

Research Article

The Influence of Constructive Journalism on News Avoidance and Long-Term News Consumption Intentions

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**ABSTRACT**

As news avoidance becomes more common, it has posed a major problem for digital journalism, which is concerned with falling audience participation and news consumption. Constructive journalism has been suggested as a type of reporting that blends fact with context and solutions, but there is not yet empirical evidence about the impact of constructive journalism on audience behavioral outcomes. Based on this, this study analyzed the results of a randomized controlled experiment to see how constructive journalism influences news avoidance and future news consumption intentions. Overall, 400 regular digital news users were randomly assigned to read a constructive or conventional version of a news article, and then completed a structured post-exposure questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze collected data along with independent-samples t-test. The results showed that participants who were exposed to CJ expressed higher scores in terms of news avoidance and more positive intentions to continue reading digital news than conventional journalism. The results of this study offer empirical proof of the positive effect that solution-oriented news framing can have on the engagement of audiences, as it helps to decrease news avoidance and increase the audience's tendency to consume more digital news. The research makes an important contribution to journalism and communication studies by adding to the experimental evidence on constructive journalism, and it has practical implications for news media that want to enhance their long-term audience connection by balancing problem-and-solution journalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has rapidly changed journalism into an interactive and very accessible communication environment where audiences can access, share and interact with news via websites, mobile apps and social media. These trends have increased the availability of information, but at the same time have led to major issues for the news media such as information overload, negativity and loss of audience. News avoidance is one of the most prominent concerns of current journalism studies, as recent reports show that more and more viewers actively turn against the news media for the perceived emotional overload, repetition and negativity of this content [1-4].

In recognition of this challenge, new approaches have emerged in journalism such as Constructive Journalism that does not solely emphasize conflict and negativity, but also includes other elements including context, solutions and balanced perspective. Constructive journalism is a new paradigm that aims to inform people and at the same time inspire hope, understanding and constructive public dialogue without losing journalistic independence and accuracy [5-7]. Previous experimental studies have found that positive news improves emotional response, levels of engagement and perceptions of news quality [8, 9].

However, despite these positive results, the literature so far is mainly focused on the impact of constructive journalism on emotional responses, trust and audience engagement. Little has been done, however, to consider whether constructive journalism can decrease news avoidance or that people may persist in consuming news over time. Similarly, the connection between constructive reporting and future news consumption intention is not well understood in experimental design study (controlled studies) [8-11]. Therefore, there is a significant gap in terms of the implications of constructive journalism on behavior beyond the instant audience response.

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To overcome this, the present study takes a Randomized Control Experiment (RCT) approach, randomly assigning participants to read a conventional news article or a constructive version of the same article. The study investigates if exposure to constructive journalism diminishes news avoidance and boosts the intention to consume news in the long-term. This study offers experimental evidence on these two behavioural outcomes, as well as implications for news organisations looking to find sustainable solutions to boost audience engagement in digital media.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Constructive journalism has become one of the most important trends in modern journalism, because it is an alternative to the mostly problem-oriented approach that has become dominant in traditional journalism. Constructive journalism, however, does not only look for the negative part of the story, but also for the positive, in the form of context, possible solutions, and positive social responses, and reports in a balanced way, remembering the important principles of accuracy, objectivity and editorial independence [12,13]. Constructive journalism has not been designed to take the place of critical reporting with a positive message, but rather to expand reporting in a manner that enhances the public understanding of complex issues and fosters constructive public discourse. This has become a growing interest of journalism scholars and media organizations looking for sustainable methods to engage audiences whilst maintaining the professional journalistic standards [14].

News avoidance is one of the biggest problems to be addressed by digital journalism today. While digital technologies have made information more accessible to the public, some people choose to restrict or entirely deny access to information because they find news content emotionally draining, repetitive, or too negative [15]. Previous studies categorize news avoidance into four types: passive avoidance, when people change their media habits or pay less attention to news; selective avoidance, when people avoid certain topics or news sources; active avoidance, when they actively avoid news; and no avoidance, when they simply do not look for news [16]. Of the various forms, active news avoidance has gained much attention in recent years due to its status as a conscious choice to avoid media that signals a desire to distance oneself from journalism, and is increasingly seen to pose a threat to democratic engagement and the sustained viability of news organisations.

Future news consumption intentions is a concept closely related to news avoidance, but is defined as a person's intentions to keep following news over time. Future news consumption intentions are measured after exposure to a news item, and reflect longer-term news consumption intentions regarding continued news consumption. A number of psychological factors have previously been mentioned that can affect sustained news consumption, such as relevance, emotional involvement, trust, satisfaction and value [17]. As a result, it is becoming more significant to understand how various forms of journalism affect news consumers' receptivity to further news consumption, from a research and practice perspective.

