

From “Public Journalism” to “Engaged Journalism”: Imagined Audiences and Denigrating Discourse

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At a moment of intense uncertainty within the news industry, a growing number believe the key to the profession’s survival depends on journalists improving their relationship with the public. As a result, many news practitioners, funders, and scholars have begun advocating for journalists to “engage” with their audiences, thus expanding the audience’s role in the news production process. In this study, we use a textual analysis of metajournalistic discourse from journalism trade magazines to reveal that although the specific language surrounding “engaged” journalism is new, its reconceptualization of the journalist–audience relationship traces back to the public journalism movement of the 1990s. Our findings illustrate that these movements are remarkably similar in their motivations, their goals, and—most importantly—the way in which their advocates imagine the news audience. The results are interpreted with an eye toward of the future of the industry and the potential effects of these interventions.

Keywords: journalism studies, engaged journalism, public journalism, metajournalism, textual analysis

Since the late 19th century, the news industry has numerous criticisms, but one remained the same: that the profession should better incorporate the audience into news-making practices (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). The much-mythologized debate between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey perfectly encapsulates this divide: More than a century ago, Lippmann argued that the political world is too large and complicated for ordinary citizens to actively participate in. Journalism’s primary role was therefore not to work in concert with the public, but instead to produce news that could be easily understood and digested by the public (Whipple, 2005).

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Dewey disagreed. He theorized that the more the public became involved in the news-making process, the more involved citizens would be in public life (Rogers, 2009). Scholars have argued that Dewey thought Lippmann's conceptualization of the public was elitist, and that the public deserved more credit, as well as more of a role in journalism (Whipple, 2005). More than a century later, this debate continues—first with the public journalism movement of the 1990s (Rosen, 1996), and now with today's discourse surrounding "engaged" journalism (Lawrence, Radcliffe, & Schmidt, 2018). This relationship between journalists and their audience is "increasingly becoming an area of concern" (Carlson, 2017, p. 3) because of its impact on journalism authority.

This study aims to identify how—and better understand why—a growing number within the news industry remains steadfastly dedicated to Dewey's vision. To accomplish this goal, we analyze metajournalistic discourse from trade magazines surrounding both public journalism and the current audience engagement movement. Metajournalistic discourse are public expressions that evaluate news, the practices that produce news, or the factors affecting the reception of news (Carlson, 2016). Journalism, like most professions, is a social construct—something discursively articulated, legitimized, and delegitimized through public comment about practices and normative beliefs (Craft & Vos, 2018; Ferrucci, 2019a).

In this study, we use metajournalistic discourse to identify how actors within journalism discursively legitimize or criticize both the public journalism and engaged journalism movements. In doing so, we find similarities not only in the methods and goals advocated by public and engaged journalists but also the ways in which supporters of both causes perceive of the news audience in the first place. At a moment when many believe journalism must make drastic changes to adapt, we conclude that the assumptions motivating the pursuit of these changes have ironically remained remarkably consistent over time.

Literature Review

Imagined Audience

Journalists, like all media producers, cannot possibly know exactly who sees what they publish. Instead, they create what Eden Litt (2012) calls an "imagined audience," which includes the people with whom they believe they are communicating. Various factors influence how journalists conceptualize their audiences, including their advertisers, their institutional culture, their interpersonal connections, their understanding of their own publishing platforms, the demographics of the people they aspire to reach, and their own self-perceptions (Litt, 2012). For instance, for-profit newsrooms that rely on advertising for revenue and therefore aspire to reach as large an audience as possible are more likely to spend less time considering the individual characteristics of the people within their audience as are community journalists working at smaller, nonprofit outlets that depend on subscribers and individual donations for sustainability (Ferrucci, 2017). Furthermore, journalists within traditional newsrooms that have historically maintained an arm's length approach to their audiences are likely to embrace their organization's culture and thus assume that the audience comprises people who are meant to be passive receivers of news rather than active participants. In short, because journalism's audiences can never be truly known, they are instead understood through a mixture of data, intuition, and external circumstances.

These data have grown more sophisticated in a digital age, leading some to conclude that journalism entered an era of increased audience understanding (Napoli, 2011). Many news publishers now routinely draw on audience metrics to understand the habits and interests of their readers (Ferrucci, 2020), giving rise to what Anderson (2011) has called “a growth in audience quantification” (p. 564). However, although audience measurement data show journalists how people behave, these data are unable to explain the motivations underlying these behaviors. Consequently, journalists have no choice but to use these data to make educated guesses about what they want. This need for interpretation explains why some within journalism perceive news audiences as passive receivers, whereas others perceive them as active participants.

