EVALUATING THE EFFICACY OF ENGAGEMENT JOURNALISM IN LOCAL NEWS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

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The *Dallas Morning News* is a leader in using engagement journalism to increase and retain digital subscribers. This ethnography examined the efficacy of the engagement journalism work by the *News* in rebuilding trust and forming relationships with its audience. This research is exceptionally timely as more newsrooms are erecting paywalls to their content and asking their audiences to offer monetary support in exchange for greater access and engagement by journalists. This work is examined through two mass communications theories: functionalism, which says a society can be viewed like an ecosystem as a “system in balance” consisting of complex sets of interrelated activities, each of which supports the others in maintaining the system as a whole; and the dual responsibility model, which says that companies should operate in the best interests of all in the community who depend on them, not only those who benefit financially. Additionally, the work is considered from a human-interaction design standpoint to evaluate whether the *News* has created affordances that enable the journalists and the readers to communicate, and whether the journalists are effectively practicing service design when publishing news and information for the audience.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the 2016 United States presidential election, trust in traditional institutions, including journalistic organizations, was left severely eroded. After decades of declining trust, coverage of the 2016 election brought Americans’ trust in mass media to an all-time low.¹ The national media was on its heels trying to make sense of how the electorate polling could have gone so wrong.² Local journalists were feeling these effects too, especially in more conservative regions of the country like Texas. For most Americans, what they describe as journalism and who they describe as journalists is influenced by their perception of the national media. This creates a challenging problem for local journalists: How does one create meaningful relationships with local community members, connect them with information they need, and make a value proposition as to why they should monetarily support your work?

These issues are central to the discussions about how to sustain local journalism. They are built on a foundation of trust between the journalists and the communities they serve. Absent trust, which normative theorists argue also must be accompanied by some basic “public cultural truth” based on respect for “human dignity and the dignity of all other forms of existence,” journalists will struggle to build connections with their community and face continuing

declines.³

However, there is a way forward, especially for journalists working in local newsrooms. These journalists are intended to be woven in the fabric of their community, which gives them ample opportunity to build trusting relationships with their audience on an individual level. As local newsrooms have shrunk under the financial pressures of the media industry, fewer and fewer communities are reported on with the depth and vigor readers once knew.⁴ As of 2017, there are fewer than 40,000 journalists working at American newspapers compared to 71,000 employed at newspapers in 2008.⁵ That means it is increasingly less likely that a local audience member will have interacted with a journalist serving their own community. And more likely they have a perception of journalists that is shaped primarily by the national media, social media, or how journalists are presented in popular culture.

After President Donald Trump first called journalists the “enemy of the American people” in February 2017⁶, the reporters and editors at the Dallas Morning News began concerted efforts to counter this narrative and build trusting relationships with their audience. This effort began somewhat unofficially with a column written by Dallas Morning News editor Mike Wilson detailing how the 250 enemies of the people do their jobs, have personal lives, and

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ultimately make mistakes that need correcting. He received many responses from readers, both positive and negative, but chose to invite two particularly critical email writers to attend one of the newspaper’s front page planning meetings.

It was an act of radical transparency to which journalists and audiences had become unaccustomed. Journalists have traditionally been gatekeepers who distributed information that they deemed important for the citizens to know. Rarely are readers invited to participate in the practice of journalism, but rather they are considered spectators. Wilson’s inclusion of two readers is an echo of practices from the American public journalism movement in the 1990s, which sought to make journalism more participatory for citizens. However, most journalists could not, or would not, shake their journalistic reflexes to keep the public at an arm’s length and assume an attitude of “detached objectivity” in the name of credibility.

Wilson’s decision to include the readers was radical in that it rejected the idea of keeping readers in the dark until the newspaper hit their front step. Instead he opened up the newspaper’s most intimate daily meeting, pulling back the curtain, for the two to offer in-person criticism rather than relegating their voices to the letters to the editor section. The readers left the newspaper slightly concerned about how some of the stories discussed in the meeting might be portrayed in the paper, but were otherwise surprised at the ordinary, perfunctory nature of the


meeting. “They don’t have horns and they aren’t out to be sinister,” one reader told NPR’s David Kestenbaum about the Dallas Morning News journalists he met.10 “It was good to talk to people one-on-one and to hear they may not even realize what you’re thinking.”

The one-on-one discussions Wilson had with the two readers in the wake of the 2016 election were the start of the News’ now two-year-long effort to increase transparency and trust with its readers through digital communities, live events, and stories based on reader’s questions and ideas. The goals of the efforts, as expressed in staff meetings, are two fold: to better understand and serve the preferences and needs of the newspaper’s North Texas audience, and to increase the number of subscriptions sold to sustain the newspaper long into the future.

The Dallas Morning News is far from alone in these efforts. This ethnography will examine the efficacy of the engagement journalism work by the News in rebuilding trust and forming relationships with its audience. This research is exceptionally timely as more newsrooms are erecting paywalls to their content and asking their audiences to offer monetary support in exchange for greater access and engagement by journalists.11 This work will be examined both through two mass communications theories: functionalism, which says a society can be viewed like an ecosystem as a “system in balance” consisting of complex sets of interrelated activities, each of which supports the others in maintaining the system as a whole12; and the dual responsibility model, which says that companies should operate in the best interests

of all in the community who depend on them, not only those who benefit financially. Additionally, the work will be considered from a human-interaction design standpoint to evaluate whether the News has created affordances that enable the journalists and the readers to communicate, and whether the journalists are effectively practicing service design when publishing news and information for the audience.

Ultimately, my research is designed to serve as a framework for journalists to examine their own work, and advocate for changes to their processes and products to enable meaningful, lasting relationships between themselves, their institution, and their audience.

My Relationship to the Dallas Morning News

I would like to disclose upfront that I have conducted this research, theoretical study, and series of interviews with Dallas Morning News subscribers and journalists while I am a member of the News’ newsroom. As the audience development editor at the News, I bring a unique perspective and intimate knowledge of the news organization’s efforts to deepen relationships with its audience and increase subscriptions through engagement journalism. This role gives me access to proprietary data about the newspaper’s audience, access to a large group of subscribers to interview, and a keen understanding of where the organization has been and where it aspires to go through these. This level of access has enabled me to conduct a participant observation study of the organization’s efforts.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED IN THIS THESIS

American newsrooms have never reflected the communities they serve. They have long been the bastion of white men and the elite class of educated wealthy white citizens in power. In 1978, the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) pledged to create newsrooms that achieved parity in reflecting the percentage of people of color in the U.S. population by 2000—then the deadline was pushed to 2025\textsuperscript{14}. Newsrooms are far from that goal. The realities of the news industry’s revenue challenge have not made achieving that goal any easier. However, the systemic lack of trust in information systems and need for audiences to be invested in the health of news institutions make creating newsrooms that reflect the community more critical than ever.

Hiring a staff that includes a diversity of races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, socioeconomic statuses that is reflective of a specific community takes time and effort on the part of management. Newsrooms need a fast and cost-effective way to forge honest, transparent connections with their audiences. The internet affords them that opportunity. However, newsrooms were slow to come to that realization. They have since suffered from their lack of foresight in the 1990s and 2000s. Still, some newsrooms have more recently realized the power in digital tools and platforms as a way to connect with the communities they have underserved. This work largely falls under the category of “engagement journalism,” which is considered journalism produced collaboratively with ones audience.\textsuperscript{15} Researchers are only beginning to scratch the surface of what this emphasis means for the news industry and society at large.


This ethnography considers the efficacy of engagement journalism practiced by the *Dallas Morning News*, where I am the Audience Development Editor and have been a leader in developing the newspaper’s engagement strategy. It serves as a reflection on this work in the context of mass communication theory and adds a new layer of analysis by applying interaction design theories to the examination of the efficacy of engagement journalism efforts. To conduct this analysis, I examine the following research questions from two perspectives:

- **RQ1:** What is engagement journalism at the *Dallas Morning News*?
- **RQ2:** How do *Dallas Morning News* journalists practice engagement?
- **RQ3:** How effective do audiences of the *Dallas Morning News* perceive those efforts?
- **RQ4:** Which types of journalists at the *Dallas Morning News* (social media producers, reporters, editors) are expected to engage with the audience?
- **RQ5:** How effective do journalists at the *Dallas Morning News* perceive their engagement journalism efforts?
- **RQ6:** What type of training is the *Dallas Morning News* providing to journalists to be effective at engaging audiences on different platforms?

Following this ethnographic analysis, is a playbook for journalists seeking to create an effective engagement strategy for their individual beat or their entire news organization. I invite you to learn from my work and the work of my colleagues at the *Dallas Morning News* and take all or pieces of what I have outlined and apply them in your own local community.
CHAPTER 3

THE CONSTRUCTION OF INFORMED COMMUNITIES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

If we are to fully appreciate the importance of the modern community, both in-person and online, we must first explore the definition and role of community in the context of the normative theories upon which mass communication studies are based. For this definition, we will rely on Jürgen Habermas’ definition of the public sphere. He derives his understanding of what exists in public from the first etymological reference of the public sphere: the German noun Öffentlichkeit.\(^{16}\) It specifies that the public sphere is part of “civil society” established in the “realm of commodity exchange and social labor governed by its own laws.”\(^{17}\) Habermas’ definition builds upon the Greek definitions of participatory democracy in that it requires citizenship as a shared criterion to be included in the public sphere.\(^{18}\)

Mass communication is chiefly concerned with public discourse. The Western democratic framework for which normative theories account requires the following shared set of cultural values in regard to this public discourse: (1) collective decisions are best arrived at by participatory debate among all in the community; (2) deliberation should be oriented toward the common good; (3) deliberation should be based on a rational, reality-based criterion of truthfulness; and (4) cultural practices should be rooted in a literate, reflexive culture of theoretical justification.\(^{19}\)

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17. Ibid., 3.
19. Ibid.
These principles of participatory democracy were first taught by the Sophists in Athens and throughout the Mediterranean around 450 BC. They trained the public to expect systematic, rational arguments that used persuasive rhetoric to combine varied interests into proposals that the majority of people could agree with, or at least tolerate. This informed debate created a “regime of truth” rather than a regime of bullying, vendetta, or violence. The citizen was empowered to take action in the face of injustice in pursuit of the political equality of all citizens opposed to the economic prowess of the few.

