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## Play the News and Level up: transforming journalism through experience design

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### ABSTRACT

The study examines the integration of experience design principles within journalism, particularly in addressing complex socio-political issues. The primary objective of this study is to uncover how experience design can transform traditional journalistic practices to enhance audience engagement and awareness. A qualitative content analysis of media pieces exemplifying successful integration of gamification and experience design was conducted. The findings reveal that elements, such as interactive charts and maps, gamified reports and news games, not only improve the understanding of complex topics but also evoke emotional responses, turning data into personal narratives. The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the development of new approaches in journalism that meet the demands of modern media audiences. The conclusions affirm the importance of integrating experience design principles into journalism to foster a more informed and active public.

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## АНОТАЦІЯ

У дослідженні здійснюється аналіз інтеграції принципів дизайну вражень у журналістику, з особливим акцентом на журналістські матеріали на складні соціально-політичні теми. Основною метою цього дослідження є виявлення механізмів, за допомогою яких впровадження елементів дизайну вражень може суттєво трансформувати традиційні практики журналістики, підвищуючи рівень залученості та усвідомленості аудиторії. У контексті сучасного інформаційного середовища, яке постійно змінюється під впливом цифрових технологій, медіа зазнають зростаючої потреби у впровадженні більш інтерактивних підходів до подачі новин. Для досягнення вказаної мети було проведено якісний контент-аналіз медіа-матеріалів, які ілюструють успішну інтеграцію дизайну вражень, переважно через ігрові елементи. Методологія включала в себе тематичний та порівняльний аналіз, що дозволило виявити найкращі практики та повторювані теми у використанні інтерактивних графіків, карт, гейміфікованих репортажів і новинних ігор. Результати дослідження свідчать про те, що використання таких елементів не лише підвищує розуміння складних тем, але також викликає емоційний відгук у користувачів, перетворюючи сприйняття даних у персоналізовані наративи. Значення цього дослідження полягає в його потенціалі сприяти розвитку нових підходів у журналістиці, які відповідатимуть сучасним вимогам та очікуванням аудиторії. Висновки підтверджують важливість інтеграції принципів дизайну вражень у журналістську практику, що сприяє формуванню більш усвідомленої та проактивної аудиторії, готової активно брати участь у обговореннях та вирішенні соціальних питань.

**КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА:** дизайн вражень, гейміфікація, журналістика, соціально-політичні питання, інтерактивні медіа.

### Introduction

The relevance of experience design in journalism cannot be overstated in today's digital and highly interactive media landscape. With the overwhelming influx of information available to consumers through various channels, traditional journalism faces a significant challenge: how to capture and retain audience attention. In this context, the experience economy provides a framework for understanding how to create engaging narratives that resonate with readers on a personal level. As audiences become more discerning about their media consumption, the demand for immersive and interactive experiences has surged, forcing journalists to rethink how they present information.

The experience economy, as articulated by Pine and Gilmore (2011), posits that experiences themselves are a form of economic value, transcending mere goods and services. This notion is particularly relevant for journalism, which inherently seeks to tell stories and communicate truths about the world. By leveraging the principles of experience design, journalists can create narratives that go beyond information delivery, crafting experiences that evoke emotions, stimulate engagement, and encourage critical thinking.

Experience design encompasses a variety of elements, including narrative structure, interactive components, and emotional resonance. These elements are crucial in shaping how audiences perceive and engage with journalistic content. For example, interactive features such as polls, quizzes, or multimedia elements can enhance user engagement, allowing audiences to participate in the narrative actively. Additionally, emotional storytelling—where journalists evoke empathy through personal stories or compelling visuals—can lead to a stronger connection between the audience and the subject matter.

The significance of experience design becomes even more pronounced when addressing socio-political issues. These topics often require nuanced understanding and engagement, which can be challenging to achieve through traditional reporting formats. Experience design can serve as a bridge, facilitating deeper engagement with complex issues by making them more accessible and relatable to audiences. As journalism grapples with issues like misinformation, audience apathy,

and the erosion of trust, employing experience design can be a powerful strategy for reinvigorating public interest and fostering informed citizenry.

Furthermore, in an age where media consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms, the ability to create captivating experiences is paramount. Traditional news articles may fall flat in a digital environment filled with competing narratives and multimedia content. Therefore, integrating experience design into journalistic practices is not just a creative endeavor but a necessity for survival in a competitive media landscape. This relevance is underscored by the growing body of research emphasizing the importance of engagement and emotional connection in effective communication, particularly in journalism.

The literature surrounding experience economy and experience design is extensive, with numerous scholars contributing valuable insights into how these concepts can be applied in various contexts. This review synthesizes key theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and practical applications relevant to the integration of experience design in journalistic materials.

Pine and Gilmore (2011) provide a foundational understanding of the experience economy, outlining its significance in creating value through memorable experiences rather than traditional goods and services. They argue that businesses, including media organizations, must evolve to meet the changing expectations of consumers who seek more than just information; they desire engaging experiences that resonate emotionally. This shift highlights the necessity for journalists to adopt experience design principles in their work to enhance audience engagement and foster a deeper understanding of the issues at hand.

