



The Challenge of Audiences as (re) Active Drivers of Journalistic Change

El Desafío de las Audiencias Como Motor (re) Activo del Cambio Periodístico

Ana-Isabel Rodríguez-Vázquez. Professor, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (Spain)

(anaisabel.rodriguez.vazquez@usc.es) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7975-1402>)

María-Cruz Negreira-Rey. Assistant Professor, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (Spain)

(cruz.negreira@usc.es) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8945-2641>)

Xosé López-García. Full Professor, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (Spain)

(xose.lopez.garcia@usc.es) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1873-8260>)

ABSTRACT

Digitization has expanded the boundaries of a journalistic field that was built up over more than a century and has led to questions about media, journalism, and the public spheres. The main objective of this article is to review and analyze the complex scenario in which journalism and digital journalism are developing, affecting legacy and digital native media, the profession and citizens, who, as an audience, occupy an increasingly central position. In the first phase of the study, the main axes and actors driving the metamorphosis of digital journalism are analyzed, to assess its functions and relevance using focus groups with academics and professionals in the area. The second phase focuses on the study of audiences and their relationship with journalism through a systematized literature review. The results show that the public is one of the main forces driving journalism. Placing them at the center of journalistic strategy involves understanding their needs, offering quality content, promoting transparency and credibility, and promoting literacy for critical media consumption. Prioritizing audiences is fundamental for establishing a solid and long-term relationship based on trust, an essential attribute for the success and sustainability of journalism in the digital era.

RESUMEN

La digitalización ha ampliado las fronteras del campo periodístico construido durante más de un siglo y ha obligado a revisar las cuestiones relacionadas con los medios, el periodismo y las esferas públicas. En este artículo partimos del objetivo general de revisar y analizar el escenario complejo en el que se desarrolla el periodismo y el periodismo digital, que afecta a medios matriciales y nativos digitales, la profesión y la ciudadanía, que como audiencia ocupa una posición cada vez más central. Para ello se analizan los principales ejes y actores que impulsan la metamorfosis del periodismo digital para valorar sus funciones y relevancia empleando la técnica del grupo de discusión de académicos y profesionales del área. La investigación se enfoca, en una segunda fase, en el estudio de las audiencias y su relación con el periodismo a través de una revisión sistematizada de literatura. Los resultados evidencian que los públicos son uno de los motores principales en el impulso del periodismo. Situarlos en el centro de la estrategia periodística implica entender sus necesidades, ofrecer contenido de calidad, promover la transparencia y credibilidad, y alfabetizar desde la base para un consumo crítico de medios. Priorizar a las audiencias es fundamental para establecer una relación sólida y duradera basada en la confianza, un atributo esencial para el éxito y la sostenibilidad del periodismo en la era digital.

KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Audiences, Digital Journalism, Journalistic Change, Journalistic Metamorphosis, Literature Review, Journalism.

Audiencias, Periodismo Digital, Cambio Periodístico, Metamorfosis Periodística, Revisión de Literatura, Periodismo.

1. Introduction

Digital journalism –the consequence of new ecological conditions for the circulation of information in contemporary society and much more than just digital technology– has expanded the boundaries of the journalistic field that was constructed over more than a century and has forced a revision of many previously taken-for-granted questions regarding media and public spheres (Steensen & Westlund, 2021). In recent years, journalism research has paid much attention to how digitization is changing journalistic practices, cultures, and institutions (Steensen & Ahva, 2015). The transformations have been so relevant that journalists themselves have reconsidered the definition of journalism and its practices (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020). Digital technology has fostered the emergence of multiple initiatives, increased free online news, and led to renewed business models. Social platforms have been integrated into media routines and have impacted how news is produced and distributed, how audiences consume it, and how the publics are shaped (Broersma & Eldridge II, 2019). From initial excitement, there was a shift to a dependent relationship with the media (Sebbah et al., 2020) and a multiplying of concerns about misinformation and quality journalism.

Digital journalism is a well-established reality (Salaverría-Aliaga, 2019) and its functions are essential for the proper functioning of democratic societies. This research is based on the need for and importance of understanding the changes produced in journalism and the consequences of disruptive processes. In this article, we start with the general objective of reviewing and analyzing the complex scenario in which journalism and digital journalism are developing, affecting legacy and digital native media, the profession and the citizenry, which occupies an increasingly central position as the audience (Fernández et al., 2016). The main axis and actors that drive the metamorphosis of digital journalism –identified from the state of the art presented in the introduction– are analyzed to assess through discussion groups of academics and professionals in the area their functions and relevance (O1). The research focuses, in a second phase, on the study of audiences and their relationship with digital journalism through a systematized literature review (O2).

The results of this literature review contribute to updating and enriching other longitudinal and bibliographic studies on the conception of audiences and their perspectives, their relationship with social platforms, and their impact on media and journalism (Costera Meijer, 2020; Masip et al., 2019; Pérez-Latre et al., 2012; Shin, 2022). Other studies are also considered as antecedents, like those that have contributed to capturing the transformation in journalism through audiences, focused on participatory journalism (Engelke, 2019), the progressive diversification of news outlets (Loecherbach et al., 2020), the impact of artificial intelligence (Calvo-Rubio & Ufarte-Ruiz, 2021), the development of mobile journalism (Westlund & Quinn, 2018), the evolution of professional profiles (Marta-Lazo et al., 2020), or innovation (García-Avilés, 2021).

1.1. Issues Concerning Journalism's Identity

The effects of digitalization and societal transformations in the last two decades have changed journalism and (potentially) its functions and have opened old and new debates in the scientific sphere. These transformations have opened the possibility of a redefinition of journalism and its relationship with democracy (Nerone, 2013). Hence, understanding the processes of constituting and forming professional identity (Raemy, 2021) is so important for this redefinition. Perhaps, therefore, journalism needs to go beyond how it has been traditionally conceptualized and practiced because technology, as a relevant external force, has altered the economy of the field and its independence. It is an open and ongoing process and a great challenge, because in the future of journalism there are risks, threats and opportunities.