This model, which informs the libertarian framework of normative theory, imbues every individual citizen with the capacity to reason and transform the world around them. All persons are born rational, free and capable of governing, John Locke wrote in 1689, meaning that individuals have the right and responsibility to develop their own belief systems and think for themselves. This is the groundwork for the idea of freedom of expression, which is included in most constitutions and in lists of basic human rights—most also include the right to not be punished for one’s beliefs. Therefore, each person has the agency and expectation that they will influence their family, friends, and fellow community members with their ideas through rhetoric and discourse. Freedom of expression also means individuals have the “freedom to be mistaken”

20. Ibid., 40.
24. Ibid., 293.
as Milton described in *Areopagitica*. This is the concept that is used by publishers as a defense against censorship or punishment before, during, and after publication.

Critical to the pursuit of an informed community operating in the public sphere is free and open debate in which truth and error on an issue have equal access. Scholars have described the so-called marketplace of ideas as the ideal format for informed citizens to be able to use their intellect to discern truth from falsities through discussion. Coupled with this is the need for tolerance, which John Stuart Mill describes in *On Liberty* as a continued dialogue between a community’s members in an attempt to discover common values shared by all.

The medium through which this discourse occurs is what has changed since the formative years of the Western world. For much of mass communication history, printers and journalists were gatekeepers of information. They decided what to print, when, and for whom. The media is considered an information trustee and given privileged access to important people and information with the expectation that journalists will objectively evaluate and disseminate the information to the public. The internet, especially social media, returned the power of discourse seen first in the Hellenistic period, to the people. Now, any person with a smart phone is a publisher able to share their thoughts, feelings, and accounts with the world. As they say, with great power comes great responsibility. And in the case of the citizen publisher, they generally

lack the same professional training and socialized ethics regarding how to determine and publish truth that journalists possess.

How is society supposed to advance through participatory discourse if all we are doing is shouting at each other on the internet? We must return to the public square with and updated ethics of dialogue. This means an emphasis not solely on broadcasting one’s thoughts and beliefs, but an increased focus on listening and grappling with the experiences of a variety of cultural and personal identities.32 Journalists can be facilitators of this refocused dialogue in their own communities by including citizens in the practice of public journalism.

CHAPTER 4
PUBLIC JOURNALISM IN AMERICA

Modern engagement journalism has its roots in the public journalism movement of the 1990s. Edmund B. Lambeth of the University of Missouri offers this relatively neutral definition of public journalism as a practice of journalism that seeks to:

1. Listen systematically to the stories and ideas of citizens even while protecting its freedom to choose what to cover;
2. Examine alternative ways to frame stories on important community issues;
3. Choose frames that stand the best chance to stimulate citizen deliberation and build public understanding of issues;
4. Take the initiative to report on major public problems in a way that advances public knowledge of possible solutions and the values served by alternative courses of action; and
5. Pay continuing and systematic attention to how well and how credibly it is communicating with the public.\(^{33}\)

New York University’s Jay Rosen has spent decades studying public journalism, also known as “civic journalism.”\(^{34}\) He observed a disconnect between journalists/news organizations and the citizenry/communitys, and between the American people and public life.\(^{35}\) Rosen’s early writing on public journalism echoes the arguments established in functionalism by Robert Merton\(^ {36}\) and finessed by Dorothy Emmet who iterated upon Merton’s ideas in her discussion of structural-functionalism, stating: The functional view shows not just that something has consequences, but

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that it has consequences within a systematic complex of other factors and that it may contribute to the continuance of this complex by reinforcing the other factors.³⁷

Therefore, journalism cannot function and remain valuable unless a robust public life continues to remains valuable. In turn, the citizens need a robust news gathering operation to provide information and context necessary to have a valuable public life.³⁸ Rosen explains further:

If public life is in trouble in the United States, then journalism is in trouble. Therefore, journalists should do what they can do to support public life. The press should help citizens participate and take them seriously when they do. It should nourish or create the sort of public talk that might get us somewhere, what some of us would call a deliberative dialogue. The press should change its focus on the public world so that citizens aren’t reduced to spectators in a drama dominated by professionals and technicians.³⁹

Put more simply the goals of public journalism in helping democracy are threefold:

1. Connect the community
2. Engage individuals as citizens
3. To help public deliberation in search for solutions⁴⁰

Public journalism also necessitates clear definitions of citizenship, community, and deliberation. Rosen differentiates a “citizen” from “consumers” or “clients.” For people to be positioned in the community or ecosystem as “citizens” means that journalists and the community at large must treat them as:

- Making individual contributions to public life
- Potential participants in public affairs

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• Citizens of the whole community, with shared interests
• A deliberative body—also defined as a public with issues to discuss
• Choosers, decision makers
• Learners with skills to develop
• Connected to a specific place and responsible for a specific place

This definition asks community members to deliberate with others. It goes beyond asking them to express their opinions; it involves demanding “a certain standard of citizenship—which includes civility, mutual respect, informed participation, and a willingness to listen and respond.” This detailed definition of citizen is critical as we iterate upon the public journalism model.

Our society has become even more splintered and divisive in the 20 years since Rosen laid out this definition. Since 1999, the gap between what Republicans and Democrats in the United States say should be the focus of Congress and the White House has grown by five percentage points. This is compared to the single percentage point of change between 1999 and 2009. In 1999, Republicans and Democrats agreed that education, crime and Social Security should be among the nation’s top priorities. In 2019, the two groups could not agree on a single item that should be listed in the top five priorities for the nation’s leaders. This partisan divide ripples through to our daily lives. Which leaves us to ask: If members of the community are not


45. Ibid.
willing to listen and contribute to the public discourse, how invested are they really to the health of the community ecosystem?

Communities have long been defined by the physical and geographic similarities between citizens. Public journalism literature from the 1990s describes the community as “associated with the geographical area in which the news organization distributes its news product, and is meant to be the location of public life.” The definition of community must be updated to allow for how authentic and diverse communities form in the digital space. It is more productive to consider existing research on how nations form. Literature contends that a community is imagined by its members as a mental construct through the sharing of commonalities, which diminishes the importance of a local geography as a component of a community.46

Journalism scholar Joyce Nip expounds what she calls the second phase of public journalism, outlining the following four shared values that define communities in both the physical and digital spaces:

1. A sense of belonging among members.
2. Shared forms among members.
3. Interactions among members.
4. Social ties among members.47

These concepts better connect citizens as defined by Rosen above. They also enable researchers to further consider how community is defined.

Communities both physical and digital remain pluralistic—they are made up of many smaller subgroups and communities. For example, the Dallas-Fort Worth area is its own community that also includes the Hispanic, Jewish, Black, Asian, and Anglo communities. Those

46. Ibid., 215.
47. Ibid., Nip. “Exploring the Second Phase of Public Journalism.”
communities can further be divided by class, gender, political ideologies, and so on. Functionalism asks how these groups work together to connect and build or come in conflict within the larger ecosystem that is the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

This same principle can be applied to journalism when considering media practitioners’ obligations to citizens, the larger community, and other stakeholders when reporting and publishing. Functional analysis of their work will still depend upon the lens through which a particular decision is analyzed. While the connective tissue between the pluralistic groups will vary, at the core of every community must be some sense of shared belonging.

However, community members can and will disagree on the best actions to take toward improving the community. This is where public journalism’s insistence upon public deliberation is key. “To deliberate is not just to ‘talk about problems. To deliberate means to weigh carefully both the consequences of various options for action and the views of others.”48 It is also the point at which public journalism departs from traditional journalistic methods. Public journalism seeks to engage the people as citizens both in the news-making process and the use of the news.49 In the traditional journalism model, the reporters and editors act as gatekeepers and filter world events to select what is important, and report them for a specific audience.50 Government officials and those with specific titles are the primary sources. Lay people are rarely interviewed.51 The selective sourcing and filtering of world events by journalists set the

49. Ibid., 216.
51. Ibid., 216.
community agenda, maintains the status quo, and creates a feedback loop that largely excludes non-titled citizens. Public journalism seeks to change that.

Early iterations of public journalism in newsrooms sought to determine concerns of the community through town hall meetings, citizen panels and polling. Information gleaned from these methods would be used to set the reporting agenda and reporters would loop back to the citizens and share their findings during the reporting process. Journalists continue to act as gatekeepers in this model as they choose how to edit stories and which to publish. They also have complete discretion over how stories are framed. The audience can respond to published work, but it is up to the established journalists to respond or change course based on the feedback.

