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## Advancing a Radical Audience Turn in Journalism. Fundamental Dilemmas for Journalism Studies

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### ABSTRACT

Despite its increasing attention for audiences, journalism studies remains an inherently production-focused discipline. Consequently, studying the perspective of audiences tends to automatically start from questions relevant for and benefitting the news industry. In this introduction, we argue for a more radical audience turn that pushes journalism studies forward beyond normative and industry concerns, and starts from the perspective of audiences themselves. We formulate four constructive starting points for advancing the audience turn in journalism: 1) further decentering journalism by also focusing on non-news and employing non-media centric approaches; 2) broadening who counts as audience by including audiences considered commercially unattractive; 3) shifting the focus from what counts as news use to what is experienced as informative; and 4) positing audiences as active agents. However, such a radical audience turn also creates fundamental dilemmas for journalism studies, raising questions about the field's object of study, the spaces and contexts of news use considered, and the objectives of journalism studies as a field. With this special issue, we call for further reflections on how news and informational needs may be conceptualized from an audience perspective and how to theorize what this means for journalism's role in society and everyday life.

### KEYWORDS

Audience studies; audience turn; journalism; journalism studies; news use; news consumption

After initial resistance, the audience turn seems to have been fully embraced by both journalism and journalism studies (Costera Meijer 2020b). Today, journalism practitioners and scholars seldom question the value of being attentive to audiences anymore. The future of journalism depends on capturing and understanding news use. Nonetheless, despite ongoing debates around the shifting boundaries and ideologies of journalism as a practice and professional field (Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2018; Carlson and Lewis 2015; Eldridge 2017), journalism studies itself remains an inherently production-focused discipline. Research addressing news audiences still tends to talk more *about* audiences than *with* audiences (Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink 2016;

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Peters 2011). Moreover, when they are taken into perspective, it is telling how many studies on news audiences—although often simultaneously concerned with democratic implications—ultimately originate from producer-oriented concerns. Whether it is the (lack of) engagement of audiences with news and journalism (Steensen, Ferrer-Conill, and Peters 2020) or declining media trust (Fisher et al. 2021), studying the perspective of audiences often appears to be considered relevant on the condition that it benefits an industry-focused research agenda.

This producer-orientation of audience studies may be the unintended by-product of the successful collaboration between journalism scholars and journalism institutions and practitioners. Indeed, if in 2009 Barbie Zelizer called for “a clearer template for the mutual engagement of journalism and the academy” (p. 38), Zelizer (2009) a decade later news media and journalism scholars often work together in the pursuit of audiences. A key example is the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism’s Digital News Report which, funded in part by industry partners, has mapped global trends in digital news consumption since 2011. We ourselves have also worked closely with news organizations on audience research, recently in the “New News Consumer” project<sup>1</sup> that this special issue results from. Collaboration between the academy and the industry has resulted in important insights into the everyday practices and experiences of news users. However, because of partnering with news organizations or designing research with industry-related issues in mind, journalism studies may have focused too strongly and too narrowly on audiences, media and research angles that are primarily of interest to news organizations. We, for example, have focused on problematizing the professional assumptions about personalization, clicks and time spent from an audience perspective (Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer 2014, 2018, 2020) or relied on research panels from publishers to help find research participants (Swart, Peters, and Broersma 2017a), thereby overlooking user practices or news users that are not as self-evidently relevant or valuable to news media.

In this introduction, we first argue for taking a more radical audience turn. This means pushing audience studies forward beyond industry concerns, and starting from the perspective of audiences themselves instead. We will outline a number of uncomfortable truths the audience turn has generated for journalism, both as a practice and as an academic field. Building on these outcomes, we then suggest four starting points for advancing a more radical audience turn in (digital) journalism studies and the benefits this may yield. However, we also consider the dilemmas that taking a radical audience turn may lead to. In our final section we discuss the potential (unintended) consequences of such a radical turn and question if this is a price worth paying for.

