WEB ANALYTICS, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND THE JOURNALISTIC DOXA:  
THE IMPACT OF AUDIENCE FEEDBACK  
ON THE EVOLVING GATEKEEPING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

New communication technologies have allowed not only new ways in which the audience interacts with the news but also new ways in which journalists can monitor online audience behavior. Through new audience information systems—web analytics and social media—the influence of the audience on the news construction process is increasing. This occurs as the journalistic field tries to survive a shrinking audience for news. In this mixed methods research, I argue that how journalists conceive of the audience as a form of capital influences the extent to which journalists integrate audience feedback from analytics and social media in their news work. I developed this theoretical framework through case studies of three online newsrooms that included a total of 150 hours of observations and 30 respondent interviews. I subsequently tested the theoretical framework refined through my qualitative analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM) based on survey data collected from 276 online editors. The findings showed a process of negotiation—between providing what audiences need and what they want, between editorial autonomy and audience influence, and between individual agency and organizational constraints—that should clarify how we understand gatekeeping in this age of a knowable and quantifiable audience.