Professionals, entrepreneurs in the sector, and audiences all agree that the survival of quality journalism depends on the integration of the technological and economic environments and the essential principles of the profession (Marta-Lazo et al., 2020). Since the mid-2010s, some studies have confirmed that the technological dimension will not disappear from digital journalism –instead it may increase because there is no turning back in the hi-tech revolution and it requires evolving and adapting (Ngel Vizoso, 2021). The influence of peripheral actors involved in journalism (Tandoc Jr, 2019) also preoccupies many academic and professional reflections that require constructive responses.

1.2. The Shift of Journalism Towards Audiences

Audiences play a central role in the changes involved in journalism. As audiences' preferences, needs and behaviors evolve, news media and journalists must adapt to meet those demands and stay relevant. The 'audience, first' strategy (Husni et al., 2015) involves recognizing that audiences are the *raison d'être* of the media and that their satisfaction, trust and participation are critical to the success and sustainability of journalism in the digital age.

Given the risk of contributing to inequality from journalism that is excessively focused on ratification (Schaetz, 2023)b, the turn of journalism towards audiences (Costera Meijer, 2020) refers to how news media and journalists approach their informative work by considering the public as an active actor in the process of news production and consumption, rather than as a mere receiver. This shift has been fueled by several factors, including technological progress, social media, and the digitization of news media, which have changed the ways in which people access and consume news content. However, this shift also poses challenges, such as the risk of falling into the pursuit of virality and popularity instead of quality and veracity of information, the need to manage privacy and security of audience data, or the tension between commercial interests and journalistic ethics (Rauch, 2020).

Finding an appropriate balance between the focus on audiences and the fundamental principles of journalism is a key challenge in this new paradigm. Journalists seek to understand the needs and preferences of their audience to offer relevant and meaningful content to reduce the growing disaffection of citizens towards information (Fisher et al., 2021; Steensen et al., 2020). The audience is essential for journalism to exist (Masip, 2016) and its relationship with news media involves reestablishing trust and credibility in journalistic content.

While the news landscape is evolving and facing challenges such as misinformation, polarization and online content overload, some outlets are reconsidering their purely click-based approach (Petre, 2021) and are looking for a more well-balanced and ethical way of producing and distributing news. This is what is known as the 'cloc phase': a combination of 'clicks' and values that pursues audience loyalty measured in the time the user dedicates to the news outlet and the level of engagement they manifest with it (Moe et al., 2016). The engagement or connection with the public pursues a necessary balance between obtaining engagement and journalistic values. Priority is given to quality, information verification, diversity of perspectives, transparency in the editorial process, and the promotion of fundamental journalistic values, such as accuracy, impartiality, responsibility, and ethics.

2. Materials and Methods

The study of the actors driving the transformation of digital journalism (O1) was based on the identification of ten main axes that support the metamorphosis of journalism, formulated on the basis of the literature review carried out for the state of the art. The axes and actors that are under analysis are: 1) government bodies and the political system; 2) the communication and journalistic industry; 3) large technology companies and the evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT); 4) the social web and social platforms; 5) journalists' professional organizations; 6) journalists, their profiles, and their professional roles; 7) civil organizations and their social involvement; 8) academic research in the field of communication and journalism; 9) audiences, active audiences, other mediators, and social dynamics; and 10) other commercial communication techniques.

These axes and actors have been analyzed in two discussion groups (Allen, 2017). A total of seven academics from the areas of Journalism and Audiovisual Communication –two from the University of Santiago de Compostela, three from the University of Málaga and one from the University of Vigo– and five professionals from companies in the sector –'La Voz de Galicia', 'Galicia Confidencial', 'Corporación Radio e Televisión de Galicia', 'Culturagalega.gal' and 'Picnic Ideas Felices'– participated in the discussions. The sessions were held in October 2022 and February 2023, at the Faculty of Communication Sciences of the University of Santiago de Compostela –framed in the development of the research project referenced in the support section– and ran for an average length of two and a half hours. The participants provided informed consent and were aware of the object of discussion and its purpose. The sessions were moderated by two researchers and the discussion was registered by audio recording and note taking. Subsequent coding was performed based on manual transcription of the audio clips. In the first session, participants discussed the elements that shape and characterize today's digital

journalistic media and their boundaries, as well as the factors that drive their innovation and transformation. The results of this first discussion served to contrast the validity and complete the definition of the main axis and actors of change in journalism in the contemporary context. In the second session, participants assessed the importance and actions of each of the ten identified axes, complementing their qualitative analysis with a quantitative score, with the aim of establishing a ranking according to their relevance as drivers of the renewal of digital journalism. The analysis of the focus group was complemented with the ideas expressed in different interviews over the last five years on journalistic change of five professionals of reference, reviewed on the basis of a continuous monitoring of the appearance of these profiles in general and specialized news media, in debates and forums on communication and journalism: Martin Baron, former editor of 'The Washington Post'; Alan Rusbridger, former editor of 'The Guardian'; Jill Ellen Abramson, former editor of 'The New York Times'; Juan Luis Cebrián, former editor of 'El País'; and Hervé Edwy Plenel, former editor-in-chief of 'Le Monde'.