In general, journalism’s imagined audience tends to comprise people who are more interested in entertaining and softer news stories than they are in political news (Nelson & Tandoc, 2019). This is why debates surrounding news production frequently take the form of a back and forth between “giving the audiences what they want” (e.g., celebrity news, cat videos) and “giving audiences what they need” (e.g., public affairs reporting; Nelson & Tandoc, 2019; Tandoc & Ferrucci, 2017). To be sure, a growing body of literature is problematizing the dichotomy between hard and soft news (Hanusch, 2012). Indeed, some see the distinction as needlessly dismissive of a kind of journalism that audiences find both entertaining and useful (Hanusch, 2012). However, this distinction continues to be consequential in newsrooms, especially among traditional journalists who see the audience as desiring one kind of journalism that is inherently less civically valuable than another (Nelson, 2019).

Yet a number of news industry stakeholders do not believe that the audience is fundamentally uninterested in political news. Instead, they argue that the audience feels alienated by and distrustful of the news because it rarely solicits their perspectives and, consequently, fails to accurately reflect their lives (Carlson, 2017; Merritt, 1998). This group believes that the audience would be more interested in following the news if they felt more included in its production. In fact, some have argued that the audience wants to understand big, complicated ideas surrounding important news, but journalism continuously fails those citizens by producing news in a way that does not consider its audience’s perspectives (Carlson, 2017). This conception of the audience rose to prominence decades ago, during what is now known as the public journalism movement.

Public Journalism

In the early 1990s, with the journalism industry suffering a downturn in both economics and credibility, Jay Rosen and Buzz Merritt together introduced the concept of public journalism. The duo aimed to incorporate the fundamental philosophy set forth by Dewey: To make the public an integral and nonnegotiable part of newsgathering processes (Rosen, 1996). They argued that public journalism—sometimes called civic journalism—would create a more engaged public. In doing so, it would profoundly improve public discourse and strengthen democracy, the very essence of normative journalism (Rosen, 1996). As the public journalism movement initially spread across the country in the mid-1990s, it took the form of small-scale projects (Blazier & Lemert, 2000). As word spread, however, it became a more foundational part of the journalistic practices within a sizeable number of participating newsrooms (Ferrucci, 2015; Gade & Perry, 2003).

The fundamental argument for incorporating public journalism techniques came from the idea that the news industry had become too professionalized (Rosen, 1996). Public journalists contended that journalists had grown too focused on practices that both knowingly and unknowingly isolated themselves from the public (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). For instance, many argued the concept of objectivity forced journalists to ignore the public, because engaging with them could lead to accusations of journalistic bias (Haas & Steiner, 2006). The basis of journalism's attempted objectivity was the notion that detached expertise would demonstrate professional credibility and earn audience trust (Schudson, 2001). Yet public journalists argued that feigned neutrality did little to win the trust of citizens who felt their personal experiences were an important kind of expertise often overlooked within traditional news routines (Lee, 2001).

Public journalism met its demise in 2002, according to most accounts (Haas & Steiner, 2006). Many argue that the movement failed because it did not earn buy-in from journalists, and that journalists believed the movement was not actually about engaging citizens, but was instead a marketing ploy meant to revitalize shrinking newsroom profits (Gade & Perry, 2003; Voakes, 1999). Without journalist backing, the movement fizzled out; however, scholars now point to numerous public journalism practices that have become embedded in newsrooms across the country (e.g., Ferrucci, 2017; Nelson, 2019; Nip, 2008).

Although many scholars and practitioners have studied public journalism, its definitions and practices have varied. To that end, Nip (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of all research concerning public journalism with a goal toward articulating the undisputed tenets of the movements. She identified the four undisputed tenets of public journalism: engage the community through open dialogue, let all citizens have influence over news organizations' agendas, make the news more understandable, and report on issues in a manner that galvanizes the community into something positive rather than frustrates it. These practices make public journalism a concrete movement. They are also the same practices that have more recently been embraced by those advocating for "engaged" journalism.

Public Journalism Returns

Today's public journalists comprise a group that has taken up the mission to transform journalism so that the profession adopts "engaged journalism" as a primary goal (Belair-Gagnon, Nelson, & Lewis, 2018; Nelson, 2019). Though the term is inconsistently defined, it stems from the notion that journalists better serve their audiences when they treat them as active, rather than as passive, participants in the news production process (Nelson, 2018). Many engaged journalism advocates assume that the amount the public trusts and consumes the news will increase if journalists more explicitly reach out to and collaborate with the audience, not just after a story has been published, but before that story's topic is even determined (Batsell, 2015; Ferrucci, 2019b).

The growing promise of engaged journalism has made it remarkably popular throughout the news industry. There has been a rise of both engagement-focused jobs within newsrooms, as well as an industry that offers audience engagement tools and services to newsrooms (Lawrence et al., 2018). In recent years, foundations have poured millions of dollars into journalism ventures experimenting with ways to enact

audience engagement, while audience analytic firms have devoted their own resources to finding ways to measure it (Ferrucci & Nelson, 2019).

