

Chapter 35

The Gamification of Journalism

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ABSTRACT

Traditional news outlets are on the decline and journalism has embraced digital media in its struggle to survive. New models of delivering news to the public are being explored in order to increase the levels of readership and user engagement. The narrative of this chapter focuses on the future of journalism and media, and the potential benefits and dangers of gamifying journalism. Since gamification is a new trend, a thorough look at the intersection between the enhancements of public mobility, the digitalization of news services, and the engagement of gamified systems can bring better understanding of future channels of reading news to the users, to researchers, and to the industry. This chapter aims to bridge the gap between gamification as an emerging practice in news distribution and yet a vastly uncharted area or research.

INTRODUCTION

No group of young people has ever had more choices to make regarding — or more control over — its own information, amusement and politics. Rock spawned one culture; TV, another; movies, hip-hop, computers, video games, still more. (Katz, 1993)

The previous quote is as relevant now as it was more than two decades ago. What Katz probably did not foresee is the converging use of media that has led to an entanglement of information, amusement, and politics. In the current media landscape the processes of mediatization, commercialization, and individualization (Lundby, 2009), spurred by the ubiquity of mobile technologies and pervasive connectivity (Dimmick, Feaster, & Hoplamazian, 2010; Van Dijck, 2013), have derived in a myriad of news services competing for the audience's attention.

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As newspapers' sales plunge and traditional news outlets decline, new models of delivering news to the public are being explored in order to increase levels of readership and user engagement. Gamification is one of these new models news outlets have adopted to engage young audiences, sparking the need for a new strand of research on the intersection of journalism and gamification (Ferrer Conill, 2014).

The narrative of this chapter focuses on the future of journalism and media, and the potential benefits and dangers of gamifying journalism. Since gamification is a new trend, a thorough look at the intersection between the enhancements of public mobility, the digitalization of news services, and the engagement of gamified systems can bring better understanding of future channels of reading news to the users, to researchers, and to the industry. This text aims to bridge the gap between gamification as an emerging practice in news distribution and yet a vastly uncharted area of research.

This chapter departs by discussing two of the conflicting logics of the journalistic field: the professional logic, which regards audiences as citizens; and the commercial logic, which regards audiences as consumers. Based on these tensions, it continues addressing the aims of applying gamification to news services, offering an account of potential benefits and pitfalls of using game-mechanics in order to engage young audiences. We aim to provide a nuanced view of the gamification of news beyond the commercial determinism and the democratic functionalism of journalism (Schudson, 1997). Next, we discuss how these new configurations of game-like news fit within the current context of media convergence, new journalism formats, audience reconfigurations, setting the context on which digital game elements can be formally applied to news. For this reason we analyze how game elements are currently implemented in journalism, to then discuss other ways to create gamified interfaces that have the potential of enhancing the democratic and civic purposes of journalism while engaging younger users, or center the news experience about the games, and not the news. The chapter concludes providing a set of challenges and needs for research, intending to propose an agenda for future research on gamification's place within journalism.

THE CONFLICTING LOGICS OF THE JOURNALISTIC FIELD

Journalism and the production of news is not any odd work, in fact it is not even any odd information or media work. To properly understand and relate to how and why journalism is produced in a meaningful theoretical and practical way, one must consider its place within society and democracy. Journalism's *raison d'être* is, in short, to serve the public with qualified information so that people can make informed decisions in their capacity as citizens holding those in power accountable (Cushion, 2012; McNair, 2000). This is the ideal and the high ground journalists and their protagonists claim when news media and journalism are under attack. But it is also, more importantly, an established empirical fact that the media environment and the contents of news have effect on how informed and engaged people are in society (Aalberg & Curran, 2011; Scheufele, Shanahan, & Kim, 2002; Shaker, 2014). In short, media matters and contributes to the quality of democracy. Journalism's status in society is also recognized formally as countries such as United States and Sweden regulate it, as the only commercial operation, in their constitutions.

Another equally important and conflicting dimension in the discourse about journalism, news media, and their function in society, is that they regularly fall short of their own standards and deliver false, irrelevant or inaccurate information. This is due to a number of different factors and obstacles such as

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