Representing Trust in Digital Journalism

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Article

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Abstract
This article examines how journalists at two prominent news organizations have aimed to portray trustworthy digital reporting of marginalized communities. The case study draws on the concepts of engagement and trust as a resource to evaluate journalists' articles and the related audience comments on *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* digital sites. This study analyzed the digital news articles and audience comments in 2012 and the latter half of 2022 during the rapid expansion of mobile audiences and American readers' declining trust in newspapers. As this study discovered, journalists at the two legacy organizations have portrayed novel forms of reporting relating to fresh notions of enhancing readers' trust as well as elements of transparency and interactivity in the news. They have represented trustworthy journalism based on an inclusive approach and personalized depictions of marginalized communities' experiences to appeal to readers increasingly using mobile devices. Although the journalists' stories attracted some toxic tweets, their articles also encouraged digital subscribers' loyalty and enthusiasm to help solve the reported problems affecting marginalized communities. This study indicates the possibilities of fostering trustworthy interactions among journalists and engaged subscribers in digital news spaces.

Keywords
digital journalism; journalist–audience interaction; news coverage; marginalized communities; media trust; The New York Times; The Washington Post

1. Introduction

Across many newsrooms, journalists have increasingly discussed how they can contribute to restoring public trust in the news coverage of the vulnerable. The newsroom discussions have been called a "reckoning" and a "reform-oriented" effort to help overturn a media culture that too often appeared to be catering to "the already comfortable while afflicting the afflicted" (Arguedas et al., 2023, pp. 3–4, 45–46).

Within America's highly advanced, complex, and varied journalism landscape, *The New York Times* (henceforth the *Times*) and *The Washington Post* (henceforth the *Post*) newsrooms have developed reputations as legacy agenda-setters that have shined a spotlight on the problems of marginalized communities. The *Times*' journalists have long portrayed their role as the "conscience of America" by exposing social issues, while the

Post reporters have become known for compassionate news coverage of the vulnerable (McCarthy et al., 1996; Schwarz, 2012, p. xvii).

More recently, journalism scholars have suggested that the rise of digital reporting could provide more opportunities for journalists to help overcome readers' declining trust in newspapers (Beckett & Deuze, 2016). The *Times* provided a promising pivotal moment in 2012 by showcasing a relatively new style of linear, narrative news or long-form journalism, allowing readers to scroll across the text on small, mobile screens (Dowling & Vogan, 2014; Morales, 2012). Journalism researchers have advocated the scrolling, digital structure for enhancing engaging news coverage of marginalized communities (Beckett & Deuze, 2016).

The *Times*' and the *Post*'s teams announced a commitment to providing engaging, trustworthy news styles for growing numbers of mobile readers by 2022

(Guaglione, 2021; Tameez, 2023). Readers' trust in newspapers had declined in mid-2022. Only 16% of Americans indicated they had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in newspapers (Brennan, 2022). Even so, the *Times* and the *Post* fared relatively well in Statista polling, with almost half of the survey respondents agreeing that the newspapers were very or somewhat credible (Watson, 2023a, 2023b). Digital scrolling structures have become a fast-growing research topic (Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Dowling & Vogan, 2014). There has been less attention to the two news organizations' coverage of marginalized community news on digital and mobile platforms that can offer opportunities for trustworthy interactions with audiences.

This is a rare study of both the journalist-driven elements and the audience responses to the news organizations' digital journalism. It seeks to answer the question: How have journalists at the two organizations portrayed trust and trustworthy digital coverage of marginalized communities, and how have audiences responded to the related news articles in 2012 and the latter half of 2022? The study focuses on journalists' news articles and the related audience comments on the *Times* and the *Post* digital platforms. The selected timeframes correspond to the growth of digital scrolling structures in 2012 and the organizations' announcements of engaging mobile news styles by 2022 (Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Burrell, 2017; Dowling & Vogan, 2014; Guaglione, 2021; Tameez, 2023).

This study is informed by concepts of engagement with audiences that relate to notions of trust. Ksiazek et al. (2016) have advanced the idea of a continuum of engagement. The continuum can begin with the time of exposure or the news release and can lead to interactivity or the active participation of audiences. As Ksiazek et al. (2016, p. 505) explain, "more (quantity) and better (quality) ways to interact with content and with other users indicate deeper engagement." Journalists need to understand engagement because the term relates to how audiences perceive the value of a news organization and whether readers will return and pay for the news, contributing to an organization's sustainability. According to Nelson and Kim (2021, p. 352), many newsrooms have been "convinced that engagement is the best way to increase trust in and loyalty to news." Moreover, Varma (2023, p. 3) has observed that traditional news reporting, emphasizing official sources and a neutral tone, relegates people who experience social injustice to "the margins of coverage." This article is based on Ford et al.'s (2020) notion of marginalizing when journalists misrepresent vulnerable communities based on race, class, gender, disability, generation, or geography. As Nelson (2021) has affirmed, journalists can potentially develop a more inclusive approach by opening digital spaces to marginalized voices. An inclusive journalism approach can encourage more audience engagement, as well as interactivity or participation, and loyalty that can lead to paid news subscriptions (Hess & Richards, 2021; Nelson & Kim, 2021).

