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The Rise of the Talking Journalist: Human Voice, Engagement, and Trust in Live Journalism Performance

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ABSTRACT

Live journalism performances have become a rising trend in journalism to gain audiences' trust and engagement. This article examines how live journalism shows bring talking journalists into the limelight. It illustrates how audience's experiences regarding journalistic talk provide an understanding of how the idea of trust is negotiated during a performance. The empirical material includes audience surveys and interviews from the Finnish live journalism show *Musta laatikko* in 2019. By bringing together aspects from journalism studies, social psychology, and sound studies, the article demonstrates the nuanced ways audiences discuss the atmosphere of the show. Especially interesting is how audiences experienced journalist's professional competence through talk. Notably, talk as a medium was seen to reduce, in positive ways, the distance between a journalist and audience but not the trust between them. Finally, the article demonstrates how live journalism and live talk can provide audiences with much-welcomed algorithm-free and full-concentration possibilities to consume journalism.

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Introduction

Along with the post-truth era, which has challenged journalism's normative vision as a critical operator in democratic public life, the field has also undergone significant changes in form, content, revenue generation models, and connection building with various audiences. With these changes, the crucial question for journalism is how to develop audience engagement, transparency, and trust (Waisbord 2018; Meier, Kraus, and Michaeler 2018). As a result, several trends, namely "liveness," "experimental events," and "face-to-face performances," have emerged, indicating how journalism aims to get closer to its audience (Adams 2020). As Jake Batsell (2015, 19) argues, the reason for the public's acceptance of in-person live events is strategic for traditional news organizations: by implementing such events, they aim to engage audiences, raise visibility, build community, create newsworthy editorial content, and find new revenue models amid a fast-changing media environment.

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However, live journalism, which ranges from single performances to entire festivals, is a relatively new and heterogeneous phenomenon. Its conceptualization varies greatly. For instance, Christine Larson (2015) calls these performances “live publishing,” while Catherine Adams (2020) describes them as “news on stage.” In-person events can also include anything from news quiz nights to political forums hosted by journalists (Batsell 2015, 19) or theater performances based on journalistic reporting, which Ori Tenenboim and Natalie Jomini Stroud call “enacted journalism” (2020, 713). Moreover, the term “live journalism” is sometimes used by media companies to describe any event where journalists talk or interview people in live events (Lyytinen 2020, 10). In comparison, Jaakko Lyytinen (2020, 10), one of the founders of the live journalism show called *Musta laatikko* (“Black Box”) examined in this article, characterizes live journalism shows as *productions* in which journalists tell “true stories” to live audiences.

Live journalism shows are typically organized by groups of journalists or media companies. Generally, the audience does not know beforehand the names of the speakers or the topics of the speeches. Usually, the speakers are journalists, but in some events, other speakers may be invited, such as social media influencers or academics. In this research, we define “live journalism” as a live event wherein journalists tell an audience news stories that have gone through the typical journalistic editorial process.

As live journalism is a relatively new field, only a few studies have examined this phenomenon. For example, Catherine Adams (2020) and Lucia Vodanovic (2020) have scrutinized live journalism using ethnographic observation. In particular, Adams’ research (2020) investigated live journalism from the public sphere’s point of view, while Vodanovic’s (2020) research focused on news content, use of sources, and the aesthetic experience of live journalism.

The question about the audience’s engagement in live journalism also gives rise to a new perspective—one that is less studied—about the actual social situation in which the speaker(s) and the audience interact with each other through aural communication, talking, and listening. Such a perspective is essential because it can be argued that the human voice is a focal component of live journalism; that is, the connection between the performing journalist and the audience is achieved through the act of talking.

Examining talk as a medium of journalistic work is not a new subject. The emphasis in research has been on broadcast talk, such as talks on radio or television (see, e.g., Scannell 1991), and, more recently, on podcasts (see, e.g., Lindgren 2021). However, in today’s media scene, a talking journalist “performing” in front of a live audience is a novelty, and in live journalism, the journalist’s position differs significantly from that of the talking journalist in traditional broadcast media. Therefore, in this article, we focus on the role of talk in a live journalism event from a contextual perspective.

As a starting point, we take Adams’ (2020, 2) view, according to which face-to-face journalism can help reestablish its status. This requires, according to Adams, the re-examination of the concept of the “public sphere” introduced by Jürgen Habermas ([1964] 1974) by overcoming the idea of “rational argument” as the only option for journalism. Consequently, she suggests looking at the physical public space where a community is brought together to explore the truth of a shared experience, that is, where the public can have a critical relation to power. These gatherings can embrace orality, visibility, and the print medium (Adams 2020).

