

**“Let’s Fix the News. Together.”**

# How Newsvoice Capitalizes upon Creativity

*A Study by*

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## Introduction

This study focuses on the ways in which *Newsvoice* capitalizes upon its creativity. Founded in 2017, Newsvoice is a crowdsourced news app with a mission: It wants to burst the filter bubbles created by social media; it also wants to limit media bias and the spread of fake news. More importantly, it wants to do so “together” with its users/news readers. In order to address media bias, Newsvoice offers its readers an immediate overview of how different media report the same news story based on their political inclination or geographical location. Like many news aggregators, the company uses an algorithm to scan hundreds of sites and aggregates the latest news in its app; however, it allows its user community to decide what stories should be highlighted, to cross check for objectivity and accuracy of the news, and to add new sources.

Along with creativity, the company touches several contemporary topics and debates present in the field of communications studies and the creative industries—such as aspirational labor, the mediatization of journalism, digital transformation, audience rights, and media bias.

Our research is anchored around the following research question: How does Newsvoice capitalize on creativity? In order to answer the question, we developed the following operational questions:

1. What is creativity, and how is Newsvoice creative?
2. If Newsvoice is trying to “fix the news,” what is it that needs to be fixed? (in what context is Newsvoice positioned?)
3. Where does Newsvoice stand in relation to similar services?
4. What types of audiences would benefit from Newsvoice and how can the company acquire them?

We begin by presenting our conceptual and contextual framework; this is where we define creativity, the creative industries, and capital as well as discuss the status quo of news production and consumption (the context in which our chosen company, Newsvoice, was created and within which it operates). We then present the methods with which we conducted our study. This is followed by our study findings: a description of Newsvoice as a company and how users

experience the app, the experience of volunteer users, and our news consumer survey. Throughout these sections, some of our operational questions begin to be answered. The next section is where we discuss our results and answer the remainder of our operational questions—thereby answering our main research question. Finally, we discuss how Newsvoice can move forward and develop, providing our recommendations for the company.

## Conceptual and Contextual Framework

In this section, we provide definitions to the two key concepts relating to our research question: Creativity and Capital. We then describe the status quo of news media and news consumption to provide some context for our chosen industry.

### Creativity

*Creativity is extra/ordinary, original and fitting, full-filling, in(ter)ventive, co-operative, un/conscious, fe<>male, re . . . creation. (Rope 52)*

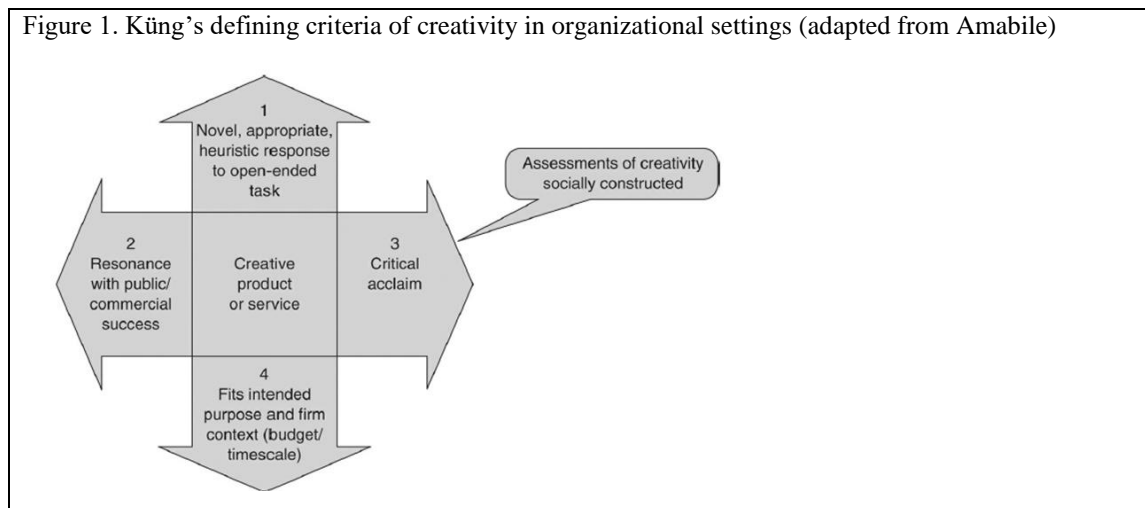
In his 2005 book *Creativity*, Rob Rope notes that it was not until the 1940s that the abstract noun *creativity* became current and in general use. Rope suggests that creativity as a concept is a “modern” Western product of the mid-twentieth century—a “response to the problems associated with rapid social and technological change” of the time (19). In his definition of creativity, Rope includes *invention* and *intervention*: in the sense that creativity brings about inventions (things as well as ideas) that represent interventions in the status quo (62). Further, Rope emphasizes the collaborative nature of creativity—in terms of people working and interacting with each other and interacting with technology, whether directly in shared time and space or indirectly at a distance (65–70). Both the idea of creativity being a response to problems and its collaborative aspect are of particular interest in our study.

Furthermore, creativity is one of the issues Lucy Küng discusses in *Strategic Management in the Media*. Küng’s work deals specifically with the media industry, and she addresses creativity and its importance within this context. To define creativity in a product/service, she presents four criteria:

1. It is original, novel or unique and solves a challenge that is open-ended, where there is no clear straightforward path to an acceptable outcome.
2. It resonates with the public and/or finds commercial success, and, by extension, it is useful, has value and/or brings benefits to others. . . .

3. It receives critical acclaim. ... definitions of creativity also include assessments from industry insiders and experts. A useful metric in this regard for the media industry is industry awards.
4. Finally, ... in order to be creative a product must help the organization meet its strategic objectives and work within available budgets and timeframes. (Küng 167)

While rope's intervention aspect is present in Küng's criteria (the first one), his focus on cooperation and the involvement of people is missing. Thus, to complete the picture, we can add collaboration as the fifth criterion in our definition of creativity.



John Hartley sees creativity as a universal and constant human attribute that occurs whenever humans make or think new things. He then confirms the collaborative aspect of creativity but ties it to industry, stating that the *industry* in *creative industries* is what “links that human attribute with large-scale organized enterprise” (4). Creativity then is the “heart” in this context, and it is what creates economic wealth and brings about social renewal, in Hartley’s view, but it does so within the sphere of the creative industries. So, what are the creative industries?

## The Creative Industries

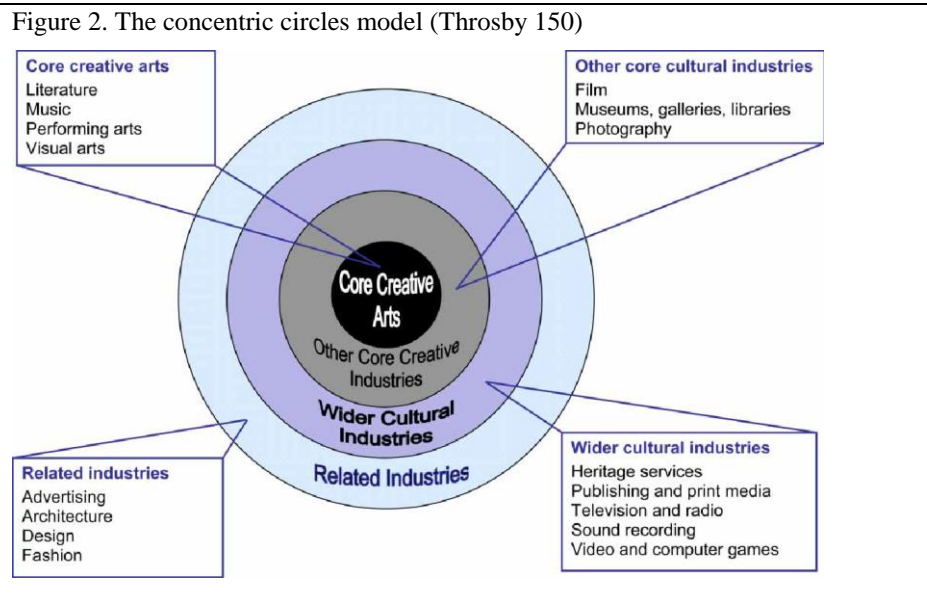
Hartley suggests that the *creative industries*, a relatively new concept, evolved from the “creative arts” and the “cultural industries” and was also influenced by changes to the concepts of “the consumer” and “the citizen” (5). The term emphasizes two “truths” in the post-industrial society,

according to Hartley: that creativity is “the core of ‘culture’” and that it is “produced, deployed, consumed, and enjoyed quite differently” now that it is commercializable (Hartley 18).

