HOW JOURNALISTS SHIFT TOWARD ENGAGING HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis or dissertation entitled

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to discover how and why journalists within nonprofit or startup newsrooms are changing routines to engage people who would not be typical or traditional readers. This qualitative research study shows how journalists are changing routines toward engaging historically marginalized communities through technology and creativity, such as utilizing text messages and community theatre as means of engagement. This study also reveals why those changes in routines matter as journalists link new routines in engagement to the long-term vitality of journalism.

Mainstream journalism's history with marginalized communities — defined in this study as low-income residents and minorities — is not favorable, and current readership statistics reveal how damaging those trends have been for the industry. If journalists believe that news-consumption leads to more-informed people and to a better functioning democracy, then it is up to journalists to make the first move toward inviting untypical readers into the news-making process. Engaging historically marginalized communities can lead to a more stable financial future for journalism, and journalists interviewed in this study believe that engagement routines are a huge part of their role in democracy. Thanks to new technology and journalism models, there has never before been such vast opportunity to reimagine journalism in the United States and how news fits into the fabrics of individual lives.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Are coloring books journalism? The Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) thinks so. The award-winning nonprofit news organization declares on its website that the kind of journalism that moves citizens to action is an essential pillar of democracy, and journalism includes coloring books (2011). As the journalism industry had morphed over recent years, with the breakdown of the traditional business model and the advent of new technology (Edmonds et al., 2012; McGrath, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2013; Nee, 2014; Voakes, 1999), CIR saw an opportunity to reinvent audience engagement directed toward communities traditionally ignored by the journalism industry. So, when CIR was primed to publish a safety project that investigated regulatory failure in the construction of California schools, the center's community engagement editor asked, "How will we get this story to the schoolchildren themselves?" (Rosenthal, 2011, p. 16). The result was a coloring book that published 40,000 copies in four languages, reaching children and parents of all walks of life and color. CIR's product reached a diverse group of people in creative ways. Contemporary journalism needs more coloring books.

A significant problem facing the industry is this: If journalism's job to inform citizens is an essential pillar of democracy (Gans, 2003), then it is unacceptable for it to ignore entire groups of people in the process of making and distributing news. There is so much room for creativity and innovation in the journalism industry, as startup news organizations continue to emerge out of the ashes of the traditional business model (Nee, 2013). Journalists need to learn from one another how to best engage non-typical readers in creative ways.

A majority of newspaper's daily readership has historically been middle class, educated and white, and literature shows this hasn't changed with the digital shift (Barthel, 2015). Even before the advent of the Internet turned the industry's traditional business model on its head, newspapers were moving toward an objective of measuring readership by "market effectiveness," or acquiring and retaining readers who possess upscale demographics attractive to advertisers (Cranberg, 1997). A study that interviewed executives at 90 of the then largest newspapers in the US found that very little, if anything, was being done to target low-income and/or minority readers. A *Chicago Tribune* editor quoted in the study, James Squires, said in 1997 that the "profitability of newspapers… has come to depend on an economic formula that is ethically bankrupt and embarrassing for a business that has always claimed to rest on a public trust" (Cranberg, 1997, p. 54). Researchers have long argued that journalism outfits targeting minority communities could be among the fittest to emerge out of a growing economic environment, but few seemed to listen (Pease & Stempel, 1990). These issues still persist, 27 years later (Barthel, 2015).

The journalism industry is now in turmoil, with readership declining steadily and massive layoffs in newsrooms as digital technologies have collapsed the traditional business model (Barthel, 2015; Jones, 2009). New models, particularly nonprofit and digital-focused startups, have gained traction as possible solutions to journalism's economic woes (McGrath, 2014; Rosenthal, 2011). These new models, and the plethora of new technologies, have radically changed how journalists do their jobs, even while journalists have historically been wary of change (Brown et al., 2014; Ferrucci, Russell, Choi, Duffy, & Thorson, 2015; Nee, 2014). News publishers now have the ability and

responsibility to invite audiences long ignored by journalism to be involved in gathering and shaping news coverage (Mayer, 2011; Peters & Witschge, 2015). Journalists are placing a renewed emphasis on audience engagement, and as the CIR project illustrates, there is opportunity for creativity both online and offline.

New models of journalism organizations and new routines in engagement have provided journalists with a unique opportunity to engage potential readers in low-income communities, minorities and immigrants. The purpose of this study was to discover how and why journalists within startup newsrooms are changing routines to engage people who would not be typical or traditional readers. This research is of practical interest because it sheds light on how the news industry's engagement with non-typical readers, especially low-income audiences and minorities, has changed with the advent of social media and new technology. This study looked at the way non-traditional newsrooms, specifically digitally native nonprofits and startups, have changed traditional journalism routines to approach this kind of work. The research has filled a gap in existing literature and provides a space for journalists to learn from one another about how to best orchestrate engagement with historically marginalized communities in a digital age. To set up the study, the following literature review covers the historical relationship between journalism and marginalized communities, the changing model of journalism with the advent of the Internet, and how these changes are creating new routines of engagement.

This research is of theoretical significance, as it has filled a gap in the existing literature of digitally native news organizations and the new wave of engagement. On a practical level, I sought to acquire data that will aid other journalists in their efforts to better serve communities that have historically been ignored by the media. It seems that,

by ignoring potential readers in low-income areas or minorities, legacy media has missed out on opportunities to develop a more diverse readership. In turn, those potential readers are not as well represented in coverage, less likely to consume news, and therefore, less informed citizens. From coloring books to text message wire services, journalists are using new models and new technology to reach an increasingly diverse audience. In order for journalists to have the opportunity to learn from one another, those changes needed to be recorded and analyzed.

This study reviewed previous literature that details how and whom journalism has historically marginalized, how the industry has changed in the age of technology and how those changes are leading to new models of journalism. Chapter 2 highlights previous literature, as well as explains the gap in literature that this study fills. Chapter 3 explains why I chose a qualitative research methodology consisting of in-depth interviews and how the nine interviewees were chosen. Chapter 4 then walks through how the study's findings addressed the research questions presented at the end of the literature review. Chapter 5 discusses the overarching themes of the findings and how researchers can build off of this body of work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The possibilities for what a newsroom can do to engage its audience have never been so endless or exciting. One can argue that engagement has also never been more needed for the vitality of the news industry and society. As an analysis of previous literature shows, American media has a long history of ignoring and under-covering marginalized communities, specifically minorities or people in low-income areas (Chideya, 2013; Cranberg, 1997; Pease, 1990; Pease & Stempel, 1990). There are studies that look at the culture of nonprofit news organization and media startups, and case studies that reveal how traditional journalism routines are being shaken up by the new cultures (Nee, 2013; Vukanovic, 2011). There is a plethora of new literature on how news organizations engage in a digital age (Mayer, 2011; Nee, 2014; Peters & Witschge, 2015). There are journalists using new platforms and new engagement techniques to engage non-typical and underserved readers in incredibly creative ways (Brown et al., 2014; Rosenthal, 2011). There has been a lack of scholarship, however, that ties all of these threads together.

Media and marginalized communities

Why does it matter that large communities of people historically haven't been engaged in the news, and therefore, historically haven't consumed the news? The answer lies in journalism's role in democracy. If a country's democracy belongs to its citizens, then the argument can be made that the democratic process can only be truly meaningful if all citizens are informed (Gans, 2003). Gans goes on to argue that it's "journalism's job to inform them." (Gans, 2003, p. 1). Following this logic, it's journalism's job to inform

all people whose lives make up the fabric of a country, not just the people groups who have historically been most likely to consume media. A second compelling argument for why marginalization within news media matters is that if one community is ignored, vilified or inappropriately glorified in journalism narratives, those marginalized and the community as a whole are both harmed (Whitehouse, 2009). Alasdair MacIntyre called this concept interlocking narratives (MacIntyre, 1984). If entire communities of people do not feel like their worlds are accurately reflected in the news, that's certainly damaging to those communities, but it is also damaging in that it is creating a false, often negative perception or stereotype of that community for everyone else.

So, who historically has been served well by the journalism industry? A majority of newspapers' daily readership has traditionally been middle class, educated and white, and that hasn't changed with the digital shift (Barthel, 2015). Even before the Internet turned the industry's traditional business model on its head, newspapers were moving toward an objective of measuring readership by "market effectiveness," or acquiring and retaining readers who possess upscale demographics that were attractive to advertisers (Cranberg, 1997). Advertisers encouraged news outlets to eliminate "fridge circulation," which referred to readers who were geographically or socioeconomically removed from the target audience of advertisers, such as white families in the suburbs. Newspapers wanting to narrow in on attractive would-be readers used database-marketing systems to target and identify lookalikes, or readers who were well educated and upscale. A study that interviewed executives at 90 of the then largest newspapers in the United States found that very little, if anything, was being done to target low-income and/or minority readers in 1997. Several interviewees said they wouldn't deliver to all parts of the city for

safety reasons, while one executive candidly said that their organization puts the least amount of effort into targeting readers in the inner city because they were undesirable to advertisers (Cranberg, 1997).

James Squires, former editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote in 1997 that almost any circulation director, if given more copies, a lower price, and promotion money could increase their circulation, which should have been attractive to those news outlets. The reason newspapers were not targeting low-income or minority readers was because advertisers only wanted high-income, well-educated readers, Squires said, adding that "the profitability of newspapers... has come to depend on an economic formula that is ethically bankrupt and embarrassing for a business that has always claimed to rest on a public trust" (Cranberg, 1997, p. 54). Though the argument was being made that journalism organizations targeting minority communities could become among the fittest to emerge out of a growing economic environment, few seemed to listen. A study conducted by the Task Force on Minorities in the Newspaper Business made the economic argument that the combination of population and press in urban centers should add up to greater circulation, but it wasn't, seemingly because the news organizations weren't aiming to increase circulation within urban centers (Pease, 1990).

Historically, there has been a lack of representation of low-income communities and minorities within news coverage and also within newsrooms themselves (Chideya, 2013; Pease & Stempel, 1990). In a study that surveyed 42 minority executives in news organizations, many of the respondents said they had seen a large amount of racial bias in news content itself and in the hiring patterns of their news organizations. The study looked at the country's 1,595 general circulation dailies in 1990 and found just 45

persons of color in assistant managing editor positions or higher. When asked if they felt pressure as "a result of not being white in a white industry," two-thirds said of the 42 study respondents yes (Pease & Stempel, 1990, p. 9). Overall, 85.7 percent of the respondents said they found a great deal or some racism in the newsrooms they worked and more than a quarter said they racism they encountered was reflective of society and created by ignorance. Interviewees also spoke of a "glass ceiling" or invisible barrier they saw in their newsrooms for minority journalists, where minorities are hired for entry level positions to fill quotas but then are not given the opportunities or investment for advancement (Pease & Stempel, 1990). The study's authors make the argument that if racism exists in newsrooms, then it also exists in news coverage. To combat this elitist coverage, the authors asserted, then news organizations needed to not only make more diversity hires, but they also needed to adjust management styles so that minorities have more opportunities for advancement into leadership positions. However, more current research shows that the suggestions of Pease and Stempel did not come to fruition (Williams, 2015).

Researchers and journalists alike have argued for more diverse newsrooms as a positive first step, just not the only step, toward better covering marginalized communities. Still, the percentage of minorities employed in daily newspapers has increased sluggishly at best over time. Newsrooms were 3.9 percent minority in 1978 and were at 13.3 percent in 2014. That is a distance away from the 37.4 percent of Americans that identify as minorities (Williams, 2015). This is perhaps the greatest barrier to more diverse coverage as "we are what we think – and in newsrooms we too frequently think alike." (De Uriarte, Bodinger-De Uriarte, & Benavides, 2003, p. 64). Because there are

few journalists who come from diverse backgrounds, newsrooms cannot draw from diverse perspectives within its own walls when reporting about minorities. When minorities do make their way to news articles, the story lines are often shaped by "entrenched newsroom conviction rather than the real knowledge born from experience or saturation in the subject" (De Uriarte et al., 2003, p. 65). As America continues to grow more diverse, newsrooms have a responsibility to be more representative of their communities, not less, and journalists need to engage in dialogues about how they could cover diversity and how they could do it better (Chideya, 2013). The larger question, more than just the numbers game of diversity, that journalists have historically needed to seek answers for is how to provide minorities with an authentic voice (Pease, 1990). Instead of approaching the issue from the market perspective of what sells and what doesn't sell, or instead of approaching the issue from just looking at the diversity of newsroom staffs, news organizations should turn to their audiences instead. Journalists should seek out and ask nonreaders what is missing from their coverage that would make news consumption vital and useful in the contexts of their everyday lives (Pease, 1990).

