

# **Replacing the public with customers – how emotions define today’s broadcast journalism markets. A comparative study between television journalists in the UK and India**

**Antje Glück, PhD**

FMC  
Bournemouth University  
Fern Barrow  
Poole, Dorset  
BH12 5BB  
United Kingdom

AGlueck@bournemouth.ac.uk

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*This paper identifies three main aspects of emotional engagement in journalistic news practice and outlines moments of tension between journalistic principles and (imagined) audience expectations. It investigates the relationship between emotionally (dis)engaging elements featured in television news coverage, and the rationale behind their deployment by journalists. In doing this, the article aims to address both journalism content and production dimension. It combines two qualitative approaches. This comprises semi-structured interviews conducted with around 50 journalists across both countries, supported by a close reading of TV news.*

*The study is set within a cross-national comparative framework of two very different television cultures – the United Kingdom and India, where debates about emotional engagement contrasts a strongly regulated public service television market in the UK standing against highly competitive commercial 24-hour news programs in India. The study present how journalists imagine news programs today. By highlighting journalistic practices outside of the normative model of Anglo-American journalism, this paper also seeks to include a de-Westernizing perspective within journalism studies. The paper will show that despite defending “classical” professional principles and news values, journalists across borders consider engagement and emotionalizing elements as indispensable in linking to audiences.*

Keywords: TV News Journalism, Journalism Cultures, Emotions, United Kingdom, India, News audiences, Dewesternization, Commercialization

## Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson tested positive for the virus. As his condition worsened, he was admitted into St Thomas' Hospital. The very next day this was all reported by the London-based tabloid press with emotive headlines such as “Now stricken Boris taken to intensive care” (*Daily Mail*), “Sick Boris faces fight for life” (*Daily Mirror*; all 7 April), with even the BBC stating “Boris Johnson is... in a personal fight against the virus ... struggling to shake the virus off” (BBC News, 6 April 2020). Indeed, the initial journalistic criticism towards Johnson’s handling of the crisis was temporarily set aside and replaced with expressions of concern for Johnson’s health, while discursive reflections and criticism around the management of the crisis took a back seat.

Meanwhile in India, emotionality dominated coverage of the country’s politics in a different way. The channel Republic TV regularly promoted slogans lionising the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, “saying he ‘crushed’ Pakistan, worked ‘magic’ at the G7 meeting, that he ‘strikes’ corruption and ‘punishes’ cheats” (Jaffrelot and Jumle, 2020). Its top anchor Arnab Goswami acted as self-appointed judge and institutionalized bias in TV political debates (Ibid.). In both cases, emotions seemed to have colonised the rational sphere of politics and the administration of a national crisis.

Headlines and reporting such as this is created precisely to attract audiences within a commercial and competitive media system, to be then sold to advertisers as commodities (Thussu, 2007). This political economy of news media encompasses a large segment of media markets such as the British and the Indian ones, seeming to emerge hand in hand with a digital and social media ecology and despite the United Kingdom having a strong public service broadcasting model.

What this case reminds us is that contrary to the normative claim that news reporting should follow journalistic principles of objectivity, neutrality or impartiality, the fact remains that ‘emotions’ continue to be central both in news production and audience engagement (Beckett and Deuze, 2016). Television, in particular, is via its specific logic and emphasis on visuals understood as ‘medium of feeling’ (Grindstaff, 2002) and, hence, of central interest for this study. In this paper, I argue that a great segment of the news produced by broadcasters presents a grammar that is emotionally charged and intends to appeal to a wide range of viewers as to increase its reach. This is true for both private, commercially-driven networks as well as public service broadcasters, with journalists across countries understanding emotions as fundamental for attracting audiences. In addition, the paper suggests that rapidly changing commercial and technological circumstances incentivise journalists around the globe to rethink decade-old professional values – including their stances towards an emotional engagement of audiences.

In their normative professional understanding, journalists especially in the United Kingdom have adhered to the ideal of excluding emotions from their practice – whilst utilising the expression of emotion to produce dramatic coverage (Pantti, 2010). Michael Schudson (2008) has pointed to the pre-eminence of the West, particularly the USA, in setting the ethical framework for modern journalism. As he argued, this “is not something that floated platonically above the world and that each country copied down, shaping it to its own national grammar. It is something that - as we know

it today - Americans had a major hand in inventing” (Schudson, 2008, p. 188). For him and others, notions around objectivity and impartiality were outcomes of the emergence of the market society, which came to define news reporting practices, deontology and wider professional ideologies (Conboy, 2004).

This paper challenges normative claims of detachment and impartiality (and an assumed exclusion of emotions) within broadcasting. Such normative claims are fundamentally based upon Western definitions of journalism (Curran and Park, 2000, Korkonosenko, 2015, Waisbord, 2013, Glück, 2019). In this sense, it is particularly the Indian broadcasting media which stand in stark contrast to the British Public Service Broadcasting model – with Indian television news known for a rather excessive use of sensationalism and emotionalization (Thussu, 2016, Bhatia, 2012).

