THE NEWS ENGAGEMENT PROCESS MODEL AND THE IMPACT OF JOURNALISTS'
EMPATHETIC COMMUNICATION ON AUDIENCES' PSYCHOLOGICAL
ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Audience metrics and other quantitative measures are limited in their ability to record and represent the scope and richness of news engagement ideals and practices in journalism. By looking into psychological and behavioral aspects of news engagement, this dissertation work aims to capture the complexity of news engagement. Particularly, this study proposes a news engagement process model that summarizes the mechanisms by which audiences and journalists engage with one other, with the intention of providing a framework that guides scholars to test relationships between journalists' engagement practices and subsequent audience engagement. The news engagement model consisting of three core constructs—journalists' behavioral engagement, audiences' psychological engagement, and audiences' behavioral engagement—is rooted in the assumption the news engagement process is a reciprocal interaction between journalists and audiences.

Based on the proposed model, this study tested one proposition from the model: the effects of journalists' empathetic communication behaviors (i.e., journalists' behavioral engagement) on audiences' psychological engagement. Emotionality, as opposed to historically detached practices in journalism, is considered to be an approach to enrich audience and journalist relationships. An online experiment with 338 respondents (2 X 3 factorial, between subjects) was conducted to test the impact of journalists' empathetic communication in radio news stories, each describing a catastrophic event, on audiences' psychological engagement. Audiences' psychological engagement was measured using the following variables: sadness, journalist identification, interviewee identification, cognitive involvement (attention, recognition, and elaboration), and transportation. Relevance and novelty were predicted to moderate the main effects between the reporter's empathetic reporting and audiences' psychological engagement.

Results of the experiment indicated that the radio journalist's empathetic communication did not have a significant impact on audiences' psychological engagement. In addition, neither relevance nor novelty had a significant interaction effect. In ad-hoc analyses that were based only on the responses of regular radio news listeners, the journalist's empathetic reporting was instead negatively related to respondents' feeling sad and recognition (against the predictions). These non-significant and contradictory results may suggest—despite the scholarly push for empathetic communication among journalists —that audiences may not respond or respond negatively to expressions of empathy by professional journalists in broadcast news stories. Implications and directions for further research are presented, emphasizing the need for detailed investigation of the contexts in which journalists should adopt perspective-taking in journalism practice.

Keywords audience engagement, engaged journalism, emotional turn, empathy, empathetic communication, news engagement

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, journalism scholars and professionals have increasingly acknowledged the need to investigate how audiences feel, think, and behave when consuming news (Beckett & Deuze, 2016). Digitalization of news now requires news media professionals to develop more dialogic and interactive relationships with audiences, including recognizing audiences' emotions when communicating with them (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). Many journalism scholars and news professionals believe that news engagement is vital to journalism's success because engaged journalism hypothetically promotes accountability and public trust (Green-Barber & McKinley, 2019; Lewis et al., 2014). Given the momentum toward softer, relationship-building communication practices, research on how journalists interact with audiences, including how audiences respond to their engagement efforts, is necessary. This study proposes a broad news engagement framework to explain both journalists' engagement practices and audience engagement responses. Such a model could help situate scholarship in news environments consisting of fragmented and personalized audiences, and also guide scholars on how to test the effectiveness of journalists' engagement efforts with their audiences.

Academics and news industry employees have primarily assessed news engagement by focusing on quantitative indicators, such as number of page views, retweets, and subscriptions (Lawrence et al., 2018; Nelson, 2018; Nelson, 2021). News engagement, however, is not just about metrics; rather, individuals' engagement can encompass both emotional and cognitive involvement, which often may lead audiences to immerse themselves in the news stories they consume and prompt them to take action (as often suggested or initiated by journalists). Yet,

scholars have given little consideration to the complexity of news engagement, including the effects of these practices on audiences' psychological and behavioral engagement.

However, recently, scholars have been arguing for a broader view of news engagement—one that is mutually beneficial to both audiences and journalists and is based on interactivity and reciprocal exchanges among them (Lewis et al., 2014; Meier et al., 2018; Nelson, 2018). This also implies that journalists might need to be more open to communicate with their audiences and embody a less detached demeanor in their reporting, which would constitute a shift away from the norm of having dispassionate and emotionless attitudes toward their sources and subjects. Some scholars and practitioners suggest that news professionals may want to consider demonstrating emotions, specifically empathy, in response to challenges and audience expectations in contemporary media environments (Blank-Libra, 2016; Bui, 2018; Glück, 2016; Lecheler, 2020). Scholars have recently begun qualitatively investigating audience's responses, indicating the impact of journalists' empathetic behaviors on audience interaction and engagement (Bui, 2018; Glück, 2016; Jenkins & Powers, 2023; Niemeyer, 2021). Yet, these underlying assumptions have not been fully integrated or even acknowledged when theorizing about or measuring news engagement. In extant literature, journalists' engagement practices are justified by loosely connecting logic to the need to better serve marginalized audience groups and interact with active audiences on digital platforms in order to reinvigorate declining news media industry revenues. Emotions have been shown to be considered to play a crucial role in engagement, but when evidence was provided, it is mainly based on qualitative research, such as interviews with journalists (Glück, 2016; Jenkins & Powers, 2023; Pantti, 2010) or scholars may present them in theoretical essays (Lecheler, 2020).

In this dissertation, I define news engagement as audiences' psychological involvement with and/or behavioral participation in consuming news content, as prompted by certain journalist behaviors. In order to examine this phenomenon, I propose a news engagement process model based on the premise that news engagement is an ongoing interactive process between journalists and audiences. The model assumes a feedback loop involving journalists' engagement behaviors and audience engagement—the latter is comprised of audiences' psychological (emotional and cognitive) and behavioral (e.g., sharing, commenting, providing news story ideas) engagement. Specifically, the model emphasizes audiences' psychological engagement as "rich, qualitative 'felt' experiences" (Isaac, Calder, & Malthouse, 2015, p. 3), which encompass audiences' emotional reactions to and bonding with interviewees and/or journalists as well as their cognitive involvement (e.g., recognition, elaboration, and attention) with a news story. By articulating what mechanisms are at work during audiences' engagement with news content, the proposed model promotes investigating audiences' engagement beyond mere audience metrics, thus furthering the scope and understanding of news engagement.

Following the presentation of the proposed model, I test one proposition stemming from the model by analyzing how journalists' empathetic communication behaviors (i.e., perspective-taking) influence audiences' psychological engagement. The aim is to provide empirical evidence of the role empathy plays in journalistic reporting. My hypotheses stemming from this proposition assumes that journalists' engagement behaviors will lead to *audiences' psychological engagement,* i.e., emotional response, emotional bonding, and/or cognitive involvement. I investigate the role of empathy in news engagement by examining how journalists effectively enact *empathetic communication behaviors* and how and whether empathy should be situated in the process of news engagement. Journalists have traditionally employed a detached manner

when interacting with people as a means to uphold the credibility of their reporting and the profession. However, recently, emotionality and empathy-laden reporting has been argued as critical reporting behaviors, particularly when covering marginalized communities or tragic incidents (Bui, 2018; Kotišová, 2017; Niemeyer, 2021; Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2021). Recognizing and understanding audiences' and communities' needs is now more crucial than ever to enhance audience interactions and engagement and, thus, to ensure journalism's survival on and off digital platforms (Beckett & Deuze, 2016).

The move toward empathetic reporting is controversial due to journalists' adherence to the long-held objectivity norm. That is, journalists have largely rejected emotional behaviors as something unprofessional and a sign of lacking objectivity (Pantti, 2010). According to this standard, the use of emotions is excused only as a narrative technique involving people affected by an event to evoke audience attention and interests (Tsang, 2018). Limited levels of emotional expressions are acceptable on rare occasions, such as in a traumatic context. However, this norm connotes that excessive emotions are "*non-authentic* emotions" and are "characteristic of lower quality news reporting" (Pantti, 2010, p. 178, italics were author's).

However, journalism scholars are beginning to interrogate the objectivity norm and promote empathetic reporting. For example, Blank-Libra (2016) stated that responding to individual audiences' needs and experiences does not mean that journalists will fail in their obligation to produce fair and representative reporting. In fact, journalists' empathetic communication might result in more fair, representative, and accurate reporting that also empowers audiences to be good citizens in their communities (Blank-Libra, 2016; Bui, 2018; Gluck, 2016). Journalists expressing empathy can be a first step to covering underserved communities from their own perspectives (Bui, 2018). However, despite qualitative research

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suggesting that journalistic empathy would be welcomed by audience members, we do not know the impact of emotional or empathetic communication on audience engagement, public trust, or audience-journalist relationships because it has not yet been experimentally tested.

In response to these unknowns, I propose a news engagement model that is rooted in two key notions that involve: 1) reciprocity and interaction between journalists and audiences and 2) engagement that consists of psychological and behavioral dimensions (which is based on other fields' interpretations of engagement). This model offers a holistic and dynamic understanding of *news engagement*, which helps researchers redirect their news engagement research. Journalistic engagement is not merely a social media or promotional skill. News engagement practices assist journalists in enacting an approach toward news reporting that recognizes audience emotions and needs, allowing them to enhance their relationships with audiences (Meier, Kraus, & Michaeler, 2018).

The present study contributes to news engagement scholarship in journalism studies in three ways by: (1) providing a theoretical framework for scholars to test relationships between journalists' engagement practices and subsequent audience engagement (the latter being comprised of audiences' psychological and behavioral responses); (2) shifting the focus of engagement discussion from standard industry-based definitions to a more complex process that includes audiences' psychological experiences; and (3) empirically testing the relationship between journalists' empathetic behaviors and audience psychological engagement. The present study examines what kinds of journalistic behaviors (such as empathetic communication) actually encourage audience engagement.

This dissertation begins with a discussion of the current literature on news engagement and introduces conceptualizations of engagement from other fields, including public relations

and social media research (Chapter Two). Based on the literature review, I outline each concept within the news engagement process model. Then, Chapter Three examines the recent turn in journalism studies toward emotionality and audiences, recognizing empathetic communication as a way to engage people. Next, I outline my hypotheses concerning the influence of journalists' empathetic communication—particularly in terms of their perspective-taking—on audiences' emotional responses, emotional bonding, and/or attachment (vis-á-vis character identification and identification with the journalist), cognitive involvement, and transportation. Then, Chapter Four and Five expounds on the design of a pilot test (Study1) and an online experiment (Study 2) that tests the effect of journalists' perspective-taking on audiences' psychological engagement. This experiment was conducted with 338 respondents who were exposed to either a control or journalistic empathetic experimental condition. Recruiting processes, stimuli, and measures are also reported. Finally, I discuss the reasons for insignificant results and how to improve the proposed model. Possible future directions for studying empathy and other journalistic engagement behaviors are also introduced.

In summary, the goal of this research is two-fold: (1) present a news engagement process model that explains how journalists' engagement behaviors encourage audiences' psychological and behavioral engagement, and (2) test one proposition of the model: the relationship between journalists' empathetic communication behaviors (i.e., perspective taking and emotional disclosure) and audiences' psychological engagement.

CHAPTER 2

NEWS ENGAGEMENT

An increasing number of journalism professionals and researchers assert that newsrooms should adopt, and practice engaged forms of journalism (Broersma, 2019; Lawrence et al., 2018; Nelson, 2018; Zayani, 2021), which led many newsrooms to hire audience engagement professionals (Assmann & Diakopoulos, 2017; Neilson, Gibson, & Ortiga, 2023). Some researchers argue that engagement is key to the profession's survival (Belair-Gagnon, 2019; Nelson, 2021). It is believed that engagement assists journalists to "connect with community members" and is thus "an important step toward making the news industry both relevant and sustainable again" (Nelson, 2021, p. 2357). As such, it is expected that engagement should build trust and connections with community members and engagement also is a means to reach out to underserved audiences (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019; Wenzel & Nelson, 2020).

Conceptual Ambiguity of News Engagement

A clear conceptual definition of news engagement could assist researchers to examine, and journalists to understand engaged journalism practices. Conceptual ambiguity associated with the meaning of engagement, as well as loosely adopted journalistic practices, hamper both the industry's and academia's understanding of the impact of engaged journalism practices specifically in terms of how audiences perceive and respond to when engaging news (Broersma, 2019; Gajardo & Meijer, 2022; Nelson, 2019).

Despite support for practicing engaged forms of journalism, journalism studies have not adopted a shared, coherent understanding of the news engagement construct (Broersma, 2019; Nelson, 2019), and engagement is therefore interpreted in disparate ways (Nelson, 2018; Neilson, 2018). Commonly, news organizations and researchers "loosely apply engagement

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where it fits their aims and priorities" without any precise or mutually accepted conceptual definition, which has led to scattered and narrow uses of the construct (Broersma, 2019, p. 2). Instead of precisely articulating the mechanisms involved in the news engagement process, most current news engagement scholarship focuses on measuring audiences' behavioral participation throughout the various stages of news production (Broersma, 2019; Lawrence et al., 2018). News engagement is often assessed narrowly and considered to be audience participation associated with published new stories (Assmann & Diakopoulos, 2017; Lawrence et al., 2018; Nelson, 2021), as in, for instance, the performance of a news post on social media. As another illustration, studies measure engagement mainly by quantifying the amount of time audiences spend on a webpage and/or calculating the number of comments, clicks, likes, or shares (see Chen & Pain, 2021; Zayani, 2020).

While the focus within the journalism industry and journalism studies has been largely centered on audiences' participatory behaviors on social media platforms as a way to observe news engagement (Lawrence et al., 2018), aspects such as the extent to which audiences enjoy or are involved in the content are not likewise considered. However, when engaging with news, audiences may become cognitively and/or emotionally attached to media content, and subsequently invest energy to process the content, pay attention to it, and become absorbed in the story (Broersma, 2019). To attract audience attention, close examination about how journalists produce and present news content, as well as how such journalists' behaviors and produced news content influence audiences are required (Broersma, 2019). However, the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral elements that could represent audience news engagement are largely overlooked (Broersma, 2019). Thus, the first step is to explore the meaning of news engagement to support a mutual understanding of the construct. The lack of clear definition means that news

organizations may not be practicing engagement in a manner that reflects the breadth of news engagement, and this narrow approach may not recognize the ways that journalists actively engage their audiences (Assmann & Diakopoulos, 2017; Gajardo & Meijer, 2022; Nelson, 2018).

If engagement really is a means to secure news organizations' success and survival—as is argued by advocates of this approach—it follows that news engagement should be addressed theoretically, and that measures beyond audience metrics should be adopted to evaluate it. While news organizations largely rely on audience metrics such as likes, shares, and comments to measure how effectively journalists engage audiences (Lawrence et al., 2018; Nelson, 2018; Djerf-Pierre, Lindgren, & Budinski, 2019; Zayani, 2021), measuring audiences' behavioral participation in terms of sharing, number of viewers, or amount of online traffic does not represent the full scope of engagement. Coherent conceptualization is crucial to enhance professionals' and academics' understanding of the concept and to promote robust discussion of how to improve engagement practices.

The following two sections (News Engagement Definition and News Engagement Model) map the literature and articulate a definition of news engagement. I introduce engagement conceptualizations used by scholars in other fields, such as public relations and social media, and integrate these definitions to identify the concepts representative of news engagement. I subsequently propose a news engagement model that summarizes different ways to study and practice news engagement. The proposed model specifically denotes that news engagement consists of (1) *journalists' engagement practices*, and (2) audiences' responses to journalists, which I refer to as *audiences' psychological engagement*—emotional and cognitive—and *audiences' behavioral engagement*.

News Engagement Definition

Engagement in journalism is broadly understood as audience participation in various news production processes, including their contribution to producing news and their news consumption (Lawrence et al., 2018; Nelson, 2018). Journalism scholars have labeled news engagement in different ways, which reflects a lack of cohesive understanding. Terms used in reference to journalists' engagement with audiences include *engaged journalism* (Batsell, 2015; Ferrucci, Nelson, & Davis, 2020), (journalists') *public engagement* (Daniels, 2014), or *engagement journalism* (Cox & Poepsel, 2020). In addition, researchers label engagement differently when they focus on audiences' involvement and participation. These labels include *audience engagement* (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019; Xia et al., 2020), *media engagement* (Mersey et al., 2010), *social media news engagement* (Chen & Pain, 2021) or *user engagement* (Broersma, 2019; Lawrence et al., 2019), and are used to describe how audiences engage with and consume news content. These variations make it difficult to summarize studies. Labeling influences the concepts' interpretation, and what is needed is a shared understanding that can contribute to developing a precise definition that in turn ensures valid measures (Carpenter, 2018).

These terms show that engagement discussions and studies in journalism have been developed based on two approaches: (1) how journalists engage with their communities and promote audience engagement, and (2) how audiences are engaged with news content. Instead of employing one of the above terms, I propose the term *news engagement* as the overarching construct that encompasses the various concepts that, within news media contexts, represent different aspects of the news engagement process. I use this term so as to include both engagement parties (journalists and audiences) and also to emphasize the reciprocal aspects of

news engagement that encompasses engaged journalism (how journalists engage with audiences and communities and solicit audiences' engagement) and audience engagement (how audiences consume and engage with news). News engagement, therefore, refers to audiences' interactive experiences, in which journalists provide various opportunities for audiences to engage with news content and with the journalists, to participate in activities related to news consumption.

While news engagement shares similarities with engagement concepts in other fields, it is unique in that it concerns people's involvement with three focal engagement objects: the news media content itself, activities proposed by the journalist (such as providing news ideas), and audience engagement with the journalist. In customer engagement research, the focal objects are largely the company and/or its brands (Trunfio & Rossi, 2021; Weitzl & Einwiller, 2018). Focal objects in social media engagement are social media activities and interactions with other social media users (Heldman et al., 2013). News engagement includes the extent to which people engage with media content, which is quite similar to social media engagement. At the same time, news engagement concerns interactions initiated by journalists and responded to by audiences, which shares similarities with customer engagement. In integrating all these elements, news engagement provides a unique context in which the engagement agent (journalists), the engagement objects (the news content, activities around consuming news, and interactions with journalists), and the engagement platforms (social media, in person meetings and interactions, and other news dissemination platforms) influence how news audiences uptake news to engage with it.

Interactivity and Reciprocity in Engagement

The underlying assumption of engagement is that it involves collaboration and interactivity. These attributes are prominent in public relations and social media studies, as

audiences' agency has radically increased in the digital era (Gajardo & Meijer, 2022; Jelen-Sanchez, 2017). Engagement scholars generally understand engagement as an aspect prevalent in the context of participatory and collaborative cultures. For instance, people take an active role in publicly communicating with news organizations via social media channels, which can enhance relationships between audiences and journalists (Johnston, 2010). Public relations scholar Jelen-Sanchez (2017) explained the purpose of engagement is "to facilitate community-organization interaction" (p. 381). Expanding on this notion of interactivity, Lane and Kent (2018) added mutuality and reciprocity to the conceptualization of engagement from *a dialogue* perspective, suggesting that engagement occurs through dialogues in which "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions" is conveyed between the engaged parties (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325). Thus, engagement provides a means for organizations and publics to co-create something, for example, meanings associated with a product/brand or media content and interact in a relationship-building way. For instance, social media engagement is understood as "the interactive, synchronous communication and collaboration among numerous participants via technology" that enables organizations to "move from basic information dissemination [...] to a fully interactive information sharing dialogue" (Heldman et al., 2013, p. 2). This reveals an assumption that engagement is conceived as a process in which both parties—journalists and the audiences they seek to engage—play active roles in creating news content. As such, engagement entails a process by which engagement agents interact with individuals—i.e., the process by which they initiate individuals' engagement and how these individuals respond to such initiatives (Weitzl & Einwiller, 2018).

In journalism studies, scholars have primarily viewed news engagement from the perspective of *audience participation*, i.e., a wide range of audience responses and behaviors

including time spent reading already-published news content (Te Walvaart, Van den Bulck, & Dhoest, 2018), news sharing, and commenting on posted news content (Peters & Witschge, 2015). Still, the way journalists solicit such audience participation entails the notion of interaction and reciprocity. Ferrucci et al. (2019), for example, focused on audience participation, explaining that news engagement (which they labeled as *engaged journalism*) referred to "the notion that journalists better serve their audiences when they treat audiences as active participants" and thereby "explicitly reach out to and collaborate with audiences" both before and after news stories are published (p. 1588). This definition itself implies that reciprocity is inherent in news engagement: engagement is a means of interacting with and including communities in news production by adopting and representing their perspectives.

Reciprocity entails mutual benefits, shared understanding, and respect (Johnston, 2014), which requires journalists to attentively and actively listen to community concerns to identify their informational needs (Green-Barber, 2018). As Lewis, Holton, and Coddington (2014) explained, reciprocal journalism is "a way of imaging how journalists might develop more mutually beneficial relationships with audiences" (p. 229). Such reciprocity consists of direct exchanges between journalists and audiences (e.g., email, in-person or social media conversation), indirect exchanges (one-to-many communication intended for community benefits, such as crowdsourcing), and sustained exchanges that are related to building relationships and foundations for future interactions (e.g., leaving a comment on a news site, expecting someone will read and benefit from it; Lewis et al., 2014, p. 233-236).