Though diversity hires are important for news organizations as they seek to reflect their communities, a more dissimilar news staff has not been proven to correlate to more diverse coverage. In 1997, Cranberg argued that diversity within newsroom staffs was an inadequate substitute for the "hard job of building circulation - by providing zoned editions for minority neighborhoods, by promotion, and by home delivery" (p. 54). He warned against newspapers that write off future generations of readers who are too poor to ring the advertisers' cash registers often enough. Pease defined diversity as both a moral issue, in that journalism should provide a voice to all people in society, and also an

economic one, with the very "survival of newspapers as a mass medium with a real and substantive role in the democratic marketplace of ideas" at risk (p. 25). He described a lack of diversity in news coverage as not just fatally shortsighted, but also a betrayal of journalism's purpose. He likened diversity hires of entry-level employees to that of adding new rowers to the oar of a galley ship; "They power the boat, but make few decisions about speed, direction or mission" (Pease, 1990, p. 25). Like Cranberg, Pease argued that hiring more minorities, both in ethnicity and socioeconomic make-up, would not magically change the way news organizations cover their communities. The problem remains that the nation's main media organizations are made up of people with the same privilege and background as those who make up the majority of their readership, and they are defining the narratives of people unrepresented in their newsrooms (Whitehouse, 2009).

If newsrooms have historically not been representative of the communities around them, what effect does that have on their coverage? Heider (2000) argued that though systematic exclusion and stereotypical inclusion by journalism organizations may not necessarily be deliberate, it results in racist or classist news coverage and false narratives. For example, black people are significantly overrepresented in news images for the "face of poverty" (Whitehouse, 2009). A researcher found in 1996 that though only 27 percent of the poor in the United States were black at that time, 63 percent of the news images of poor people were of black people (Gilens, 1996). Even the *New York Times*, which is historically lauded for its journalism ethics (Steele, 2003; Wilkins & Brennen, 2007), is not above the issue. The publication caters to its readers, who are majority white, educated and affluent, and its journalism can reinforce the worldview of its readers rather

than challenging it (Rodriquez, 2000). Richard Rodriquez critiqued the *Times* for a series called "How Race is Lived in America," which focused exclusively on how "whites" and "blacks" perceive one another. How could the nation's "paper of record" forget that race in America goes beyond black and white, Rodriquez asked (Rodriquez, 2000). And there's also the issue of how journalists cover economic class, which one African-American editor quoted in a 2003 study called the biggest issue for news. The editor cited coverage of community college as an example, saying that when "you read the stories a tone comes with them says that we, our reporters, don't think much of community colleges or the people who go there" (De Uriarte, et al., 2003, p. 69). Due to lack of diversity in newsrooms, long entrenched routines of coverage continue to go unchallenged. And, unsurprisingly, those who feel falsely represented or unrepresented in the news cycles continue not to consume mainstream journalism.

If little is being done to target and engage minority and low-income readers, and if newsrooms aren't representative of those communities, then why would those readers pay for or express interest in the news? There is a vicious cycle where news organizations don't engage minorities or people in low-income communities well in the news-making process, don't report on those communities as accurately as they could as a result, and many in those communities express a distrust of the media (La Ferle & Lee, 2005). From 1999 to 2014, the percentage of people in America with Spanish/Hispanic origin who are daily newspaper readers fell from 39 percent to 20 percent (Edmonds et al., 2012). The population of daily African-American/black readers fell from 51 percent to a little more than 30 percent. Readership among people who make less than $24,999 dropped from 33 percent in 2009 to 24 percent in 2014. Though readership among the white population

and middle class to wealthy populations has also dropped significantly in the last decade, those groups still remain the majority of news consumers (Edmonds et al., 2012). This is not a new issue. A study in 1972 found that blacks and the urban poor were far more likely to be newspaper nonreaders than the white and middle to upper class (Bogart, 1972). Even then, the argument was being made that the declining news consumption among minorities correlated with the phenomenon of minorities to "vote with their feet," or to sit out of their communities' political processes (Pease, 1990, p. 33).

Of course, the ignorance of marginalized groups by traditional journalism does not mean that other forms of journalism haven't risen up to serve their communities. "Ethnic media," defined broadly, has been described as journalism by and for immigrants and/or ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities, as well as journalism for indigenous populations across the world (Ball-Rokeach, Katz & Matsaganis, 2011). Though there's been a proliferation of growth in the ethnic media sector, "ethnic media remained largely invisible to mainstream media producers, advertisers and marketing professionals, policymakers, and last, but not least, many academic researchers" (Ball-Rokeach, et al., 2011, p. xiii). Advertisers underestimating the purchasing power of minority groups and mainstream media's ignorance of ethnic media as rivals were among the reasons listed for ethnic journalism's surge. As minority groups continue to grow in America, mainstream journalism outfits are losing opportunities to compete with ethnic media for an audience that is becoming bigger everyday (Ball-Rokeach, et al., 2011). Take the Hispanic press, for example. Hispanic newspapers have also lost circulation over the years, but not close to the extent of the English press (Guskin & Mitchell, 2011). Hispanic broadcast has thrived and competes now in some of the nation's largest

markets; take Univision, which surpassed one or more the English-language networks several times throughout the 2010/2011 season (Guskin & Mitchell, 2011). Univision isn't limiting its scope to just Spanish-speakers, either. The New York-based news organization has launched an English Twitter, blog and soccer website (Guskin and Mitchell, 2011). Even with the success of Spanish-language media, a Pew Research Center survey found that a "growing share of Latino adults are consuming news in English from television, print, radio and internet outlets, and a declining share are doing so in Spanish" (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2013). Hispanic media, and the changing nature of Latino people in America, speaks to the opportunity available to mainstream media, if they would just grab it. From a sheer economics standpoint, mainstream media is missing out on an opportunity to capture a large audience that is seeking English-language content. On the issue of equity, ethnic media has gained ground in America arguably because mainstream media has historically decided that it does not care whether minority groups are its consumers or not.

If journalism leads to more informed citizens and a healthier democracy (Gans, 2003), then journalists cannot in good conscience tailor their content toward one demographic group, while making no effort to engage those who have been historically marginalized. The historic ignorance of marginalized communities goes past hindering the decision-making abilities of people within those groups, as it is a failure to educate and inform the whole of society. Leaving minorities or people in low-income communities out of the newsgathering and dissemination process prevents members of the majority groups in society from learning about or empathizing with their fellow Americans (Pease, 1990). The argument for media to change its routines toward

marginalized communities is not a new one, though it seems to have yielded little fruit (Cranberg, 1997; La Ferle & Lee, 2005; Pease, 1990). However, there are now more opportunities on the horizon of media landscape arguably than ever before, as the traditional model for news making is breaking and changing at a rapid pace.

Rise of non-traditional newsrooms

The journalism industry is reeling from the 20th and 21st centuries, which ushered in an era of discontinuous change with new technologies and an unstable economic market (Jones, 2009; Nee, 2013). The advertising revenues that newspapers had long depended upon started to fail quickly, with print advertising revenue falling by half from 2006 to 2011 (Edmonds et al., 2012). Traditional print newsrooms have struggled to monetize the Internet, with only 3.2 million in revenue from online advertising in 2011 compared to 20.6 million in print advertising. Daily circulation and subscriptions have also fallen, with daily circulation dropping from 62.3 million in 1990 to 43.4 million in 2010. Unable to find stable financial footing, hundreds of newspapers across America have shuttered their doors, such as the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Oakland Tribune* (Barthel, 2016; McGrath, 2014). The number of daily newspapers fell from 1,611 in 1990 to 1,350 in 2011, with the launch of any new dailies reported as "extremely rare" (Edmonds et al., 2012). Broadcast journalism hasn't suffered from the same economic woes as print media, with moderate economic progress (Masta, 2015; Vogat & Masta, 2015). Legacy media, especially newspapers, however, have taken blows in readership and funding, shrinking local journalism throughout the nation (Mitchell, 2015). If consuming journalism leads citizens to be more informed and fosters democracy, then what happens to society if quality journalism continues to shrink? Though these statistics

can be read with a tone of doom and gloom, there are new models rising up in the journalism industry that are attempting to fill the gaps left by the shrinkage of mainstream media (Mitchell et al., 2013; Nee, 2013).

More than 172 digital nonprofit news organizations were launched between 1977 and 2012, according to a 2013 report by the Pew Research Center, and often with the goal of filling gaps left by shrinkage of traditional journalism (Mitchell et al., 2013). The classification as a nonprofit news organization refers to the tax status and financial structure, rather than the news produced. The Pew report surveyed 172 nonprofit organizations, ranging from nationally known to hyperlocal, and 93 of which reported positive economic growth. The study found that all but nine U.S. states at the time had at least one nonprofit news organization and that most are trying to work within specialized journalism niches, rather than replace all editorial functions of mainstream media (Mitchell et al., 2013). Like the Center for Investigative Reporting, a large portion of nonprofits surveyed, about one-fifth, focused on producing investigative reporting. Since 2005, more than 60 digitally native nonprofits have been formed to create the Investigative News Network (Nee, 2014). Overwhelmingly, people working at nonprofit news organizations expressed optimism about their work, with four times as many outlets predicting they will hire new staff than reduce staff, and 81 percent expressing confidence that they would be financially solvent in five years (Mitchell et al., 2013). One researcher said "the emergence of nonprofit journalism enterprises in media markets across the country may be a partial answer to the decline of traditional news outlets in an ever-changing age of media consolidation and competition from the Internet" (McGrath, 2014, p. 35).

The rise of startup, nonprofit models is significant in the effort to fill gaps in coverage, but it is also significant to note that many are driven by different ideals than traditional journalism models. For example, when the *Rocky Mountain News* shuttered its doors in Denver, Colorado after publishing for 150 years, a former reporter feared that the remaining newsrooms in Colorado wouldn't be able to produce the in-depth stories needed to hold institutions accountable. She went on to found the nonprofit journalism project, *I-News*, as a way to fill what she saw as a gap in public service journalism in Colorado (McGrath, 2014). The concept of a nonprofit news organization is not exactly a new one, however. The long-standing Associated Press is a nonprofit organization founded in 1846 with the goal of financing a Pony Express route to bring back news from the war on Mexico (McGrath, 2014; Nee 2014). Three journalists founded CIR in 1977, paving the way for similar investigative nonprofits that would launch in the future. What is significant is that the increased pace of new nonprofit journalism start-ups has been "fueled by the need for solid reporting and the declining prospects for employment in traditional media" (McGrath, 2014, p. 35), as the *I-News* example shows. But these nontraditional newsrooms are not only aiming to fill growing deficits in reporting. Because these nonprofit start-ups are not tied to the traditional financial model of news, though they have financial concerns of their own, many are able to focus time and energy on community building and civic engagement, or center themselves around the concept of "civic" or "public" journalism (McGrath, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2013; Nee, 2014).