The study also draws on the concept of trust as a journalism resource that is part of all the work associated with writing, producing, and distributing news, as well as audience responses. As Moran and Nechushtai (2023) explain, trust is embedded in all aspects of journalism and "shapes and is shaped by the multitude of actors and communities that attend to it" (p. 459). According to Carlson (2016), news reporters can develop metajournalistic discourses that are public expressions about journalism's meaning and legitimacy. Audiences, too, can establish metajournalistic discourses to evaluate news articles. Journalism can be viewed as trustworthy when audiences find that the news includes emotional authenticity or meaningful insights. This study contributes to this recent research by examining the portrayal of trust and trustworthiness in both the journalist-driven elements and audience responses relating to the news coverage of marginalized communities.

2. Reinterpreting Trust and Trustworthy News

Rebuilding audiences' trust has been considered crucial for journalists needing to develop engaging news to attract loyal subscribers and boost journalism organizations' sustainability (Nelson & Kim, 2021). Traditionally, journalists would use a news writing style of "detached expertise" to elicit readers' trust (Nelson, 2021, p. 35). Journalists emphasized elite sources, including political leaders. Their reporting focused on the hard news or "bad news" of crime to shape public values of equality, morality, and order (Mickler, 1998, p. 57). However, the impersonal stylistic norm tended to exclude marginalized community voices (Moran & Nechushtai, 2023; Varma, 2023). For example, Lane et al. (2020) discovered that the *Times* and the *Post* provided official views of a racial threat in crime-related articles about an unarmed Black teenager, Trayvon Martin, who was fatally shot in Florida in 2012. Aswad (2019) also noted that the *Times* accentuated official quotations in the news coverage of Syrian refugees that suggested their exclusion from US society.

More recently, researchers have advanced broader concepts of trust and trustworthy news. Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) has affirmed that journalists can potentially cultivate readers' trust by authentically reporting public expressions of emotion. Beckett and Deuze (2016) have asserted that trustworthy journalism needs to focus on people and value the audience. According to Papacharissi (2016, p. 311), networked audiences can be viewed as "affective publics" who ideally can be connected through expressions of sentiment. As Varma (2023) has noted, news that merely circulates marginalized voices in solely emotional terms is not sufficient; she has shown a need for new narrative structures that allow for "woven vignettes" to present the perspectives of marginalized people about the issues that affect them (p. 6). Vignettes should include marginalized communities' views of shared conditions beyond individual circumstances (Varma, 2023; Wake, 2021). This in-depth

reporting represents an advancement of the traditional inverted pyramid model in journalism that prioritized official views in the first paragraphs of news articles.

The rise of digital journalism contributed to the hope that online spaces could provide opportunities for varied, trustworthy news. For example, Wall and El Zahed (2015) found that the *Times* blog, The Lede, incorporated citizen journalist videos that provided glimpses into Syrian people's experiences during the country's civil war in 2012. They suggested that the raw, unpolished videos could boost audience trust in authentic news. As Wall and El Zahed wrote (2015, p. 176), "The emotionality of the videos…may well cause more intense audience involvement with and connection to what is being viewed." Smit et al. (2017) noted that other legacy broadcasters provided skeptical views about the citizen videos of violent attacks. Legacy news organizations mainly displayed videos rather than inviting audience interactivity or participation in the news.

In the 24/7 news cycle, many daily digital articles appeared as quick-hitting clickbait created in a "short, fast, news ticker-like way" (Planer & Godulla, 2021, p. 567; Usher, 2019). Newsroom managements have often required journalists to market saleable news on Twitter about trivial topics (Alieva, 2023; Tiffen & Smith, 2023). According to Tandoc and Vos (2016, p. 961), digital journalists' interactions with social media audiences suggested "a top-down, we-tell-you-what-is-important approach." This style of reporting represented a myth of interactivity (Young et al., 2018).

Nelson and Kim (2021) have observed that legacy journalism organizations, such as the *Times*, increasingly recognized a need to be more transparent and willing to engage with audiences. They state:

A growing number of journalism stakeholders have therefore begun investing millions of dollars and countless resources into efforts to make the news more "engaging" and "transparent," in hopes that doing so will result in more public trust and, consequently, more audience loyalty. (Nelson & Kim, 2021, p. 349)

News transparency has offered a way for audiences to "see inside" the truthfulness of journalists' reporting and practices (Ananny & Crawford, 2018, p. 974). Journalists could show more transparency by explicitly attempting to invite audiences to engage with the news production process (Nelson & Kim, 2021).