There are many notable similarities between public journalism and today's audience engagement advocates. Many of the outside organizations that stepped in to bolster the efforts of public journalists are now doing the same for audience engagement advocates. And some of the chief proponents of public journalism, such as media critics Rosen and Dan Gillmor, have similarly embraced the audience engagement experiments unfolding today. And because the rationales behind public journalism and engaged journalism are so similar, their implementations are remarkably alike as well. Like public journalists, engaged journalists similarly seek to create opportunities for journalists to interact with and hear from the public throughout the news production process. The continuity between the two has led some scholars to wonder if public journalism ever truly "failed," or if instead it was simply "a necessary step in a punctuated evolution" (Nelson, 2019, p. 9).

Of course, there is one significant difference between the public journalism and engaged journalism movements: the Internet. Many of the organizations that have become the biggest practitioners of engaged journalism use digital tools and services designed to help journalists interact with their audiences via online mechanisms that simply could not have existed in the era of public journalism. For example, Hearken, one of the most prominent audience engagement companies, provides newsrooms across the globe with an online platform that allows journalists to solicit questions from audience members (Nelson, 2018). Yet, although the Internet may have created additional means by which engaged journalism can be practiced that were not available to public journalists, it has not changed the overarching ideological goals that these two movements share. In fact, in an especially notable echo of public journalism, many newsrooms that have embraced engaged journalism practices privilege off-line, in-person interactions between journalists and audience members much more than they do those that unfold online (Ferrucci & Alaimo, 2019; Nelson, 2017; Wenzel, 2019).

In short, although the Internet has both changed the news media landscape and also added new opportunities for journalists interested in reshaping their relationship with their audiences, the practices and goals of engaged journalists are still remarkably similar to those embraced by the public journalists of the 1990s despite the different name and some surface-level differences in language and practice. This study seeks to understand why these approaches are so similar, and what those similarities mean for journalism's ongoing attempt at self-improvement. To that end, we draw on metajournalistic discourse as our methodological approach.

Theory of Metajournalistic Discourse

Metajournalistic discourse is a unifying term, one that encapsulates and brings together many different types of formerly disparate research agendas in journalism studies. Carlson (2016) argued that the concept is increasingly important because journalism itself is a socially constructed profession, something that remains fluid in its attempts to provide the service needed by the community at the time, and a profession that typically reflects the culture in which it is created. More importantly, in these times of constant disruption in journalism, studying metajournalism allows for us to understand how the industry is

constructed "through both the exercise of institutionalized news practices and through explicit interpretative processes justifying or challenging these practices and their practitioners" (Carlson, 2016, p. 350). Although scholars have simplistically defined the term as "what journalists say about their capacity to do what they ought to do" (Craft & Thomas, 2016, p. 1), the concept includes more than journalistic utterances. As a way of bringing the field together, Carlson (2016) outlined the theory of metajournalistic discourse.

In his theory, Carlson (2016) argues that there are three main components of metajournalistic discourse, and that these components should remain at the forefront of all studies because they provide the necessary contextual information concerning how the content is consumed. The first component is site/audiences, which explains where the discourse is published. The audiences cannot be separated from the site, because the site affects how the audience interprets the message, and who the audience is depends on the site. The second component is the topic of the discourse. The topic can be reactive, meaning it concerns one particular incident, or it can be generative, meaning it concerns the industry as a whole. Finally, the third component comprises the actors who compose the discourse, either journalists or the audience. Journalism is an "interpretive community," as Zelizer (1993) noted, which means studying how the community discusses itself can provide valuable information. In other words, journalism "is a profession that relies on internal and external actors discursively legitimizing and justifying its practices" (Ferrucci, 2019a, p. 288), and this type of work can "help bridge the gap between empirical and normative work" (Craft & Thomas, 2016, p. 4).

In the past, scholars have examined reactive metajournalistic discourse created by journalists in mainstream press through paradigm repair studies (e.g., Hindman & Thomas, 2013). These studies allowed researchers to understand what the press did incorrectly and how it violated normative practices in those particular instances. Other works have focused on generative content created by audiences on television (e.g., Ferrucci, 2018), or blogs (e.g., Vos, Craft, & Ashley, 2012). Audiences play an important role in shaping journalism; consequently, these studies play a similarly important role in that they reveal to scholars the preferences underlying these audiences' influence.