### Three Uncomfortable Truths

The audience turn has so far yielded at least three uncomfortable truths for news organizations. These are underlined and illustrated by the contributions to this Special Issue and, at the same time, offer a starting point for an even more radical approach. First, the audience turn challenges the assumption that the news that journalists produce is inevitably meaningful, informative, insightful, important or relevant to users. In

fact, audience research has shown for years that for some people, other media genres (Edgerly 2022; Moe and Ytre-Arne 2022, both in this SI), institutions (Picone and Vandenplas 2022, in this SI), or even specific actors such as the cashier at the local grocery store (Örnebring's and Hellekant Rowe's (2022), in this SI), might better satisfy citizens' needs of being informed about current affairs than journalism (Costerá Meijer and de Bruin 2003; Naerland 2020; Street, Inthorn, and Scott 2013; Van Zoonen 2005). In addition, while the importance of the economic survival of the profession and the preservation of its democratic role are central assumptions in most journalism research, figures from the most recent Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2021, p. 19) demonstrate how over half of the surveyed news users is unconcerned about the financial state of the news industry. Surveying audiences in 33 predominantly Global Northern and mostly democratic countries, characterized by high levels of internet penetration, the study finds that although 31% is aware "that news is less profitable these days," on average, only 17% has paid for online news themselves. Moreover, only a very small minority indicates they might do so in the future to support news organizations that are struggling (Newman et al. 2021, p. 19). Finally, only 44% of the respondents in 46 markets around the world feels they can trust "most news most of the time," showing that the informative value of journalism might not be as evident to audiences as journalism practitioners and scholars often assume. In other words, while the contributions to our special issue show that news itself matters in users' everyday life, this is not necessarily true for journalism as an institution. What is experienced as relevant, important and timely information by audiences might, but does not automatically, align with what is produced by professional journalists.

Second, and relatedly, a radical audience turn contests the industry-inspired assumption that the use of news equals the use of journalism. While traditional journalism remains recognizable for audiences as a cultural form (Swart, Peters, and Broersma 2017b; Tamboer, Kleemans, and Daalmans 2020) and a social institution, work around shifting perceptions of "newsness" (Edgerly and Vraga 2020a, 2020b) and on hybrid forms of news, such as political satire and other types of infotainment (Otto, Glogger, and Boukes 2017), shows that what is experienced as news may very well transcend the boundaries of journalism's professional output (see also Baym 2017; Chadwick 2013; Costera Meijer 2006). This applies both to news as a media genre and as a democratic concept that supports public connection, learning and participation. Moreover, what is perceived as news is far from universal and might differ between users, cultures and contexts (Edgerly and Vraga 2020a; Tully 2022, in this SI). If news does not equal journalism, this not only raises practical concerns for the journalistic profession. It also brings about more existential questions about the role and purpose of journalism studies as a field. What are journalism scholars to do, if from an audience perspective, journalism studies might not necessarily be about journalism? In other words, if journalism as an institution is no longer automatically the locus where audiences encounter what they experience as news, what does this mean for the object, boundaries and aims of journalism studies?

Finally, most journalism scholars tend to assume that using news and journalism is intrinsically good and normatively desirable. Conversely, the avoidance or non-use of news is typically framed as essentially problematic for audiences. Woodstock (2014)

problematized this “news-democracy narrative,” by illustrating how limiting one’s news use could also benefit society. It can lead to “a constructive attitude toward the present and future, a willingness to work with others—qualities that enable news resisters to engage in meaningful political participation” (p.834). In addition, as evidenced by the growing work on digital disconnection (e.g., Brennen 2019; Syvertsen 2020), deciding to limit one’s intake of journalism might, from an audience perspective, be classified as healthy behavior. As Villi et al. (2022) demonstrate in this special issue, experiences of news overload and emotional distress are widespread, even among regular news users. This aligns with recent calls for focusing on what users perceive as the right quantity of news and when they feel saturated and satisfied instead of aiming to minimize news avoidance or non-use per se (Moe and Ytre-Arne 2021). Thus, while more news use might benefit news producers, this may not always be in the interest of news audiences nor society.

### **How to Advance a Radical Turn in Journalism Studies?**

Building upon findings from the past fifteen years of audience research, we propose to reframe journalism studies by further decentering journalism as an industry and as a distinctive genre, and by prioritizing the perspectives, practices and experiences of those (dis)engaging with news and information. Recently, Zelizer et al. (2021) suggested that journalism cannot longer take audiences for granted and should actively find them where they are. However, if we aim to advance a radical audience turn in journalism studies, what could be the constructive starting points? And what would be the consequences of such a shift?

