

Media Activity Theory: Impact on Journalism Education, News Production, and Consumption in the Digital Age

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Keywords: Theory of Media Activity, Journalism Education, Media Landscape, Media Production, Media Consumption, Interactive Media, Participatory Media, Technological Advancements, Media Producers, Media Consumers, Journalism Practice, Contemporary Media Environment, Journalism Pedagogy, Media Theory, Media Studies.

Abstract: This research paper provides a comprehensive exploration of the Theory of Media Activity and its relevance as a conceptual framework for journalism education. The author offers a thorough review of existing literature on media activity theory, emphasizing its potential to enhance the understanding of the evolving media landscape and its implications for journalism practice. Through a combination of theoretical analysis and practical examples, the paper elucidates the ways in which the Theory of Media Activity can inform and enrich journalism education, particularly in relation to the interactive and participatory nature of contemporary media. In this article it is presented a compelling argument for the integration of media activity theory into journalism curricula, emphasizing its capacity to equip students with a nuanced understanding of the reciprocal relationship between media producers and consumers. Furthermore, the paper discusses the implications of technological advancements on media production and consumption, highlighting the need for journalism educators to prepare students to navigate and contribute to the future of journalism in a rapidly changing media environment. Overall, this research paper offers valuable insights into the potential benefits of embracing the Theory of Media Activity as a foundational framework for journalism education. Its thorough analysis and practical implications make it a valuable resource for educators, researchers, and practitioners seeking to enhance journalism pedagogy in response to the dynamic nature of contemporary media.

1 INTRODUCTION

The study of journalism education involves exploring the principles, practices, and ethical considerations within the field of journalism. It encompasses a broad spectrum of topics, such as news reporting, writing, editing, multimedia storytelling, media law and ethics, and the historical and sociological aspects of journalism. According to Tim P. Vos (2019), journalism education aims to equip students for careers in journalism, media, public relations, and related fields by providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills to collect, analyse, and present information in a fair, accurate, and ethical manner.

The societal role of journalism education is to train aspiring journalists and media professionals to uphold the highest standards of accuracy, fairness, and integrity in their work. By teaching students critical evaluation of information, effective

communication, and an understanding of journalism's role in a democratic society, journalism education contributes to ensuring that the public has access to reliable and trustworthy news and information. This role is crucial in promoting transparency, accountability, and informed citizenship. David M. Ryfe, a notable scholar, has extensively written about the role of journalism education in society. His 2012 book, "Can Journalism Survive? An Inside Look at American Newsrooms," explores the challenges and opportunities facing journalism education amid a rapidly changing media landscape. Ryfe delves into the significance of journalism education in preparing future journalists to adapt to technological advancements, shifts in audience behaviour, and evolving professional standards. His work provides valuable insights into the pivotal role of journalism education in shaping the future of the media industry and its broader impact on society.

The origins of journalism education can be traced back to the early 20th century, with universities offering courses in newspaper reporting and editing. However, it wasn't until the mid-20th century that journalism education became more formalised and widespread. The University of Missouri established the first journalism school in the United States in 1908, serving as a precursor for many other universities to follow suit.

2 METHODS

In Uzbekistan, the development of journalism education began after gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Before this, journalism was incorporated into broader communication or literature programs. Since independence, there has been an increasing acknowledgment of the significance of journalism education in fostering a free and independent press in Uzbekistan. Today, numerous universities in Uzbekistan offer journalism programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

According to the Harvard University Nieman Foundation website (<https://www.niemanlab.org>), journalism education has evolved in recent years to adapt to the changing media landscape. With the ascent of digital and social media, journalism programs now emphasize multimedia storytelling, data journalism, and audience engagement. Many journalism schools also provide specialized tracks in areas such as investigative reporting, environmental journalism, and international reporting to prepare students for careers in specific fields.

Aside from conventional classroom instruction, journalism education often incorporates practical training through internships, student media outlets, and collaborations with professional news organizations. These hands-on experiences enable students to apply their skills in real-world settings and establish professional connections that can aid in launching their careers. According to C.W. Anderson, the future of journalism education will continue to be influenced by technological advancements, shifts in media consumption habits, and evolving professional standards. As the media industry adapts to new challenges and opportunities, journalism education will play a crucial role in preparing the next generation of journalists to navigate these changes while upholding the values of accuracy, fairness, and public service.