Based on Adams' viewpoint, we examine the audience's insights and interpretations about a talking journalist and how these interpretations provide understanding about their relationship to journalism. In turn, this can lead to debates on how aurality can play a part in building audience engagement and, eventually, trust in journalism. As a theoretical–methodological frame, we utilize the social psychologist concept of the atmosphere by Erving Goffman (1963, 1981), focusing on analyzing the nature of social gatherings. However, we extend this perspective with sound studies research that emphasizes the contextual analysis of sound (Sterne 2003). As empirical material, we used data collected in autumn 2019, comprising interviews and survey answers from spectators of a live journalism show called *Musta laatikko* ("Black Box") organized by *Helsingin Sanomat*, the largest subscription newspaper in Finland.

From Text to Audio

As a rule, the history of journalism has been understood as the history of written text. The starting point of journalism, which dates back to as early as sixteenth century Europe, can be linked to the birth of gazettes and handwritten newsletters, although Chalaby (1998) presented journalism as a discourse and profession started the second half of the nineteenth century.

Despite the secondary, and even neglected, role of orality and aurality in media studies, the historical significance of (public) speech has been highlighted in the literature. For example, Cristopher Joseph Westgate (2013, 997–998) has argued that the history of journalism goes back to speech and songs in ancient Rome, where deaths, rumors, and other public matters were announced accompanied by bells, drums, and other musical instruments in local gathering places. Similarly, Andrew Pettegree (2014, 38, 135–139) has highlighted how in Medieval society, particularly in Protestant Northern Europe, the sermons were the places to hear the news. On the whole, the relationship between orality and textuality is historically complex; as Pettegree (2014, 372; also, Moon 2020) states, in the mid-fifteenth century, the written media did not develop in a vacuum but entered existing infrastructures and conventions of oral communication. A good example of this is news ballads, a combination of orality and textuality. As Una McIlvenna (2016) has pointed out, it was the performativity of news ballads that played an important role; in Early Modern Europe, in the time of low literacy rates, singing the news in the streets with melodies that people could sing along was the most effective way of circulating the news. From this point of view, the town criers can be considered as the historical ancestors of modern live journalism (Adams 2020).

Similarly, the political theater in the twentieth century, and especially the The Federal Theatre Project's (FTP) "Living Newspaper" in 1935 in New York, has been presented as models for live journalism show's where journalists and theater workers staged performances based on current events (Sillesen 2015; Adams 2020).

Radio, with its new technology and the birth of broadcasting media, broke the monopoly of written journalism. According to Conboy (2004, 188), radio was the first major technology to shape the new national public in the twentieth century being the primary electronic entertainment medium in nearly every home. It served various functions providing consistent source of news, information and entertainment for so-called "enlightened public" (Nyre 2008). Lars Nyre (2008) has stated, that as a paternalistic

voice, radio was holding nations together, also in the times of crises. Its capacity to enter private spaces and speak as one person speaks another, highlighted the significance of audio (Nyre 2008).

However, it is possible to argue that audio media finally made its headway at the beginning of the twenty-first century with the development of digital platforms and mobile devices. Since then, sound has become a trend in the multimedial media landscapes. Especially podcasts have experienced the rapid rise of success. If radio brought the audience together, experiencing the events simultaneously through the radio waves, podcasts provide more individual medium: they are listened on-demand and alone, and in them, human voice is speaking to one listener at a time. Therefore, it can be argued that podcast listening is an active choice compared to radio channel surfing (Marx 2015). Siobhan McHugh (2014) attributes the reason for the current audio storytelling boom in the easiness of digital audio production and consumption: it provides an ideal format for communities to tell their own stories without resorting to professionals' help and storytelling traditions (McHugh 2014, 142).

Similarly, journalistic events such as live journalism shows have emerged as a rising medium for live talk in recent years. Pop-Up Magazine, the first live journalism show in history organized in 2009 in San Francisco, continues to produce new shows still today. This show aims to bring storytellers—from podcasters to documentary filmmakers—to the same stage to tell unpublished "true stories" in front of live audiences (Lyytinen 2020, 6, 13). As Lyytinen states (2020, 14), the popularity of Pop-Up Magazine is part of the public speaking renaissance in 2000s America, together with TED Talks and live shows linked to podcasts, such as *This American Life*.

Audience Engagement and Live Journalism

Making engagement the core issue of journalism is often argued based on the importance of understanding and meeting the needs of audiences in the post-truth era (Nelson 2021, 2351). Broadly understood, "audience engagement" basically refers to "exchanges between journalists and audiences" (Belair-Gagnon, Nelson, and Lewis 2019, 558). However, as a journalistic principle, it is understood in the literature in highly different ways. For instance, in the digital era, engagement is often measured by minutes or clicks from online audience metrics (Nelson 2021, 2353). In addition, audience engagement is defined as "the level of activity of audience behaviour" (Napoli 2011, 91), "the way of creating a community" (Kennedy 2013), "the collection of experience of media users that makes them "use" the media brand" (Malthouse and Peck 2011, 4), "the degree to which a news organization actively considers and interacts with its audience in furtherance of its journalistic and financial mission" (Batsell 2015, 7) or "a focus on, respect for, and enthusiasm about the role of the audience" (Mayer 2011).