Critics of public journalism saw defining communities, especially in the digital age, as highly problematic. “The proliferation of the internet and an internal dissatisfaction with the movement contributed heavily to the undertaking’s ultimate demise,” Patrick Ferruci concluded in his 2015 paper. Others criticized the public journalism as potentially entering to the sphere of propaganda because the focus on engagement with the community so altered journalistic routines to compel reporters to become activists on behalf of democracy and self-governance. Both these criticisms have merit, but encourage iteration on the basic ideas outlined by Rosen in the 1990s. However, some newsrooms, especially those in non-profit, public media and subscription-based newsrooms, have seen success iterating on the public journalism model both

52. Ibid., 216.
53. Ibid., 216.
55. Ibid., 905.
in engaging audiences for reporting purposes and for increasing fundraising to remain financially viable and valuable to their communities.
CHAPTER 5
THE RETURN TO ENGAGEMENT JOURNALISM

In recent years, engagement journalism has become a mantra for newsrooms seeking to create meaningful relationships with community members. In many ways, it is the newest wave of public journalism. Non-profit newsrooms like the Texas Tribune, St. Louis Beacon (now part of St. Louis Public Radio), and WBEZ Chicago, were trailblazers in iterating upon the most successful aspects of public journalism to create this new form. Subscription newsrooms like the Dallas Morning News, the Boston Globe, the Seattle Times and the Philadelphia Inquirer are investing resources in engagement as a subscriber retention effort.

Market theory says that consumers decide the quality and value, producers respond to consumers’ needs and desires, a market will self-correct if not fulfilling those needs, consumers have a freedom of choice, the market allocates society’s resources efficiently, and producers possess a motivation to succeed and innovate.\(^{56}\) Therefore, media companies are forced to look critically at the news as a product and measure consumer appetite for such content against the journalistic mission to cover the most minute news from a local school board meeting.

In January 2019, the Dallas Morning News’ parent company A.H. Belo laid off 43 employees, including 20 in the newsroom.\(^{57}\) The journalists at the News have long been making decisions about which stories to cover—arguably in the gatekeeper role, as journalists have been for decades—but the reality of having substantially fewer reporters to cover the nine-county area


that makes up North Texas seemed to be a wake up call. To help shape the news organization’s future, the News’ publisher Grant Moise wrote in an editorial that the newspaper’s leadership had asked its audience three questions: (1) What do you want us to cover? (2) What do you value most about our coverage? and (3) Where can we improve? These responses were used, in concert with proprietary data collected by the News about digital readership habits, to choose what to invest time, money, and resources in covering with full-time staff journalists. It remains to be seen whether this strategy is successful.

The Dallas Morning News’ changes are an example of a legacy organization striving to continue their journalistic mission while weighing the express desires of a majority of readers. The newspaper’s leadership concluded that their mission is to provide readers information about local communities and Texas. The News’ goal is to produce journalism that is engaging to its local readers that will compel them to pull out their credit cards and pay for it. Tawnya Adkins-Convert and her research partners agree that this value proposition is possible. However, researchers frequently build upon the W. Lance Bennett’s four tendencies of journalism in outlining ways that the News, and other newsrooms, should seek to avoid in the search to be more engaging and inclusive of audiences:

1. News is personalized: Events are presented as reports about individuals and as human interest stories, the historical, institutional and political conditions establish the social context. “Political processes, power relations, and economic forces underlying events tend to be ignored.”


59. Ibid.


61. Adkins-Covert, 231.
2. News is dramatized: Events are represented as stories constructed to present controversy, conflict problems and solutions, and emphasize rising and falling narrative arcs. “Abstract, technical, and ambiguous aspects of events are seldom discussed.”

3. News is fragmented: Information is presented without clear connections. “The media present events rather than issues.”

4. News is normalized: Official sources are prioritized over the community, which provides an air of authority and security. Injustice at the hands of authority is rarely reported.

The researchers concluded: “In American journalism, ‘why’ is the question most often left unanswered, or answered with an insinuation.” This is a question that modern engagement journalism seeks to answer in collaboration with the audience.

Newsrooms have been slow to adapt to this method of journalism. As previously discussed, the public journalism movement in the 1990s encountered considerable resistance from reporters and editors. However, as the internet and social media have become equalizers, especially among young people, there is a new opportunity for journalists to iterate upon the lessons of the 1990s. This has pushed newsroom editors to ask that reporters engage and form bonds with their readers in these digital communities. For most news organizations featured in a 2017 study, engagement means offering some place for the community to be in communication with the journalists. Examples include web comment sections, feedback forms to collect reader

62. Ibid., 231.
63. Ibid., 231.
64. Ibid., 231.
65. Ibid., 241.
67. Lawrence et al., "Practicing Engagement." 2017
suggestions, or social media listening.\textsuperscript{68} For other newsrooms, engagement also encompasses in-person engagement events in their community. Some practitioners described this action as shifting the audience from a passive consumer role to an active participatory role.\textsuperscript{69}

But still, there is a business case to be made for engagement journalism. As readers become more engaged, practitioners report these readers return to websites more frequently.\textsuperscript{70} For organizations with pay-meters, which limit the number of free visits to a website before prompting a reader to pay, a focus on engagement as a way of driving loyalty and return visits can be fruitful in the form of subscription sales. Readers will not be able compelled to pay for the journalism if it is not either extremely comprehensive on multiple levels—like the \textit{New York Times}\textsuperscript{71}—or focused on their specific local community or a niche topic area. Sharon Chan at the \textit{Seattle Times} summarizes how local publishers are approaching engagement as a business and a mission-driven practice:

\begin{quote}
We want to as a business be engaging as many potential subscribers or viewers of advertising as possible. That’s increasingly important. Especially as print subscribers start to die off essentially. So I think of engagement as that kind of basic acquisition of customers. But I also think about the public service mission of journalism and how we serve them by creating thoughtful civil dialogue. I think that that’s actually really missing in … community dialogue, national dialogue today.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

From my position in a leadership role at the \textit{Dallas Morning News}, I know this is similar to what the \textit{News’} audience team is tasked with. That being connecting passive readers to the news and

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., Lawrence et al., "Practicing Engagement.” 2017
information they indicate—whether explicitly through feedback on social media or elsewhere, or through implicit data collection and analysis of their reading habits—that they want on the platform they feel most comfortable. They key to this level of engagement is that a team of journalists are specifically hired and trained to listen to the readers and help forge this connection.73

It is important that they are professional journalists. They still use news judgment to help facilitate meaningful connections between the community members and the newspaper. In most cases, as at the Dallas Morning News, this team is not only posting and engaging with readers on social media, but are curating story placement on the homepage and in email newsletters for readers. The idea of engagement-based reporting is permeating the entire Dallas Morning News newsroom through the newspaper’s Curious Texas project and subscriber-only Facebook group, both of which will be discussed at length later.

73. Ibid., Rosen. 2009.
CHAPTER 6
THEORETICAL BASES OF ANALYSIS

I am taking a somewhat unusual approach to the theoretical analysis of the efficacy of engagement journalism by combining mass communication theories with those of interaction design. Too often mass communication theory is presented in the normative tradition, it is prescriptive of what journalists should do to improve society or advance the purposes of democracy. This is fine in the abstract of an academic paper, but in reality, the practice of journalism must consider the individuals involved in the consumption and dissemination of the information first. Engagement journalism puts the audience at the forefront. That is why I have chosen to infuse classic mass communication theories with those from the design disciplines that focus on usability and physical functions of an object or system.

For this analysis, we shall consider journalism a system of practice and news and information a product of that practice that is designed to afford the audience the opportunity to take action in the society based on their information consumption.

Functionalism

Functionalism conceives of social systems as living organisms whose various parts work, or function, together to maintain processes. If we consider that community journalism has multiple stakeholders such as journalists, readers, advertisers, and corporate owners. We must also consider that those stakeholders each serves a different function within the community organism. “Community information sharing involves the operation of civic organizations, media,
and the school system as mechanisms for generating and sharing information and educating the public on major issues that it might ‘make balanced judgments and avoid contentious disputes.’”

Journalism cannot exist within the community without readers or viewers. Journalism also needs the community to provide material worth covering. Without the community there is no media. Journalism is also dependent upon advertisers and underwriters—the financial backing can come in the form of individual subscriptions or in many cases in the United States, massive corporate underwriting to offset the lack of print and digital advertising. Those advertisers need the community to buy their goods or services.

Every aspect of the media ecosystem is connected. Again, consider the core function of journalism: creating an informed citizenry in the public sphere. As previously established, to be informed the public must be able to obtain news that is comprehensive and offers facts and outcomes. The public must be able to understand why community institutions, such as government, non-profits, businesses, make decisions that affect the community. Journalists must consider the functions and dysfunctions of their work through the various lenses of their individual community stakeholders.

All aspects of the community are connected most directly through the media because of the media’s inherent role of taking in, repackaging, and rebroadcasting information necessary to the core functions of the whole community organism. Communication systems theory narrows the scope of functionalism to focus specifically on the news media by examining the mass

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76. Adkins-Covert et al., “News in My Backyard,” 229.
communication process as composed of interrelated parts that work together to meet some goal.  

Even more specifically, researcher and media theorist Charles Wright outlined four key functions of media: surveillance of the environment; correlation of the parts of society in that environment; transmission of social heritage from one generation to the next; and entertainment. Put more simply: media functions to explain the community; provide context about the community’s sub-groups and how they fit together to form the larger community; offer historical knowledge about the community and societal norms; and entertain and amuse the community members.

