

Re-learning to listen: one way news organizations can regain trust

Audiences are salient part of news cycle. However, in media studies exists an old debate which revolves around the question are audiences active participants in the media experience, or just passive consumers. The debate originated in 1920s between Walter Lippmann (in his 20s) who was a journalist and social commentator and John Dewey (in his 60s) who was a philosopher at Columbia University.

Lippmann and Dewey shared the view that the press plays a crucial role in a vibrant democracy. However, Lippmann thought that modern society had become too intricate for the public to comprehend and make informed decisions. Therefore, he envisioned the press as a bridge between uninformed masses and powerful insiders who help formulate policies for elected decision-makers. The journalists' function, in this view, is to evaluate government policies and present well-informed conclusions to the public.

Dewey agreed with much of Lippmann's critique of the future of democracy, but he differed in his perspective on the public and the role of the press. Dewey saw journalists as the teachers of the public, while Lippmann viewed them as leaders of the citizenry. Dewey believed that the public was capable of rational thought and decision-making, and active citizen participation was vital for a healthy democracy. In this context, the job of the journalist is to engage and educate the public in the critical policy issues of the day, enabling them to participate in the democratic discourse.

Journalism has traditionally been seen as a one-way communication, where news organizations would broadcast information to their audience without necessarily engaging with them. However, in recent years, after online media revolution, there has been a growing movement towards engaged journalism, which seeks to involve audiences in the news process and give them a voice in shaping the stories that are reported. The engaged journalism is defined as "an inclusive practice that prioritizes the information needs and wants of the community members it serves, creates collaborative space for the audience in all aspects of the journalistic process, and is dedicated to building and preserving trusting relationships between journalists and the public" (Green-Barber & McKinley, 2019).

Engaged journalism is a form of journalism that prioritizes listening to the community and involving them in the reporting process. It seeks to build stronger relationships between journalists and their audience, and to make journalism more responsive to the needs and interests of the people it serves. Engaged journalism is not just about delivering news to the public; it is about creating a dialogue and building trust.

One way in which newsrooms are practicing engaged journalism is by actively seeking out input from their audience. This can be done through surveys, polls, and social media channels. Newsrooms are also hosting public forums and town hall meetings where they can hear directly from their audience and discuss issues that are important to them. For example, The Texas Tribune has a "Community Voices" program that invites readers to contribute their perspectives on local issues. They also have a "The Texas Tribune Festival" event each year that brings together politicians, journalists, and community members for discussions on important issues.

Another way in which engaged journalism is being practiced is by partnering with community organizations and groups. By working with these groups, newsrooms can gain a better understanding of the issues that are important to the community and develop stories that are more relevant and impactful. Engaged journalism is not just about reporting on the community; it is about working with the community to create better journalism. For example, The Oaklandside, is a nonprofit news outlet dedicated to serving local information needs, amplifying community voices and investigating systems in and for Oakland. The Oaklandside's journalists work closely with local community organizations to ensure that

their reporting reflects the needs and interests of Oakland residents. They have a team of journalists who are deeply embedded in the community and regularly attend community events and meetings. They also have a community engagement team that works to build relationships with local organizations and community leaders. This team hosts events and community conversations to get feedback from residents and to involve them in the reporting process. Additionally, The Oaklandside has an open newsroom policy, which means that members of the community can visit the newsroom and meet with reporters to share their perspectives and ideas for stories.

Jake Batsell in his book “Engaged Journalism: Connecting with Digitally Empowered News Audiences” also discusses the importance of engaging with communities that have been historically marginalized or underrepresented in mainstream media. Engaged journalism can help to amplify the voices of these communities and provide a platform for them to share their stories and perspectives. For instance, City Bureau, a Chicago-based newsroom, trains and employs journalists from underserved communities to report on the issues affecting those communities. The organization also holds regular public meetings where community members can share their ideas and feedback on the reporting process.

Engaged journalism also involves a shift in mindset for journalists. It requires them to see themselves not just as reporters, but as facilitators of conversation and engagement. They must be willing to listen to the perspectives of their audience and incorporate them into their reporting. They must be open to feedback and willing to adapt their reporting based on the input they receive.