Adams' (2020) and Vodanovic's (2020) approaches provide different and thought-provoking perspectives on audience engagement by highlighting the complex and often affective relationship between journalists and audiences. In particular, Adams' analysis of the significance of the theater and its ability to highlight "local, immediate, live and meaningful," and allow the audience to be part of the "action" and of change (2020, 6) raises a question of how to understand the nature of interaction and the role of different sensory modalities in it.

Vodanovic (2020, 13), meanwhile, suggests that live events enable an audience to engage with news at a slower pace, thus providing an understanding of journalism production and the space where such events take place. She further highlights an aesthetic point of view when talking about engagement, illustrating it as offering “a particular sensibility to the audience, who is partaking and also creating the event” (2020, 4). Both authors, therefore, discuss the importance of the multisensory experience when achieving audience engagement.

The question about audience engagement in live journalism is closely linked to the question of trust, and as Adams highlights, it is important to “regain public trust” “at a time of low credibility” in journalism, when the Internet and the power of algorithmic intelligence increase people’s experiences of isolation and atomization (2020, 1, 5). In her analysis of two live journalism events, she illustrates how live stage performances give way to the audience to experience “behind the scenes” of journalistic work, which, in turn, enhance the experience of trust and credibility. In this way, trust is conveyed primarily through interaction, revelation, and proximity; the content shared in a live event enables an audience to view journalists as humanized professionals with integrity (Adams 2020, 10). Notably, the trust built in a live event also affects audience members’ feelings of trust toward the media after an event (2020, 11).

In summary, Adams’ and Vodanovic’s perspectives regarding live journalistic events and their roles in promoting engagement and trust broaden the Habermasian idea of the public sphere. For Adams, this is an explicit goal: she argues how theater, especially as a performative mode, has the potential to develop a public sphere into a space where critical discussions “can, but do not have to, lead to change” (Adams 2020, 2). The encounters between journalists and the audience have a crucial role in this space.

In her article, Adams uses the concept of the “atmosphere” referring to the affective stance of the encounters. In the current work, this view serves as a starting point through which we analyze journalistic talk and talking. Traditionally, the study of talk has been classified under the field of communication, but here, we have chosen the perspective that brings together angles from both social psychology and sound studies. This is because we argue that journalistic talk in live journalism is an aural phenomenon that brings forth both talking and listening in space and place. Moreover, we believe that it provides a fruitful way to examine encounters between journalists and audiences, that is, how audiences discuss and reflect journalistic practices and its institutional frames. Thus, our perspective continues Adams’ approach but highlights in more detail the roles of talk and listening and how both modes highlight the perceptions and expectations associated with the journalistic profession. Based on these findings, it is possible to reflect further on issues of engagement and trust in live journalism.

Talk—Fostering Engagement and Trust in Live Journalism

In research, the affective stance of social gatherings is often called an “atmosphere” (de la Fuente and Walsh 2021, 215). The concept of an “atmosphere” highlights the sensorial elements and the embodiment of interaction instead of approaching it as instrumental or simply descriptive. Thus, the concept addresses similar aspects that Adams (2020, 14) considers as crucial elements of news on stage. The idea of atmosphere derives mainly from Erving Goffman (1981, 166), who saw that face-to-face undertakings

“succeed or fail as interactions in the degree to which participants get caught up by and carried away into the special realm of being that can be generated by these engagements.” In other words, Goffman is interested in how people interact in gatherings, how social roles are negotiated, and how they give way to collective affects, which are not entirely reducible to the individual bodies from which they emerge (Anderson 2009, 80). Goffman also highlights how, while listening to the speaker, participants open themselves for engagement: they turn their minds to the talk and their eyes to the speaker. This encourages the development of a “group atmosphere” and “we-rationalale” (1963, 95–98).

In journalism research, the concept of the atmosphere has been used to some extent. For example, in her media aesthetic analysis on on-screen journalism, Marina V. Zagidullina (2020) examined how especially technical choices can be used to create a certain atmosphere that could affect users’ actions, for example, donating money to charity after seeing a story.

The concept of atmosphere naturally brings forth the roles of listening and talking in the performance because, as Gernot Böhme (2017, 140–141) emphasized, voice is an atmospheric presence of someone, and as an atmospheric presence, voice is felt in affective sharing (*Teilnahme*), thus affecting listeners’ mood. However, Goffman also argues that speaking and listening are not merely auditive actions and that other senses, especially sight, are essential (1981, 129–130). Goffman’s ideas have been brought up in sensory studies, for example, by Phillip Vannini, Dennis Waskul, and Simon Gottschalk (2012), who noted how Goffman wanted to focus on the “nonverbal dynamics of facework” and how “a social order is emphasized in talking by important sensations and non-linguistic cues” (Gottschalk 2012, 47), i.e., they are important in creating an atmosphere.