The rapid acceleration of digital news not only attracted a growing number of online subscribers but also led to the growth of hate speech on social media. Ksiazek (2015) established that many news organizations initially tried to filter out anonymous audiences' offensive messages. Reporters were increasingly targeted by abusive readers promoting misinformation or "junk news" on social media (Coatney, 2021, 2023, p. 171). The negative news messages also discouraged some other readers, including digital users under the age of 35 (Arguedas et al., 2023); younger readers at times formed habits of avoiding the news about "depressing or overwhelming" topics (p. 43).

Increasingly, legacy establishments have abandoned or limited online comment sections (Ksiazek & Springer, 2020). Removing the comment sections could undermine news organizations' efforts to engage with online audiences. As Nelson et al. (2021, p. 581) have noted: "User comments offer citizens an opportunity to actively participate in public discussion of current events, knowledge creation, and the journalistic process. Abandoning or limiting these capabilities compromises that opportunity for user engagement." Craft et al. (2016, p. 678) have also remarked that some audience commenters can uphold positive values, becoming "potentially powerful shapers of journalism's standards of performance." This study contributes to the research into enhancing trust in digital news by examining both the journalist-driven elements and audience responses relating to the *Post*'s and the *Times*' coverage of marginalized communities.

3. Method

This study used a three-stage strategy for identifying digital news coverage of marginalized communities. First, early news topics were identified by examining the annual overviews of the *Post*'s and the *Times*' digital journalism in 2012 ("2012: The year in graphics," 2012; The Wonkblog Team, 2012). Two news topics related to marginalized community members: the fatal shooting of Black teenager Trayvon Martin and refugees fleeing Syria's war. The study included both topics based on Ford et al.'s (2020) notion of marginalized communities misrepresented in the news based on race, class, gender, disability, generation, or geography. An online search of the *Post*'s and the *Times*' archives identified 40 news articles about the topics in the digital newspaper sections in 2012. The 40 items included news articles with embedded videos and blogs that had originally contained audience comments and featured tweets. The related audience comment sections had often been disabled or removed. Even so, this study's sample has included 34 audience comments and 12 tweets that specifically focused on the reporting of the topics rather than general discussions. The sample in 2012 included 40 digital news articles, 34 audience comments from the subscribers' sections, and 12 tweets.

The second stage involved identifying the two legacy organizations' digital-specific news coverage of marginalized communities between June and December 2022. Digital news articles were sourced from the hyperlinks shared on the news organizations' Twitter handles for PC users in 2022 (@nytgraphics and @PostGraphics). The articles were also sourced from the organizations' Twitter Lite sites for mobile device users, including youth audiences at the time (mobile.twitter.com/nytgraphics and mobile.twitter.com/wpdatateam). All 788 general

news tweets were manually reviewed by a human coder. Of these, 13.83% (*n* = 109) of tweets contained hyperlinks to related news articles about marginalized communities. This study's sample included 20 related long-form articles about a member or members of marginalized communities. The articles did not include news about sports competitions, commentaries about political party debates, or reports lacking direct sources. This sampling strategy allowed for a close analysis of the digital long-form articles (see Table 1).

The third stage related to the audience comments about the set of long-form articles that journalists shared on Twitter in 2022. This study's sample included readers' tweets (*n* = 393) and subscribers' comments (*n* = 331) that were specifically related to the reporting. Audience responses were analyzed according to whether they mainly supported an article, expressed emotional reactions, or posted a call for action (Ksiazek, 2018).

The digital news articles and subscribers' comments were also analyzed to assess the representations of trust. This analysis included a quantitative method to examine the different types of news messages. The study's qualitative analysis focused on metajournalistic discourse—public expressions by journalists and audiences about the meaning of the news and the journalism practices that produced them (Carlson, 2016). The news articles were analyzed in relation to the speakers or sources, the placement, the conditions underlying the publication, and the audiences. Altogether, the final refined sample included 60 digital-specific news articles, 405 audience tweets, and 365 subscribers' comments related to the reporting.

4. Findings and Discussion

Three main themes emerged from the analysis of the sample of news items. The themes emphasized news transparency, digital interactivity, and emotional appeals. Together, these themes show how the *Post*'s and the *Times*' reporters have aimed to portray inclusive writing styles about trustworthy news of marginalized communities.