The audience was identified in the focus groups as one of the actors with the greatest impact on the transformation and innovation of today's digital journalism. In the second phase of the research, the analysis focused on the role of audiences as strategic actors that gain relevance in the development of journalism (O2). To that end, a systematized literature review was conducted (Codina, 2018) in the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases, which highlighted the main lines of research and results in the study of audiences and their relationship with journalism and digital journalism –an emerging area in recent years. The search applied the formula [audience* AND journalism] for the titles of the publications, filtering the results by articles and by the thematic areas of Communication (WoS) and Social Sciences (Scopus). The period 2018-2023 was covered, analyzing the results of the last five full years and the current year, up to March 2023. The sample for this period accounts for 65% of the total results in the two databases. A total of 111 articles was obtained. After discarding duplicates and those not related to the object of study, the sample consisted of 57 publications. These were analyzed by applying an analysis sheet to obtain the identifying data of each article (title, authorship, journal, abstract, keywords, authors' affiliation, year of publication, DOI), its objectives, geographical scope of the research, news media and platforms under analysis, methodology and main results. Complementarily, and to frame these studies in the shared international context, the Digital News Report publications for the period 2018-2022 were also reviewed.

3. Results Analysis and Discussion

This section of the article presents and discusses the main results of the research. First, the results of the focus group are presented, comparing the ideas of the participants with the scientific literature for each of the axes and actors of journalistic change. Subsequently, the results of the literature review on audiences –valued by the discussion group as one of the actors with the greatest impact on the transformation of journalism– are shown.

3.1 The Axes of Change in Digital Journalism

Each of the axes and actors identified as drivers of change in digital journalism has multiple dimensions that have directly or indirectly affected the transformation of journalism.

The political scenarios of different countries affect changes in journalism not only because of the regulatory capacity of the respective governments in a context of media-State interaction (Žuffová, 2023), but also because of the dynamics they drive. The participants of the discussion group have argued that national and supranational governing bodies should build a regulatory framework adapted to the current context, to establish order and balance in society and the market, prevent irregularities and violations of the system, or to promote accessibility and safe technological development. However, they have also pointed to a tendency towards immobility as the market advances, which may be the result of pressure from other actors.

The communication and journalism industry has been valued for its role in the expansion of digital development, innovation in organizations and content or market expansion. Both traditional and start-up companies are considered to play a fundamental role, although they should work more with academia to enhance knowledge transfer and strengthen their corporate social responsibility. The digital era has posed considerable challenges for the sustainability of news media, while at the same time diversifying the opportunities for publishing and journalistic organizations.

Large technology companies have become important players in the network society. Such actors are valued as highly relevant in the development of the technology that determines part of the context and operational processes of news media and their relationship with the audience. Its impact on journalism is produced as a side effect of the necessary adaptation of journalism, not because there is an interest in its progress. Since its origin, technology and the 'technological giants' have contributed to the renewal of digital journalism and to opening new horizons (Whittaker, 2019).

Social networks and their adoption by news media have had a strong impact on how news is produced, shared, and consumed (Broersma & Eldridge II, 2019). In the focus group, social media applications were valued as an opportunity and a conditioner. They are key to reaching new audiences and building loyalty, experimenting with new formats, integrating participation or connecting with young people. However, they pose a significant challenge in the fight against disinformation and create new boundaries that force us to redefine journalism.

Professional organizations of journalists have defended the interests of the profession and have demanded sustainable business models for a public interest digital journalism (Medina-Laverón et al., 2021). However, they were critically assessed in the focus group, as participants stated that they are not always useful because they often lag behind the market and the demands of journalism. They also point out that they can be biased organizations, with little collaboration with companies and governments, little pluralism, and lack of integration of young professionals.

Innovative journalists, new professional profiles that emerged in the periphery of journalism and interdisciplinary teams have driven, with their practices, important changes in digital journalism. The experts in the focus group described them as great drivers, because of their courage to lead innovative projects, develop new ideas or take on new challenges, even though they often struggle against an adverse context. Transnational ties, in many cases, have encouraged the pace of adoption of new practices (Heft & Baack, 2022).

Civil organizations have actively participated in the creation of content by starting their own channels. These actors usually agree with the traditional rules governing quality journalism, but in recent years they have been calling for media literacy of the citizenry against information disorders. The focus group participants defined this actor as a necessary watchdog and defender of the journalistic profession, although in many contexts it does not get to mobilize, build proposals or participate with the other actors involved.

Training and research, led by universities, have both played a relevant role in the training of professionals with the adaptation of curricula to the competencies required by the digital context. The academy and the work of researchers were valued by experts as an axis of dynamization that responds quickly to new phenomena and changes in journalism to provide knowledge and reflection, as well as to train new professionals. However, it was pointed out that there is a lack of transfer, sharing and dialogue with the society and the industry.

Audiences (whether more or less active), influencers and the long list of mediators and recommenders that have joined the network have established new communicative dynamics. Many news media have placed at the center of their strategies a better knowledge of their audiences, which is key to quality journalism (Costera Meijer, 2020). Digital media have incorporated emerging profiles and measurement tools to establish a closer relationship with audiences (Rodríguez-Vázquez et al., 2022). They were valued in the discussion group as a major driver of digital journalism, as both media and journalists seek to know them, how they consume and what they demand, to discover their assessment of the journalistic service, integrate them actively into the information process, regain their trust or connect with young people. They are also active media watchers, although their media literacy needs to be improved to be able to face disinformation.

Commercial and communication techniques –including native and brand advertising, public relations, digital marketing– have established renewed influences with journalism. The effectiveness of native advertising lies in its ability to resemble content produced by journalists, but the potential to mislead readers threatens the credibility of journalism and raises ethical concerns. Focus group participants valued its impact on the renewal of journalistic language and the transfer of marketing techniques to media organizations.

Finally, the focus group participants quantitatively assessed, on a scale of 1-10, the relevance of the different actors in the transformation of digital journalism (Table 1).

Table 1: Average Quantitative Score Assigned to the Actors Driving Change in Digital Journalism.