Thus, with the growth of the IT sector in the 1990s, policymakers were eager to gain and be able to evaluate economic benefits from the various industry sectors that came to be “the creative industries” (18). The term became prominent and was given policy in 1998 in the United Kingdom, when a Creative Industries Taskforce (under the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport [DCMS]) published the *Creative Industries Mapping Document*. The document provided a definition of the creative industries as “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent which have a potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (DCMS qtd. in Hartley et al. 59). The DCMS definition included thirteen industry sectors: “advertising, architecture, art and antiques, computer games/leisure software, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television and radio” (Hartley et al. 59).

Rosamund Davies and Gaudi Sigthorsson reference the DCMS definition and describe the creative industries as “a combination of *individual creativity* and *the mass-production of symbolic cultural goods*” (4). They see three features that connect and define all the creative industries: for an industry to be considered creative, an “input of *human creativity*” is required (1).

As previously mentioned, the creative industries combine the creative arts and cultural industries. This can be seen more clearly in the “concentric circles model” proposed by David Throsby (see Figure 2). Throsby places the creative arts at the center, while the wider circles include the cultural industries and other related industries. His placement is based on “cultural value” generated by creative ideas (Throsby 149).



While the DCMS definition is the widely accepted one, Potts et al. argue for a less “industrial” and more “market-based” interpretation of the concept that accounts for the complex and social nature of the creative industries contemporary markets. They propose a definition of the creative industries in terms of consumer choice—which is affected by the inherent novelty and uncertainty of these industries and, therefore, influenced by the choices of other people in their social network—and derived from media and communication studies, which factors the rise and importance of consumer-generated content (Potts et al. 169–170).

Potts et al.’s proposition offers a useful alternative that is applicable for creative companies (such as the subject of our case study, Newsvoice) for which the value of a product or service is indeed socially determined and dependent on individual choices and interactions.

***What about Creative-Industry Audiences (Can We Even Call Them That)?***

Hartley et al. discuss the peculiar relationship the creative industries have with their audiences, partly due to the type of market (where supply precedes demand because it offers new experiences that the public has yet to have and therefore cannot know to want beforehand) but mostly due to technological affordances that enabled passive consumers to evolve into active users or producers (12–16). Media consumers, in particular, are increasingly collaborating with other consumers and with professional media producers in the making and sharing of content



(21). They are *co-creating* value. “The value-generating media consumer is at the very core of creative industries discourse,” argue Hartley et al.; the role of the audience when it comes to generating content has become an integral part in the creative industries, not an activity performed by “hard-core fans” (21).

The role of audiences is further developed below within our specific context, where we define citizen journalism and aspirational labor. As it will be further discussed in our analysis, the value generating role of audiences is key to understanding Newsvoice capitalizes on creativity. But first, what is capital?

## **Capital**

Bourdieu identifies capital in three different categories: economic, social, and cultural. Economic capital refers to financial resources such a money, properties, or assets. Social capital is the capital that is gained through social interactions such as building durable relationships and social networks. Cultural capital is set by skills that are accumulated and learned over time, conscious or unconscious, becoming the individual’s set of tools and knowledge.

Another prominent framework on capital useful in our research is Coleman’s understanding of social capital. According to Coleman, “it is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions for individuals who are within the structure.” He further states that “just as physical capital is created by changes in materials to form tools that facilitate production, human capital is created in changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways (100). Moreover, Putman claims that

social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (19)

Social capital according to Putman is a theory of systems and pluralism focus on communities and collective agency. This is contrary to Bourdieu and Coleman who believe that social capital moves from the individual outward and therefore can be facilitated by the individual.

Building further on the concept of human capital, Becker explains, “Human capital refers to the knowledge, information, ideas, skills, and health of individuals” (3).

## **Our Context: The State of the News**

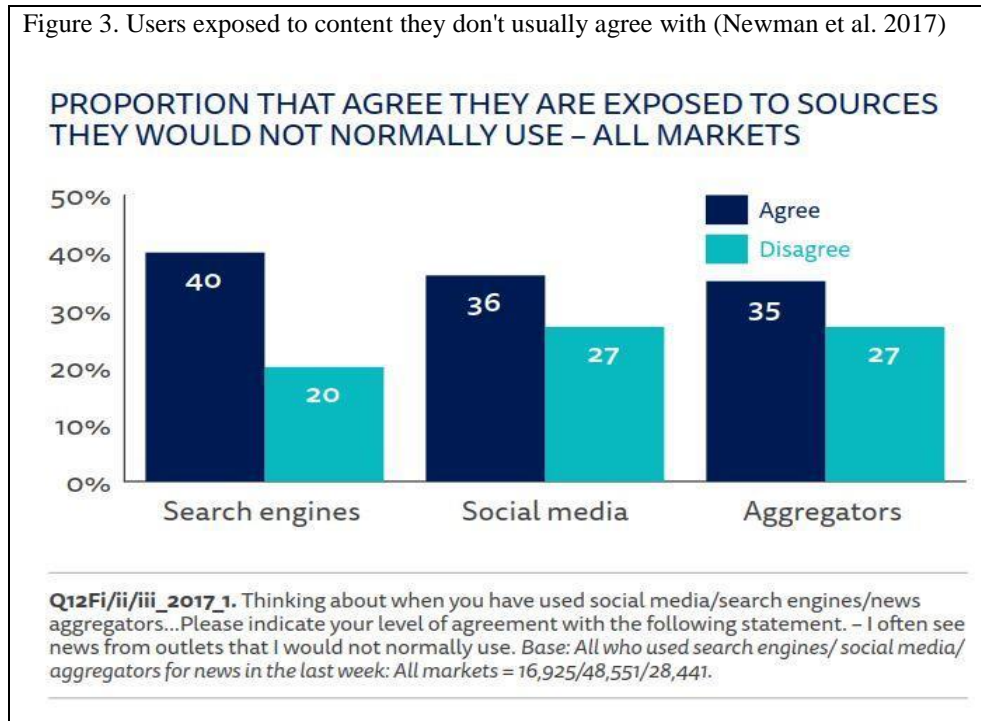
The launch of Newsvoice came at a critical moment for the status quo of journalism: Many news outlets still struggle with the challenges of the digital transformation: New technologies such as VR and Smart Speakers are giving rise to new forms of news consumption; social media has cemented its position as a source of news content, while giants like Google and Apple provide native news aggregators in their OS; and last but not least, public debate suggests that the field is experiencing an unprecedented crisis of trust (Van Kerkhoven and Bakker 20).

Reuters’ “Digital News Report” for 2017 places trust in media in the US at 53%, 43% for the UK and 42% for Australia. The analysis of six years of data shows that, in most of the 30 countries studied in the Reuters’ report, there is a “consistent pattern, with television and online news” being the most frequently accessed source, whereas “readership of printed newspapers has declined significantly” (Newman et al. 11). Furthermore, social media is the field in which the biggest change has been observed, with “over half (51%) of the US sample” claiming it as the source of their news (11). However, the authors of the report suggest that social media ought to be seen not as “something different” in the news media ecology but as “part of the everyday mix” (11).

Parallel to this growth is the role that the 2016 US presidential election played in positioning social media as a “key player”—a status that has come with issues of its own, such as “its well documented role in spreading made-up news stories” (Newman et al. 11). Only 24% of the respondents consider social media a trustworthy source of news, compared to 40% for news media; the report also found a correlation between distrust in media and “perceived political bias” (10).