While a deeper comparison of the complex British and Indian TV markets would go beyond the scope of this article, some additional features can help to understand the different market contexts for TV news in India and the UK: Both countries are characterized by similar political systems (democracy with a certain guaranteed space for freedom of the press); a highly differentiated dual system in broadcasting; a similar professionalization level in broadcasting journalism including access to the profession (education); and finally, institutionalized expertise in the field (Thussu, 2012).

Hence, the comparative analysis will contribute to the debate about rethinking the function and place of emotions in broadcast journalism by centring on notions about news audiences in the UK and India to highlight the problematic and contested nature of normative claims.

As the data show, the key overlaps that we can see between British and Indian broadcasters (as a former British Empire colony) are present less in the realm of core journalistic norms, but in how changing broadcasting markets might potentially lead to a shift in professional values – towards values derived from the market; and to a reevaluation of affective-emotive elements.

### **Do audiences need emotive news? Audience perceptions among journalists**

The journalist-audience relationship is characterized primarily by indirect “expected expectations” – or what journalists assume about what the audience expects and wants in the journalism they consume (Heise et al., 2014). This section highlights how these audience perceptions interlink with ideas about the public and the place of emotions in news journalism. I argue that emotions have always been an essential part of the journalistic realm; despite being absent in contemporary Anglo-American journalistic codices of practice. Academic work on emotions in journalism centred for long on often normative debates around infotainment and sensationalism. Over the past two decades, however, emotions in journalism have been approached as a more serious and nuanced subject of study (see Beckett and Deuze, 2016, Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016).

For news professionals, it is not an easy task to inhabit the world of the audience, as daily news production appears detached, and feedback remains highly selective via social media. Hence, journalists understand themselves as ‘audience representatives’ (Gans, 1979). For the Indian TV context, this means a “middle-class journalist imagining the self as the audience” (Batabyal, 2012: 13)

producing news content “based on their own likes and dislikes and those of their immediate families and friends”. This can be called “imaginary empathy” (Glück, 2016), describing a mode of relating to a subject (such as an audience).

Journalism’s imagined audience is frequently built into “tacit knowledge” (Polanyi, 1966). It becomes manifest in the routines of news production such as news values, in the news product itself, and in “journalists’ rhetoric about their product” (DeWerth-Pallmeyer, 1997: 2). This contributes to journalists mythologizing “the public” (Anderson, 2013). For this reason I argue that newsroom journalists, consciously or unconsciously consider audiences as “magically transformed into citizens” (Madianou, 2005: 99). For long, journalists carefully nourished normative idea(l) of the audience as a deliberative public demanding news “in order to get information” (Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2005: 90). However, the increasing pressures of competition in digital environments has meant that journalists are beginning to taking their audiences more seriously. This includes an examination of actual audience practices and the acknowledgement of audiences striving for an emotional gratification while watching news (Peters, 2011).

But this perception of an audience solely as a public counters the imperatives which a market economy imposes on news journalism – where news appears as a product, and where independent audiences might simply refuse “to become publics, satisfied to engage with the media purely for reasons of identity, pleasure, knowledge, lifestyle” (Livingstone, 2005b: 11). Here, an underlying emotive component emerges. To touch the emotions of viewers and provide an “emotional tendril” to a news story became an indispensable journalistic practice. Through this practice, journalists are able to show “why this is interesting” to a viewer (DeWerth-Pallmeyer, 1997: 109).

In consequence, some traditional journalism techniques increasingly raise skepticism among news professionals, for example, the choice of narrative storytelling practices such as the inverted pyramid lead. If broadcasters follow a rather mechanistic expository style of hard news stories originally designed for the press (Lewis, 1991), if they “simply lay out a series of facts, often in declining order of importance”, news stories may spark in viewers at best “a superficial interest” (Lewis, 2016: 186).

This shift in the debate about emotions, casting emotionality as “enemy of the informed citizenship,” ties in with what German journalism scholar Mast argued three decades ago:

“Information as such is uninteresting for the recipients. It needs to open up possibilities of emotional participation. The interesting thing about information therefore is its emotional content.” (Mast, 1991: 185, translated from German).

Calls for a reflexive consideration of emotive processes in journalism however, have long been overshadowed by a normatively-led sensationalism debate, painting emotionalization in a negative light (Klöppel, 2008). Ultimately, however, emotional processes cannot remain relegated to a private consumer sphere, but are essential for civic and public participation (Richards, 2009).

Here, serving the emotional needs of audiences may not only stimulate the emotional-wellbeing by rewarding social and cognitive experiences (Bartsch and Schneider, 2014), but also motivate action as “informed and active citizenship might require emotional involvement and personal identification with

social issues” (Bas and Grabe, 2015: 160). Hence, emotional involvement problematizes those hitherto simplistic conceptualizations of audiences as ‘rational’/‘irrational’ suggested by Coddington et al. (2021). A fuller understanding shows us that emotions transcend both spheres and fundamental to moral decision-making and deontological acting (Jeffery, 2014).