Although the aforementioned researchers include other news audiences in their conceptions of reciprocal relationships, I focus more on the repeated reciprocal interactions between journalists and community members when "journalists actively listen to and

communicate with audiences" (Nelson, 2018, p. 529). News engagement begins when journalists

seek to understand and prioritize a community's informational needs and communicate with their

audiences (Green-Barber, 2018; Nelson, 2019). This means that journalists recognize audiences'

and communities' experiences and concerns, respect their emotions and perspectives, and

actively reflect such awareness in their news reporting (Nelson, 2019; Belair-Gagnon et al.,

2019). Communication in news engagement, then, is a two-way collaboration when audiences

and journalists not only co-create news content, but also interpret the events and issues covered

in the news. Hence, with the notion of reciprocity and mutual benefit, the discourse on news

engagement can shift from audience participation and benefits for news outlets (increased

subscriptions) to journalism's contribution to society and to building enhanced audience

relationships. Scholars suggest that such news engagement can benefit society by producing

local content that meets communities' needs and demands (Cox & Poepsel, 2020; Wenzel,

2019), facilitating civic awareness, community connection, and the building of social capital

(Lewis et al., 2014; Ferrucci, Nelson, & Davis, 2020).

However, in journalism studies the notion of engagement has yet to be clearly discussed

or connected to the notions of reciprocity and interactivity. Scholars have just begun to consider

the complexity of news engagement in terms of reciprocity between engagement agents

(journalists) and individuals (audiences). This void precludes scholars and practitioners from

understanding news engagement practices, such as what engagement is or what kinds of

engagement practices journalists should pursue in order to encourage audience responses. This

also means that scholars need a more precise understanding of the mechanism that audiences

respond to journalistic engagement practices Reciprocity and interaction that can build public

trust cannot be done without deeper understanding of what happens to engaged audiences, both psychologically and behaviorally.

Psychological approaches to engagement in other fields (e.g., public relations and social media studies) can inform journalism studies about the complexities of news engagement. Conceptualization based on the aforementioned fields offers a foundation that helps scholars learn how to study how journalists can build more trusting and satisfying relationships with their audiences. In the next section, I posit that news engagement is a reciprocal process that consists of journalists' engagement behaviors and audiences' responses. Built on public relations and social media engagement literature that adopt psychological interpretations of engagement, I also suggest that audiences' responses are comprised of audiences' psychological and behavioral engagement.

Figure 1

The News Engagement Process Model
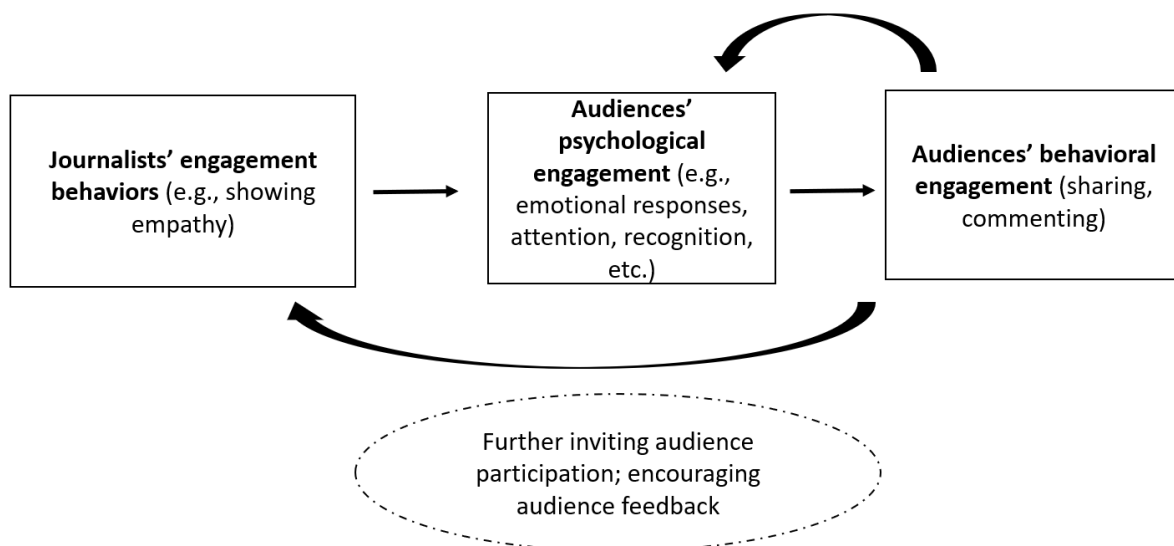
News Engagement Model

To summarize, the news engagement process proposed in this study begins with journalists' engagement practices, which in turn elicit audiences' psychological (emotional and cognitive) engagement and their subsequent behavioral engagement. Thus, the process model includes the following: (1) journalists' engagement behaviors, (2) audiences' psychological engagement, and (3) audiences' behavioral engagement (see Figure 1).

Interactive Feedback Loop Initiated by Journalists

Journalists have historically interacted with their news sources but not with their audiences (Robinson, 2009). Furthermore, they have mostly relied on elite sources, maintaining a top-down news communication approach, which to some extent disregards the public's concerns and the perspectives of the layman. The advent of digital devices in the 2000s led professionals and scholars to recognize their audiences as active participants in the news dissemination process (Beckett & Deuze, 2016). Now scholars suggest that journalistic practices should be based on more interactive, bottom-up approaches to engage with audiences (Meier, Kraus, & Michaeler, 2018; Wenzel, 2019). This change means that journalists should more actively listen to audiences, reflect on their responses, and include their feedback in news products. The aim of such activities is for journalists to understand the informational needs and preferences of audiences and communities they serve (Green-Barber, 2018).

This also means that audience participation in news engagement (such as providing user-generated content for a single news story) is not a one-time event, but rather, engagement involves ongoing relationship strategies wherein each group listens and responds to one another in civil communication settings (Nelson, 2018). As hosts of town hall meetings, journalists typically not only listen to and learn about their community, but they also build relationships

with their audiences and across audiences. Such an approach is conducive to greater symmetry of communication power between the journalists and community members (Schultz, 2000). As the power equilibrium shifts toward audiences, journalists start practicing news engagement that emphasizes readers.

Such shifts reveal that reciprocity is key to the process of news engagement. News engagement ideals and strategies will never be fully realized if scholars rely solely on quantitative measurements, such as tracking audience metrics. Thus, journalism studies scholars should find ways to measure and interpret engagement as it is reflected in contemporary society—this involves listening to, understanding, and further empathizing with audiences (Craft & Vos, 2018; Hess & Waller, 2017; Pignard-Cheynel & Amigo, 2023). It is argued that audiences need to feel they have a relationship with the news media and with journalists; connecting with and listening to audiences leads to more accurate representations of them in news media content (Craft & Vos, 2018) and enhances journalist-audience relationships (Wenzel, 2019). Craft and Vos (2018) explain that listening is a core component of journalistic practice and calls for journalists' understanding of the need to "listen more, better, and to a more diverse set of voices" (p. 966).

While listening is one form of journalist engagement behavior (Craft & Vos, 2018; Jenkins & Powers, 2023), scholars also suggest that a greater degree of interaction between journalists and community members, including various offline activities, is a desirable journalist engagement behavior. For instance, Wenzel (2019) showed that journalists can engage with their communities by using society columns (i.e., columns that detail the social and cultural events and gossip in local areas; in Wenzel's study, journalists invite local residents to write the columns) and the "liars tables" tradition to listen to residents' concerns and interests. Studies

suggest that through these interactions, journalists can enhance public trust and, arguably, increase readership. Moreover, community members also benefit from representative, trusted news media. What is missed is a close examination of the linkage between journalists' approaches to their audiences and the outcomes of their interactions with audiences (such as public trust and benefits to communities)—how audiences perceive, feel, and respond to them, or *how audiences engage with the news and journalists*.

Hence, news engagement begins with journalists' engagement behaviors that solicit audiences' participation and contribution, or more broadly, their responses to such behaviors. These interactions in which both journalists and audiences benefit (reciprocal interactions) can be viewed as a process by which engagement agents (journalists) interact with individuals, i.e., the process by which *journalists initiate individuals' engagement* and how *individuals respond* to such initiatives (Weitzl & Einwiller, 2018). Furthermore, the process is based on repeated, ongoing interactions and exchanges between journalists and audiences. Therefore, I posit that news engagement can be better explained and understood as a process in which *journalists' engagement behaviors* initiate the news engagement process, which then leads to *audiences' psychological response/engagement*, and audiences' psychological responses may further lead them to behaviorally engage in some action (i.e., *audiences' behavioral engagement*).

Journalists' Engagement Behaviors

To reiterate, journalists' engagement behaviors refer to their activities meant to solicit audience responses to and participation in news production. These are inclusive practices that help journalists understand and connect with communities, create collaborative spaces, and help audiences interact with and through their consumption of news content (Green-Barber, 2018). In an effort to identify community issues and concerns, and also to facilitate partnerships with local

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organizations, journalists do a number of things: create forums and discussion boards, include

email addresses and links to social media platforms, and create in-person channels, such as

holding listening sessions (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019; Lewis et al., 2014). These engagement

behaviors are intended to motivate audiences to respond to news stories, participate in news

production, and participate in larger community debates, which can lead to audiences'

attachment or commitment to the given issue and/or people in the stories. Possible activities, as

discussed in the previous section, includes active listening (Craft & Vos, 2018) that allows

journalists to better understand communities and to reflect their diverse perspectives. Deeper

communication and connection via attentive listening could be more aptly realized if journalists

expressed their empathy toward communities and audiences. As such, empathy is an important

element of journalists' attentive listening and mutual understanding (Blank-Libra, 2016).

Arguably, audiences are more likely to become engaged when they observe that journalists

acknowledge their concerns and show empathy, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Three.

In the next section, I elaborate on audiences' psychological engagement and subsequent

behavioral engagement. As a brief overview provided in advance, news audiences' engagement

consists of two concepts that influence one another: psychological engagement (audiences'

emotional and cognitive engagement, their emotional responses, identification, cognitive

involvement, and transportation) and behavioral engagement (audiences' active, behavioral

participation in news consumption).

Audiences' Psychological and Behavioral Engagement

Audiences' engagement primarily refers to a wide range of *audience responses* that

contain two constructs: (1) news audiences' *psychological (emotional and cognitive)* and (2)

behavioral engagement (See Figure 2) (Brodie et al., 2011; Malthouse & Calder, 2011; Napoli,

2011; Trunfio & Rossi, 2021; Weitzl & Einwiller, 2018). One merit of acknowledging these distinct components of engagement is that scholars can more precisely explain engagement processes by which each component is subjected to various drivers and factors (Brodie et al., 2011; Malthouse & Calder, 2018; Weitzl & Einwiller, 2018).

For example, public relations scholars note that engaged individuals are "fully absorbed, involved, occupied, or engrossed in" engagement objects or activities proposed by engagement agents (Johnston, 2016, p. 272). Being "fully absorbed, involved, occupied, or engrossed" describes individuals' psychological, or more specifically emotional and cognitive, engaged states. The audiences' psychological engagement is comprised of components such as attention, immersion, awareness, attachment (feeling of belonging to the given company or brand), pride, inspiration, enthusiasm, and dedication (Chen, 2018; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kang, 2014). For example, customers may build an attachment or commitment to a brand (Kang et al., 2021) and feel proud to purchase it (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Audiences' behavioral engagement refers to individuals' behavioral reactions that result from psychologically engaged states. Individuals may participate in activities proposed by a company, such as brand naming or repeatedly visiting an online shopping site (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). According to public relations literature, individual engagement is revealed as both emotional engagement (e.g., positive affect, emotions) and cognitive engagement (e.g., attention and elaboration, information processing), which subsequently lead to individuals' behavioral engagement (e.g., actual activation) (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014; Malthouse & Calder, 2017; Weitzl & Einwiller, 2018). In addition, behavioral engagement can also elicit further psychological engagement (Weitzl & Einwiller, 2018). For instance, the more individuals participate in marketing activities associated with a company's brand (often via social media),

the stronger their attachment and positive affect toward the brand (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 258; Weitzl & Einwiller, 2018). Engaged individuals, as Bowden et al. (2013) illustrate, are willing to "make cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investments in interacting with the service brand or branded product itself, the specific brand community, or specific networked agents/individuals" (p. 493).

Figure 2

Audiences' Engagement: Psychological Engagement and Behavioral Engagement
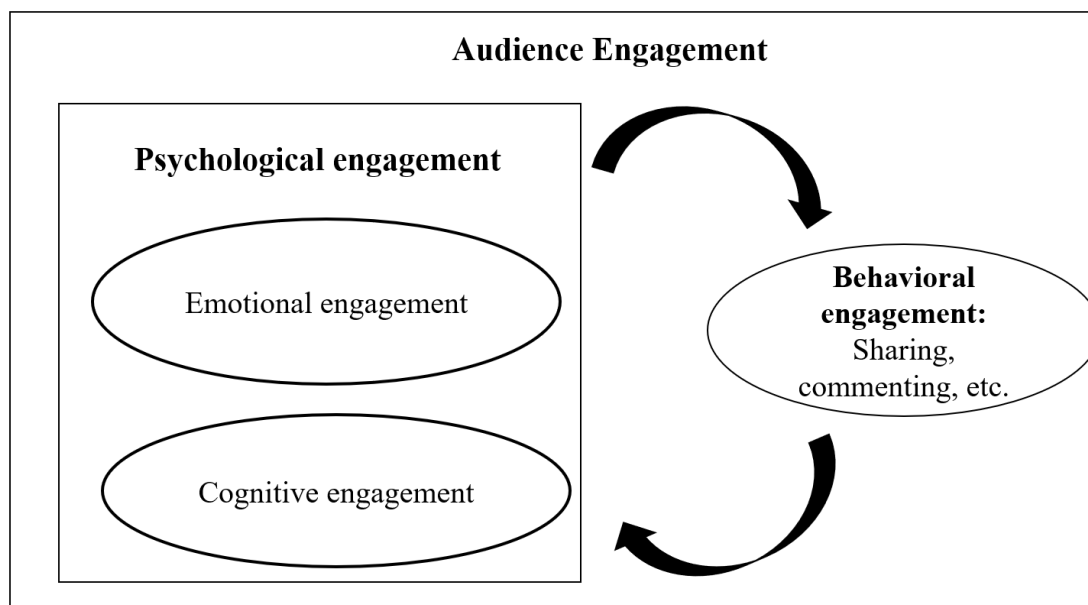
Likewise, audiences' news engagement can be comprised of psychological and behavioral engagement. For example, when audiences react emotionally, they may become attached to the people/communities being covered (Barnes, 2014; Te Walvaart et al., 2018) and/or to the journalist reporting the news (Wan et al., 2018). Audiences can also be cognitively involved in processing news content by paying attention to and making sense of the content based on their schemata (i.e., recognition and elaboration). Such emotional and cognitive engagement may facilitate audiences' subsequent behavioral engagement. In other words, audiences' emotional responses (i.e., psychological engagement) result in behavioral

engagement, such as social media consumption and sharing (Brown et al., 2016; Rubin, 1993). Furthermore, behavioral engagement (such as active participation in discussing a certain issue presented in news content) can enhance audiences' awareness of the issues (cognitive engagement) and also reinforce their emotional attachment toward people in the stories (emotional engagement).

Audiences' Psychological Engagement Components. Audiences' psychological engagement refers to a state in which audiences are emotionally and cognitively involved with news content and/or the journalist. For example, audiences can feel emotions about and cognitively process media content. Media studies have investigated these audience reactions under the concepts of character/celebrity/media persona identification, transportation, and cognitive involvement. One thing to note is that these concepts include both emotional and cognitive engagement components. For example, identification (individuals' feelings or attachment regarding engagement objects/agents) include both audiences' emotions (emotional attachment) and cognition (their assessment regarding messages presented by engagement agents and values associated with them). Scholars also use measures to assess individuals' psychological engagement without differentiating emotional and cognitive engagement (Chen, 2018; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kang, 2014). Thus, I also do not separately suggest measurements for emotions and cognition, but rather integrate them under the umbrella of psychological engagement. Below I discuss representative components: *audiences' emotional responses, identification, cognitive media involvement, and transportation*.

Audiences' Emotional Responses. The first component representing audiences' psychological engagement are *audiences' emotional responses*, such as enjoyment, fear, anger, and inspiration (Johnston, 2018; Kang, 2014). Psychologically engaged audiences might respond

to a story by experiencing emotions such as disgust, joy, and sorrow (for example, when viewing soap operas; Perse, 1990a) or hope, anger, and fear (when reading news on social media; Brown et al., 2020).

Identification. *Identification* refers to internalizing "beliefs, values, and attitudes toward identified objects" (Kang et al., 2021, p. 35). Public relations research explains that engaged individuals (in this case, customers) align their life values and beliefs with the given brand or values represented by a company. An emotional connection and alignment with a company is referred to as customer brand identification (So et al., 2013). In the realm of journalism, psychologically engaged individuals may develop an attachment to the people in a news story or the journalist reports the news, and this attachment constitutes *identification.*

In the context of media, identification is concerned with emotional connectedness with media personas and/or cognitive assessment of the image and/or values associated with the personas (Kang et al., 2021; Rain & Mar, 2021). Identification also describes empathizing with and being attached to people featured in stories (e.g., characters in dramas, interviewees in news stories); this is called *character identification* (in the context of news media, this study refers to it as *interviewee identification*). An individual can also identify with the messenger delivering the content (e.g., public relations practitioners, social media account managers, or journalists who report the news); this is labeled as *journalist identification*.

Interviewee identification involves individuals' seeking a common ground with the identification object because they share (or believed they share) the same interests as the character (Burke, 1969). Interviewee identification especially takes place when audiences feel empathy and affinity for the people in the media content. For instance, when a news source is

faced with a tragedy, the audience may empathize with the person affected by the situation. Audience empathy indicates attachment and social bonding with interviewees in a news story.

News audiences may feel a sense of connectedness to not only the interviewees but also the journalist narrating the story, as has been found in celebrity and fandom research (Kang et al., 2021). *Journalist identification* refers to audiences liking the reporting styles or images of the given journalist, which may result in audiences resonating with the values, emotional state, or viewpoints presented by the journalist (Wan et al., 2018). For instance, audiences may recognize some news outlets as employing a specific character or presenters with certain political affiliations.

In particular, audiences may develop a greater degree of identification—either it is character or journalist identification—when journalists create interactive and immersive news content (and thereby develop content that is emotional and empathetic toward the interviewees/communities covered; Kang et al., 2021). Delivering impactful scenes with vivid descriptions or empathetic tones can lead audiences to identify with the interviewees and also develop a positive affect toward the journalist.

Audiences' Cognitive Involvement. News audiences are engaged when they have an "intense focus on a text" and the processing of its messages (Evans, 2017; Te Walvaart, 2018, p. 903), which is referred to as cognitive engagement. Political communication, persuasion, marketing, and advertising scholars assert that people are more likely to process perceived important information cognitively rather than peripherally, which leads to deeper processing of information, and therefore, more intense involvement with it (Perse, 1990; see also Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Cognitive engagement is displayed by attention to and close assessment of the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Thus, cognitive engagement can be described as "an

investment in attention and processing to develop understanding or knowledge about a topic or an idea" (Johnston, 2018, p.22). Understanding involves comprehension, recognition, and absorption, while knowledge is developed based on experience, reasoning, or assessment (Johnston, 2014; Hollebeek et al., 2011; Weitzl & Einwiller, 2018).

In the context of *news media* consumption, such states of audiences' cognitive involvement are related to their *attention* to (*Perse,* 1990a; Rubin, 1993) and *recognition* and *elaboration* of messages presented in media content (Perse, 1990b; Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984). Perse (1990a; 1990b) conceptualized attention as response selectivity, recognition as developing patterns and categorization of information based on individuals' schema and experiences, and elaboration as developing associations with information. Engagement can be described in relation to audiences' attention to the given issues or events. Civic engagement literature purports that news consumption leads to people's recognition and elaboration (Galston, 2007)— audience participation causes public awareness and appreciation (or recognition) and elaboration on the given message in mobilizing public actions. Audiences' cognitive involvement in the present study includes components of audiences' attention, recognition, and elaboration.