Newman et al. state that news aggregators such as Apple News and Google News have “doubled in the last year” (11). This trend represents a curse and a blessing due to the fact that these aggregators rely on traditional content providers, which means that news producers have

yet another competitor to their native apps and portals. Furthermore, although “echo chambers and filter bubbles are undoubtedly real,” the report also found that users of aggregators are experiencing more diversity than “non-users” (11).



It should be noted that diversity is not necessarily a feature of aggregators since services such as Flipboard allow users to customize the topics and even the sources of the feed, meaning that coded in the affordances of the service is the possibility of users defining the boundaries of their eco chambers. User generated filters as the aforementioned one should be considered in further detail since 29% of the respondents of the Reuters study admitted to “sometimes” avoiding the news due to the negative effect it has on their mood or due to a lack of trust (Newman et al. 11).

Furthermore, Newman et al. do distinguish between aggregators that exist as “stand-alone products,” such as “Flipboard and SmartNews,” and those that allow content to redirect to the original source, such as Apple News or Google News, with the second group showing the “strongest growth” (14). However, when all access routes are taken into account, 73% of respondents under 35 use a “side-door of some kind” (14). Furthermore, it is worth noting that the report does not study the frequency with which users seek to go beyond the headline and summaries provided by social media or news aggregators.

Parallel to the growth of aggregators is the rise in the use of algorithms replacing human editors with “more than half of us (54%)” preferring algorithms over journalists as content curators, a trend that is even higher with younger users (64%) (16).

On a more positive note, the triumph of Trump came with a bump in online subscriptions (from 9 to 16%) as well as the tripling of donations. The authors announce that “most of these new payments” come from the 18 to 24 demographics, a figure that counters the prevailing narrative that young people are unwilling to pay for news services (11).

All of the above begins to answer our second operational question, what needs fixing and where is Newsvoice positioned in the context of news media? The issue is further expanded in our analysis. However, first we need to define a few relevant concepts that will aid us in our task.

### ***Mediatization of Journalism***

There is a consensus amongst researchers that journalism has been undergoing a process of mediatization (e.g., Kammer; Kunelius and Reunanen); however, what exactly mediatization entails remains a contentious topic.

Mediatization in general can be understood as a process where a certain field or profession adapts itself to the “media logic” or the way in which media works and the “forms and formats they indirectly privilege and sustain” (Kammer 145). For Kammer, the mediatization of journalism means that the field is increasingly “subordinating itself to the imperatives of the media institution and the media logic.

Kunelius and Reunanen suggest that journalism is entering the second phase of mediatization, which is characterized by the submission of what constitutes public interest to commercial logics, a saturation and polarization of news sources, a pursuit of immediacy over quality, a de-skilling and multi-skilling of journalists, a crisis of trust and an increase in audiences demands for accountability in the journalistic process.

### ***Citizen Journalism and Aspirational Labor***

Luke Goode asserts that citizen journalism could be an important factor related to social news. The concept refers to audiences that are also the producers of the news, a kind of participatory journalism where regular citizens create their own news by producing audiovisual content that

can be distributed through blogs or social media (1288). Holt and Karlsson propose that citizen journalism is a way for the public to express themselves and to present their own opinions. Citizen journalism calls our attention to aspirational labor, a sort of investment that users make in which they are willing to contribute their time for free in the hope that they will reap future benefits from it.

For Brooke Duffy, people participate in aspirational journalism because it could help them in the future with social or economic profit and career opportunities or CV building, things which on the long term could be of more value than immediate economic profits (“Amateur, Autonomous, and Collaborative”). Thus, as a form of free labor, aspirational labor could explain why audiences willing to contribute their creative output for free.

## Research Design

In order to examine on the way in which Newsvoice capitalizes on creativity, we use several methods of ethnographic research design, which involves extended observations through “participant observation, in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people and observes and interviews the group participants” (Creswell 90).

Ethnography can also be seen as a toolbox of methods that are integrated into a multifaceted methodological approach. The multitude of conceptualizations within the ethnographic research design allows us to have a multilayered insight into Newsvoice and their creative process. Furthermore, utilizing the framework given by the ethnographic design, we will be able to collect and analyze various qualitative data.

### **Research Methods**

We relied on participant observation to get a sense of Newsvoice from a user’s perspective. We conducted interviews to gather information on the company, the app, and its users/workers—gaining different perspectives and insights into its creative process. We also created a questionnaire to understand the needs and grievances of news consumers in order to confirm the motivation for creating the app and its usefulness and value for consumers.

#### ***Participant Observations***

In order for us to actively participate and observe Newsvoice, we explored their digital presence through their website, social media, and the application. Having downloaded the app on our smartphones, we were able to engage with it naturally as news readers and users, learning about the product’s interface and usability.

#### ***Interviews***

We conducted a semi-structured interview with the founder and CEO of Newsvoice, Viktor Lidholt, via Zoom. We prepared a set of questions that we informed our interviewee of prior to the interview in the hopes we would get more accurate and well thought out responses. We also

received permission to record and use the interview in our research. Our questions revolved around the creative process behind Newsvoice, its current situation, and future plans.

Having mentioned our desire to get in contact with some of the moderators volunteering for Newsvoice, Viktor Lidholt supplied us with information that resulted in two extra interviews with current moderators—active app users who do volunteer work for Newsvoice. The two moderators were Wesley, a nineteen-year-old Media Arts university student from Texas, US, and Aiden, a fifteen-year-old high school student from Australia. At the start of the interviews, we asked for permission to record, explained that we were not employees, nor were we affiliated in any manner with Newsvoice, and reminded them that if at any point during the interview they felt uncomfortable with any of their answers they could ask us to refrain from using them. They were asked about how they found the app and their own experience as users, but mainly, the questions revolved around the motivation behind their active engagement with Newsvoice.

### *Questionnaire Survey*

As a supplement to our research, we conducted a small survey on news consumption. We created an online questionnaire comprising of questions about news consumption habits, preferred news sources, and satisfaction with the state of the news. These questions were general and not tied directly to Newsvoice. Our aim was to get an idea of the general news consumption of our peers and whether the ethos of Newsvoice, fixing the news, resonated with them and they could benefit from and be counted as potential Newsvoice users.

## Newsvoice and Study Findings

This section presents the research findings based on our methodology. First, we present our chosen creative industry, a news aggregator called Newsvoice, based on the information from our participant experience with the app and our interview with its founder. Second, we provide another level of user experience based on interviews with current Newsvoice users who are also volunteers. This is followed by results from our small questionnaire (representing the target audience). Finally, we briefly compare news aggregators to use this in the analysis.

### **Newsvoice**

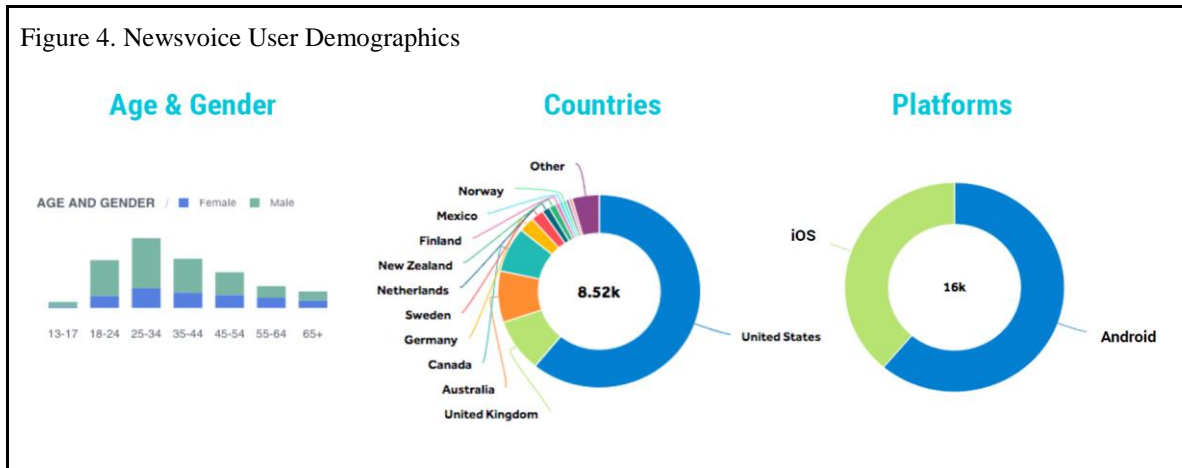
In simple terms, Newsvoice is an app that aggregates the news. It provides its users with news stories from the main US and international news outlets as well as independent media; it also shows them different perspectives by offering multiple sources for each news story. But there is more to it than that. Newsvoice does not simply provide a service, it has a mission: fixing the news ... by crowdsourcing and democratizing it. Newsvoice proclaims itself to be a “movement” and a “community” (“Newsvoice: Trending news”). The community comprises Newsvoice users who, by downloading and using the app, are no longer just news readers but part of the critical and creative process.