At the same time, understanding the concept of atmosphere calls for perspectives from the field of sound studies. As mentioned previously, the history of journalism has generally been studied based on the history of written text. However, the “sensory turn” accelerated by multimedia environments has led to a break from the unreflective visual epistemology (Bull 2019) and the primary role of text. The approach has roots in history: in the 1960s Marshall McLuhan (1964) and his student, Walter J. Ong (1982), already argued how different media technologies served as extensions of our senses and how the rise of electronic media led to the return of orality and the development of the so-called “acoustic space.” Later, sound scholar Jonathan Sterne (2003) has criticized the ideas of McLuhan and Ong for audiovisual litany, which, through dichotomies, maintained the ocularcentric state of the world. He further argues that audiovisual litany idealizes hearing (and, by extension, speech) and overlooks the complex interaction of the senses.

Sterne’s approach highlights the contextual understanding of sound, that is, how it is entangled with space and place as a part of sensory life. Thus, talk and listening offer a perspective through which the relational and situational aspects of social interaction can be analyzed. The following analysis focuses on the different aspects of how the professional role of journalists is understood and experienced in live journalism. The analysis then resembles the “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of live performances and how trust in journalism is negotiated at the microsociological level.

Data and Methods

The research data consist of interviews and surveys gathered among the audience of *Musta laatikko*, a regularly organized live journalism show conceptualized by the Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*. All performers are staff writers or photographers, representing a noteworthy difference from many other live journalism shows, such as those examined by Adams (2020) and Vodanovic (2020). The journalists performing in *Musta laatikko* prepare their speeches with the help of the editorial team and a speech coach. In the show, the journalists tell news stories accompanied by possible audiovisual elements on the screen, props, or guest performers. An intermission separates the two halves of the show. The shows are organized in a theater hall with a traditional theatrical setting within a darkened auditorium.

In *Musta laatikko*, as in several other live journalism productions, the audience cannot participate actively during a performance, but they can meet the journalists after the show in the theater hallway (Lyytinen 2020).

The speeches cover a variety of topics, from politics to science and sports—anything that could be published in *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper. New productions are typically produced twice a year and performed for sold out audiences (Lyytinen 2020).

The data used in this research were collected in autumn 2019 among the audience of the 14th production of *Musta laatikko*. In this particular production, the speeches covered the following themes: (1) the reform of Finland's social and healthcare system, (2) what makes criminal gang members join the gang, (3) living as a widow, (4) the Finnish rap music scene, (5) a traffic plan of Helsinki from the 1960s, (6) the esoteric influences in early twentieth century Finnish art, (7) the day a correspondent based in Moscow was called to cover the flight MH-17 in Ukraine, and (8) pictures of Finland.

The data were originally gathered for *The Power of Live Journalism* research project by the first author of this article, with the objective of learning what aspects the audience generally values in *Musta laatikko*. While answering, the respondents and interviewees did not know that the data would also be used for research primarily focused on voice and talk, but the interview consent form and the survey form included a notion of using the data in possible further research. The interviewees were asked about how they found journalists' performances at the stage and "how they found their personal way of performing and talking." This question included the presumption that there was a personal speaking style, which was considered in the analysis by excluding answers only agreeing the presumption. However, the matters of voice, speaking, and performing were all widely addressed in answering to other questions, too.

The possibility of completing the survey forms was organized after the show. The interviewees were recruited during the intermission, after the show or by calling them afterward, based on permission given in the survey. The interviews were conducted for a maximum of seven days after the interviewees saw the show. The data corpus consisted of 17 semi-structured interviews and a survey ($N = 510$). The ages of the survey respondents altered between 13 and 85, median age being 52 years. 27 percent of the respondent were 60 years or older. However, *Musta laatikko* has been noted to attract "even the most hard-to-reach group of 15-year-olds" (Lyytinen 2020). Moreover, more than 73 percent of the respondents were women and 26 percent were men. A total of 60 percent of the respondents were first-time spectators of *Musta laatikko*. Among the 17

interviewees, eight were 20–39 years old, four were 40–59 years old, and five were 60 years or older. Eight of the interviewees were first-timers, three had seen two to four productions of *Musta laatikko*, and six had seen more than five productions.

The interviews started with an open question wherein the interviewees could share anything they had in mind about their experience with the *Musta laatikko* performance. The question set asked of everybody included themes, such as experienced emotions, credibility, and different performance aspects (e.g., performing journalist, visuality, rhythm, and topics). The general remarks about the data corpus are published in *The Power of Live Journalism: A Handbook* (2023).

In addition to talk-related materials from the interviews, the data set chosen for this analysis included 76 answers for the survey's open question, wherein the respondents were asked to describe what worked or did not work in terms of how journalism was presented in the *Musta laatikko* performance they had watched. The obtained data were analyzed to answer the following questions:

(RQ1) How does the audience of the *Musta laatikko* live journalism show describe the talking journalists and the effects of talk on their experiences with live journalism?