4.1. News Transparency

Digital news can potentially be a "carrier of the ethic of transparency" that explicitly provides behind-the-scenes insights into the journalism production process to elicit audiences' trust (Revers, 2014, p. 823). The *Post*'s and the *Times*' journalists used a candid style in digital blogs in 2012 that revealed glimpses into the news coverage of marginalized communities. More than a third of this study's article samples in 2012 explicitly referred to behind-the-scenes revelations.

For example, journalist Paul Farhi (2012) observed that the story of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, "began as a routine police-blotter item, a journalistic afterthought." As Farhi affirmed in the *Post*'s style

Table 1. Sample of the long-form articles accessed via Twitter from June to December 2022.

The New York Times	*The Washington Post*
How the police killed Breonna Taylor	The God of São Félix
The chain of failures that left 17 dead in a Bronx apartment fire	Massive flooding in Kentucky engulfs homes, leaves at least 15 dead
The illegal airstrips bringing toxic mining to Brazil's Indigenous land	More dangerous heat waves are on the way
Expanded safety net drives sharp drop in child poverty	A failure of enforcement
"Very dire": Devastated by floods, Pakistan faces looming food crisis	See the scale of Pakistan's flooding in maps, photos, and videos
In Hasidic enclaves, failing private schools flush with public money	Hurricane Fiona hit Puerto Rico as a category 1 storm
Majority of Latino voters out of G.O.P.'s reach, new poll shows	The unseen toll of nonfatal police shootings
How diverse are the candidates in the midterm elections?	As fatal police shootings increase, more go unreported
Hey, New Yorkers: Meet your neighborhood's new Congressional district	The gold-mining city that is destroying a sacred Venezuelan mountain
Extreme heat will change us	Fatal force

section, "The national media didn't descend on Sanford." He wrote that eventually, "the story moved like a fast-burning fuse, leaping from traditional news sources to the blogosphere and social media." *Times* journalist Charles M. Blow (2012) highlighted in an opinion blog that citizen communities, rather than journalists, initiated the questions about a neighborhood watch member's shooting of Martin. Blow (2012) remarked, "This case has reignited a furor about vigilante justice, racial-profiling and equitable treatment under the law, and it has stirred the pot of racial strife." The *Post*'s journalist Patrick B. Pexton (2012) discussed the pressures felt by young bloggers who had talked with him about their responsibility for reporting trending news, such as the story about the shooting. As Pexton opined in a blog, "They said that they felt as if they were out there alone in digital land, under high pressure to get Web hits, with no training, little guidance or mentoring and sparse editing." The *Times*' readers posted their positive reactions to Blow's (2012) reporting of a tragedy in the digital subscribers' comment section. The audience comments included, "Thanks for picking up on this story," after wondering about "the minimal media coverage" and "why it was taking so long." A dominant theme was sharing behind-the-scenes messages in the *Post* and the *Times* news blogs about Trayvon Martin.

Journalists can create a sense of trust by sharing their candid reasons for reporting the news (Moran & Nechushtai, 2023). Of this study's sample in 2012, the *Times*' journalists embedded citizen YouTube videos and tweets in digital news articles to show they were portraying Syrian refugees' overlooked experiences. For example, a *Times* team used an inclusive tone to explain their news site, "watching Syria's war" ("Watching Syria's war," n.d.). They shared a back story that, "We wanted to make sense of these videos" and "worked diligently to verify and add context to some of this footage" ("2012: The year in graphics," 2012). The related descriptions portrayed Syrian people's experiences, such as, "cradled in someone's arms, the boy was wrapped in a checkered scarf with a bandage" ("Watching Syria's war: Children," n.d.). The news captions emphasized "what we don't know," disclosing missing details about the identities of children and camera operators pictured in the scenes. A *New York Times* team ("Watching Syria's war: Children," n.d.) selected tweets that included Syrian residents' personal messages and hashtags related to online support sites. The citizen tweets included, "a mortar shell struck a school in #Aleppo killing four children and a teacher. This is the same school my cousins go to. #Syria." Sharing behind-the-scenes revelations in the news blogs suggested Moran and Nechushtai's (2023) view that journalists try to structure their reporting to elicit audience trust.

News leads can be a significant way that journalists can show transparency by writing opening paragraphs that bear witness to the hidden conditions of marginalized communities (Varma, 2023). Journalists reported behind-the-scenes revelations in this study's sample of long-form news articles in 2022. The journalists' revelations appeared in prominent news leads, suggesting a fresh style for increasingly mobile users (Tameez, 2023). A *Times*' team, for example, revealed in a lead summary that they had identified hundreds of illegal airstrips that allowed for criminal gold mining in Indigenous Yanomami people's traditional land in the Amazon. Journalists reported in a bold, emphatic style, "the *Times* identified more than 1,200 other unregistered airstrips across the Brazilian Amazon—many of them part of criminal networks that are destroying **Indigenous lands** and threatening their people" (Andreoni et al., 2022). Crowdsourced satellite images focused on the damaged homes in the Indigenous communities. The lead summary included an enhanced byline portrayed as a fresh journalistic technique in 2022. Enhanced bylines began replacing traditional datelines that had included only brief mentions of the journalists' locations. Instead, the enhanced bylines in lead summaries focused on how journalists produced the news. As the *Times*' assistant editor, Edmund Lee, explained in an interview, "A big part of ensuring trust is letting people know we are where we say we are" (Tameez, 2023). This study's news article sample in 2022 included long, linear narratives. The mobile-driven style frequently appeared in the articles for the *Post* and the *Times* readers (see Table 1).