The company is a startup founded in 2017 by Viktor Lidholt, a former senior software engineer at Google. It is currently run by four employees (including the CEO, Viktor himself) and seventy-five volunteers, four of which act as moderators.

Although based in Stockholm, Sweden, Newsvoice offers news only in English and thus has an international audience with users mostly from the English-speaking world. They have an average of 16,000 users, with 60% from the USA and the remainder located mainly in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. The figure below, provided by Lidholt, shows their user demographics.



Figure 4. Newsvoice User Demographics



At the moment, the service is free and does not feature ads; as such, it is not generating revenue and its financing comes from venture capital. The end goal is developing a large enough audience that is willing to pay a monthly subscription to access premium features, which are still in development and were not disclosed to us.

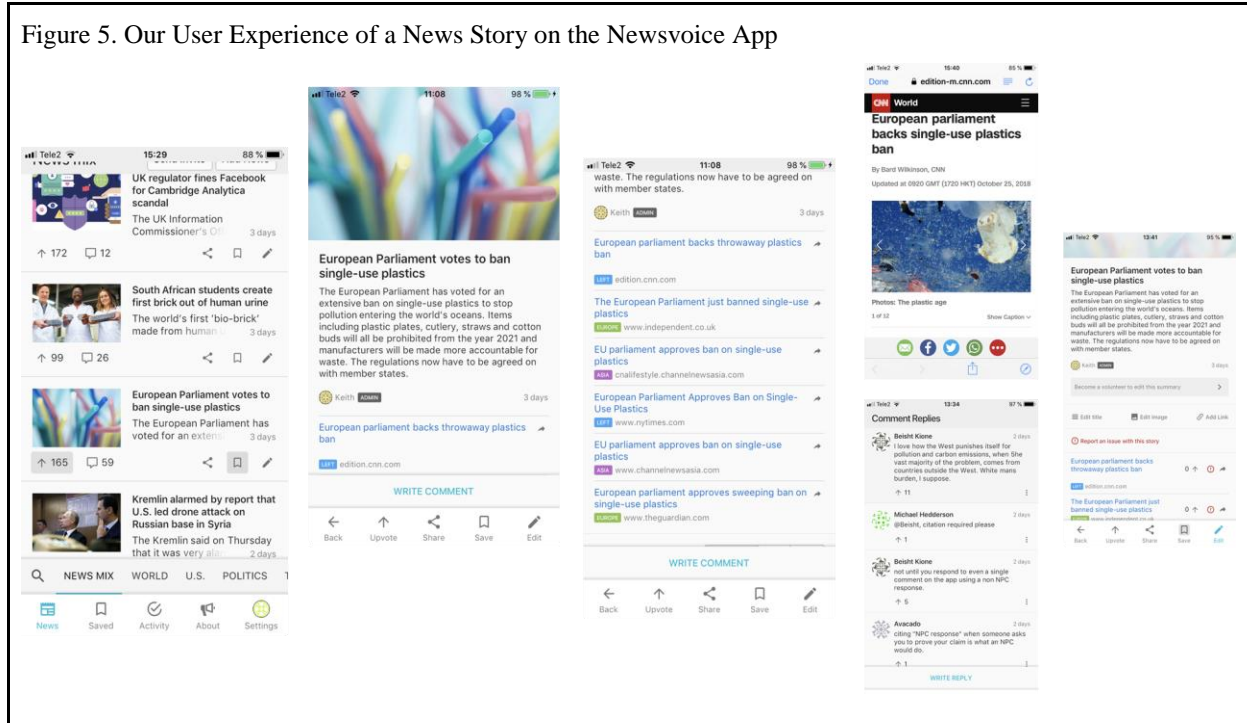
The company uses an algorithm that scans the web (a couple of hundred news sites) for news stories, analyzes the text, uploads the links, and categorizes them. Currently, the app covers six news categories—World, U.S., Politics, Tech, Business, and Crypto—and the user can customize their own feed, the “News mix” category, by selecting whether they want more or less news from each of the six main categories. It worth pointing out that although users can select the categories they are most interested in, they cannot choose the sources; thus, the affordances of the app do not allow them to build their own “filter bubble”.

Along with an “unbiased” headline and summary to a news story, the app offers links to established news sources of the story and places them on the political spectrum with tags (left, right, independent, etc.). The categorization of the sources is not done by Newsvoice but taken from established media watchdogs (Allsites.com and Mediabiasfactcheck.com). The goal here is to allow the users to gain awareness and possibly make more conscious decisions of which sources to read and trust. Users can settle for the summary or dive deeper by clicking on the sources, which redirects them to the outlets that produced said story.

“Let’s fix the news. Together.” This is the tagline the company uses to invite users. It encompasses what Newsvoice is about with a few key words. “Fixing the news” is the aim, and “together” is how it is accomplished—with the collaboration of the company and its users. Users of the app are all invited to contribute to the content: They can comment and add links to existing

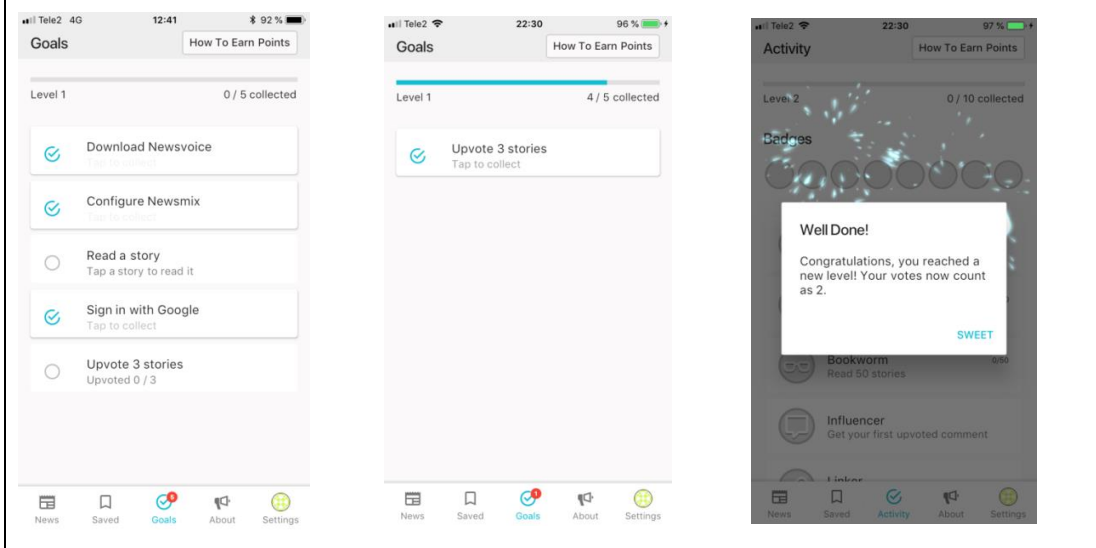
stories. More importantly, they can “Add News” by volunteering. This involves editing stories, writing headlines and summaries for new stories, or adding new links to stories. Through their interaction with the app, users will “earn points” and get “badges.”