(RQ2) How can these experiences be seen to create a unique atmosphere that enhances audience engagement with journalism?

Qualitative data-driven content analysis was conducted with the help of the data analysis tool Atlas.ti. Audience engagement was chosen as a concept of interest after reading the data corpus and the voice-related data. Afterward, the data were coded and categorized.

Findings

Listening: Creating an Atmosphere Through Presence and Interaction

Listening to live speech was generally seen as a pleasant experience. Listening was often mentioned, together with following the performer's gestures and stage presence, as "seeing and hearing" the journalist. Encountering the performer in a theatrical setting where the audience was in silence, in a darkened auditorium, and the performer was on stage under the spotlight aroused the feeling that "the journalist is talking directly to me."

Theater space also created the possibility for focused listening, which allowed the spectator to "get more out of the topic." This also created an atmosphere of shared experience such that the stories and emotions were felt to be experienced together with the performer and the other members of the audience. Furthermore, the feeling of direct connection was enhanced by small gestures. For example, one of the interviewees described how the journalist who took his glasses on and off while also looking at the audience and the notes in turn, gave the spectator "a feeling that he is really talking to us, the audience." Sharing the same space with the audience, the performers were seen as sharing "something from their true selves and putting themselves out there." The impression was affected by the tone of voice, speaking style, and stage presence.

The interviewees were asked to compare the live journalism experience with their consumption of other types of journalism, such as watching news on television or reading news articles online or from a newspaper. For example, one interviewee described

being a prisoner of his own habits when it came to following the news; even though he wished to learn about new things, he found himself reading about the topics he already knew or liked. Similar remarks were made by several, especially younger, interviewees and respondents who thought that, in the performances, they were “made to listen to” all the speeches, because unlike listening or watching audio or video news content online, the speeches could not be rewound back to listen to them again or forwarded to skip content. This was mentioned as a positive aspect, as it gave the audience the possibility of being open to topics that were unfamiliar to them or those that they would not have otherwise chosen.

Several participants also appreciated the fact that information about the topics and speakers was not available beforehand. Some mentioned that they did not even want to have the program notes at the theater, as it could create for them presumptions of the speeches; instead, many participants widely described as enjoyable the experience of listening to the speeches with an open mind. The participants also mentioned that the audience, who was free from presumptions, gave “the journalist a possibility to speak.” This, in turn, opened up the possibility of surprising the audience, especially when “a topic I thought would be boring ended up being one of the most impressive experiences of the show.”

The presence of the journalist was also seen to enhance the participants’ feeling of trust; it was widely stated that seeing and hearing the journalist gave extra credibility to the journalism of *Musta laatikko*. Only two interviewees thought that seeing and hearing the journalist did not affect the credibility of live journalism. However, they felt that it added “an extra layer of emotion,” helped to “understand [the] point of view or genre,” and “gave a perception of [a] journalist as a person.”

The Speaking Style: Balance Between Authenticity and Rehearsed Fluency

The data show two distinctive, sometimes contradictory, perspectives on speaking style: the participants highlighted both the importance of fluency and the impression of authenticity or personality in speaking style.

A personal speaking style was a widely addressed issue in the data, although it was understood quite differently. Generally, it was understood among participants as the vivid use of voice and gestures, expressivity, and the use of language that was considered “authentic” for a speaker instead of “grapholectal” or “papery” talk; These words were used to describe talk, which had a sentence structure that resembled more written than spoken language. “Using one’s own words” was a common description in the data, referring to both the content and the way of speaking being controlled by the performer. The personal speaking style was said to make the performance alive and interesting. It created an atmosphere that enhanced the feeling of engagement and helped the audience immerse themselves in the story.

The journalist, whose speech concerned flight MH-17, was mentioned as having a personal speaking style, and his speech was especially widely commented in the data. One interviewee, for example, commented that this performer “went off from the script, and that was good” because it gave a feeling that he empathized with his story. On the one hand, his performance felt especially sympathetic, enabling the audience to “come closer.” On the other hand, some respondents thought that his speaking was

characterized by fumbling; they also criticized him for exposing details about the plane crash, which was taken as “social pornography”—something that was “not needed” in a quality live journalism performance.

Another interviewee criticized the audience’s reactions to this speech, seeing laughter as offensive toward the casualties of the crash. At first, she wondered if it was the way the performer talked that made the audience react, but when asked more closely, she stated it was the audience that reacted in the wrong way, and the journalist “was just telling facts that are not funny in any way.” Another interviewee mentioned that humor in this particular speech was a result of the performer’s speaking style: “He had a self-ironic way of talking about himself, or his tone of voice and other matters conveyed in his way of telling a story were amusing.”

Another performer whose speaking style was widely commented on, and which divided opinions among the audience, was a photographer. He was especially remembered from previous shows, and his performance was said to be one that “guaranteed laughs.” For instance, in his speech about pictures of Finland, he played with stereotypes of Finnish people. The rhythm of his speech changed based on the current audience. His script included punchline types of jokes, and he even added new lines sometimes. However, the humorous style was not always liked. For example, one interviewee who experienced this kind of live journalism for the first time thought that “the standup-like style of performing was not something that was expected in journalism, and the jokes were old.”