Transportation. Transportation refers to the extent to which respondents feel that they are experiencing something (e.g., events presented in content, etc.). Transportation is a state if being mentally drawn into the story that is presented; it is "a type of attachment to characters in a narrative (Carù & Cova, 2006; Kang et al., 2021, p.2; Rubin, 1993; Russell et al., 2019). As such, transportation is understood as a form of engagement (Kang et al., 2021). For instance, when engaging with news, audiences may be so captivated by the story that they *feel* the experience of the events and the people involved, "making mental connections between related pieces of information" (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002, p. 41). They are "transported into" the

world of the story, which influences their attitudes and behaviors in relation to health (Green & Clark, 2013) and social stigma (Cohen, Tal, & Mazor, 2015). Transportation largely concerns audiences' emotional investment and the extent to which they generate mental imaginary (Russell et al, 2019), which can engender a greater degree of involvement than identification. Thus, this study includes transportation as another component of audiences' psychological engagement.

In summary, *audiences' psychological engagement* is comprised of emotional engagement and cognitive engagement that may result in audiences becoming engaged by doing the following: (1) emotionally responding to the content, (2) identifying with people in the news stories and/or the journalist (i.e., character identification and journalist identification), (3) paying attention to, recognizing, and elaborating on the information (i.e., cognitive involvement), and (4) being captivated by the story narrative (i.e., experience transportation).

In the next section, audiences' behavioral engagement—another component of audience news engagement—is detailed. Journalism studies research shows that psychological engagement leads to *audiences' behavioral engagement*, such as taking suggested actions presented in news content or participating in activities proposed by journalists. For instance, social media users who become emotional while reading news content are more likely to comment on or share the content with others (Barnes, 2014; Brown, Lough, & Riedl, 2020).

Audiences' Behavioral Engagement. Audiences' behavioral engagement refers to how individuals participate in activities proposed by engagement agents (e.g., a company in the context of public relations/social media or an employer in the context of organizational communication and psychology). Public relations and social media scholars assess behavioral engagement based on audience metrics, including time spent on a website, number of page

views, and the extent to which customers participate in a company's marketing activities like voting for a new brand name (Oh et al., 2017; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Audience behavioral engagement is typically understood in terms of their interaction with various engagement objects. First, audiences may interact with news content itself or with journalists. The most common behavioral approach in recent studies has been audiences' online or social media activities, such as sharing news with their followers, clicking "like" buttons, commenting on posts, replying to other news comments, and creating news content. However, news audiences may engage in civic behaviors, such as attending public forums held by local news outlets, which can also be considered a form of audience behavioral engagement (Lewis et al., 2014).

The behaviors mentioned above are grouped into two types of activities: 1) engagement that directly stems from news content and 2) engagement that occurs around news content or audiences' news consumption (Steensen, Ferrer-Conill, & Peters, 2020; Te Walvaart et al., 2018). Some indicators that represent audiences' behavioral engagement are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Audiences' Behavioral Engagement

Forms of Engagement	Engagement Objects	Descriptions
Engagement directly stemming from news content	Engagement with news content	Share news, click "like" buttons, and comment
	Engagement with journalists	Provide story ideas to journalists, share user-generated content, and offer feedback on journalist-produced content
Engagement around news content	Interaction with other audience members and civic activity/participation	Participate in discussions, attend public hearings, participate in mobilizing public opinion

CHAPTER 3

JOURNALISTS' EMPATHETIC COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

In the 1960s, healthcare practitioners and scholars in the U.S. began to recognize the importance of empathy in physicians' communication with their patients (Halpern, 2014). Physicians and nurses who traditionally examined and communicated with patients in a detached and objective manner began to acknowledge the impact of demonstrating empathy. In addition, they recognized that understanding their patients' concerns influenced the outcome of their treatments: building trust meant that patients were more likely to respond to advice and actively engage with the treatments administered to them (Halpern, 2014, Hardee, Platt, & Kasper, 2005). Similar changes have recently occurred in the news media industry, where the display of emotion in journalistic practices has become more acceptable and understanding audiences is now an essential way to engage with them (Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Bui, 2018; Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2021).

In particular, empathy (i.e., recognizing and understanding other's emotions and experiences from their perspective) is at the center of journalism's emotional practices (Gluck, 2016). Empathy assists journalists to adopt multiple perspectives and deploy emotions in both reporting the news and engaging audiences (Gluck, 2016, Pantti, 2010; Tsang, 2018). Journalists' public display of empathy and understanding of community concerns can be considered as evidence of their empathy toward interviewees and their communities. Empathetic behaviors can be performative (as in live or recorded broadcast news) or interpersonal (as in interviewing individual news sources). Shin's (2021) scale to measure audiences' perceptions of journalists shows that people evaluate journalists based on the extent to which they express empathy and respect for communities and audiences. In alignment with the findings that audiences appreciate

journalists' empathy, the present study argues that contemporary audiences expect journalists to demonstrate empathetic communication behaviors, and thus, empathetic reporting practices are worthy of further attention and investigation.

The Emotional Turn in Journalists' Behaviors

Wahl-Jorgensen (2020) argues that journalism is encountering an emotional turn, which is leading a growing number of scholars to pay attention to emotionality in journalism. Several academic researchers argue that journalists need to shift their journalistic practices from a detached reporting approach to a more interactive and open one, displaying emotion in their news reporting and in their relationships with audiences (Hellmueller et al., 2013; Lecheler, 2020; Vos, & Poepsel, 2013; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). In particular, scholars note the significance of practicing empathy in news reporting (Blank-Libra, 2016; Gluck, 2016). Although displays of emotions are not new to journalism, they have mostly been associated with negative reactions—sensationalism, entertainment, and commercialization (Pantti, 2010; Schmidt et al., 2022)—and have been considered evidence of biased reporting (Blank-Libra, 2016).

However, as emotions have become crucial to digital communications (Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Lecheler, 2020), and because digital technologies shrink the distance between journalists and audiences, journalists have been re-thinking their emotional practices (Kotisova, 2019). Emotional content attracts audiences, drives people to share content on social media (Brown et al., 2020), and links individuals' personal experiences to group-level phenomena, such as individuals with a common attitude about an issue forming a sense of solidarity with one another (Brader et al., 2011). Active media users in digital platforms "have accentuated the emotional and affective everyday use of media, as well as the increasing mobilization, exploitation, and capitalization of emotions in digital media" (Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2021, p. 1148). It is not

surprising, then, that journalists' emotional practices are now being discussed in relation to the

survival and sustainability of news outlets or journalism altogether (Beckett & Deuze, 2016;

Lecheler, 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2021).

A result of the emotional turn in journalism is the recommendation that journalists should

strive to identify and understand people's emotional experiences (Duan & Hill, 1996; Halpern,

2014; Tsang, 2018). In this regard, scholars began to consider how journalists *resonate* with their

audiences, suggesting that inspirational media content may be one way to do it (Janicke-Bowles

et al., 2019; Parks, 2021). For instance, Parks (2021) suggests that journalism may need to

provide joyous content and focus on positive affect, such as joy, and on "the affective

characteristics of people and events that produce a sense of well-being, delight, and even

courage" (p. 821). Offering audiences transformative emotional experiences, Parks (2016) states,

aligns with the essence of journalism; informing, and also influencing and empowering people

and this can, for example, encourage them to reorient their lives (McIntyre, 2015). Another

group of scholars pays attention to empathy (Blank-Libra, 2016; Gluck, 2016); they suggest that

journalists abandon the traditionally detached manner and embrace empathy as a new way to feel

and understand their audiences. Blank-Libra (2016) explains that empathy works in tandem with

the objectivity norm: because empathetic reporting requires journalists to acknowledge others'

perspectives, this in turn helps them provide fair and representative reporting. Journalists'

empathetic expression "enriches interviews and the narratives that follow by fostering mutual

trust and negating stereotypes" (Ferré, 2019, p. 632) and, thus, enhances storytelling and fosters

trusting relationships between themselves and their interviewees (Gluck, 2016; Wahl-Jorgensen,

2013). Journalists who demonstrate empathy for the communities they cover are expected to

likewise facilitate audiences' empathy with people and their communities being covered, and

thereby develop public awareness and attention to issues and events, i.e., to engage their

audiences (Gluck, 2016). Arguably, audiences are more likely to become engaged when they

observe journalists acknowledging their concerns and showing empathy. The following section

details the concepts of empathy and empathetic communication behaviors in journalism.

Empathy

There are various definitions of empathy as well as approaches for effectively employing

it. Depending on scholars, empathy can be considered: a multidimensional construct with

affective and cognitive dimensions (Davis et al., 1987; Platt & Keller, 1994), a construct that

describes only one of the dimensions (Halpern, 2003; Tsang, 2018), a construct that contains

both dimensions without differentiating between them (Renstrom & Ottati, 2020), or two

separate constructs—one affective and the other cognitive (Niedtfeld, 2017). Here, affective

empathy involves sharing another's state of mind or emotions—the ability to feel and resonate

with another person's emotional experience (Engelen & Röttger-Rössler, 2012). Cognitive

empathy, on the other hand, relates to perspective-taking—the ability to identify and understand

another person's state of mind and to adopt their perspective (Davis et al., 1987; Engelen &

Röttger-Rössler, 2012).

Medical scholars have examined empathy, focusing mainly on the cognitive dimension

and physicians' behaviors (primarily verbal) to convey such understanding (Halpern, 2014). And

since the 2000s, they have paid attention to affective empathy and the communication behaviors

that convey it (Halpern, 2014; Riess & Kraft-Todd, 2014), examining the effects of empathy in

combining or differentiating affective and cognitive empathetic communication behaviors

(Howick et al., 2018). This approach in the medical field suggests that affective and cognitive

empathy each can be demonstrated by a different set of communication behaviors.

The focus of this study, with regard to empathy, is how journalists demonstrate their empathy to audiences and how this demonstration influences audiences. This study adopts the aforementioned medical field approach, thereby considering journalists' empathetic communication to be a demonstration of two sets of communication behaviors: disclosing their emotions and communicating their understanding based on perspective-taking. The present study is exploratory, since little is known about the influence that journalists' empathetic displays have on audiences.

The Effects of Empathy. Across disciplines, studies have investigated the impact of displaying empathy in one-to-many communications, in public engagement, and in interpersonal interactions. In all three situations, empathy may facilitate an interlocutor's cooperation (Schoofs et al., 2019) and help build trusting relationships between, for example, a company and its customers or a physician and their patients (Bridgen, 2011; Halpern, 2014; Schoofs et al., 2022). In the case of interpersonal interactions, displays of empathy help build trusting relationships, as those between physicians and clients (Halpern, 2014) or leaders and employees (Schoofs et al., 2019). Moreover, empathetic leaders can encourage employees to align with the company's or organization's values and goals (Schoofs et al., 2019). Likewise in journalism, a reporter's empathy is essential for obtaining sources' trust and encouraging them to be forthcoming when discussing sensitive or traumatic events in which people face distress or tragedy (Carpenter et al., 2018; Gluck, 2016). In the case of public communication, in which expressions of empathy are more performative, a spokesperson can display empathy in hopes of excusing their company's behavior and safeguarding its reputation during a time of crisis, such as when a company causes its stakeholders to suffer financially (Schoofs et al., 2021). If the stakeholders perceive the public relations practitioner as empathetic, they will likely consider them to be authentic and believable

(Bridgen, 2000; Schoofs et al., 2022). Indeed, when someone shows empathy toward a specific group in a public setting, this display can also positively affect observers' perceptions of the empathizer (Schoofs et al., 2022). For example, a politician who empathizes with a certain group in public will often garner more favorable attitudes, and the public, in turn, might be more open to the politician's stance (Renstrom & Ottai, 2020). Likewise, when audiences witness journalists publicly showing their empathy toward communities in distress, the audiences may have positive emotional responses to and perceptions of the journalist, enhancing their engagement during news consumption. Publicly showing empathy can thus be considered as a sign of journalists' sincerity, and it can help audiences develop affinity attachments to the journalists.

Journalists' demonstrations of empathy can also lead to audiences' emotional arousal, in which emotions are contagious, and encourage audiences to be empathetic or psychologically engaged (Da Waal, 2009). Empathy provides a platform to create intersubjectivity (i.e., sharing subjective experiences between individuals), enhancing individuals' awareness of others' situations (Hardee, Platt, & Kasper, 2005). Hence, by conveying empathy in news reporting, journalists facilitate audiences' emotional responses to those being covered, increase audience attention to and understanding of the given issue, and create audience engagement within the context (Gluck, 2016). In other words, journalists' expressions of empathy may prompt certain kinds of audience emotions, like sadness or concern, especially in cases of disaster reporting. Journalists' empathy may also generate audiences' cognitive involvement with the story content (i.e., facilitate their attention to and understanding of the given story and issue). In addition, audiences' deeper understanding of the people in the story, which they would gain vis-a-vis

journalists' empathy, could spontaneously lead them to identify with the given interviewees (Oatley, 1994; Keen, 2006).

To summarize, by publicly displaying their empathy, journalists may lead audiences to have emotional reactions (i.e., emotional responses), be more responsive to their messages, pay greater attention to the story, and develop a deeper understanding of the issues being reported (i.e., cognitive involvement and transportation). Also, journalists' displays of empathy help audiences build attachment with journalists (i.e., journalist identification) and may connect audiences with the people in the story (i.e., interviewee identification) (Gladwin, 2020; Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010), which contribute to audiences being more deeply engaged with the reporting.

Journalists' Empathetic Communication Behaviors

Empathy is delivered and expressed through empathetic communication. Empathetic communication involves "communicative responsiveness," and these behaviors are represented by two dimensions: 1) identifying and understanding the mental states of others (i.e., cognitive empathy), and 2) attuning to others' emotions and sharing emotions with others (i.e., affective empathy) (Halpern, 2014; Renstrom & Ottati, 2020, p. 768; Singer, 2006). In news reporting, journalists may employ empathetic communication when developing trusting relationships with interviewees in an interpersonal setting, which helps them gather and secure relevant information (Ferré, 2019; Pantti, 2010). In circumstances of more public displays (e.g., live broadcast), journalists' empathetic communication becomes more performative, meant to either show to a wide audience their empathy for interviewees/affected communities or empathize with interviewees in interpersonal communication. The focus of the current study is the latter— empathetic communication in performative situations when journalists report news.

Empathy is demonstrated by empathetic communication behaviors. For example, empathic communication coding system (ECCS) views physicians' empathetic behaviors as "emotionally focused talk, psychosocial discussion, positive talk, and positive nonverbal communication" (Bylunda &Makoul, 2002, p. 208). Communication that conveys affective empathy includes showing general feelings that are attuned to the emotions of those who are suffering, such as encouragement and support (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004; Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2007). Nonverbal communication behaviors, such as facial expressions and tone of voice, can also be used to demonstrate affective empathy (Nakamura & Milner, 2023). Likewise, journalists reporting on disasters may exhibit affective empathy by displaying emotions that reflect the interviewee's emotional state, such as tearing up, appearing speechless, or verbally expressions of their feelings (e.g., by saying, "I am sad and overwhelmed by the magnitude of…") (Caffrey, 2023; Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2007).

Empathetic communication to convey cognitive empathy involves more intellectual inference and verbal communication skills (Platt & Keller, 1994), including the empathizer's recognition of similarities between their past experiences and someone else's present experience (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004). Thus, one can display cognitive empathy by communicating their understanding of or prediction for another's situation, which is often related to the empathizer's previous similar experiences (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004; Pfeil & Zaphiris, 2007; Platt & Keller, 1994). Similarly, journalists may demonstrate cognitive empathy by saying that they understand interviewees' situation and emotions (Schoofs et al., 2019), based on similar experiences from their personal life. This can also include predicting what interviewees and the community will go through (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004). Journalists can do this at the beginning of a news story with statements such as "I was also born

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and raised right here where the cyclone hit and destroyed so many people's lives." This conveys the journalist's understanding of the devastation and what happened to the community.

Hypotheses

To summarize, journalists demonstrating empathetic communication in their reporting should elicit audiences' emotional responses and affective attachment to the people and communities covered, as well as to the journalist who reports the story. Affective attachment may be demonstrated by (1) identification and empathy toward interviewees in a story (Brown, 2015; Cohen, 2001), and (2) identification with the journalist who covers the story. In addition, such demonstrations may enhance audiences' understanding of the stories and improve their awareness of a given issue (this points to the model's cognitive engagement element).

For the sake of simplicity and parsimony, and to control factors that influence the engagement condition, this study focuses on testing the impact of radio journalists' empathetic communication on listeners' psychological engagement. Research has reported the physical appearance of reporters or message senders (including, for example, age and race, which can be assessed by appearance), provides a cue for how audiences perceive them (Davis, & Krawczyk, 2010; Dumdum & Garcia, 2011; Julian, 1977). For instance, Davis and Krawczyk (2010) found the perceived attractiveness of sports newscasters had a positive impact on audiences' views of their competence, expertness, dynamism, and trustworthiness. Even the style of reporters' clothing may influence their perceived credibility (Julian, 1977)—it has been found that casual outfits are positively related to higher levels of credibility. This is why this study presents an auditory (i.e., radio) rather than visual news stories to respondents, to reduce the influence of reporters' appearance on their perceptions and thereby minimizing the effects of confounding variables.

The experiment manipulates the journalist's cognitive empathy (in this case, perspective-taking showing an identification with people affected by the situation) as conveyed in fictitious stories presented by a radio news station reporter and tests the effects of a radio journalist's cognitive empathy on audience' psychological engagement (see Figure 3). Originally, the study planned to test the effects of affective empathy (emotional-disclosure) and cognitive empathy (perspective-taking). However, pilot test results (Study 1) suggested that the study sample did not differentiate between the affective empathy condition and the non-empathy condition. The study sample also assessed that the reporter in the affective empathy condition was less empathetic than the reporter in the cognitive empathy condition (see Table 2 and 3). Thus, the hypothesis testing (Study 2) was conducted solely in the perspective-taking empathy condition, where the radio news reporter expressed his understanding of the suffering experienced by the interviewees and their communities.

This study hypothesizes that radio journalist' empathetic communication results in: a) audiences experiencing emotional responses; b) audience' identification with the interviewees and communities being covered; c) audiences' identification with the journalist; d) audiences becoming attentive to and comprehending the issues/events reported (cognitive involvement), and their being fully absorbed in the story (transportation).

As hypothesized, cognitive processing and emotional attachment to media content would occur during audiences' psychological engagement stage. Audiences interpret news content and invest a varying level of cognitive energy in order to understand news stories, depending on the stories' relevance to them, and/or on the basis of their existing knowledge or experience of similar issues/events. Relevance (the extent to which audiences perceive something to be influential and/or familiar) is a fundamental element in information retrieval; relevant news

content is more likely to be shared via social media (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017), which is one indicator of audiences' behavioral engagement. Presumably, the underlying mechanism by which relevance affects behavioral engagement is associated with high levels of emotional and cognitive attachment to the given content. As such, relevance is expected to mediate the effects of empathetic communication on audiences' psychological engagement.

Another element to consider is the novelty of the reporter's practices. Emotional expression is a relatively rare or less preferred practice in journalism (Kotisova, 2018; Pantti, 2010), and was often tabooed in news reporting (Hopper & Huxford, 2015). If people think of a reporter's practice as being unusual, or less than professional, such perceptions might interfere with their psychological news engagement. In particular, among the respondents' psychological variables tested in this experiment, there is a specific variable that relates considerably to their reactions to and/or assessment of the reporter in this study: journalist identification.

In sum, this dissertation hypothesizes:

H1: Journalists' perspective taking (cognitive empathy) is positively related to audiences' psychological engagement in terms of: H1a) sadness; H1b) journalist identification; H1c) identification with the people in the story; H1d) elaboration; H1e) attention; H1f) recognition, and H1g) transportation.

H2: The relationships between journalists' perspective taking and audiences' psychological engagement are moderated by audiences' perceived relevance of the given news content.

H2a) The relationships between journalists' perspective taking and audiences' sadness are moderated by audiences' perceived relevance of the given news content.
H2b) The relationship between journalists' perspective taking and audiences' journalist identification is moderated by audiences' perceived relevance of the given news content.
H2c) The relationship between journalists' perspective-taking and audiences' identification with the people in the story is moderated by audiences' perceived relevance of the given news content.
H2d) The relationship between journalists' perspective taking and audiences' elaboration is moderated by audiences' perceived relevance of the given news content.
H2e) The relationship between journalists' perspective taking and audiences' attention is moderated by audiences' perceived relevance of the given news content.

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H2f) The relationship between journalists' perspective taking and audiences' recognition is moderated by audiences' perceived relevance of the given news content.

H2g) The relationship between journalists' perspective taking and audiences' transportation is moderated by audiences' perceived relevance of the given news content.