Yet the vast majority of recent studies examining metajournalistic discourse concern generative discourse created by journalists. These works focus on how journalists, through this discourse, discursively define and legitimize key journalistic concepts. For example, Vos and Singer (2016) analyzed industry trade magazines to understand how journalists defined the concept of entrepreneurial journalism. Others have conducted similar studies of trade discourse to uncover how photojournalists define the concept of "access" (Ferrucci & Taylor, 2018), or how journalists articulated the mission of journalism startup organizations (Carlson & Usher, 2016), or how they articulated the gatekeeping role. Some work aims for similar goals, but adjusts the site/audience by examining mainstream press to understand definitions and practices. In that vein, studies have focused on how ombudsmen do (or do not) fit into journalistic practice (Ferrucci, 2019a), how journalists use links in digital copy (De Maeyer & Holton, 2016), how journalists legitimized 2016 United States presidential election coverage (McDevitt & Ferrucci, 2018), or how journalists engage with the audience (Craft & Vos, 2018).

For this study, we seek to better understand how journalists articulated the need for public journalism and engaged journalism, which thus tells us how they discursively legitimized the necessity of

these movements. We also seek to understand how journalists, through discourse from trade magazines about the movements, imagine the audience. To do this, we look to generative content, written by journalists and published in trade publications. This mimics the choices made in similar studies, such as Vos and Singer's (2016). Examining content published in trade publications allows for a deeper understanding of how journalism, as an interpretive community, talks to itself. And because these examples of generative content are not published with the intention of reaching the broader news audience, they are even likelier to accurately represent the internal beliefs of the industry as a whole.

Our research questions follow:

RQ1: How does the metajournalistic discourse from industry trade magazines explain the need for the public journalism and engaged journalism?

RQ2: How does the metajournalistic discourse about public journalism and engaged journalism imagine the audience for journalism?

Method

Our approach methodologically follows the blueprint articulated by Vos and Singer (2016) by using textual analysis. As noted by Vos and Singer (2016), a study of this sort that focuses on two particular subjects—public journalism and engagement—aspire to “modest empirical goals” (p. 149). When conducting a textual analysis, researchers aim to uncover a range of interpretations, which allows for completeness concerning what the reader could infer from the content (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Definitions in the news industry are socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1990), which makes textual analysis optimal, because researchers can then analyze and contextualize how these very definitions are being constructed in the data.

For this study, to gather the data, we conducted a search for the terms “public journalism,” “civic journalism,” and “engagement.” The data came from trade magazines including journalism trade journals, journalism institutes, and other trade journals concerning journalism and related professions. Following guidelines and using the same corpus of 17 trade magazines used by Vos and Singer (2016), the data came from (1) only United States-based and Canada-based publications to eliminate any potential differences due to national variances and (2) only publications with accessible archives.

For data about public journalism, we searched for articles from January 1, 1992, to January 1, 2002, the generally established time period of the movement. For engagement, we searched for articles from January 1, 2005, to January 1, 2019. This search produced 444 articles. One researcher then read through all this material and removed articles that only mention the terms—articles without any discourse about the terms. In total, then, this study uses data from 128 articles, 57 pertaining to public journalism and 71 about engagement. This number, although fewer than the Vos and Singer (2016) sample, contains more than (or, in some cases, roughly the same amount) of discreet stories as the data for other like-minded studies that both include popular press or do not, such as Craft and Vos (2018), Ferrucci (2019a), and Perreault and Vos (2020).

The units of analysis are the articles featuring metajournalistic discourse about public journalism and engagement; therefore, each entire article was read and coded. The researchers examined each article and highlighted passages explicitly or implicitly pertaining to the concepts. To emphasize this study's focus on industry discourse, it again follows Vos and Singer (2016) in that, in the findings, it does not identify names of publications, writers, or speakers of a quotation. If we identified where the discourse came from, it would inevitably privilege some outlets and not others. The majority of readers of trade discourse do not know who, for example, Emily Bell is, and naming her would take away from the themes presented by the industry as a whole.

The researchers analyzed the data in the empirical manner defined by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995). This process includes three distinct steps: First, one researcher read through the entirety of the data, making notes about how the publications considered the concepts. Second, the researcher once again read through the data, this time looking for emergent themes or patterns. Finally, the researcher returned to the data once more, this time with themes in mind, and wrote notes and observances concerning these themes. After completing all three stages, one researcher wrote the findings section.

Findings

The Need for Public Journalism and Engagement

The first research question for this study asks how metajournalistic discourse from industry trade magazines explains the pursuit of the public journalism and engagement. Because journalism is a socially constructed industry persistently and continuously changing (Zelizer, 1993), this question allows for a better understanding of how the industry sees itself, starting from 1992 into the present. After a careful analysis of the data, three themes emerged concerning the first research question: First, journalism is in trouble and needs fixing; second, there is a need to remodel how journalists think and act; and third, the industry needs a market-driven or nakedly capitalistic approach due to an economic downturn.