Some news lead variations appeared across the *Post* platform. For instance, journalists Terrence McCoy and Cecília do Lago used a human-interest tone in an article about an environmental scandal that affected Parakanã families in the Apyterewa Indigenous Territory in the Amazon. A lead news summary focused on a local official responsible for the territory: "He's been called a deforester and killer. Now he's called mayor" (McCoy & do Lago, 2022). The opening summary included an animated background image of deforested land. The related byline contained an explanatory message: "*Terrence McCoy, who covers Brazil for The Washington Post, visited a remote, illegally built town within Indigenous territory for this story.*" McCoy used a more impersonal tone in a related article about the official system damaging Indigenous communities. The lead headline in McCoy's related article emphasized, "The Amazon, Undone….Deforesters are plundering the Amazon" (2022). Journalists portrayed transparent news styles to disclose what Varma (2023, p. 6) has called "the shared conditions" of marginalized communities that expose the problems of official governance.

A notable number of audience subscribers reflected on the value of the news reporting by posting comments at the end of the articles that were part of this study's sample in 2022. Audiences shared expressions of support on both the *Times* site (n = 106) and the *Post* site (n = 62). Readers specifically commented that a news investigation was "important," "fascinating," and "well-researched'' regarding the *Times* (n = 54) and the *Post* coverage (n = 36). Examples include, "[t]his

article is a solid reason, I have been a subscriber to the NY Times for years—and—will proudly continue," and "THANK YOU WAPO for featuring this very important story" (Andreoni et al., 2022; McCoy, 2022). The *Post* subscribers also referred to their reading preferences. Their comments included, "a very informative article" and "Nicely colored graphics. (I'm often a bit of a scold on this issue.) Excellent, simple color contrast that quickly reinforces the text" (Muyskens et al., 2022). Subscribers' comments often showed their loyalty, a quality that Nelson and Kim (2021) have found to be related to audiences' trust in a news organization (see Figure 1).

Journalists generated wide-ranging reactions to their news tweets in 2022. The most popular news investigations promoted on Twitter included the Amazon exposés by the *Post* and the *Times* during the week when each article was published (Au & Connected Action, 2022a, 2022b). Even so, readers' tweets were varied (see Figure 2). Most Twitter users tweeted cynical views that the articles were "junk science" or "fake news" (*n* = 212). To a lesser degree, some subscribers posted messages about fake news (*n* = 44) to discredit the reporting of environmental damage. Others tweeted political party endorsements (*n* =115). Despite the growing use of online blocking tech, some tweets included extreme racism and violent messages (*n* = 29). Notwithstanding the toxic tweets, some Twitter users posted direct expressions of support (*n* = 55). Digital newspaper subscribers also became commenters who tried to counteract Twitter users' toxic messages. For instance, a subscriber commented on some users' abusive comments about the *Post*'s coverage of Appalachian communities during a major flood. The subscriber remarked, "The comments to this article are asinine. Eastern Kentucky is an impoverished part of the country that has already suffered enough" (Childress et al., 2022). This sharing endorsed Craft et al.'s (2016) views that audience subscribers can help to uphold journalism standards. The journalists' articles and subscribers' comments indicated a collective initiative to enhance the news coverage of marginalized communities.

4.2. Digital Interactivity

Journalists can help to enhance trust in the news during their digital interactions with audiences (Ksiazek et al., 2016; Nelson & Kim, 2021). The *Post* and the *Times* teams developed some interactive elements in the sample of news articles about Trayvon Martin in 2012. For example, the *Times*' journalist Holly Epstein Ojalvo (2012) developed an inclusive article seeking students' comments for the newspaper's education site, The Learning Network. The article accentuated the need for a safe digital space that "explicitly invites the voices of young people" who were at least 13 years old. Some student commenters responded that they were "shocked" and "a little bit angry" that they had not heard of Martin's story before. For the *Times*' The Lede blog, journalists Jennifer Preston and Colin Moynihan (2012) shared the hashtags of social media networks in support of Martin's family, such as #millionhoodies and #trayvonmartin. The Lede's journalists shared their aim "to draw readers into the global conversation about the news taking place online." Similarly, a *Post* local blog included "an open letter from black America" to the US President at the time, Barack Obama (Harriston, 2012). Blog writer Keith Harriston included a communication professor's call to action to help overturn discrimination against Black communities. The professor was quoted as saying, "Make calls. Write letters. Send e-mails.'' The news blogs and youth audience messages in 2012 included a conversational tone of immediacy that indicated Papacharissi's (2016) view of "affective publics" who are mobilized and connected by sentiment.