### ***Non-News and Non-Media Centricity***

First, pursuing a radical audience turn requires taking less (mainstream) media-centric and less news-centric approaches to their fullest potential. As Peters et al. (2022: 62) argue in their contribution, “while studies of audiences are striving ahead, de-centering and situating journalism by considering informational alternatives is taking a little longer to catch up.” Picone and Vandenplas (2022) come to a similar conclusion, calling for the need to look beyond informational content and also include fictional, political and commercial content. As they write: “the audience turn in journalism studies might resemble a roundabout more than a curve: it has no endpoint but requires a continuous effort to reassert and reimagine the role of the audience” (p. 86). Moe and Ytre-Arne (2022) in this special issue propose media diaries to grasp how audiences engage with news as mixed with, and relative to, other aspects of public connection. All these studies critically engage with “news” as distinct from other forms of media content and plead for studying news use as embedded in other everyday practices.

Critically, such calls for a focus beyond news and even beyond media have been made several times before, including by ourselves (Broersma 2019; Costera Meijer 2006, 2007, 2008; Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer 2019; Swart, Peters, and Broersma 2017a), but apparently something is holding journalism scholars back from bringing this point to full fruition and truly break away from centering news. Are we

running up against the limits of the field? Taking these questions seriously presumes a different engagement with the object of (digital) journalism studies. Is it journalism, is it news, or is it the promise of public connection—enabling people to orient themselves toward matters of shared concern—that scholars need to study (Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham 2016; Swart, Peters, and Broersma 2018; Swart, Peters and Broersma 2019)? To truly open up the field for a non-media centric approach, we need to move beyond studying which news and news-adjacent media people use, and take a different starting point. For instance, Örnebring and Hellekant Rowe (2022, in this SI), use the creative approach of “media day” timelines. Taking the local rather than news as a starting point, their study reveals the central role grocery stores and schools play as hubs for (hyper)local information. These kinds of approaches clarify which functions journalism does, or does not, fulfill in citizens’ daily lives (Broersma and Peters 2016; Peters and Broersma 2019). However, have we sufficiently considered the implications of taking a non-news-centric approach for the aims and boundaries of journalism studies as a field? For instance, how should we weigh the perceptions and experiences of audiences with alternative news media, including those that spread misinformation and conspiracy theories (see for instance the upcoming Digital Journalism special issue “Contesting the mainstream: Understanding Alternative News Media”)? In the final section we contemplate the consequences for journalism studies if journalism as a professional practice and as an institution loses its privileged status as the dominant way to orient oneself to matters of shared concern.

### **Who Counts as Audience?**

As we argued earlier, journalism studies has privileged audiences that are of interest to the news industry. This raises the question if scholars have excluded or overlooked audiences that are less appealing to news media, thereby helping reproduce rather than challenge inequalities in news reach, news exposure and news use (e.g., Thorson, Xu, and Edgerly 2018; Thorson 2020). In particular, it appears that journalism scholars have tended to overlook what may be called the “structurally unattractive” (cf. Thorson 2020), such as adults with a lower socio-economic status, especially as intersected with other social categories like race and gender (for notable exceptions, see e.g., Lindell 2018; and Banjac (2022) in this SI). Such groups might remain out of focus because they are neither considered a (financially) interesting target audience for news organizations (Usher 2021), nor a *potentially attractive* future audience such as young people who might still develop an interest in news. Moreover, in contrast to the higher-educated, middle and upper class, student-heavy samples that feature so frequently in journalism research, for journalism scholars, these groups are typically more difficult to reach. This has led to a situation where we have focused too narrowly on target audiences and “future” audiences of (mainstream) journalism, at the expense of other groups in society.

In their contribution to this special issue, Picone and Vandenplas (2022) observe “a downward spiral where people that feature a less open attitude towards society are not only confronted with lower socio-economic capital, but also with media-poor news repertoires.” As a result, those “who would benefit the most from being exposed to a wide array of views and sources, specifically, are in fact not” (p. 86). How can we center this

attitude in our research without a priori problematizing people's (lack of) news use and—consequently—automatically seeing increased news use as the solution?

We suggest that a radical audience turn requires taking a broader view of who counts as audience. In her contribution to this special issue, Banjac (2022) draws upon Alper, Katz, and Schofield Clark (2016) to pay less attention to a “deficit-based approach” by “deemphasizing disadvantages audiences face in accessing daily news and media” and a focus on “their agency in overcoming challenges (asset-based approach)” instead (p. 127). She, for instance, finds that working class and Black audiences in South Africa creatively overcome the limitations of the unaffordability and inaccessibility of (quality) journalism. It is therefore also important to study how people “work around” the journalistic and business imperatives of news organizations and the affordances of news platforms. Importantly, such an approach demands conceiving of research participants not as an audience-to-be-captured, but rather as people navigating a public world in ways which may not necessarily be of financial interest to news media or centered on professional journalism. However, if taking a radical audience turn means moving research away from treating (traceable) news use as a normative end in itself, what would be appropriate alternative end goals? We will discuss this in the final section of this introduction.