In "The Handbook of Journalism Studies, 2008," Tim P. Vos asserts that journalism education is a vital component of a healthy democracy. By equipping

students with the knowledge and skills needed to produce high-quality journalism, journalism education helps ensure that the public has access to reliable information and diverse perspectives. As the media landscape continues to evolve, journalism education will remain essential in preparing future journalists to meet the needs of an ever-changing society.

Before delving into the term "Media theory," it is prudent to define what media and theory mean. Simply listing activities such as TV, radio, film, the Internet, and newspapers is insufficient to define the meaning of media. Perhaps the most appropriate way to describe media is as a technological means to deliver messages to the public across different regions, cities, countries, or even globally. While these media are commonly known as mass media, they lack interaction between sender and receiver. The term "mass" indicates the massiveness of media reception like TVs, films, radios, etc. However, Marshall McLuhan argues that media should not be "mass" to be considered media. Before the term "mass media," there was the singular form "medium," signifying someone or something between an object or subject. This notion, mentioned by Marshall McLuhan and quoted by Neil Postman, suggests that three essential things for sight are the organ, the object, and the medium. In this context, while typing, the computer screen is the object, and the eyes are the organ, with the medium being the light. Therefore, without light, working on the computer would not be possible. Human mediums, in this sense, can send messages to others through a supernatural sense. The media today vastly differs from the past, with significant technological advancements. According to historical evidence, a human medium is a supernatural sense allowing one to send messages to others.

Media theory is akin to a virus that tends to spread frustration, concern, and alarm among students, as claimed by Haenlain. The theory of media activity, as a conceptual basis for journalism education, is an intriguing and relevant approach to understanding the role of journalism in society. It emphasizes the active nature of media production and consumption, providing a framework for comprehending the complex relationship between journalists, media organizations, and audiences.

Media activity theory posits that media production and consumption are dynamic and interactive processes involving various actors, including journalists, media organizations, and audiences. Unlike the traditional view of journalism as a one-way communication process, this theory

highlights the active role of audiences in interpreting and responding to media content. It also emphasizes the agency of journalists and media organizations in shaping the news agenda and framing public discourse.

One central concept of media activity theory is viewing media as a social institution that plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing social and political processes. This perspective emphasizes power dynamics inherent in media production and consumption, drawing attention to how journalists and media organizations can shape public discourse and influence public opinion. Media activity theory recognizes diverse and often conflicting interests in the media landscape, including political, economic, and cultural factors shaping the production and dissemination of news.

The chart below illustrates these concepts, created based on the author's understanding of the topic:

Another key concept is media literacy, referring to individuals' ability to critically analyse and evaluate media content. Media literacy education is considered an essential component of journalism education, helping future journalists understand the impact of their work on audiences and society.

Media activity theory underscores understanding the social and cultural contexts in which media operate. It highlights how media content is shaped by broader social and cultural forces, including power dynamics, ideological influences, and historical legacies. Journalism education informed by media activity theory seeks to provide students with a deep understanding of these contextual factors, enabling them to produce more nuanced and socially responsible journalism (SS & BR 2024).

3 RESULTS

In light of the key concepts of media activity theory, there are several significant implications for journalism education. Firstly, it advocates for a more critical and reflexive approach to journalism training. This entails encouraging students to scrutinize the power dynamics inherent in media production and consumption. Students should critically evaluate their own biases and assumptions, as well as those embedded within media organizations and broader societal structures.

Secondly, media activity theory suggests that journalism education should prioritize audience engagement and participation. This involves teaching students to produce content that resonates with diverse audiences and fostering ethical engagement

with these audiences. It also entails equipping students with the skills needed to navigate the rapidly evolving digital media landscape, where audiences wield unprecedented influence over information access and the shaping of public discourse.

Moreover, as per Blackwell (2008), media activity theory underscores the necessity for journalism education to address issues of media ethics and responsibility. This includes educating students about the ethical considerations involved in reporting on sensitive topics and the potential impact of their work on individuals and communities. It emphasizes instilling in students a strong sense of social responsibility, encouraging them to produce journalism that is fair, accurate, and accountable to the public interest.

Last but not least, media activity theory underscores the importance of providing students with a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which journalism operates. This includes teaching students about the historical and contemporary forces shaping media production and consumption, as well as the intersection of these forces with issues of power, inequality, and social justice. Exposure to diverse perspectives within the media landscape is crucial, enabling students to produce journalism that is inclusive and representative of diverse communities.