Journalism in Trouble

The majority of the discourse studied for this inquiry revolved around the idea that both public journalism and engaged journalism could fix what ails the journalism industry. The discourse that fits within this theme primarily centered around the notion that journalism lost a connection to the public and therefore would remain broken until that connection was repaired. The idea that, in some abstract time in the past, journalists connected with their audiences was implicit in this discourse. The content from trade magazines bemoaned how journalists no longer served their audiences well, but did so at one point; presumably, the authors of this content believed that when journalism was its peak economically, this connection was strong. Stories often stated ideas such as "journalists and the daily newspapers for which they work have become increasingly estranged from the readers and communities they seek to serve,"¹ or the engagement movement is a product of journalists' "growing realization that they were out of touch with their readers," or

¹ All quotations in the findings come from the data. All articles used can be found in Table 1.

journalism—and democracy—are in deep trouble. It's critical for news organizations to "reconnect" with their alienated communities by paying much more attention to what the people think. It's time for newspapers and broadcasters to get off the sidelines and actively work to solve the problems of their towns.

Regardless of whether trade magazines discussed public journalism in the 1990s and early 2000s or engaged journalism more recently, much of the reasoning behind the movements concentrated around the assumed notion that journalism is not close enough to its audience, and that journalism acts in an elite manner.

Table 1. Publications Included in the Analysis.

Publication name	Public journalism articles	Engagement articles	Total
<i>Advertising Age</i>	1	4	5
<i>American Journalism Review</i>	27	3	30
<i>Broadcasting & Cable</i>	3	1	4
<i>Columbia Journalism Review</i>	18	12	30
<i>Editor & Publisher</i>	0	22	22
<i>Media Report to Women</i>	1	6	7
Nieman Journalism Lab	4	12	16
<i>Poynter</i>	3	8	11
Reynolds Journalism Institute	0	3	3
Total articles	57	71	128

Although the aforementioned examples explicitly noted the presumed brokenness of journalism through its connection to the audience, other discourse did the same implicitly. In these cases, the discourse was frequently dismissive of traditional journalistic output. For example, when discussing how public journalism became a big part of one organization, a source said, "I know that's got to be a big part of our mission. Otherwise, we are just another paper covering the same stories and not making a difference." The implication, of course, is that journalism without an audience-first mentality fails to have an impact. Or, as one article noted, public journalism's audience-first focus "corrects for traditional journalism's" weakness. Another piece argued that by consistently covering the same types of stories without putting the audience first, journalism illustrates its "preoccupation with insider events and frivolous side issues at the expense of substance." Overall, the most prevalent theme found for this research question argued that journalism needed fixing because it did not put its audience first and without this focus, "it will not be an asset for democracy."

Expanding Journalistic Practices

The second most common theme that emerged about why public journalism and engaged journalism were needed centered less on the industry itself not connecting to the audience, and more on the notion that journalists were profoundly wrong in the way they went about their jobs—and how those jobs should not only be corrected, but expanded. This theme consistently argued the necessity of these two movements due to journalists needing a thoroughly different mindset. Essentially, the movements are "not about journalists doing a few things differently. It is (a) fundamental (change), the adoption of a role beyond

telling the news." The phrase "beyond telling the news" appeared in several articles across both movements, emphasizing both explicitly and implicitly that journalism needed to be more than reporting and crafting stories, which could not happen without reconceptualizing the role of both journalists and their readers. For example, the discourse about both movements often stressed that neither public nor engaged journalism could be accomplished by changing a handful of established journalistic routines. Instead, accomplishing these goals "requires a philosophical journey because it is a fundamental change in how we conceive of our role in public life."

Although the discourse emphasized that these goals could not happen with a few tweaks but rather with "a strategy for cultural change" within the industry, many articles provided examples of practices associated with remodeling how journalists think and act. For example, instead of traditional stories, public journalists needed to characterize "both the stories that run and those that don't (as) extended discussions and, often, explanations to readers." These practices often focus on building relationships as opposed to reporting. Therefore, journalists need to understand that "work of engagement (is a) move from thinking of (journalism) as transactional to thinking of it as building relationships." If journalists think of their work as a "collaboration" or "conversational," they can engage an audience far better; but typically, the discourse argues, journalists think of themselves as experts and the audience as students.

The discourse surrounding both public and engaged journalism suggested that the news industry's traditional perception of the news audience leads journalists to approach their relationship with their readers in a "transactional"—rather than "collaborative"—way. The articles that made this observation occasionally voiced skepticism about the likelihood of these movements taking hold within the industry at large because journalists often "vow (to) do things differently, and yet not much changes," or "journalists suck as setting goals." In fact, most of the discourse concerning this theme argued that journalists do their jobs very, very badly. And the result of this failure is news that "does not help the public act upon" issues and treats important issues as a "game of strategy rather than substance." One particular article nicely summed up the goal of these movements as ultimately changing the type of content journalism produces so that it eliminates "instructional stories or the so-called process stories" because "what is interesting to people is stories about real human beings."