Figure 3

Journalists' Cognitive Empathy and Audiences' Engagement
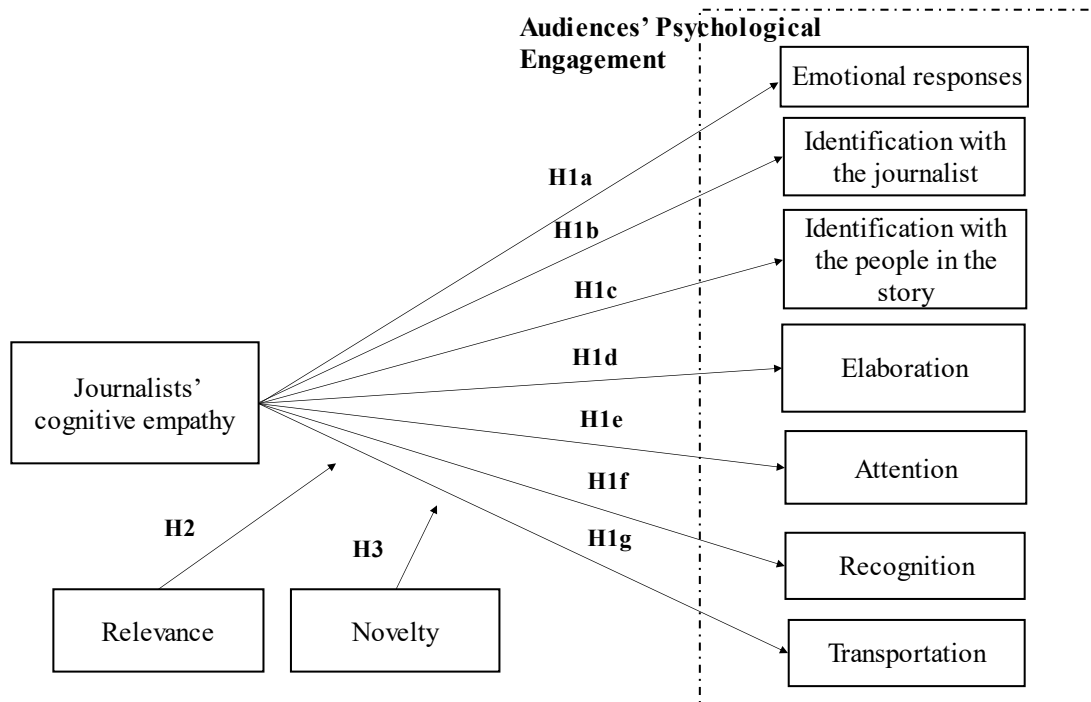
H3: The relationships between journalists' perspective-taking and audiences' psychological engagement are moderated by audiences' perceived novelty of the reporter's empathetic communication.

H2a) The relationships between journalists' perspective-taking and audiences' sadness are moderated by audiences' perceived novelty of the given reporter.

H2b) The relationship between journalists' perspective-taking and audiences' journalist identification is moderated by audiences' perceived novelty of the given reporter.

H2c) The relationship between journalists' perspective-taking and audiences' identification with the people in the story is moderated by audiences' perceived novelty of the given reporter.

H2d) The relationship between journalists' perspective-taking and audiences' elaboration is moderated by audiences' perceived novelty of the given reporter.

H2e) The relationship between journalists' perspective-taking and audiences' attention is moderated by audiences' perceived novelty of the given reporter.

H2f) The relationship between journalists' perspective-taking and audiences' recognition is moderated by audiences' perceived novelty of the given reporter.

H2g) The relationship between journalists' perspective-taking and audiences' transportation is moderated by audiences' perceived novelty of the given reporter.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY 1: PILOT TEST

I conducted an IRB-approved online experiment to test the impact of empathetic communication on audience's psychological engagement. Qualtrics (a U.S.-based survey provider that offers monetary incentives to people who participate in interviews, surveys, and experiments) was used to recruit the sample, which reflected demographics in the U.S. (U.S. Census, n.d.). Before proceeding with the hypotheses testing experiment (Study 2), a pilot test (Study 1) was conducted to determine the effectiveness of a manipulation in the experimental design—i.e., whether respondents perceived that the reporter's behaviors in the experimental condition were more empathetic than the behaviors in the control condition.

Procedure

Pilot testing was conducted based on a sample of 60 participants (within-subjects). Twenty respondents were randomly assigned to one of the three story topics (pandemic outbreak, ferryboat sinking, or hurricane hit) across one control condition (non-empathetic) and two experimental conditions (affective empathy, and cognitive empathy), which together totaled 60 respondents. They were then asked to rate the extent to which the given reporter displayed empathy. I used scales for affective empathy, cognitive empathy, and overall empathy (see Appendix A: Study 1 Survey Questionnaire). Respondents were also asked to assess the extent of the perceived reality of the news stories.

Stimulus Materials

Three story topics of traumatic incidents were chosen, and nine stories were created for the experiment (each story included one of three topics, and each topic included all of the following attributes: non-empathetic, affective empathy, and cognitive empathy conditions). The

three topics were: (1) a pandemic outbreak that threatened public health, where people suffered from a medical supply shortage and died without appropriate treatment, (2) a hurricane that devastated a community and caused much suffering, and (3) a ferry boat that sank, killing many people in the community. The first represents an unexpected natural disaster, the second a frequent and somewhat-preventable natural disaster, and the third a human-made disaster. These topics also involved a catastrophic incident causing deaths and injuries in which a whole community suffered hardship. They also bear two common elements: (1) a mass casualty incident in which victims overwhelmed local healthcare staff and systems, overtaxing limited healthcare resources (World Health Organization, n.d.) and (2) a tragic event in which an area larger than a city is affected. The purpose of choosing the three topics was to set an authentic stage for journalists to express their empathy because they would presumably evoke a high level of psychological reaction from audiences. As such, the news content possessed both treatment variance (message manipulation) and message variance (employing multiple messages per treatment level), as suggested by Thorson et al. (2012).

A former professional journalist and a former news producer created the original radio news stories, which a paid radio journalist (with more than 30 years of radio experience) edited and recorded to increase the authenticity and representation of journalistic emotional engagement. The radio journalist was hired for his substantial expertise as well as access. He also recruited voice actors to play the interviewees.

To control the effects of interest and proximity on participants' psychological reactions, the same location, community, and number of victims were presented across conditions and no recognizable or established news outlet was named in the stories. Each story ranged from two minutes to two minutes and 30 seconds, which is the average length of radio news story

packages that deliver reports on crucial or impactful incidents (Relg & Lundy, 2014; 24h in a newsroom, n.d.). I also consulted with the radio reporter who recorded the stories to confirm that the story length was adequate for disaster reporting.

In the affective empathy (emotional disclosure) condition in each of the three stories, a radio reporter expressed sadness by choking up and voice faltering for a moment. In the cognitive empathy (perspective-taking) treatment condition, a radio reporter expressed his empathy for the interviewees' suffering. A journalist may also express personal understanding (the similarity of experiences) of the interviewees' situation based on personal experience. The writers ensured that each story had a lede that specifically described a traumatic or life-altering ordeal experienced within a U.S. community. The radio journalist included one soundbite of an interview subject expressing distress and another soundbite of an official source. The reporter communicated his understanding, and in one of the occurrences, he communicated his understanding based on personal experience (See Appendix D: Stimulus Stories). By contrast, the radio reporter in the non-empathetic condition did not demonstrate any empathy regarding interviewees' distress and the community's hardships. As such, the non-empathetic condition aligned with the more traditional journalistic practice of presenting news in a detached manner.

Measures

Empathy

Journalists' empathy as perceived by respondents was measured using affective empathy (8 items), cognitive empathy (7 items), and overall empathy (three one-item measures that include how caring, how supportive, and how sensitive the reporter was). First, items based on previous literature were adapted or created to measure the level of journalists' affective empathy (emotional disclosure) and cognitive empathy (perspective taking) respectively. The wording of

each item from previous scales was modified to fit the content. Participants rated the news articles to assess each empathy level based on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. To measure affective empathy, one item was adopted from Qian's (2000) empathy measure in mediated experiences, and four items were adapted from the scale of Kellett et al (2006) to measure whether leaders can express one's own emotions in the workplace. An example is "The reporter communicated to audiences how he feels in relation to the circumstances." Four additional items were created based on affective empathy definition (i.e., the ability to feel how others feel and share such emotions with others), including "The reporter shows and shares his emotions with others."

Next, seven cognitive empathy items were adopted from Kane and colleagues' (2007) Jefferson Scale of Patient's Perceptions of Physician Empathy items, to measure cognitive empathy. The researchers validated the scale to measure physician's empathy (i.e., cognitive empathy communication skills) perceived by patients. The questions measured participants' perceptions of the journalist's empathetic concern and understanding, and largely aimed to deal perspective-taking aspects of empathy. An example is "The reporter understood the community and its members' concerns." Additionally, one item was added to assess the extent to which participants think the reporter connected his personal experience with the community and interviewees in the news story to communicate the impact.

I conducted factor analyses to explore the empathy structure, and to determine whether the empathy measurement used in the pilot test appropriately measured the effectiveness of the experimental conditions. The EFA analysis implies that empathy could consist of two factors (affective and cognitive), and I proceeded with the experiment based on the results. Explanatory factor analysis (EFA, Promax rotation) with the eight emotional-disclosure items suggested one

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factor ($\alpha = .970$). I chose Promax rotation based on Gorsuch (1983)'s recommendation when items were intercorrelated and the simple structure is clear. Factor loadings were between .894 and .946, and inter-item correlations were between .769 and .866. EFA with the seven perspective-taking items also suggested one factor solution ($\alpha = .961$), with factor loadings between .816 and .935 and inter-item correlations between .680 and .887. The EFA results suggested that the empathy construct consists of two components—cognitive and affective—and each set of survey items measures the intended component of empathy. The mean score of emotional-disclosure and perspective-taking empathy scale were 3.744 (*SD* = .9104) and 3.855 (*SD* = .8200), respectively. [1]

In addition, respondents were asked to assess how caring, supportive, and sensitive the reporter's empathetic communication was in the news story, and they answered the questions based on a five-point scale: 1 = not at all to 5 = extremely (Renstrom & Ottati, 2020). The mean score of caring was 3.839 (*SD* = .9557); supportiveness was 3.789 (*SD* = .8914); and sensitivity was 3.684 (*SD* = .9651). This Renstrom and Ottai's measure has been used to assess voters' perceptions of a politician's empathy in public settings, for example, by asking participants to assess the conversation (written in a transcript) between the politician and voters in terms of how empathetic (sensitive, caring, and supportive) the politician is and how sensitive the candidate's response is.

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[1] When an adequate numbers of sample size was obtained (n =338) in study 2, I conducted CFA for the two sets of empathy scale (affective and cognitive). Analysis results were provided in Appendix E: Empathy Scale. As a summary, the results suggested an adequate fit with data: $\chi2 = 379.34$, df = 89, p < .001, CFI = .924, TLI = .910, RMSEA = .098, 90% CI [.088, .109] (Hu & Bentler, 1999; March & Hocevar, 1985), implying that affective and cognitive empathy are distinct systems (Niedtfeld, 2017) that can have separate and discriminable effects on individuals' psychological reactions (Davis et al., 1987).

Perceived Reality

Perceived reality was measured by asking respondents to rate the authenticity level of stories in each condition. The measure was modified from Potter's (1986) and Popova's (2010) perceived reality scale, and Quan's (2000) viewers' reality sense and authenticity measurements in mediated experience. Examples include, "The way the reporter presented the news story is similar to the way that other reporters present news," and "The way the story was narrated for news was quite typical." An EFA (Promax rotation) suggested one factor (Carpenter, 2018): the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin [KMO] Bartlett's test = 0.76, $\chi2$ = 120.503, *df* = 15, p <.000). Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .859 (*M* = 3.31, *SD* = .794).

Results

Paired samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether respondents rated the reporter's empathetic communication behaviors in each of the two treatment conditions to be more empathetic than the reporter's behaviors in the non-empathetic condition (Table 2). In comparing the perspective-taking empathy condition and the non-empathetic condition, respondents rated the reporter in the perspective taking empathy condition as being more caring (*M* = 4.08, *SD* = 0.962) than the reporter in the non-empathetic condition (*M* = 3.62, *SD* = 1.195). The t-statistics were 3.208 (*p* = .001), with *df* =59, respectively. The effect size for the difference between the groups was calculated using Cohen's d, resulting in a value of .414 – a small-medium effect (Becker, 2000). In terms of how sensitive the reporter was, the mean test score for the perspective taking empathy condition was 3.97 (*SD* = 0.991) and the mean test score for the non-empathetic condition was 3.42 (*SD* = 1.183). The t statistic was 3.639 (*p* < .001), and the effect size (using Cohen's d) was .160, indicating a small effect. In terms of how supportive the reporter was, the mean test score for the perspective-taking empathy condition

was 3.88 (SD = 1.091) and the mean test score for the non-empathetic condition was 3.55 (SD =

1.1185), with the t-statistic of 2.348 (p = .011) and the effect size (using Cohen's d) of .303.

Respondents also rated the reporter in the cognitive empathy condition as showing higher levels

of cognitive empathy (M = 4.07, n = 60, SD = 0.581) than the reporter in the non-empathetic

condition (M = 3.67, n = 60, SD = 1.00). The t statistic was 3.402 (p < .001). The effect size for

the difference between the groups was calculated using Cohen's d, resulting in a value of 0.439 –

a medium effect.

Table 2

Paired samples t test results for the perspective-taking empathy and non-empathetic conditions

	Mean	SE	Paried t test			
			t statistic	*df*	Sig (one-tailed)	Cohen's d
COGNITIVE EMPATHY						
Perspetive taking	4.07	0.581	3.402	59	<0.001	.439
Non-empathetic	3.67	1.000				
AFFECTIVE EMPATHY						
Perspective taking	3.96	.952	3.578	58	<0.001	.466
Non-empathetic	3.50	1.13				
CARING						
Perspective taking	4.08	.962	3.208	59	.001	.414
Non-empathetic	3.62	1.195				
SENSITIVE						
Perspective taking	3.97	.991	3.639	59	<0.001	.470
Non-empathetic	3.42	1.183				
SUPPORTIVE						
Perspective taking	3.88	1.091	2.348	59	.011	.303
Non-empathetic	3.55	1.185				

Respondents also rated the reporter in the emotional disclosure (i.e., sadness) empathy

condition as being more sensitive and affectively empathetic than the reporter in the non-

empathetic condition (see Table 3). Specifically, in terms of how sensitive the reporter was, the

mean score for emotional disclosure condition was 3.80 (SD = 1.117); and the mean score for the

non-empathetic condition was 3.42 (SD = 1.183). The t-statistic was 2.892, with p = .003.

However, no statistical differences between the emotional disclosure condition and the non-

empathetic condition were found when respondents rated how caring and supportive the reporter

was in delivering the stories (p = .064 and .276, respectively). The mean score for affective

empathy of the emotional disclosure condition was 3.76 (SD = 1.18), and the mean score of the

non-empathetic condition was 3.50 (SD = 1.13). The t-statistic was 1.918 (p = .03).

Table 3

Paired samples t test results for the emotional-disclosure empathy and non-empathetic conditions

	Mean	SE	Paried t test			
			t statistic	*df*	Sig (one-tailed)	Cohen's d
COGNITIVE EMPATHY						
Emotional disclosure	3.81	1.09	1.053	59	.148	.136
Non-empathetic	3.67	1.00				
AFFECTIVE EMPATHY						
Emotional disclosure	3.76	1.18	1.918	59	.030	.248
Non-empathetic	3.50	1.130				
CARING						
Emotional disclosure	3.82	1.242	1.541	59	.064	.199
Non-empathetic	3.62	1.195				
SENSITIVE						
Emotional disclosure	3.80	1.117	2.892	59	.003	.634
Non-empathetic	3.42	1.183				
SUPPORTIVE						
Emotional disclosure	3.63	1.221	.599	59	.276	.077
Non-empathetic	3.55	1.185				

Respondents perceived that the non-empathetic condition was the most plausible and authentic ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.925$) compared to the cognitive ($M = 3.47$, $n = 60$, $SD = 1.117$, $p = .042$) and affective conditions ($M = 3.16$, $n = 60$, $SD = 1.164$, $p < .001$). In other words, respondents considered the non-empathetic condition as being the most realistic and plausible, followed by the perspective taking condition and the emotional disclosure condition. As a note, this perceived reality variable was replaced by novelty of journalists' practices as perceived by audiences in Study 2. The aim was to directly investigate audiences' perceptions of empathetic reporting.

Summary

Taken together, the results of the pilot test indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the mean test scores between the perspective-taking (cognitive) empathy group and the control group. Specifically, the perspective-taking group had a higher mean test score than the control group in terms of how cognitively empathetic, caring, sensitive, and supportive the reporter was, as perceived by respondents. The emotional-disclosure (affective) empathy groups did not show significant differences with the control group in some empathy levels (cognitive empathy as well as how caring and supportive the reporter was). Additionally, when comparing the journalists' empathy levels in the perspective-taking and emotional-disclosure conditions as perceived by respondents, the reporter in the perspective-taking empathy condition was rated to be the most empathetic across all of the empathy measures (affective empathy, cognitive empathy, and the three overall empathy items). In terms of perceived reality, the non-empathetic condition was considered the most plausible and realistic compared to the cognitive and affective conditions. It is notable that the affective condition showed the lowest authenticity level as rated by respondents. This low level of

authenticity as perceived by respondents could also be due to their negative attitudes toward the emotional news reporter — one respondent commented: "I wouldn't listen to that reporter anymore because he is not impartial."

Given the results, I decided to test only the perspective-taking empathy condition to investigate the effects on audiences of journalists' empathetic reporting: (1) with regard to the care and supportiveness shown by the reporter, there were no differences between the emotional disclosure condition and the non-empathetic condition in empathy levels as rated by respondents (i.e. the experimental condition of emotional disclosure empathy might not generate the intended impact), (2) the reporter behaviors in the perspective-taking empathy condition were rated as being more realistic and plausible than the behaviors in the emotional disclosure condition, and (3) across all empathy measures, the reporter's behaviors in the perspective-taking empathy condition were rated as being more empathetic than the behaviors in the emotional-disclosure empathy condition.

CHAPTER 5

STUDY 2: HYPOTHESES TESTING

Procedure

Based on the pilot test results, especially the one suggesting that affective empathy conditions might not have impact on people's psychological engagement, hypotheses testing was conducted using only the cognitive empathy (perspective-taking) condition. An online experiment (2 X 3 factorial, between-subjects design) was conducted to compare randomly assigned respondents' responses to either a condition in which they listened to radio news stories in which a journalist employed empathetic communication or radio news stories in which a journalist did not convey any empathy. The conditions presented in the stories consisted of: (1) story topic 1: the journalist's empathetic communication (i.e., perspective-taking); (2) story topic 2: the journalist's perspective-taking; (3) story topic 3: the journalist's perspective-tasking ; (4) story topic 1: non-empathetic (i.e., no emotional disclosure), (5) story topic 2: non-empathetic, and (6) story topic 3: non-empathetic.

Respondents were randomly assigned to listen to one of the six stories. They then rated the extent to which the reporter showed empathy in delivering the news stories, and then they were presented with questions that specifically measured their psychological engagement. In addition, respondents assessed the relevance of the story topic and incident presented in the stories to them, as well as their perceived novelty in terms of how the reporter delivered the story (these two variables were the moderators). Lastly, respondents were also asked to share their demographic information (age, gender, education, racial/ethnic background, and political affiliation).

Participants

A power analysis via G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) indicated a minimum of 306 respondents (51 respondents per cell) was needed in order to have 80% power to detect a small - sized effect with the traditional 0.05 criterion. Qualtrics recruited 363 respondents. Incomplete and/or unreliable responses (e.g., where people choose the same option for every survey question or complete the survey within 200 seconds) were deleted, resulting in 338 respondents (54-56 per cell).

Demographics

The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 97, with a mean age of 48 (SD = 18.25). Approximately 48% of respondents were male, while 51% were female. Four respondents identified themselves as non-binary. The majority of the sample identified as White (76%), followed by Black/African American (14%), Asian (5%), American Indian or Alaska Native (1%), and mixed race (3%). Two respondents identified as other (Latin and Puerto Rican respectively). Sixteen percent of the sample was of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Education levels were as follows: high school degree or equivalent (31%); some college, i.e., college level classes after high school but without a college degree (29%); bachelor's degree (17%); associate's degree (13%); graduate degree (8%), and less than high school (3%). A categorical measure of political affiliation showed 33% of respondents reported themselves as Democrat, 31% as Republican, and 28% as independent. Additionally, 8% of the sample identified as non-political, while 1% identified as other. Annual household income before taxes was reported as less than $20,000 (25%); $20,000 to $49,999 (33%); $50,000 to $99,999 (29%); $100,000 to $149,990 (9%), and greater than $150,000 (4%).