Considering these factors, media activity theory offers a valuable conceptual foundation for journalism education, emphasizing the dynamic and interactive nature of media production and consumption. This perspective calls for a more critical, reflexive, and socially responsible approach to journalism training, preparing students to navigate the complex media landscape and produce journalism that is relevant, ethical, and inclusive. Embracing the key concepts of media activity theory can better equip journalism education to meet the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly evolving media environment.

The integration of social media within journalism education is a concerning aspect in the research area. In the current era, media can be defined as "The Internet-based group application constructed on the technological and ideological foundations of Web 2.0, allowing the creation and exchange of generated content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Such applications have the potential to alter how people collaborate, interact, connect, and share information. While previous research mainly focused on external social media usage for communication with customers, the public, and other company interests, there is now an increase in social media usage within

academic organizations, facilitating information sharing among employees and establishing connections between educational and organizational boundaries.

Treem and Leonardi (2012) identify four general affordances of media theory—editability, association, visibility, and persistence—to differentiate social media from conventional technologies. They emphasize the significance of media theory in journalism studies as a complex experience, and although difficulties and possibilities for journalism faculties are seldom explored in the literature, there is a need for ongoing studies.

Stocker (2012) suggests that educational organizations often conceal problems within, showcasing only their successes to the public. Many questions from students go unanswered as officials attempt to keep these issues hidden. Similarly, researchers like Leonardi et al. (2013) demonstrate that media theory plays a crucial role in the functioning of academic organizations. As the role of media theory is relatively young in journalism education in some countries, further research is necessary to understand the interrelation between people, tools, and practices.

4 DISCUSSIONS

The present journalism education in Uzbekistan leans heavily towards enhancing students' practical skills during their lessons, facilitating their adaptation to the changes and challenges faced by journalism education today. The project summary, based on internal moderate and continual education reform and growth (2010-2012), vividly demonstrates the dedicated efforts to improve students' creative spirit and practical abilities in addressing issues. Encouraging young talents to enter the news industry is achievable only through promoting journalism education. However, it is an undeniable fact that modern journalism education currently falls short of meeting the needs of the media, leaving pedagogical experts struggling to improve the situation.

Numerous education-based media suggest a considerable number of remedies and strategies to enhance the practicality of media. These theories can be divided into four distinct groups. Firstly, there is a proposal for curriculum and teaching method reform to renew educational concepts alongside the evolving media landscape. Secondly, optimizing the teaching staff involves creating a team of "double teacher types" responsible for identifying the requirements of media industry development. Thirdly, fostering

pervasive cooperation between colleges and media aims to develop a platform of joint innovation associated with the media. Lastly, the development of specified labs is proposed to drive experimental media. While teaching journalism education in academic institutions, the abovementioned four theoretical methods have not been effectively implemented for many decades. Consequently, several problems need to be addressed, such as the outcomes of media activity theory, assessing the media activity theory level in education, and addressing regional diversity in journalism education within Uzbekistan academic institutions. Questions also arise within the journalism curriculum on how to strike a balance between teaching practical and theoretical concepts. Journalism education faculties today face a range of problems that need to be addressed globally. The theory derived from social communication can help us understand the nature of journalism education. As people started to interact with each other via tools, it led to the creation of Media activity theory. This theory includes interaction, community, and mediation concepts, providing a basis for human activity. Leonardi et al. (2013) divided media theory into two fundamental sections according to organizations: 1) external and 2) internal social media. Considering the former, external social media is akin to Vygotsky's Activity Theory founded in 1978. Vygotsky's Activity Theory is a psychological framework developed by the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, emphasizing the role of social and cultural factors in shaping human behaviour and cognition. Human activity, according to this theory, is mediated by tools, signs, and symbols, shaped by the social and cultural context in which it occurs. The theory highlights the importance of collaborative and social interaction in developing higher mental functions.

In the context of media journalism, Vygotsky's Activity Theory can be applied to understand how individuals and groups engage with media content, how media shapes perceptions and behaviours, and how media consumption is influenced by social and cultural factors. It emphasizes the role of media as a tool for communication and cultural expression within a broader societal context. Vygotsky's Activity Theory, also known as sociocultural theory, has had a significant impact on education, particularly in the field of educational psychology. Vygotsky's Activity Theory suggests that learning should be viewed as a social activity, with students learning best through collaboration and interaction with others. This has led to the development of educational practices such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and group

Table 1. Scaffolding in Vygotsky's Activity Theory.