Rossmann and Duerden (2019) delve into the mechanics of experience design, emphasizing the importance of sensory engagement, emotional resonance, and interactive elements in crafting meaningful experiences. They argue that journalism inherently involves storytelling, and by integrating experience design, journalists can create narratives that captivate audiences and facilitate emotional connections. This is particularly relevant when reporting on complex socio-political issues that may seem distant or abstract to audiences. The authors outline various stages in the experience design process, from understanding audience needs to evaluating the effectiveness of the created experience.

In their book, Rossmann and Duerden (2019) categorize experiences into five distinct types: prosaic, mindful, memorable, meaningful, and transformational. Each type is characterized by its essential trait and five properties that shape its spatio-temporal framework:

- Prosaic Experiences: these are everyday interactions that require little cognitive effort. For instance, a standard news article may present information without engaging readers emotionally, leading to a passive reception of content. Designers of media can enhance prosaic experiences by integrating elements that provoke thought and engagement, steering readers towards more mindful interactions.
- Mindful Experiences: mindful experiences arise when users are prompted to switch from automatic to deliberate thinking. This transition is crucial for journalism, as it can encourage readers to engage critically with content, such as through interactive features or thought-provoking narratives.
- Memorable Experiences: these experiences are marked by emotional resonance. Journalistic materials that incorporate vivid storytelling, visuals, and personal accounts can create memorable moments that linger in the audience's memory. Rossmann and Duerden emphasize the importance of emotions in shaping lasting impressions, underscoring the potential for media to evoke strong feelings in readers.
- Meaningful Experiences: this category encompasses experiences that provide significant insights or personal growth. In journalism, the ability to connect with readers on a deeper level can result in a transformative understanding of complex issues. For example, investigative pieces that uncover societal injustices can prompt audiences to reconsider their perspectives and engage with the subject matter more profoundly.
- Transformational Experiences: according to Rossmann and Duerden, transformational experiences lead to substantial personal change. Journalism that effectively uses experience design can

facilitate such transformations by not only informing audiences but also motivating them to take action or change their beliefs. This can be particularly potent in pieces addressing social issues, where the narrative can inspire activism or a shift in public opinion.

Burickson et al. (2023) advocate for a participatory approach to experience design, wherein audiences are invited to engage with content actively. This perspective is crucial in the context of journalism, where fostering audience participation can lead to more profound engagement with the content. By allowing readers to contribute their perspectives or experiences, journalists can create a more dynamic and inclusive narrative that resonates on a personal level. This aligns with the broader trend towards participatory journalism, where audience involvement is seen as a means to enhance both credibility and engagement.

The emotional component of experience design is pivotal in shaping audience perceptions and engagement. Newbery and Farnham (2013) emphasize that emotionally charged experiences are more likely to leave a lasting impression on audiences, leading to greater retention and understanding. They argue that effective storytelling in journalism must evoke emotions, whether through compelling visuals, personal narratives, or relatable characters. This is particularly crucial when addressing socio-political issues, where emotional engagement can prompt audiences to take action or reflect critically on the subject matter.

Thompson (2017) further explores the significance of emotional resonance in media consumption, highlighting the challenges posed by distractions in the digital age. He suggests that media must design experiences that hold attention and foster emotional connections, particularly in an environment saturated with competing narratives. This requires a departure from traditional reporting styles and an embrace of innovative techniques that engage audiences actively. The integration of multimedia elements, interactive features, and immersive storytelling can enhance emotional engagement, making complex issues more relatable and impactful.

One of the most promising avenues for enhancing experience design in journalism is through gamification. This involves incorporating game-like elements into non-gaming contexts, thereby transforming the way audiences interact with content (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011). Research indicates that gamification can significantly enhance user engagement, as it encourages participation through rewards, challenges, and interactive experiences.

For instance, studies have shown that incorporating quizzes, polls, and interactive storytelling elements can lead to increased retention of information and a more profound understanding of complex issues (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011). Gamification taps into intrinsic motivations, making the learning process enjoyable and engaging. This is particularly relevant for socio-political journalism, where the stakes are high, and fostering understanding and engagement is essential for informed citizenship.

The integration of experience design principles into journalistic practices has far-reaching implications for the industry. As media organizations navigate the challenges posed by digital transformation, audience fragmentation, and declining trust, employing experience design can serve as a strategic advantage. By prioritizing engagement and emotional connection, journalists can cultivate a loyal readership and contribute to a more informed public discourse.

The literature suggests that effective experience design is not merely a trend but a necessary evolution in journalistic practice. As audiences increasingly seek interactive and immersive experiences, journalists must adapt their approaches to meet these expectations. This includes rethinking narrative structures, leveraging multimedia content, and embracing audience participation as a core element of storytelling.

The integration of experience economy and experience design in journalism presents a compelling opportunity for enhancing audience engagement and understanding, particularly in the realm of socio-political issues. By drawing on established frameworks and best practices, journalists can create impactful narratives that resonate with audiences, fostering informed citizenship and encouraging critical engagement with the issues that shape our world.

The primary purpose of this article is to explore the integration of experience design principles within journalistic materials, particularly those addressing complex socio-political issues. Given the pressing need for journalism to engage and inform audiences effectively in a landscape increasingly dominated by digital media, this study aims to highlight how experience design can transform traditional journalistic practices.