The majority of the sample (83%) reported they were interested in news: 34% were somewhat interested, 25% were very interested, and 24% were extremely interested. On the contrary, 10% of respondents said that they are not very interested in news, and 6% of them were not at all interested. The sample's main platform that they accessed news was TV (42%). Thirty-five percent of them identified smart phones as their main platform to access news, followed by computers (14%), radio (6%), tablets (3%), and printed newspapers (1%). More than one third (34%) of the sample access news "several times a day." More than one fifth (21%) reported "once a day," 18% "several times a week," and 8% "once a week." In addition, 6% access news less often than once a month, and 6% reported they never get news. In answer to how often they listen to radio news (including podcasts), 22% of respondents said they access radio news "several times a day"; 18% "several times a week"; 16% "once a day"; and 11% "less than once a month." Respondents who never listen to radio news account for 16%.

Table 4

Summary of Descriptives and Factor Analysis of Each DV

Variables	Sadness	J_identification*	I_Identification*	Elaboration	Attention	Recognition	Transportation
Factor loadings	.601-.881	.823-.836	.708-.882	.677-.850	.872 -.861	.726 - .862	.835-.879
Cronbach's alpha	.864	.846	.821	.892	.831	.725	.957
M (SD)	3.79 (1.146)	4.54 (1.303)	5.17 (1.246)	4.59 (1.347)	4.99 (1.509)	5.61 (1.070)	4.03 (1.652)

Note: J_Identification refers to identification with the journalist, and I_identification refers to identification with the interviewees

Measures

All dependent variables and moderators were averaged to form a composite level of each dependent variable regarding the effects of the radio news reporter's empathetic practices. For all

indices, higher values correspond to a greater level of psychological engagement. A reliability

test (Cronbach's coefficient alpha) was conducted with measures used in this experiment.

Principal Axis Factoring and Promax rotation was performed to apply the scale used in this

experiment (Carpenter, 2018). The reliability test and EFA results were summarized in table 4.

Dependent variables

The dependent variables include variables representing audiences' psychological

engagement following being presented with one of six radio news stories: participants were

asked to rate their level of psychological engagement on a seven-point scale. In this experiment,

audience's psychological engagement includes measures that represent the audiences': (1)

emotional responses (in particular, sadness), (2) identification with the people covered, (3)

identification with the journalist who delivered the news, (4) cognitive media involvement

(measures are adapted from cognitive dimension measures of involvement scales), and (5)

transportation (see the appendix C: Study 2 Survey Questionnaire). All items were adapted to

this experimental context.

Emotional Responses (Sadness). Respondents' emotional responses were measured by

asking them to indicate their level of emotional reaction (that are sadness, sorrow, worry, and

gloom) while listening to the story (Oliver et al., 2012). Considering that the news content

presented in each of the three stories used in this experiment was negative and disaster-related,

sadness was assessed separately by using Scherer's (2005) five-item sadness scale (e.g., tearing

up). After EFA, one cross loading item was deleted ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.146$, $\alpha = .864$) (Pett et al.,

2003).

Interviewee Identification. *Audiences' attachment to the people* being interviewed and

the affected community were measured with the *character identification* scale adapted from Rain

and Mar (2021) and Tal-Or and Cohen (2010). An example item is "I understand what happened to the community the way the interviewee and people in the community experienced." Respondents were asked to assess their level of agreement or disagreement based on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 7 ("Strongly agree"), $M =5.17$, $SD = 1.246$, $\alpha = .821$.

Journalist Identification. Audiences' identification with the journalist was measured using six items adapted from Mazodier, Henderson, and Beck's (2018) *fan identification scale.* The Mazodier et al.'s (2018) fan identification scale was used to measure a specific person (e.g., a celebrity) or a group with whom media users experienced attachment and social bonding (Kang et al., 2021). This fan identification scale differs from character identification in that it is mainly concerned with how people align their life values with and develop an affinity with a celebrity or athlete presented in the media. The character identification scale primarily indicates media users' understanding of the characters in a story and is largely based on their sympathy with the given characters. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with the items based on a seven-point scale (from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 7 = "Strongly agree"). An example is, "I have a lot in common with the radio reporter narrating this story." After two items with cross and weak loadings were deleted, a factor analysis yielded a single factor. The mean score was 4.54 ($SD = 1.303$, $\alpha = .846$).

Cognitive media involvement. Cognitive media involvement describes audiences' understanding and recognition of the given issue and incident (adapted from cognitive dimension measures of involvement). *Cognitive engagement* was measured based on attention, recognition, and elaboration scales developed by Perse (1990b) and used in communication research (see also Sun et al., 2008; Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002). As such, cognitive involvement was measured by

using three scales that measure attention, recognition, and elaboration respectively. First, attention was measured using a five-item Attention Scale (e.g., "I paid close attention to what happened"), $M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.509$, $\alpha = .831$. Recognition was measured using a three-item Recognition Scale (e.g., "I recognized the hardship experienced by the people and the community as described in the report"), $M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.070$, $\alpha = .725$. Elaboration was measured by a five-item Elaboration Scale (e.g., "I thought about how what I heard in the report related to other people I know"), $M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.347$, $\alpha = .892$. For the Elaboration Scale, two original items ("I think about what this will mean to me and my family" and "I think about what this will mean to other people") are modified based on Eveland and Dunwoody's (2002) revised items to make them more applicable to measure cognitive involvement in the context of consuming hard news, not watching entertaining media content.

Transportation. Transportation refers to audiences' cognitive engagement with a story narrative. Eight items that measure narrative transportation were adapted (Russell et al., 2019). This scale concerns the degree to which an individual is absorbed into a story narrative and measures their mental and emotional immersion as well as the extent to which they generate mental imagery. Examples include, "I was carried away by the news story" and "I could picture myself in the scenes of the story." Respondents will assess their level of agreement or disagreement with the item on a seven-point scale (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"), $M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.652$, $\alpha = .957$.

Moderator

Relevance—participants' previous experience related to the topic presented in the story—was measured using three items. The first item (adapted from Tunney's (2022) study) asks respondents to rate on a five-point scale (1 = Definitely not, 2 = Probably not, 3 = Might or

might not be, 4 = Probably yes, 5 = Definitely yes) the extent to which the story topic was

personally relevant, M = 2.602, SD= 1.283, and α =.903. A factor analysis for relevance

produced unidimensionality (the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin [KMO] Bartlett's test = 0.73, $\chi2$ = 679.54,

df = 3, p <.000) with the factor loading coefficients ranging from 0.88 to 0.94.

Table 5

Correlation and Descriptive Statistics for Moderators and Dependent Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Novelty	1								
2.Relevance	.37**	1							
3.Sadness	.22**	.32**	1						
4.Identification_ J	.18**	.32**	.04	1					
5.Identification_I	.06	.16**	.58**	.66**	1				
6.Attention	-.44**	.12*	.06	.04	.21**	1			
7.Recognition	-.40**	-.10	.23**	.20**	.45**	.64**	1		
8.Elaboration	.31**	.48**	.67**	.67**	.64**	-.02	.13*	1	
9.Transportation	.27**	.42**	.74**	.64**	.60**	.08	.19**	.74**	1
M	2.69	2.60	3.79	4.54	5.17	5.61	4.99	4.50	4.03
SD	.883	1.282	1.146	1.303	1.246	1.070	1.509	1.347	1.65 2

*p < .05, **p < .01

Identification_J refers to identification with the journalist, and identification_I refer to identification with the interviewees

Because there are no existing scales to measure *novelty* in terms of the ways that

journalists report the news, I created a novelty measure. Based on literature, journalists'

reporting novelty is defined in relation to unexpectedness of reporting styles or approaches, in

which people do not expect the journalist to deliver news in that way (Mendelson, 1997; Prati,

Junior, & do Amapa, 2016). Unexpected aspects of journalists' reporting might relate to a

behavior that is considered to be new, rare, or unusual to audiences/readers (Prati et al., 2016). In

addition, audiences may consider unexpected reporting styles to be unprofessional on the part of

the journalist (Lee, 2015). Taking these aspects together, eight novelty items were developed and

rated based on a five-point scale (from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree). Example items include, "The way the reporter presented the news story aligned with my expectations of how reporters should present news," and "The reporter acted unprofessionally when narrating the news." After an EFA (Promax rotation), three items with cross loadings and low correlations were deleted (the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin [KMO] Bartlett's test = 0.85, $\chi2$ = 640.42, df = 10, p < .000). Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .833 (M = 2.694, SD = .883).

Table 5 reports correlations and descriptive statistics for all dependent variables and moderators. Table 6 presents descriptive statistics for these variables in the non-empathetic and empathetic conditions.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Moderators, Dependent Variables, and Empathy in Empathetic and Non-empathetic Conditions

	Non-Empathetic		Empathetic	
	M	SD	M	SD
Novelty	2.60	.883	2.79	.875
Relevance	2.49	1.227	2.72	1.330
Sadness	3.87	1.093	3.71	1.194
J_Identification	4.52	1.239	4.56	1.368
I_Identification	5.28	1.169	5.04	1.310
Attention	5.07	1.513	4.91	1.506
Recognition	5.73	.980	5.50	1.442
Elaboration	4.54	1.327	4.46	1.370
Transportation	4.09	1.637	3.96	1.670
Empathy	3.59	.797	3.81	.813

Note: J_Identification refers to identification with the journalist, and I_identification refers to identification with the interviewees

Control variables

The research controlled for the possible confounding variables of gender, age, education, political affiliation, and racial/ethnic background. Studies show that certain demographic variables are associated with news consumption. Age is related to news interest (Pew Research, 2010)—for example, young people are generally less interested in news (Prior, 2007). Education

is positively related to spending more time reading news and the awareness of social events (Benesch, 2012; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2011). Women are also known to be less likely engaged with news (Benesch, 2012), but women are more likely to be empathetic with the story and show higher levels of negative emotional reactions to news, such as fear and sadness (Lemish & Alony, 2014). Interest, awareness, and emotional response toward news story topics could differ depending on their political affiliation. For example, people may respond differently to the pandemic outbreak story due to a politically divided U.S. (Mordecai & Connaughton, 2020).

For the four control variables (gender, race, political affiliation, and education), single or multiple dummy variables were created and treated as covariates in the process model: For gender, 0= man, 1= other; for race, 0= White, 1= other; for political affiliation, three dummy variables were created each with Republican group and Democrat group as a test group; for educational level, three dummy groups were created: less than high school or high school equivalent, some college (reference group), and a bachelor's degree or higher. The dummy groups and the reference groups were chosen based on previous studies that investigated the effects of media use and public perceptions (Callanan, 2012; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Moule & Wallace, 2017; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). For example, females were reported to be more emotional and empathetic with story characters (De Wied, Zillmann, & Ordman, 1995). Thus, I coded women for 1 and other genders for 0 to see the impact of being female as compared to other genders. In terms of race, white racial groups are usually chosen as a reference group, so as to detect the differences of people who belong to other racial groups: I coded 1 for other racial groups and 1 for White. I also took the variations of variables into consideration—i.e., each dummy group had a large enough number of respondents.

Data Analysis

Because each dependent variable is considered to be a discrete variable, each of them was individually predicted with regard to the effect of empathetic reporting on each. This followed the practices of previous studies, i.e., the studies from which the present study adapted its measure (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002; Perse, 1990b; Sun et al., 2008).

Using PROCESS model 2 (Hayes, 2013) and SPSS macro, both the main effects of empathetic reporting on audiences' psychological engagement, as well as the moderation effects of relevance and novelty on the relationship between empathetic reporting and dependent variable, were tested. The analysis is based on 5,000 bootstraps with empathetic condition (non-empathetic =0, empathetic =1) as a predictor, relevance and novelty as moderators, and identification with the journalist as an outcome variable. Based on previous studies, age, gender, education, and political affiliation were included as covariates (Benesch, 2012; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2011; Prior, 2007; Lemish & Alony, 2014). The same procedure was performed with each dependent variable of audiences' psychological engagement subsequently.

Results

Analyses of Main Hypotheses

Journalists' empathetic reporting behaviors, in particular their perspective-taking behaviors, did not have an impact on audiences' psychological engagement (which were measured by sadness, identification with the journalist, identification with the people in the story, elaboration, attention, recognition, and transportation). The two moderators (relevance and novelty) did not interact with the effects of journalists' empathetic reporting on audiences' psychological engagement.

It is notable that moderators and a few control variables had a significant impact on several dependent variables when the respondents were exposed to tragic news stories across conditions. When the respondents were exposed to disaster reporting, their perceived relevance of the story they heard was positively related to their sadness, identification with the reporter, elaboration on the story content, attention to the story, and transportation regardless of whether or not the reporter expressed empathy. The novelty of the reporter's reporting practices as rated by the respondents is positively related to elaboration on the story content but is negatively related to their attention to the news story, regardless of the condition. A few demographic variables showed statistically significant relationships with audiences' psychological engagement across conditions. The results tables are presented in Appendix F.

H1a hypothesized the positive relationship between empathetic reporting and sadness. The result indicated that the effect of empathetic reporting on audiences' experiencing sadness was not significant (p = .3563). Thus, H1a was not supported. **H2a** and **H3a** posited the interaction effects of relevance and novelty on the relationship between empathetic reporting and sadness. The result showed that the interactions were not significant (p = .8361 for relevance and .8740 for novelty), resulting in rejection of H2a and H3a.

H1b hypothesized positive relationships between empathetic communication and journalistic identification. The result indicated that empathetic communication did not have a significant impact on identification with the journalist (p = .6345), rejecting H1b. **H2b** predicted the moderation effects of relevance on the relationship between empathetic reporting and identification with the journalist, and **H3b** posited the moderation effects of novelty on the relationship. These hypotheses that predicted moderation effects on identification with the journalist were all rejected. Relevance did not have a significant interaction effect on the

relationship between empathetic reporting and audiences' identification with the journalist (p = .6893), and novelty, either (p =.7259).

H1c hypothesized that journalists' empathetic reporting was positively related to audiences' identification with the people in the story. H1c was rejected, as the result indicated the relationship was not significant (p = .3501). **H2c** and **H3c** respectively predicted the moderation effects of relevance and novelty on the relationships between empathetic reporting and identification with interviewees. Neither relevance nor novelty had a significant moderation effect on the main effect (p = .8746 and .8361, respectively), also rejecting H2c and H3c.

H1d posited the positive relationship between empathetic reporting and audiences' elaboration related to the story was not supported (p = .3501). **H2d** and **H3d** predicted the moderation effects of relevance and novelty on the main effect, respectively. Moderation analyses indicated that the interaction effects were also not significant (p = .2365 and .6644, respectively) and thus H2d and H3d were not supported.

H1e hypothesized that journalists' empathetic reporting was positively related to audiences' attention to the story. The result indicated the relationship was not significant (p = .5447), rejecting H1e. **H2e** predicted the interaction of relevance on the main effect, and **H3e** predicted the interaction of novelty on the main effect. Neither H2e nor H3e was supported. A moderation analysis showed that the effect of empathetic reporting on audiences' attention was not dependent on people's perceived relevance to the story, or on the novelty of the journalist's reporting practices (p = .0743 and = .5656, respectively).

H1f, which predicted the main effect (a positive relationship between empathetic reporting and audiences' recognition of the story content), was not supported (p = .8757). In

addition, hypotheses that posited the interaction effects of relevance (**H2f**) and novelty (**H3f**) were also rejected ($p = .7364$ and $= .8478$, respectively).

H1g proposed a positive effect of empathetic reporting on audiences' transportation. The results showed the effect was not statistically significant, and H1g was not proven ($p = .6911$). **H2g** hypothesized that relevance moderates the relationship between empathetic reporting and audiences' transportation. **H3g** posited that novelty moderates the relationship between empathetic reporting and audiences' transportation. The moderation effects of relevance and novelty were statistically insignificant ($p = .9512$ and $.8051$, respectively), rejecting H2g and H3g.

Additional Analysis

Independent *t*-tests were additionally conducted to explore the effects of journalists' empathetic communication behaviors and audiences' psychological engagement without considering moderator interactions. The results indicated the significant relationships between empathetic communication and two components of audiences' psychological engagement: interviewee identification ($p = .032$, one-sided) and recognition ($p = .025$, one-sided). However, the mean test scores of the experimental condition were lower than the score in the non-empathetic condition both for interviewee identification ($M = 5.043$, $SD = 1.306$ vs $M = 5.294$, $SD = 1.169$) and for recognition ($M = 5.499$, $SD = 1.144$ vs $M = 5.726$, $SD = .980$). In other words, the radio news reporter's empathetic communication behaviors resulted in lesser levels of interviewee identification and story recognition compared to the control condition in which his behaviors did not include an expression of empathy. This is contradictory to the hypotheses in this study, which assumed the positive effects of empathetic communication on audiences' psychological engagement. These *t*-test results showed similar findings of the analysis on regular

radio news listeners in the sample (38% of the sample), in that the reporter's empathetic communication was negatively related to sadness, recognition, and elaboration. The analysis results with regular radio news listeners in the sample were provided in Appendix G.

Structural equation modeling using IBM SPSS 29 AMOS also produced non-significant results. The results indicated that the full structural model, which assumed the positive relationships between journalists' empathetic communication and the seven components of audiences' psychological engagement, were not adequate (CFI = .474, RMSEA = .404, CIM/DF = 55.87). Hu and Bentler (1999) recommended the value of an RMSEA smaller than .06 and a CFI larger than .95 for a good model fit. The threshold value for a CMIN/DF is equal to or less than three for an acceptable fit (Kline, 1998).

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

In alignment with the recent literature about news engagement and emotionality in journalism, it was expected that in this study, the radio news reporter's empathetic communication, and especially his demonstration of cognitive empathy toward the interviewees and their community, would engender audiences' psychological engagement. However, all results taken together revealed that the radio news reporter's empathetic communication as presented in the experimental condition did not demonstrate a significant relationship with respondents' psychological engagement. The data indicate that empathetic communication did not facilitate audiences' psychological engagement.

Several reasons can account for the non-significant results. First, H1 posited a positive relationship between empathetic communication and audiences' feeling sadness. This hypothesis assumed that sadness would likely be the strongest emotion experienced by respondents who listened to a story describing trauma and human suffering. However, respondents might in reality react differently and not experience sadness. It was also possible that a confound (e.g., negative perceptions of the given radio news reporter) hindered respondents from feeling sadness in relation to the reporting.

In addition to sadness, concern and anger are other emotions that people might have experienced while listening to the radio news stories in this study (Makwana, 2019). Listening to stories about a man-made disaster (i.e., ferry boat sinking) might generate anger as the main emotion felt by respondents (Makwana, 2019). Since this study only measured respondents' sadness, other emotional reactions that could be aroused by the stimulus stories in the experiment may have been missed. Second, radio news might not be the most appropriate environment to

examine the effects of empathetic communication on respondent's negative emotional responses (such as sadness). Peacock and colleagues' study (2011) showed that television is a better medium than radio to activate negative emotional reactions to news content. Positive emotions, such as joy, amusement, or happiness would be more effectively aroused by the experimental condition and thus provide a more effective perspective from which to examine journalists' display of empathy on audiences' emotional arousal in a radio news environment.

Third, since the reporter's empathetic communication behaviors diverge somewhat from traditional journalistic practices guided by objectivity and factuality, respondents in this study might not have favored the radio reporter's reporting style (Van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014), and this may have hindered their emotional responses and involvement. The higher mean score for novelty of the reporter's practices in the empathetic condition (M = 2.79, SE .875= vs 2.60, SE = .883) also hinted at the possibility that the sample may have considered empathetic communication reporting as being less plausible and professional. Studies have indicated that people might develop less favorable attitudes or even get offended, if they perceive that inauthentic or insincere empathetic behaviors are displayed, and thus the intended effects of empathy may be compromised (Mahmoud & Grigoriou, 2017). Similarly, audiences might have thought that the reporter's empathetic communication behaviors are market driven, and thus not sincere. Further examination of various emotional reactions to news stories, as well as how people perceive and evaluate journalists' empathetic communication behaviors is required.

H2 (which suggested a positive relationship between empathetic communication and journalist identification) assumes that people develop emotional attachment to journalists who appear to be empathetic and understanding professionals (Wan et al., 2018). Gender role

violation and mistrust of the reporter's genuineness in the experiment could have influenced respondent's opinions about the radio news reporter, resulting in the rejection of H2.

Empathy is traditionally regarded as a feminine trait. The reporter in this experiment was a male in his mid-60s; a male's display of empathy is generally perceived unfavorably because such behaviors violate traditional gender role expectations (Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Jansz, 2000; Renstrom & Ottati, 2020). As such, the reporter's show of empathy in this experiment would likely be considered less favorable, which would presumably hinder respondents from identifying with him. Again, the study sample might have been suspicious of the genuineness of the reporter's sentiment. The reporter in this experiment expressed empathy by communicating his awareness of the event's tragic nature in the news dissemination stage, where empathy display is a performative behavior. Audiences might suspect the reporter of feigning empathy to look good or to show off (Mahmoud & Grigoriou, 2017; Williamson, 2019); these perceptions could have hindered the respondents from identifying with the reporter. Additionally, the non-significant results regarding journalist identification suggest that scholars and news professionals should consider how to prove sincerity and authenticity. The recent attention to news engagement is derived largely from the news industry's ongoing issues, that are, public's distrust and decrease in revenues (Nelson & Schmidt, 2022). Engagement efforts would likely fail if audiences doubted their genuineness; news professionals should be mindful so that their behaviors are based on "ethical consideration of committed and responsible journalists," rather than on depersonalized corporate structure and market-driven journalism (Holt, 2012, p. 8).