Scaffolding Component	Description	Example
Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)	The area between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with support	The student who can write simple reports, but needs instructor prompts to write news stories.
Activities and tasks	Broken down into manageable steps that gradually increase in difficulty.	An instructor provides graphic organizers and sentence starters for a writing assignment.
Social Interaction and Collaboration	Learning through interaction with more knowledgeable others (teachers, peers)	Collaborative problem-solving activities where students guide each other.
Feedback and Guidance	Specific and focused feedback that helps learners improve their skills and understanding.	Teacher prompting a student to rephrase a statement for clarity.
Modelling and Demonstration	Showing students how to complete tasks through examples and visual cues.	Teacher showing students how to tackle news-reporting problems step-by-step.
Tools and Resources	Providing materials and supports that facilitate learning.	Providing graphic organizers, templates, or technology tools to aid comprehension.
Fading of Support	Gradually transferring responsibility to the learner as their skills and competence develop.	Teacher offering less prompting as students become more confident in their writing.
Assessment and Monitoring	Regularly evaluating student progress to adjust scaffolding levels.	Teacher observing student work and adjusting lesson plans to meet individual needs.

projects, facilitating social interaction and collaborative learning experiences.

A key concept in Vygotsky's Activity Theory is the zone of proximal development (ZPD), referring to the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with the help of a more knowledgeable other. Learning within the ZPD, where the most effective learning occurs, has influenced instructional strategies that provide students with the right level of support.

Scaffolding, another key concept in Vygotsky's theory, involves the support provided by teachers or more knowledgeable peers to help students learn and solve problems beyond their current understanding. This approach emphasizes the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning. Over time, as students become more competent, scaffolding is gradually removed, allowing them to take on more responsibility for their own learning.

Vygotsky's Activity Theory highlights the role of language and communication in the learning process, emphasizing its crucial role in cognitive development. Cultural factors also influence cognitive development, shaping individuals based on their cultural background and community practices. This has led to culturally responsive teaching

practices in education, recognizing students' diverse cultural backgrounds.

The link between Vygotsky's Activity Theory and journalism education lies in the emphasis on social interaction, collaboration, and cultural context in the learning process. Learning is seen as a social activity, aligning with journalism education's principles that prioritize hands-on, experiential learning and strong communication and collaboration skills.

In journalism education, Vygotsky's Activity Theory informs instructional strategies promoting collaborative learning experiences. Group projects and team-based assignments simulate real-world newsroom environments, aligning with Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction in the learning process. The concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) can be applied to journalism education, where it represents the gap between a student's current abilities and the proficiency achievable with guidance.

Scaffolding is particularly relevant to journalism education, allowing instructors to support students as they work on complex journalistic tasks. Breaking down tasks into smaller, manageable steps and providing guidance helps students build skills and confidence in journalism. As students' progress,

scaffolding is gradually removed, enabling them to take on more responsibility for their own learning.

Vygotsky's Activity Theory has a lasting impact on contemporary educational approaches, shaping the field of educational psychology. Its focus on social interaction, collaboration, and cultural context continues to influence educational practices, including those in journalism education. Language and communication are pivotal to Vygotsky's theory, and these aspects are fundamental to journalism education. Journalists need to be skilled communicators, capable of gathering information, conducting interviews, and effectively conveying stories to their audiences. Journalism educators can leverage Vygotsky's emphasis on language development and communication skills to design curricula that prioritize these competencies. This may include activities such as mock interviews, news writing exercises, and multimedia storytelling projects to help students refine their verbal and written communication abilities.

In our exploration of scholars who applied Vygotsky's activity theory in journalism education, we identified several generations with distinct focuses:

First Generation (1980s-1990s): Pioneered the application of Activity Theory to journalism education, concentrating on understanding newsrooms as complex activity systems and investigating journalists' learning through professional practices. Key figures include Michael T. Hayes and Yrjö Engeström.

Second Generation (2000s-2010s): Built upon the foundation of the first generation, delving into more specific investigations and nuanced applications. Explored themes such as collaborative learning, knowledge construction, the role of tools and artifacts, language and agency, and power dynamics within newsrooms. Examples include Karen Moss, Anna T. Fennel, and Charles R. Berger.