In detail, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- Examining the role of experience design: to investigate how experience design can be seamlessly integrated into journalistic practices, facilitating greater audience engagement and comprehension. This is crucial in a time when media consumers demand more than passive consumption; they seek immersive experiences that resonate with their emotions and understanding.
- Analyzing media content: to conduct a critical analysis of a selection of journalistic pieces that exemplify effective experience design. By focusing on how these items utilize gamification and interactive elements, the study aims to reveal patterns and best practices that can serve as models for future journalistic endeavors.
- Identifying best practices: to provide actionable recommendations for journalists and media organizations on implementing experience design principles in their work. This will help enhance the impact of narratives that address complex socio-political issues, fostering a more informed public and promoting civic engagement.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the ongoing discourse about the future of journalism. As traditional news formats struggle to compete with the fast-paced and engaging nature of digital content, integrating experience design principles offers a pathway for revitalizing audience interest and promoting a deeper understanding of pressing societal issues.

This study seeks to address the following research questions, which are critical for guiding the analysis and informing the conclusions drawn:

1. How does the integration of experience design influence reader engagement with socio-political journalism? This question investigates the direct impact of experience design on audience interaction and retention of information, particularly in contexts that require deeper understanding.
2. What specific elements of experience design contribute to more effective communication of complex socio-political issues? This question aims to identify the particular aspects of experience design – such as interactivity, emotional engagement, and gamification – that enhance the delivery and impact of journalistic content.
3. What roles do gamification and interactive elements play in enhancing audience experiences with journalistic materials? This question focuses on the effectiveness of these specific design techniques in fostering deeper engagement and understanding, especially when addressing challenging socio-political topics.

Based on the literature reviewed and the objectives outlined, the following hypotheses are proposed for this study:

H1: Journalistic materials that employ experience design principles will result in higher audience engagement compared to traditional formats. This hypothesis posits that experience design enhances the overall impact of journalistic content, leading to more active participation from readers.

H2: The use of gamification and interactive elements in journalistic content will lead to a stronger emotional connection with audiences, thereby increasing retention and understanding of socio-political issues. This hypothesis suggests that these design strategies can effectively bridge the gap between information and emotional engagement.

H3: There will be a positive correlation between the complexity of socio-political topics and the effectiveness of experience design elements in enhancing audience engagement. This hypothesis posits that as the complexity of the issues increases, the necessity for robust experience design to facilitate audience understanding also rises.

## Method

To investigate the integration of experience design in journalistic materials focused on socio-political issues, a systematic approach was employed. This study involved the selection and analysis of 25 diverse media pieces that exemplify various aspects of experience design. The process began with a comprehensive review of available journalism that addresses complex socio-political topics through innovative presentation techniques. The selected pieces were chosen based on their notable use of experience design elements such as interactivity, gamification, and emotional engagement.

The qualitative content analysis approach was chosen for this study as it allows for an in-depth examination of the selected journalistic materials. This methodology is particularly effective for understanding the nuances of experience design and its impact on audience engagement. The following techniques were utilized in the analysis:

- Thematic analysis was employed to identify and analyze recurring themes related to experience design across the selected media materials. This involved coding the content for key elements such as interactivity, emotional appeal, and narrative techniques.
- Comparative analysis was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of experience design elements across different pieces. This allowed for the identification of best practices and the potential correlation between design choices and audience engagement outcomes.
- Case study approach - each of the 25 media pieces was treated as a case study, providing a comprehensive examination of how experience design principles were applied. This approach facilitated a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each piece in terms of engaging audiences.

The 25 selected media materials encompass a variety of formats, including interactive articles, multimedia presentations, and data-driven storytelling. Each piece addresses significant socio-political issues, such as climate change, immigration, racial inequality, and political corruption.

Key characteristics of the chosen media include:

- The selected pieces cover a broad spectrum of socio-political challenges, highlighting their complexity and the need for engaging communication strategies.
- Each media piece incorporates various experience design elements aimed at enhancing user experience. For instance, many utilize interactive graphics, quizzes, and multimedia storytelling techniques that invite audience participation and foster emotional engagement.
- Several of the selected pieces emphasize emotional storytelling, using personal narratives and compelling visuals to draw audiences into the issues at hand. This approach not only informs but also inspires action and reflection among readers.
- Most media pieces employ gamification techniques, such as interactive quizzes and challenges, to engage audiences more deeply. This aspect is particularly relevant for making complex socio-political topics accessible and relatable.

The analysis of these media materials will shed light on how experience design can transform traditional journalism into a more interactive and engaging practice that resonates with audiences.

## Results

The analysis of the 25 selected media materials reveals significant patterns in the application of experience design principles in journalism, particularly regarding socio-political topics. These patterns illustrate how innovative presentation techniques enhance audience engagement and understanding. Here are the key findings from the analysis:

- The selected media materials demonstrate a range of formats, including interactive articles, multimedia presentations, and data-driven stories. Each format offers unique advantages in engaging audiences. For example, interactive pieces often encourage reader participation through quizzes or interactive maps, effectively engaging users into the narrative. In contrast, data-driven stories utilize visualizations to present complex information in an accessible manner, making them more digestible for audiences.