According to Holt (2012), authenticity in journalism relates to journalists' commitment to "the task of serving the public with good and trustworthy information from reliable sources," going beyond merely following organizational routines in producing news (p. 4). This is not an

easy task because journalists work on a tight schedule and timeline (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996), and it is important to recognize that journalists' engagement efforts are diminished when audiences consider their display of empathy as a performative or manipulative action based on commercial interests or journalistic cliches.

Considering the intimate and personal nature of understanding another's feelings and experiences, interpersonal settings, rather than the performative setting presented to respondents in this study, might be more appropriate contexts for journalists to demonstrate authenticity and ensure their empathetic communication is effective. Studies show that journalists display empathy during interpersonal interactions and interviews to secure the trust of their news sources and thereby obtain information (Gluck, 2016; Carpenter et al., 2018). Medical studies show that interpersonal empathetic communication facilitates trust building, decreases patient anxiety and/or pain (Howick et al., 2018); in a corporate setting, the likelihood that employees will follow a leader increases (Yue, Thelen, & Walden, 2023). Further research in journalism should investigate the various contexts where journalists can show empathy in interpersonal contexts, as well as the effects of empathetic communication in interpersonal interview settings.

In terms of the non-significant effects of H3, which suggested a positive relationship between empathetic communication and interviewee identification, the short running time and audio-only environment might also have influenced the results. The running time (between two and two and a half minutes) of radio stories provided in this experiment might not have given audiences enough time to identify with the interviewees. More interactive and richer media environments than existed in this experiment—such as a 360-degree video or a music video— would offer a more impactful influence on respondents in terms of identifying with the people in the story (Bergin, 2016; Ishii, Lyons, & Carr, 2019; Kang et al., 2021). Studies have also shown

that using video was more effective in building social ties (Ishii et al., 2019) or enhancing quality

of friendships among adolescents (Sheer, 2010). Non-verbal communication especially—

obviously not presented in an audio environment—more effectively conveys empathy than does

verbal communication (Riess & Kraft-Todd, 2014). The use of a relatively rich medium would

improve the effectiveness of the experiment in detecting any effects of empathetic

communication on respondents' psychological engagement.

Several simultaneous factors might have played a role in terms of failing to prove the

positive relationship between empathetic communication and cognitive involvement (H4, H5,

and H6; attention, recognition, and elaboration respectively). Because of the audio-only

environment and the running time (less than 2.5 minutes), respondents' level of recognition and

elaboration could not be greatly influenced. Gender role violation and the reporter's performative

behaviors also hampered respondents from being cognitively involved in the story. For example,

gender role violation can influence the effect of empathetic communication on respondents'

attention and elaboration vis a vis the likelihood of their being distracted by behaviors they

perceived as being cognitively incongruent (Vince, 2002). That novelty (of the reporting practice

as rated by the respondents) had a negative relationship with recognition ($b = $ -0.5649, SE

$= .1075, p <$0.000) regardless of the condition (whether or not they were exposed to the

empathetic condition) hints at the possibility that lower opinion levels of the reporter hinder

respondents' cognitive involvement (See Appendix F: Regression Results). In other words,

people's perceptions of a reporter's practices that deviated from the norm could hamper their

recognition of the event in the story.

Based on the assumption that empathetic communication leads people to be more deeply

involved in news stories than non-empathetic communication, H7 posited a positive impact of

empathetic communication on transportation, However, the results showed that empathetic communication did not prompt the study sample's being fully absorbed in the story. One possibility is that respondents may have not experienced the experimental condition in this study as being real, thus hindering their transportation. Verisimilitude—plausibility or realism of the story—is required for narrative transportation (Van Laer et al., 2014). The study sample's perception that the experimental environment was artificial might have hampered respondents' transportation. Using actual stories or a sample that the stories are likely relevant might be better to test the effect of empathetic communication on transportation. Transportation is also related to audiences' experiencing inspiring moments (Green et al., 2012; Van Laer et al., 2014). Designing experiments that provide respondent highly emotionally escalated, as well as realistic and plausible, moments would be required to test journalists' engagement behaviors on audiences' psychological engagement.

It is notable that the study sample also indicated that different groups, such as women or Democrats, can show different psychological engagement responses: regardless of whether they were exposed to the empathetic condition, women in the study sample experienced more sadness than men when exposed to disaster reporting ($b = .3522$, $SE = .1377$, $p = .0110$). Also, identifying themselves as Democrat is positively related to identification with interviewees ($b = .5847$, $SE = .1626$, $p = .0004$), elaboration ($b = .5401$, $SE = .1538$, $p = 0.0005$), and transportation ($b = .7542$, $SE = .1960$, $p = .0001$) (see Appendix G: Regression Results). These differences suggest that examination of specific target groups would be required for journalists to better engage with their audiences. It is also noteworthy that the results of additional analysis conducted with regular radio listeners showed that empathetic communication did indicate a significant impact on a few dependent variables related to audiences' psychological engagement

(sadness, recognition, and elaboration), but the influence, rather than demonstrating the predicted positive impact, was a negative one.

Taken together, the results revealed in this study imply the need for more profound investigation of audiences, and for more meticulous examination of the contexts in which journalists' expression of emotions and empathy would actually succeed in engaging audiences. Despite a scholarly push for empathetic communication among journalists, audiences may not respond, or may respond negatively to expressions of empathy from professional journalists. The data indicated that the practice of empathetic communication should be a content or audience specific practice, rather than a blanket solution as a basis for interacting with audiences. For example, emotional or empathetic disclosure by journalists may be acceptable in very specific circumstances, such as a disaster or reporting in a traumatic context (Takahashi et al., 2022; Pantti, 2010). Also, specific contexts, in which, for instance, journalists emphasize positivity and/or inspire audiences by presenting joyful and entertaining events, can be the places where journalists and audiences actually interact and engage with each other. In other words, journalism that focuses on positivity (e.g., hope and empathy) can encourage audiences to engage cognitively with the given issue, and touch them emotionally, and thereby make them receptive to messages (such as solutions for the issue) presented in news (Meijer, 2022). Such contexts can evoke positive emotions and provide transformative moments: for example, peace journalism shows stories of humanity and hope (McGoldric & Lynch, 2016; Meijer, 2022), and sports journalism provides both information and entertainment and also can generate feelings of connectedness between individual audiences and journalists, and audiences with each other (English et al., 2022).

Previous studies have examined journalistic practices where journalists show empathy and are emotionally connected to specific audience groups, such as Blacks (Fayne, 2023; Robinson & Culver, 2019) or women (Loosen et al., 2020), or in reaching out to and building relationships with underserved audiences (Jenkins & Powers, 2023). These studies rely largely on using qualitative interviews with journalists and do not provide much empirical data concerning the general public's expectations and their perceptions of such reporting practices. Investigation of various circumstances as well as diverse audience populations would be required to articulate the effects and success of journalistic practices in relation to empathy and emotionality. Future research should articulate the effects of empathetic communication in various contexts, as well as its distinct effects on various demographics.

In this regard, the news engagement model proposed in this study could offer a timely framework to investigate the effects of empathetic communication, and also provide an impetus for research about journalists' other engagement behaviors, and how these influence audiences' news engagement. Still, the news engagement model requires more sophisticated elaboration on associations between psychological engagement components. Some components of audiences' psychological engagement might be associated with other components; for example, emotional responses might elicit audiences' attention (Öhman et al., 2001), and transportation is reported to have mediated the effect of media on audiences' positive emotional responses (Lim & Childs, 2020). On the other hand, according to another study, emotional responses and attention can be positively associated with transportation (Green et al., 2012). With these complexities of news engagement, as well as the content specific nature of audiences' psychological engagement, more detailed approaches to enacting engagement practices are required, including the

relationships between components of audiences' psychological engagement proposed in this study.

Future Research

In the discussion section, I mentioned the need for further consideration of various contexts in which journalists' engagement behaviors, including empathetic communication, would actually lead to audiences' psychological engagement. I also emphasized the importance of articulating specific engagement behaviors and examining their effects on various demographics.

In this regard, I suggest that scholars investigate the effects of engagement built on previous research and discussions that have explored different medium or new medium effects on audience engagement (Thomson, 2002; Van Laer et al., 2014). For example, podcasts have recently been getting more attention as a new tool to provide vivid experiences and better audience-journalist interactions (Van Laer et al., 2014). Immersive journalism is also expected to facilitate audiences' empathy and emotions in order to motivate engagement with news (Bujić et al., 2020). Another area worthy of further examination is the communication between journalists and audiences on social media. For example, Twitter and blogs provide space for journalists to share their emotional reflections when covering disaster or crisis events (Pantti, 2019). Recent trends point to a steady rise in social media interactions between journalists and audiences, especially in cases of disaster or unexpected incident reporting; in these instances, journalists rely on social media to express empathy and reach out to community members (Jenkins & Powers, 2023; see also Dunmire, 2023). These and other digital platforms provide a broad realm for journalists to express emotion and empathy (Beckett & Deuze, 2016) and share stories to evoke audience engagement. Closer investigation of how such behaviors effectively convey

empathy, and how other engagement behaviors influence audiences and foster interactive relationships are valuable avenues for future research.

To further investigate and elaborate on engagement, scholars can expand on previous research about audience emotions and what affects their attitudes and behaviors. For instance, recent attention to emotionality in journalism has led to studies on various emotions aroused when audiences are exposed to news content (McIntyre, & Gibson, 2016; Parks, 2021). Such trends also include recognizing the value of positive emotions in news reporting, and offering inspiring and "self-transcendent" experiences to audiences (Janicke-Bowles et al., 2021, p. 428). For example, Parks (2021) suggests joy as a new, explicit news value in the contemporary news media industry, pointing to the need for "reorienting the minds of journalists and audiences toward affective characteristics of people and events that evoke well-being, delight, and courage" p. 820). Park's study actually highlights one aspect that has been neglected: the positive and inspiring outcomes of news engagement. Discussing positive emotions, and journalists empathizing with interviewees are practices that deviate from traditional journalistic approaches that focus on objectivity, and, often, negativity (Orgeret, 2020). As such, considering news engagement as a process where ongoing reciprocity between journalists and audiences occurs opens up an opportunity to re-interpret the ideals of objectivity and professionalism in journalism (Gluck, 2016; Orgeret, 2020). The inclusion of emotions in journalism also paves a new path for journalists to be more open and transparent in their communication with audiences. Further research should investigate the full potential of emotions, especially positive emotions, in terms of their affective dynamics and audiences' resultant psychological and behavioral engagement.

As the data in this study suggests, scholars also need to consider the backfire effects of journalists' engagement behaviors (Mahmoud & Grigoriou, 2017), where engagement practices

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hinder audiences' news engagement or generate their negative attitudes toward journalists and/or the communities/groups being covered (Tse, 2014). This means that scholars should consider the contexts and boundaries wherein journalists' specific types of engagement behavior might or might not work. For instance, many studies outside journalism have proven the effects of empathetic communication; however, the contexts were mainly interpersonal interactions or when authorities or celebrities strategically express emotions and empathy to secure the public's favor (Schoofs et al., 2022). In terms of news, different kinds of strategies and behaviors vis a vis empathetic communication might be required. Additionally, future research should investigate how empathetic communication can be enacted in interpersonal communication settings, and also test the effects of identified empathetic communication behaviors on audiences' psychological engagement. With the exception of a few studies in which journalists employ interpersonal empathetic behaviors, such as touching (Takahashi et al., 2022) or listening (Craft & Vos, 2018; Jenkins & Powers, 2023), little is known about which empathetic communication behaviors (whether verbal or non-verbal) are used, and which ones promote or discourage audience engagement. Literature on empathetic communication in medical and educational contexts, where interpersonal empathetic communication behaviors have been intensively investigated, can inform journalism scholars in this regard. I recommend that future research delve into the following questions concerning emotions and empathy: How should journalists express their emotions/empathy or use emotional content in their stories to respond to audiences' expectations and perceptions? And, if demonstration of journalists' empathy is required, how can the field of journalism successfully adopt the practice?

In addition, I recommend further investigation into empathy-related concepts and measures in journalism studies as well as the identification of various empathetic behaviors. So

far, journalism studies have produced only limited research on emotions and empathy. Literature in the fields of psychology and medicine demonstrate that affective and cognitive empathy play different roles in people's emotions (Halpern, 2014; Mark et al., 1987). It is necessary to explore how each type of empathy (affective and cognitive) might exhibit different effects on audiences' engagement, such as generating different emotional responses.

While news engagement is believed to build public trust and enhance audience relationships, little is known about how audiences engage with news and how they are prompted to take action. Likewise, little is known about how audiences *disengage* from news. The news engagement model proposed in this study can help scholars test the positive or negative relationship between journalists' engagement behaviors (such as empathetic communication) and audiences' psychological engagement. The proposed model still needs to be tested to discern the effects of audiences' psychological engagement on audiences' behavioral engagement, the effects of journalists' various engagement behaviors (in addition to empathetic communication), and the relationships among all the psychological engagement components. In wanting to adopt the news engagement model as created by the author, it is essential to recognize that audiences' psychological engagement depends on context (as suggested in the results). For example, in examining journalistic practices of interpersonal communication, the transportation component may not be relevant to audiences' psychological engagement, but it would be useful to investigate journalists' engagement behaviors in YouTube videos or other immersive environments. Adequate modification of the model would be required to expand its application.

Finally, many emerging practices in journalism can be examined using the proposed news engagement model. One possible area is immersive journalism derived from post-mobile technologies (e.g., augmented reality or mixed reality) that is expected to facilitate deeper levels

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of audiences' engagement and involved experiences (Sánchez Laws, 2020). The process

provided in the news engagement model—which moves from journalists' engagement behaviors

to audiences' various psychological reactions to audiences' behavioral engagement—can also be

applied to the examination of influences and successes in immersive journalism.

Academic Implications

The contribution of this research to news engagement scholarship within journalism

studies is three-fold. First, the study offers a theoretical framework for scholars to understand

news engagement and test relationships between journalists' engagement behaviors and

subsequent audience engagement. The proposed news engagement model offers a way for

scholars to identify various journalists' engagement behaviors and also examine their effects on

audiences.

Second, this experiment illuminates the complexities, by highlighting audiences'

psychological engagement, whereas current practices, which heavily emphasize audiences'

behavioral engagement (e.g., sharing, clicking, or subscriptions), offer a limited understanding.

The model articulates various components comprising audiences' psychological engagement,

and opens up novel approaches and new journalistic practices that recognize their emotions and

cognitive involvement. To meet audiences' needs and expectations, journalists and news

organizations need to reach out to diverse audience groups that are especially fragmented and

individualized (Beckett & Deuze, 2016), by, for example, clearly identifying such groups and

their expectations. Journalism is often considered a result of organizational routines (Shoemaker

& Reese, 1996); journalists' news engagement practices also tend to be understood in terms of

regimented news production systems. For instance, many news professionals and scholars

consider news engagement to be journalists' postings of personal elements on social media, or

including user-generated content in their reporting (Lasorsa et al., 2012). Also, while studies suggest that audiences still value traditional journalism norms like objectivity, and expect journalists to report based on same (Van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014), meeting the expectations of fragmented audiences cannot be achieved by a single approach solution. Contexts and boundaries of each kind of engagement behavior must be considered, and scholars, in alignment with journalists' accountability and transparency, should also recognize the importance of journalists' sincerity and genuineness in expressing empathy.

Last, using the proposed news engagement model, this study empirically tested the effects of journalists' empathetic behaviors on audiences' psychological engagement, revealing that there are various contexts that journalists should take into consideration when expressing empathy and engaging with audiences. Again, the non-significant results reveal how different, or fragmented, audiences in contemporary media environments are. There are discernable differences between journalistic contexts (where the goal is to collectively create news) and other empathetic communication contexts (which involve intimate interactions, as in medical settings, or politicians' strategic behaviors to obtain popularity). In the context of news media, the notion of reciprocity and value co-creation (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018) involving audience interactions and engagement would be for the sake of society or, at least, be beneficial in some way for audiences as well as journalists. The idea of news engagement being of benefit to society has been part of several studies, such as that of Lewis et al. (2014) on reciprocal journalism, Belair-Gagnon et al. (2019) on public media journalism, and Ferrucci et al. (2020) on public and engaged journalism. Building upon this research, as well as on the findings of this study, scholars should expand the notion of engagement and address related challenges faced by contemporary scholars—and thereby set the foundation for a more sustainable journalism that moves away

from a trickle-down direction and toward more conversational and empathetic audience interactions.

Practical Suggestions

For journalists and news organizations, the findings in this study inform a crucial piece of information: audiences do not always welcome or deem acceptable journalists' displays of empathy. This means that journalists should examine distinct strategies for target audience groups, as well as consider in what contexts empathy and other engagement practices are most effectively deployed. For instance, journalists' performative empathetic communication might be acceptable for specific demographic groups that have a preference for advocacy or constructive journalism. Interpersonal empathy would align more with what news audiences expect from journalists: journalists' empathetic listening and communication in the context of interpersonal settings is considered to be a more favorable, or even moral obligation (Craft & Vos, 2018). As mentioned in Chapter Three, developing manuals on empathetic communication and behaviors, such as how to use verbal and non-verbal signals, could be of beneficial in this regard. Also, news engagement is a complex process in which many factors and contexts are simultaneously at play. Many newsrooms that adopt news engagement practices try to find evidence or monetized outcomes of engagement. The proposed news engagement model can help journalists specify their practices and articulate desired outcomes so that news organizations can more concretely discuss strategies and their effects.

Expanding on the discussion above, I would also like to suggest that journalists and news media owners consider the possibility that audiences may not want to engage with journalists, or might even disengage from news and journalists because they do not favor journalists' engagement behaviors. In finding ways to attract audiences' attention and keep them engaged,

journalists may also need to acknowledge the influence of positive emotions, such as joy or happiness—emotions that can elevate audiences and make them feel pleased or empowered. Such inspirational experiences might be what contemporary audiences seek from media (Janicke-Bowles et al., 2021), and in that context inspire them to become engaged with the news and with the journalist.

More importantly, journalists should understand that sincerity and authenticity of their behaviors are crucial to obtain the intended outcomes of their engagement behaviors. In the end, regaining or enhancing public trust would begin by journalists demonstrating that they are connecting and interacting with their audiences, and listening to their concerns, interests, and their perspectives.

Limitations

The non-significant results of this study can be attributed to its many limitations. First, this study examined only sadness in the context where journalists expressed empathy toward interviewees and their tragic events. Entirely different stimuli, that can, for instance, motivate respondents to experience positive emotions and become highly elevated might evoke more intense emotions and increase significant results. For example, podcasts about sports games can escalate audiences' emotions and make them feel connected (English et al., 2023). Also, the radio medium might be more appropriate to examine positive emotions, such as excitement or joy (Peacock et al., 2011). While the study offers some insight into when audiences might or might not engage, formats other than radio news reporting, such as a podcast or live broadcast, might have provided a more appropriate format to generate transformed experiences and to examine the effects of journalists' empathetic communication. To more reliably test the effects of empathetic communication behaviors on audiences' psychology, different topics (e.g., positive

in addition to tragic), and different environments (e.g., more realistic and transformative) might produce more significant results.

In addition, the experimental condition was artificial in that it was conducted online and presented fictitious news stories. More realistic and authentic stimuli would be recommended to transport respondents to the scenes and places where events occurred. The radio news reporter in this study was male, which may explain why many respondents did not engage with his empathetic reporting style, as empathy is traditionally considered a feminine trait. The sample size was relatively small (50 people per cell) particularly in terms of investigating differences between demographic groups. The sample size was determined based on G*power analysis for moderation with small effect size. However, 80 participants per cell would be required to have an 80% power to detect a medium-sized effect with the traditional .05 criterion. Further, the study tested the effects of radio news stories using a sample reflective of the general U.S. population. The majority of the sample (62%) were not regular radio listeners, which may have hampered their engagement. Finally, the measures used in this study were all newly developed or adapted to the context of the experiment. Although I confirmed the measures' structures (e.g., unidimensionality) by conducting factor analyses, some of the measures used might not aptly describe or explain the data in the study. Considering the complexity of the news engagement process, it might be necessary to explicate each individual component of audiences' psychological engagement.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The research study documented in this dissertation presents the following conclusion: journalists' empathetic communication may not relate to audiences' psychological engagement. The effect of empathetic communication is contextual, and as such, it is possible that empathetic communication may instead decrease audiences' psychological engagement. Altogether, the results suggest that contextual factors might play a role in determining whether or not a journalist's display of empathy influences audiences' psychological engagement. Journalists' performative empathetic communication might be acceptable to specific demographic groups that have a preference for advocacy or constructive journalism (in contrast to the representation of the general population used in this study). Yet, interpersonal empathy, rather than performative empathy, might align more with what news audiences expect from journalists and thus would be an area worthy of closer examination. In particular, I encourage scholars to conduct research that identifies various interpersonal empathetic communication behaviors and tests their effects.