In recent years there has been a proliferation of experiments which have investigated how constructive journalism influences audience reactions. Constructive news stories have been demonstrated to cause higher positive emotional responses, hope and optimism, perceptions of news quality, and engagement levels than traditional news stories in previous studies [18-20]. There have been some positive findings on trust and perceived credibility as well. However, most of the current experiments have concentrated mainly on emotional responses or trust or on the initial interactions after exposure to positive news. There has been much less empirical research on whether constructive journalism can diminish the audiences' avoidance of news or can foster ongoing news consumption after the initial reading [21].

This restriction is an important one that is missing from the current literature. Constructive journalism is well advocated as a means of making audiences feel better about journalism, but there is little experimental evidence of how effective it is in decreasing news avoidance and increasing intentions to engage with news in the future. In addition, few existing studies have focused on changes in psychological reactions, and not on general behavioral reactions to continued news consumption [22]. This is especially significant given the need of news outlets to find ways to regain the trust of audiences in increasingly competitive digital media landscapes. For this reason, the present study uses a Randomized Control Experiment (RCT) to compare the responses of the audiences after watching the constructive and conventional news articles. From the literature reviewed, a set of hypotheses is proposed:

1. H1: Participants exposed to constructive journalism will report significantly lower levels of news avoidance than participants exposed to conventional journalism.
2. H2: Participants exposed to constructive journalism will report significantly higher future news consumption intentions than participants exposed to conventional journalism.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study was conducted using a method that was called Randomized Control Experiment (RCT) to investigate the effect of constructive journalism on news avoidance and re-consumption of news. An experimental design was chosen because it

offers one of the most powerful ways of establishing causal links among variables by controlling for potentially confounding variables by randomizing participants to the various levels of the experimental variable. Randomized experiments provide higher internal validity and allow for comparisons among the different types of news reporting than do observational and survey-based studies.

There were 2 independent groups in the experiment. A computer-generated randomization procedure was used to randomly assign participants to either the EX-group or the CON group. The constructive news article was presented to the experimental group while a traditional version of the story was presented to the control group. In order to make the experiments valid both articles talked about the same topic and had the same factual information, same length and style of writing. The only difference between the two conditions was the framing of the journalist. The problem and its negative implications were highlighted in the conventional article, while the constructive article provided the same factual information, along with context, possible solutions and examples of constructive societal reactions. The design made it possible to rule out the possibility that any differences in the responses that participants showed were due to the content of the news rather than the framing style.

The sample size was determined as approximately 400 participants as this number is sufficient to detect medium sized effects in a two-group experimental design, and it has good statistical power to estimate the statistics. Participants were then randomly assigned to the subject assigned news article and immediately subsequently completed a structured questionnaire assessing the two dependent variables of the study, news avoidance and future news consumption intentions. Demographic data such as age, gender, education and the frequency of digital news consumption was also gathered to describe the sample and assess the equivalence of the experimental groups.

The study was carried out in an ethical manner in relation to research with human participants. The participation was voluntary, the respondents gave informed consent to participate in the research, and all data collected were anonymous and for research purposes only.

The experimental procedure was divided into four steps: (1) random allocation of the participants into the constructive or conventional news conditions, (2) reading either the constructive or conventional news article, (3) completion of the post-exposure questionnaire, and (4) statistical comparison of the two conditions. Figure 1 shows the overall experimental procedure used in this study.

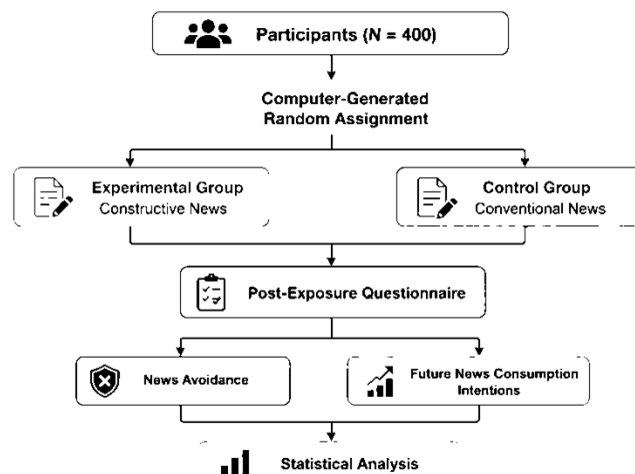


Fig. 1. Overview of the Randomized Controlled Experimental Design.

3.2 Participants and Experimental Procedure

400 participants were recruited by online invitation for this research. The participants consisted of adults who consumed digital news on social media, mobile apps, and news websites at least once a week. To guarantee a familiarity with digital news environments, the individuals participating in the experiment were only those who reported consuming digital news several times per week. This was a voluntary participation with informed consent obtained electronically before data collection began.