### ***From What Counts as News Use to What is Experienced as “Informative”?***

A third avenue for radically advancing the audience turn—related to our call for a non-news-centric approach—is to recognize that news use is more than a set of cognitive practices and experiences, informed by users' explicit knowledge. The large majority of research now focuses on how much and what kind of news people use from an industry-based definition, as well as what counts and can be counted as news use: measurable news consumption. We propose that a radical audience turn means shifting the focus from what news use is toward what is *experienced* as “informative.” If the central question becomes which experiences of “journalism,” “news” or “information” are truly valued beyond particular genres, beats or actual consumption patterns (Costera Meijer 2021a), we need to move beyond the “frequency fallacy” and the “duration fallacy” of particular audience metrics (cf. Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink 2021, p. 16).

Practices of news use—what people do with news—are increasingly receiving scholarly attention. However, when and how people experience journalism as valuable in and for their daily lives, what this appreciation means and how it affects and impacts users remains understudied. Despite appeals for considering users' emotional (Wahl-Jorgensen 2020), intuitive (Swart and Broersma 2021), habitual (Broersma and Swart 2021; Groot Kormelink, *forthcoming*), embodied (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Suenzo 2020), material and sensory (Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer 2019) dimensions of news use, the field of journalism studies, as well as media effects research around news consumption in communication sciences, media studies and related fields, still remains strongly focused on the rational, cognitive processing of information.

As we have argued elsewhere (Broersma and Swart 2021; Costera Meijer 2020a, 2021a; Groot Kormelink 2020; Swart and Broersma 2021), such a narrow perspective



ignores the various modes of knowing through which people come to experience news and how they (learn to) make decisions around news and media use. In other words, it neglects how people's news experiences, news literacy and media habits are also shaped by users' implicit and tacit forms of knowledge, built through routines of everyday use (Chan, Lee, and Chen 2021; Meyers, Erickson, and Small 2013). A more inclusive epistemological approach that highlights users' sensations, affects and "gut feeling" (Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink 2021) may help to move beyond merely assessing what people recognize as news, and instead, to understand what *feels* like "news" to them. Indeed, it broadens our gaze toward what is experienced as informative. Such a shift, of course, has major methodological implications (Costera Meijer 2016, 2020a) and consequently may require different tools. The authors in this special issue, for example, employ media diaries (Moe and Ytre-Arne, 2022) and mobile messaging diaries (Kümpel 2022) to capture people's media use. Similar innovative approaches are needed to tap into users' emotional, intuitive, embodied, material and sensory news experiences.

### **Audiences as Active Agents**

Finally, a radical audience turn means positing audiences as active agents (cf. Silverstone 2007). This shift requires asking ourselves about the consequences thereof. First, if we recognize that news use is an activity, this may involve holding users responsible for their media choices: what they use, how they use it or what they do *not* use. If we want to avoid putting the responsibility for ethical behavior in journalism one-sidedly with news organizations and journalists, a condition for advancing our understanding of user ethics in journalism demands further developing a normative framework for users' ethical experiences (Costera Meijer 2021b). Since their attention and financial support will determine which news media will survive or flourish, how can news users be encouraged and supported to ethically reflect on their user practices? For instance, mindlessly scrolling through Facebook, Instagram or Google News has algorithmic consequences and the question is how users can be inspired to consciously click on the kind of journalism that opens up new horizons. Would this imply that scholars should invent a vocabulary and new concepts that encourage audiences to reflect on what kind of journalism they truly value, the one that is "good for [their] soul" (Costera Meijer 2021b)? Approaching audiences as moral agents presupposes that users are knowledgeable about the consequences of their clicking and sharing behavior and the time they spend on news, and how audience analytics interpret these actions (Gajardo and Costera Meijer, *forthcoming*). This calls for more awareness of the reciprocity between algorithmic decision-making and users' own behavior in online news environments (Swart 2021).