Axes and Actors	Average Score (1-10)
Journalists, professional roles and profiles	9.5
Audiences, active audiences and social dynamics	9.5
Communication and journalism industry	8.25
Social web and social media	7.62
Academic research in the field	7
Other commercial communication techniques	7
Large technology companies and ICT evolution	6
Governing bodies and political system	5
Professional journalists' organizations	4.25
Civil organizations and social involvement	4

3.2. Audiences as an Object of Study in Journalism

Audiences and their news consumption behaviors have been studied because of their strategic importance for news media and journalists. In recent years, audience trust has declined, except during the hardest moments of the Covid-19 pandemic (Newman et al., 2022). Although a gradual growth of audiences paying for information has been observed, it is still a minority in most countries (Newman et al., 2022) and users prefer to subscribe to other services (Newman et al., 2019). In a polarized context, concerns about misinformation have also increased (Newman et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2022), coupled with conscious news avoidance (Newman et al., 2021). Another challenge regarding audiences is to understand and respond to the behavior of Generation Z, which prefers to access news through social platforms (Newman et al., 2020). Since 2018, there has been a decline in the use of Facebook for news consumption, an increase in private messaging services, and a significant growth of Instagram and TikTok (Newman et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2020).

A total of 57 articles were analyzed in the systematized literature review, with audiences and their relationship with journalism and digital journalism as the main object of study. The number of articles maintains a growth trend in the period studied, with 4 being published in 2018, 12 in 2019, 8 in 2020, 12 in 2021, 17 in 2022 and 4 in 2023. The highest volume of articles was published in the journals 'Journalism Studies' (21.05%), 'Journalism Practice' (19.30%), 'Digital Journalism' (17.54%), 'Journalism' (12.28%), 'Media and Communication' (7.02%), and 'Observatorio' (3.51%).

Regarding the geographic context of the research, 9.12% are comparative cross-national studies or have an international object of analysis; 10.83% of the articles are framed in European countries, 7.98% in the United States and Canada, 2.85% in Latin America, 1.71% in the Middle East, 1.71% in Africa and 0.57% in Australia. 40.35% of the papers focus on audience-related phenomena, taking news media as the object of study, while studies focused on social platforms are in a minority. In terms of methodological design, it is common to find mixed methodologies in the research, although the qualitative nature of many of the studies is noteworthy. Among the most frequent methods are surveys, quantitative and qualitative content analysis, literature reviews, case studies, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, focus groups, Delphi, ethnography, participant observation, and experiments.

While the volume of publications grew in the period under analysis, the topics and objects of study have also been evolving. In general terms, research in 2018 and 2019 focused on audience participation and active audiences, participatory and reciprocal journalism, user-generated content management, metrics or engagement in media and platforms. In 2020, the idea of a turn towards journalism audiences and the need to connect with them on an emotional level was consolidated. Research on trust in journalistic brands and information and factors that determine it grew. The impact of metrics or the integration of the audience into innovation processes continued to be studied. In 2021, the topic of trust in relation to neutrality or media literacy was maintained and the concept of engagement was further developed. In 2022 and 2023, investigations defending a greater shift towards audiences were published and there was a proliferation of studies on perception in relation to constructive, immersive, predictive, slow or live journalism.

From the first steps of digital journalism to the present day, there has been a progressive shift towards audiences, driven by the awareness of serving the citizenship of quality journalism, digitization, and the growing relevance of audience engagement (Costera Meijer, 2020). A greater understanding of legacy and digital native

media consumption is being sought (Nelson, 2020) and the transformation of the traditional commercial logic of media organizations has been studied, adapting to more audience-centric strategies, with varying degrees of development depending on the geographical and media context (Blassnig & Esser, 2022).

This shift must continue for journalism to become more inclusive, to build a news agenda that also serves commercially unattractive audiences, and for journalists to be considered active agents (Swart et al., 2022). Strengthening media literacy is key to regaining the trust of audiences (Robinson et al., 2021), which also depends on how they value journalistic quality in relation to the sources of information (Manninen, 2020) or their perceptions of the ideological positioning of the media (Ojala, 2021).

The search for connection with audiences, increasingly fragmented, makes use of the emotional bond that can be created with them (Lecheler, 2020). Several researchers have studied the potential of journalism for this purpose. Live journalism is experimented with to connect with the audience in the public space and to build a more vivid and explanatory narrative (Adams & Cooper, 2022; Ruotsalainen & Villi, 2021; Tenenboim & Stroud, 2020). Constructive journalism, with a positive approach to current affairs and a focus on solutions, can help regain trust and connection with the media (Fei, 2021; Meier, 2018). Testimonial journalism allows audiences to feel more represented and empathize with stories (Or et al., 2023), while immersive journalism helps to establish emotional connection (Greber et al., 2023). Slow journalism is presented as quality journalism that requires conscious and leisurely reading (Manias-Muñoz & Álvarez Berastegi, 2022). On the other hand, predictive journalism can foster the engagement of users in their interaction with journalists and expert sources (Allaham & Diakopoulos, 2022).

Research on audience engagement and commitment has been another of the main topics of study. The theoretical conception of engagement was contrasted with its management in the media, where the development of collaborative practices in newsrooms is not free of complications (Schmidt et al., 2022), although its importance is key to the search for new models of sustainability (Nelson, 2021a). Although the pursuit of engagement is usually associated with the online environment, some studies show that journalists may prefer forms of reciprocal journalism in offline contexts, with physical encounters with readers (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019).

The use of audience metrics has an impact on journalistic work, as it creates tensions between the search for massive audiences and quality news service (Fürst, 2020; Nelson & Tandoc Jr, 2019). When engagement is transformed into economic capital, metrics can be the origin of inequalities in terms of the attention paid to different media audiences (Schaetz, 2023).