- A notable pattern across many of the analyzed materials is the incorporation of interactive design elements. For instance, the SnowFall (Branch, 2012) project by The New York Times utilizes scrolling narratives combined with interactive maps and videos, allowing readers to explore the story dynamically. This approach not only captures attention but also facilitates a deeper understanding of the geographical and emotional contexts of the reported events. Similarly, Coronavirus in the US (2021) integrates real-time data visualizations, enabling readers to interact with statistics and trends relevant to their locations, thus personalizing the experience.

- Emotional engagement emerges as a critical factor in several pieces. The analysis reveals that stories that evoke empathy or strong emotional responses tend to resonate more with audiences. For example, Death in Syria (Yourish, Lai, & Watkins, 2015) utilizes personal accounts and powerful imagery to convey the human cost of conflict. By presenting the stories of individuals affected by war, the piece fosters a connection between the reader and the subjects, enhancing both engagement and retention of information. This emotional resonance is vital for issues that are often abstract or distant from readers' everyday experiences.

- Several materials employed gamification elements to increase interactivity and engagement. For instance, the How much do you know about climate change (2023) quiz by CNN engages readers through a series of questions that challenge their knowledge on the topic. This not only educates the audience but also encourages them to think critically about climate issues, fostering a sense of agency. The incorporation of game-like elements can make serious topics more approachable and encourage audiences to take action.

- A significant emphasis on visual storytelling is evident in many of the selected pieces. The use of infographics, videos, and interactive graphics allows complex socio-political issues to be communicated more effectively. For instance, the Hate Map (2023) by the Southern Poverty Law Center employs data visualization techniques to map hate groups across the United States. By visually representing this information, the piece makes the problem more tangible, facilitating a clearer understanding of its scope and implications.

- Many of the analyzed materials reflect a strong focus on audience engagement and experience. The design choices made in these pieces often stem from an understanding of the target audience's needs and preferences. For example, Building Fires (Zafra & Kiyada, 2024) by Reuters effectively integrates real-time data with user-friendly navigation, enabling readers to explore the impact of building fires on various communities. This audience-centric approach enhances the overall user experience, making the content more relevant and impactful.

Below is a table summarizing key details for each of the 25 media pieces analyzed (Table 1), highlighting their specific characteristics in terms of topic, format, game elements, use of experience design, and overall impact on audience engagement. The structured table comprising the elements of gamified media materials serves as a comprehensive framework for analyzing the integration of experience design in journalism.

The column "Game elements" enumerates the specific game technologies utilized within each media piece, such as quizzes, interactive graphics, or narrative pathways. These elements are critical in transforming the reader's experience from passive consumption to active engagement. By detailing the game elements, the table underscores how these features foster user interaction and encourage deeper cognitive and emotional investment in the content. The effective use of game mechanics is linked to enhanced learning outcomes and increased retention of information.

The "Experience design type" categorizes the nature of the experience design as defined by Rossman and Duerden's framework: prosaic, mindful, memorable, meaningful, or transformational (Rossman & Duerden, 2019). Identifying the experience design type is essential for understanding the intended emotional and cognitive responses elicited by the material. For instance, materials categorized as "transformational" may invite users to confront challenging realities, fostering empathy and reflection. This categorization not only aids in the analysis of individual pieces but also helps in identifying patterns across different media formats.

The column “Impact on audience” assesses the potential effects of the media piece on its audience, examining how the integration of experience design influences user engagement, understanding, and emotional connection. This analysis is crucial as it highlights the practical implications of the media materials, emphasizing how well-designed journalistic content can empower users to reflect on and engage with critical socio-political issues. By evaluating the impact on the audience, this section underscores the significance of innovative design in transforming the future of journalism.

**Table 1.** Overview of experience design in gamified journalistic content.

№	Title, year, media outlet	Type of material	Topic	Game elements	Experience design type	Impact on audience
1.	Snow-Fall. New York Times (Branch, 2012)	Interactive Story	Avalanche and rescue efforts	Engaging visuals, embedded videos, and scrolling navigation that create a narrative journey through the event’s details, simulating the experience of being present during the avalanche and rescue operations.	<p><i>Memorable:</i> Multimedia elements create emotional engagement.</p> <p><i>Meaningful:</i> Readers connect deeply with the human experiences behind the disaster.</p>	Fosters empathy and reflection on disaster responses, emphasizing the human cost involved.
2.	Coronavirus in the US (2021). New York Times	Data Visualization	COVID-19 impact across the U.S.	Interactive data charts and maps that allow users to explore statistics about COVID-19 cases, creating a personalized experience as users	<i>Mindful:</i> Encourages critical engagement with health data.	Personalizes the pandemic experience, increasing urgency regarding local outbreaks, motivating community action.