There is, however, a flipside to this. If emotions are overwhelming, this might affect the normative ideal of the informed citizen, resulting, for example, in passivity through “news fatigue” (Aitamurto and Varma, 2018). This might cause a “crisis of communication for citizenship..., an impoverishing way of addressing citizens about political issues” (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995: 203). This is particularly a concern in the context of political news coverage, which is heavily influenced by ownership structures, the intensity of competition, and type of funding (Curran and Seaton, 2018). Emotions, then, come to act as a means to connect and “fuel engagement with news and information” (Beckett and Deuze, 2016: 2).

By now, emotional investment in audiences is considered a valid strategy in certain parts of the industry (Fuller, 2010, Santos, 2009), as journalism bends to the rules of new technological developments such as social media, “where trust and authority is increasingly based on the ability to create emotional bonds” (Møller, 2016). This means that in order to provide meaning, raise curiosity (and hence attention), and evoke passion or engagement, emotions can help to create an “experience of involvement” (Peters, 2009).

In the present study, this belief informs questions about journalists’ understanding of publics and viewers, how they relate to different parts of the audience, and how a “powerful” story is made. But this research goes further by investigating the “civic value” of emotions. Specifically, the research considers whether emotions may contribute to the public sphere, and considers the role commercial imperatives in shaping the presentation of news?

### **Infotainment, changing journalistic role concepts and journalism cultures**

This section engages with relevant aspects of this discussion for this study. It builds a framework which links infotainment and television with journalistic role concepts and contextual factors to understand how distinct emotive regimes in news production are established. This is subsequently placed within debates around journalism cultures.

The inclusion of emotions, particularly in TV journalism, have been highlighted in debates about infotainment, understood as “factual information embedded in entertainment” (Khorrami, 2011: 32, own translation). Infotainment integrates a broad range of emotions, emotionalization strategies and performativity through audio-visual elements, an informal anchoring style, speech, gestures, or mimics (Schultheiss and Jenzowsky, 2000).

Infotainment programs and the deployment of sensationalism rose with the growing competition among television channels after the introduction of private broadcasting ('commercialization thesis'; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). These trends, combined with the rise in journalistic autonomy and

changing environmental and technological demands (Weischenberg, 2007, Bolin, 2014), meant that news became increasingly entertainment-focused (Bogart, 1980).

By comparing the dominant journalism cultures of the United Kingdom and India it becomes evident how diverse and distinct news cultures across the globe can be. British news television – especially the BBC – is characterized by a certain formality, detachedness, and seriousness in the style of anchoring and reporting – “an epistemic style that discourages performances of commitment” (Montgomery, 2007: 32). British journalists mainly consider emotions to appear as characteristic of news content itself. The professional commitment to serve as an impartial detached observer, as analyzer and monitor is rarely questioned (Pantti, 2010, Richards and Rees, 2011, Stenvall, 2014, WJS, 2017). In addition, the British public service model is highly regulated and overseen by OFCOM. Regulations require broadcast news to be fair, balanced and impartial. In consequence, emotions are frequently excluded from debates around professional identity (Pantti, 2010). Though their presence is acknowledged, emotions are usually relegated to an invisible and private backwater of news production, as they are considered to interfere negatively for a variety of reasons, among them bias or sensationalism (Richards and Rees, 2011). At the same time, journalists have developed different strategies to handle elements of emotional content. These rituals of emotion practice include “outsourcing” emotive contributions to external actors – ordinary citizens, ‘legitimate’ news subjects, or user-generated content (Pantti and Husslage, 2009, Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013).

In contrast, the Indian television market is divided between the government-related Doordarshan of national reach and a largely self-regulated private broadcaster market, which currently comprises 388 permitted news channels across the country (Government of India, 2020). In this highly competitive environment, many broadcasters appear to seek emotion-driven audience engagement while “shaping political discourse in a noisy democracy” (Thussu, 2010: 128). Accordingly, what we find here is less a “balance of emotion and information” (Dean, 2017), but a frequently excessive emotionality (Kumar, 2015). In consequence, misinformation, distrust, and bias emerge; and emotive appeals to particularistic group identities divert attention from underlying socio-structural problems such as neoliberal ideology and pressing national inequalities. This reflects, for example, in the news reporting around the suicide of Bollywood actor Sushant in 2020, when Indian 24-hour news channels were criticised for dramatic visual displays of the actor’s dead body and headlines (Bajpai, 2020, Chowdhury, 2020). However, only few studies exist which comprehensively examine Indian TV newsrooms – among them notably Batabyal’s (2012) take on Star Ananda and Star News.

Globally changing circumstances of news production have brought about a rethinking of journalistic role concepts. The classic (Western) notion of information disseminator/watchdog may need to broaden to include the infotainer/entertainer role (Weischenberg, 2007, Mellado and van Dalen, 2016). On the one hand, journalists fear losing privileges and authority when giving up their normative role exclusively tied to information dissemination (Lünenborg, 2007). On the other hand, their desire to produce engaging news coverage of publicly relevant issues, along with commercial pressures and trends of media populism, makes journalism transgress its traditional boundaries in order to attract audiences (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999).