Movements Are Market Driven

Although the majority of the discourse about this first research question pointed out faults with journalism as a whole or journalists specifically, the least frequent—but still consistent theme—pointed to the industry's economic woes. For this theme, the discourse argued that in both the time of public journalism and the current time of engagement, journalism is suffering an economic downturn so dire as to demand change to either adapt to new conditions or positively affect profits.

Much of the discourse noted, regardless of time period, that due to lower profit margins or commercial influence on ownership, many news organizations suffered from staff cuts. With less people to cover communities, the discourse argued, both the public journalism and engagement movements could allow for remaining journalists to stay close to the audience despite the fact "that news organizations have too few reporters to comprehensively cover their communities." The need to embrace these movements is

essential because “what’s happened is that the practical demands, the production demands, have come to rule the intellectual life of the newsroom.” Consequently, some of the discourse argued that by publicly embracing public or engaged journalism, news organizations would send a signal to the audience and community that they care, even if the content produced could never be as good as it was with a larger staff. In fact, one of the few critical articles explained that public journalism was only “the latest substitute for a healthy editorial budget and solid journalistic instincts,” that the movement is “gobbledygook at best, dangerous at worst,” and that “any good thing that does come out of” it is really just “plain old traditional journalism.”

Although we observed some sentiment about how the two movements were aimed to obscure staff cuts, other articles presented the movements as a mechanism to increase profits. Sometimes this notion was couched in the idea that profit would come from doing positive things. For example, some articles mentioned that both engaged and public journalism would “double” pageviews, “understand demographics,” and move readers “from consuming free articles to (purchasing) a digital subscription.” In general, the public and engaged journalism movements, the discourse argued, could be market driven in a number of ways: by obscuring the cuts made by news organizations, by leading to journalism that reaches a larger number of people, or by leading to journalism more likely to earn audience support in the form of subscriptions or donations.

Imagined Audience

The second research question asks, “How do the public journalism and engaged journalism movements imagine the news audience?” An imagined audience not only affects how journalists do their jobs, but also how they view the role of journalism as a whole (Napoli, 2011). After a careful analysis of the data, three themes emerged concerning the second research question: First, the audience includes marginalized populations who want to contribute to the news production process, yet are traditionally not allowed to do so. Second, the audience knows more about its needs than journalists do. And third, the audience is disdainful of journalists’ elitist approach to their work.

Marginalized Groups

The most frequent theme to emerge pertained to how the public journalism and engaged journalism movements imagine their audience involved a marginalized public. Without explicitly calling journalism elite, the data in this theme suggested that journalists often ignore any nonpowerful public and, in doing so, marginalize an audience of people who are eager—yet unable—to contribute to journalism. For example, one article about public journalism argued there existed a vast number of “citizens who felt they were being overlooked” in journalism’s coverage and decisions. The goal of journalism should be, according to this discourse, to “promote inclusivity” and incorporate these “nontraditional sources” by “addressing issues that people are talking about but that aren’t being reported in the mainstream.” This is needed because these audiences are predominantly “White, male, privileged and Western.” Much of the discourse implied that journalists know that a diverse audience exists, but they still specifically privilege their White, male and Western audience. Similar language frequently came up in the discourse surrounding engaged journalism as well.

The majority of the discourse rarely identified specific marginalized audiences, but rather discussed them as one body of people consistently ignored by traditional journalism. However, some discourse talked about certain audiences in particular. For example, journalism could do a much better job "to boost the participation of women" and include content about "the lives of people with low incomes." Another article specifically mentioned millennials as a group "often dismissed in newsrooms as being disengaged and newsless," but holding significant insight. One piece attempted to identify all of these marginalized audiences: "We are not hearing from underrepresented voices, whether you define those voices by age, race, socioeconomic factors, ability, education, ideology, geography, religion, physical ability, orientation or gender identity."

One interesting implication of public and engaged journalism advocates' conceptualization of the news audience is it both acknowledges the diversity of the audience, yet in one key way simultaneously ignores that diversity. This discourse laments traditional journalism's decision to keep the news audience generally—and these diverse groups specifically—at arm's length. However, implicit in this conceptualization is the assumption that the audience—though comprising many different kinds of people—is united by the fact that many of its members want to participate in the news production process. In other words, public and engaged journalism advocates tended to idealize the news audience as a whole, while simultaneously acknowledging that the news audience comprises many distinct groups. In short, these advocates were critical of traditional journalists, whom they believe took an inaccurately "mass audience" approach to news production that resulted in the alienation of certain members of the public. However, these advocates also appear to believe that there is at least one characteristic that is consistent across different subsets of the audience: a desire to contribute to news production.