Figure 5. Our User Experience of a News Story on the Newsvoice App



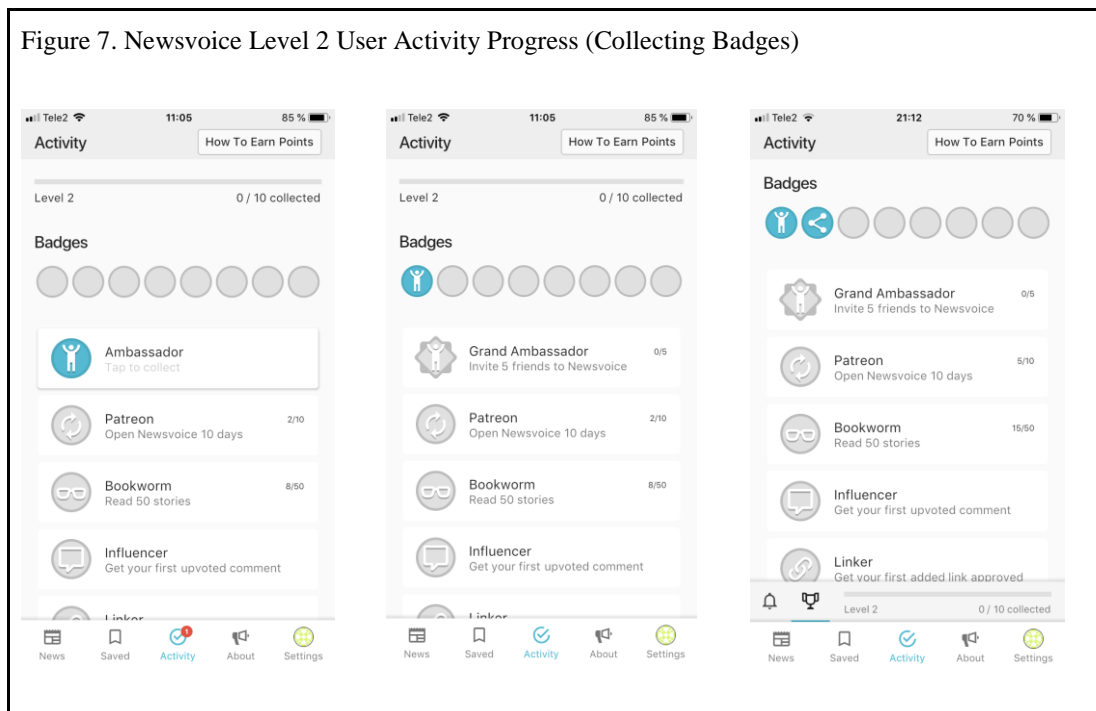
Users can keep track of their own activity on the app in the “Activity” section, where they can see their badges and the list of goals to be accomplished to earn more points and badges and get to the next “Level” (see figures 6 and 7). Points are earned by, for example, reading stories, sharing them, inviting friends to join, or performing the volunteer tasks mentioned earlier and having their work approved by Newsvoice staff and/or other moderators.

Figure 6. Newsvoice Level 1 User Activity Progress (Previously “Goals”)



Volunteers who make it to Level 5 with an approval rate of 80% or higher can then apply to become moderators. The “Rules & Guidelines” section provides volunteers and moderators detailed information on how to get their comments, sources, and summaries approved—especially concerning how to avoid bias and any form of discrimination.

Figure 7. Newsvoice Level 2 User Activity Progress (Collecting Badges)



Of course, not all users may want to be involved in the process. They may not have the interest, time, or skill to write neutral summaries and add stories, etc. In this case, readers can simply go through the news feed and read headlines and quick summaries. They can also take a look at the different sources for the story through the links provided, and perhaps add a comment or “upvote” the stories they find most interesting or important.

The “upvote” function is Newsvoice’s way of letting the readers/users decide what is important in the world of news; they get to decide what the main headlines should be by raising the stories they believe are more important to the top. This is Newsvoice’s way of “democratizing” the news. Another way is the comment section for every news story. Users express their thoughts and reactions to the news as well as engage in discussions with one another, having the ability to reply to each other’s comments. Users are asked to “be nice” when commenting as well as use sources to support their arguments. Using sources in the discussions give users an opportunity to have their comments featured; this emphasizes to the users the importance of critical thinking and credibility and helps raise the discussions to another level.

### **Interview with Volunteer Moderators**

Our two interviewees were Wesley, who has been using the app for four and a half months, and Aiden, who has been a user for four weeks. Both of them came across the app through YouTubers that focus on political commentary: Tim Pool and Bearing. Both interviewees were immediately drawn in by the concept and mission of Newsvoice. Similarly, volunteering came as a natural extension of the affordances of the app: as Wesley puts it, “all you have to do is check a box.”

#### ***Moderator I: Wesley***

In his first week, he contributed with over 30 summaries; at the same time, he was active in the comment section. When asked what motivated him to be so involved, he responded,

The comments and the community that use the app, they tend to agree with my opinion, so I thought I would rise up to the task. I felt that I would be doing the community a favor. the users come from a perspective in media that is underrepresented, and I want that perspective to have a spotlight, and I can do that as a mod

Furthermore, he felt that his political leaning, “middle-left to moderate-conservatives or conservative libertarians” were underrepresented in social and mass media. His explanation for this is that both fields are polarized and dominated by extremists of both sides that constantly “yell at each other,” whereas “the people that use the app tend to have a middle ground perspective” and take part in more informed and respectful debate. Wesley emphasized that another big source of motivation comes from wanting Moderates like himself to have a bigger spotlight and have their voices heard.

Regarding the time commitment, Wesley claimed that he does not keep track because “it’s fun... probably about 4 to 6 hours a week...that’s basically the amount of time I spend on my hobbies.”

In terms of benefiting from the volunteer work, Wesley said he has no interest in using the experience to build a CV (for a career in journalism) or obtain employment with Newsvoice. His only goal is to help the app grow because he believes that once it becomes mainstream his position as a moderator will allow him to,

influence media in a way that seems more fair to me...which is obviously subjective because there is no objective way to present the news. I just want to be able to influence the way that people see the news, and make sure that everybody’s voice is heard equally.

However, he did admit to be interested in pursuing a career in media “now that news and political opinions have become so polarized.” He also expressed interest in becoming a film director because “films can influence audiences.”

The possibility to influence the media was the dominant theme throughout our conversation, and he treated it as a goal of its own when questioned regarding what he was getting back or would like to get for his tasks as a moderator. Only towards the end, when we pushed more on the topic of reward (to the point of leading him with the question), he joked about “getting a paycheck,” yet he emphasized that it was a joke.

***Moderator II: Aiden***

Much like Wesley, Aiden considered himself to be a “moderate conservative” with “a passion in rejecting extremes on both sides.” Additionally, he sees the time spent in the app as a continuation of his normal activities:

I certainly don't view it as a chore, and if I have other things to do, I wouldn't leave them aside for Newsvoice... I check the news anyways, so that's when I do it... I don't log in at school, so I make sure it doesn't affect my life.

Since he began using the app, it has become his primary source of news. Aiden spends about ten hours a week using the app, of which “25% is spent with the volunteering tasks.

For him, there appear to be three sources of motivation: Firstly, he shares the idea that news needs fixing, so he believes in Newsvoice's mission and wants to be a part of it. Secondly, he views his tasks as a way of improving his language skills, to which he explained, “I get a sort of moral joy out of it, I see it as educational.” Thirdly, he enjoys being part of the community of users and wants to see it grow. Lastly, he gets a sense of pride out of being a moderator: “I feel it is an honor that has been bestowed, and a level of trust, and I feel I should use that responsibly.” Regarding his first source of motivation, he added that what he likes most about the app is that he can check both left- and right-wing opinions. He adds,

I find the comment section to have some of the most sophisticated reviews, with some exceptions, of news stories you find anywhere in social media. If you compare it with Twitter, you'll find that Newsvoice is often much more intelligent, whereas in twitter you see a lot of abuse.