Journalistic role conceptions in India and the United Kingdom generally share many relevant role understandings, such as informing and educating audiences. What is striking, however, is where journalism role concepts diverge: A majority of Indian journalists – as respondents of the World of Journalism Study indicated – do not see their role limited to analyzing current affairs, but seek to engage beyond that in promoting national development or encouraging people to participate in political activities (WJS, 2017).

This wider role understanding corresponds to what is defined as the “interventionism” dimension of journalism cultures. Interventionism reflects the willingness of journalists to actively engage in social development, being “involved, socially committed, assertive” (Hanitzsch et al., 2011: 275). I propose this as a major distinguishing element between British and Indian television journalism. In this sense, Indian news producers appear to be more open to combining ideas of national development with motivating citizens and government-critical journalistic elements. Interventionism understands audiences less as detached spectators, and recognizes the possibility of affective motivation. The scarce advertisement resources in the highly-competitive Indian TV market impact role understandings. Becoming a journalistic entertainer, a strict reliance on sensationalism and attracting audience attention allows for survival in the shark pool of Indian journalism (Thussu, 2016). Although news programs in the United Kingdom faced a shift towards infotainment too, they maintain the public service ideal of audiences as citizens.

The ideas around interventionism as a central distinguishing feature between the dominant British and Indian television journalism cultures will provide a framework to contextualize the journalistic interview data of the empirical section, where journalists link role understandings and audience orientations with with external pressures such as commercial demands.

## Methods

To understand emotions within the framework of different journalism systems, this study follows a comparative cross-cultural approach and includes a ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ journalism culture.

The United Kingdom and India were selected for three major reasons. First, both countries are linked by an uneven colonial and postcolonial history, which led to the modelling of Indian Doordarshan according to principles of the BBC after independence. Moreover, the BBC maintains the status of a credible news source within India, while the United Kingdom is home to a significant South Asian diaspora (ONS, 2011). The second reason is the very dissimilar emotion regimes British and Indian journalism follows in what concerns the acceptance of emotions on screen (Glück, 2017). Finally, the article contributes new knowledge on journalism practices in countries of the global South.

The design of the empirical investigation relied on a triangulation of two qualitative methods (Mertens, 2010). The main method was in-depth interviews. The development of the interview guide was informed by prior closereading of Indian and British news programs, which focused on presentation



styles, narrative-discursive elements, and decisions about news story selection. Three main research questions emerged:

RQ1 – How do news content producers (journalists, editors, reporters) reason and reflect on the role and function of emotions in news coverage with regard to news audiences?

RQ2 – In what way do British and Indian journalism cultures/systems agree, or not, on a shared professional understanding about the scope of emotional expression in television news?

RQ3 – How do news content producers (journalists, editors, reporters) reason and reflect on the compatibility of their journalistic role concepts with regard to emotive elements in news coverage?

I conducted 48 semi-structured interviews with a diverse sample of journalists across the United Kingdom and India. Journalists were selected using a mixed strategy of purposive sampling and chain sampling, in accordance with the aim of representing a wide range of professional positions and diversity in gender and age (26-61 years). In India, 26 interviews with journalists were carried out; in the UK 22 interviews. Interviewees were recruited exclusively from television stations. In the UK, these were BBC, ITV and Sky News; in India the regional and national 24x7 news channels Aaj Tak, Doordarshan, News X, CNN-News18 (CNN18), India Today, ABP News, and NDTV. Interviews were conducted in English and in Hindi.

For purposes of confidentiality all interviewees were numbered with a country ID (B for British, I for Indian) and analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), integrating semantic levels of text as well as latent underlying ideas about professional ideologies, audiences, and emotions.

Two key themes emerged from the interview data: 1) how audience understandings and semantics link with varying emotionalization strategies; and 2) how journalistic role understandings condition different ideologies around emotions, intervention, and engagement. Both will be presented in the following sections.

## **Findings and Discussion: Understanding the audience**

### **Terminologies: “Publics”, “viewers” – and the commercialized nation**

The first observation concerns the terminology journalists use when referring to audiences. In the interviews, British and Indian journalists speak about audiences in multiple ways. Most prominently is terminology marking audiences as “people” or “viewers”. While this might appear neutral on first sight, labelling audiences as “people” or “viewers” actually collapses two audience concepts into one – namely, the public understood as a collective entity – but consisting of individual viewers. This links

what Livingstone (2005c) distinguished in her work about audiences still as two separate groups - active citizenship-oriented *publics* and consumer-oriented *viewers*.

Indian journalists display an intention to actively involve audiences. For example, I13 (formerly senior management, CNN18) describes angry anchors “waking *people* up” and turning them into “angry *citizens*” or creating a “long line of *people* wanting to do something”. This links to the idea of an ‘emotional citizen’ or ‘engaged people’. On the other hand, interviewees criticize colleagues for a pretentious language use, when anchors “shout like they are doing *public*, but the real concern does not seem there” (I2, deputy editor, Doordarshan), as they follow commercial imperatives rather than connecting to the “*common man on the street*” (I8, deputy editor, India Today).