The Knowing Audience

Although the first theme identified specific audiences missing from journalism and therefore the public sphere, the second theme concerning the imagined audience discussed the audience as a whole, as a body with more knowledge than journalists. In this theme, because of this intelligence and knowledge about the world, journalists needed to "take readers seriously" and take the "opportunity to learn, know or understand critical issues or ideas FROM THESE PEOPLE (emphasis in original)." To incorporate this all-knowing audience, journalists need to "get rid of the notion of journalist as expert" and think of the audience "as partners."

The discourse suggested numerous manners for this imagined audience to gain more agency. Sometimes, this could be described generally, such as ensuring to make a "concerted effort to talk to voters and other ordinary folks, as opposed to the endless supply of clever quotes from political handlers and insiders." More specifically, journalists could "write a story and show it to readers to see if it's alright to print," or engage in "public listening" sessions or "deliberative forums where agendas can be shaped." In short, when it came to the discourse surrounding both public and engaged journalism, there was an assumption that audiences comprised people with valuable—yet frequently neglected—perspectives and insight that journalists should actively solicit to improve quality.

An Issue of Elitism

The final theme for this research question was less focused on how the audience was described, and more on the relationship between the journalists and their audiences. To put it simply, the discourse surrounding both public and engaged journalism frequently noted that traditional journalists perceived themselves as elitist and therefore uninterested in listening to what the commoners in the audience had to say. This critique often came alongside calls for journalists to avoid using only expert sources and journalists' own knowledge in stories, but also to incorporate insight from the more ordinary members of the audience. For example, multiple articles criticized *The New York Times* specifically as an example of elite journalism—a news organization that only “serves elites.” Journalists, one article similar to many others said, only “function as part of an elite, setting public agendas by mostly writing about local politicians and community leaders.” Although the majority of discourse argued journalists could avoid only serving the elite by fundamentally changing how they conceptualize their jobs, other articles basically said “journalists are unavoidably players.” In this theme, the audience could not be elite because they “are part of the community.” Implicitly, this suggested that journalists are not part of the community, and that this presents a serious problem within the dynamic between journalism and the public. In other words, journalists are elite not only because of how they serve other elites and mostly write about other elites, but “the media are (also) cut off from their own critics.”

The potential dilemma presented by this theme revolves around whether journalists must be elite. This theme both argues that journalists believe themselves to be elite and then engage in elitist practices by ignoring nonelites. Theoretically, this could be overcome by incorporating the audience more into news production. It could also be overcome by newsrooms hiring journalists who come from backgrounds that are more aligned with the people they aspire to reach. Yet some felt that this was not a problem to be solved so much as it was an unfortunately fixed state of affairs. In some instances, this theme was presented in a way that indicated that journalism's elitism was unavoidable. Therefore, perhaps the most salient conclusion from this theme is that some believe journalists will always be part of the elite because of their inherent power of the news agenda, but could act in a more noble manner and better represent nonelites by incorporating them as much as possible in news production processes.

Discussion

These findings reveal just how similarly people writing in powerful industry trade magazines have described both the motivations for as well as the appeal of public and engaged journalism interventions. In the articles written about both, there is remarkable consistency in the conceptualization of the problems facing the news industry—namely, a lack of credibility and stable profits. More importantly, there is a strong similarity when it comes to the solution to those problems: fix the relationship between journalists and the audience by bringing the public more explicitly into the news production process.

The consistency of the diagnosis of and solution to journalism's problems within both the public and engaged journalism movements stem from their shared assumption about the news audience: that it comprises people who are interested in civic life, eager to contribute to the stories told about their communities, and often filled with insights that journalists should be drawing on to improve the quality of

their stories. There is an obvious, intuitive appeal to this assumption, because it suggests that the news industry has a great deal of autonomy when it comes to solving its profession's most pressing problems. Bring the audience into the process, make sure they feel that they have the opportunity to contribute, and they will not only improve the quality of the news but become more loyal news consumers as well.

In light of our findings, we would like to put forth an argument that not only centers on how the public journalism and engaged journalism movements are similar, but also on why. We believe that the echoes of public journalism within engaged journalism are no accident. As we described in our introduction, the motivations underlying both movements stem from a Deweyan embrace of who news audiences comprise and what they expect from news. In other words, we believe the underlying assumption that motivated the pursuit of public journalism has reemerged within the engaged journalism movement: that people are disenchanted with news they increasingly see as elitist, and that they would be more likely to support and consume the news if they were granted a larger role in its production.

The fact that this ethos of public journalism has made such a triumphant return—as well as the fact that its advocates continue to butt up against resistance from more traditional journalists (just as public journalism advocates did)—also indicates the limitations of audience metrics. Although audience metrics are playing increasingly significant roles in newsrooms, there remains some confusion when it comes to interpreting what they reveal. Consequently, there continues to be disagreement between journalists who believe audience preferences for news are fixed and those who—like the public journalists before them—believe that these preferences depend in part on how involved audiences are in news production.