Furthermore, the “authentic” or personal style of talking was widely discussed as a matter of trust. When talking “naturally,” the speaker sounded like their “true self” and “not like an actor who is reading someone else’s text,” which led to the idea that the performer “has nothing to hide and speaks from one’s heart.” Some participants shared thoughts that they could “notice from the face and voice whether the performer was lying.” The interviewee who most stressed the matter was particularly skeptical about trusting the written news and journalism in general and saw live journalism as more credible and trustworthy.

However, opinions were mixed about whether they considered the performers’ speaking styles as personal or not; some found that the aim “to articulate clearly” made their speaking styles “more or less commensurate.” The personal speaking style was seen to suffer if the speech sounded scripted and rehearsed, and many participants hoped for a more personal touch in the speeches.

Aside from expecting “authentic” and personal sounding talk, the participants expected to hear fluent talk. For example, the same interviewee found some speeches too rehearsed but still evaluated the performances as “good in general, since the performers had rehearsed a lot.” Some interviewees noticed a contradiction in hoping for fluent speech that did not sound like it was rehearsed. They thought that the talk they described as “unnatural” (e.g., for using grapholectal language and phrase structure that would not occur naturally in spoken language) “built a wall” between the performer and the audience. This made the participants feel that “the performer does not relate to the topic or is not truly involved,” that the performance is “somehow pre-written,” or sounded “very rehearsed,” and made one “remember this is a performance” and realize that “this is not a story told by a person, but a story rehearsed by a person.”

Interestingly, some participants also argued that fluency in speech had a positive effect on feelings of trust and credibility. They stated that the “proper use of language” and a “skilled talker with a logical structure of the speech” could make the performance both easy to follow and convincing, even on a scale that would offer the possibility of manipulating the audience.

The Journalist’s Ownership of the News Story: The Dialogue Between the Journalist as a Person and a Competent Professional

The interviewees were explicitly asked to evaluate the performers’ personal or professional relation to the topic of the speeches, but the theme was also widely addressed in answering other questions. This shows how important the audience regarded a journalist as a representative of a specific profession. In this paper, we call this aspect a journalist’s “ownership of the news story.” It includes, for example, the audience’s thoughts about each journalists’ expertise on the topic, commitment to the story, and how such commitment was felt to be displayed in the speech.

First, the participants found it necessary that journalists’ motivations, enthusiasm, and true emotions were transmitted in their voice, speaking style, and stage presence. It was noted that an enthusiastic speaker could get the audience excited, even when the topic was not interesting. At the same time, if the performer did not seem to deliver the expected emotions, this made it more difficult for the audience to become immersed in the story being presented. When the audience thought the performer was sharing “authentic” emotions, it was taken as proof of the journalist truly caring about the topic; thus, the audience was more convinced both about the importance of the matter and the truthfulness of the talking journalist.

Second, the audience respected the performers’ strong and longstanding relation to their topics and the information they shared about their work as journalists. The live performance highlighted this aspect in a particular way. Only one respondent found it strange to see the journalists performing; otherwise, it was unanimously considered a crucial element in the show that the performer talking about the topic was a journalist who was deeply connected to it and did not “only speak as ordered,” like actors or news anchors. The fact that journalists were performing was said to make “the story more alive” and attractive, bringing it closer to the listeners, evoking their emotions, and making the story feel “more personal,” both to the journalist and the listeners. Journalists opening the editorial process by sharing how the news stories were made and what they thought during the process increased the feeling of credibility gained from the stories. Journalists were generally taken as experts on their topics, and the audience wanted to hear their professional experiences and analyses of the topics with news value and even old news events.

Some interviewees noted that the journalists’ personal and professional connections to a topic were intertwined, and personal connections were especially understood in multiple ways. For some, it meant deep professional connection that came with years of motivated work on the topic, while for others, it also meant a personal life connection achieved by sharing personal experiences, opinions, or thoughts. How their speeches conveyed the performers’ personalities was also noted as a unique feature of live journalism. Several participants noted that journalists’ personalities were presented in ways that would have been impossible in written news stories and traditional broadcast journalism.

However, journalists sharing matters about their personal lives aroused mixed reactions. It was mostly taken as a matter that brought the audience closer; the journalists willing to share part of themselves with the listeners were appreciated. Moreover, the respondents thought that this increased the persuasiveness of the performance. Personal connection to the topic was said to give a journalist deeper knowledge of the matter and motivation to speak about it, as well as credibility, because “who would lie about one’s own matters?” This was especially the case when talking about the speech where the journalist talked about her life as a widow. Many respondents respected the fact that she was courageous enough to open up about her life, and many more found the speech moving. However, some felt there was too much personal information; therefore, listening to the story was even described as uncomfortable “since I don’t know this person, why is she telling this story to me: I felt that I came here to eavesdrop on personal matters that are not my business.”