Audience engagement is conditioned, in part, by the relationship of news media and users with social platforms. News media must adapt to the consumption and interaction behaviors of these sites (Fincham, 2021) to reach or expand their audiences, which causes difficulties for new or small journalistic projects (Ratner et al., 2023). Social media can also be an opportunity to disseminate journalistic content and encourage participation, as has been observed in the study of initiatives on YouTube (Djerf-Pierre et al., 2019).

The audience currently plays an active role as a participant in the news production process, although the conception of its functions held by journalists and users themselves may be different (Vos et al., 2019). In studies of the audience, methodological proposals have been designed that define the different degrees of participation, depending on the possibilities offered by the media and the involvement of users (Spyridou, 2019).

Some studies on audience engagement show that participation can be managed to integrate user-generated content into media digital editions (Mata & Masip, 2018), experiment with audience-led content to deliver relevant and quality news (Nettlefold & Pecl, 2022), produce big data journalism projects (Palomo et al., 2019), develop technological innovations and solutions (Zayani, 2021), or discuss the integration of artificial intelligence applications into the news process (Guzman, 2019).

Participation spaces are assumed to be positive ways to integrate audiences and regain their trust, but their management and control by journalists is not free from difficulties (Deavours et al., 2022; Wolfgang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, academia stresses the need to know the perspective of audiences on the dominant journalistic discourse (Banjac, 2022) and the roles of journalism to contrast it with that of the profession itself (Riedl & Eberl, 2022).

4. Conclusions

From the debate on the main axes and actors driving the metamorphosis of digital journalism (O1), relevant conclusions can be drawn that explain this transformation in the current complex context. Firstly, there are actors who are not fulfilling their responsibility to act in the transformation of journalism and

do not respond effectively to the existing challenges, as is the case of government bodies, professional organizations of journalists or civil entities. On the contrary, some actors are valued as important drivers of digital journalism, such as the communication industry, technology companies and social platforms. These largely shape the game board, although their driving force tends to be economic and not that of service to citizens.

Journalists and audiences are the most relevant actors in the process of journalism metamorphosis. Journalists drive innovation from their knowledge and professional experience, with efforts to engage in continuous learning, adaptation to the changing scenario, and a vocation for informative service. Audiences, on the other hand, are the beginning and end of journalistic activity and drive it with their active roles and demands. It is concluded that a greater involvement of researchers and universities, professional and civil organizations is necessary to reach the organs of power, which must assume their role as regulators to create a safe context for citizens.

The systematized literature review on the relationship between audiences and digital journalism (O2) has shown a radical shift of news media and journalists towards audiences, which allows us to identify some key transformations in the current context.

- Adaptation to technological and media consumption changes. It involves keeping abreast of trends and changes in the consumption behavior of audiences, who have greater control over how, when and where they consume news. News media need to adapt to build closer relationships and to stay relevant and attractive.
- Audience knowledge, personalization, and adaptation of content as a permanent challenge. Audience analysis is based on the notion of ‘journalistic humility’, recognizing that audience behavior can never be fully understood or predicted (Nelson, 2021b). Metrics in journalism (Fürst, 2020) entail tackling audience segmentation, collecting demographic data, assessing satisfaction, and understanding audience preferences. In addition, news media must be concerned about news avoiders (Newman et al., 2021).
- Fostering interaction and participation. Active audiences (Froufe & Neira, 2014) have driven the inclusion of forms of participatory journalism (Deavours et al., 2022) and the integration of audiences into news production (Lewis & Westlund, 2015), which is essential in times of low media credibility. Constructive, positive or solutions journalism (Meier, 2018), collaborative journalism, reciprocal journalism (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019) or local journalism (Pignard-Cheynel & Amigo, 2023), among others, provide approaches in this direction by encouraging dialogue with audiences.
- Diversity and inclusion. Growing awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion in the media involves listening to marginalized voices (Banjac, 2022), making space for different points of view, and ensuring that news coverage is inclusive and equitable.
- Primacy of journalistic quality. The production of high-quality journalistic content that is relevant, interesting and valuable to audiences serves to vindicate the journalistic profession in the face of the threat of artificial intelligence (Calvo-Rubio & Ufarte-Ruiz, 2021). The advance of tools such as ChatGPT forces a review of the verification of information, impartiality, the presentation of diverse perspectives, the contextualization of topics, and the narration of impactful and meaningful stories, applying journalistic precision and ethics.
- A commitment to trust and credibility with high doses of transparency. Being transparent in the editorial process forces media organizations and platforms to open newsrooms to generate trust, show how information is obtained and verified, correct errors in a timely manner, and reinforce journalistic ethics for greater credibility (Fisher et al., 2021; Ojala, 2021; Robinson et al., 2021).
- Claim for media literacy. Education is said to be the main tool to help audiences develop critical skills to evaluate the veracity of online information, especially in social media (Robinson et al., 2021). The audience must appreciate and claim quality journalistic work, for which they must understand the different journalistic genres and recognize fake news or disinformation.

The literature review reflects a shift from journalism to audiences, which is also observed in academia. Research is now focused on understanding audience perceptions of information and news media –relevant

to identify the factors that influence their appreciation of reliability and quality, or emotional connection—and studying different forms of journalism—constructive, slow, immersive, etc.—to connect more effectively with them. The research feeds open theoretical debates—such as the conception of engagement or active audiences—and issues that are the subject of debate in the profession—such as the management of metrics and their impact on editorial decisions, adaptation to platforms or the integration of the public into innovation processes. The review of the literature allows us to identify lines of research in which further progress is needed, such as the perception of audiences to deepen knowledge of mistrust, disaffection or aversion detected towards news and information, which is highly worrying. The study of the media literacy of the different audiences should be strengthened to transfer to society strategies for the training and education of audiences.