One especially interesting finding in our data was about the things left unsaid in both the public and engaged journalism discourse. Articles focused on each of these topics rarely addressed the risks associated with their pursuits. The findings here suggest that both the public journalism and engaged journalism movements center around the ideas that (1) journalism helps civic engagement and (2) the news itself would benefit from more explicitly incorporating the wisdom of its audience, which comprises people eager to have more agency in journalistic practice. This raises the following question: Might incorporating people with weak ties to social institutions and low levels of knowledge into news production actually diminish the quality of the news?

The combination of conceptualizing the audience as experts and pursuing newsroom profits may lead journalists to outsource their agenda setting in potentially unforeseen and unwanted ways. Doing so may lead news publishers to do the very thing that often gets lamented about journalism today: They may decide not to cover major news that the public finds uninteresting. For example, in the data, there was a story about how, during the public journalism movement, a journalist wanted to cover the rise of right-wing militias. She was told no because the "readers did not have an appetite for that kind of story." As noted in the article, "Thomas's rejected story idea is one that looks awfully good in retrospect . . . because she proposed it months before the federal building exploded in Oklahoma City." Yet because the public did not care for the story, it was not pursued. Specifically, at a moment when many conservatives in the United States believe that the "mainstream media" comprise biased liberals who pretend to be balanced, but are in fact the "enemy of the people," there is reason to fear further distrust should journalists begin actively attempting to advocate on behalf of certain groups of citizens. Furthermore, if engaged journalism efforts

become focused primarily on audiences from specific socioeconomic backgrounds who are therefore seen as the likeliest to financially support news organizations, the news agenda may end up perpetuating the very kind of exclusive reporting practices that engaged journalism advocates are attempting to address.

We do not suggest these more distressing outcomes are the likeliest to occur. Perhaps those who advocated for public journalism and now are advocating for engaged journalism are entirely correct in their predictions about the outcome of these efforts. However, every method of news production has its advantages and disadvantages. The neutral, mass audience approach of the 20th century may have sought to present the news as objectively as possible, but often did so by leaving out the experiences of groups of people or by creating a sense of false equivalency between two sides of an issue. A public or engaged form of journalism may bring subsets of the public into the news in a way that greatly improves their understanding of journalism as well as journalism's understanding of them. Yet success for each of these movements would likely yield at least some undesirable consequences, the discussion of which is conspicuously absent from the discourse surrounding both of them.

An obvious limitation of this study is that it only examines discourse from trade magazines. These trade magazines often rely on the same powerful actors for definitions and opinions. Most certainly, other definitions and interpretations of these movements and the audience exist, but, as noted by Vos and Singer (2016) and Carlson (2016), because these are the ones chosen by powerful trade magazines, they have significant influence over how the industry as a whole socially constructs, both currently and historically, these meanings. It should also be noted that although this study used a census list of United States-based and Canada-based trade publications (Craft & Vos, 2018; Vos & Singer, 2016), only nine published articles surrounding these movements and the majority came from an even smaller subset of that nine. Another limitation of this study is that its focus on the discourse surrounding public and engaged journalism, and the conceptualizations of the audience present within this discourse, did not take into account changing approaches to and uses of the term "audience" in the first place. Some within the engaged journalism community are increasingly going to great lengths to distinguish between community members and audience members in an ongoing discussion surrounding who journalists report about and who they report for (Wenzel, Ford, & Nechushtai, 2019).

In conclusion, our findings provide empirical evidence that although public journalism may have failed in its original iteration, its spirit endured. On the one hand, this could indicate that change in journalism occurs slowly. On the other, it could mean Dewey's argument about the journalist-audience relationship may never end, but also may never lead to significant changes within the profession. The concern this poses is that by focusing on journalism's relationship with its audience, news industry stakeholders run the risk of overlooking other issues perhaps more responsible for the profession's problems. These include the increasing consolidation of news outlets, the growing influence of social media platforms and search engines when it comes to the news that audiences actually get exposed to, and the poor economic treatment of journalists. This is all to say that, at a moment of profound financial instability within the news industry, every engaged journalism effort comes with an opportunity cost in the form of the road not taken. However, at some point, the industry might want to look less inward and acknowledge that romanticizing the audience could potentially have negative effects on journalism credibility. Maybe the underlying assumption at the heart of public and engaged journalism—that more audience input is potentially the panacea for the

journalism's lessened presence in citizens' everyday lives—gives far too much credence to the idea that if journalism does X, then the public will do Y.

To be sure, this is not to say that the relationship between journalism and news audiences should be disregarded. We applaud those using this discussion about engaged journalism to analyze and advocate ways for how best to approach the public. Our hope is that, by describing the similarities between this discussion and the previous one about public journalism, we can encourage today's conversation to not just emulate the one that came before, but to expand on it.

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