Take, for example, a local news reporter or team taking community officials to task through an investigation. The reporters and editors seek to shine a light on corrupt practices in the community’s governmental body. Most would argue that corruption is a dysfunctional part of society and that efforts to uncover and eliminate it would therefore be highly functional. The journalists in this case are operating at the highest expectations of the profession.

They are also considering how reporting this story will affect the community and the news organization’s bottom line through increasing subscriptions. The potential for an increase in subscriptions because of the community’s investment in the investigation means the work is also functional for the news organization’s financial backers and advertisers. But what about a section of the community that has been the beneficiary of this particular corrupt politician’s

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79. Ibid.
actions? Would those members of the community continue to view this journalistic effort as functional and operating in their best interest? Likely not.

A key criticism of functionalism is that it is overly accepting of the status quo.80 This is demonstrated in established media organizations’ roles in shaping how society views social inequality and regularly problematic representations of marginalized groups.81 “Professional journalists have often sought to preserve their status by explicating how their work differs from amateurs, articulating the opposition to or superiority over citizen journalism, for example, either on philosophical or practical grounds.”82

Contemporary journalism studies often ask “who counts as a journalist, what counts as journalism, and what is appropriate journalistic behavior.”83 These questions inherently push already marginalized voices in the community to the outside. How are journalists expected to adequately understand, empathize, and report on issues that are the most important to these marginalized sub-groups of their community if they lack any access to or understanding of the people who make up the group?

Some argue that newsrooms should balance their majority opinions and experiences by training "citizen journalists.” Luce explored this consideration in her case study in the United Kingdom offering people with physical disabilities and the homeless short-term journalistic training. The goal was to give these marginalized members of the community the tools and training to report their stories and to ask the questions most important to their immediate group

80. Ibid., 119.
81. Luce et al. “Citizen Journalism at the Margins.” 266.
82. Ibid., 268
83. Ibid., 268
of peers. The case studies were intended to confront some of the criticisms of functionalism by increasing the number of voices.

The researchers theorized that they would be able to offer the community a more complete picture of itself and simultaneously broaden the understanding of how journalism is defined. However, Luce and her research partners found that without larger institutional support the participants expressed concern about the potential for negative damage that could be done to them if they participated in citizen journalism. The citizen journalists feared that if they would face reprisals if they used their new-found voice to speak up against powerful people in their community. The researchers found that the fear of losing state-sponsored benefits sometimes held participants back from reporting the stories they thought were important to the community.

Technology used to be a primary barrier for marginalized groups to publish their own stories, but those walls have for the most part been lowered significantly. Some may still face exclusionary web design or unaffordable devices or internet access, but for the majority of people in American communities technology has evened the playing field. What has not changed are the feelings of fear and paranoia for marginalized groups seeking to gain a public voice. The responsibility then falls on the established media to improve its function for these sub-groups within communities and serve the ecosystem as a whole.

One would expect that the internet and digital journalism offer great opportunities for previously marginalized groups to join in the work that newsrooms are doing to report on

84. Ibid., 269, 274.
85. Ibid. 275
86. Ibid., 268.
communities around the world. Anyone with access to digital technology and reasonably fast internet has the tools to be their own publisher. Marginalized groups are often highly skeptical of traditional media and struggle to make their voices heard by the mainstream. Relatively few Blacks and Hispanics, which combine to make up nearly 30% of the U.S. population, believe they see an accurate depiction of themselves in the American media. The same studies indicate that while these groups are avid media consumers, when members begin to question the validity of the media coverage about their community, their engagement in the news declines.

This makes the ability to bypass gatekeepers and self-publish more important to these groups. For example, activists created #BlackLivesMatter hashtag to draw attention to shootings of unarmed black men and other issues affecting African Americans. These users are just one example of a marginalized community using the power of social media to bypass traditional media forms to tell their own stories. In cases like this, one must ask what the larger community is losing by ignoring the perspectives of their own sub-groups. News organizations are seeing the results of decades of inaction in covering multiple perspectives in their local communities. As their community demographics change, so do the considerations citizens make when determining if they are willing to pay for news and information.

88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
Dual-Responsibility Model

In the 1940s, when social researchers first developed the theory of social responsibility of the press, there were more than 50 companies that owned American news outlets. The theory calls for an independent media that holds social institutions to task while providing objective, accurate news reports, lending a voice to all people in the community—not just the elite groups that have previously dominated the cultural conversation.

However, in the context of modern media, social responsibility theory is too idealistic. In the more than 50 years since social responsibility theory became popular, massive media conglomerates have gobbled up local news outlets and consolidated them into regional newsrooms. The decrease in the number of local newsrooms is a major factor in the erosion of the trust in recent decades. Social responsibility theory only considers the journalists’ responsibility to the public in making editorial decisions and makes no attempt to address outside pressures they may face including financial pressures outside of their control.

To accommodate for these radical shifts in media, we lean on the dual-responsibility model developed by Terry Adams-Bloom and Johanna Cleary in 2009. They revised social responsibility theory, clarifying the role of fiscal, as well as social, responsibility in news decision making.

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93. Ibid., 73.


95. Ibid., 78.
Dual-responsibility combines the “high ideals and First Amendment considerations of social responsibility theory while recognizing the economic realities of today’s mega-corporate environment…[giving] wide berth for ethical business practices and good corporate citizenship lessens the importance of pure capitalism.”96 This calls for companies to operate in the best interests of all of their stakeholders.”97 When applying this to community journalism, stakeholders may include those who are focused on profits like company shareholders, publishers, CEOs, and other corporate underwriters.

The *Dallas Morning News* has historically not been the best model of dual-responsibility. In 1999, it was rated the nation’s fifth-best daily newspaper in a survey of newspaper editors.98 Not long after, Belo, the company that owned the newspaper (it is now owned by the A.H. Belo company, when the newspaper and TV businesses split), made several bad investments.99 The newspaper’s staff of 600 was slashed and global and national bureaus were closed. Over the next several years, circulation has declined.100 The newspaper’s business management made the choice to prioritize profits over its obligations to the community.101 Something that the individual journalists in the newsroom now struggle with as they strive to remain relevant to their readers.

Dual-responsibility theory tries to account for stakeholders beyond the corporate decision makers. These include journalists producing the news reports, community leaders, and lay people.

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97. Ibid., 3.


99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., Bennett. 2016.

101. Ibid.
who may or may not read the news product. Accounting for the interests of community members who may not be core readers or regular news consumers is critical in the modern media landscape. Consider that when media companies utilize dual-responsibility theory, and in turn stakeholder theory, they are able to incorporate “a commitment to the public good that outweighs short-term individual self-interests.” On first read, it sounds like dual-responsibility theory strikes the right balance of journalistic ideals and the realities of financing modern journalism. However, problems begin to arise when researchers apply the theory to current publishing methods in an attempt to define the communities different publishers serve.

Adams-Bloom and Cleary acknowledge that the internet could make a publication’s “community” the entire world. “Space is no longer strictly tied to one physical place; hence, community becomes a problematic term when talking about news media and digital technology.” The fundamental research to develop dual-responsibility theory was focused on broadcast news. It is easy to see how the rise of cable news and the internet makes tracking audiences with only Nielsen ratings difficult. However, for local newsrooms, especially newspapers, defining local communities may be more feasible than ever in the digital realm.

Real-time analytics on digital stories allow newsrooms to track at the IP address level where readers are physically located. Digital analytics tools like Google Analytics and Parse.ly reveal “how users interact with websites and mobile apps by automatically recording aspects of users’ behavior and then combining and transforming the behavior into data that can be analyzed.” This detailed knowledge can be sorted and used to determine who is reading what types of stories at what times of day.

102. Ibid., 3.
This data about readers is powerful. It is information that advertisers want to know about who they can target. Media companies have long used demographics to set advertising rates and make editorial decisions. Detailed analytics offer more information about news consumers and their habits than ever before. They also show publishers who is talking about their stories and on which digital platforms.\textsuperscript{104} The availability of this rich data reinforces the need for dual-responsibility theory in modern newsrooms. Journalists and media companies must exercise extreme responsibility and care when handling this data. Balancing the ability to customize news presentation to audience habits and the responsibility journalists have to serve their core function of creating a more informed citizenry must be part of editorial decisions as modeled in modern engagement journalism practices.

Interaction Design

How do audiences actually reach news and information? How do individuals gain knowledge that can be applied to their own life? How effective are the means of distribution utilized by news organizations? Who are they missing by using those distribution methods? Is the audience’s knowledge base growing because of the journalistic work? These are all questions journalists must ask as they iterate and develop products to spread information, especially now that the media landscape is more congested than ever. News organizations can learn from the study of interaction design to inform how they can improve and better share news and information with their audiences.

Consider first the interaction design principle of affordances, which are at the most basic level the characteristics of an object or system that help a user do something. They fall into four categories:

- Cognitive, which help users with thinking, deciding, learning, remembering, and knowing about things
- Physical, which help users with clicking, touching, pointing, gesturing, and moving things
- Sensory, which help users with seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling things
- Functional, which help users conduct real work, get things done, or use the system to do work

The concept of affordances first came from the perceptual psychologist James J. Gibson, who studied the relationship between a living being and its environment and what the environment affords the living being in question.

Critical to understanding affordances is that they do not change based upon the needs, perceptions, or desires of a user. “An affordance is not bestowed upon an object by a need of an observer and by his act of perceiving it. The object offers what it does because it is what it is.”

Don Norman took Gibson’s ideas about affordances and applied them to design theory in his 1990 bestseller *The Design of Everyday Things*:

> An affordance is a relationship between the prompters of an object and the capabilities of the agent that determine just how the object could possibly be used…affordance is not a property. An affordance is a relationship. Whether an affordance exists depends upon the properties of both object and the agent.