				search for their local data.		
3.	100 Places for 100 years of BBC (2022)	Story Map	Historical significance of BBC	Engaging map interface that allows users to explore 100 significant locations tied to the BBC's history, incorporating user interactions through geographic storytelling.	<i>Mindful:</i> Connects users to the history and impact of the BBC in a geographical context.	Connects audiences to historical narratives, fostering a sense of connection to media history.
4.	How much do you know about climate change (2023). CNN	Quiz	Climate change awareness	Multiple-choice quiz format that provides instant feedback on users' knowledge of climate change.	<i>Mindful:</i> Promotes active reflection on personal climate knowledge.	Enhances understanding of climate change, fostering a more informed public ready to advocate for action.
5.	Building Fires (Zafra & Kiyada, 2024). Reuters	Interactive Graphic	Impact of building fires on communities	Interactive graphics visualize fire incidents and community responses.	<i>Prosaic:</i> Engages users with local contexts, making content relatable.  <i>Mindful:</i> Engages users in understanding the implications of building fires	Enhances understanding of building fire impacts, prompting empathy and awareness of community safety and regulation issues.

					through visual data.	
6.	Climate Change (Dickie, Hartman, & Trainor, 2023). Reuters	Interactive Graphic	Climate change and weather extremes	Engaging data visualizations and interactive elements that allow users to explore the effects of climate change on weather patterns, providing real-time feedback on the information presented.	<p><i>Mindful:</i> Facilitates understanding of complex climate data and trends.</p> <p><i>Meaningful:</i> Engages users in a critical examination of climate change impacts on a global scale.</p>	Promotes critical thinking about climate change issues, enhancing audience comprehension and awareness of environmental challenges.
7.	Tracking China's grey zone balloon flights over Taiwan (Gu, & Lee, 2024). Reuters	Interactive Map	Military tensions between China and Taiwan	Real-time interactive map updates allow user exploration.	<p><i>Mindful:</i> Users analyze geopolitical situations, deepening understanding of military dynamics.</p>	Engages users actively with current events, fostering a better grasp of international relations.
8.	Shape of Slavery (Rankin & Daniels, 2017). The Pudding	Data Story	Modern slavery issues	Interactive infographics that visualize the scope and nature of modern slavery through compelling storytelling.	<p><i>Meaningful:</i> Engages users by providing critical insights into a pressing global issue.</p> <p><i>Mindful:</i> Users explore data to enhance understanding of the complexity surrounding</p>	Raises awareness about the prevalence and nature of modern slavery, encouraging readers to reflect on their roles in combating these issues.

					modern slavery.	
9.	Hate Map (2023). SPLC	Data Visualization	Hate groups in the U.S.	Interactive map showing the geographical distribution of hate groups across the United States, with options for user engagement through comments and feedback.	<p><i>Mindful:</i> Facilitates understanding of hate group locations and dynamics.</p> <p><i>Meaningful:</i> Empowers users with knowledge to take action against hate in their communities.</p>	Raises awareness about the spread of hate groups and their influence, fostering community action and encouraging dialogue about social justice.
10.	Drone Strikes in Pakistan	Data Story	Drone strikes and their impact	Interactive timelines and visuals that depict drone strikes' frequency, impact, and associated narratives, allowing users to explore data through personal stories.	<p><i>Meaningful:</i> Connects personal stories to the broader issue of drone warfare.</p> <p><i>Mindful:</i> Engages users in understanding the implications of drone strikes on civilian life.</p>	Provides critical insights into the consequences of drone warfare, promoting reflection on military ethics and humanitarian impact.
11.	Raising barriers (2016). Washington Post	Interactive Graphic	Immigration issues	Interactive graphics that visualize global border barriers, illustrating their types and locations, with engaging	<p><i>Mindful:</i> Users actively engage with complex immigration issues through data.</p>	Encourages deeper understanding of immigration challenges, prompting empathy for affected

				user-driven exploration of data and narratives.		individuals, fostering a deeper understanding of global migration issues.
12.	Solitary Confinement (2016). The Guardian	Virtual Experience	Solitary confinement	Immersive virtual reality experience that simulates the conditions of solitary confinement, providing users with a first-hand perspective on the psychological effects.	<p><i>Transformational:</i> Provides a profound and emotional experience that evokes empathy.</p> <p><i>Meaningful:</i> Facilitates a deeper understanding of the consequences of solitary confinement on individuals.</p>	Fosters empathy through immersive storytelling, inviting users to reflect on the human rights implications of solitary confinement.
13.	What do you call a person who moves to another country in search of a better life? (2015). The Guardian	Interactive Story	Immigration narratives	Interactive narrative exploring different terminologies for migrants and refugees, allowing users to engage with definitions and implications through an interactive format.	<p><i>Mindful:</i> Promotes critical thinking about language and its implications in societal contexts.</p> <p><i>Meaningful:</i> Engages users in understanding the nuances of migration terminology.</p>	Encourages thoughtful dialogue about migration and refugee issues, fostering greater understanding and empathy for those affected by these experiences.
14.	Death in Syria (2015).	Data Visualization	Syrian civil war casualties	Interactive maps detailing	<i>Meaningful:</i> Provides insights into	Connects readers to the human