Regarding the educational reward, he claimed not to be interested in a media career; instead, his focus is in politics. He did point out that he needs to be informed and have solid language skills for a career in politics, which is where his Newsvoice work comes in.

Relating to the third source of motivation, Aiden expects to “one day play a role in expanding Newsvoice because right now it is very USA focused... I want to be a part of making it bigger, maybe have an Australia page and help it grow worldwide.”

We explored this further and asked how he envisioned this role and whether he would like a formal job with the company, to which he replied that it is not something he is counting on or expecting:

I would take any employment offer based on its merits; if it's worth my time I would take it...but it is not something I am counting on because although Newsvoice wants to be the biggest news app in the world, we are a long way from that.

Instead, it appears that what drives him in his goal of helping Newsvoice grow is the wish to have an Australian news section:

I would like to see domestic news based on where people are logging from... We are a long way from that, but it's certainly an ambition I have, and if they would ask for help, I would be more than happy to assist in whatever way I can.

Lastly and related to the sense of pride, Aiden added that he feels a sense of responsibility towards the users of Newsvoice, not towards the company:

When I wasn't a moderator and I'd submit a summary, there usually wasn't a response for four to six hours, and I found that very frustrating. So, I do feel a sense of responsibility because I don't want that to happen to other volunteers.

## **Questionnaire Results**

A total of 24 respondents, between the ages of 20 and 46, participated in our survey.

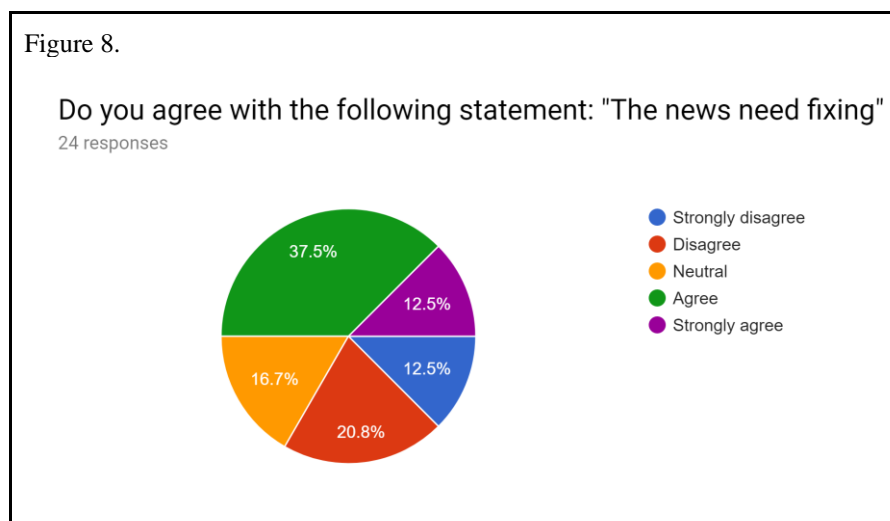
When asked about their *main* source of news and the motivation behind it, most respondents said they check online news sites (BBC, Guardian, and local sites) or use news apps for ease of access and convenience. The rest added public service radio, public service television, and physical newspapers with online sources. Two respondents said they use social media because it is "quick" and "easy," though one was apologetic about it.

The majority of respondents (71% or 17 of 24) have a preferred news source. They mention habit or being "used to" the specific source, "in-depth analysis," dislike of "capitalist

propaganda,” desire for specific political perspective (“centered” or “not too right-leaning”), desire for local news, and trust of their source’s reliability. Those who do not have a specific preference expressed lack of 100% trust, the desire to avoid “biased news,” and the assumption that “no news outlet can offer the full picture.” One said they did not have a preferred source because social media gives them the “most important/biggest/trending news” whereas a “proper news page” will have too many articles, few of relevance.

Further, 71% (17 of 24) of the respondents stated they have at some point stopped using a specific news source. The reasons included the following: “too sensational,” biased, untrue/unreliable, “fake news,” “clickbait,” lack of objectivity. One person said, “I get angry when I’m deceived.” A reason had to do with the source changing in some way (e.g., they started charging for their service, their videos offer little info considering their length, they “became Nazis”).

When asked if they felt that “the news needs fixing,” the responses were mixed (See figure below). Half the respondents agreed with the statement (9 agree; 3 strongly agree), while about a third of them did not (3 strongly disagree; 5 disagree), and the rest were neutral (4 of 24). However, it is worth noting 3 people may have mis-clicked “strongly disagree” rather than “strongly agree” (the former was the first clickable option) judging by their justifications: they all mentioned “fake news,” bias, and manipulation. If our assumption is correct, the corrected results would then show 62.5% agree with and 20.8% disagree.





Those who agreed with the statement stated that there is too much bias, lack of credible sources, and no autonomy. Some mentioned how sensationalized or dramatized the news is; a few used the word “clickbait.” One person pointed out the prevalence of bad news (as an active decision by big news agencies). Those who disagreed equated “fixing” the news with limiting freedom of expression (“All views must be heard,” said one respondent). Half of them placed the responsibility on the shoulders of the reader, saying they need to fact-check, not trust everything they read, learn what “good sources” are, and read different points of view. A couple of respondents said there has always been fake news and good and bad journalism, “something for every taste.” One person said the media landscape is “balanced” as far as they are aware. The neutral votes were either left unjustified or (like those who disagreed) said the audience “needs to learn to gather news from several sources.”

## **News Aggregation**

Newsvoice is one of many other news aggregators that select news from a wide range of sources. In order to answer our third operational question relating to the comparison of Newsvoice with other aggregators, we looked at services such as Google News, Apple News and Flipboard. We found that they all share the same concept of collecting large amount of data and news from different sources to present for the user. These apps are also developing rapidly and have a large user base.

While all the aggregators use algorithms to collect news stories, the other three services we looked at use algorithms that automatically customize news feeds depending on what the users are reading and searching. With Flipboard, the user first selects between different categories what their interest are about; furthermore, they can also choose the sources they want to see in their feed as well as remove the ones they do not want to follow. This is different from Newsvoice, where users customize their own feed in a “news mix” category while still seeing all the available categories and, more importantly, are not able to veto any news source. They are also actively a part of selecting what news gets emphasis. However, the main difference from other aggregators we identified is how Newsvoice uses free labor to build content (this will be discussed below along with further discussion of Newsvoice as an aggregator).

## Result Analysis and Discussion

### How Is Newsvoice Creative?

In our interview with Newsvoice founder, Viktor Lidholt, we asked where the idea of creating Newsvoice came from. Lidholt explained that the idea came about after he had been living in the United States for four years and working for Google; he had noticed how “broken” the news was in the country, “even more so than in Sweden,” and built an app that he wanted for himself—an app that perhaps other people wanted as well, something people would need. This reminds us of Rob Rope’s statement about creativity being a response to a problem (19). It is an *invention* that functions as an *intervention* in the status quo. It can also be considered a “response to a problem” (Küng 166), thereby achieving the first of Lucy Küng’s creative products criteria.

Judging by the number of users after only one year and having interviewed a couple of Newsvoice users who appreciated the app’s value to the point they decided to contribute, we can say that Newsvoice “resonates with the public” and “brings benefit to others,” Küng’s second criterion (167). Critical acclaim (through, e.g., awards) is the third criterion for creativity, and Newsvoice already has one under its belt: On Sweden Demo Day 2017, one of the largest events for start-ups in Sweden, Newsvoice was introduced as the winner of the Almi Invest Most Promising Startup of the Year Award (Moh).

Küng’s final criterion requires the creative product to help the organization accomplish its objectives within the constraints of their resource limits (167), and while the app is still a work in progress, it has been up and running for over a year with the limited budget and the support of all its users and the few staff members of the company. Lidholt is optimistic about the future of the app and company.