Civic journalism has been defined as a partnership between journalists and the community, with an emphasis on political participation and community awareness (Voakes, 1999). Voakes uses Davis Merritt's definition of civic or public journalism,

which is based on two criteria: it is inextricably bound up in the public life of a community, and that journalists have an obligation to engage citizens within their communities. A national survey of 1,037 journalists found a strong association with civic journalism, especially among journalists at smaller, localized organizations that valued the importance of neighborhood news. The positive association among journalists toward civic journalism is a significant historic shift, Voakes argues. While civic journalism doesn't have a universally recognized definition, it is distinguishable from traditional journalism practices in that journalists make a deliberate attempt to reach out to citizens, to involve them in the news making process beyond sources for a story, listens to them and encourages citizens to listen and talk to one another (Fouhy & Schaeffer, 1995; Voakes, 1999). Civic journalism is rooted in the belief that journalists are not all knowing and perhaps should involve its readers in the agenda-setting, story-creating processes. It asserts that journalists need help from its community members in understanding and reporting on those communities (Fouhy & Schaeffer, 1995). Civic journalism has been misunderstood as a marketing device or a commitment to reporting only "positive" news, but such views miss the philosophy behind the movement (Voakes, 1999). A critique has been that civic journalism lies in direct conflict with the role of "watchdog" journalism, as it leads to a loss of objectivity. However, such critiques of civic journalism do not adequately look at the recurrent themes that Voakes defines within the variable concept "approval of civic journalism." Civic journalism "involves journalistic initiative rather than reactive coverage; it involves an interest in moving toward solutions to community problems that takes journalism far beyond the detached reporting of the problems" (Voakes, 1999, p. 33). Though this move from "detached objectivity" is a relatively new

change within journalism routines, it is a significant one that is reflected in the mission statements of many new nonprofit news organizations (McGrath, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2013; Nee, 2014; Voakes, 1999).

Traditional journalism in America seems to be headed toward irrelevance to many, but civic or public journalism is advocated as a way to reconnect with readers (St. John III, 2007; Voakes, 1999). Journalists who responded to the 1996 survey said that the historic trend for newsmakers to distance themselves from communities has made it easy for would-be-readers to disengage from their product or avoid their produce all together. One journalist wrote: “Unless newspapers make people in their communities feel a part of them, as if they have a stake in them, they will disappear… People no longer want to be merely observed. People want to be cared about" (Voakes, 1999). The ideals of civic journalism have become popular in journalistic ideology once again, as the industry tries to swiftly figure out how to maintain relevancy in an age where traditional models no longer have a monopoly on news. The question is whether civic journalism can survive with a liberal-economic media model like that of the United States. Some scholars suggest that if implemented consistently and seriously, civic journalism would cause traditional media outlets to lose rating appeal among advertisers or would shake up power structures to the dismay of advertisers (Voakes, 1999). The emerging nonprofit model of journalism doesn’t rely on advertisers —but on charitable giving, grants and foundations —and therefore has given journalists the freedom to adopt the principles of civic or public journalism in creative ways.

Entrepreneurial journalists within these nonprofit news organizations are building their outlets on mission statements that are consistent with the role of news media in

American democracy, but also emphasize fostering community engagement and digital-focused practices (Nee, 2013). A study that interviewed ten managers of nine digitally native news outlets in the United States found that all leaders of community-centric organizations named public engagement as part of their mission. More than half of the respondents also said they viewed their job as using their digital platform to create new reporting practices or as providing in-depth coverage of local issues that traditional media were ignoring. These mission statements sound very similar to the ideas of civic or public journalism.

> Online news entrepreneurs are strategically using their platforms to "focus primarily on their public service mission, engage consumers, publish information through a variety of methods and formats, collaborate with outside media, diversify revenue sources and provide technology training to journalists and to the public (Nee, 2013, p. 1).

The study found these digital media outlets were using digital technologies to solicit comments and citizen input as a way to better engage potential audiences, particularly through social media. All of the participants spoke about the freedom they felt under their model of nonprofit journalism to experiment with newer technologies and re-create practices with audience engagement. The research found that "the community-centric models are using a combination of social media, multimedia, and live blogging software and…are fostering the creation of online community forums to encourage engagement and a dialogical relationship with the news consumer and newsmakers" (Nee, 2013, p. 18). While traditional journalism outfits struggle to find their footing again, nonprofit, startup newsrooms are on the rise, and they are placing a renewed emphasis on how to best form partnerships between journalists and the communities they are working to serve, and even the communities news has traditionally not served.

New routines of engagement

There is exciting opportunity for innovation, not just in the realm of how to digitize media, but also in the realm of how to rework traditional routines of journalism to better suit underserved communities. The advent of digitally native newsrooms is shaking up traditional journalism routines, specifically by placing a new focus on engaging with underrepresented communities. Journalism outfits have historically had an aversion to civic engagement, which can be traced to the early 20th century era of press professionalization (St. John III, 2007). The U.S. government's use of propaganda during World War I, to create citizen support for the war, fueled credulity and emphasis on objectivity and detachment within the journalism industry (St. John III, 2007).

The Woodrow Wilson administration used propaganda from the new Committee on Public Information to spur American support for the war. Many journalists became skeptical and guarded of the effects of the propaganda during this era, leading journalist Walter Lippman to argue for the case for the professionalization of journalism in the early 1920s (St. John III, 2007). The ideal of professionalization created a mantra of objectivity among newsmakers, which inherently meant that journalists distanced themselves from the communities they were covering and completely ignored the communities they weren't covering. The contemporary press is dependent on "official sources, spectacles, and conflicts to construct stories," creating a press that is increasingly out of touch with the issues that matter to citizens (St. John III, 2007, p. 255). However, the rise of digital technology and new models of media have presented journalists with possibilities to re-engage the public, which is important, because stories that "clearly illustrate a range of citizen voices stand a better chance of moving the public to

awareness and action" (St. John III, 2007, p. 267). And to produce content with a range of citizen voices, journalists have to purposefully engage with sources and readers unlike themselves or their usual audience. And there is more at stake than creating more diverse coverage. In order for journalism to make the right changes to survive in a complex digital era, media must combat decreasing levels of trust and focus on a participatory culture that creates a dialogue between journalists and audiences (Broersma & Peters, 2013). This requires a significant change in routines toward audience engagement.

The re-focus on public or civic journalism in the digital age has led journalists to change the way they view their audience. One of the biggest challenges for individual journalists is how to reimagine the news producer-consumer relationship as collaborative rather than hierarchical. The traditional top-down roles of gatekeeping and agenda setting have created a view of audience that tells journalists their primary role is to provide information, rather than to engage in a collaborative dialogue with the public (Nee, 2013). The way newsmakers view readers has gone through iterations over time, but it's usually described in terms of standing for something "other," and the journalists view themselves as entrusted to speak on behalf of the audience (Heikkilä & Ahva, 2014). The rise of user-generated content and citizen journalism has changed the idea of the "audience" from a passive group to an active one within the news-making process (Atton, 2009; Heikkilä & Ahva, 2014). Scholars and researchers have long found that journalists tend to be rooted in their traditional ways of doing things, such as consistently using the same official sources, without much input from their readers (Ferrucci et al., 2015; Gans, 2004). Researchers have also found that journalists have known very little about their audiences and have had little interaction with those consuming their product (Gans, 2004;

Mayer, 2011). This has created a huge problem for the industry, as traditional readers become less and less interested in consuming traditional news and nonreaders remain on the periphery of coverage. As journalists try to figure out how to best create buy-in within diverse communities, "audience engagement" has become an ill-defined buzzword, and yet also a very important concept.

While not a new ideal, engagement has emerged with renewed popularity in digital journalism. There is not a standard definition of what journalistic engagement is, however. A study of how journalists define audience engagement found that those in "mission-driven" newsrooms aimed to solve community problems and learn local issues while those in commercial newspapers focused more on driving traffic to their websites and creating user loyalty (Mayer, 2011). These findings led Mayer to outline three characteristics of audience engagement: community outreach, conversation, and collaboration. Mayer's research demonstrates how audience engagement should now be a necessary part of journalists' routines, and cannot be talked about or executed as a general goal. News organizations need to be able to specifically articulate what they are trying to accomplish when they talk about audience engagement, Mayer stated, or else it will be difficult to design new journalistic routines around those goals moving forward. This is why it is significant that some journalists are making it a priority to focus their engagement efforts toward communities that have historically been neglected by media (Brown et al., 2014; Rosenthal, 2011).

Journalists in nonprofit news organizations, who do not have to focus on creating content that targets already established news consumers, have a unique opportunity to focus their attention on engaging historically marginalized audiences. There is evidence

that there are new opportunities for this kind of engagement in a digital age. Social media has been a major force in changing journalistic routines during the digital age, as 40 percent of journalists now list social media networks as "very important" to their work (Willnat & Weaver, 2014). Over half of journalists in a recent study said they regularly use social platforms, such as Twitter, for gathering information and reporting out stories. And these new uses of social media are lending themselves to engagement work. For example, studies have shown that a large segment of users of Twitter, a social network that broadcasts information to followers in 140 characters, are typically underrepresented as news sources and consumers. Minority Internet users are more than twice as likely than whites to use Twitter, and use of the social media site spans income levels (Brown et al, 2014). Journalists need to be more aware of how to use tools like Twitter to engage with minority users, but often are ignorant (Brown et al, 2014). There is a lack of scholarly research, however, that focuses on the journalists that are aware and are making strides toward engaging marginalized communities.

Researchers have cautioned that journalists not just celebrate new media technologies for their potential in participation, but to really question what makes engagement meaningful in people's everyday lives:

> While there are an ever-increasing number of ways for the public to be involved in the news process, there are a more limited number of discussions of the different affordances and structural differences of participation and – quite crucially – the consequences of participatory digital tools and the extent to which such opportunities are actually available equally to different social groups (Peters & Witschge, 2015, p. 25).

In order for journalists to have a successful dialogue around this kind of engagement, there needs to be more scholarly work that focuses on it. Arguably, there has never before been such vast opportunity to reimagine what journalism is in the United States and how

news fits into the fabrics of individual lives. Media's history with the marginalized communities of low-income residents and minorities is not favorable, and current readership statistics reveal how damaging those trends have been. If journalists believe that news-consumption leads to more informed people and to a better functioning democracy, then it is up to journalists to make the first move toward inviting untypical readers into the news-making process. As Peters and Witschge (2015) caution, it is dangerously easy for journalists to view audience engagement as a one size fits all solution to the industry's woes. Doing so would miss the opportunity altogether to re-center routines around civic journalism and experiment with practices that specifically seeks to engage marginalized communities. Many journalists in digitally native nonprofits have the freedom and encouragement to explore this new world of engagement and opportunity. There is so much room for opportunity in analyzing how journalists are handling this kind of work, as well as their successes and failures with forming relationships within these communities.

Research Questions

This study aimed to discover how journalists within startup and nonprofit news organizations are engaging historically marginalized audiences, especially how they are engaging people who would not be typical or traditional readers, via in-depth interviews with journalists. Questions included:

> **RQ1:** Whom do journalists at startup and nonprofit newsrooms see as non-traditional readers or groups that have been historically marginalized by American media?

RQ2: How has technology and social media changed the way journalists at startup and nonprofit newsrooms interact and engage with non-typical readers?

RQ3: How do these journalists at startup and nonprofit newsrooms define "engagement" with historically marginalized audiences?

RQ4: Why do these journalists at startup and nonprofit newsrooms feel as though engagement with non-traditional readers is important for the journalism industry?

Throughout the process, I expected to learn how and why journalists within startup and nonprofit newsrooms are engaging people who would not be typical or traditional readers. I wanted to present the journalists' own interpretations of who those readers are and why it is important that media change routines to engage them more directly. Perhaps most significantly, the study has highlighted successes and failures in this changing engagement with marginalized communities, allowing journalists to learn from other similarly stationed professionals across the nation. Examples of engagement ranged from investigative journalism blended with theater to a text-alert newswire for local coverage (Alvarez; 2014; Hare, 2015). A goal of the research was to create a scholarly dialogue around this topic so that journalists can learn best practices from one another, which currently does not exist in the literature. The study aimed to shed light on the meaning these journalists ascribe to their efforts to bring marginalized communities into the news-making and distribution processes.

Chapter 3: Method

New models, new routines, and a new focus on engagement are changing the way journalists engage underrepresented communities. A qualitative method sheds light on why journalists are changing their routines, how they understand these changes and whether or not the changes are making the impact they desire. This chapter explains how journalists were selected for this study and the rationale behind using interviews to illuminate this type of engagement.