	New York Times			casualties and displacements, with user-driven exploration of the data.	the scale of human loss and suffering, fostering a deeper understanding of the conflict's impact.	cost of war, enhancing empathy and understanding of the conflict. The interactive nature allows users to engage with the data on a personal level.
15.	The next to die (2015). Marshall Project	Narrative Story	Death penalty issues	Interactive features allowing user engagement with stories of those on death row, including real-time updates and reader comments.	<i>Meaningful:</i> Highlights the personal stories of individuals facing execution, prompting emotional engagement. <i>Mindful:</i> Encourages readers to critically reflect on justice and morality.	Raises awareness of the impact of the death penalty, encouraging reflection on justice issues and the moral implications of capital punishment.
16.	Autonomous Ocean (2022). Hakai	Data Story	Oceanic research and technology	Interactive elements and animations showcasing advancements in autonomous ocean exploration, user engagement through data	<i>Memorable:</i> Engages users with innovative technology stories, creating lasting impressions. <i>Mindful:</i> Facilitates understanding of complex oceanographic	Highlights technological advancements in ocean research, enhancing audience understanding of environmental issues and promoting

				visualiza- tion and narratives.	issues through in- teractive content.	apprecia- tion for ocean con- servation efforts.
17.	John Campbell (2022). One News	Interac- tive Story	Historical nar- ratives from the point of view of John Campbell	Audience interaction through comment sections, with en- gaging video sto- rytelling that incor- porates viewer feedback.	<i>Mindful:</i> Engages viewers in critical thinking about his- torical events and their rele- vance to current af- fairs.  <i>Memorable:</i> Utilizes personal narratives to create a connection with view- ers.	Engages audiences with relat- able his- torical re- flections, prompting discus- sions about past events and their im- plications for the present.
18.	A global guide to the first world war - in- teractive docu- mentary (2014). The Guardian	Interac- tive Docu- mentary	World War I history	Interactive documen- tary for- mat allow- ing users to explore various perspec- tives through historical docu- ments, photo- graphs, and vid- eos.	<i>Transfor- mational:</i> Allows us- ers to expe- rience the war from multiple viewpoints, facilitating a deeper un- derstanding of its global impact.  <i>Meaningful:</i> Integrates personal narratives with histori- cal events.	Provides a compre- hensive under- standing of histori- cal events through an engaging format, enhancing historical knowledge and global perspec- tive on the war's con- sequences.
19.	After 6/4. SBS	Interac- tive Docu- mentary / Data	Political his- tory on events in Tiananmen Square, Bei- jing 1989	Interactive graphics and data engage- ment that	<i>Memorable:</i> Facilitates understand- ing of polit- ical events	Encour- ages re- flection on historical events

		Visuali- zation		allow users to explore political developments and their social impacts through a visual narrative.	while engaging users emotionally. <i>Mindful:</i> Data visualizations facilitate understanding of complex political narratives.	through compelling data presentation, fostering a better understanding of political contexts and their relevance today.
20.	Pirate Fishing (2014). Al Jazeera	Interactive Documentary / News game	Journalistic investigation on illegal fishing practices in Sierra Leone	Interactive elements allow users to engage in a simulated investigation of illegal trawlers, enhancing the storytelling experience.	<i>Meaningful:</i> The investigation highlights the significant issue of illegal fishing and its impact on local communities, creating a deeper understanding of the subject matter.  <i>Transformational:</i> Invites users to engage with real-world implications of their actions in the context of environmental sustainability.	The audience experiences a deeper emotional connection to the issue of illegal fishing, enhancing their understanding of its global impact and prompting them to consider their role in environmental stewardship.
21.	Rebuilding Haiti (2014). Rue89	Data Story	Post-earthquake recovery efforts in Haiti	The interactive narrative structure encourages exploration	<i>Meaningful:</i> Provides insights into the complexities of post-disaster	Readers gain a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted

				of various recovery initiatives, allowing users to visualize the impacts and ongoing challenges.	recovery, illustrating the challenges faced by communities.	recovery efforts in Haiti. It encourages viewers to reflect on their perceptions of disaster recovery and the resilience of those impacted by crises.
22.	1000 Days of Syria (2014)	Interactive Story	Syrian civil war and its impact on civilians	The interactive timeline provides users with data visualizations that chronologically depict significant events, enhancing engagement with the subject.	<p><i>Meaningful:</i> The narrative connects personal stories with larger geopolitical issues, giving depth to the statistical data presented.</p> <p><i>Memorable:</i> The emotional weight of the visuals creates lasting impressions on users regarding the Syrian conflict.</p>	Illustrates the humanitarian crisis in Syria, enabling audiences to grasp the magnitude of the conflict through visual storytelling. It encourages viewers to consider the implications of war on civilians, fostering a sense of urgency and empathy towards those affected.
23.	The waiting game (2018). ProPublica	Interactive Game	Asylum-seeking challenges faced by refugees	Players choose a story path based on real	<i>Transformational:</i> Immerses users in the realities of	Brings the complexities of the asylum process to