When seeing audiences as active agents, however, we should be wary of having too high expectations of participation of people in democratic processes and in journalism in particular. When the digital turn hit the news industry, scholars anticipated audiences to engage in news production through, what was then called, "user generated content" (Bruns 2005, 2008). Similarly, people were expected to engage more in informed public deliberation based on increasing opportunities for interactivity with

both the news and other citizens (Borger, Van Hoof, and Sanders 2016; Peters and Witschge 2015). Instead, we now observe that people are indeed producing tons of content—think of Instagram posts, tweets and YouTube videos—but not so much content that qualifies as journalism in news organizations’ terms. This, however, does not mean that such content is not informative about current affairs or not meaningful for citizens who want to connect to public issues. While a small, be it vocal, minority engages in online public debate—though not necessarily in the desired rational, open and informed way that is underlying normative understandings of democratic participation—most people do not visibly participate (comment or share) (Swart, Peters, and Broersma 2019). However, they do reflect on societally important information distributed by news organizations or social media in other manners, such as discussing these current affairs face-to-face (Sakariassen and Costera Meijer 2021) or via “dark” social media platforms (Swart, Peters, and Broersma 2018; Swart, Peters and Broersma 2019). Questioning why specific “marginalized” groups do not participate openly, with a focus on intersectional, i.e., gendered, class, age, educational, ethnic or lhbtiq+ dimensions and how this relates to broader social structures of inequality, could shed light on people’s motivations to connect to public issues or what motivates their “inhibition” to visually participate online (Sakariassen and Costera Meijer 2021).

A radical audience turn, thus, asks for developing a more precise vocabulary for what counts as “agency.” It demands a reconsideration of what counts and what is measured as reflection, participation and engagement in relation to public issues. For instance, “smaller” or offline everyday practices, such as liking, making memes or sharing (print) newspapers and accounts with others might not qualify as participatory in the traditional sense, but “can nonetheless become a field of agency and resistance” (Picone et al. 2019, p. 2015) and could be very valuable for people’s engagement with news and journalism. Likewise, “engagement” is now often either discussed in terms of democratic participation or in terms of metrics. This ignores other acts through which how people negotiate their (dis)engagement with news, such as “avoidance” (Skovsgaard and Andersen 2020), “abstaining” (Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink 2021) and “dosing” (Groot Kormelink and Klein Gunnewiek 2021).

## **Moving Forward: Fundamental Dilemmas for Journalism Studies**

In this introduction, we made the case for radically advancing the audience turn and identified promising venues to move the ball forward. We proposed pushing audience research in journalism studies beyond industry concerns towards prioritizing the perspectives, practices and experiences of those (dis)engaging with news. Specifically, we argued for taking a less news-centric approach, for having a more inclusive notion of who counts as audience, for centering what is experienced as informative, and for developing a more precise vocabulary for news users as active (moral) agents. The ultimate aim of this endeavor is to open up the discussion about what counts as the societal roles and functions of journalism—if any—from an audience perspective. Rather than asking what they want or what they need from journalism, we suggest as

central question what kind of information people need to orient themselves in society and everyday life.

Yet, we recognize that multiple fundamental dilemmas regarding journalism studies, and studying audiences in relation to journalism, emerge if we would take the audience turn to its full potential. This would open up questions about the object of journalism studies and the methodological challenges involved, the objectives of journalism studies, and the role of contemporary journalism and the news industry in audience research.

First, moving from a production perspective on news toward what audiences experience as informative raises the question what the *object of journalism studies* should be. On the one hand, audience research shows that journalism and the news it traditionally produces remain very recognizable to audiences as a cultural form (Tamboer, Kleemans, and Daalmans 2020). The power that such traditional markers hold becomes apparent when we for instance consider users' perceptions of trustworthiness (Fisher et al. 2021) or willingness to pay (Chen and Thorson 2021). On the other hand, what is experienced as news—cognitively, but also affectively and intuitively—very well extends beyond the boundaries of journalism. One challenge ahead for journalism studies is to consider the consequences of opening up or broadening its object of study. Do we treat all information equally or do we formulate normative criteria, such as reliability, societal or democratic value or inclusiveness, to carve out our object of study? It raises the question how we, for instance, make sense of people's frequent use of beauty blogs, celebrity gossip or hockey websites as reliable and relevant information. If we exclude such sources due to their supposed lack of societal relevance, we risk overlooking or excluding information sources that are of importance to people themselves. Yet, which consequences are involved if we don't distinguish between beauty blogs and news about—say—public affairs? Should we include intentions when making sense of people's use of information as news or as entertainment?