Audiences have a significant impact on changes in journalism, as their preferences, needs, interactions and expectations influence the way news is produced, distributed, and presented. Placing audiences at the center of journalistic strategy involves understanding their needs, offering high-quality content, encouraging participation, dialogue and listening, promoting transparency and credibility, and adapting to changes in media consumption behavior. Prioritizing audiences is fundamental to establishing a solid and lasting relationship based on trust, an essential attribute for the success and sustainability of journalism in the digital era.

Author Contribution

Idea, Ana-Isabel Rodríguez-Vázquez, Xosé López-García, María-Cruz Negreira-Rey; Literature review (state of the art), Ana-Isabel Rodríguez-Vázquez, Xosé López-García; Methodology, Xosé López-García, Ana-Isabel Rodríguez-Vázquez, María-Cruz Negreira-Rey; Data analysis, María-Cruz Negreira-Rey, Xosé López-García; Results, Xosé López-García, María-Cruz Negreira-Rey; Discussion and conclusions, Ana-Isabel Rodríguez-Vázquez; Writing (original draft), Ana-Isabel Rodríguez-Vázquez, María-Cruz Negreira-Rey, Xosé López-García; Final revisions, Ana-Isabel Rodríguez-Vázquez, María-Cruz Negreira-Rey, Xosé López-García; Project design and sponsorship, Xosé López-García.

Funding Agency

This article is part of the R&D project Digital-native media in Spain: Strategies, competencies, social involvement and (re)definition of practices in journalistic production and diffusion (PID2021-122534OB-C21), funded by MCIN / AEI/10.13039/501100011033/ and by ‘ERDF A way of making Europe’.

References

- Adams, C., & Cooper, G. (2022). “i Felt I Got to Know Everyone”: How News on Stage Combines Theatre and Journalism for a Live Audience. *Journalism Practice*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2022.2052345>
- Allaham, M., & Diakopoulos, N. (2022). Predicting Covid: Understanding Audience Responses to Predictive Journalism via Online Comments. *New Media & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221135632>
- Allen, M. (Ed.). (2017). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411>
- Banjac, S. (2022). An Intersectional Approach to Exploring Audience Expectations of Journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 10(1), 128-147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1973527>
- Belair-Gagnon, V., Nelson, J. L., & Lewis, S. C. (2019). Audience Engagement, Reciprocity, and the Pursuit of Community Connectedness in Public Media Journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 13(5), 558-575. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1542975>
- Blassnig, S., & Esser, F. (2022). The “audience Logic” in Digital Journalism: an Exploration of Shifting News Logics Across Media Types and Time. *Journalism Studies*, 23(1), 48-69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.2000339>
- Broersma, M., & Eldridge II, S. A. (2019). Journalism and Social Media: Redistribution of Power? *Media and Communication*, 7(1), 193-197. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i1.2048>
- Calvo-Rubio, L. M., & Ufarte-Ruiz, M.-J. (2021). Artificial Intelligence and Journalism: Systematic Review of Scientific Production in Web of Science and Scopus (2008-2019). *Communication & Society*, 34(2), 159-176. <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.34.2.159-176>
- Codina, L. (2018). *Revisión Bibliográfica Sistematizada: Procedimientos Generales Y Framework Para Ciencias Humanas Y Sociales*. Barcelona: Máster Universitario en Comunicación Social. Departamento de Comunicación. Universitat Pompeu Fabra. <https://doi.org/10.31009/metodos.2020.i01.05>
- Costera Meijer, I. (2020). Understanding the Audience Turn in Journalism: From Quality Discourse to Innovation Discourse as Anchoring Practices 1995–2020. *Journalism Studies*, 21(16), 2326-2342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1847681>
- Deavours, D., Heath, W., Miller, K., Viehouser, M., Palacios-Plugge, S., & Broussard, R. (2022). Reciprocal journalism’s double-edged sword: How journalists resolve cognitive dissonance after experiencing harassment from audiences on social media. *Journalism*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849221109654>