This study used in-depth interviews with nine journalists who work for digitally native nonprofit news outlets and/or are also focusing on engaging marginalized communities. Using qualitative methods allowed for insight into these journalists' thought processes and perceptions of audience engagement, which would not be possible through quantitative measures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Nee, 2013). As qualitative research is interpretive research, it was important for me to take my personal and professional background into account as the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Both my undergraduate and graduate career at the University of Missouri School of Journalism have prepared me for engaging with audiences that differ from me. My experiences have also motivated me to study media and marginalized communities, as I have spent several years in almost all-white newsrooms that have declining circulations. Professionally, I am currently working for a nonprofit news startup as a journalist and community editor while conducting research. My employer, Chalkbeat, reports on public school systems in low-income areas and prioritizes engaging diverse audiences. My own

professional agenda for talking to journalists of similar station as my own is obvious; I wanted to learn from what others are doing.

I aimed to interview eight to 12 people from June to December 2016, as past researchers have found that range of sample size to yield rich, qualitative data when conducting open-ending interviews with journalists (Brown et al., 2014; Nee, 2013). To select interview candidates, the research moved from criterion sampling to snowball sampling, leaving room to add on additional interviews throughout the process until reaching a point of saturation within the content of the interviews. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked the journalists to recommend other people doing similar work who would also fit the criteria of the study, which is referred to as the snowball sampling method (Lindsay, 2008). Snowball sampling has proven to be effective in similar studies of journalists and engagement practices, such as a qualitative project that looked at how digitally native news nonprofits are engaging their audiences and innovating online journalism practices (Nee, 2013). Due to this method, the interviewees spanned a geographically diverse sample, from New Orleans to Detroit to small-town California. There are cons to having such a geographically expansive sample, such as potential for a lack of prevailing common themes (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn, 2000). However, there are also pros to a geographically diverse sample for a qualitative research study, and common themes were easily found as the journalists interviewed were in similar careers.

Criterion sampling, or picking interview subjects that all meet certain qualifications, can assure that data collected is high in quality and relevant to the study (Yin, 1994). To start the sampling process, I searched for journalists who were John S.

Knight fellows and who were looking into a facet of audience engagement with underrepresented communities. John S. Knight Journalism Fellowships at Stanford have been providing funding since 1996 for journalists who are trying to make big changes within the industry to move away from the traditional model of journalism, according to the fellowship's website. The website has a database of all current and past fellows, with a description of what issues they were addressing during their fellowship. I used these descriptions to select five journalists as a starting point for interviews, such one fellow who was seeking to answer, "How do we fill the information gaps faced by low-income news consumers?" The journalists also needed to have been involved with, have worked for or be currently working for a digitally native nonprofit or startup news organization. These fellows were contacted via their Stanford email addresses (see Appendix A for sample email). I then set up a time with each participant to speak over the phone and recorded each interview on my computer. Anonymity was offered to and accepted by all nine participants as part of Institutional Review Board requirements. Anonymity allowed the journalists to speak freely about their work and job without fear of identification.

Interviews were the best method for this kind of study, as a main focus of the research was to determine what journalists are doing to engage underrepresented communities, why they deem that work significant, and whether or not they believe it's working. For example, a previous study successfully used interviews to explore how journalists in nonprofit news organizations are viewing social media as an opportunity to revitalize public service journalism (Nee, 2013). Data for this research project was gathered through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, which started with broad, open-ended questions but allowed for conversation to casually flow (see Appendix B for

interview protocol). Interviews allowed me access to information within the interviewee's own perspective and not from observation alone (Berger, 2000). The interviews for this research were conducted over the phone, as all the journalists interviewed were not located geographically close enough to make in-person interviews possible. Interviews over the phone have been found by researchers to be effective at creating a causal, collaborative dialog that is more like a conversation than interview (Bird, 2003; Woodstock, 2014). Each interview was recorded through a digital recording app, and then transcribed. The interviewees and I occasionally exchanged email follow-ups after the initial interview to ensure accuracy and allow for clarification. Outliers, or answers that directly go against the majority findings, were marked in the data and handled on a case-by-case basis.

Once the interview was transcribed, I coded the data to look for common themes and subthemes (Creswell, 1998; Nee, 2013). During the coding process, the researcher used the constant comparison method whenever finding alikeness between the various interviews. This allowed for greater internal validity when it comes time to draw conclusions from the themes and subthemes, as the method requires the researcher to theorize inductively by constantly comparing new data with old until reaching a point of saturation (Boeije, 2002). Following Nee's methodology and Creswell's model, this study analyzed the data from interviews by (a) reading through transcripts and notes (b) recording initial summaries (c) seeking feedback from interviewees (d) disseminating codes and categories within the data (Creswell, 1998; Nee, 2013). The codes and categories identified across the interviews informed themes and subthemes that sought to answer the research questions presented. To analyze the data, a different color was

assigned to each research question. Numbers and roman numerals were attached to each theme and subtheme, respectively. The themes and subthemes developed from my impressions and field notes made after conducting, transcribing and reviewing the interviews (Nee, 2013). The themes, and their subthemes, were then copied from the interviews and organized by theme and subtheme in a new document, so I could more easily see parallels and outliers. I also checked my findings against secondary documents, such as the journalists' articles, social media and blog posts, and found no inconsistencies between the journalists' work and the way they had described their work.

Nine people were interviewed before the researcher hit saturation. In in-depth interviews, the researcher knows they have reached saturation when the interviewees start to reiterate the same themes (Morse, 1993; Nee, 2013). "Saturation" is defined as reaching a point of redundancy or exhaustion within the research method (Morse, 1994). I knew I had hit saturation after my last two interviews, which while were still rich with information, did not yield new themes or subthemes.

A major limitation of the study was its inability to determine the success of the journalists' efforts. Because the study relied solely on the journalists' perspectives, and did not include interviews from people in the communities, the research was not be able to measure the impact of the journalists' actions. There is great potential for additional study, as learning about the successes or failures of engagement from interviews with members from the communities themselves would be very valuable. The role of community editor is also fairly new in the modern journalism ecosystem (Mayer, 2011). Both journalists and community editors are doing this kind of work, and both were represented in this study, however, this study does not focus on how their differences of

job titles affects their engagement work. There is great opportunity for potential study there. This study was also not generalizable, as it is looked at a small group of journalists and their experiences. There would be potential for case studies to come out of this research project, as some of the ideas of engagement will likely merit a closer look. The study was also limited by its scope. I do not assert that people in low-income areas and racial minorities are the only communities that have been marginalized by journalism practices throughout history. There is a need for future study that looks at the way journalists are engaging historically marginalized people beyond what was focused on in this study.

As expressed earlier, there has never been such opportunity in the world of engagement for creatively and intentionality. Both the increase of new technology and change of industry models have provided greater opportunity than ever before for journalists to alter old patterns of behavior and try to engage audiences in exciting new ways. As journalists take advantage of those opportunities and create new routines of engagement, those changes merit documentation. If these new ways of engagement are not recorded and analyzed, then how will journalists be able to learn and grow from the successes and failures? My hope is that this research added to knowledge and filled a gap in current literature. Perhaps most importantly, this research allowed journalists to reflect on what it means to engage historically marginalized communities in a digital age and offer a space for reporters to learn from one another.

Chapter 4: Results

The nine journalists interviewed — who were spread over the nation and held different job titles — were excited to talk deeply about a subject for which they each expressed great passion. It was clear they had thought deeply about whom journalism has historically ignored, and about how they can leverage new technology and funding opportunities to reverse that pattern.

RQ1: Whom has American media historically marginalized?

Though I went into this research project with the working assumption that people in low-income areas and minorities have been historically marginalized by American journalists, reflecting the prior literature on the topic, it was important to pose an open-ended question to the journalists themselves before addressing anything else: Whom did they see left out of the news-making cycle? All nine journalists interviewed answered with some iteration of minorities or people in low-income areas or both. There were outliers, such as one journalist who said he believed the LGBTQ community has been one of the most marginalized groups in journalism history. While this study focuses on minorities and people in impoverished areas, it does not assert those are the only groups often left out of American media.

The marginalization of the poor.

People who are economically disadvantaged were talked about at length by many interviewees and became my first emergent code of this research question. One of the first journalists I interviewed is working in Detroit, developing a startup news organization that seeks to deliver personalized, data-driven reporting specifically to low-

income audiences. She spoke at length of "information gaps" between the wealthy and the poor, and how the technology age has actually worsened those gaps, when one would think that greater access and innovation could have leveled the playing field.

> Interestingly, I think that technological disruption of the news industry is what caused the news industry to move away from low-income consumers in the first place. You know, they started losing money, and so they wanted to double down on the people in their audience who had money when the advertising started to be harder to get. So I think that it created even larger information gaps in a lot of ways.

Research backs her assertion. In 2013, a researcher at DePaul University looked at how technology has impacted the knowledge-gap hypothesis, which proposes that knowledge is unevenly distributed in society and that socioeconomic status (Tran, 2013). The study found through survey data that using the Internet to get information is by and large a consumption pattern of affluent, highly educated groups. Other journalists interviewed affirmed the belief that the technological disruption has widened the information gap for poor Americans, but were quick to note that this pattern of marginalization goes deep into journalism's history. Another journalist interviewed created a news organization in East Palo Alto, California that was designed for — and run by — the area's impoverished populations. "Since (advertising) was always the dominant model for media, that was the driver for coverage of wealthier or more middle-class communities, and why there has always been less coverage of other communities," according to the journalist. This was consistent with what I had found in my literature review (Cranberg, 1997; Pease & Stempel, 1990).

The marginalization of minorities.

Also falling in line with previous studies, interviewees spoke at length about how minorities have also long been left out of the news-making cycle. All nine journalists

interviewed for this study mentioned minorities in some version of their answers to my research questions, however, the terms varied. Some talked about people of color broadly, while others focused on immigrants, and other still focused on African-Americans and/or Hispanics. The common theme throughout? American media has historically failed to diversify its newsrooms and its coverage, and it's been to journalism's detriment.

For Hispanics and African-Americans in America in particular, the cycle of not being news consumers of mainstream journalism boils down to a lack of trust, said a New York-based journalist. She is studying the use of digital tools and education to create greater diversity and inclusion in American media for Spanish-speakers. "It comes to this: Hire reporters that are from the community that are African-Americans or Hispanics, people that know that community, people that have ties with the community, that understand the issues and can relate to them," according to the New-York based journalist, who is Hispanic. To her, and to four of the nine journalists interviewed, not having a diverse newsroom was directly tied to not having a diverse readership. "You know, it's like if you want to actually reach the community, you need to hire people that are from the community," she said of minority groups. Five of the nine journalists interviewed were themselves journalists of color.

The lack of diversity in newsrooms leads to inauthentic coverage at best, or missed coverage at worst, said a journalism professor interviewed for this project. She has become a leading voice for the concept of "social journalism," another term for the resurgence of public service journalism highlighted in this study's literature review (Voakes, 1999). She said by leaving minority voices out of mainstream news coverage,

by not prioritizing relationships between newsrooms and those communities, journalists have created huge, dangerous coverage gaps. “If people of color weren’t left out of mainstream news, and we were doing a better job of listening, we would have been writing about things like police violence before Ferguson became a hashtag,” she said of national outrage and local protests in Ferguson, Missouri in the summer of 2014 after police shot an unarmed black teenager (Wines, 2014). “You know, it’s not like (police violence) in black communities was a new problem that suddenly popped up. Most mainstream news organizations weren’t really listening to all areas of their community,” she added. The journalist emphasized a theme I heard throughout my interviews: Journalists are not asking communities of color, “What matters to you?” And because of that, journalists are failing at holding truth to power for these communities.

Mainstream, traditional media has marginalized people in low-income areas and minorities, but nonprofit or startup media hasn’t done enough to change the tide, three of the journalist interviewed told me. One journalist, who runs a startup organization that helps equip journalists to engage communities through short message service (SMS) texting, said, “While its public media’s mission to educate the public, most serve a primarily white, well-educated audience.” However, that journalist also went on to say that there’s never been “such opportunity” for journalists wanting to change the way they do engagement. What specifically are those opportunities? Text messaging and social media are two.

RQ2: How new technology can change the tide

In this increasingly digital age, how to use new technologies is on the forefront of most journalists’ mind. How those technologies impact new forms of engagement is no

different. I asked each journalists interviewed specifically how they thought technology and social media has changed the way journalists like them interact and engage with historically marginalized readers. I was expecting many of the journalists to focus on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter as tools for this kind of engagement work. And many did. But what surprised me were the four journalists who heavily emphasized SMS texting as one of the most exciting uses of technology for engaging people in low-income areas or minorities.