Another important aspect of creativity, our fifth criterion based on both Rope’s and Hartley’s definitions, is collaboration. As we have demonstrated above, Newsvoice relies very much on user participation and collaboration with the company in making the app work (not only by consuming but by creating the very content they are to consume).

## **Where Does It Fit in the Creative Industries?**

A start-up company, based on a creative idea, created an app—a creative product that provides a creative service. As such, Newsvoice fits well into the definition of the creative industries. As a news app, Newsvoice also falls into Throsby’s wider cultural industries that enclose a creative core in his concentric circles model (Throsby 149–150). Further, the DCMS definition included thirteen industry sectors— “advertis-ing, architecture, art and antiques, computer games/leisure software, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, music, performing arts, publishing, soft-ware, television and radio” (Hartley et al. 59)—where Newsvoice can perhaps be categorized as both “publishing” and “software.”

Furthermore, Newsvoice also relies heavily on the creative industries in the following ways: According to Lidholt, their main marketing drive is taking place in social media, not through a channel of their own (their social media strategy is currently on pause due to a lack of staff) but by product placement done by YouTube influencers. Moreover, its role as a news aggregator would not be possible without the professional journalism industry.

The above subsections comprise the answer to our first operational question. Below, we then attempt to address our fourth operational question as well as our main research question.

## **How Does Newsvoice Capitalize Upon Its Creativity?**

The growth and expansion of the of the cultural industry and the creative industry combined with the rise of technology has given rise to new effective and innovative ways to gain capital for industries; thus, the industry not only gains economic capital but also stronger and more efficient social and cultural capital as well as human capital. Newsvoice’s structure allows and welcomes anyone who has downloaded the app to have a interactive role in news production/consumption, thereby creating the possibility of gaining different forms of capital. This section shows the variety of ways in which Newsvoice gains capital.

### ***Capitalizing on Technology***

Newsvoice happens to be the very first released app built using Flutter.io—Google’s cross-platform framework. Flutter is a development ecosystem that allows programmers to use the same code in IOs and Android operating systems, a feature that not only allowed Newsvoice to

cut on development costs but also garnered media attention by being the first app to be deployed using it.

### ***Capitalizing on the Mediatization of Journalism***

A key element of the impact the Newsvoice narrative is having on its users is the crisis of trust in mainstream journalistic institutions and the mediatization of journalism. News aggregators are part of the media logics exerting pressure on journalism. The *raison d'être* of Newsvoice is the notion that mass media has resulted in a concentration of power by multinationals that have vested interests in controlling the news; thus, Newsvoice seeks to allow its users to hold the media accountable. The application is used by regular citizens who then function as supervisors of the news flow to eliminate filter bubbles.

However, it is worth noting that, as a news aggregator, Newsvoice relies on mainstream media producers, and it is also a competitor for the attention of the audiences (Kunelius and Reunanen); this places Newsvoice in a paradoxical relationship vis a vis journalism. On the one hand, it plays an important role in exposing users to different points of view and countering filter bubbles. On the other hand, it may take away potential readers from established journalist outlets without producing original news content in the traditional sense.

The relevance for citizen journalism (previously defined using Goode as well as Holt and Karlsson in our Conceptual and Contextual Framework section) in this study is that Newsvoice uses its audience as volunteers to help them create content. In this regard, we could see how Newsvoice is capitalizing on the use of citizens as a kind of journalists for the platform. It should, however, be pointed out (as mentioned above) that the application does not create original content per se (it creates original headlines and summarizes based on the research and output of established journalistic institutions and their gatekeeping role). Therefore, we did not only connect the findings to citizen journalism in its described form but also as a form of “social news,” where the user is able to use news as a social form of communication within the application (Goode 1293).

This social communication, served by the comments function, is one of the things Newsvoice also capitalizes on. A research study by Hille and Bakker points out that news media are more prone to outsourcing their commenting and participation in the news reporting to social media sites, such as Facebook or Twitter, so the quantity of comments and participation

increased since users were no longer anonymous. However, social media are not exactly known for quality debate. Aiden, one of the Newsvoice moderators, explained that this one of the main things he appreciates about Newsvoice: The comment section has “some of the most sophisticated” reviews and comments on news stories in social media. Compared with Twitter, Newsvoice is often much more “intelligent” and lacks the “abuse,” according to Aiden. This view is echoed by the second moderator we interviewed, the respondents to our questionnaire, and the Reuters news report. Once again, we find that Newsvoice capitalizes on this by marketing itself in contrast to social media.

Furthermore, we believe that Newsvoice is capitalizing on the mediatization of journalism by claiming to address some of the issues arising from it, exemplified by their slogan “Let’s fix the news. Together.” The idea of fixing news in a collaborative manners further echoes Goode’s “social news,” or the different ways in which audiences actively participate by sharing, commenting, and rating news by mass media or other institutions. According to its founder, what differentiates Newsvoice from other apps is the role that audiences play: “what we are doing is very smart, using our readers to make the app better... I think that’s the future.” Accordingly, the role Newsvoice users play could fall under the concept of “audiences and fans as free labor.”

Social news and citizen journalism relate to the use of fans and audiences as free labor; however, they are not the same. Social news refers to an engagement where the users participate in the news and respond to them actively. The purpose for their participation could solely be a desire to showcase their views on society or to respond to the news reporting. It is therefore an important factor in a democratic process (Goode 1290). This is unlike the fans as free labor, where the audience actively needs to participate to make the concept work or for other purposes.

However, as Baym and Burnett suggest, digital labor may result in an exploitative relationship, where the producers let others do the work for which they profit. This feature is also clearly present in our case—although we would qualify the term “exploitative,” for as the moderators mentioned, they see their participation as recreational. However, Viktor Lidholt acknowledges this dimension when he says that “there are no plans to remunerate moderators, regardless of growth.”

Based on the above, we consider that there is no Newsvoice without the free digital labor of its audience; thus, we believe it is relevant to further understand the motivations behind this digital free labor, which leads us to the concept of aspirational labor (previously defined in our

Conceptual and Contextual Framework section). We believe that any analysis of Newsvoice is incomplete without further exploring the motivations of its volunteers to contribute their time, which shows how Newsvoice capitalizes and cultivates these volunteers.

### *Capitalizing on Users' Creativity*

What differentiates Newsvoice from other aggregators is the audiences' role. Baym and Burnett use the term "filter" to describe how the audience could play a role in the product lifespan by determining what happens with it (436). In the case of Newsvoice, we observe this in the way in which volunteers and moderators create the content as well as approve others' content. The affordances provided by the service also allow users to vote on news items, submit news sources, and write headlines and summaries. All of this is an integral part of the app, so it would not work without its active users.

Interestingly, our initial assumption regarding aspirational labor being a key motivation behind their participation was not confirmed; instead, we identified four common sources of motivation behind their contributions to the app: (1) A belief in Newsvoice mission, (2) a sense of responsibility and pride in being a moderator, (3) recreation, and (4) accessing an audience and feeling part of a community.

Pride and responsibility as motivation echoes empirical results of a 2014 study of the motivation behind active reddit users, in which the authors found that "reputation represent the positive recognition and credibility users can gain through their actions and participation" (Bogers et al. 335). In the case of Newsvoice, Wesley's statement that he would "rise to the task" as a favor to the community of which he is a part is illustrative. In a similar vein, Aiden expressed a sense of responsibility for the trust he has been given and said becoming a moderator feels like he was bestowed with an honor.

Regarding participation as recreation, we discovered during our observations of Newsvoice that it capitalizes on the use of gamification: how traditional game elements are used in another context such as recruitment processes or, in our case, applications (Landers et al.). In the case of Newsvoice, the application uses game elements such as a gaining points and leveling up after completing the goals set up in the application. The goals, which we compare to a game's achievement system, included tasks such as reading a number of stories, sharing stories, or upvoting them, to name a few. This results in the earning of badges and rewards for the user.