Of this study's sample in 2022, inclusive messages encouraged subscribers to use interactive data tools in four long-form articles. For example, a *Times* news article carried an inclusive message, "hey New Yorkers," and a direct appeal for readers to use an interactive search tool to "meet your neighborhood's new congressional district" (Lu & Fandos, 2022). An embedded link in the article allowed readers to filter or look up redistricting changes for each "racial or ethnic group" in their communities. Related community profiles referred
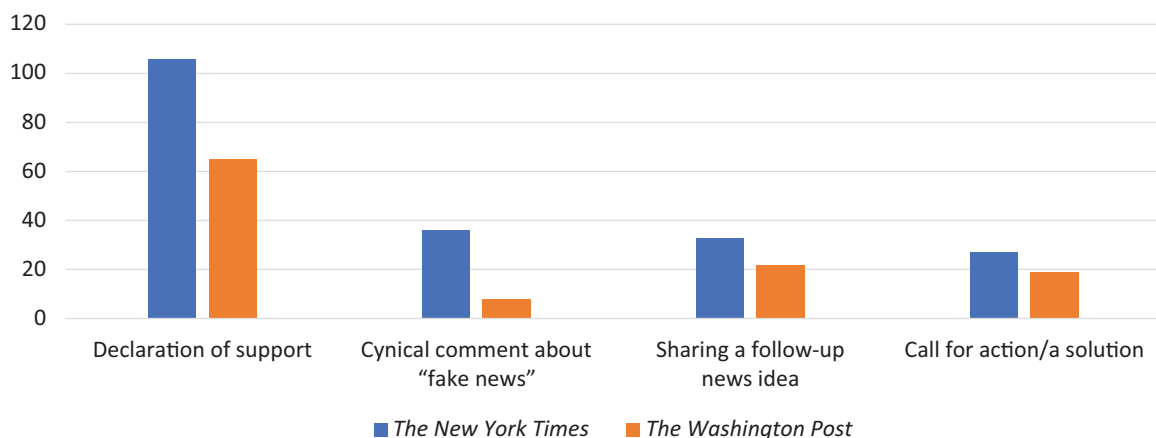

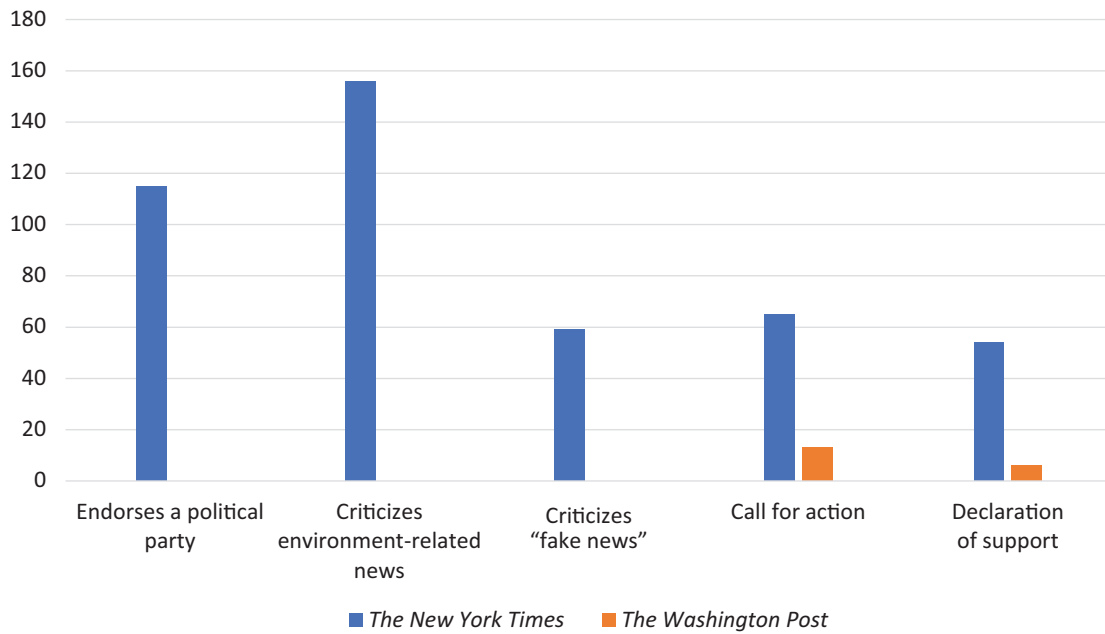**Figure 1.** Main themes in audience comment sections.