UK journalists on the British side view distinct major news events and political change as key opportunities for reporting emotions. With Princess Diana’s death in 1998, for instance, B10 (senior editor, ITN) speaks of “many *people*... very moved and very upset by it”. B15 (senior editor, BBC) remembers a story with “*people* wandering – like Jesus arrived. Bizarre! But we reported it as a social phenomenon”. Unlike their Indian counterparts, British news journalists prefer a more distanced observer stance. Here, the shock, numbness and mourning of the British population were externalized and reported about, as singular news event. Accordingly, the social-emotive climate of a population is taken as a given fact; it serves as source material to *report on* – but not to *engage with*.

Hence, despite a shared terminology across borders, a fundamental difference emerges between India and the United Kingdom. While British participants describe emotional crowds as distanced objects to report on, Indian interviewees express an inclination to engaging audiences as emotional citizens.

Parallel to the shared connotation of ‘audience-as-people’ to be understood as both public and commercial categories, journalists across both countries refer, secondly, to ‘publics’ in the Habermasian sense, understood as participants in a rational-cognitive discourse, which excludes emotions and feelings (Habermas, 1990 [1962]). Starting with Indian journalists, few Doordarshan journalists discuss what *public* means for their public service channel with regard to the representation of emotions on screen. I4 (junior news editor, Doordarshan) reminds that “we have to mend the grievances of the people, and the citizens of this country”. Taking viewers and their concerns nationwide seriously also reflects I2’s engaged attitude in “be[ing] *a public servant*” – however, I2 ads that Doordarshan journalists have to consider working along governmental agenda-setting too.

Some private channels, too, understand themselves as deeply committed to democracy:

The primary role of journalism is to work in the public interest... journalism has to raise issues of public concern in a country like India... [like] some public-spirited campaigns on sanitation, on health issues. (I6, senior, CNN18 ret)

Here, a perceived public duty turns into emotive engagement along government lines, in order to advance the social progress in India, filling the space that the actual public service broadcaster leaves at times empty (I14, senior editor, NDTV). Journalists target a “*public outcry*” via stories that “involve *public emotion... public anger... citizen concerns*” (I13), or where the public gets “polarized” (I6, former senior editor, CNN18).

In the UK context, “*public service duty*” (B14, former morning editor, BBC News 24) or the BBC’s relying “on the *public’s authority*” (B1, trainer, BBC) translates into an abstract and externalized “*public interest*” as an underlying principle for the recognition and application of news values. Here, emotionality, and any advantages it may have for increased engagement, are set aside in favour of an informational-functional attitude to news delivery. Emotions may be present “because of the people we interview” (B3, head of news, ITV). It is acceptable to report on the public as an emotional agent; as in the emotional reactions of a “British public” upon Nelson Mandela’s or Princess Diana’s death (B9, managing editor, Sky News), for example, with a “massive public showing of grief and emotion” (B14, B15).

The third and most significant difference between Indian and British TV journalism is the particular Indian case of emotive nationalism, or what I refer to as ‘audience-as-nation’. Here, audiences are understood and addressed as “nation”. This is connected to an emotionally charged frame, a frame which we can describe with Anderson (1991) as “imagined communities”. This emotive nationalism frequently appears in coverage of India’s historically conflictive relationship to neighboring Pakistan. I9 (political editor, CNN18) explains that “people in India love this Pakistan bashing; that’s where the emotion comes in”. She refers to former *Times Now* anchor Arnab Goswami, one of the most prominent Indian TV journalists, as one prime example for the Indian nationalist discourse. As Bhushan (2013) explains: “Belligerence towards India’s neighbors, often adopting a more hardline position than the government” and jingoism are common (Bhushan, 2013: 38). NDTV India’s senior news editor I19 describes news coverage about a Pakistani boat which had sunk in the Arabian Sea close to Indian territory:

Indian defense claimed that they [the boat crew] themselves burnt it down. There was no evidence of doing that. No one tried to get to know the truth. Everyone went on the lines that ‘Pakistani boat was trying to attack Indian citizens’, and the coastguards saw them and they chased them, and they themselves downed themselves. It was a nationalistic line. Emotionalizing... The story became – a nationalist emotion, nationalist sentiment. (I19)

Here, journalism understands and addresses an audience in particular as a homogeneously understood emotional collective entity. “National pride and patriotism” (I9) are popular media narratives in India (Bhushan, 2013, Batabyal, 2012) and are prominently expressed and observed with Indian interviewees.

The pressure to frame news events in a nationalist way is high among certain news organizations in India (I19, NDTV). This is what we can call as “commercial nationalism” (Andrejevic, 2016), where sentiments of nationalism become monetized. Comparing India with the UK makes visible how closely journalism is tied to its respective society, following at the same time hegemonic discourses and taking account of the cultural, political and commercial norms that prevail in and characterise each national setting. The political pressures in India leave journalists in danger of accusations “sedition” and “anti-nationalism” from interlinked nationalist citizen and media spheres, in a context in which Prime Minister Modi is seen to exercise considerable influence (I13, CNN18).