Access to cell phones despite socioeconomic status.

People who are living paycheck-to-paycheck or are struggling with unemployment are rarely going to subscribe to a news service, according to both research and journalists interviewed (Nee, 2013), but they will pay for a cell phone (Raine, 2013). Increasingly, people below the poverty line are able to purchase smartphones with Internet capability, as the iPhones and Androids of the world become more affordable (Ungarino, 2015). Journalists interviewed for this study see cell phones in the pockets of low-income people as an engagement opportunity that cannot be overlooked.

One journalist interviewed for this study has turned text-message journalism into a career. He founded an organization that makes two-way messaging easy to use between journalists and community members. The goal of his company is to make collecting stories and building engagement through text messaging an easy task for journalists all over the nation.

> The world is heading toward a mobile-first world. So by going for messaging, starting with SMS, but then really looking beyond SMS, to all the MMS (multimedia messaging service) phones out there, we felt like there was real opportunity to build something that would engage people wherever they are.

Here's how his organization works: Journalists can sign up for a unique phone number on his company's website and start to share that number with the community. Once the journalist has a contact base built within the software, he or she can send out mass text messages, perhaps asking for interviews on a certain topic or alerting the community to where they can find a relevant story that has been published. As the community starts to interact with the journalist, the organization builds profiles for each community member by asking them demographic questions. The software also tags and organizes audience members as they interact with specific questions, allowing for easy follow-ups for the journalists. The organization's founder said he got the idea not only because mobile technology was becoming more popular, but also because he saw it as an equalizer among socioeconomic groups in the U.S. He saw text messaging as an easy way that journalists could start reaching across those economic barriers and diversifying their source pools, rather than continuing to go to the same sources over and over again. Other journalists interviewed for this study agreed with him. "We are in an unprecedented situation in which even in relatively low-income communities, everyone has a cell phone," said one journalist, who was based for much of her career in Memphis, Tenn. She was working on a project with low-income students in Memphis and found that text messaging was by far the best way to keep tabs.

> It was impossible to keep track of these kids by mail because their families are so transient and are moving so often. Yet, every single kid had a phone and most of them were smart phones. That's become such a priority that people even with limited resources are making sure they have a phone.

This journalist was not alone in believing that text messaging was an easy way to keep in touch with people in low-income areas. This creates significant opportunity for

journalists to quickly and easily keep track of sources in lower socioeconomic stratospheres, and therefore, diversify their source base.

Two of the journalists interviewed were incorporating text messages as a regular part of their sourcing and engagement practices. One Detroit-based journalist is creating a new startup news organization based solely on text-messaging software as a way to provide information to people in low-income areas. For example, she's working on a reporting series that digs into Detroit's landlords. She wants people in the community who are curious about a rental to text her the name of the landlord or the address, so she can gather information, and text them back with answers. It's like a personalized news wire service. And the text message itself is the journalism product. "Detroit has a lot of digital divide problems, so, that's why I need to use SMS text messaging. And it's also just an effective way to go back and forth with the people you're trying to reach," she said. Another reporter in New Orleans is using similar texting software, though he's using text messaging to try to recruit diverse voices for his shows on a National Public Radio affiliate.

> When I first moved to New Orleans, I did my own kind of community survey and found that everyone had a cell phone. And when I asked people how they would feel about receiving a text message from a journalist, I was surprised. People said they would be more likely to respond. Not everyone has access to email or a computer. And you can ignore an email, but it's different getting a message that's directed at you. It's a personal ask.

An example the journalist mentioned was an African-American mother who lives in a low-income area of New Orleans. The journalist was looking for diverse voices for a radio story he was working on about affordable housing. The mother signed up to receive text messages from the journalist after hearing another piece he did on public radio.

> (The African-American mother) is not a voice you get to hear very often. About a hundred people responded (to the text message asking for sources on affordable housing), which was probably the best response I've gotten. You know, there's probably 1,200 people who regularly get a text for me. But, I mean, she was a needle in a haystack. Like, how do you find her otherwise? Right? And in a sense, she found me. She chose to participate. That's a very different activity than me as a reporter walking around knocking on doors.

These journalists said they were using text messaging specifically as a way to reach a more diverse audience. While text messaging isn't a brand new technology, journalists haven't capitalized on the potential it has for sourcing, missing the fact that 91 percent of U.S. adults now own a cell phone (Raine, 2013). Interviewees for this study spoke of practical ways that using text messaging has not only allowed for more diverse sourcing, but also allowed them to better communicate about their journalism products to communities who historically have not consumed their work. Sometimes, that journalistic work is the text message itself, but as in the case with the New Orleans radio journalist, sometimes it's a traditional radio story. Text messaging also provides an easy opportunity for journalists to keep track of sources and to keep a pulse on what is impacting their communities. It allows journalists to be better listeners. However, many journalists interviewed for this study added that text messaging isn't the only tool to reach more diverse audiences.

Social media as an equalizer.

In the age of Facebook and Twitter, social media is an engagement tool that is an obvious choice for journalists. But the five journalists interviewed for this study warned that social media should be used for much more than just pushing out content — it's a way to reach across socioeconomic barriers and engage with readers in a genuine way.

Before diving in, it's important to first highlight what poor engagement, in the form of social media, meant to the journalists interviewed. To those journalists, here's what engagement was not: Dishing out articles on a journalism organization's social media feeds, such as Facebook and Twitter, and expecting a diverse readership to find you. One journalist interviewed, based in Seattle, said doing so would be making the same mistake journalists have made in the past: Assuming that all they had to do was publish their product with no further effort to engage their audiences. She added that the new focus on audience engagement, such as the creation of the engagement editor position at many major new organizations (Mayer, 2011), could become synonymous with a social media editor. "Community editors need to have the same power as reporters to get out there, away from computer screens, and interact with sources on a regular basis. It's not just about posting to Facebook regularly," she said. Instead, it's about showing up in the same spaces people are congregating, said another journalist who echoed the Seattle journalist's take. This journalist works for a national nonprofit news organization that focuses on investigative reporting projects. "If you want a non-traditional audience to know your stuff, you have to show up and put your content right in front of their faces," he said. And where are people congregating? Social media platforms like Facebook.

Roughly eight in 10 online Americans used Facebook in 2016, according to the Pew Research Center, up seven points from a similar study conducted in 2015, and that stretches across socioeconomic status and race (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). Facebook is the new public park or water cooler in that it's where people congregate, said one journalist interviewed for the study, the same journalist who launched his own text-

messaging software. And journalists have to do more than just show up to the "public park." They have to listen to those who are there.

> It's great to reach audiences wherever they are. And they're on social media, so you have to be there. You have to be distributing content. But that falls short of what we believe is the promise of social media, which is to create a conversation between news organizations and their communities and to make news organizations more responsive to those communities. There are a bunch of organizations that are good at using social media as a listening tool, as well as a distribution tool. Those are the ones to watch.

So, how do you use social media as a listening tool? It's not rocket science, said the above journalist, and an easy way to start is finding Facebook groups where people are congregating and asking a question in that space. Two other journalists interviewed for this study also mentioned Facebook groups as an effective tool for reaching diverse audiences with sourcing questions. Facebook groups can be public, meaning journalists can find them with a quick online search, and they can be very specific. For example, suppose that I was a journalist in Memphis, Tennessee, and I wanted to reach African-Americans in the city with a question on public transportation. After a quick search on Facebook, I could find a group with more than 2,220 members called "Memphis Raise Your Expectations," which is a congregating place for Memphians of color to talk about race and social justice. One journalist interviewed for the study, who is in charge of an engagement team at a national investigative nonprofit news organization, said Facebook groups have been very effective in helping his journalists find specific sources. For one project, his team needed to find U.S. veterans who were struggling with poverty. Instead of physically fanning out to Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) halls, they took to Facebook.

> Veterans are highly organized on Facebook. VFW halls and American Legions all over the country have Facebook pages or groups, and many of these vets

> congregate and develop communities on Facebook. So, that's where I found most of our participants for this project, and Facebook was a huge tool in building a community for us.

Journalists interviewed for this study added that if you show up in these online spaces to pose questions, you have to follow through. You have to return to those spaces and post the journalism you create, or tag that Facebook group in the article post. It's no different than writing an article and calling your main source to tell them that the article has been published, said one journalist. Authentic online engagement requires listening to the people you want to engage, "but don't be a tourist," said the Seattle-based journalist.

> You can't just dip into social justice Facebook groups when you need a Hispanic voice or an African-American voice. Again, that's not what true engagement is supposed to be. Journalists need to consistently be a part of those groups, monitoring how people feel and what they are saying. They need to be consistently posting relevant articles. Not just asking a question, and then never visiting that page again.

Seven of the journalists interviewed for this study, however, cautioned that Facebook and other social media outlets shouldn't replace on-the-ground reporting. Though Facebook is home to an incredibly diverse audience, not everyone is represented there. The same journalist who led the engagement project for U.S. veterans was also working on a project that needed to reach pregnant African-American women in low-income situations. That was a super specific audience that Facebook wouldn't be the most effective way to reach, he said.

> They're not you know they're not creating Facebook groups and Facebook pages at the same level that veterans are. So my approach in terms of like what I have to do to build this community will be different, but you know the nuts and bolts of it and the methodology will be the same.

And the methodology he spoke of was a mantra that I heard over and over again through these interviews: Engagement is reaching people where they already are and not expecting them to come to you.

Throughout the data collection for this study, I was surprised by the emphasis on Facebook versus Twitter or other social media platforms. When asked how new technology has affected engagement routines and practices, the majority of the journalists interviewed for this study spoke of social media exclusively in terms of Facebook even though the majority also mentioned briefly that they used additional social media sites in addition to Facebook for their work. However, one journalist interviewed spoke in depth of how she saw Twitter and Snapchat as necessary engagement tools, specifically to reach Hispanic millennials, which is her target audience. News needs to be more social, she said, because that's "where young people of color are." She and other interviewees stated that journalists can view social media platforms as competitors instead of collaborators, and that's to the journalists' detriment. "I mean we need to stop fighting, trying to get people to go where we are, and go where they are, right? Guess what, young people aren't newspaper subscribers. They're social media consumers." Research backs these journalists up, with minority Internet users more than twice as likely than white user to use some social media sites (Brown et al, 2014). Further, a 2015 American Press Institute study found that 88 percent of millennials surveyed said they at least occasionally get their news from sites like Facebook and Twitter. As such, if journalists are to build a sustainable model for the future, engaging news consumers where they are means viewing technology and social media as daily tools for sourcing and distribution.

RQ3: Defining engagement with historically marginalized communities.

While the term "engagement" was in several of the job descriptions of journalists interviewed for this project, many defined engagement routines with historically marginalized audiences in their own unique ways, echoing previous literature that "engagement" doesn't have a common definition (Mayer, 2011). However, each of the nine journalists interviewed for this study said they have substantially changed their routines around how they view and define authentic engagement with people who have been traditionally left out of the news making cycle.

Engagement as listening.

A national engagement editor said changing his routines around engagement began after the first time he "thought of community not as a reporter at the top of some pyramid but as sitting around a table, listening. That's a used cliché now for engagement, but I still really believe it." This editor was one of two national engagement editors interviewed for this study. They work for two different national investigative news nonprofits and manage teams of journalists that are dedicated to engagement.

The movement in journalism toward detached objectivity (St. John III, 2007) led journalists to feel unsettled by the idea that they should listen to their audiences and answer their questions, said another journalist who heads a university program on social journalism.

> Journalists have assumed for a long time that they can write what they think the world needs to hear, and the world will hear it. But here's the thing, if I think that you don't care about my reality or my problems or my questions, why would I read you? Why would I become loyal to you? A lot of what we teach about (at her university) is about listening, really. And just trying to figure out, OK, this is what this group of people needs, and here's what I as a journalist can do to provide it.