Figure 2. Main themes in Twitter users' comments.

to map-makers' efforts to avoid excluding working-class Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Latino voters. Journalists Denise Lu and Nicholas Fandos referred to popular symbolism, such as portraying a community as "the heart of one of the city's most iconic Black districts since Shirley Chisolm," the first Black woman elected to the US Congress. The news profiles included supportive messages "to allow Asian-American voters a greater say in the political process" (Lu & Fandos, 2022). Journalists developed personalized, interactive messages that presented marginalized communities as a crucial part of everyday civic life.

The *Post*'s news teams also wrote inclusive messages encouraging subscribers to use interactive data tools. For example, journalists invited users to search the *Post*'s database online and track the missing records of the victims of fatal police shootings ("Fatal force," 2023). The related captions included personalized appeals such as "see all victims." Personalized data also appeared in a different version of the *Post*'s article. This article featured an interactive database with the message, "See departments near you" (Tran et al., 2022). Readers could look up comparative tables that showed variations between the relatively low level of official data and the *Post*'s records of victim statistics in local communities. Journalists presented inclusive messages to involve audiences in national news.

An inclusive style can promote a sense of audience involvement in news coverage and enhance a perception of trustworthy journalism (Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Griffen-Foley, 2020). The articles in this study's sample generated readers' calls for action in tweets (*n* = 78) and subscriber comments (*n* = 46) in 2022. Subscribers asked how they could assist in solving a problem after feeling "helpless," "hopeless," and "depressed" about

the news of environmental damage in the Amazon's Indigenous communities. As a *Times* subscriber asked after reading about the gold-mining damage in communities, "So what can we do? This is incisive, first-rate reporting that leaves me depressed and hopeless. Whom do we contact, how do we figure out where the gold goes?" (Andreoni et al., 2022). A *Post* subscriber commented similarly about the news organization's Amazon investigation: "Good article, thanks! It's also depressing. What can we in the U.S. do to limit this damage?" (McCoy, 2022). Other readers shared personalized appeals about the news of climate change affecting vulnerable communities, such as, "Where are our priorities? When will we wake up and realize that this disaster is already on our doorsteps?"(Rubin et al., 2022). These audiences preferred to become involved in practical problem-solving rather than habits of news avoidance.

The interactive elements generated online calls to care for the marginalized communities portrayed in the news. For example, a *Post* team tweeted a call for action in mobile Twitter news about their interactive weather database: "Look up how many more 100+ degree temps your area is going to experience in 30 years." The *Post*'s news article included an emphatic subheading, "Unequal risk," and the journalists' warning that "the poor, the elderly, very young children and people with certain chronic medical conditions are most at risk" (Muyskens et al., 2022). A reader responded to the journalists' article, commenting, "We need…a willingness to allow for compassion and empathy." The article became one of the most popular digital news investigations shared on Twitter during the week (Au & Connected Action, 2022c). The audience reactions indicated that compassionate news of marginalized communities could also become popular online.

4.3. Emotional Appeals

Journalists can share trustworthy news with an emotional authenticity that includes "the human factor at its center" (Beckett & Deuze, 2016, p. 4). Of this study's sample in 2012, the *Post* shared a digital cartoon series to elicit readers' emotional responses to the story of Trayvon Martin. Candorville cartoonist Darrin Bell created a week-long series, "The Train to the Afterlife," which portrayed imagined scenarios about Martin's possible opportunities had he not been fatally shot. Bell explained he was "reminding people this [Martin] was a living, breathing, vital human being with potential, not a useless stock character in the American story who deserved what happened to him." Bell's assertion was promoted in the *Post* as one of the best quotes of 2012 (Cavna, 2012a). The *Post* also provided a selection of readers' reactions, including their comments that the cartoon series "moved me to tears" (Cavna, 2012b). Some readers described themselves as a blue-collar American as well as a "retired white guy." A reader remarked, "I don't think in all the discussion that has gone on, anyone made a more eloquent statement on this tragedy" (Cavna, 2012b). The inclusive news messages appeared to elicit trustworthy exchanges between journalists and what Papacharissi (2016) calls affective publics united by collective sentiment.