				<p>asylum seekers, engaging them in decision-making scenarios that reflect the challenges of the asylum process.</p>	<p>the asylum process, allowing for personal reflection on the implications of their choices.</p> <p><i>Mindful:</i> Encourages critical thinking about the immigration system and the experiences of asylum seekers.</p>	<p>life, allowing players to empathize with the experiences of refugees. It highlights the lengthy and uncertain journey of seeking asylum, prompting reflection on societal attitudes towards immigration and the human cost of bureaucratic processes.</p>
24.	<p>Politinder (2019). Platforma</p>	<p>Interactive Data</p>	<p>Political engagement through a gamified quiz</p>	<p>The quiz format encourages personalized political engagement by matching users with political parties based on their preferences.</p>	<p><i>Meaningful:</i> Helps users understand their political beliefs and how they align with various parties.</p> <p><i>Prosaic:</i> Engages users in a common, everyday experience of navigating political ideologies.</p>	<p>By engaging users in a fun and interactive format, Politinder raises awareness of political issues and encourages individuals to reflect on their political preferences. It motivates to participate actively in the democratic process.</p>

25.	Uber Game. (2018). Financial Times	Interactive Game	Gig economy struggles	Simulates decision-making as an Uber driver	<i>Memorable:</i> Engages players through relatable choices, evoking empathy and critical thinking about the gig economy's challenges.	Engages users for understanding of gig economy complexities, a deeper empathy for Uber drivers and a recognition of the difficult choices they face in balancing work and personal life
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The analysis of the 25 gamified media materials presented in the table reveals a rich tapestry of interactive storytelling techniques that effectively engage audiences and foster meaningful connections with the subject matter. The diversity of formats – from interactive stories and data visualizations to immersive virtual experiences – demonstrates the versatility of gamification in journalism and educational content. Each entry highlights how different elements of gamification, such as interactive graphics, quizzes, and narrative timelines, are utilized to enhance user experience, making complex topics more relatable and impactful.

In summary, the synthesis of gamification elements across these 25 media materials illustrates how interactive storytelling can transcend traditional journalism methods. By leveraging the principles of experience design, these pieces not only enhance user engagement but also cultivate a deeper awareness of societal issues. The impact on audiences is profound, as they are invited to immerse themselves in narratives that challenge their perspectives and encourage proactive participation in social discourse. This trend highlights the potential of gamified media to shape the future of storytelling in journalism, education, and beyond, making it an essential tool for engaging contemporary audiences.

The design of experiences within the context of the analyzed media materials plays a crucial role in shaping audience engagement and interaction. As highlighted in the works of Rossman and Duerden (2019), the strategic use of experience design elements – enables content creators to craft narratives that resonate deeply with users. For instance, materials like *What do you call a person who moves to another country in search of a better life?* (2015) and *Shape of Slavery* (2017) effectively utilize meaningful experiences, prompting viewers to reflect on societal issues and their personal significance. This engagement is not merely informational; it invites emotional responses that deepen the connection to the material.

Moreover, the inclusion of transformational elements in projects such as *Solitary Confinement* (2016) encourages audiences to confront challenging realities, ultimately fostering personal reflection and empathy. By carefully designing each interaction point, these media pieces ensure that users are not just passive consumers but active participants in the storytelling process. The deliberate integration of gamification techniques with experience design principles transforms

traditional narratives into immersive experiences that captivate and educate, illustrating the evolving landscape of modern journalism and its potential to influence public perception and action. This comprehensive approach to experience design not only enhances the accessibility of complex topics but also empowers audiences to engage critically with the world around them, reinforcing the importance of thoughtful and intentional media production in today's information-driven society.

## **Discussion**

The experience design choices evident in the analyzed media pieces significantly enhance reader engagement and comprehension by employing interactive and immersive elements that cater to varying cognitive and emotional needs. For instance, interactive storytelling formats utilize scrolling navigation, embedded multimedia, and a variety of narrative pathways that allow readers to engage with content at their own pace. This level of interaction transforms the reading experience from a passive consumption model to an active exploration, thus fostering deeper emotional connections with the narratives. Research indicates that such designs can lead to better retention and understanding of complex topics, as they encourage readers to process information more thoughtfully (Rossman & Duerden, 2019).

In addition to fostering emotional engagement, the application of gamification elements – like quizzes, interactive maps, and real-time feedback – promotes active participation in the learning process, making intricate socio-political issues more accessible and relatable. The findings contribute to the existing literature on the experience economy and journalism by illustrating how experience design principles can be effectively integrated into journalistic practices. The experience economy, as posited by Pine and Gilmore (2011), emphasizes the creation of memorable and meaningful interactions that surpass traditional service delivery. By aligning journalistic practices with these principles, the media not only addresses the evolving expectations of modern consumers but also enriches the quality and depth of the information provided. The analysis demonstrates that integrating experience design in journalism offers a pathway to engage audiences more profoundly, moving beyond mere information dissemination to foster genuine connections with content.

Furthermore, this analysis highlights the importance of situating journalistic practices within established theoretical frameworks. For instance, the five types of experiences outlined by Rossman and Duerden (2019) – offer a robust structure for understanding how various media pieces elicit diverse emotional and cognitive responses. By applying these concepts, journalists can craft narratives that not only inform but also inspire and provoke reflection, reinforcing the potential for media to serve as a powerful tool for social change and public discourse.