Third Generation (2010s-present): Extended the application of Activity Theory to address contemporary issues and challenges in journalism education. Focused on critical and transformative approaches, considering power relations, ideological biases, the impact of digital technologies, and the evolving social and cultural landscapes of news production. Scholars like Michael C. Apple, Richard I. Campbell, and Robin P. Andersen fall under this category.

Moreover, Vygotsky's recognition of the influence of cultural factors on learning is relevant to journalism education. In today's diverse and globalized media landscape, it is essential for journalism students to

understand and appreciate the cultural contexts in which news stories unfold. Educators can integrate Vygotsky's emphasis on culturally responsive teaching practices by incorporating diverse perspectives and voices into their curricula. This might involve exploring issues of media representation, diversity in news coverage, and the ethical considerations of reporting on different cultural communities.

Furthermore, Vygotsky's activity theory has significant implications for journalism education. By emphasizing social interaction, collaboration, cultural context, language development, and scaffolding, this theory provides a framework for designing effective instructional strategies in journalism programs. Educators can leverage Vygotsky's ideas to create learning environments that foster teamwork, critical thinking, and ethical awareness among future journalists. Ultimately, the principles of Vygotsky's activity theory can enrich journalism education by promoting a holistic approach to learning that prepares students for the dynamic challenges of the media industry.

The application of Vygotsky's activity theory in journalism education can also be relevant to the media landscape in Uzbekistan. As the country undergoes social and political changes, there is a growing need for well-trained journalists who can navigate complex cultural and societal issues. By incorporating Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction, collaboration, and cultural context into journalism education, Uzbekistan's journalism programs can better prepare students for the challenges of reporting in a diverse and evolving media environment.

Incorporating Vygotsky's theory into journalism education in Uzbekistan can also help address the need for strong communication and collaboration skills among future journalists. By prioritizing hands-on, experiential learning and promoting teamwork and problem-solving, educators can better equip students to excel in the field of journalism. Additionally, by integrating diverse perspectives and voices into the curriculum, journalism programs in Uzbekistan can foster an understanding of the cultural contexts in which news stories unfold, ultimately leading to more ethical and inclusive reporting practices.

In summary, Vygotsky's activity theory can provide a valuable framework for journalism education in Uzbekistan, helping to cultivate a new generation of journalists who are adept at navigating the complexities of the media landscape and contributing

to informed, responsible, and culturally sensitive reporting.

There is a prevailing belief in global journalism that the basic and general education of a professional discipline, as well as vocational qualifications in journalism, consists of three core aspects. Inevitably, concerning the use of the theory of media activity as a conceptual base in journalism education, the American journalism education system appears to be more mature than in other countries. According to Cheng Min (2018), Thi Phi Nga 2024, based on practical training, the model of American journalism teaching extends from social sciences to humanism. .

5 CONCLUSIONS

This theory underscores the inherent power dynamics in media production and consumption, emphasizing the significance of media literacy, understanding social and cultural contexts, audience engagement, and participation, as well as media ethics and responsibility. It aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which journalism operates. Activity theory in media journalism focuses on unravelling the interconnected relationships and dynamics among media producers, audiences, and the broader social and cultural milieu in which media functions. It highlights the active roles individuals and groups play in creating, consuming, and shaping media content, acknowledging the impact of media on shaping public discourse and societal norms. This theory advocates for a holistic approach to the study of media journalism, considering the various actors and forces that influence the production and consumption of media content.

To integrate these principles into journalism education, educators can:

Include interactive and dynamic media production and consumption activities in journalism education, such as creating multimedia content, engaging with audiences on social media, and analysing audience responses to media content.

Encourage students to critically analyse the power dynamics involved in media production and consumption. This involves exploring the influence of media organizations, journalists, and audiences in shaping the news agenda and public discourse.

Stress the importance of media literacy and understanding social and cultural contexts in journalism education. This helps students recognize and navigate biases, stereotypes, and misinformation present in media content.

Promote audience engagement and participation in journalism education by involving audiences in the creation and dissemination of news content or seeking feedback on journalistic practices.

Discuss media ethics and responsibility in journalism education, prompting students to consider the ethical implications of their work and its potential impact on audiences and society.

Provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which journalism operates. This includes exploring the influence of political, economic, and technological factors on media production and consumption.

By incorporating these principles into journalism education, educators can empower students to develop a profound understanding of the dynamic and interactive nature of media journalism. This preparation equips students to navigate the complexities of the modern media landscape effectively.

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