An often-overlooked way of reporting on marginalized groups has been to interview and quote them in the news (Varma, 2023). This study's sample of news articles in 2022 frequently included marginalized community members' views. Marginalized community members represented a majority of all news sources in the sample of articles in the *Times* (65%) and the *Post* (42%). For example, a *Times* team reported on their efforts to interview eyewitnesses and recreate scenes of a police raid that killed an innocent Black medical worker, Breonna Taylor, in Kentucky. Journalists emphasized their interviews with more than a dozen of Taylor's neighbors because of a lack of camera recordings during the police raid on her home in 2020. A related video included camera footage of Taylor's boyfriend after the raid as he cried out, "What's going on?….My girlfriend is dead" (NYT Graphics, 2022a). The sample of news articles in 2022 shared a theme of evoking emotions to show a broader need for social change.

Eyewitness accounts of marginalized community members' experiences appeared prominently in this study's sample of news articles in 2022. Another *Times* team, for example, recreated scenes of a fire that killed 17 people in an affordable housing building in the Bronx. The team reported, "The main fire safety system failed disastrously" (Singhvi et al., 2022). Animated captions focused on trapped residents' 911 emergency phone calls that included a ground-floor resident's declaration, "I'm eight months pregnant," and the plea of an upper-level neighbor, "Please don't forget about me!" A *Times* team tweeted that the article was one of their "high-

est profile projects," and the related videos attracted 6,514 views on Twitter at the time (NYT Graphics, 2022b). The *Post*'s journalists Arelis R. Hernández and Zoeann Murphy (2022) also focused on survivors' stories in a news lead about Puerto Rico residents' experiences after Hurricane Fiona. The news lead included a caption, "Survivors of Fiona wait for help: I'll take anything." This focus on eyewitness accounts indicated journalists' intention to act in a role that Parks has called "caring, storytelling humanists" (2020, p. 1242).

Journalists' expressions of empathy can become a "cornerstone" for restoring audience trust (Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2021, p. 1151). Readers shared their empathetic reactions in subscribers' comments (*n* = 101) and tweets (*n* = 32) on the *Post* and the *Times* platforms. Their messages included, "I weep," calling an article "shocking" and "terrifying," and thanking journalists for "shedding light on a heartbreaking problem," and being "able to speak to humanity." Readers related the vulnerable groups' experiences to their lives. A *Times* subscriber commented that an article about an extreme heat wave affecting overseas laborers was "certainly not an experience relegated to distant locales…this will likely be something we all face" (Rubin et al., 2022). Subscribers emphasized the relevance of a vulnerable group's story for wider communities.

The articles also generated online subscribers' suggestions (*n* = 64) for follow-up news about the marginalized communities portrayed in the digital articles. The sample of comments in 2012 particularly related to students wanting to read more about Trayvon Martin's story. For example, a student commented in 2012, "I have not heard anything about this [Trayvon Martin's] case until today in journalism, but I will be following its results on the news" (Ojalvo, 2012). Other readers in 2022 shared their ideas for follow-up reporting about the *Times*' coverage of local Hasidic schools. Readers suggested reporting on varied Hasidic communities' experiences, and one subscriber remarked, "There seems to be a potentially much broader issue" (Shapiro & Rosenthal, 2022). The *Post* subscribers, at times, conversed with one another to show their concern for a person portrayed in an article. For example, readers suggested the *Post*'s journalists revisit the home of a Black victim of a nonfatal police shooting to check on his condition (Howey et al., 2022). The readers' comments indicated the possibilities of embedding what Moran and Nechushtai (2023) call the resource of trust not only within the initial news production but also in any subsequent follow-up articles about marginalized community members who appeared in the initial reporting.

5. Conclusions

This study has found varied representations of trustworthy journalism by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Journalists portrayed novel practices in that they were being transparent about their work by including behind-the-scenes revelations in

enhanced news leads. These news revelations included journalists' reasons for trying to expose hidden problems affecting marginalized communities. The news about Trayvon Martin appeared in non-traditional formats, including social-oriented blogs as well as the news reporting of digital cartoons during the growth of digital scrolling structures in 2012. A decade later, journalists used an inclusive writing style, simple, interactive tools, and photographic evidence encouraging mobile users to engage with the articles. Their reporting suggested a popular appeal across the local, national, and international news sections in 2022. Journalists opened digital spaces for personalized depictions of marginalized community members' experiences. This reporting style suggested an effort to express trustworthy news representing marginalized communities' interests.

These findings also indicate a growing need for journalists to recognize audiences' commenting contributions. Despite some users' toxic tweets, journalists have encouraged subscribers' comments that show active involvement in the news investigations. The subscribers' feedback indicates a sense of loyalty, empathy, and emotional commitment to the news organizations. The readers' reactions can be indicators of trustworthy journalism. Journalists can enhance their articles by acknowledging shared areas of interest during news exchanges with engaged subscribers. A renewed commitment to shared exchanges can strengthen a sense of trustworthy relations between journalists and civic-minded readers.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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