019; Picone, Courtois, & Paulussen, 2015; Zerba, 2011).

Human-Computer Interaction Studies

A third novel explanatory frame may help scholars to approach news as a technology-mediated *interactive* experience beyond the instrumental value of usability or utility studies, which emphasize technology’s fit to behavioral goals. Such a frame uses affective and emotional aspects of the interaction to explain, for instance, the ambivalence in news users’ preference for personalized news. Although most people are said to be in favor of it (Purcell et al., 2010) and personalized news could be realized by simply pushing some buttons on their smartphone or tablet, Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer (2014) discovered, when checking people’s actual settings, that news users apparently found it more convenient to just scroll along the items they were not particularly interested in. In addition, many news users refrained from clicking or tapping on a news item not for lack of interest but because it would interrupt their “news flow” (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018, 2019). Affordances of technology (e.g., clicking for more information,

hyperlinks, personalization of news) are appreciated as such, but that does not mean they are also actually used. Emphasizing the need for a non-deterministic conception of technologies' affordances, Davis and Chouinard (2017) illustrate how people's experiences of affordances also depend on their awareness and knowledge of them.

The experiential perspective in HCI studies emphasizes the situatedness and temporality of technology use. Relevant for making sense of digital news use is the description of Hassenzahl and Tractinsky (2006, p. 95) of user experience (UX):

UX is about technology that fulfils more than just instrumental needs in a way that acknowledges its use as a subjective, situated, complex and dynamic encounter. UX is a consequence of a user's internal state (predispositions, expectations, needs, motivation, mood, etc.), the characteristics of the designed system (e.g., complexity, purpose, usability, functionality, etc.) and the context (or the environment) within which the interaction occurs (e.g., organisational/social setting, meaningfulness of the activity, voluntariness of use, etc.).

Bargas-Avila and Hornbæk (2011) motivate the "turn to experience" in HCI studies by a search for experiential qualities of technology use such as enchantment, engagement, tangible magic, and relevance rather than product qualities. According to Hassenzahl and Tractinsky (2006, p. 92) these hedonic experiences can range from "stimulation (i.e., personal growth, an increase of knowledge and skills), identification (i.e., self-expression, and intimate interaction with relevant others) to evocation (i.e., self-maintenance, memories)." Such concepts may help journalism scholars to understand the pleasures that are—or are not—provided by new, interactive journalistic genres such as "immersive journalism" (Van Damme, All, De Marez, & Van Leuven, 2018), news activities, such as news sharing, and innovative news genres, such as news games and news quizzes.

Entertainment Studies and Narrative Studies

Concepts and theories developed in *entertainment studies* and *narrative studies*—the fourth explanatory prism—will enable journalism scholars to refine their vocabulary not only to encompass a broader range of emotions and feelings, but also to make qualitative distinctions between them. Twenty years ago, Glasser (2000) already called for the study of the "enjoyment of news use." Our everyday news use, he argued, could not be explained merely by rational, utilitarian, extrinsic, and other instrumental motivations. It is important to understand the appeal of news based on the reading or viewing experience itself. Nevertheless, journalism scholars and journalists tended to equate enjoyment with entertainment—journalism's Other—which may explain why affective experiences of news are generally approached from a critical point of view (Grabe, Zhou, & Barnett, 2001; Hendriks Vettehen et al., 2008). Supposedly, people are attracted by the spectacular, sensational, and remarkable and are more likely to share news that, for instance, makes them angry or amuses them (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). The entertaining appeal of news is often studied from the assumption that it aims to distract people from the serious side of life by diverting their attention to more trivial issues.

Exploring the pleasure principle of news use may help scholars to come to terms with the difference between what people truly enjoy as valuable and worth their while and other pleasurable experiences of news. In entertainment studies and narrative studies, scholars distinguish between attention and arousal, on the one hand, and more complex affective states such as satisfaction, appreciation, and transportation, on the other (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Green & Brock, 2000; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Roth, Weinmann, Schneider, Hopp, & Vorderer, 2014). This corresponds

to the way viewers of two different current affairs shows enjoyed attention and arousal as forms of temporary mood management that distracted them from the here and now, while the notion of “satisfaction” covered more sustainable experiences, such as finally understanding something or learning something new (Coleman & Moss, 2016; Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2017).