With the rise of the right-center nationalist government, there is this lot of sense of patriotism... and ultra-nationalism. People are not willing to be questioned about India's role in anything. We are the saints; we cannot go wrong in anywhere. THAT is dangerous to any society... If you really seek out audience approval all the time, you infer mess. (I8, senior, India Today)

The audience-as-nation not only appears in moments of national pride and nationalist sentiments, but likewise in moments of national tragedies. The heavy floods in Uttarakhand in 2014 were elevated to a national dimension, where “the power of the visual image has the capacity to actually unite people in tragedy”. There, “people [were] traumatized, money was pouring in, politicians were reaching out” (I6, CNN18). This intensified use of emotion as a persuasive tool encourages measurable actions of donations, as it creates a possibility for viewers to (emotionally) identify with a story and show compassion, with a national coloring (I6) – a clear manifestation of an emotionally lived and socially constructed coherent group identity. This again is consistent with Anderson's (1991) argument that media is complicit in the construction of “imagined communities” – communities shaped and tied together through perceived “emotions of the collective” (I11, senior editor, Doordarshan).

Looking at British statements, emotions of a collective appear solely in the case of Lady Diana's death. B10 (ITN) mentions “collective grief ... [a] nation mourning with flowers outside Kensington Palace”. This reaffirms both the distant stance of British TV journalism and lack of expressed journalistic responsibility for contributing to the creation of emotional states in audiences.

### **The meaning of audience understandings for journalistic role conceptions**

Indian and British journalists show agreement in what constitutes the ‘public’. Across countries, publics are considered not merely as passive or hedonistic consumers, but as active citizens in the lifeworld (Livingstone, 2005a).

However, journalists differ in the degree of emphasis on emotive aspects across the two countries. While British journalists see themselves in the role of informers, reporting already existing social sentiments, Indian journalists seem to favor a more engaging approach towards audiences, encouraging them to actively participate in shaping issues in a democracy, and actively advancing the link between media and democracy.

British journalists in particular rarely express thoughts about the impact of their work on audience emotions apart from reference to legally defined responsibilities of duty of care (Ofcom, 2020, especially Section 2). This may be explained by the prevalent professional values among journalists in the UK, including the influence of traditions of public service across other parts of the UK media sector. Admitting a socially relevant emotive impact openly seems difficult in a climate where journalism's central and institutionalized public role rests on principles such as factual news coverage and detachment. British journalists mostly describe media coverage as an effect of an already present social emotion, leaving media therefore in a professionally ‘correct’ distant – and passive – role (see below the section “Emotion-as-information I”). In contrast – and as will be seen further below - the more emotional tenor of the Indian example manifests clearly.

Finally, the Indian news coverage is emotionalized through the mobilization of nationalistic sentiments and the creation of the 'audience-as-nation'. The Indian interviewees explain that they navigate their engagement of news audiences through a mobilization of collective emotions of national pride, prejudice, outrage, and tragedy, which are discursively legitimated. This, however, does not go along with the professional values strongly emphasized by British journalists, including detachment, neutrality, and impartiality.

After having outlined the preferred journalistic concepts of audiences and the place of emotions in each of them, the next section will focus on a taxonomy of the role journalists assign to emotions in audience reception.

## How journalists understand the impact of emotions on the audience

With emotions being part and parcel of the interaction between news journalists and news audiences, this section looks at journalists' motivations for integrating emotive elements within the relationship to their audiences. It will show that this transcends broadcasters of both commercial market and public service orientation across countries. This analysis focuses on the perceived functionality of emotions in newsmaking, shaped by ideas about audience attention and engagement.

Combining findings and discussion in one section, I propose three main journalistic motivations for using emotions in reports: 1) to arouse attention, 2) to provide information material for deliberation, and 3) with a motivational purpose. The following sections will detail this taxonomy.

### Emotions generate attention

Indian and UK journalists shared an understanding for emotions as an important stimulus for viewers to (re)direct the attention and tune into a news program, as "you want to connect emotionally with the audience" (I6, CNN18). More than any other medium, television is considered a "feeling medium" (Glynn, 2000, Grindstaff, 2002) and "emotional medium" (I22, anchor, NDTV India). That television has a distinctive nature is perceived by both Indian and British journalists:

Emotions make good television. (B5, senior editor, ITN)

Emotion comes across very powerful on television. (I13, senior management, CNN18)

Information alone – or 'disseminating' knowledge (B14, BBC News24) – is not suitable for television in order to achieve a desired impact with audiences:

You find multiple ways of engaging people. And when you are in tension [under pressure] to engage people, then obviously you would use all possible ways to catch and hold attention. And that's only possible if you could invoke a sentiment in them towards the story you are doing. (I23, senior editor, ABP News)

The attention will come through emotional connection and emotional impact. (B12, junior producer, Sky News)

Both interviewees believe that evoking emotions is indispensable for connecting to an audience;. In this sense, Indian journalists generally display a more nuanced idea of how emotions work within news reception. I2, a senior journalist of Doordarshan, mentioned the philosophical approach of “samwegatya pragya”, an enlightend state of knowledge where emotion and cognition are understood as being intrinsically linked in reasoning.