Some thought the *Musta laatikko* performances were more subjective than journalism in general, and many considered live journalism as a concept where journalists were allowed to have the level of subjectivity that would not be acceptable, for example, in news articles or TV news. It was mentioned that a personal topic presented in a colloquial and “earthy” manner made the topic feel even more personal. Most of the participants who made comments about subjectivity did not see it as problematic; instead, they noted that the strong subjective standpoint in the story did not offer the spectator “room for alternative points of views, but it does not necessarily have to.”

The audience, therefore, seemed to take the journalists simultaneously as experts on their topics and their peers: the idea that “the performer talked as [a] human talks to a human” and was, therefore, considered an equal to the audience occurred several times in the data. This, in turn, enhanced the participants’ feelings of being connected to the performer. Two participants mentioned being a fan of journalists, but more often the respondents shared thoughts of being interested to see what kinds of persons the “familiar names from the newspaper” were and finally learn that they were “just average Joes.”

Third, the audience respected the performing journalists’ commitment to their performances. It was widely presumed in the data that the live journalism speeches were something that the journalists truly wanted to do and share with the audience. This feeling of performers having the urge to tell their stories was linked to the idea of them sharing their “true emotions” in their speeches. Furthermore, other aspects of the performances, such as visualizations, were respected. For some, the time and effort made to complete the productions also enhanced the feeling of trust, because “if this was total nonsense, I doubt the performer would talk like this and would have used this amount of time for it.” The audience further appreciated the exclusive contents of the shows; they enjoyed being the first ones to hear the stories or see the animations made for the show.

Discussion

With the advent of the challenges the field of journalism has faced during the last decade, media companies have begun to search for new ways to reach audiences. As a result, face-to-face performances, especially live journalism in which the audience and journalist

share the same physical space, have become new venues for journalistic practice. As shown by Adams (2020) and Vodanovic (2020), live journalism creates a unique platform for audience engagement, which may also provide for developing Habermas' idea of the public sphere.

In this article, we examined in more detail the relationships between the journalist and the audience in a live journalism performance by focusing on the roles of aural communication, talking, and listening. We argue that this perspective is essential because journalism is still often understood as a textual practice, where the text conveys meaning. However, the rise of live journalism calls for a new understanding of talking as a kind of journalistic practice.

As a starting point, we used Sterne's view on how the sonic medium should be studied as an integral part of sensory life, thus providing an understanding of, for example, the qualities of interaction. Then, we used Goffman's concept of atmosphere as an analytical concept that supports Sterne's view and provides tools to analyze various social roles in face-to-face circumstances. As talking and listening occur in a particular moment under specific circumstances, the atmosphere developed in such a situation has an effect on the interaction between the audience and the performer. In this sense, talk and voice not only carry the content in live journalism; they are also the key elements in the atmosphere of the event: through talk, voice, and gestures, audience members encounter a journalist's professional motivation and emotions. We argue that this facilitates an examination of the audience's engagement with the news stories, thus highlighting aspects that embody the audience's trust in the live journalism performance.

By using empirical materials from *Musta laatikko*, we examined how an audience describes the talking journalists and the effects of such an act on their live journalism experience (RQ1). We also examined how these experiences can create a unique atmosphere and foster further engagement with journalists and journalism (RQ2).

Our key findings are as follows: (1) Listening to talking journalists in a live performance enabled the audience to concentrate on journalism and hear about topics they would not have chosen themselves. (2) The audience had contradictory expectations about what kind of speaking style they considered proper for a journalist: simultaneously, they wished to hear an "authentic" speech that did not sound too rehearsed but expected fluency. (3) The audience expected to find in the speeches the performers' ownership of their stories, which included the speakers' emotions, motivations, and personal and professional commitments. (4) Finally, the trust and credibility of the talking journalists are key themes in the data. For many spectators, seeing and hearing the talking journalists in a live situation enhanced the feeling of trust in the journalists as professionals and in the credibility of their content. The ideas concerning trust also included notions about the performances as a whole. For example, aside from the performer and the topic, the organizing media house was mentioned, which was seen to create a unique and trust-worthy atmosphere for the event.

Many of our findings have also been highlighted in previous research. This especially concerns the unique power of the live situation. Both Adams (2020) and Vodanovic (2020) noted how seeing and hearing a journalist set a new mindset for the audience; for example, they are willing to listen without knowing the topic beforehand. In addition, seeing and hearing the journalist enables the audience to concentrate on journalism and immerse themselves in the news story. This coincides with Vodanovic's (2020, 13)

observation about how the space and format of live journalism foster slower engagement with news stories, leading to a more profound understanding of journalism.