Advantages of engaged journalism

There are many advantages of engaged journalism. Engaged journalism can lead to more relevant and impactful reporting by ensuring that news coverage reflects the needs and interests of the community. By involving the community in the reporting process, newsrooms can build trust and relationships with local residents and organizations, which can lead to a stronger sense of community ownership and investment in local news.

Engaged journalism can also lead to a more diverse range of voices and perspectives being represented in news coverage. By partnering with community organizations and groups, newsrooms can ensure that the voices of marginalized and underrepresented groups are heard and their stories are told.

Engaged journalism can also lead to a more sustainable business model for newsrooms, as community members who feel invested in the reporting process are more likely to become paying subscribers and donors.

Overall, engaged journalism can lead to a stronger, more vibrant, and more impactful news ecosystem that better serves the needs of local communities.

In conclusion, engaged journalism is a growing movement that is transforming the way newsrooms operate. It is about creating a dialogue with the community and involving them in the news process. Newsrooms that practice engaged journalism are re-learning to listen to their audience and are producing more relevant and impactful journalism as a result. By embracing engaged journalism, newsrooms can build stronger relationships with their audience and help to create a more informed and engaged citizenry.

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Century of truth: transparency and engagement

The 21st century is often referred to as the “Century of Truth,” where people demand transparency and honesty from individuals and organizations, including the media. The rise of social media and citizen journalism has provided the public with an unprecedented level of access to information, and as a result, news outlets are being held to higher standards of accountability. In response, transparency became one of the most recently established ethical principle of professional journalism. Media transparency deals with the openness and accountability of the media outlet.

Michael Karlsson in the article “Rituals of transparency” defines disclosure and participatory transparency:

- disclosure transparency is a form of transparency that involves disclosing information about the news production process to the audience. This can include information about sources, funding, ownership, and editorial policies. Disclosure transparency is important because it allows the audience to make informed judgments about the reliability and credibility of the news they consume. By providing information about the news production process, journalists can help to build trust and credibility with their audience, as well as promote accountability and ethical standards. Disclosure transparency can take many forms, from simply providing a list of sources or funding information to more in-depth explanations of editorial policies and decision-making processes.
- Participatory transparency is not just about providing information or making it available, but about actively involving the audience in the process of creating and disseminating news. This type of transparency can help to build trust, foster a sense of shared responsibility, and encourage greater engagement and participation from the audience. Participatory transparency is essential for the news media to remain relevant and trustworthy in the digital age.

Recently, more and more media organizations have been adopting engaged journalism, a model that prioritizes inclusivity, collaboration with the community, and transparency. Engaged journalism involves building relationships with the community and empowering citizens to play a more active role in the news-making process. It requires newsrooms to be more transparent about their methods and processes, and to actively seek out input and feedback from their audiences. This approach aims to create a public which is more informed about reporting and more involved in it, and so build trust between journalists and their communities.

Jake Batsell in his book “Engaged Journalism: Connecting with Digitally Empowered News Audiences” emphasizes the importance of transparency and engagement in modern journalism. The author argues that traditional journalism practices that involve a one-way communication flow, from journalists to readers, are no longer sufficient in today’s digital age. Instead, journalists need to actively engage with their audiences and provide transparency about their reporting processes and decision-making.

The book highlights several examples of engaged journalism that prioritize transparency and engagement. For instance, The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit news organization, publishes detailed information about its funding sources and organizational structure, as well as its editorial guidelines and ethics policies. The organization also holds regular events and town halls where its journalists can meet with and gather feedback from their audience. Another example is ProPublica, a nonprofit newsroom that specializes in investigative journalism. ProPublica regularly publishes “reporting recipes,” which are

detailed explanations of how its journalists conduct investigations and report stories. These recipes provide transparency into the reporting process and allow readers to better understand how investigative journalism works.