The visual dominance of TV supports an emotive connection to viewers, as “emotion connects very very quickly and very fast” (I13, CNN18) due to a faster processing rate of the human brain for visual stimuli than verbal information (Kahneman, 2012). In this sense, even public service models of journalism need to adapt for TV by drawing on emotive elements:

A boring person sitting at a desk talking in a boring way doesn't make great telly, but if there are some emotion or drama – it does! And a good interviewer, for instance... you want to ask questions that challenge them [interview guests]. (B9, senior managing editor, Sky News ret)

In India, the underlying entertainment orientation in journalistic practice is even more pronounced: Anchors being “hysterical” (I22, anchor, NDTV) or “outraged... make for very good television” (I14, editor, NDTV), as do overwhelmed reporters sobbing live into the camera (I21, senior editor, NDTV). Emotions pander the self-indulgence of the audience and the “thriving culture of emotional paranoia” (Chakraborty, 2015). People and their stories “bring the things alive. It becomes heated, it becomes lively; it becomes more interesting” (B14, BBC News24). This potential to generate the initial attention in TV as a linear medium becomes highly relevant in the very competitive Indian environment.

This creation of interest is especially pursued by commercial channels with a clear market orientation (DeWerth-Pallmeyer, 1997). The line between news and entertainment was always difficult to draw – it oscillates between transforming professional core principles (most prominently, Bell, 1998) and a stance that television “should be entertaining yet not provide entertainment” (quoted in Mowrer, 1960).

Along those lines, the following two sections illustrate more in detail the perceived purpose of emotions within the formation of audience understandings of news, drawing on analytical concepts of informing or motivating, reflecting distinct imaginaries of journalists, and linking again back to notions of audiences as citizens or emotional collectives.

## Emotion-as-information I: enabling ‘rational’ decision-making

Reporting emotions can provide important information about a news event and, hence, enrich deliberative discussions within the public sphere. Accordingly, emotions possess an information value within news journalism. This notion is reinforced by debates conceptualizing emotions as fundamental part of the news experience. Emotive contents and perspectives enhance the understanding of a news story (Früh and Wirth, 1997).

Among the sample of British journalists, two distinct positions on the use of emotions in reporting could be identified. The first group evaluates the reporting of emotions positively, provided that such reporting contained informational value relevant to the story. In this reasoning, emotions-as-information can potentially empower an audience to make their own (informed) decisions. Emotive and factual news input together enable a process of rationalized argumentation and decision-making within the tradition of public deliberation discourses (Habermas, 1990 [1962]).

In news practice, this translates to providing multiple (emotive) perspectives to viewers – without including one’s own journalistic judgement:

There were always people who are very passionate on both sides. And our job is to not say to the viewer: that guy is totally right. It is to say to them – look, this guy feels so strongly about this; here is another guy who feels exactly the same level passion in the opposite direction. But you don’t conclude your piece by saying: the one who we showed you first was right! You have to leave it so that the person is able to come to their own verdict. (B19, junior producer, Sky News)

British journalists here maintain their ‘classic’ professional boundaries by distancing themselves from emotive aspects of news coverage and putting these on a par with other types of information input, which translates into a news coverage in which journalism doesn’t acquire responsibility for the emotional content, and where journalists demonstrate impartiality. This echoes earlier findings about Western European journalistic practices of outsourcing emotions by describing/reporting emotions of others such as news subjects (Pantti, 2010, Stenvall, 2014, Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). Emotive perspectives are offered to audiences – but they are assumed to be “perfectly capable of deciding for themselves, what they think or feel about something” (B2, Director General (ret.), BBC). This means that journalistic responsibility for audience reactions is rejected (Pantti, 2010).

In contrast, however, a second group of British journalists regards emotions with scepticism. They consider emotions as a distraction or inhibition of ‘appropriate’ cognitive-rational processing of understanding:

I try to limit the amount of emotion in news reporting as much as I can. The emotional factor is not a powerful factor in my reporting. It is important for my viewers... to understand the extent of any kind of crisis that may have befallen people, but that is not necessarily an emotional matter. (B11, anchor, Sky News)

In this statement, news serves as a passive device contributing to educate and inform ‘rational’ members of the public sphere, to whom the final decision-making is left.

## Emotion-as-information II: Emotion as agenda



In journalists' accounts, emotions can also inform through stirring motivation. Here, emotions are understood to discretely steer emotional audience involvement, aiming for changes in attitudes, reactions, or behaviour patterns. These ideas about emotional engagement come across in role understandings of journalists where they perceive themselves as educators, advocates, developmental journalists or agents of change.

Not everyone is just interested in listening to facts, because when you look at BBC... the kind of feature stories in the news... like the bomb blast, or for a rape story, and for a victim the kind of stories they do. They have very very emotional connect; something that makes you cry... That's really important. (I10, junior producer, India Today)

That's the emotion that matters, what they are feeling, what they are telling you. And I think it is very important to try and capture that on screen. Because you want to make a connection with the audience. You want to make them care about these individuals... For example, at the moment of the coverage of the migrant stories... the most touching ...coverage I have seen in a way is about very small details. (B21, senior correspondent, BBC)

News coverage becomes impactful when viewers identify with it. A viewer who cares (B21, BBC) or cries (I10, India Today) is more ready to translate this individual "private" feeling into a public action. Emotional shock effects are assumed to act as a "wake up" signal for viewers; "acts of barbarism should be shown to people" (I2, Doordarshan) – for example, the famous Vietnam War picture of a girl with burnt skin, "so people do realize that it is a bad thing". Audience members are encouraged to reflect on and rationalize their feelings about an issue (I22, NDTV).