Six journalists interviewed for this study defined engagement, at least in part, as listening and gave specific examples for what that practically means to them. The journalist quoted above tied this idea of engagement to minority groups in particular. People of color often feel stigmatized or ignored in mainstream news media outlets, as previous literature has reported (Chideya, 2013; Pease & Stempel, 1990), and this journalist said that is chiefly because journalism has become more interested in "writing what matters to the journalists in the room than getting out and asking Black people, Latino people or really just anyone in general: What matters to you?" She added that journalists, especially white journalists, must develop sources in communities of color that will tell them what they aren't covering or getting right.

A national engagement editor described listening as putting the community "in the driver's seat of the investigation." He said when his nonprofit news organization launches a deep investigation it is often because they have been tipped off to a problem they didn't know existed. Directing news coverage based on what your audience is asking for has, unfortunately, been equated with poor journalistic ethics, he said. When, in reality, "assuming that you don't know everything, assuming that people different from you know better about what affects their lives, makes you a much better reporter," he said. For example, his organization launched an investigation into how pesticide use in California affected field workers after they asked members of that community what issues were impacting them the most.

Several other journalists also tied "listening" to "trust," including a journalist who works for a California-based nonprofit news organization that focuses on investigative reporting. "Engagement is about building trust. It's about creating reciprocal relationships

with public that we serve and trying to show that we're here to listen." However, in order to build trust that leads to authentic relationships, journalists have to do more than solely listen.

Engagement as a two-way conversation.

The New Orleans-based radio journalist said he has seen an apathetic trend in his career as a journalist, where journalists will "helicopter into" an African-American neighborhood, for example, to gain sources for a particular story, and then those sources will never hear from that journalist again. "You can't just appear, interview and leave, and that's the end of it. Authentic engagement is a two-way conversation, and ultimately the hope that you're building a real relationship with that community," he said. Whereas engagement as listening was about engaging historically marginalized communities on the front-end of the news cycle, engagement as a conversation is about bringing diverse communities into the cycle even after news pieces have been published.

With new technology and online sites, the shelf life of a journalistic piece is longer than it's ever been before, said one journalist. He described engagement as a "constant feedback loop," and heavily warned against the belief that once a story is published, a journalist's job is done.

> It's laziness to ignore what your audience is saying after you publish something. Say you publish an article on Facebook. Are you reading the comments on that post? Are you answering the readers' questions? You're missing out on a part of your job description if not … Are you making sure your product is getting to the people who most need to read it? Maybe that's posting your story in a Facebook group, or maybe it's showing up at a community meeting with printouts. Are you talking to the community about how you can keep the conversation going?

The same journalist — who led engagement efforts for the project on U.S. veterans — said that his team encouraged veterans to submit personal stories after the investigation's initial publication.

> You have to keep the conversation going that keeps the topic alive or the people affected involved. We regularly wrote articles out of stories submitted to us on Facebook or email … We knew those stories were important to the veterans that we heard from.

Engagement as listening and engagement as a two-way conversation went hand-in-hand for the majority of journalists interviewed for this study. If journalists are listening to their audience, especially audiences that have historically been marginalized by journalists, then they can't disappear when a story publishes. One journalist, who holds the title of director of engagement at a major nonprofit news organization, said he sees publishing a story as the "halfway point" when it comes to authentic engagement. "If your published story is the product of a relationship between you and your community building, then you don't just publish and say, 'There, I'm done.' You make sure you're maintaining a two-way street," he said. And maintaining a "two-way street," means that journalists care about creating products that reach different communities in different ways. It means viewing journalism as a "public service and not just publishing an article and walking away," he added. If journalism is indeed a public service, a belief described in some form by every journalist interviewed for this study, then that means your product must change based on how different communities want to be served.

Engagement as a service.

"Civic duty" or "public service" were by far the most popular terms used when interviewees tried to define why they had changed their engagement practices. As found in a review of past literature, "civic" or "mission-driven" journalism has experienced a

resurgence in popularity among engagement-minded journalists (Mayer, 2011; Peters & Witschge, 2015). The specific examples interviewees gave were especially insightful in determining how a trend toward civic journalism has impacted their routines of engagement.

A journalist in charge of engagement for a national investigative nonprofit emphasized that journalists must think "out-of-the-box" when it comes to serving their audiences. An example he gave was a big investigative project about youth violence his organization had recently conducted. The audience most impacted by the topic of the investigation was young people of color in inner cities. Publishing that piece in a newspaper or even online would likely never reach those kids, he said. So, he and his colleagues partnered with a youth justice organization to lead a video production workshop with inner-city students of color. Through that workshop, they informed students about their investigation, and they also encouraged students to document their own stories of youth violence. To this journalist, leading a workshop was a form of service-based journalism.

> When we spend a lot of time reporting on a big investigation, we want to make sure that we get out there, and that the information that we've reported on gets to people that are most affected. That's driven our philosophy around a lot of our engagement work. Who are the people most directly affected by the story, issue, topic, and what are the different levels of stakeholders? And how do we get to them and how do we empower them with information in a way that helped spark some kind of change or impact? ... You know, we cover a lot of really tough things; we look at problems and then we want to help people try to realize solutions as well.

A second example the journalist gave ties back to an investigation mentioned previously, where his organization looked into how pesticide use in California affected field workers and those in the nearby communities. What group was most impacted by that

investigation? Young people — mostly Hispanics — who were attending nearby schools while their parents worked the fields. These students were not likely to find out about this investigation on their own, he said. So, he and his team of journalists went into the schools.

> We found one high school, and it's surrounded on all four sides by the strawberry fields that use a dangerous pesticide. So, my colleague and I, we went and contacted one of the teachers there, and she happens to teach a drama class. We have a collaboration here where we turn some of our stories into plays. So, we created a play out of the strawberry fields investigation, and then we worked with the teacher and her theatre class.

The students put on a public play, which was attended by many in the community, where the students essentially acted out the journalists' reporting. The journalist said it was likely that the investigation would have never reached those students and parents in the same powerful way had the journalists not viewed it as their responsibility to find a creative medium. His examples illustrate what engagement looks like to him as a form of public service.

While the words "civic" and "service" were tossed around a lot by interviewees, many used the terms interchangeably, or used terms like "social" or "impact-driven" journalism to define the idea of journalists thinking like public servants rather than producers of content. The inconsistency in terminology signals that routines of engagement as a service are still relatively new and without a common definition. But even with those inconsistencies in wording, what was amazingly consistent throughout each interview was the idea that these journalists believed it was in their job descriptions to get their audiences the information that they need. They did not view it as the audience's job to come to them. When asked to define what she meant by "social journalism," a journalism professor went on to say "It's basically the idea of journalism

as a service rather than a product…You know, starting with the people that we want to serve and trying to understand: What are their problems? What are their needs?" She went on to say that it is the journalist's responsibility to figure out how to deliver news in the most convenient and accessible way for the audience. Another journalist — who is based in Detroit and runs a startup that uses text messaging to reach low-income audiences — said her product was a perfect example of assessing the needs of an underserved audience and delivering a service. Again, her product is a text-message sent directly to people asking about housing issues in impoverished areas of Detroit. She called this providing her readers "high-value information" in a medium that they naturally want to consume.

> This is a super practical service; It's helping people make better decisions about the housing market. But the product that comes out and that the consumer sees could not be more different than a long-form magazine piece. But it's still journalism. So, say someone texts in an address like 1706 Birchcrest. The text message they would get back would be, "(Her organization) has found the following issue with this address…" And then it would lay out that issue or issues. We're meeting people where they are, in their pockets, with information they need to make better decisions with their money.

While all of the interviewees were very excited to talk about how their engagement routines were serving their audiences, several of the journalists, three of nine to be exact, also expressed dissatisfaction with their perception that "engagement" has become a buzzword in journalism to describe having a social media presence. They also expressed dissatisfaction that, for nonprofit news organizations specifically, "engagement" can be very superficial work to fulfill a line on a grant. They warned that there are bad forms of engagement, such as assuming what an under-served community needs without asking them. Though these statements were outliers, they have to be taken into consideration, as

journalists will hopefully continue to work to define what authentic engagement and poor engagement means to them.

The journalist who has championed SMS texting as a way to build engagement especially warned against such practices:

> For a community to truly be served by their journalism organization, I think that requires so much more than social media. It's not "Hey, the story's done, so let's have a social media strategy for getting it out there." We have to be architects of participation, and we have to think, "Who are we not really in conversation with that we need to be? And then, how do we reach those people in a way that makes them comfortable? How do we listen to their questions and provide answers? I think that is a fundamental role of an engagement editor. If your mission or your responsibility is to serve as much as the community as possible, then you need to be able to say, "You need this information the most, because I know you and I've listened to you, and here's that information in a form that naturally reaches you."

The journalists made it clear when giving specific examples of their routines that it takes a lot of work, time and creativity to engage historically marginalized communities where they are and with information they want. This begged the question, what motivates these journalists to change their routines and do this challenging engagement work? The answer lies in discussing why this work matters personally to these nine journalists.

RQ4: Why does engaging non-traditional readers matter?

The changes in their routines described by the journalists were significant, signaling that they felt this work was important for the journalism industry and for themselves. For some, "engagement" was in their job title at their organization. For others, they had launched nonprofit news organizations or startups built around the idea of re-engaging minorities or people in low-income areas. All nine interviewees had built their careers in some way around the idea that this kind of engagement work is necessary and important for the vitality of the journalism industry as a whole.

Engagement as an economic incentive.

Every journalist interviewed for this study lamented on the financial state of the journalism industry. As previous literature has shown, journalists all over the nation are struggling to monetize the digital age of news making (Barthel, 2015; Jones, 2009). Yet, these journalists view re-engaging historically marginalized communities as a path forward to regaining a loyal audience and a stable financial footing. Five of the nine specifically spoke about how news that prioritizes engagement could be the sustainable model for journalism.

There is a "major economic impetus" for journalists to start caring about engaging audiences in their work, said a journalism professor who studies trends in engagement practices.

> Journalism supported by an advertising model worked really great for a long time, but now it's not working so well. So people are realizing, "like OK we need to actually engage audiences and build a more kind of a loyal following and get people participating in the news." So, with this trend toward engagement we've been talking about, a big element behind that push is: How do we make journalism sustainable?

She went on to say that the severe economic pressure of a collapsing business model has made journalists take a hard look at themselves and change their practices. The journalist who launched his own text-based media organization agreed, saying that journalists today are faced with 'this existential crisis of, "How do we support what we do?"' He warned that journalism organizations that view social media as a "savior in the moment, a life raft" are missing the point. That's a temporary fix, he said, whereas strategic community building creates loyal audiences over time.

> I just think there's a lack of long-term thinking, a lack of creative and strategic thinking around, "How do we use technology in a way to build a stable community that can grow over time?" And I'm certainly not suggesting that (my

> company) is the only way to do that, but that's why we're designing it, to kind of put a tool in journalists' tool kits that gives them some control over that relationship and creates a conversation and allows them to reach out to communities that they aren't currently reaching out to and to build that slowly but surely over time.

"Relevance" was also a common term to hear during interviews, especially when interviewees tied the need to re-engage communities to a financial footing for journalists. Because journalism has lost its relevance — both among advertisers and audiences — it's been easy for former news consumers to walk away, and for traditionally marginalized communities to stay away. The same journalist went on to say there is "a very strong business case" for prioritizing journalism's relevance in diverse communities.

> This decline in relevance for traditional news seems never ending — unless you get a wealthy person to buy the newspaper and kind of make it their project — that cycle is just going to end in a bust. You just have to think logically and say, "If people feel like they're engaged, if they feel like they're involved, and that we reflect their point of view and their reality, they're going to pay attention to us." And then attention beholds business, to a great level.

Even though, "attention beholds business," how can journalists make money when the attention they are targeting is from people who historically have not had the money or desire to pay for news? One Detroit-based journalist interviewed said newsmakers have underestimated the purchasing power of people in low-income areas and minorities, which is reflected in previous literature (Pease & Stempel, 1990).

Other journalists interviewed argued that philanthropic communities are very willing to support this kind of engagement, which nonprofit news organizations are benefiting greatly from. Seven of the nine journalists interviewed were either currently at a nonprofit news organization or had worked at one previously. One journalist, who heads engagement at a national investigative nonprofit new organization, said his team was largely foundation funded, which has allowed his organization the flexibility to

really focus on engagement with underrepresented communities. “We're actually funded to do this kind of work specifically. We have an opportunity and flexibility to get creative and experiment in a way that's harder to do in a traditional newsroom,” he said. Another journalist, the texting software creator, said the nonprofit model for journalism and engagement routines must go hand-in-hand.