When considered in the context of mass communication theories, affordances are similar

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106. Ibid., 644.


108. Ibid.

to evaluating a news organization through the lens of functionalism. The goal of a news organization is to spread information within a community of users. If the products and platforms that a news organization chooses to use do not afford users the ability to connect with them on sensory and cognitive levels through reading and listening to then begin to think about the news, decide on an opinion or action, and deepen knowledge, then the news organization has failed tests of affordances and functionalism on a macro level.

Consider the lack of trust in the media. A Gallup and Knight Foundation study of indicators of trust in the media found that most U.S. adults, including 9 in 10 Republicans, express having lost trust in the media in recent years.\textsuperscript{110} They also found that 69\% of those who say they have lost trust also say that their trust can be restored.\textsuperscript{111} The survey found through an open-ended question that the top reasons for respondents to say they do not trust news organizations are focused on inaccuracy and bias. About 10\% of respondents said that “clickbait” was also a negative factor. “Clickbait” can be interpreted as either a sensational headline or one that triggers a an immediate reaction based on individual biases.

These responses indicate serious problems from an affordance perspective for the news industry. Consider how the products and systems through which journalism is communicated to society at large can affect the message. News organizations are not doing themselves or their audiences any favors with the methods they choose to present the news. No longer are consumers choosing between a few news channels on television, one or two newspapers, and a few radio stations. They are bombarded by information signals and drowned by information served up in an instant online. News is presented beside opinion. The same talking head on CNN may deliver

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
something newsworthy during the same segment that they are sharing their opinion or analysis on the news.

It is no wonder, when examining these methods through the lens of design affordances, that audiences are confused, frustrated, and tired of working to become informed citizens. “We have to accept human behavior is the way it is, not the way we wish it would be,” Norman wrote. News organizations can no longer wait and expect for news consumers to suddenly figure out the differences between news and opinion. Clear labeling, radical transparency of sourcing, and use of platforms that reach audiences where they are already are critical to journalism’s modern functions. It is time for journalists to adopt a service design thinking mindset.

**Service Design Thinking**

“Service design is a practical approach to the creation and improvement of the offerings made by organizations…It is a human-centered, collaborative, interdisciplinary, iterative approach which uses research, prototyping, and a set of easily understood actives and visualization tools to create and orchestrate experiences that meet the needs of the business, the user, and other stakeholders.” Service design achieves for design theory what dual responsibility achieves for communications theory—it combines the needs of the business with

the needs of the users. It also begins to offer a practical framework for journalists to apply to their own service-minded work.

Service design follows a service dominant logic, which is understood through five axioms:¹¹⁴

- Service is the fundamental basis of exchange.
- Value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary.
- All social and economic actors are resource integrators.
- Value is always uniquely phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary.
- Value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutes and institutional arrangements.

One can begin to see how these axioms may be applied to the news industry, especially in an organization that puts a high value on engagement journalism.

Journalism cannot be created without a community of readers, viewers or listeners. When presented with a news product for the first time, it should be clear what the product’s purpose is: to inform the product user. The value of that product is defined both by the journalists who created it and the audience who benefits from its creation. News products have historically included a mix of topics and sections for this very reason. While Person A may be a political fanatic who wants to read every minute detail of a recent city council decision, Person B may be more interested news about the arts community and upcoming entertainment opportunities.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, the journalists may be most invested in the publication of a groundbreaking investigation.

¹¹⁴. Ibid., 29.
¹¹⁵. Ibid.
Both Person A and Person B are valuable members of the audience, but neither necessarily came to the newspaper for the investigation. The journalists need Persons A and B to be invested enough in their individualized niche topics that they can also recommend pieces of content that the journalists find important to society at large. This rational is often considered as if journalists are pushing for consumers to, as they saying goes, “eat their vegetables” in addition to the sweet things they are more focused on. Ultimately, it is the consumer that determines the value of the work by either buying/supporting the news organization or not.

Therefore, it behooves journalists to be co-creators with their audiences. Journalists are not omniscient. They are not a special class of being who knows more about the experiences of the sub-communities in the area they serve. They must acknowledge the audience’s role in the creation of news. News organizations must evaluate the systems and processes in place for communication between journalists and readers from a design perspective. Those are the systems serving as affordances for community members to be participants in the news. Without such systems, journalists have no community co-creators as called for by service design. Further analysis must be conducted to evaluate the affordances that journalists then have to communicate with the community at large and with individual members.

Some news organizations are already hard at work building relationships and creating feedback loops with their community. This research seeks to examine their methods and create an engagement playbook that follows these design thinking principles to encourage further iteration on engagement journalism practices.

116. Ibid.
CHAPTER 7

SUBSCRIPTION-FUNDED NEWSROOMS

Most major U.S. newspapers, including the Dallas Morning News, are working to grow digital subscriptions with the goal of making them a long-term sustainable business solution. Advertising models are no longer a feasible path forward, especially on the local level, given the efforts by Google and Facebook to swallow the market for advertisements that once filled local newspapers.

Dual-responsibility theory incorporates “a commitment to the public good that outweighs short-term individual self-interests” and naturally encourages news organizations to pursue a subscription or membership model. When the community is the news organization’s primary customer base, an additional level of accountability is created. When dual-responsibility model is combined with functionalism, this accountability also forces newsrooms to ask if their work is actually providing information and serving the needs of multiple segments of their audience. When newsrooms fail to function for a group, they will stop subscribing. A business imperative to listen to the community’s needs and involve their input to produce engaging journalism that is worth paying for.


119. Ibid Luce, Jackson, Thorsen. 2016
CHAPTER 8

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY

This ethnographic case study is focused on evaluating subscriber and journalist attitudes and perceptions of engagement journalism at the *Dallas Morning News*. The method of ethnographic study is appropriate for this research because it enables an evaluation of the complex phenomena of relationship building in practice. This effort needs to be observed within its natural setting. Ethnographic research uses observation and interviews to gather data. Research suggests that ethnography is one of the most effective methods for revealing the context and depth behind how different types of journalism are practiced.

Because of my intimate knowledge of the *Dallas Morning News* and my influence as a practitioner of engagement journalism at the newspaper, perhaps this study is influenced by autoethnography, which places greater emphasis on the ways in which the ethnographer interacts with the group or culture being researched. This method allows researchers to draw on their own experiences to explain a phenomena or culture. The use of personal narratives in this case offers the academy access into the participants’ private worlds, which are filled with rich data.

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122. Ibid.


125. Ibid.
Case Study

The *Dallas Morning News*, the focus of this study, is one of the largest newsrooms in Texas with more than 150 journalists as of January 2019. At the beginning of this study in the fall of 2017, the *News* was considered the largest newsroom in the state with 250 journalists. However, attrition and layoffs in the newsroom shrunk the staff considerably over the course of two years. While the newspaper has journalists working in Dallas, Austin, Washington, D.C., and on the U.S.-Mexico border, this analysis will largely focus on the efforts of journalists in Dallas to engage their local subscribers in North Texas. As the staff of the *News* has continued to shrink, the newspaper has increasingly chosen to focus its efforts to offer readers a view of the world “from a North Texas lens,” meaning nearly all staff-staff-written stories must somehow connect to the nine counties of emphasis for the news organization.

This ethnography is specifically delimited to focus on the aforementioned research questions in Chapter 3 regarding engagement journalism and audiences’ access to news and information created by journalists. This research method and selection of sources were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Texas.

Observational Research

Participant observation is used to describe the act of experiencing and recording events in social settings. The validity of this method comes from the researchers being present at the time of the action under research observation. Most settings offer an insider’s perspective of an action only to those who are willing to become members of the group. This is why my

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participation in the act of engagement journalism at the *Dallas Morning News* is highly beneficial to this study. I have observed operations and decisions in the newsroom during my five years of employment beginning in October 2014. This work was specifically considered through a research lens from January 2017 through February 2019. My day-to-day job requires that I participate and help develop strategies around engagement journalism. This means I have first-hand knowledge that further informs my research.

**Subject Interviews**

Additional context was added to the data from participant observation through in-depth interviews. Interviewing means to “develop a view of something between people.”\(^{128}\) Qualitative interviews encourage the subjects to freely articulate their interests and experiences.\(^{129}\) This study primarily relies on the informant interviews. Informant interviews are people whose first-hand knowledge of a cultural scene are valuable for a specific research objective. These individuals operate in the same environment that is being studied in a variety of different roles and are respected by peers.\(^{130}\) Interviews allow me as a researcher to ask for clarification beyond my initial line of questioning. They also give the subject the freedom to lead the conversation to subject areas that I would not otherwise anticipate. As a professionally trained journalist, this is also a method of data collection with which I very familiar and comfortable. This method enables me to lean on my trained skills to build rapport with my subjects and collect more honest answers to my questions.

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130. Ibid.
In the case of the Dallas Morning News in-depth interviews were conducted with seven journalists including investigative reporters, editors, community reporters, and audience journalists. The interview subjects were chosen in a convenience sample of those colleagues who have first-hand knowledge of how the News practices engagement journalism. Five women and two men were interviewed. These qualitative interviews were conducted in February 2019. These interviews were conducted through a mix of in-person conversations and email correspondence to accommodate the scheduling needs of the researcher and subjects.