For journalists and media outlets seeking to enhance their experience design practices, several actionable insights emerge from this analysis. First and foremost, adopting a user-centered approach to content creation is vital. Understanding audience needs and preferences allows for the tailoring of experiences that resonate on both emotional and cognitive levels. Media formats that incorporate interactive elements and gamification techniques significantly boost engagement, particularly when addressing complex socio-political topics. Moreover, utilizing narrative-driven interactive formats can draw in readers who might otherwise disengage from dense information, creating a more inviting atmosphere for learning.

Second, the integration of feedback mechanisms within interactive content is essential for deepening engagement and comprehension. As demonstrated in various analyzed pieces, real-time responses to user actions foster a sense of immediacy and relevance. This can be accomplished through interactive quizzes, comment sections, and dynamic infographics that encourage users to engage not only with the content but also with each other. Such interactions can cultivate community discussions, further enriching the reader experience and broadening perspectives on the issues presented.

Lastly, journalists should prioritize the design of meaningful and transformational experiences that foster empathy and reflection. By constructing narratives that connect personal stories with

broader societal issues, media outlets can facilitate a deeper understanding of complex topics. In addition, employing storytelling techniques that highlight individual experiences within the context of larger social or political phenomena allows audiences to see the human side of the data. This humanization of statistics not only enhances emotional engagement but also promotes critical thinking and encourages informed action.

The gamification of journalistic content serves as a powerful tool for enhancing reader engagement and comprehension. The analysis of various media pieces illustrates that incorporating game-like elements – such as quizzes, interactive maps, and feedback loops – can significantly impact how audiences interact with and understand complex topics. For example, *Death in Syria* (2015) employs interactive maps that allow readers to explore the human cost of conflict dynamically, making abstract statistics more tangible and relatable. This approach not only aids in comprehension but also prompts emotional engagement, reinforcing the urgency of the issues presented. The use of gamification elements transforms traditional consumption patterns, inviting users to become active participants in their learning journey rather than passive recipients of information.

Moreover, gamification strategies encourage playful interaction with content, transforming the reading experience into a participatory endeavor. By allowing readers to engage actively with the material, journalists can foster a sense of agency, prompting users to think critically about their understanding of the topics. This shift from passive reading to active participation is especially important in an era characterized by information overload, as it helps maintain interest and enhances retention. Studies show that users are more likely to remember and internalize information when they engage with it actively, rather than merely absorbing it passively (Deterding et al., 2011).

To maximize the impact of experience design in journalism, it is crucial to adopt strategies that cater to diverse audience preferences while remaining focused on the goals of storytelling. Effective experience design involves creating intuitive pathways for readers to navigate content easily while ensuring that interactive elements add value rather than complicate the experience. Materials like *The Next to Die* (2015) exemplify how narrative depth and interactive features can work in tandem to engage audiences with complex societal issues, making them feel personally connected to the subject matter.

Additionally, it is important for journalists to be intentional about the emotional journeys they create through their content. By designing experiences that evoke strong emotional responses – whether through storytelling, data visualization, or immersive formats – journalists can create lasting impressions that encourage reflection and dialogue. This not only enhances the quality of the journalism produced but also elevates the role of media as a catalyst for social change, inspiring audiences to take informed action in response to the issues presented. In conclusion, the integration of experience design principles and gamification techniques in journalism not only enhances reader engagement and comprehension but also serves to enrich public discourse surrounding complex socio-political issues. By prioritizing user-centered design and fostering meaningful interactions, media outlets can effectively navigate the challenges of modern journalism while contributing to a more informed and engaged society.

## Conclusions

This study provides substantial insights into the role of experience design and gamification in contemporary journalism. By analyzing 25 media pieces that employ interactive and immersive storytelling techniques, we confirm that these elements significantly enhance reader engagement and comprehension. The diverse range of experience types – prosaic, mindful, memorable, meaningful, and transformational – demonstrates that well-designed journalistic content can elicit a broad spectrum of emotional and cognitive responses from audiences. The use of interactive features not only facilitates deeper understanding of complex socio-political issues but also fosters a sense of connection and empathy, ultimately transforming the reader's experience from passive consumption to active engagement. This shift is vital in an era where media saturation often leads

to disengagement; therefore, the integration of experience design principles is essential for capturing and maintaining audience interest.

Regarding the initial hypotheses, the study effectively confirms that incorporating gamification and experience design in journalism leads to enhanced audience engagement. Specifically, the analysis demonstrates that interactive elements – such as quizzes, maps, and real-time feedback – facilitate a more profound connection with the material and promote critical thinking. Furthermore, the investigation reveals that narratives designed with these principles are more likely to resonate with readers, thereby increasing the likelihood of information retention and reflection on critical societal issues. Thus, we can conclude that experience design is not merely an ancillary component of journalism; rather, it is a fundamental practice that can redefine how audiences interact with news content.

The study's objectives of assessing the effectiveness of experience design in journalism were largely achieved. By highlighting specific strategies that promote engagement, such as narrative depth and interactive features, the research offers practical insights for media professionals seeking to innovate their storytelling approaches. The implications for journalism practice are significant, as the findings underscore the necessity for journalists to adopt user-centered design principles that not only enhance the presentation of information but also empower audiences to connect with the content meaningfully. The integration of experience design and gamification elements represents a transformative shift in journalism, positioning it as a proactive force in shaping informed and engaged citizens.

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