Here you can find a few Pro Publica's reporting recipes:

1. [Reporting Recipe: How to Report on Voting by Mail](#)
2. [Reporting Recipe: How to Investigate Racial Disparities at Your School](#)

Various studies show the importance of transparency of the news outlets. For example, [Trust in Digital Publishing 2021](#), a report by The Trusted Web, explores the current state of trust in the digital publishing industry. The report highlights the importance of trust in building strong relationships between publishers and their audiences, and offers insights and recommendations for publishers to improve trust. The report shows, that transparency and accuracy helps to build loyal public. For example, 46% of respondents said they'd be willing to pay for a news site subscription if they know the site publishes news that is accurate, factual, and objective. The report argues, that the relationship between readers and news sites is based on trust, and readers are leaving and changing their news sources regularly, seeking out better sites with more transparency and better reporting.

What is more, research has shown that the public believes more transparency in the news would also be beneficial in building trust. For example, a study conducted by the Queensland University of Technology in 2020 found that declarations of conflicts of interest and openness about biases were ranked among the top five ways to improve trust in news among Australian news consumers. The survey, which included 1,619 respondents from across Australia, found that 85% of participants believed that it was important for news outlets to declare conflicts of interest, while 78% believed that news outlets should be open about their biases. The survey also found that other transparency practices, such as publishing corrections and updates and providing access to sources and data, were also important for building trust in the news media.

One more example, is a survey from the Gallup Foundation of 1218 adults in the United States in 2021, that explored their attitudes towards the news media and the factors that influence their trust in news outlets. One of the key findings of the survey was that commitment to transparency was ranked among the top determining factors in whether a news organization was deemed trustworthy. Specifically, the survey found that 84% of respondents said that their trust in a news organization was influenced by its commitment to transparency, with 62% saying it was a major factor and 22% saying it was a minor factor. This placed transparency ahead of other factors such as accuracy, depth of coverage, and political bias. The survey also found that transparency practices such as clearly labeling opinion and analysis pieces, correcting errors promptly, and providing detailed sourcing information were viewed as important for building trust in the news media.

Transparency and engagement can lead to more effective and impactful journalism. By prioritizing these principles, news organizations can build trust with their audiences, foster more meaningful relationships, and ultimately produce journalism that better serves the public interest. In the newsroom, transparency can help to build trust and credibility with audiences. Transparency can be achieved through various means:

1. Disclosing conflicts of interest: Journalists may disclose any potential conflicts of interest that could influence their reporting. For example, if a journalist has a financial interest in a company they are reporting on, they would disclose this information to their audience.
2. Providing sources and data: Journalists may provide sources and data used in their reporting to show how they arrived at their conclusions. This helps readers to understand the evidence behind the story.

3. Corrections and updates: If a news organization makes a mistake in its reporting, it may issue a correction or update to ensure accuracy and transparency.
4. Editorial guidelines: News organizations may publish editorial guidelines that outline their standards and practices for reporting.
5. Public editor/ombudsman: Some news organizations employ a public editor or ombudsman who acts as a liaison between the newsroom and the public, fielding complaints and concerns and addressing issues of transparency and accountability.
6. Open newsroom: Some newsrooms have opened their doors to the public, allowing people to observe the editorial process and engage with journalists.
7. Fact-checking: Some news organizations have dedicated fact-checkers who review stories for accuracy and identify any false or misleading claims.

Engaged journalism is not just about building relationships with the community, it is also about building a sustainable business model for newsrooms. By prioritizing transparency and engagement, newsrooms can build a loyal and invested audience, which is more likely to become paying subscribers and donors. This approach can help news organizations become less reliant on advertising revenue and more sustainable in the long term.

In conclusion, engaged journalism is a critical approach for newsrooms in the 21st century. By prioritizing transparency, inclusivity, and collaboration with the community, newsrooms can build trust and credibility with their audience, and develop a more sustainable business model. As the media landscape continues to evolve, it is clear that engaged journalism will be a key driver of success and impact for news organizations.

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Anti-social media: engaging audiences under a subscription model

Anti-social media refers to a trend of users disengaging from popular social media platforms due to privacy concerns, overwhelming content, and the perceived negative effects on mental health. As a result, some individuals have turned to subscription-based platforms that offer a more curated and controlled experience.