This design of the application, with its likeness to a game with its achievement system, encourages users to participate in the development of the application. The Levels also play a role in the appointment of moderators, giving users more power and responsibility over the application's content.

Moreover, regarding recreation, both moderators expressed that they did not see their tasks as cumbersome but rather as an extension of their hobbies or their existing free-time behavior. Wesley explicitly identified it as a leisure activity. Once again, this finding resonates with those of Bogers et al., who found entertainment to be “one of the most commonly mentioned effective and explicit motivations for user participation” (336).

Lastly, gaining access to an audience as a motivation for active participation was explicitly stated by Wesley, who wants to influence the way that people see the news and give others of his political inclinations (moderates) a “spotlight.” Aiden echoed similar feelings when he expressed that he liked to debate (using the comment function) with other users that have opposing views.

It is also worth noting that although aspirational labor motivations were not present—meaning neither of the moderators are doing it to get a job with Newsvoice, build a CV, or gain experience—Brooke Duffy considers that what characterizes the aforementioned expectations is that the user sees their contribution as possessing immaterial value that goes beyond economic profit (60). Both Wesley and Aiden seem passionate about Newsvoice and the idea of expanding its service, to Australia for instance (Aiden), and having a meeting point for those of varying political views beyond just the left- and right-wing views; those are the features valuable to them.

## **Who Can Benefit From Newsvoice?**

Our small survey shows that news consumers are indeed either (1) stuck in the social media bubble, (2) hovering in its periphery and affected by it, or (3) confine themselves in a different bubble—the specific news source/outlet that matches their political thinking or geographical location. This makes them the kind of audiences that Newsvoice wants to reach as part of its mission to burst the social media bubble. Those who did not use either social media or specific sources wanted to avoid “biased news” and felt that “no news outlet can offer the full picture.”

These are the kind of news readers that would benefit from Newsvoice as it would solve a problem for them.

Further, most news readers do agree with Newsvoice' proclamation that the news needs fixing because of the bias and sensationalism; accordingly, the app would offer them the bias-free re-presentation of the news. The prevalence of bad news and the control of news outlets over what the biggest headlines are or what is worth the attention was mentioned. This particular issue is dealt with by Newsvoice through the "upvote" function. The purpose is to democratize the news and allow readers to decide what is important, not have it decided for them.

Even those who did not agree that the news needs fixing indirectly showed themselves to potentially be the perfect Newsvoice users. How? For one thing, they take the status quo of news bias and polarization as a given, as natural, so the presence of different sources and perspectives for one news item would not phase them but rather agree with and cater to their "all views must be heard" and "something for every taste" attitude. For another thing, and this is the most important, most of them emphasized the responsibility of the news reader to use critical thinking, to fact check, to look for different sources and points of view—thus proving that what Newsvoice asks of its users in what many news consumers out there believe they should be doing anyway.



## Conclusion and Recommendations

In this section, we address possible weak points that Newsvoice should consider and offer potential ways of addressing them. We also offer recommendations for the company to further capitalize on their current resources.

Newsvoice has clearly struck a chord with its current audience. We believe this is due to a delicate balance between the app affordances, the user community it has attracted and developed, the resonance of their mission statement within the current political landscape, and the free nature of the service. Maintaining this balance should be the guiding principle when considering the future of the service.

A major modification of one of those elements (requiring payment) may inadvertently affect the others and cause unexpected outcomes in the relationship with and expectation of its users. Furthermore, its function as a news aggregator depends on the broader journalistic industry, which is still reeling from the growing pains of the digital transformation and may see Newsvoice as a competitor for the 18 to 24 demographic (the group experiencing the biggest growth in subscriptions).

Based in the above, we believe Newsvoice should be vigilant regarding the following sources of pressure: (1) industry pushback, (2) criticism of its use of free labor, (3) the effect of paywalls on its existing user base, and (4) maintaining its image of neutrality.

### ***The Four Pressure Points and Possible Solutions***

Newsvoice capitalizes on the mediatization of journalism, and it is a competitor to news producers. As the company grows, it is likely to garner more attention and encounter industry pushback. An example is the case of LinkedIn Pulse, a news aggregator that shot to fame in 2010 after Steve Jobs complemented the creativity of its developers; later that day, the app was removed from the Apple Store because *The New York Times* complained it infringed on its rights. There is no clear answer to this as the issue intersects with the key obstacles encountered by news outlets as they adapt to the digital era. Regardless, Newsvoice should ensure that its app does not infringe on fair usage, not only on legal grounds but also on how it is perceived by news companies.

On a related note, as Newsvoice becomes profitable, it could encounter criticism for its use of free labor—as was the case with the *Huffington Post*. However, we do not consider this to be a high risk, since the way in which Newsvoice relies on its moderators and volunteers is not nearly as labor intensive as was the case with the bloggers that helped launch *The Huffington Post*.

Another thing to consider is that many of the content providers that Newsvoice relies on are behind paywalls, so charging for Newsvoice may be perceived as a step too far as the user would still have to pay to access some of the content featured. However, it appears that the main source of value for the user base is the comparison of different headlines in order to quickly get a bird’s-eye-view of the different editorializations of a topic. In this regard, it may be worth exploring the possibility of creating a “pay what you want” (PWYW) pricing strategy (with a minimum price) coupled with a marketing narrative that strengthens the intangible value that Newsvoice provides to its users. One of the main advantages of PWYW model is that it is considered an efficient tool for penetrating new markets.

When it comes to the issue of Neutrality, we have noticed in their podcast (which is not accessible through the app and tricky to find on their website) that Newsvoice has conducted interviews with left-leaning commentators. Not giving similar attention to right-wing views can be perceived as a sign of bias by its right-leaning audience. Conversely, giving a platform to right-wing voices may be perceived as a negative feature by the left leaning audiences. We recommend that if they want to continue with interviews, they place great attention to maintaining an image of neutrality. Having accomplished that, they should make their podcasts more accessible through the app.

### ***Expanding on Current Resources***

It is clear from both our usage of the app and our interviews with the moderators that Newsvoice has developed an audience that not only is able to engage in but also enjoys polite and informed debate. Furthermore, the company has already established working relationships with influencers of various political leanings whose sponsorship of the app seems to be well-received by potential users.

Accordingly, we suggest that Newsvoice capitalizes on both resources by organizing and moderating *live debates* between its network of influencers. This can be done by relying on

existing technologies such as the live stream services provided by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Periscope. Moreover, due to the nature of their work, the network of influencers is likely to already have the equipment and experience needed to participate in such events. Not only will it expose Newsvoice to potential users, it will also serve as a way to develop its social media presence at the same time as it cements Newsvoice as a meeting place for informed debate—not only furthering its mission statement but also reinforcing the company’s image with little financial cost.

One of the definitions of creativity we came across was Potts et al.’s more “market-based” interpretation, where they account for the complex and social nature of the creative industries contemporary markets. They factor in *consumer choice* influenced by the choices of *other people in their social network* (not simply the cost and quality of a product; rather, word of mouth, trends, etc.). Part of the value is the novelty of the app itself, the knowledge it produces, and the service it provides. Mostly, the value lies with its “community” of users. The social networks to which these users are connected are the market Newsvoice needs to access even better than they already are.

In order to capitalize on their users’ social networks, Newsvoice can perhaps encourage their community of users to actively spread the word about the app on social media (since Newsvoice currently lacks the resources to do so). While this is one of their volunteer options, it is limited to the number of volunteers interested in this aspect; furthermore, while the “sharing” of stories is already part of the app’s activity list, this standard sharing of news is generic (resembles the format used by any other news outlet or aggregator) and lacks a more “personal” and genuine feel that might be more inviting and eye-catching.

Hosting a social media “takeover” by asking a celebrity or influencer to take over Newsvoice’s Twitter account for a day might be another way. Allowing users to share Newsvoice’s promo video is another option currently not available through the app itself. Moreover, hosting a competition where users create their own promo video and share it on their social media might be another way of getting users to engage creatively in spreading the message; they are also more likely to share their work with friends even if they did not win the competition.

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