Participants were randomly selected into one of two experimental conditions, using a computer-generated randomization procedure. The experimental group ($n = 200$) read a positive framing while the control group ($n = 200$) read a traditional version of the same news article. To reduce selection bias and maximize the equivalence of the two groups prior to the experimental intervention, random assignment was used.

The two types of news article covered the same public problem and were of equal length, factual content and writing style. The only experimental manipulation was in the way the same information was presented in the news articles. While the

conventional version simply described the problem and its impacts, the constructive version emphasized solution-oriented explanations, possible solutions, and examples of positive societal responses.

Participants were asked to take an immediate post-exposure questionnaire that included items assessing news avoidance and intentions for future news consumption, as well as demographic information, such as age, gender, education, and digital news consumption frequency, after completing an exposure assessment that asked about reading the assigned article. Participants were asked to read a specified article and then immediately complete a post-exposure questionnaire consisting of items assessing news avoidance and intentions for future news consumption, as well as demographic information, such as age, gender, level of education, and frequency of digital news consumption. Participants also rated how constructive they felt the news article was in order to verify the success of the experimental manipulation. The responses were also employed as a manipulation check to ensure that the two versions of the article were understood differently, as per the intended framing.

The experimental procedure involved four steps: (1) participant recruitment and informed consent, (2) random assignment of participants to one of the two experimental conditions, (3) exposure to the assigned news article and completion of the post-exposure questionnaire, and (4) data screening and statistical analysis. In order to increase the internal validity of the experiment, demographic characteristics were subject to a randomization check prior to the hypothesis testing stage for this experiment. The experimental design is given in the Table I.

TABLE I. SUMMARY OF THE EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

Component	Description
Research Design	Randomized Controlled Experiment (RCT)
Participants	400 regular digital news users
Sampling Method	Online volunteer recruitment
Experimental Group	Constructive news article (n = 200)
Control Group	Conventional news article (n = 200)
Randomization	Computer-generated random assignment
Independent Variable	News framing (Constructive vs. Conventional)
Dependent Variables	News Avoidance; Future News Consumption Intentions
Manipulation Check	Perceived constructiveness of the news article
Control Variables	Age, Gender, Educational Level, Frequency of News Consumption
Response Scale	Five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

3.3 Measures and Statistical Analysis

Participants were given an-structured post-exposure questionnaire right after they read the news article. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first part gathered demographic data such as age, gender, level of education, and frequency of digital news consumption. The second measured News Avoidance, the third assessed Future News Consumption Intentions, and the fourth was a manipulation check to ensure that participants viewed the assigned news article as intended. The questionnaire items were all rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Five items were adapted from previous studies on intentional news avoidance to assess News Avoidance. These items measured participants' tendency to avoid news due to negative emotional experiences, information overload, and/or decreased interest in news exposure. Five items assessed participants' willingness to follow digital news after exposure to the experimental stimulus, which was used to measure Future News Consumption Intentions. Higher scores meant more likely to stay involved with digital news in the future.

The obtained data have been screened before conducting the hypothesis testing to identify the incomplete questionnaires, duplicate questionnaires, missing data and potential outliers. Only valid responses that meet the expectations for an acceptable quality were included for analysis. This internal consistency was then examined for both measurement scales using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.70$ was accepted). Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were then used to describe participants' responses.

The normality assumptions were checked using the Shapiro–Wilk test and the homogeneity of variance assumption was checked using Levene's test prior to conducting the main analyses. Randomization test was also conducted to ensure that there was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups with respect to demographic factors. Continuous demographic variables were analyzed by Independent Samples t-tests while categorical demographic variables were analyzed by Chi-square tests.

Independent Samples t-tests were used to analyse the research hypotheses by comparing the two groups of students (constructive journalism group and conventional journalism group) on both dependent variables. The level of 0.05 was used for determining statistical significance. As well as significance testing, Cohen's d was computed to provide a sense of the magnitude of the difference observed and to assess the practical significance of the experimental intervention. IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29) was used for all statistical analyses. The summary of the statistical procedures used in this study is presented in Table II.