The subtler range of concepts developed in entertainment studies and narrative studies is useful when analyzing the layered affective experiences of journalism. For journalism scholars it makes sense to distinguish between hedonic experiences—attention and arousal, fun and pleasure, diversion and distraction—as part of everyday enjoyment and their more intense, sustaining eudaimonic counterparts—appreciation, satisfaction, transportation, and narrative engagement—as more intense feelings which refer to a state of happiness. For instance, the concept of appreciation has been used to describe the positive emotions involved in a thought-provoking experience, stories that invite advanced reflectiveness (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Richardson, Parry, & Corner, 2012). In narrative studies the concept of transportation was developed to make sense of the captivation of news users when they feel moved by a news story in an unfamiliar narrative world, in particular when the experience taught them something about the workings of this world or—just as valuable—about themselves (Green & Brock, 2000).

In the context of news use, these states of eudaimonism or happiness may function to describe quality news less in terms of *content* and more from a user perspective, as a quality *experience* (Costera Meijer, 2013a; Costera Meijer & Bijleveld, 2016). Being able to distinguish more precisely the affective, cognitive, and pragmatic dimensions involved in the enjoyment and happiness involved in news use will make it easier for scholars of journalism to make sense of the affordances of everyday news use without a priori celebrating them as enlightening or condemning them as “merely” distracting.

Cultural Studies and Literary Criticism: Ethics as User Experience

A turn to experience in journalism ethics is developing slowly. In journalism studies, ethics has been understood to refer to the quality of the content and the professionalism of the production procedures of journalism (Ward, 2010). Although news *use* has also been studied from an ethical context, the emphasis was mostly on the production perspective. People were asked how they relate to (Ward, 2005) or whether they recognized ethical qualities in news such as “diversity, relevance, ethics, impartiality, objectivity and comprehensibility” (Urban & Schweiger, 2014, p. 821). In contrast, Dewey (1934, p. 332) called attention to the ethical features of the user experience itself: the feelings of connection among people that encourage “the expansion of sympathies, imagination and sense.” In this vein, Tester (2001) pleaded for taking seriously the feeling of compassion as a moral criterion for valuable news experiences.

A wider range of ethical experiences has been discussed in literary criticism in terms of the kinds of “friendship” stories offer (Booth, 1988). Booth’s critical metaphor of friendship invites journalism scholars and news users to pose self-reflective questions such as: what kind of friendship am I looking for in journalism? Is it the kind that offers me confirmation, comfort, or consolation or the kind of company that offers useful information about health, fashion, politics, or traveling which can immediately be put into practice? Booth’s idea of ethical friendship, he suggests, will encourage people to move outside of their comfort zone and require them to rethink their predispositions. This kind of friendship can involve direct pleasure and direct gain but is also “good” in and of itself. It contributes, in the words of Booth, to “the good of my soul.” In this context, news users are expected to make ethical choices. They can choose “to occupy” their time with more or less ethical news experiences. Occupation as moral dimension of news use may become even more important as the business models of media organizations are increasingly based on the laws of the attention economy. If people click on a trivial news item, they

should realize that news organizations assume it catches their attention because it interests them or because the issue is important for them. Consequently, they can expect algorithms to provide them with more of the same.

From a similar cultural studies perspective, Silverstone (2007, p. 27) pointed out a moral distinction between *members of the audience*, referring to being passively on the receiving end of mass media, and *users*, referring to people as active participants in media culture. The latter carry some kind of responsibility for their involvement in it. As agents in media culture, users should reflect on the moral quality of their media participation: in their subscription to a particular news product; in their actual selection of news; and in the quality of their comments, likes, or criticism they provide. These three ethical dimensions—friendship, occupation, and participation—differ from the usual ethical approaches in journalism because they focus on and invite people to reflect on the ethical qualities of the news experience itself: the extent to which one experiences a soul-enriching friendship, a valuable usage of one’s time, and/or a constructive, responsible participation in media culture.

A TURN TO AUDIENCES, A TURN TO EXPERIENCE?