> If you’re a nonprofit and you get charitable exceptions and people can donate to you tax free, then I think your responsibility is to do more than just get subscribers. You have a responsibility to serve a community, regardless of race or ethnicity. And if you’re not, you should think about why you should be a nonprofit.

Still, while the nonprofit model makes prioritizing engagement efforts easier, interviewees said they hope for-profit, traditional journalism outfits are taking note. “I think because there are so many more of us doing (engagement), more journalists are taking notes and want to produce these interesting stories or these impactful stories that are community-driven, that are crowd-powered,” said an engagement editor at a national nonprofit. A different national engagement editor agreed and added that he hoped for-profit media would move toward engagement practices, as he believes his company is demonstrating how engaging historically marginalized audiences “can really help lead to greater support for news” and how “engagement is a vehicle for sustainability.”

Engagement as a democratic necessity.

In addition to viewing engagement as a means for financial stability, journalists interviewed also hit home that they viewed their engagement routines as a necessity if journalism is to be a pillar of democracy (Gans, 2003). Terms such as “public service” or “service-based journalism” were repeated again and again in interviews, a nod to

previous literature that ties new engagement routines with a resurgence of "civil" or "service-based" journalism (St. John III, 2007; Mayer, 2011).

Journalists can't serve their function in society if they don't have relationships with all members of society, said the journalist who created a nonprofit news organization geared toward Palo Alto's economically disadvantaged. He created the nonprofit, which later closed due to financial constraints, to provide a service to a group of people he felt were being completely ignored by local media. But he added that he believes new routines of engagement are gaining popularity among journalists because it "gets to the heart of why we all originally wanted to do this job."

> It's a resurgence of service-based journalism. And it's happening because there's no shortage of journalists who really care about the world's disenfranchised. We get into this job because we believe we can make the world better. But now, more than ever, there's opportunities for journalists who are over only writing for the wealthy or watching their readerships decline. Between technology and this rise in nonprofit news, we have so many chances to do things differently.

Other interviewees echoed that engagement practices aligned closely with what they believed to be the core ideals of journalism, the ideals that got those journalists into the industry in the first place. "Journalism that's for all people, not just a select few, is pretty much the definition of what we should be," said a national engagement editor.

> The goal of what we do is to create news that serves the people who are most affected. Or at least that should be the goal. That should be the motto of journalism, but what we're doing now is recognizing that there are ways we can be more direct with how we really serve communities and the public service model around journalism. To me, this is so important because it's what I believe in.

Another journalist — the one who created the texting-based software — called journalism the biggest "check and balance in the country, and especially a check against extremism." But he went on to say journalism could only serve that purpose if journalists

are innovating to reach diverse audiences. Journalism works best as a public service if it's reporting accurately on the whole society, he said, not just certain segments.

> And I think journalists ought to be right at the heart of that question: How do we build relationships with diverse communities and then create journalism they actually benefit from and want to read or see? The journalism industry as a whole has gotten a little complacent with understanding why we're doing what we're doing. We do what we do because our audiences need accurate information to make decisions.

The journalists emphasized that inclusive practices benefit not only the disenfranchised, who deserve to be better represented in media, but it benefits society as a whole, echoing previous literature (Whitehouse, 2009).

Three of the journalists interviewed mentioned the ethnic press as a model that has previously filled the reporting gap for minorities in particular. "But the problem is that Hispanic media or African-American newspapers, while they are crucially important to their communities, are not widely read outside of those communities," said a journalist who is working on engagement practices with Latino millennials in New York City. She went on to say there's huge benefit for society for diverse voices to show up in media consumed by both the white or wealthy and the minority or poor. "To me, journalists are at the service of the community and are there to inform to serve and to help the community," she said. She gave an example of how problematic it can be when news isn't nuanced and contextualized, especially toward Hispanics and those in low-income areas.

> People still think that in this country where if you work hard, you will make it. But it's not like that. You know, if you go to a school in a poor neighborhood, your chances of getting to a university at an Ivy League are very, very slim. Or any university at all. And we have a school system made in a way where they don't make it if they're from poor neighborhoods. So, we need to talk about this because people don't know. They only hear stories of that one poor kid from the inner city who goes to Harvard. And they hear a lot of stories of violence in these

> neighborhoods or crime. So, they start to equate those people with being bad people, because that's all they know. I talk about all the time why it is important to have an educated Hispanic population because it won't be a minority anymore in a few years; our minority will be the biggest. So, not only do Hispanics need to be consuming more news to be informed members of society, but other members of society need to learn more about Hispanics so there's not all this judgment.

Another way to put it is that engaging marginalized communities is necessary for good journalism, because journalism creates "self images" for communities, said the journalist who created a text-based software to make it easier for journalists to diversify their sources.

> I do think that over time, I've realized how powerful journalism is at shaping a community's self image. If you don't see yourself (represented in journalism), you start to feel like you don't matter and you don't have any value. This is a profession that is purportedly democratic at its heart. As so is the country, because if you roll it back to the founding documents of the country, it says, "All men are created equal." And if you really believe that stuff, which I do, you say, "Okay, journalism should be an extension of that." And then you see journalism doesn't really reflect those values at all or to the extent it could.

Unless journalists are thinking strategically about how they represent communities historically marginalized by wider society, are they truly creating accurate self-images?

One of the critiques of civil or service-based journalism is that it can lead to crossing the line between journalism and advocacy, according to previous literature (Voakes, 1999). Only one journalist mentioned this as a fear, and only in the context of public perception. "If we're doing our jobs, we know that line, and we know what crossing it looks like. But there's this idea out there that journalists shouldn't care deeply about the underprivileged or have passions. That's crap," said a journalist who runs engagement for a national investigative nonprofit. A second journalist also mentioned advocacy, but not as a fear, and rather something journalists have to wade into at times.

> Nobody knows about some of the horrific things immigrants or those in poverty go through because these people don't matter to national media or anyone. They're

> the lowest spectrum of this society and they don't have a voice here. They don't have any rights here. So, as journalists who are a part of this community, sometimes reporters have to be advocates for a community and shout, "Hey, look what's happening over here! Do you see how messed up this is?" I don't think that makes what we do less credible at all, said the New York City-based journalist working with Hispanic youth to create media they want to produce and consume.

Overall, it was overwhelmingly clear that these nine journalists view their jobs as a responsibility to society, and that their role in democracy is to house public debate around hard issues. "I like to think of journalists as conveners of a conversation and part of the responsibility when we talk about an issue or a problem is to make sure that it's accurate of the people group it affects most, people understand it and know what they can do about it," said a national engagement editor. Again and again, the journalists came back to their belief that they would actually be doing a disservice to the democratic process if 1) Their journalism was not inclusive and diverse in sourcing, and 2) Their journalism did not reach diverse audiences in diverse ways for them to consume.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Purpose of study

Between the popularity of new technologies, growth of social media and the new funding models of journalism, it's clear that journalism routines are going to continue to change. And they are going to continue to change rapidly. It is important that journalists learn how to best capitalize on all the possibilities for engagement in a digital age. This study looked at the way non-traditional newsrooms, and specifically journalists in digitally native nonprofits and startups, have changed traditional journalism routines to approach the work of engagement. As shown, "engagement" is not a well-defined concept in the journalism industry, though it is a very popular one. Therefore, this study sought to put definitions and examples to the ways journalists have changed their routines toward engagement in the hope that the journalists interviewed could learn from each other and teach others.

The purpose of this study was not only to determine how journalists are practicing this form of engagement, but also to learn they are changing their routines. The "why" behind these journalists' routines is significant because it lends itself to a deeper conversation about how these journalists view their jobs and how they view the role of journalism is society as a whole. According to a survey of journalists, less than one-fourth of the respondents said that U.S. journalism was headed in the right direction in the digital age (Willnat & Weaver, 2014). However, in an era of pessimism among journalists toward the future of the industry, it was encouraging to hear the journalists

interviewed speak eloquently on the hope the industry has if it is able to re-center itself in the public eye as representative of communities and necessary for democracy.

Summary of major findings

This entire research project centered around the idea that there are communities that have been historically marginalized by American media. Past literature shows that to be true (Voakes, 1999; Whitehouse, 2009; Williams, 2015). However, it was necessary to hear from these journalists themselves — including journalists of color — whom they perceive to be traditionally marginalized by their industry, if anyone. My findings from the in-depth interviews were absolutely in line with previous research. Minorities — ranging from African-Americans to Hispanics to immigrants of all races — were mentioned in each interview. People in low-income areas were also mentioned in seven of the nine interviews. There were outliers mentioned, such as people in the LGBTQ community, however, those interviewed for this study were largely focusing on minorities and/or people in low-income areas. The journalists talked about this marginalization not just in terms of the past but also in terms of the present. They do not believe that traditional media was improving at engaging marginalized communities. Rather, many spoke of how the cash-strapped industry is getting worse as it tries to cling to its traditional readership.

The belief that the problem of media marginalization is getting worse is incredibly significant, as journalists have the opportunities to change routines and gain new readership. It was clear that these journalists, many of whom have staked their careers on new engagement routines, view these routines as a way to boost journalism out of its pattern of marginalization. As one national engagement editor said, new routines in

journalistic engagement can be "a life raft for so many journalists floundering at sea." As literature and this study's interviews showed, the journalism industry is in dire need of revitalization (Barthel, 2015).

When asking journalists what technology could aid in being a life raft, I was expecting social media to be the highlight. I was deeply surprised by the emphasis on SMS texting as a means of engagement. Upon reflection, it became obvious that texting is an underused method of source development and outreach. As literature shows, nine in 10 adults in the U.S. own a cell phone, regardless of race or socioeconomic status (Raine, 2013). It was impressive to hear from the journalist who had developed technology to make texting easier on journalists as a form of engagement. His company could completely revamp the way journalists do sourcing. The organization allows journalists to build a network of diverse sources that they can reach via text with the same ease as sending an email. What was equally insightful was interviewing journalists who are using that technology in order to diversify their sources, such as the radio journalist in New Orleans or the journalist reporting on housing in Detroit. It was clear that journalists were using texting as means of new engagement routines, and that they believed their practices to be working. This matters deeply, as journalists continue to learn from one another which engagement practices work and which don't. These journalists have a vision for how technology used in everyday life (i.e. texting) can help journalists be more creative with sourcing and distribution.

A second means of creativity was more expected — social media. Previous literature has highlighted social media outlets, such as Twitter, as popular places for minorities to gather (Nee, 2013). Interviewees echoed this literature and held up social

media as a gathering place for diverse audiences, specifically minorities or people in low-income areas. I was expecting a more even number of mentions between Facebook and Twitter, but the majority of interviewees who solely mentioned Facebook surprised me. They spoke of Facebook's ability to specifically target audience segments, through Facebook groups for example, as a way to very strategically put their content in front of the eyes of diverse audiences or mine for specific sources. However, several of the journalists warned that social media is not an easy way out or a silver bullet. Simply posting stories on social media accounts did not count as authentic engagement in their eyes, but strategically using mediums such as Facebook to target diverse audiences groups did. When asking journalists to define engagement, it was important to hear what they perceived to be poor engagement as well as authentic engagement. Using social media as simply a distribution tool was not enough. For both text messaging and social media, the journalists interviewed gave specific examples of engagement practices they perceived to be working well and replicable. These examples show the impact new technologies and social media has had on journalistic routines, as well as the importance for journalists to dialogue about best practices as engagement continues to be better defined.