As indicated in the findings chapter, the study of journalistic talk in a live performance raises the importance of emotions in establishing the atmosphere of an event. Chris Peters (2011) called this one of the most prevailing changes in journalism: the presence of a variety of emotions in journalism and the increasing acceptability of journalists' involvement in their stories. He argues that emotions in news can potentially resurrect audience interest and that offering diverse emotional styles in journalism has the potential to engage disparate audiences and build the experience of involvement (2011).

Furthermore, the audience in *Musta laatikko* evaluated the talking journalists based on the emotions they interpreted from their voices and performances or the emotions that they felt were missing. At the same time, these emotions felt from the performers' speeches strongly affected the emotions felt by the spectators, which was linked to the level of their immersion in the performances. In other words, both the performers' and the audience's emotions play an essential role in creating the atmosphere of the event. This supports Michelle Rosaldo's (1984, 143) idea that a person experiencing emotions develops the "I am involved" perception. This also shows how audience members interpreted the lack of emotions in a performer's voice and speaking style as that person not being genuinely involved with the topic.

Overall, the crucial question for journalists and media institutions is how to enhance audience engagement and trust. Similar to Adams (2020) and Vodanovic (2020), in our analysis, we identified the possibilities of using live journalism to develop a relationship that engenders audience's trust in journalism. From this point of view, it is noteworthy how talk and talking as such were discussed through the idea of trust. A performer having a personal speaking style and showing "genuine" emotions were mentioned as factors that increased the audiences' feelings regarding a performer's credibility. In other words, trust and credibility were based on the idea of the authenticity of the journalist. As a value judgment, authenticity highlights the relational aspects of social negotiations. Therefore, instead of defining authenticity, it is more interesting to understand how it is constructed.

Theo van Leeuwen's (2001, 393–394) note how the interview practices in media are often based on the romantic believe that a spontaneous speech is perceived as more truthful than a prepared speech was highlighted often in data. In particular, the perceived authenticity of the speech was linked to the idea of a performer being genuinely interested in his/her topic and being truthful about it. Even the data was not unanimous, it is noteworthy, that for some spectators, the subjective perspective of the speaker, and seeing and hearing the journalists strongly increased their feeling of trust towards the news stories.

The audience's trust in the performer's good intentions is aligned with music researcher Simon Frith's (1996, 71) definition of performative authenticity as the "perceived quality of sincerity and commitment." When evaluating music performances, audiences tend to complain about bad music being inauthentic and insincere and proceed to judge music as linked to its performer's sincerity (Frith 2004, 28). Based on the data obtained in the current study, the live journalism audience evaluated the performances in the same manner, that is, by concentrating on how natural the talks were. This notion is similar to Quintilian's notion, which he presented in Ancient Rome, of an ideal

orator as “a good man speaking well” (Harper 1979, 115). It also coincides with the idea proposed by Juho Ruotsalainen and Mikko Villi (2021, 174) regarding how the manuscripts of the *Musta laatikko* speeches contributed to a deeper understanding of journalism and offered possibilities for a broader conceptualization of the world by inviting audiences to practice critical and independent thinking.

It is noteworthy that the credibility of the journalism of *Musta laatikko* and the audiences’ trust in the performing journalists were strongly tied to the organizing media *Helsingin Sanomat*. In particular, giving audiences access behind the scenes of news stories, working practices, and the personal thoughts of journalists strengthened the credibility of the media house. Adams (2020, 14) also mentioned this kind of transparency as an essential part of “news on stage.”

Conclusion

Live journalism offers a special platform for the audience to see and hear journalists in person. Even though the audience’s role during the *Musta laatikko* show was relatively passive compared with some other live journalism shows, the analysis showed how the performance, as it stood, invited involvement—a unique experience compared to different types of journalism. As we have shown, the study of aural communication, talking, and listening can provide an interesting perspective by which to understand the nature and dynamics of interactions during live performances.

The significance of aurality can be understood primarily in relation to the growing complexity of media environments, where datafication and platformization modify everyday interactions with new media. It was noteworthy how the audience was willing to trust the expertise of journalists and pay tickets to see and hear well-produced quality journalism on stage without knowing the topics or speakers beforehand. The key element in creating trust was the talking journalist, and the connection between the performing journalist and the audience was established through the talk. The question is not about blind faith in the journalist; instead, the analysis shows how the audience considered their perceptions of journalism and its roles and functions when listening to a talking journalist. It can be argued that the talk creates a dialogic relationship between the journalist and the audience, even though no actual discussion occurred during the events. This reciprocal nature of live journalism was also highlighted in the interviews with the journalists who had performed in *Musta laatikko* (Lilja 2020).

Our intention is not to overemphasize the aural aspect of live performances. They are always multisensorial and multidimensional happenings, where, for example, visualizations and other elements are important. However, the strong historical emphasis on text and textuality can hide the possibilities of live talk situations in developing journalism. Clearly, there is a demand for algorithm-free, full-concentration possibilities to consume journalism, and live journalism is one alternative that can offer the audience such an experience.

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