As noted earlier, journalism studies tends to look at news use as a disembodied, cognitive activity and its devices and platforms as neutral mediators of information. This chapter has called for more attention towards people’s experiences of journalism by focusing beyond cognitive and pragmatic dimensions of news use to include emotional, sensory, and haptic experiences. In so doing, it suggests analyzing journalism in line with recent calls for nonrepresentational and non-media-centric approaches to media use (Couldry, 2012; Couldry & Hepp, 2016; Moores, 2012). Adding perspectives, scholarly insights, and concepts from information studies, media studies, HCI studies, entertainment studies, narrative studies, ethnography, cultural studies, and literary criticism to the founding explanatory frames of journalism (sociology, history, linguistics, political communication, and ethics) can help scholars make sense of news use. Adding emotional, interactional, technological, haptic, practical, embodied, material, and sensory dimensions to the study of journalism is not only important for academic reasons. Because the business models of commercial and public service journalism increasingly depend on users’ engagement with news, doing justice to the situatedness of the news experience may encourage news organizations to rethink their assumptions regarding their users and audiences.

Adding an expressive approach to an instrumental view on news experience may not only broaden the scope of research into audience engagement from measured engagement with news (which has become the dominant institutional perspective) back to its original conception as the driving force behind political or civic participation (instrumental view). It may also lead to an inclusion of studying news engagement (or disengagement, for that matter) as important in itself for news users and thus worth analyzing (expressive view).

Drawing on insights and concepts from information studies revealed how journalism can benefit from being studied by a “non-news-centric” approach. What is valued as important current information may not always overlap with what news organizations present as news. Moreover, when using social media in particular, the boundaries between news and other kinds of information become fluid, as is illustrated by the popular habit of “the checking cycle,” regularly, in one quick session checking one’s news app, email, dating sites, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and so on (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015).

Extending the scholarly repertoire of journalism studies to include the material turn in media studies enables scholars to study how media technologies, platforms, and devices do much more than transmit information. First, users may experience news as “incidental,” while their newsfeed

is actually steered by commercial, public, and algorithmic logics (Poell & Van Dijck, 2014; Van Dijck & Poell, 2015). Second, how and when news is experienced also depends on the material and tactile characteristics of the platform or device: on weekends, in a relaxed way discussing news from the newspaper with loved ones at the breakfast table, on working days, quickly scanning headlines on one's smartphone or tablet to feel updated. While technological determinism should be avoided, the convenience of smartphones and their particular usefulness for filling the interstices of time (Dimmick, Feaster, & Hoplamazian, 2011; Picone et al., 2015) may nonetheless have lured young people back to journalism.

Because the main perspective of the experiential view on HCI is “to contribute to our quality of life by designing for pleasure rather than for absence of pain” (Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006, p. 95), the integration of an HCI perspective in journalism studies may prevent scholars and journalists from striving to “interaction” as a quality in itself and encourage them to much more precisely analyze which kind of “interaction” is experienced as valuable or worthwhile. The concepts and theories developed in HCI studies will improve scholars' understanding of the pleasure, or lack thereof, involved in interactive journalistic genres such as news games, immersive journalism, and long form news narratives.

Furthermore, concepts and theories from entertainment studies and narrative studies can bridge the gap between entertainment and journalism not so much as genres, but as experiences. If excellent journalism should be reinvented to bridge the news gap, as scholars suggest, it could benefit from a refinement of the academic discourse for labeling, contemplating, and comparing what counts as pleasure and what counts as happiness. The concepts derived from narrative studies and entertainment studies can broaden journalism studies' repertoire for distinguishing an entertaining experience from a quality experience that journalism may trigger in users. Differentiating between forms of mood management, such as lifting our spirits, and more sustainable forms of appreciation, such as moving us to think, enables scholars to reconsider the role of pleasure in journalism beyond “mere” entertainment.

Finally, an expressive view on journalism ethics will foster a sharing of the burden of ethical responsibility amongst news organizations, news makers, and news users. News users can also be expected to act ethically by reflecting on the kind of friendship that journalism triggers in them, by the amount of time they choose to spend with these friends, and by taking on the responsibility for their own news participation. It is also up to news users—in terms of attention and financial support—to choose which journalism will survive.

A turn to experience will oblige scholars to rephrase the general question of which term to use—audiences, publics, users, consumers, or even just “people”—into a contextual and situated one. The more specific question—when is which term appropriate?—cannot be answered without taking into account the circumstances, relationships, characteristics, and specific use of the media, devices, platforms, and technology; the kind of entertainment and narratives; and even the virtues of the media-participants. Whether journalism will be operating as a constructive cultural force is up to all its actors: to scholars, producers, and participants alike.

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