Additional data to evaluate the efficacy of the journalists’ efforts was collected through a series of qualitative in-depth interviews with nine Dallas Morning News subscribers who are members of the newspaper’s subscriber-only Facebook group. A second convenience sampling was used, this time with subscribers. Interview subjects were solicited through a post in the Facebook group. Subscribers who volunteered to be interviewed emailed the researcher and set up a time for either an in-person interview or phone call. Nine subscriber interviews ranging between 30-45 minutes in length were conducted in October and November 2018. Seven women and two men volunteered for the study.

Interviews from both groups were transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions were then reviewed and coded to examine responses related to the aforementioned research questions.

Limitations

Ethnography requires the researcher to be an instrument as well. Because this method is focused on studying people, it simultaneously increases and decreases the validity of

the research. Ethnography has limitations. The conversations in the field and interviews conducted can never be entirely replicated. The responses are also mediated by the presence of the researcher.

Autoenthography is a focused analysis of a personal narrative, which limits the scope of conclusions the researcher may draw. It also requires the researcher to reflect upon his or her own feelings and self-disclose. A major criticism of autoethnography is that it is a narcissistic and individualized research method. That is why in this case my own ethnographic observations are being contextualized with interviews from my colleagues and Dallas Morning News subscribers.

133. Ibid.
134. Ibid.
CHAPTER 9

THE *DALLAS MORNING NEWS*' METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT JOURNALISM

In May 2016, the *Dallas Morning News* explicitly pivoted its focus to focusing on growing revenue through digital subscriptions. This new focus made the newsroom apt to consider its relationship to the North Texas community. The newsroom had recently undergone a restructuring to become “digital first.” The *News* ’ restructure and refocus was a precursor to Table Stakes program, which seeks to accelerate the transition of major metropolitan newspapers to evolve their practices, reach new audiences, and better engage their communities.137 The *News* was in the first class of Table Stakes newsrooms and has continued to be involved.

During this process, reporters and editors reapplied for jobs and new teams were created to better reflect what newsroom leaders thought were necessary features of a modern news organization. The eight-member Audience team was created during this process. These journalists were tasked with managing the homepage, social media, news alerts, newsletters, and coaching their colleagues in digital best practices. The team was largely focused on promoting and broadcasting the *News* ’ journalism to the world. In November 2016, I joined the Audience team with the task of helping pivot the Audience team to be journalists focused on engagement who involved the North Texas community in the practice of journalism.

Since then, engagement journalism has permeated throughout the newsroom. For the purposes of this ethnography, two major engagement projects are worth consideration: the *Dallas Morning News* subscriber-only Facebook Group and Curious Texas.

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Subscriber-Only Facebook Group

Facebook Groups have been a feature on the social networking site for many years, but were rarely used by news organizations until 2016. The rise in Facebook Groups coincided with the platform’s decision to assign content from Facebook Pages, including those from news outlets, lower rankings in the algorithm that surfaces content to users in the Facebook News Feed. Facebook Pages typically are used by businesses or organizations to broadcast and share news and information with Facebook users who “follow” a particularly Page. Presumably, by choosing to follow a Page, one is signaling to Facebook that such information is valuable to you as a user, but the algorithm shuffle in 2016 eliminated that logic.

Some news organizations began experimenting with Facebook Groups early including the *Dallas Morning News*, but they became a widely accepted option for journalistic engagement efforts in 2018. Unlike Pages, Groups are ranked higher in the News Feed algorithm for members, so they are more likely to see content posted in the Group.

The *Dallas Morning News* launched its subscriber-only Facebook group in September 2017. The group was designed to be a closed space for a facilitated discussion between readers and journalists. The group’s public description lists it as “a place for subscribers to be invited to live events with reporters and editors and participate in hosted discussions about news topics. It is designed to be a space to increase transparency and build trust with our audience through regular discussions about news gathering, production and questions that journalists and readers


tackle.”  It is moderated by a team of digital editors as well as members of the newspaper’s marketing and customer service teams. As of February 2019, the Group has nearly 1,900 members and averages nearly 5,700 posts, comments, and reactions per month. The Group’s members are 59 percent female, 40 percent male, and 1 percent of members list a custom gender identity. While the Group includes members as young as 18, most members are 35 or older. The majority of members identify on Facebook as living in Dallas, Texas, other top cities include Plano, Richardson, Garland, Frisco, McKinney, Carrollton, Irving, Allen, and Arlington — all are primary areas for home newspaper delivery. The Group’s membership is a mix of print-only, print + digital hybrid, and digital-only subscribers.

![Dallas Morning News subscriber-only Facebook Group](image)

**Fig. 1: Dallas Morning News subscriber-only Facebook Group**

Curious Texas

In December 2017, I launched Curious Texas, a Hearken-powered project at the *Dallas Morning News*. Hearken is an engagement tool that enables news organizations to create website embeds that collect audience submissions. It also includes a back-end organizational system to

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facilitate quick use of the audience submissions. We describe Curious Texas as a project that 
invites the community to join in our reporting process by submitting questions about things 
 happening in their community that they are curious about. The idea is simple: Readers have 
 questions, and our journalists are trained to track down answers.

It took most of 2017 to get buy-in from newsroom leadership for the Audience team to 
launch an engagement project of this scale. When I began as the Engagement Editor in 
November 2018, my role was viewed by reporters and editors more as a “social media editor.” I 
quickly learned that I would need to prove to my colleagues that engagement reporting was a 
valuable use of our time. I also needed to prove to our readers that they could trust us to read 
their submissions and include them in our reporting.

I launched my first callout using a Google Form as Trump’s travel ban took effect and 
crowds filled Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. I asked for immigrants living in Texas to 
share their reactions to the ban.141 My expectations for the response were low, but instead we 
received more than 50 responses from immigrants representing more than 30 countries.142 As 
similar callouts saw success throughout 2017, I made the business case for us to invest in 
launching a Hearken-powered project. We published our first Curious Texas callout in the 
waning days of 2017 and published our first story in January 2018. Our initial goal for Curious 
Texas was to report 32 stories in the year. I set a fairly low number for an initial goal because we 
did not have a full-time reporter available to commit to the project. We approached it as an 
experiment and two features reporters agreed to participate.

living-texas-want-hear-story.

answered-immigrants-living-texas-tell-stories.
Our readers responded to the project immediately. We met our goal by March and reporters from nearly every section of the newspaper have since participated. In July, I added a full-time engagement reporter to our Audience team. She is now the lead reporter for Curious Texas. In its first year, we collected more than 820 questions from our readers and answered nearly 100. These stories consistently exceed our newsroom metrics in returning visitors, engaged time and path to conversion. They are some of the most clicked items in our newsletters, and subscribers regularly mention at live events that they are some of their favorites to read.

With a grant from the Community, Listening and Engagement Fund through the Lenfest Institute, we added GroundSource as an engagement tool to our Curious Texas project.143

GroundSource is similar to Hearken, but it is SMS-texting based. It enables reporters to create a series of auto-texts and then further a conversation with a group of users who have opted-in to receive messages. We use the SMS texting tool to add a communication pathway for community members who may not have a strong relationship with the newspaper or regularly read our website.
CHAPTER 10

JOURNALISTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD ENGAGEMENT JOURNALISM

The journalists interviewed for this ethnography work in all different areas of the Dallas Morning News’ Dallas newsroom. They include members of the Audience team, community reporters, investigative journalists, editors, and journalists working on our subscriber acquisition and retention team in the marketing department. They range in years of service at the News. For some, working at the Dallas Morning News is their first full-time job in journalism. In total, seven journalists were interviewed.

Defining and Practicing Engagement Journalism

Generally, the journalists interviewed put a premium on the role engagement plays in their daily work. Nearly all of the journalists described engagement journalism as journalism that begins with their audience. It is “journalism powered by the surrounding community,” said one journalist. Another journalist on the audience team echoed her colleague describing the goal of engagement journalism as community building. An assigning editor described engagement journalism as a practice that goes beyond simply finding stories:

To me, engagement journalism means interacting with readers through a variety of formats on a regular basis, before and after the publication of stories, and reporting stories that resonate with them.

A reporter who became the News’ first reporter entirely focused on engagement efforts described the practice she’d come to embrace as: “a two-way conversation between the reporter and the reader…[it] also aims to be more transparent about the reporting process.”

Depending on the individual journalist’s role in the newsroom, they described their practice of engagement differently. The common thread between the seven interviews, however, was the audience. Members of the Dallas Morning News Audience team described their practice
of engagement as primarily managing the branded accounts on social media including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit. These are the staff members who walk the delicate line of finding a way to humanize the monolithic brand that is the Dallas Morning News. To be effective, they must be able to listen and empathize with the reader, understand what the problem is, and quickly direct them to someone who can help find a solution. During the onslaught of news that we have become accustomed to, it is no easy task. These journalists are also the most plugged into the newsroom’s analytical tools and use the data to bolster their honed news judgement.

For reporters, practicing engagement often means listening to audience responses on social media and looking for story ideas through news tips or the News’ Curious Texas project. One such reporter joined the Audience team in July 2018 with the specific focus of practicing engagement journalism. She acts as a model for other reporters to emulate in how she interacts with readers on social media and during in-person events. She frequently asks readers what they think about a piece of news. She is also key in offering in-person tours of the newsroom to subscribers and other groups. A big part of practicing engagement she said is making sure to say, “thank you,” to her readers.