Subscription is a business model used by some media organizations to monetize their content by charging users for access. Under this model, users pay a subscription fee to access a media organization's content, either on a recurring basis (such as monthly or annually) or for specific pieces of content. Subscription models can provide a reliable and sustainable revenue stream for media organizations, and can also help to reduce their reliance on advertising and other potentially problematic revenue sources.

One key advantage of a subscription model is that it can attract a more engaged and invested audience. When users pay for a service, they tend to be more committed to using it and deriving value from it. Subscription-based platforms can offer exclusive content, personalized recommendations, and a sense of community that is not always present on free social media platforms.

Another benefit of a subscription model is that it allows for more control over the content and user experience. Rather than relying on advertising revenue to support the platform, subscription-based models can prioritize the needs and preferences of their users. They can also take a more proactive approach to content moderation, filtering out harmful or irrelevant content and providing a safer and more enjoyable experience for users.

However, there are also several challenges to implementing subscription models in the context of engaged journalism, including:

1. **Accessibility:** Subscription models can limit access to information for those who cannot afford to pay, which can create equity issues and limit the reach and impact of journalism.

2. **Audience retention:** Engaged journalism requires ongoing engagement with audiences, which can be challenging to sustain over time and may require significant resources and investment.

3. **Relationship building:** Engaged journalism requires building relationships with audiences and communities, which can be time-consuming and require a significant investment of resources.

4. The challenge for subscription-based platforms is to balance the need for revenue with the desire to maintain user privacy and security. Some users may be hesitant to share personal information or pay for a service that they perceive as risky or intrusive. Subscription-based platforms must therefore invest in robust security measures, transparent policies, and effective communication to reassure users and build trust.

Engaging audiences in media outlets under a subscription model is critical for publishers to build a loyal subscriber base and maintain revenue streams. The following are some strategies that media outlets can use to engage audiences and build a sustainable subscription-based business model:

1. **Personalization:** Personalization is one of the most effective strategies to engage audiences. Media outlets can use data analytics to understand the interests, preferences, and behaviors of their subscribers and create personalized content that resonates with them. Personalized content can increase engagement and improve loyalty.

2. **Exclusive Content:** Offering exclusive content can be an effective way to engage audiences under a subscription model. This can include access to premium articles, videos,

podcasts, or live events. Media outlets can leverage their expertise and provide in-depth analysis, insights, and perspectives that are not available elsewhere. By offering exclusive content, media outlets can differentiate themselves from competitors and provide more value to their subscribers.

3. Interactive Features: Interactive features can help media outlets engage audiences and foster a sense of community. This can include features such as comments sections, discussion forums, and live chats. By allowing subscribers to interact with each other and with journalists, media outlets can create a more engaging and interactive experience for their subscribers.

One example of interactive features that media outlets are using to engage audiences under a subscription model is The New York Times. The newspaper offers a range of interactive features on its website, including comments sections, discussion forums, and live chats. The New York Times also offers a feature called “Times Insider,” which provides subscribers with behind-the-scenes access to journalists and their reporting. Subscribers can read exclusive articles and Q&A sessions with journalists, and participate in live events and webinars.

Another example is The Guardian, which has a comments section on its website where readers can engage with journalists and other readers. The Guardian also offers live Q&A sessions with journalists and experts, allowing subscribers to ask questions and participate in real-time discussions.

4. Rewards Programs: Rewards programs can incentivize engagement and encourage subscribers to remain loyal. Media outlets can offer rewards such as discounts, merchandise, or exclusive content to subscribers who engage with their content regularly. By offering rewards programs, media outlets can increase engagement.

Subscription-based services must be responsive to user feedback and willing to adapt and evolve in response to changing needs and preferences. This requires a commitment to ongoing research, data analysis, and user testing, as well as a willingness to experiment with new features and approaches in order to keep audiences engaged and interested.

In conclusion, engaging audiences under a subscription model requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes exclusive content, community building, user privacy and security, and ongoing innovation and adaptation. By taking a user-centric approach and investing in strategies that prioritize engagement and loyalty, subscription-based services can build a successful and sustainable business model that delivers value to both users and stakeholders.