Previous literature has shown that the term "engagement" does not have a common definition among journalists today (Mayer, 2011). Though this rang true during interviews, there were common themes that emerged among the journalists' descriptions of engagement, specifically engagement with historically marginalized communities. Mayer, one of the foremost researchers of new engagement routines, outlined three characteristics of audience engagement: community outreach, conversation, and

collaboration (Mayer, 2011). My findings were similar to Mayer's in many ways, though I broke them down into different themes: Engagement as listening, engagement as a two-way conversation and engagement as a service. These routines mark a significant change in the way these journalists view their job. The traditional top-down roles of gatekeeping and agenda setting created a view of audience that told journalists their primary role is to provide information, rather than to engage in a collaborative dialogue with the public (Nee, 2013). However, these interviews showed that these journalists see their work as quite the opposite, as a service to their readers that is inherently collaborative. It is crucially important to document this change of view these journalists have toward their work. It is also important to continue to document what journalists perceive as effective engagement versus inauthentic engagement as journalists and researchers work to define these new sets of practices.

As journalists change their routines toward engaging historically marginalized communities, it's important to explore why they are changing routines and not just how they are changing. Asking journalists why this form of engagement was important for the journalism industry revealed two main themes: There is economic incentive for engagement, and these routines are significant contributions to journalism's role in democracy. As the journalism industry continues to struggle financially in the digital era, ideas for how to build a more sustainable model are critical. Three of the journalists interviewed, all of whom work for nonprofit news organizations, expressed that engagement strategies were vital to their ability to achieve grants and funding. Others stated that they believed engagement practices were the key to gaining audiences that had traditionally avoided consuming mainstream media, and new readers mean new funding

sources. All of the journalists emphasized that if journalism was to be a pillar of democracy, journalists needed engagement practices that were inclusive of all of society, not just a few. They believed that engagement with marginalized communities was be a necessity and that it was a problem that journalists had grown complacent with their audiences. To these journalists, journalism had historically failed to provide accurate information of all people, to all people. And therefore, the industry wasn't successfully acting as a true pillar of democracy.

Theoretical implications

One of the main goals of this research project was to fill a gap in existing literature of how nonprofit and startup news organizations and a new wave of engagement are intertwined. This study's theoretical significance is that it ties together threads that have previously been studied separately. There is a very obvious financial crisis in today's journalism industry; meaning new techniques for recruiting and retaining readers are vital. Literature has shown that American media has not historically done a great job of bringing marginalized communities, specifically minorities or people in low-income areas, into the news-making and news-consuming cycles (Chideya, 2013; Cranberg, 1997; Pease, 1990; Pease & Stempel, 1990). The rise of nonprofit news organizations and media startups has been documented, revealing journalists are willing to experiment with new models in order to reverse the impending economic trends (Nee, 2013; Vukanovic, 2011). There is also new literature on how news organizations are trying to engage readers in a digital age (Mayer, 2011; Nee, 2014; Peters & Witschge, 2015), and how these journalists are using new technologies to do so creatively (Brown et

al., 2014; Rosenthal, 2011). However, as this study revealed, these journalists see engagement practices as critical to the vitality of their news nonprofits or startups.

To the journalists interviewed for this study, engagement strategies for marginalized communities and new economic models of journalism go hand-in-hand, a trend among journalists that has not been documented in literature before. This study details the creative ways journalists are using technology to engage new readers, as well as the beliefs of the interviewees that engagement strategies could be the difference maker in bringing mainstream media out of its downward economic slump. While new engagement strategies have been documented before, this study focuses for the first time on engagement with communities who have historically been misrepresented in mainstream news and/or who have historically not been news consumers. It is clear that the trend toward engagement is picking up steam among American journalists, and it is crucial to keep adding to the theoretical body of knowledge of how journalists define engagement and how their changes in routines reflect those definitions. There is also need for further study regarding how effective these engagement strategies truly are.

Practical implications

On a practical level, another major goal of this study was to collect and disseminate data that would aid other journalists in their efforts to better serve communities that have historically been ignored by the media. I believe this study has accomplished that by documenting the journalists' specific examples of engagement strategies with underrepresented populations. From using text-messaging to build sources to producing school plays from journalistic investigations, this study is ripe with ideas that can be replicated by journalists all over the nation. It was also important to document

through this study how the journalists viewed their role in society. Interviewees for this study linked their careers' worth in society with their efforts to strategically form relationships with people whom they perceived to be historically under-served by American media. This finding has wide-reaching implications for understanding journalism's role in society, which in the eyes of these journalists, is a role that is changing. According to this study's findings, by ignoring potential readers in low-income areas or minorities, legacy media has missed out on opportunities to develop a more diverse readership, build a more sustainable economic model and better fulfill their role in democracy. However, these journalists believe they are changing that through their new news organizations and their change in journalistic routines. On a personal level, I have learned many new practical ways I can better serve audiences in my own journalism career. I believe other journalists, researchers or policymakers who read this study will do the same.

Limitations

Perhaps the largest limitation of this study was its inability to determine the success of the journalists' efforts. While the hope remains that other journalists can learn new engagement strategies from those interviewed for this research, it was not the job of this study to then interview people in low-income areas or minorities who had been the targets of such engagement efforts. So, while this study successfully recorded the journalists' views and opinions, it presents a one-sided picture. Given more time and resources, it would have been extremely valuable to find audience members who had interacted with these journalists and hear how these engagement practices affected them. Nonetheless, this study provides a framework that future research can build upon. This

study was also not generalizable, as it looked at a small group of journalists spread out over a geographically diverse sample. While there is value to looking across the nation to find trends in engagement routines, there are limitations in the conclusions drawn from that sample. Documentation that these journalists changed their engagement routines does not mean similar changes in routines are happening among all journalists across the nation. Finally, this study was limited by its scope. As previously stated, I do not assert that people in low-income areas and racial minorities are the only communities that have been marginalized by journalism practices throughout history. As outliers in this study told me, there are many, many marginalized groups in history that could have easily fit into this study, such as LGBTQ populations. With unlimited time and resources, it would have been ideal to broaden the study to more than just minorities and people in low-income areas. That being said, focusing in on these two audience groups allowed for more specific findings and also set the table for future researchers.

Directions for future research

Though this study fulfilled its role in filling one gap in literature, it has also proved that there is great need for further study on journalism and audience engagement in a digital age. I was intrigued by the many different definitions of quality engagement among the journalists interviewed, and there is great potential for future study on how journalists are coming to define both quality and poor engagement practices. The roles of engagement editor and community editor are also fairly new in the journalistic world, according to this study as well as previous literature (Mayer, 2011). This study includes journalists with titles ranging from "engagement editors" to "audience strategists" to "reporter" who were including engagement practices in their daily work. This study does

not focus on how their differences of job titles affects the journalist's view of engagement or how it affects their changes in routines. However, there would be great potential for study of these new job titles and their impact on the industry. Along a similar vein, it would have been interesting to do a case study on one or more of the projects the national engagement editors interviewed for this study had completed. While there is merit to the breadth of this study, there is great potential for future studies to focus on the causes and effects of one engagement project that represents such a change in routine for journalists. As previously stated, perhaps the biggest gap that this literature leaves to be filled is how effective these new strategies of engagement truly are. Have these engagement strategies created a more diverse readership at these journalists' organizations? Are they creating an impact? Are they building a more sustainable model of journalism? While it's clear journalistic practices of engagement are radically changing, there needs to be literature that studies whether or not these practices stick, and how effective they truly are.

Conclusion

History says that a majority of traditional U.S. media's readership has been middle class, educated and white, and the digital shift hasn't reversed that trend (Barthel, 2015). The past few decades have shown that the digital age has not been kind to the journalism business model, and the steady decline in readerships has led to widespread layoffs and closures (Barthel, 2015; Jones, 2009). New models have risen up to fill those holes, particularly nonprofit and digitally native startups, as possible solutions to journalism's economic woes (McGrath, 2014; Rosenthal, 2011). These new models, along with the help of a plethora of new technologies, have given journalists the opportunity to radically change their routines, especially around how they interact with

their audiences (Brown et al., 2014; Ferrucci et al., 2015; Nee, 2014). Journalists now have the opportunity and responsibility to invite audiences long ignored by media organizations into the news-making cycle (Mayer, 2011; Peters & Witschge, 2015). The journalists interviewed for this study detailed how they were working toward the goal of engaging historically marginalized communities in a digital age.

The nine journalists featured in this research project spoke to how technology, especially text-messaging and social media, have created new opportunities to engage historically marginalized communities. They also spoke to how their news organizations, whether a nonprofit model or startup, gave them more flexibility to try out new routines of engagement. For example, there was the Detroit reporter who created a startup news organization that delivers news to low-income audiences in the form of a text-messaging wire service. There was the national engagement editor who used Facebook to specifically reach U.S. veterans for a large-scale investigation. New technology has given journalists a whole new playing field of audience engagement. And, according to the journalists interviewed, all media producers would do well to take advantage.

New engagement practices have offered glimmers of hope in an otherwise dim situation. The journalists interviewed acknowledged that there is serious industry pessimism toward the future of journalism and its role in society. However, new engagement routines have inspired renewed energy and passion. The journalists spoke gravely about the future of the industry's traditional business model, yet in the next breath, they spoke passionately about how they were working to win new readers or listeners. Audience engagement offered these journalists a hopeful vision for their future rather than a grim one, as they believe that these practices can lead to a more financially

stable industry. However, these journalists made it abundantly clear that they did not see engagement with historically marginalized communities solely as a means to a financial end. They viewed it as a righting of a wrong and as a way to better serve their roles in democracy.

The journalists in this study recognized an issue that has been discussed in previous literature: If journalism's job to inform citizens is an essential pillar of democracy (Gans, 2003), then how can journalists ignore entire groups of people in the process of making and distributing news? The solution these journalists have come up puts the responsibility of reaching diverse audiences on themselves. They see it as their role not to just produce news, but also to reach people with their news, especially people whom normally wouldn't come to them. This can look like a coloring book distributed to schoolchildren, a text-message from a radio journalist in New Orleans or a community play orchestrated by journalists in California. These changes in engagement routines have radically altered the way these journalists do their jobs and have led to new job creation within the industry (Mayer, 2011). Engagement with historically marginalized communities can take countless forms and an impressive amount of creativity. Time will tell if they lead to a more diverse readership for mainstream American journalism. If these nine journalists' passions are any indication, their practices will have their desired effect.

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Appendix A:

Email to potential participants

My name is Caroline Bauman, and I am a master's student at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. I'm looking to interview journalists for my thesis about how they engage potential readers in underrepresented communities, such as low-income residents, minorities, people who don't have Internet access at home, don't subscribe to a print product, etc. This will be for a research study. If this strikes a chord with you, I would love to spend a few minutes on the phone with you or have an email conversation to further explain my project. You can reach me at carolinebmn@gmail.com or 479-841-0862. Thank you!

Appendix B:

Interview protocol

Interview questions may include:

- What communities are you prioritizing with your engagement strategies?
- How do you define engagement with audiences and/or potential audiences?
- What do you define as an untypical audience for journalism? What about a historically marginalized audience?
- How are you reaching untypical audiences in unique ways?
- Why is this kind of engagement important to you?
- How do you measure success, both in terms of journalism in general and this kind of engagement specifically?
- How do you define journalism as a public service?

Appendix C:

Consent form

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how journalists are changing routines to engage communities in the news making process in new and creative ways. I am asking you to take part in this study because your information was listed on the John S. Knight Journalism Fellowships at Stanford website page. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

Study title: How journalists shift toward engaging historically marginalized communities in a digital age

What the study is about: This study will aim to discover how journalists within startup and nonprofit news organizations are engaging historically marginalized audiences, especially how they are engaging people who would not be typical or traditional readers, via in-depth interviews with journalists.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will take from 30 minutes to an hour to complete. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview for note-taking purposes. The interview will consist of questions about your job, your views on journalism and the industry at large, and how you see your role in the industry changing.

This interview is voluntary and for research purposes only. You can withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate and there will be no penalizations at all.

Risks and benefits:

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

There are no benefits to you outside of the opportunity to share your expertise with others, in the hopes that this research project can contribute to journalists. There will be no compensation.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored on my personal computer, which will be locked in an office or in my home at all times. If I tape-record the interview, the audio recording and interview data will be kept for seven years after the study has been completed.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Caroline Bauman. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 479-841-0862 or carolinebmn@gmail.com. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board

(IRB) at the University of Missouri at 573-882-9585 or access their website at https://research.missouri.edu/irb/. You can also email them at irb@missouri.edu.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.