Taken together, the results reveal the need for further examination of audience expectations and for extensive empirical evidence in various contexts that test the effects of journalists' empathetic communication. As Wahl-Jorgensen (2020) and Lecheler (2020) note, journalism scholars have left the study of perceptions and media effects to communication scholars. The study of emotions and empathy in journalism has not garnered much attention among scholars, largely because "psychology-oriented approaches" are not seen to be compatible with the sociological tradition in journalism studies (Lecheler, 2020, p.2). By integrating two bodies of literature—that of engagement and emotionality within journalism studies and that of

psychological engagement in public relations and communication disciplines—I sought to address a gap in journalism literature by analyzing some of the complex mechanisms of the engagement process between journalists and their audiences. The study's results highlight the need for further investigation of the context surrounding journalists' empathetic reporting as well as investigation of precisely what influences audiences' psychology and behaviors. In this regard, the proposed news engagement model in this study can help scholars do three important things: identify the elements comprising audiences' psychological engagement; differentiate between the components of psychological engagement and behavioral engagement; and consider psychological engagement a distinct set of antecedents that facilitate audiences' engagement behaviors. The news engagement model can shift the focus of engagement discourse from audience metrics to consider a more complex process that includes audiences' various psychological responses.

Engaging audiences is vital to journalism, not just for the sake of its survival, but also to facilitate a better-informed and well-functioning society. In developing my news engagement model, I aimed to offer a useful lens to further examine interactions between audiences and journalists, assist scholars and professionals in developing clear conceptualizations of news engagement, and to better understand the effectiveness of journalists' practices. Ultimately, I argue that current approaches to and conceptualizations of news engagement are likely insufficient, as they fail to consider the content specific nature of audience engagement. These approaches also fail to indicate the effects, let alone the effectiveness, of emotionality on audiences of specific journalists' engagement behaviors. In short, news engagement studies should not only look beyond audience metrics but also abandon the "all-in-one" approach to news engagement. Currently, news engagement, as well as emotionality and empathy, are not

clearly articulated in journalism literature; neither do they constitute a *universal remedy*.

Journalism faces many challenges—not the least of which are public (dis)trust, a decrease in

viewers and listenership, and the need to adapt to evolving digital environments. A more detailed

consideration of the impacts of each engagement behavior on different audience groups might be

the first step in addressing the challenges presented by today's participatory, active audience-

centered, and emotionally driven news media landscape.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study. We as researchers provide a consent form to inform, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision about whether you want to participate in the research study. Feel free to reach out to the researchers with any questions you may have.

STUDY TITLE The Impact of Journalists' Empathetic Communication on Audiences' Psychological News Engagement

INVESTIGATORS Soo Young Shin, shinsoo2@msu.edu and Serena Miller, serena@msu.edu, School of Journalism, Michigan State University

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH The purpose of this research study is to investigate how journalists' empathetic reporting behaviors influence audiences' news engagement. We are not able to provide you with a few details about the study at the beginning of the study. You might be unaware of or misled about some information provided during the study. However, we will provide more information following your participation.

LENGTH OF STUDY Participants will complete an approximate 15-minute survey.

THE STUDY PROCEDURE You will listen to a radio news story about one of three topics (a natural disaster, a tragic incident, or a pandemic), and then you will be asked to answer questions about your reactions, emotions and/or understanding pertaining to the radio news story. You will also be asked whether you have had any previous experience with the events described in the story, as well as some demographic-related questions.

POTENTIAL RISKS The story that you will hear contains content related to human casualties, hardship, and distress experienced by people and their community. Emotions such as fear, anger, or sadness may arise when you listen to the news story. If you are uncomfortable listening to such news stories, you may withdraw from participation in this research study. You may stop participating at any time. If you withdraw from the study before its completion, we will not use the data you provided to us. Although the researcher does not anticipate that any survey responses will fall into third party hands, the security of Qualtrics—the software that will organize the survey responses—cannot be guaranteed.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY The data for this research study will be collected anonymously. Neither the researchers nor anyone else will be able to link data to your name. Your survey answers for the research study will be collected and stored on a Qualtrics website (an online survey provider). Information that is printed out will be stored in a locked filing

cabinet in a locked office. Only the principal investigator and the adviser, as well as the MSU Human Research Protection program (HRPP) will have access to these research records. Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The anonymous results of this study may be summarized and published for public dissemination, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY There are no costs associated with participation in this study. Upon completion of answering all the questions, you will receive the amount you agreed upon prior to your participation in this survey.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY If you have concerns or questions about this study, you may contact the researchers at shinsoo2@msu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research study participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, or e-mail irb@msu.edu.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered.

You are 18 years of age or older and understand the statement above. By completing this survey, you are agreeing to participate in the research. Please click on the ">>" button to continue.

APPENDIX B: STUDY 1 SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for participating in a research study that examines journalists' reporting communication styles. You will listen to a radio news story, and then you will be asked to answer several questions.

Here is the story. Please listen carefully.

STORY

Now I would like to ask you how caring you think of the radio journalist speaking in this story. Please indicate the level of caring on a scale of 1 to 5.

1 = Not at all
2 = Slightly
3 = Moderately
4 = Very
5 = Extremely

How sensitive do you think the radio journalist is toward the community and people affected by hardship in the story? Please indicate the level of journalist's sensitivity on a scale of 1 to 5.

1 = Not at all
2 = Slightly
3 = Moderately
4 = Very
5 = Extremely

How supportive (i.e., sympathetic or encouraging) do you think the radio journalist is toward the community and people affected by hardship in the story? Please indicate the level of journalist supportiveness on a scale of 1 to 5.

1 = Not at all
2 = Slightly
3 = Moderately
4 = Very
5 = Extremely
(Renstrom & Ottati, 2020)

Now, please recall the radio story and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The reporter showed and shared his emotions with others.
The reporter conveyed the same emotions that the interviewees and people in the community experienced.

The reporter experienced the same feelings as the interviewees and the person in the story.
The reporter felt what the interviewees and people in the story were experiencing.
The reporter showed he is emotionally connected with the people and community.
The reporter showed emotional support for the people and community.
The reporter showed sadness in responses to the community and interviewees' emotions.
The reporter communicated to the audience how he feels in relation to the circumstances.
The reporter understood the community and its members' emotions.
The reporter understood the community and its members' concerns.
The reporter seemed concerned about the community and its members.
The reporter viewed the situation/events from the perspective of the interviewees and the community.
The reporter paid attention to what was happening in the lives of the people in the story.
The reporter is an understanding professional.
The reporter connected his personal experiences with the community and interviews in the news story to communicate the impact.

1= Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Neither agree nor disagree
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly Agree

(Qian, 2000; Kane et al., 2007; Kellett et al., 2016)

Perceived reality

We ask about your thoughts regarding the ways in which the reporter delivered or narrated the story you have just listened to. Please select the responses that best represent your answers.

The way the reporter presented the news story aligns with your expectations of how reporters should present news.

The way the reporter presented the news story is similar to the way that other reporters present news.

The reporter presented the news story is too ideal to be practiced in reality.

The reporter surprised me because the reporting narration was different than other reporters' ways of presenting the news.

The way the story narrated for news was quite typical.

(Qian, 2000; Potter, 1986; Popova, 2010)

APPENDIX C: STUDY 2 SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Emotional Responses

Please indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement with the following statement. While I listened to the radio news story:
I felt a lump in my throat.
I felt myself getting choked up.
My heart seemed to ache.
Tears came to my eyes.
I felt sad.
I was empathetic toward the people impacted in the story.

(Perse, 1990b)

2. Identification with Interviewees

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

> I understand the events reported the way [THE GIVEN COMMUNITY OR INTERVIEWEES] understands them.
> While listening to the news story, I felt like [THE GIVEN COMMUNITY AND/OR INTERVIEWEES] felt.
> While listening to the story, I could really get inside [THE INTERVIEWEES]'s head.
> I tend to understand why [THE COMMUNITY AND INTERVIEWEES] responded to the situation the way they did.

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Somewhat disagree
4 = Neither disagree nor agree
5 = Somewhat agree
6 = Agree
7 = Strongly agree

(Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010)

3. Journalist Identification

> I have a lot in common with the radio reporter narrating this story.
> I feel strong ties to the reporter who narrated this story.
> I find it difficult to form a bond with the reporter who narrated the story (reversed).
> I don't feel a sense of being 'connected' to the reporter who presented the story (reversed).
> Overall, I feel good about the reporter who narrated the story.
> In general, I am glad that there are journalists like the reporter who narrated this story.

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Somewhat disagree
4 = Neither disagree nor agree
5 = Somewhat agree
6 = Agree
7 = Strongly agree

(Kang et al., 2021)

4. Cognitive Media Involvement

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

While listening to the radio journalists' story…

[Attention]

I paid close attention to the events that happened.
I listened carefully to what the journalist said.
My mind wandered while listening to the report.
I missed parts of what happened to the community in the report.
It was hard to concentrate on the story.

[Elaboration]

I tried to think about what should be done to respond to the given event/issue reported.
I thought about the story again and again.
I thought about how what I heard in the report related to other things I know.
I thought about what actions should be taken by policymakers and/or the communities based on what I listened to.
I found myself making connections between the story, and what I've read or heard about elsewhere.

[Recognition]

I understood the story.
I recognized the hardship [PEOPLE OR COMMUNITY] experienced in the report.
I recognized [THE ISSUES MENTIONED IN THE STORY].
I got confused by [WHAT THE JOURNALIST REPORTED]
[WHAT THE JOURNALIST REPORTED] seemed too complicated to understand.

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree

3 = Somewhat disagree
4 = Neither disagree nor agree
5 = Somewhat agree
6 = Agree
7 = Strongly agree

(Perse, 1990b; Eveland, & Dunwoody, 2002).

5. Transportation

Please indicate your general reactions to the news story you have just listened to.

I was carried away by the news story.
I felt like I was there.
I was caught up in the news story.
I entered that world.
I could picture myself in the scenes of the news story.
I experienced strong emotions while listening to the news story.
I felt moved by it.
The story affected me emotionally.

1 = Not at all
2 = Not very much
3 = Very little
4 = Somewhat
5 = Quite a bit
6 = Pretty much
7 = Very much

(Russell et al., 2019)

6. Relevance

The following question concerns whether you have experienced *something similar* to the events in the story you listened to (i.e., topic relevance). Please indicate the extent to which the topic is personally relevant to you.
1 = Definitely not
2 = Probably not
3 = Might or might not be
4 = Probably yes
5 = Definitely yes

(Tunney, 2022)

Does the situation reported in the story remind you of situations in your own life?
Do the events presented in the news story remind you of events that happened to you?

1 = Definitely not
2 = Probably not
3 = Might or might not be
4 = Probably yes
5 = Definitely yes

(Tunney, 20222; Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010)

7. Novelty

Please recall the story again and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

The way the reporter presented the news story aligned with my expectations of how reporters should present news.
The reporter delivered the story as I would expect.
The reporter delivered the story just how reporters would do in the real world. The reporter's narration in the story was different from other reporters' ways of presenting the news.
The manner in which the reporter narrated the story was new to me.
The reporter acted unprofessionally when narrating the news.
The reporter's narrative style surprised me.
The reporter's narrative approach was unexpected.

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Somewhat disagree
4 = Neither disagree nor agree
5 = Somewhat agree
6 = Agree
7 = Strongly agree

(Mendelson, 1997; Prati, Junior, & do Amapa, 2016; Lee, 2015)

8. Demographics and News Use

What is your gender?
    Man
    Woman
    Non-binary/third gender
    Prefer not to answer
    Other (prefer to self-describe) _____

What year were you born? _____

How would you describe your race or ethnicity?

American Indian or Alaska native
Asian
Black or African American
Hispanic or Latino
Mixed race
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
White
Other (describe) _____

What is the highest level of education you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

Less than high school
High school degree or equivalent
Some college (college-level classes after high school but you have not earned a degree)
Associate's degree
Bachelor's degree
Graduate degree (Master's or Ph.D.)

What is your *political affiliation?*

Democrat
Republican
Independent
Other (describe)
None

How often do you listen to radio news (on air or online) to get information?

Several times a day
Once a day
Several times a week
Once a week
Several times a month
Once a month
Less than once a month
Never

How often do you access news (i.e., read an entire article or listen to an entire segment)? News means national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via radio, TV, newspapers, or online.

Several times a day
Once a day

Several times a week
Once a week
Several times a month
Once a month
Less than once a month
Never

How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news?

Extremely interested
Very interested
Somewhat interested
Not very interested
Not at all interested
Don't know

Which of the following types of news are most important to you (Select all that apply)?
International news
National news
State news
City/community
News about your neighborhood

In the last week, which would you say has been your main platform for accessing news?

TV
Radio
Printed newspaper
Computer (desktop or laptop_
Smartphones
Tablet (e.g., iPad, etc.)

APPENDIX D: STIMULUS STORIES

Directions
This document includes three versions of radio news stories for each of the following three topics: pandemic outbreak, ferryboat sinking, and hurricane hit. The three versions can be described as non-empathetic, employing affective empathy, and employing cognitive empathy, respectively. Assigned radio journalists will read the passages based on the directions.

1. Pandemic outbreak

Original version: The reporter reads the story in the traditional news reporting style—objective and fact-based reporting.

Health officials fear another pandemic is possible after a mysterious virus killed hundreds of people in New Orleans. More than 500 people have died over the last two weeks after contracting an unknown illness according to the Louisiana Department of Health. Doctors say they are in short supply of the drugs needed to treat conditions associated with the virus. In addition to a high fever and flu-like symptoms, officials say those affected may experience a rash and pain in their ears and eyes, which may linger for weeks. Hospitals are becoming desperate as they are now overflowing with patients.

Cases are first mistaken for the common cold, and many patients were sent home only to have the infection rapidly progress, leading to an infection that filled their lungs with fluid. Available antibiotics are not effective. Michelle Engleson says her four-year-old son is in the hospital, waiting for drugs to treat the symptoms. The mother rushed to the hospital when she found her son had difficulty breathing, but the hospital didn't have antibiotics needed to treat her four-year-old's high fever. Engleson cannot visit her child because all sick patients have been quarantined.

Quote: ["You know kids, they get sick all the time. I was letting the fever run its course. Then he woke up in the middle of the night and couldn't breathe. His face was completely blue. I blame myself for not getting him there in time. Yesterday I had a son, and today my only child is gone"].

The medical community in New Orleans is appealing for help. Hospitals are overflowing, supplies are scarce, and like with the coronavirus pandemic, personal protective equipment is not inadequate to meet the demands. The US Department of Health and Human Services announced today that travel to New Orleans and the surrounding areas is strongly discouraged as they try to limit the spread.

Quote: ("We want people to know we've got a serious virus here. Stay away from New Orleans until we get a handle on what we are dealing with. And hopefully, that time will also give other cities a chance to prepare because it's coming.")

Dr. Sarah Nelson, chief medical doctor for the New Orleans health department, is appealing to the public for help with medical personnel and supplies.

Affective Empathy Version—Emotional Disclosure: The reporter reads the underlined sentences by (1) expressing sadness or urgency by choking up, etc. This affective empathy version may also include sentences that the reporter (2) says how sad he feels and/or (3) presents emotional support to the community or interviewee.

Health officials fear another pandemic is possible after a mysterious virus killed hundreds of people in New Orleans. More than 500 people have died over the last two weeks after contracting an unknown illness according to Louisiana Department of Health. <urgency> Doctors say they are in short supply of the drugs needed to treat the virus. </urgency> In addition to a high fever and flu-like symptoms, officials say those affected may experience a rash and pain in their ears and eyes, which may linger for weeks. <urgency> Hospitals are becoming desperate as they are now overflowing with patients. </urgency>

Cases are first mistaken for the common cold, and patients were first sent home only to have the infection rapidly progress, leading to an infection that fills their lungs with fluid. Available antibiotics are not effective. Michelle Engleson says that her four-year-old son is in the hospital, waiting for drugs to treat the symptoms. The mother rushed to the hospital when she found her son had difficulty breathing, but the hospital didn't have antibioticsto treat her four-year-old's high fever. <sadness> Engloeson is unable to visit her sick child. </sadness> PAUSE She is one of many family members not allowed to visit their loved ones due to quarantine restrictions for people admitted to the hospital.

Quote: ["You know kids, they get sick all the time. I was letting the fever run its course. Then he woke up in the middle of the night and couldn't breathe. His face was completely blue. I blame myself for not getting him there in time. Yesterday I had a son, and today my only child is gone"].

<sadness, but recovering> The medical community in New Orleans is appealing for help. </sadness> Hospitals are overflowing, supplies are scarce, and like with the coronavirus pandemic, personal protective equipment is not adequate to meet the demands. The US Department of Health and Human Services announced today that travel to New Orleans and the surrounding areas is strongly discouraged as they try to limit the spread.

Quote: ("We want people to know we've got a serious virus here. Stay away from New Orleans until we get a handle on what we are dealing with. And hopefully, that time will also give other cities a chance to prepare——because it's coming.")

Dr. Sarah Nelson, chief medical doctor for the New Orleans health department, is appealing to other communities for help with medical personnel and supplies.

Cognitive Empathy Version—Perspective-taking: This version shows the reporter's cognitive empathy (perspective-taking), represented by showing his understanding of the interviewee's suffering. This can also be done in relation to the journalist's previous experience (the similarity of experiences) and by predicting the interviewees' situations based on his personal experience. NOTE: the underlined sentences are added to show the reporter's perspective-taking.

I'm sorry to report some unwelcome news about a new, unknown virus affecting U.S. residents. Medical officials fear another pandemic is possible after a mysterious virus killed hundreds of people in New Orleans. More than 500 people have died over the last two weeks after contracting an unknown illness according to Louisiana Department of Health. Doctors say they are in short supply of the drugs needed to treat the virus. In addition to a high fever and flu-like symptoms, officials say those affected may experience a rash and pain in their ears and eyes, which may linger for weeks. Hospitals are becoming desperate as they are now overflowing with patients.

Cases are first mistaken for the common cold, and patients were sent home only to have the infection rapidly progress, leading to an infection that filled their lungs with fluid. Available antibiotics were not effective. Michelle Engleson says that her four-year-old son is in the hospital, waiting for drugs to treat the symptoms. The mother rushed to the hospital when she found her son had difficulty breathing, but the hospital didn't have antibiotics to treat her four-year-old's high fever. I can't imagine how the mother is feeling now that she's unable to visit her little boy. As a father, I understand the suffering she may be experiencing as a parent, especially since she is not able to visit her son due to her child and all other patients being quarantined in New Orleans city limits.

Quote: ["You know kids, they get sick all the time. I was letting the fever run its course. Then he woke up in the middle of the night and couldn't breathe. His face was completely blue. I blame myself for not getting him there in time. Yesterday I had a son, and today my only child is gone"].

The medical community in New Orleans is appealing for help. Hospitals are overflowing, supplies are scarce, and like with the coronavirus pandemic, personal protective equipment is not inadequate to meet the demands. The US Department of Health and Human Services announced

today that travel to New Orleans and the surrounding areas is strongly discouraged as they try to limit the spread.

Quote: ("People really need to know we've got a serious virus here. Everyone—you need to stay away from New Orleans until we get a handle on what we are dealing with. And hopefully, that time will also give other cities a chance to prepare because it's coming.")

Dr. Sarah Nelson, chief medical doctor for the New Orleans health department, is appealing to other communities for help with medical personnel and supplies and advising against travel to New Orleans.

2. Ferryboat Sinking

Original version: The reporter reads the story in the traditional news reporting style—objective and fact-based reporting.

Hope is fading this morning as dive teams in Louisiana continue their search for victims after a party ferryboat carrying more than 150 people capsized and went under. Officials say it happened just after 1:00 a.m. The ferry was headed to shore following a party cruise on the Mississippi when witnesses say they heard a loud explosion and felt like the boat split in half as it entered the water. Crews have rescued 100 survivors and pulled more than a dozen bodies from the river. Many of the missing are university students who were celebrating graduation and the end of the semester. Michelle Engleson wept as she described the call her 20-year-old fearful son made as the ferry was sinking.

Quote: ["He said, 'I think I'm going to die. I'm on a boat, and it's sinking fast.' I heard lots of screaming. Then we got disconnected. I didn't have time to say I love you."]