Put differently, what might we lose if “journalism” as a particular professional practice and the cultural form it usually takes, is no longer the privileged point of departure in (digital) journalism studies? What are the consequences for our scholarly field, if digital journalism, as Waisbord (2019: 354) argues, “is not particularly tied to any strict epistemology or conventional news routines and norms to decide what makes news?” To solve these dilemmas, we need to develop new theoretical paradigms that stretch far beyond the boundaries of what is currently understood as (digital) journalism studies (see e.g., Moe's (2020) notion of “distributed readiness citizenship”). It also presupposes reconsidering how we “name” our objects of study: conceptualizing audiences in terms of citizens, publics, consumers or users, for example, guides our research design and thus what we observe and what remains out of sight. For instance, if we take good or active citizenship as our conceptual lens, how do we make sense of citizens actively involved in societal issues, but informing themselves with questionable sources outside of the journalistic domain?

Second and relatedly, our call for a non-news-centric approach and for centering on what people experience as informative generates methodological dilemmas. Specifically, a radical audience turn means revisiting *the spaces and contexts of news use*. If we want to look beyond journalism's traditional distribution structures and

meet audiences where they are, we need to engage with non-proprietary platforms and spaces that may be commercially relevant but lack an orientation to professional journalistic values, or platforms or spaces in which journalistic content merges with other types of information, such as the increasing number of “meso” news-spaces that sit between public and private realms (Tenenboim and Kligler-Vilenchik 2020). Similarly, contexts that are less commercially relevant for news organizations or where journalism and traditional forms of news feature less prominently come into focus then. This raises questions about where to start when potentially all spaces and platforms can contain journalism, offer spaces for news or other information that is perceived as news or has relevance for public connection.

A related methodological challenge is how to make sense of news and information used in these spaces and platforms. Even if user activity can be tracked or traced in full, how can we meaningfully distinguish between different types of information? For instance, what counts as informative might differ between people. Although innovative research designs such as Mobile Intensive Longitudinal Linkage Analysis (MILLA) (Otto et al. 2022, in this SI) and mobile messaging diaries (Kümpel 2022, in this SI) can help establish these meaningful differences on an individual level, the question becomes how to scale such results. A mix of automated and qualitative approaches and interdisciplinary research—e.g., collaboration between computer science and cultural studies—is needed to help overcome these dilemmas (Loeberbach et al. 2020).

Third, a radical audience turn raises questions about the *objectives of journalism studies* as a discipline. Most current work starts from the implicit or explicit assumption that news and journalism are essential to informed citizenship and democracy, and that news organizations provide an essential infrastructure and service to meet these normative goals. This raises issues about reconciling an audience-centric research agenda that starts from the perspectives and experiences of audiences themselves with the interests of professional journalists, news organizations and the news industry. If we decenter journalism in favor of whatever (non-news) media audiences themselves use and value as informative, what justifies the existence of journalism studies as a separate field of scholarship? If we acknowledge that it is an interdisciplinary field in itself, wouldn't its boundaries blur too much when both its object of study and its underlying objectives evaporate? This raises questions about the *raison d'être* of journalism studies and the place of audience research therein in particular. Does a radical audience turn in journalism studies end up eating its own tail by deprivileging the special status of journalism, or is this privileged status worth preserving and must a radical audience turn therefore ultimately be “deradicalized” through renewed attention to what makes news news?

Finally, the radical audience turn brings up dilemmas around how journalism studies relates to the news industry regarding audience research. If, as we suggested, journalism scholars should look beyond news audiences that are primarily of interest to news organizations, where should this lead us? When studying overlooked audiences, for instance, do we “merely” document their practices and experiences, or is it ultimately the objective of journalism studies to translate such findings back to journalism as a profession, an institution or a cultural form? For instance, work on intersectionality has highlighted the structural challenges that

audiences face in accessing or being able to enjoy news and how they seek to overcome them. Is the role of audience researchers in journalism studies here only to pinpoint and understand these issues, or should we also take an active stance in fostering inclusivity, by developing a vocabulary that news media can make sense of and make actionable?

In this introduction we have sketched what advancing a radical audience turn might bring to journalism studies, and ultimately to journalism itself. Our aim was not to outline a fully fledged research agenda that could simply be rolled out in the years to come. We are very much aware of the challenges, dilemmas and complexities a radical audience turn implicates, which may explain why such a turn has not been brought to its full potential. At the same time, we feel that scholarship could gain much from a novel and fundamentally different approach that opens up new opportunities for thinking about audiences, users, publics, citizens, news and journalism. This introduction should therefore be interpreted as an open invitation to further reflect on how, in response to a quickly shifting digital information sphere, we can conceptualize news and informational needs from an audience perspective, and theorize what this means for journalism's role and function in society and in the daily lives of citizens.

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