Another reporter who was recently given a new assignment to cover Collin County, one of North Texas’ fastest growing areas, is leaning on engagement journalism practices to meet his audience in the physical and digital communities they have built. Sometimes this takes place in Facebook Groups that are intended for the particular cities, or he goes and meets active community members at local coffeeshops or libraries. He approaches his audience in the place where they feel most comfortable as a way to gain their trust and improve his own reporting on their community.
One journalist who was interviewed moved from a role in the newsroom to a role on the subscriber acquisitions and retention team in the *Dallas Morning News*’ marketing department. His view of engagement journalism was in line with those of the reporters, but he offered a customer-focus that came across slightly different than those of the reporters:

[Engagement journalism] includes things like ensuring our newsletters are as robust as possible or ensuring our customers understand where to go to get the news they care about. A lot of the issue now is that people don’t understand where to go to interact or engage with reporters or the newsroom in general. We’re working on a number of initiatives to help better train our subscribers to understand they have a voice and how to use it. For example, our new onboarding emails will teach new subscribers how to better use their subscription and where to go to contact people in the newsroom.

The journalists interviewed all said they strive to respond to the community when they reach out by phone, email, or on social media. However, they draw the line at interactions with anyone who seems to be deliberately trolling them, or not offering any sort of meaningful form of conversation. One investigative reporter said she specifically has the ability to direct message her on Twitter and Instagram turned off because she is not willing to open herself up the harassment that too often plagues women and people of color.144

When asked if she responds to readers who contact her about the newspaper, one assigning editor said: “I see that as part of my ethical responsibility to the people who read our work.”

Knowing the Audience

The journalists generally said they had a sense of who their audience is and what type of stories interest them. The *Dallas Morning News* has made analytics a key part of their newsroom

for several years. Every reporter and editor has access to their analytics tool, Parse.ly, and is expected to keep track of key metrics including return visitor numbers and average engaged minutes on individual stories. The News’ internal research has shown these to be indicators that a story is likely to be in the path to conversion, meaning that the story was likely read by someone in their consumer journey to becoming a subscriber. It was important to newsroom leaders to choose metrics that reporters could track themselves. These messages about readership numbers and engagement are socialized daily by myself and the News’ director of digital strategy.

Even with such robust data about which stories are being read digitally on which platforms, the journalists suggested they would like to know more about the individual people who are reading and interacting with their stories. What it seems the reporters are really looking for is a way to combine the readership data they have access to with additional demographic and behavioral data to create personas. Interaction and product design theory indicates that this would be a productive way for individual reporters create a rich depiction of who the people are behind the audience.145 This practice makes it easier for practitioners to make smarter, more informed decisions quickly about what and how to report the news. In a time of shrinking newsroom resources, such approaches to thinking are essential.

The journalists largely viewed themselves in the traditional watchdog role. They consistently listed holding government and institutions accountable as their top role within the community. They also said that focusing on providing local information about businesses and community safety are important parts of their work. The ability to offer stories and reports that delight and amuse the audience is also still part of what they see as their mission. One editor

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interviewed summed it up well: “Our primary focus should be on producing the kind of journalism that has an impact on our community, but it needs to be the kind of journalism people want to read.”

The journalists acknowledged that while they hope the interests of the audience align with what they feel is their journalistic mission, that is not always the case. When asked what she thinks is the audiences’ priority, one member of the Audience team offered a somewhat cynical reply: “Honestly? Puzzles, things to do in the area, and what’s going on in national politics.” The response is not too surprising considering the *Dallas Morning News*’ history with the ramifications of removing a puzzle. In 2018, the Jumble puzzle was inadvertently removed from the daily newspaper and the newsroom was inundated with calls, emails, and social media posts. Mike Wilson, the *News*’ editor, ultimately wrote a comical correction in the form of a Jumble.146

Involving and Reflecting the Audience

For the *News*’ engagement reporter, if a story does not start with interest or curiosity by the audience, it is not worth pursuing:

The audience is everything. If a story doesn’t have an audience, it can’t make an impact in a community. People have to read our reporting in order for it to make a difference. And we can’t learn more about a topic if people don’t engage with our reporting. That’s how reporters get follow-up stories and new tips. It’s also increasingly important now, since our newsroom’s staff is significantly smaller than it was decades before. We must rely now more than ever on our audience to tell us what’s happening in their community, since our reporters can’t be everywhere at once.

This same journalist sees great potential in the traditionally undeserved communities, but said that it is going to take work to earn their trust after decades of ignoring them:

I believe that has a lot to do with how the paper has historically covered lower-income communities and communities of color, which hasn’t been great…These communities were always—and at times still are—not really considered in daily coverage, so it’s not surprising that they aren’t willing to buy into the newspaper now that we are trying to reach them. However, the fact that we have to work harder to gain their trust does not mean that we shouldn’t work to gain it at all. We’ve made some progress in recent years within those areas, but not enough. We still have a long way to go if we want to become a profitable local news outlet.

The journalists acknowledged the *Dallas Morning News*, like many news organizations, has a significant way to go in reflecting its audience. Several journalists interviewed who are Hispanic women who grew up in the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area expressed a desire to see more journalists in the newsroom who already had connections to the area as one way of improving the representation. Some suggested that having more journalists who live in historically disenfranchised areas of the city would help them shine a light on the needs of those communities.

Others discussed the need to see more women and people of color in management positions at the newspaper. The *Dallas Morning News*’ top editors include one white woman, one black woman, one Hispanic man and one Asian man. The remaining five top-level editors are white men.

The journalists are keenly aware that the internet has created more competition in how community members find information. They expressed concerned that some community members are relying on Facebook groups to provide them enough news to get through their lives. They have seen success with engagement journalism, especially through Curious Texas, but they worry about scaling these efforts to create meaningful relationships with enough people that they will subscribe and support the newspaper long into the future. Again, a poignant comment from the News’ engagement reporter:
I feel that journalists have been taught to believe they know more than their readers. While this can be true, it’s not a valid reason to mute our community and readers. Reporters also tend to brush off engaging with their audience because it’s considered another additional task to their day…Engagement in journalism can be comparable to good customer service in any other industry. Other industries have figured out that brushing off people isn’t the best way to grow a business. Now it’s time for the journalism industry to learn this lesson.
The majority of subscribers who volunteered to be interviewed fell in two categories: long-time subscribers of the *Dallas Morning News* who grew up in the North Texas region and were raised in households who subscribed to the paper; or those who have subscribed to the newspaper off and on over many years depending on their financial situation or place of interest. Many described themselves as “news junkies,” who at least glance at headlines either in print, in the digital replica of the newspaper, or on the website daily.

All interview subjects, except one, indicated that they learn something about their community or the world around them from the newspaper on at least a weekly basis. Many indicated they found information they otherwise would not know on a daily basis. The subscriber who indicated he rarely learns something new from reading the newspaper said he considered himself “highly informed” and suggested that the newspaper’s audience is more general and is written for “somebody lower down on the scale.” In contrast, the majority of interviewees described themselves as “life-long learners” who look to the newspaper to help them see and understand parts of the larger North Texas community.

The Role of Journalists in the Community

The in-depth interview responses were quite enlightening, especially considering the assumptions that working journalists can make about the perception of their own role. “A key foundation of democracy, and hopefully we’ll maintain that,” one subscriber said. He added: “They’re just a very important part of our community and our way of life.”
One subscriber focused on metaphor to describe how she perceived journalists’ work in the community: “Think about the beam of a lighthouse. It scans the landscape and if it finds something, it puts a beam on it and you know a little bit more. I think that is a perfect description of what a journalist does. They keep scanning the landscape and if there’s something that needs attention, they draw attention to it. To me, that’s the best thing they do for me because they will see something on the landscape I don’t know to look for.”

Many subscribers focused on the importance of journalists providing local information that they otherwise would not have reported. Reporting the who, what, when, where, and why emphasized as a necessary part of journalists’ function within the community by multiple interviewees. These individuals were also the only ones to express concern about bias slipping into reporting. “I want them to report the news,” one subscriber said. “The question is what is defined as news, and does that topic strike a bell with the reporter or editor who’s gotten it and says, ‘That’s a great story. Let’s run with it,’ or ‘Let’s put that on the back burner, so to speak.’ You know, everyone has their biases.”

This perception of potential bias is the most challenging part of modern journalism for both journalists and readers. Public journalism argues that journalists must more actively engage readers to evangelize their work, but individualized evangelism is difficult to scale and there will be some individuals who are inevitably unreachable. The question for journalism practitioners is whether the concern or complaints about bias are legitimate if the individual continues to support the news organization financially. Dual-responsibility and functionalism would argue that if the individual continues their financial support through a subscription, then surely they must perceive some degree of value from the news organization, otherwise they would cancel their subscription.
One subscriber described the newspaper as being able to help them filter through the onslaught of content on social media: “One of the biggest benefits I get from the *Dallas Morning News* is that it is a reliable source…I would rank the *Dallas Morning News* as one of the top five newspapers in the country based on my experience. It’s just a great, great source of honest news you can count on.”

Fig. 3: Comments by subscribers in the *Dallas Morning News*’ subscriber-only Facebook Group addressing the efficacy of the journalists’ work. (Names redacted for privacy.)

**What Journalists Should Cover**

Most subscribers indicated that some form of holding powerful people and institutions accountable was the highest calling for journalists. This was described in keeping tabs on
government officials, especially those at the local level, through regular political coverage and robust investigative staffs. Others indicated that they wanted to know more generally about what is happening in North Texas. They were interested knowing about more events coming to the region or notable people doing impressive things. Still, many also said that it is also part of journalists’ work to entertain and amuse their readers through features about the local arts community. Many also reminded the researcher that the comics remain important to them as consumers — a reminder of what constitutes the true third-rail of American journalism.