Families are gathering in an auditorium, where they are desperately waiting for news about their loved ones. Most of the passengers are feared dead either from the explosion or drowning. The ferry was also traveling through a strong current at the time of the explosion. Captain Sarah Nelson is the spokesperson for the New Orleans dive team who is leading the rescue. She says the explosion may have seriously injured many people making it challenging for the passengers to stay afloat.

Quote: (Nelson: "People think of the Mississippi River as being slow flowing, but these strong currents can easily pull people under. On top of that, we believe many were near the source of the explosion and were seriously injured before the boat went under.)

New Orleans mayor LaToya Cantrell is pleading for additional rescue divers and medical personnel from neighboring communities to help with the search.

Affective Empathy Version—Emotional Disclosure: The reporter reads the underlined sentences by (1) expressing sadness or urgency by choking up, etc. This affective empathy version may also include sentences that the reporter (2) says how sad he feels and/or (3) presents emotional support to the community or interviewee.

<sadness> Hope is fading this morning as dive teams in Louisiana continue their search for victims after a party ferryboat carrying more than 500 capsized and went under. </sadness> Officials say it happened just after 1:00 a.m. The ferry was headed to shore following a party cruise on the Mississippi when witnesses say they heard a loud explosion and felt like the boat split in half as it entered the water. Crews have rescued 100e survivors and pulled more than a dozen bodies from the river. PAUSE Many of the missing are university students PAUSE who were celebrating graduation and the end of the semester. Michelle Engleson wept <sadness> as she described the call her fearful 20-year-old son made as the ferry was sinking. </sadness>

Quote: (Michelle: "He said, 'I think I'm going to die. I'm on a boat, and it's sinking fast.' I heard lots of screaming. Then we got disconnected. I didn't have time to say I love you.")

<sadness> It is heartbreaking to see families gathering in an auditorium, and desperately waiting for news about their loved ones. </sadness> Most of the passengers are feared dead either from the explosion or drowning. The ferry was also traveling through a strong current at the time of the explosion. Captain Sarah Nelson is the spokesperson for the New Orleans dive team who is leading the rescue. She says the explosion may have seriously injured many people making it challenging for the passengers to stay afloat.

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New Orleans mayor LaToya Cantrell is pleading for additional rescue divers and medical personnel from neighboring communities to help with the search.

Cognitive Empathy Version—Perspective-taking: This version shows the reporter's cognitive empathy (perspective-taking), represented by showing his understanding of the interviewee's suffering. This can also be done in relation to the journalist's previous experience (the similarity of experiences) and by predicting the interviewees' situations based on his personal experience. NOTE: the underlined sentences are added to show the reporter's perspective-taking.

An unthinkable accident that is one of every parents' worst nightmares has occurred. Hope is fading this morning as dive teams in Louisiana continue their search for victims after a party ferryboat carrying more than 500 capsized and went under. Officials say it happened just after 1:00 a.m. The ferry was headed to shore following a party cruise on the Mississippi when witnesses say they heard a loud explosion and felt like the boat split in half as it entered the water. Crews have rescued 100 survivors and pulled over a dozen bodies from the river. Many of the missing are university students who were celebrating graduation and the end of the semester. Michelle Engleson wept as she described the call her 20-year-old fearful son made as the ferry was sinking.

Quote: (Michelle: "He said, 'I think I'm going to die. I'm on a boat, and it's sinking fast.' I heard lots of screaming. Then we got disconnected. I didn't have time to say I love you.")

Families are gathering in an auditorium, where they are desperately waiting for news about their loved ones. Most of the passengers are feared dead either from the explosion or drowning. The ferry was also traveling through a strong current at the time of the explosion. Captain Sarah Nelson is the spokesperson for the New Orleans dive team who is leading the rescue. She says the explosion may have seriously injured many people making it challenging for the passengers to stay afloat. As a father of two children, I cannot imagine how devastating it must be for parents to not know about whether their children are alive or dead. As a parent and New Orleans resident myself, it is heartbreaking.

Quote: (Nelson: "People think of the Mississippi River as being slow flowing, but these strong currents can easily pull people under. On top of that, we believe many were near the source of the explosion and were seriously injured before the boat went under.)

It is a hard time for all of us community members, and of course, local first responders who rescued the passengers. New Orleans mayor LaToya Cantrell is pleading for additional rescue divers and medical personnel from neighboring communities to help with the search.

3. Hurricane Hit

Original version: The reporter reads the story in the traditional news reporting style—objective and fact-based reporting.

Hurricane Susan is being blamed for hundreds of deaths near Louisiana's Gulf Coast. The category 4 hurricane came ashore with 150 mile an hour winds and dumped heavy rainfall overnight. Officials confirm St. Bernard Parrish took the brunt of the damage. The dead include at least 250 people who gathered in an emergency shelter when it collapsed.

New Orleans resident Michelle Engleson says she heard a loud thud and felt the ground shaking inside her mobile home just before she and her daughters, ages six and 10, escaped. She tells us she threw them under her pickup truck located outside of her home and covered them with her own body through the worst of the storm.

Quote: (We thought we were going to die. We knew we had to get out of the house because it was about to blow away, but it was too late to get to shelter. All we could do was lay on the ground with the rain and wind pounding us. I kept my eyes closed and prayed for my girls. I guess the Lord saved us today.")

They were some of the lucky ones. Engleson's own mother wasn't so fortunate. She was in the mobile home next door. This morning all that's left is the cement foundation. Many of the dead were residents of the mobile home park. Local officials have turned to the state and federal governments for help. St. Bernard Parrish Mayor Guy McInnis tells us this hurricane produced the worst damage he's seen in all of his 60 years living on the Gulf Coast.

Quote: (Guy McInnis: We've got dead, we've got the injured, we've got the homeless, and everyone is hungry and tired. And we can't get them what they need. We can't even get to many of them because the roads are blocked or washed out. We've got a really bad situation on our hands, and if we don't get help, more will die.")

President Joe Biden has approved the natural disaster declaration for the affected communities.

Affective Empathy Version—Emotional Disclosure: The reporter reads the underlined sentences by (1) expressing sadness or urgency by choking up, etc. This affective empathy version may also include sentences that the reporter (2) says how sad he feels and/or (3) presents emotional support to the community or interviewee.

Hurricane Susan is being blamed for hundreds of deaths near Louisiana's Gulf Coast. The category 4 hurricane came ashore with 150 mile an hour winds and dumped heavy rainfall overnight. Officials confirm St. Bernard Parrish took the brunt of the damage. <sadness> The dead include at least 250 who people gathered in an emergency shelter when it collapsed. </sadness>

New Orleans resident Michelle Engleson says she heard a loud thud and felt the ground shaking inside her mobile home just before she and her daughters, ages six and 10, escaped. She tells us she threw them under her pickup truck located outside of her home and covered them with her own body through the worst of the storm.

Quote: (We thought we were going to die. We knew we had to get out of the house because it was about to blow away, but it was too late to get to shelter. All we could do is lay on the ground with the rain and wind pounding us. I kept my eyes closed and prayed for my girls. I guess the Lord saved us today.")

They were some of the lucky ones. Engleson's own mother wasn't so fortunate. She was in the mobile home next door. <sadness> Sadly, when <u>Engleson saw this morning her mother's house, all that's left is the cement foundation.</u> </sadness> PAUSE <sadness> <sadness> Many of the dead were residents of the mobile home park </sadness>. Local officials have turned to the state and federal governments for help. St. Bernard Parrish Mayor Guy McInnis tells us this hurricane produced the worst damage he's seen in all of his 60 years living on the Gulf Coast.

Quote: (Guy McInnis: We've got dead, we've got the injured, we've got the homeless, and everyone is hungry and tired. And we can't get them what they need. We can't even get to many of them because the roads are blocked or washed out. We've got a really bad situation on our hands, and if we don't get help, more will die.")

President Joe Biden has approved the natural disaster declaration for these affected communities.

Cognitive Empathy Version—Perspective-taking: This version shows the reporter's cognitive empathy (perspective-taking), represented by showing his understanding of the interviewee's suffering. This can also be done in relation to the journalist's previous experience (the similarity of experiences) and by predicting the interviewees' situations based on his personal experience. NOTE: the underlined sentences are added to show the reporter's perspective-taking.

<u>Another tragedy to communities that have been devastated by the storm several times.</u> Hurricane Susan is being blamed for hundreds of deaths near Louisiana's Gulf Coast. The category 4 hurricane came ashore with 150 mile an hour winds and dumped heavy rainfall overnight. Officials confirm St. Bernard Parrish took the brunt of the damage. The dead include at least 250 people who gathered in an emergency shelter when it collapsed.

New Orleans resident Michelle Engleson says she heard a loud thud and felt the ground shaking inside her mobile home just before she and her daughters, ages six and 10, escaped. She tells us she threw them under her pickup truck located outside of her home and covered them with her own body through the worst of the storm.

Quote: (We thought we were going to die. We knew we had to get out of the house because it was about to blow away, but it was too late to get to shelter. All we could do is lay on

the ground with the rain and wind pounding us. I kept my eyes closed and prayed for my girls. I guess the Lord saved us today."

They were some of the lucky ones. Engleson's own mother wasn't so fortunate. She was in the mobile home next door. This morning all that's left is the cement foundation. Many of the dead were residents of the mobile home park. Local officials have turned to the state and federal governments for help. St. Bernard Parrish Mayor Guy McInnis tells us this hurricane produced the worst damage he's seen in all of his 60 years living on the Gulf Coast. <u>As a member of this community, I have seen hurricanes destroy so many people's lives, but I also have witnessed the strength and resilience of these residents who will have to rebuild the city—and their lives—once again.</u> Local officials have turned to the state and federal governments for help. St. Bernard Parrish Mayor Guy McInnis tells us it's the worst damage he's seen in all of her 60 years living on the Gulf Coast.

Quote: (Guy McInnis: We've got dead, we've got the injured, we've got the homeless, and everyone is hungry and tired. And we can't get them what they need. We can't even get to many of them because the roads are blocked or washed out. We've got a really bad situation on our hands, and if we don't get help, more will die."

President Joe Biden has approved the natural disaster declaration for these affected communities.

APPENDIX E: EMPATHY MEASURE

Factor analysis was performed to examine the internal structure of the 15-item empathy scale that consists of an 8-item scale as a measure of emotional disclosure empathy, and a 7-item scale as a measure of perspective taking empathy, respectively. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, in which the emotional disclosure and perspective taking scales were covaried with each other as a separate construct. The results suggested an adequate fit with data: $\chi2 = 379.34$, $df = 89$, $p < .001$, CFI = .924, TLI = .910, RMSEA = .098, 90% CI [.088, .109] (Hu & Bentler, 1999; March & Hocevar, 1985), implying that affective and cognitive empathy are distinct systems (Niedtfeld, 2017) that can have separate and discriminable effects on individuals' psychological reactions (Davis et al., 1987). Cronbach's coefficient alpha was conducted as a basic measure of reliability: $\alpha = .938$ for the emotional disclosure empathy scale and .891 for the perspective taking empathy scale.

Table 7

Moderation of Novelty and Relevance on the Relationship between Empathetic Communication and Sadness

	Coefficient	SE	t	p	F $(12, 325)$	R	$R2$
Constant	2.0633	.3824	5.3964	325.0000	6.2304	.4325	.1870
Predictor (Non-empathetic =0, empathy =1)	-.3601	.3899	-0.9237	.3563			
Novelty	.1738	.1065	1.6319	.1037			
Interaction 1 (Predictor X Novelty)	-.0178	.1439	-.1233	.9019			
Relevance	.2278	.0754	3.0226	.0027			
Interaction 2 (Predictor X Relevance)	.0600	.1008	.6549	.5130			
Age	.0084	.0039	2.1556	.0319			
Gender (Man = 0, other = 1)	.3522	.1377	2.5583	.0110			
Race (White = 0, other =1)	-.1478	.1443	-1.0239	.3066			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.4605	.1413	3.2504	.0012			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.0522	.1457	.3583	.7203			
Education 1 (Other = 0, low education = 1)	.2450	.1498	1.6359	.2018			
Education 2 (Other = 0, high education = 1)	-.0593	.1468	-.4040	.6865			

Note. Low education: less than high school or high school degree or equivalent; high education: bachelor's degree or higher

Table 8

Moderation of Novelty and Relevance on the Relationship between Empathetic Communication and Journalist Identification

	Coefficient	SE	t	p	F (12 ,325)	R	$R2$
Constant	2.8146	.4450	6.3251	.0000	4.7118	.3850	.1482
Predictor (Non-empathetic =0, empathy =1)	.2159	.4537	.4759	.6345			
Novelty	.1330	.1239	1.0730	.2841			
Interaction 1 (Predictor X Novelty)	-.0670	.1675	-.4001	.6893			
Relevance	.3140	.0877	3.5800	.0004			
Interaction 2 (Predictor X Relevance)	-.0412	.1174	-.3509	.7259			
Age	.0058	.0046	1.2684	.2056			
Gender (Man = 0, other = 1)	-.0516	.1602	-.3219	.7477			
Race (White = 0, other =1)	.1158	.1680	.6891	.4912			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.5215	.1644	3.1721	.0017			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.2722	.1695	1.6055	.1094			
Education 1 (Other = 0, low education = 1)	.1404	.1743	.8054	.4212			
Education 2 (Other = 0, high education = 1)	.0335	.1708	.1963	.8445			

Note. Low education: less than high school or high school degree or equivalent; high education: bachelor's degree or higher

Table 9

Moderation of Novelty and Relevance on the Relationship between Empathetic Communication and Interviewee Identification

	Coefficient	SE	t	p	F (12 ,325)	R	$R2$
Constant	4.1977	.4402	9.5352	.0000	2.6205	.2970	.0882
Predictor (Non-empathetic =0, empathy =1)	-.4200	.4489	-.9357	.3501			
Novelty	-.0039	.1226	.0322	.9744			
Interaction 1 (Predictor X Novelty)	.0262	.1657	.1579	.8746			
Relevance	.1422	.0868	1.6380	.1024			
Interaction 2 (Predictor X Relevance)	.0240	.1161	.2071	.8361			
Age	.0073	.0045	1.6174	.1068			
Gender (Man = 0, other = 1)	.1794	.1585	1.1320	.2585			
Race (White = 0, other =1)	-.0914	.1662	-.5500	.5827			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.5847	.1626	3.5951	.0004			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.2162	.1677	1.2889	.1983			
Education 1 (Other = 0, low education = 1)	.0646	.1725	.3743	.7084			
Education 2 (Other = 0, high education = 1)	.7969	.1690	.4550	.6494			

Note. Low education: less than high school or high school degree or equivalent; high education: bachelor's degree or higher

Table 10

Moderation of Novelty and Relevance on the Relationship between Empathetic Communication and Recognition

	Coefficient	SE	t	p	F (12 ,325)	R	$R2$
Constant	7.0530	.3861	18.2667	.0000	7.9332	.4760	.2266
Predictor (Non-empathetic =0, empathy =1)	.0616	.3937	.1565	.8757			
Novelty	-.5649	.1075	-5.2534	.0000			
Interaction 1 (Predictor X Novelty)	-.0279	.1454	-.1921	.8478			
Relevance	.0343	.0761	.4505	.6527			
Interaction 2 (Predictor X Relevance)	-.0343	.1018	-.3369	.7364			
Age	.0033	.0040	.8253	.4098			
Gender (Man = 0, other = 1)	-.0599	.1390	-.4308	.6527			
Race (White = 0, other =1)	-.1758	.1457	-1.2064	.2285			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.2055	.1426	1.4406	.1507			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.1540	.1471	1.1148	.2658			
Education 1 (Other = 0, low education = 1)	-.2431	.1513	-1.6074	.1089			
Education 2 (Other = 0, high education = 1)	-.1385	.1482	-.9344	.3508			

Note. Low education: less than high school or high school degree or equivalent; high education: bachelor's degree or higher

Table 11

Moderation of Novelty and Relevance on the Relationship between Empathetic Communication and Attention

	Coefficient	SE	t	p	F (12 ,325)	R	R2
Constant	6.0506	.4909	12.3246	.0000	7.9559	.4265	.2271
Predictor (Non-empathetic =0, empathy =1)	.3035	.5006	.6063	.5447			
Novelty	-.8064	.1367	-5.8974	.0000			
Interaction 1 (Predictor X Novelty)	.1063	.1848	.5752	.5656			
Relevance	.1944	.0968	2.0082	.0454			
Interaction 2 (Predictor X Relevance)	-.2318	.1295	-1.7902	.0743			
Age	.0137	.0050	2.7323	.0066			
Gender (Man = 0, other = 1)	.1532	.1768	.8663	.3869			
Race (White = 0, other =1)	-.0273	.1853	-.1474	.8829			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.0593	.1814	.3268	.7440			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.1053	.1871	.5629	.5739			
Education 1 (Other = 0, low education = 1)	-.2231	.1923	-1.1600	.2469			
Education 2 (Other = 0, high education = 1)	-.2476	.1885	-1.3141	.1897			

Note. Low education: less than high school or high school degree or equivalent; high education: bachelor's degree or higher

Table 12

Moderation of Novelty and Relevance on the Relationship between Empathetic Communication and Elaboration

	Coefficient	SE	t	p	F (12 ,325)	R	R2
Constant	2.6935	.4164	6.4684	.0000	11.7193	.5496	.3020
Predictor (Non-empathetic =0, empathy =1)	-.3973	.4246	-.9357	.3501			
Novelty	.2738	.1160	2.3605	.0188			
Interaction 1 (Predictor X Novelty)	-.0681	.1568	-.4342	.6644			
Relevance	.3713	.0821	4.5236	.0000			
Interaction 2 (Predictor X Relevance)	.1303	.1098	1.1860	.2365			
Age	-.0004	.0043	-.0852	.9322			
Gender (Man = 0, other = 1)	-.0187	.1499	-.1245	.9010			
Race (White = 0, other =1)	.1323	.1572	.9415	.4007			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.5401	.1438	3.5109	.0005			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.0906	.1587	.5710	.5684			
Education 1 (Other = 0, low education = 1)	.1420	.1631	.8703	.3848			
Education 2 (Other = 0, high education = 1)	-.11118	.1598	-.6994	.4848			

Note. Low education: less than high school or high school degree or equivalent; high education: bachelor's degree or higher

Table 13

Moderation of Novelty and Relevance on the Relationship between Empathetic Communication and Transportation

	Coefficient	SE	*t*	*p*	F (12 ,325)	*R*	*R2*
Constant	2.0164	.5305	3.8008	.0000	8.8810	.4969	.2469
Predictor (Non-empathetic =0, empathy =1)	2.0164	.5305	3.8008	.0002			
Novelty	.2648	.1478	1.7920	.0741			
Interaction 1 (Predictor X Novelty)	-.0493	.1997	-.2470	.8051			
Relevance	.4651	.1046	4.4471	.0000			
Interaction 2 (Predictor X Relevance)	.0086	.1399	.0612	.9512			
Age	-.0011	.0054	-.2036	.8388			
Gender (Man = 0, other = 1)	-.0456	.1910	-.2388	.8114			
Race (White = 0, other =1)	.2327	.2003	1.1718	.2462			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.7542	.1960	3.8481	.0001			
Political Affiliation 1 (Other =0, Democratic =1)	.2219	.2021	1.0980	.2730			
Education 1 (Other = 0, low education = 1)	.0266	.2078	.1281	.8982			
Education 2 (Other = 0, high education = 1)	-.1427	.2036	-.7005	.4841			

Note. Low education: less than high school or high school degree or equivalent; high education: bachelor's degree or higher

APPENDIX G: ADDITIONAL TEST ONLY WITH REGULAR RADIO NEWS LISTENERS

Based on the results, I conducted an additional analysis to see if there are differences between radio news listeners and respondents who did not identify themselves as regular radio news listeners. It is possible that regular radio news listeners (i.e., those who listen to radio news at least once a day) comprise news audiences distinct from those who mainly watch broadcast news. As regular radio listeners, they are likely familiar with and reactive to radio news reporters' expressions of empathy. Considering that the majority of the sample of this study (62%) were not regular radio news listeners, examining the effects of empathetic communication only on those who identified as regular radio news listeners might reveal the relationship between empathetic communication and audiences' psychological engagement. Here, I refer to regular radio news listeners as respondents who reported that they access radio news "several times a day (22%)" or "once a day (16%)," which accounts for 38% of the sample.

The results indicate that the journalist's empathy had some negative impact on a few psychological engagement variables, including sadness ($b = -1.6234$, $SE = .6776$, $p = .0182$) and recognition ($b = -1.1613$, $SE = .5574$, $p = .0394$). The effect of empathetic communication on elaboration was marginally significant ($b = -1.5376$, $SE = .7777$, $p = .0504$). This means that the more empathetic journalists are, the less audiences are likely to feel sad, the less they are likely to recognize the issues and/or events in the news, and the less they are likely to elaborate on the story. These results are against the predictions that hypothesized positive relationships in this study.