Journalism is here seen as an autonomous active part of society, with its own agency, and interdependent with audiences. The process of opinion formation is not left to idealized 'rational' beings, having been provided with sufficient (news) input. Rather, it is a dynamic chain of events which subtly incorporates the emotive side of processes of stimulation and engagement, persuasion and conviction. It demonstrates a noticeable degree of interventionism, where journalists are prone to be motivated, socially committed and promoting certain values to audiences (Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2017).

British journalists again draw a clear professional boundary in their discourse, trying to tell a story "as accurately as you can, but with the maximum emotional impact that people can take" (B20, senior correspondent, ITN), as it is "the facts that people are upset about" (B9, Sky News). Journalists claim to follow a strict ritual of factual coverage. They do not readily admit to the strategic use of emotive elements, which are relegated to an external audience (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013).

We can also see the potential for emotions to empower marginalised groups, such that journalists are able to generate empathy and compassion through stories on individual news subjects.



As an aid to understand the world, it also shows that Africans have the same human emotions as everybody else! You know they have kids that they are worried about, they wanna protect, they are scared for, and I would hope the audiences are sufficiently open-minded that they can accept that as well... We want to show that this is a global community. (B15, senior editor, BBC ret.)

Helping “the audience identify with what the person is living through” (B15, BBC) aims to simply “strike” or “touch a chord” (I13 – CNN18, I23 – ABP News, I8 – India Today), without evoking pity. News subjects are shown as equal and empowered (B15, BBC). Such narratives have the potential to engage TV audiences with ordinarily unpalatable issues including AIDS and rape (I8, ABP News). They function as emotive bridges which sensitize audiences. From this perspective, treating emotions as a crucial component of social information might encourage news viewers to react affectively and to identify with disadvantaged groups (Van Kleef, 2016).

Emotion-eliciting news content serves as emotional investment which transcends the level of the affective-emotional by stimulating and encouraging reflective thinking. This, in turn, can create the potential for an active participation in the public sphere.

## Conclusion

In both the United Kingdom and India, journalists consider emotions an indispensable element for journalistic decision-making. Across both countries, the negotiation of ‘classic’ professional values is informed by the need to engage audiences. The analysis contrasted a ‘Western’ with a ‘non-Western’ culture and argues that the outcome of this tension is largely often driven by structural constraints.

Emotions achieve three goals central to the journalist-audience relationship. First, they serve as a means of attracting viewers. Journalists in both countries consider using emotive dispositions and emotionalizing devices to be indispensable in generating attention for a news report (Pantti, 2010); and with TV news programs becoming a ‘credible brand’ themselves (Andrejevic, 2016).

Secondly, contrary to many assumptions implied in the criticism of emotional input in journalism, emotions inform audiences as they carry informational value within news reports. Emotions help in enabling rational decision-making and deliberate discourses within the sense of the classic public sphere ideal. Third, they become a device and aim of journalistic storytelling, where audiences are explicitly addressed in an emotive manner and motivated to emotionally align with news stories and framing. Enacting feelings before an audience – in the form of sympathy, compassion, anger and wrath – presents journalism as both, part of the political and the commercial-economic system. Television news, especially, becomes an emotive agent within the interplay of different fields. Further research in this area may help to identify journalistic epistemologies and deontologies around emotive storytelling in TV.

Nevertheless this study also highlighted some noticeable cross-national differences. British journalists consider emotions as an element of information; and mediating different emotive perspectives to an audience allows a better understanding of a story. In addition, British journalists distance themselves from effects of the emotionalization of news to maintain their professional identity boundaries. In this

sense, and apart from a duty of care, they express less responsibility for how audiences emotively perceive information.

Though there are similarities between journalists' views in the two countries, the data demonstrated that Indian journalists show more inclination towards treating emotions as an equal – or even greater – engaging force than facts. Driven by pragmatic competitive forces, the aim to create an emotive involvement of viewers suggests that within Indian broadcast news viewers are mostly seen as customers – even through detours over other multiple role concepts such as responsible citizenship or patriotism. This also applies, if to a lesser extent, to British TV news journalism.

What becomes clear is that journalism indeed can take on its own agency in the face of grave imminent and structural deficits in society, as is shown by a more affirmative stance of Indian news producers towards interventive and engaging forms of journalism. Here, emotively charged news can serve social functions – of creating a sense of belonging, or by taking over actions of civil society in place of an absent accountable political sphere.

In this sense, this study highlights how relevant empirical contributions outside of the Global North are. By analysing perceptions of news and contextual factors determining journalism in the Southern hemisphere, this study hopes to help the development of a de-Westernization approach in journalism studies.

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