One subscriber was deeply impressed with the access she had to the journalists:

Typically, we don’t really know what goes on behind the scenes...we’re not only getting to see some of the process behind the stories and how you put together different pieces, but we’re also asked what we think about an issue or what we’d do in a similar situation. It makes me feel more valuable as a subscriber to know that you care about us as individual community members, and not just as nameless folks out there who are subscribing. I think it’s really interesting because there’s always this debate about how online media is killing print media. But I think in this case, it’s actually kind of reinforcing that relationship. It makes me want to be a subscriber because I like that extra dynamic.

She added that she was surprised that the journalists working at the newspaper were not entirely old white men. She expressed that she was encouraged to know that younger journalists were reporting on topics and were frequent commenters in the Facebook Group.

Others echoed her sentiment, even those who were the most critical of the newspaper. One of the critical subscribers cheered the access that he had to journalists and customer service representatives. Every subscriber interviewed said they had reached a journalist within the last year by email, several had attended live events or met journalists working in the community, and all said they frequently communicated with staff members on Facebook. One subscriber added that she was impressed to find a community of fellow readers in the Facebook Group. “We have
found something, a commonality, and now we’re allowed to interact inside that commonality,” she said.

The subscribers interviewed said that they had all had largely positive experiences when they had contacted a journalist. One subscriber said she felt like she could “do a grocery store wave” to *Dallas Morning News* journalists now because they are just as responsive on Facebook as her personal friends and family are on the platform. Many interviewees said they do not necessarily expect a response when they reach out to journalists, but are regularly impressed with the generosity and kindness shown to them when they do reach out with a question or feedback. “I think anytime you are creating a dialogue on social media, that responsiveness and getting people pulled in to actually have the conversation is important,” one subscriber said. She added “You’re giving an opportunity to directly interact with whatever is happening and I think that is good.”
CHAPTER 12
CONCLUSIONS REGARDING EFFICACY OF ENGAGEMENT METHODS

The results of this ethnography are narrow in scope, but they are encouraging for the journalists at the *Dallas Morning News* practicing modern engagement journalism and researchers interested in the subject. It is clear that such work is meaningful to the community, but what is unanswered is the best way to scale these techniques. In many ways, the *News’s* particular Facebook Group is successful because it is a tight-knit community that includes readers and journalists. It is easy to imagine how this may quickly become unwieldy or unproductive if it were opened up to the public at large, or if it were not narrowly focused on subjects related to the North Texas community.

Consider this Facebook Group through the lens of functionalism, which says that media functions to explain the community; provide context about the community’s sub-groups and how they fit together to form the larger community; offer historical knowledge about the community and societal norms; and entertain and amuse the community members.147 The *News* is purposefully limiting the scope of this audience to create a digital sub-group for its subscribers. This delimiting allows the journalists involved in the group to tailor the information to the needs of the community. Curating the Group so that it is highly functional for its members increases the perceived value of the group by both the journalists and the subscribers.

Consider also the application of dual responsibility model, which says that companies should operate in the best interests of all in the community who depend on them, not only those who benefit financially.148 In the case of the subscriber Facebook Group, the journalists are

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especially sensitive to the interests of the subscribers because they are invested financially in the work produced by the newspaper. Creating a space that is highly functional for a specific group works in the financial interests of the newspaper. However, it does not account for the other communities in the greater Dallas-Fort Worth area who may not be able to afford a subscription. Dual responsibility theorists would suggest that the news organization expand how they are accepting support from its audience so that the newsroom can accommodate the needs and interests of groups beyond the paying subscribers. One possible solution has already been modeled by the New York Times, which created a program through which donors could sponsor student subscriptions.149 A similar program could be developed at the local level to improve access to news in underserved communities through philanthropic organizations.

Additionally, these research interviews indicated that Dallas Morning News subscribers find the work of the newspaper to be of high value and that the individual journalists offering their time to discuss subjects further is of additional value. This also affirms the perception that the newspaper’s engagement efforts are functional for this group. Consider the service design thinking theories, which approach the creation and improvement of the products made by organizations through a human-centered, collaborative perspective to meet the needs of the audience.

These interviews indicate that the Dallas Morning News reporters and editors practicing engagement journalism are exemplifying the efforts outlined by service design theory. They are listening and considering the end audience when creating journalism. They are choosing which platforms to engage upon through knowledge about where the audience feels most comfortable.

They also invite feedback from the audience about their work. The research interviews indicate that *Dallas Morning News* readers find the journalists to be approachable and open to criticism and feedback. They indicate that they have learned about the practice of journalism and have found the practice of engaging with journalists to be humanizing both for themselves and the journalists.

The journalists and the readers largely agree that the most important role of local journalists is to hold powerful institutions and people accountable. They also agree that helping the community better understand itself is a critical role of the local newspaper. These priorities speak not only to how this group of subscribers views the ultimate function or disfunction of the newspaper in their community, but also sets a standard by which they consider continuing their financial support. After two years of focusing on engagement, both the journalists and the readers seem to have adapted to the practice. Both groups see room for improvement. The subscribers seem especially impressed by the access and response that they are regularly given by the journalists. Some have even indicated publicly that they will renew their subscriptions because of the engagement work, which is highly encouraging.

The next question that is most pressing for journalists is whether or not they can recreate this success without operating on a major social media platform. How can these relationships be forged within a space more controlled by the journalists themselves, and not subject to the wills of Silicon Valley? Perhaps as digital subscriptions grow, newsrooms should be increasing their own efforts to develop conversations within their site comments? Or perhaps digital society at large will revert back to the days of topical message boards?

It is clear that with this small sample, these engagement efforts are meaningful and can be replicated right now by other newsrooms. A longitudinal study of subscriber habits as they relate
to engagement journalism is highly warranted. As are comparative ethnographic case studies between other newsroom’s efforts in using engagement journalism to build and retain loyal, subscribing audiences.
CHAPTER 13
STEAL THESE METHODS

You too can and should practice engagement in your newsroom. The following is a quick and dirty list of questions to ask yourself as you consider deepening relationships with your audience.

1. Who is your audience? What characteristics do you know about them? Can you use data to build a persona that helps you explain your audience to others in your news organization?

2. Who will be your engagement leader? Is there an editor who is passionate about people? How can you support them? Engagement is hard work and be emotionally taxing. They will need support.

3. Do you have allies in your newsroom who can be your engagement collaborators? Find them. They will help make your ideas better.

4. What platforms do you already reach your audience on? Do you see frequent feedback that you could address? Should you consider combining digital engagement with in-person events?

5. What is your ideal form of community response? Do you need to create community guidelines for your staff or your readers?

6. Do you have a marketing or other department that can be helpful as you try to reach new people? Where can you find support within your organization?

7. Do you want to create content? Start small. It will take time to train your journalists and your audience to want to participate in this type of work.

8. Follow through on your promises to your audience. Nothing ruins a relationship like broken promises.
9. What does your audience get by participating? Make the value proposition to them clear from the start.

10. Be prepared for success! If your first experiment goes well, how will you iterate upon it and make it better?
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO SUBSCRIBERS
1. How do you define engagement?
2. How do you practice engagement?
3. How well do you feel you know your audience?
4. How can your audience reach you or other members of your newsroom? (Ex. phone, social media, email)
5. How many journalists work in your newsroom?
6. How large is your organization’s audience?
7. What is your primary focus as a news organization?
8. How would you describe the role of journalists in society?
9. What are the three most important issues for journalists to report on?
10. What do you believe the three most important issues for your audience are?
11. What role does the audience play in reporting?
12. Do you respond when an audience member contacts you?
13. How reflective of the community is your news organization?
14. How could your organization become more reflective of the community?
15. How much do you think your audience values your contribution to their community?
16. How do you think your audience thinks of journalists?
17. Is there anything you’d like to add?
APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO JOURNALISTS
1. Why do you subscribe/support the *Dallas Morning News*?

2. How long have you been a subscriber?

3. How do you read the publication? (online vs. print vs. social media)

4. In the last year, have you contacted a journalist?

5. If so, why did you contact them?

6. How did you contact them?

7. How responsive would you describe journalists to feedback or ideas you’ve offered?

8. How well do you feel your local media represents your views?

9. How often do you learn something new from your local news?

10. How would you describe the role of journalists in your community?

11. What are the three most important topics for a local news organization to report on?

12. What do you think your local news organization could do better?

13. How do you describe the interactions you have had with journalists?

14. How would you describe your interactions with other community members online, especially in communities facilitated by journalists?

15. Is there anything you’d like to add?

16. What is your age?

17. What city do you live in?
APPENDIX C

PERMISSION FOR STUDY FROM DALLAS MORNING NEWS
The Dallas Morning News

Mike Wilson
Editor

September 4, 2018

Ms. Hannah Wise
The Dallas Morning News
By Hand Delivery

Dear Hannah,

This letter constitutes written permission for you to interview Dallas Morning News subscribers as part of your graduate thesis research. I’ve been informed of your research and approve the interviews.

Continued good luck with your studies.

Best,

[Signature]

Mike Wilson
APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
IRB #: IRB-18-425
Title: Effects of engagement efforts on audience perceptions of journalists
Creation Date: 9-3-2018
End Date: 11-1-2019
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Tracy Everbach
Review Board: UNT IRB Full Board
Sponsor:

Study History

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Key Study Contacts

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REFERENCES