- Djerf-Pierre, M., Lindgren, M., & Budinski, M. A. (2019). The Role of Journalism on Youtube: Audience Engagement With "Superbug" Reporting. *Media and Communication*, 7(1), 235-247. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i1.1758>
- Engelke, K. M. (2019). Online participatory journalism: A systematic literature review. *Media and Communication*, 7(4), 31-44. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i4.2250>
- Fei, W. (2021). A New Exploration of Journalism: Strengthen the Connection With Its Audience. *Social Sciences in China*, 42(2), 169-183. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02529203.2021.1924468>
- Fernández, S. P., Arrillaga, I. L., & González, D. G. (2016). European Newspapers' Digital Transition: New Products and New Audiences. *Comunicar*, 24(46), 27-35. <https://doi.org/10.3916/C46-2016-03-english>
- Fincham, K. (2021). Business as Usual: How Journalism's Professional Logics Continue to Shape News Organization Policies Around Social Media Audiences. *Journalism Practice*, 17(7), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1991437>
- Fisher, C., Flew, T., Park, S., Lee, J. Y., & Dulleck, U. (2021). Improving Trust in News: Audience Solutions. *Journalism Practice*, 15(10), 1497-1515. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1787859>
- Froufe, N. Q., & Neira, A. G. (2014). Active Audiences: Social Audience Participation in Television. *Comunicar*, 22(43), 83-90. <https://doi.org/10.3916/C43-2014-08>
- Fürst, S. (2020). In the Service of Good Journalism and Audience Interests? How Audience Metrics Affect News Quality. *Media and Communication*, 8(3), 270-280. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i3.3228>
- García-Avilés, J.-A. (2021). Journalism innovation research, a diverse and flourishing field (2000-2020). *Profesional De La Información*, 30(1), 1-33. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2021.ene.10>
- Greber, H., Aaldering, L., & Lecheler, S. (2023). The Worthwhileness of Immersive Journalism—Taking on an Audience Perspective. *Journalism Practice*, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2023.2177711>
- Guzman, A. L. (2019). Prioritizing the Audience's View of Automation in Journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 7(8), 1185-1190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1681902>
- Heft, A., & Baack, S. (2022). Cross-bordering Journalism: How Intermediaries of Change Drive the Adoption of New Practices. *Journalism*, 23(11), 2328-2346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884921999540>
- Husni, S., Wenger, D. H., & Price, H. (2015). *Managing Today's News Media: Audience First* (1st ed.). SAGE Publications. <https://go.revistacomunicar.com/OV1mV8>
- Lecheler, S. (2020). The Emotional Turn in Journalism Needs to Be About Audience Perceptions: Commentary-virtual Special Issue on the Emotional Turn. *Digital Journalism*, 8(2), 287-291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1708766>
- Lewis, S. C., & Westlund, O. (2015). Actors, actants, audiences, and activities in cross-media news work: A matrix and a research agenda. *Digital Journalism*, 3(1), 19-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.927986>
- Loecherbach, F., Moeller, J., Trilling, D., & van Atteveldt, W. (2020). The Unified Framework of Media Diversity: a Systematic Literature Review. *Digital Journalism*, 8(5), 605-642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1764374>
- Manias-Muñoz, M., & Álvarez Berastegi, A. (2022). Is Digital Slow Journalism Valued? An Analysis of Its Audience in Spain. *Observatorio (OBS*) Journal*, 16(2), 251-269. <https://doi.org/10.15847/obsOBS16220222039>
- Manninen, V. J. E. (2020). If only they knew: Audience expectations and actual sourcing practices in online journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 14(4), 412-428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1625719>
- Marta-Lazo, C., Peñalva, S., & Rodríguez Rodríguez, J. (2020). Digital Journalism Competences. Systematic Review of the Scientific Literature on New Professional Profiles of the Journalist. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 75(ART-2020-119215), 53-68 <https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2020-1416>
- Masip, P. (2016). Investigar El Periodismo Desde La Perspectiva De Las Audiencias. *Profesional De La Información*, 25(3), 323-330. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2016.may.01>
- Masip, P., Ruiz-Caballero, C., & Suau, J. (2019). Audiencias Activas Y Discusión Social en La Esfera Pública Digital. Artículo De Revisión. *Profesional De La Información*, 28(2), 280204. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2019.mar.04>
- Mata, J., & Masip, P. (2018). Participatory Journalism and Active Audiences: an Analysis of the Participation Spaces in the Television News Websites of Spain and Brazil. *Tripodos*, 42, 136-151. <https://bit.ly/3KVVLSxy>
- Medina-Laverón, M., Sánchez-Taberner, A., & Breiner, J. (2021). Some Viable Models for Digital Public-interest Journalism. *Profesional De La Información*, 30(1), e300118. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2021.ene.18>
- Meier, K. (2018). How Does the Audience Respond to Constructive Journalism? Two Experiments With Multifaceted Results. *Journalism Practice*, 12(6), 764-780. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1470472>
- Moe, H., Poell, T., & Van Dijck, J. (2016). Rearticulating Audience Engagement: Social Media and Television. *Television & New Media*, 17(2), 99-107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476415616194>
- Nelson, J. L. (2020). The Enduring Popularity of Legacy Journalism: an Analysis of Online Audience Data. *Media and Communication*, 8(2), 40-50. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i2.2736>
- Nelson, J. L. (Ed.). (2021a). *Imagined Audiences: How Journalists Perceive and Pursue the Public*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197542590.001.0001>
- Nelson, J. L. (2021b). The Next Media Regime: the Pursuit of 'audience Engagement' in Journalism. *Journalism*, 22(9), 2350-2367. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919862375>
- Nelson, J. L., & Tandoc Jr, E. C. (2019). Doing "well" or Doing "good": What Audience Analytics Reveal About Journalism's Competing Goals. *Journalism Studies*, 20(13), 1960-1976. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1547122>
- Nerone, J. (2013). The Historical Roots of the Normative Model of Journalism. *Journalism*, 14(4), 446-458. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884912464177>
- Nettlefold, J., & Pecl, G. T. (2022). Engaged journalism and climate change: Lessons from an audience-led, locally focused Australian collaboration. *Journalism Practice*, 16(1), 19-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1798272>

- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Levy, D. A. L., & Nielsen, R. K. (2018). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://bit.ly/3UUVKqA>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2019). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://bit.ly/3GVK6SH>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Eddy, K., & Nielsen, R. K. (2022). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://bit.ly/3UUVKqA>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., & Nielsen, R. K. (2020). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://bit.ly/41LZZDk>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2021). *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://bit.ly/3oxIVRr>
- Ngel Vizoso, Á. (2021). Periodismo De Alta Tecnología: Signo De Los Tiempos Digitales Del Tercer Milenio. *Profesional De La Información*, 30(3), 300-301. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2021.may.01>
- Ojala, M. (2021). Is the Age of Impartial Journalism Over? The Neutrality Principle and Audience (Dis) Trust in Mainstream News. *Journalism Studies*, 22(15), 2042-2060. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1942150>
- Or, S., Meir, N., Ron, D., Livio, O., Tsfati, Y., & Tal-Or, N. (2023). The Impact of Testimony Journalism on Audience Engagement: an Experimental Investigation of the Effects of Point of View. *Journalism Studies*, 24(5), 573-593. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2173957>
- Palomo, B., Teruel, L., & Blanco-Castilla, E. (2019). Data Journalism Projects Based on User-generated Content. How La Nación Data Transforms Active Audience Into Staff. *Digital Journalism*, 7(9), 1270-1288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1626257>
- Pérez-Latre, F. J., Portilla-Manjón, I., & Sánchez-Blanco, C. (2012). Social networks, media and audiences: A literature review. 24(1), 63-74. <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.24.36221>
- Perreault, G. P., & Ferrucci, P. (2020). What is Digital Journalism? Defining the Practice and Role of the Digital Journalist. *Digital Journalism*, 8(10), 1298-1316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1848442>
- Petre, C. (Ed.). (2021). *All the News That's Fit to Click: How Metrics Are Transforming the Work of Journalists*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691228754>
- Pignard-Cheynel, N., & Amigo, L. (2023). (Re) Connecting With Audiences. An Overview of Audience-inclusion Initiatives in European French-speaking Local News Media. *Journalism*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849231173299>
- Raemy, P. (2021). A Theory of Professional Identity in Journalism: Connecting Discursive Institutionalism, Socialization, and Psychological Resilience Theory. *Communication Theory*, 31(4), 841-861. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/ctaa019>
- Ratner, Y., Dvir Gvirsman, S., & Ben-David, A. (2023). "Saving Journalism from Facebook's Death Grip"? The Implications of Content-Recommendation Platforms on Publishers and Their Audiences. *Digital Journalism*, 11(8), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2023.2180403>
- Rauch, J. (Ed.). (2020). *Resisting the News: Engaged Audiences, Alternative Media, and Popular Critique of Journalism*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.2003214>
- Riedl, A., & Eberl, J.-M. (2022). Audience Expectations of Journalism: What's Politics Got to Do With It? *Journalism*, 23(8), 1682-1699. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920976422>
- Robinson, S., Jensen, K., & Dávalos, C. (2021). "listening Literacies" as Keys to Rebuilding Trust in Journalism: a Typology for a Changing News Audience. *Journalism Studies*, 22(9), 1219-1237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1937677>
- Rodríguez-Vázquez, A.-I., Dragomir, M., & Francisco-Lens, N. (2022). Audiences First: Professional Profiles, Tools and Strategies of Digital Newsrooms to Connect With the Public. In *Total Journalism: Models, Techniques and Challenges* (pp. 211-226). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88028-6_16
- Ruotsalainen, J., & Villi, M. (2021). 'A Shared Reality between a Journalist and the Audience': How Live Journalism Reimagines News Stories. *Media and Communication*, 9(2), 167-177. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v9i2.3809>
- Salaverría-Aliaga, R. (2019). Digital journalism: 25 years of research. Review article. *Profesional De La Información*, 28(1), 280-301. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2019.ene.01>
- Schaetz, N. (2023). Journalism & Audience Datafication: How Audience Data Practices Shape Inequity. *Digital Journalism*, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2023.2171894>
- Schmidt, T. R., Nelson, J. L., & Lawrence, R. G. (2022). Conceptualizing the Active Audience: Rhetoric and Practice in "engaged Journalism". *Journalism*, 23(1), 3-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920934246>
- Sebbah, B., Sire, G., & Smyrniaos, N. (2020). Journalism and Platforms: From Symbiosis to Dependency. *Sur Le Journalisme, About Journalism, Sobre Jornalismo*, 9(1), 12-17. <https://bit.ly/43Y2ofK>
- Shin, S. Y. (2022). News Media Image: A Typology of Audience Perspectives. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 24(2), 80-140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15226379221092019>
- Spyridou, L.-P. (2019). Analyzing the active audience: Reluctant, reactive, fearful, or lazy? Forms and motives of participation in mainstream journalism. *Journalism*, 20(6), 827-847. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918784733>
- Steenen, S., & Ahva, L. (2015). Theories of Journalism in a Digital Age. *An Exploration and Introduction*, 3(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.927984>
- Steenen, S., Ferrer-Conill, R., & Peters, C. (2020). (Against a) Theory of Audience Engagement With News. *Journalism Studies*, 21(12), 1662-1680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1788414>
- Steenen, S., & Westlund, O. (Eds.). (2021). *What is Digital Journalism Studies?* Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429259555>
- Swart, J., Groot Kormelink, T., Costera Meijer, I., & Broersma, M. (2022). Advancing a Radical Audience Turn in Journalism. Fundamental Dilemmas for Journalism Studies. *Digital Journalism*, 10(1), 8-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.2024764>

- Tandoc Jr, E. C. (2019). Journalism at the Periphery. *Media and Communication*, 7(4), 138-143. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i4.2626>
- Tenenboim, O., & Stroud, N. J. (2020). Enacted Journalism Takes the Stage: How Audiences Respond to Reporting-based Theater. *Journalism Studies*, 21(6), 713-730. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1720521>
- Vos, T. P., Eichholz, M., & Karaliova, T. (2019). Audiences and Journalistic Capital: Roles of Journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 20(7), 1009-1027. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1477551>
- Westlund, O., & Quinn, S. (2018). Mobile Journalism and Mojos. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.841>
- Whittaker, J. P. (Ed.). (2019). *Tech Giants, Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Journalism*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351013758>.
- Wolfgang, J. D., McConnell, S., & Blackburn, H. (2020). Commenters as a Threat to Journalism? How Comment Moderators Perceive the Role of the Audience. *Digital Journalism*, 8(7), 925-944. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1802319>
- Zayani, M. (2021). Digital Journalism, Social Media Platforms, and Audience Engagement: the Case of Aj+. *Digital Journalism*, 9(1), 24-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1816140>
- Žuffová, M. (2023). Fit for Purpose? Exploring the Role of Freedom of Information Laws and Their Application for Watchdog Journalism. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 28(1), 300-322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211006702>