TABLE II. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Analysis	Purpose
Data Screening	Identify incomplete responses, duplicates, missing values, and outliers
Cronbach's Alpha	Assess internal consistency of the measurement scales
Descriptive Statistics	Summarize participants' responses (Mean, SD)
Shapiro–Wilk Test	Assess normality of the data
Levene's Test	Assess homogeneity of variance
Chi-square Test	Verify group equivalence for categorical demographic variables
Independent Samples <i>t</i> -test	Compare the two experimental groups on the dependent variables
Cohen's <i>d</i>	Measure the magnitude of group differences (effect size)
Significance Level	$p < 0.05$

4. RESULTS

4.1 Participant Characteristics

The overall number of participants who completed the experiment successfully and were included in the final analysis were 400. The number of respondents in the two experimental conditions were equally divided, consisting of 200 participants in the Constructive Journalism group, and 200 participants in the Conventional Journalism group. A balanced demographic profile was found for the sample, as can be seen in Table III. There was a fairly balanced gender spread with 207 males (51.8%) and 193 females (48.3%). In terms of educational qualification, most of the participants (53.0%) had a Bachelor's degree, followed by the Postgraduate degree (27.0%) and High School education or less (20.0%). When asked about how often they access digital news, 50.0% said they did it daily, 25.8% said several times a day, and 24.3% said several times a week. As seen in Table 3, there were no significant differences in the mean age of participants between the Constructive Journalism (35.14 years, SD = 9.41) and Conventional Journalism (36.08 years, SD = 9.63) groups. In general, the characteristics of the demography showed that the samples were a diversified group of regular digital news users and were considered to be a representative base for the subsequent experimental analysis.

TABLE III. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

Characteristic	Category	Constructive (n = 200)	Conventional (n = 200)	Total n (%)
Gender	Male	101	106	207 (51.8%)
	Female	99	94	193 (48.3%)
Education	High School or Less	38	42	80 (20.0%)
	Bachelor's Degree	108	104	212 (53.0%)
	Postgraduate Degree	54	54	108 (27.0%)
News Consumption Frequency	Several Times per Week	46	51	97 (24.3%)
	Daily	102	98	200 (50.0%)
	Multiple Times per Day	52	51	103 (25.8%)
Age (Mean ± SD)	—	35.14 ± 9.41	36.08 ± 9.63	—

4.2 Randomization Check

A randomization test was done to ensure that there were no differences between the groups (Constructive Journalism and Conventional Journalism) in their demographic information before applying the test to the research hypotheses. Independent-samples *t*-tests were used for the continuous variable, age, while Chi-square tests were employed for the categorical variables, gender, educational level and news consumption frequency. Table IV shows that there were no significant differences found between the two experimental groups for any of the demographic variables studied. The groups were comparable in terms of age ($t(398) = -0.99$, $p = .324$), gender ($\chi^2(1) = 0.25$, $p = .617$), educational level ($\chi^2(2) = 0.28$, $p = .869$), and news consumption frequency ($\chi^2(2) = 0.29$, $p = .865$). These results show that the random assignment procedure was effective in creating two groups of subjects that did not differ on any demographic variables, thereby ensuring the internal validity of the experimental design and suggesting that any significant differences between the experimental and control groups on the dependent variables were due to the manipulation of the experimental variable.

TABLE IV. RANDOMIZATION CHECK BETWEEN EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

Variable	Statistical Test	Test Statistic	<i>p</i> -value	Interpretation
Age	Independent-samples <i>t</i> -test	$t(398) = -0.99$	.324	No significant difference
Gender	Chi-square test	$\chi^2(1) = 0.25$	.617	No significant difference
Educational Level	Chi-square test	$\chi^2(2) = 0.28$	.869	No significant difference
News Consumption Frequency	Chi-square test	$\chi^2(2) = 0.29$	.865	No significant difference

4.3 Manipulation Check

To ensure the two news stories were received as the experimenter had hoped, a manipulation check was completed. After reading the assigned news article, participants assessed how well the article was considered to be constructive, solution-oriented and balanced. The independent samples *t*-test was used to compare the participants' perception between the two

experimental conditions. As shown in Table V, the participants of the Constructive Journalism condition did feel that the news article was overall constructive, compared to the participants of the Conventional Journalism condition. The mean constructiveness score of the Constructive Journalism group ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.69$) was higher than that of the Conventional Journalism group ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.75$). There was a significant difference between the two groups ($t(398) = 11.93$, $p < .001$) and a large effect (Cohen's $d = 1.19$). This confirms that the experimental manipulation worked and that participants were able to easily differentiate between the constructive and conventional framing condition.

TABLE V. MANIPULATION CHECK RESULTS

Condition	Mean	SD	t	p -value	Cohen's d
Constructive Journalism	3.94	0.69			
Conventional Journalism	3.08	0.75			
Statistical Comparison	—	—	11.93	< .001	1.19

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

Statistics are presented to give an overview of participants' responses in both experimental conditions before formal hypothesis testing is conducted. As shown in Table VI, participants in the Constructive Journalism condition had a lower mean score on News Avoidance ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.78$) than did participants in the Conventional Journalism condition ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.81$). In contrast, the mean score of the Constructive Journalism group ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.74$) was significantly higher than that of the Conventional Journalism group ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.77$). The overall descriptive statistics suggest that there are apparent differences between experimental conditions that are explored in the following section using inferential statistical analyses.

TABLE VI. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Dependent Variable	Constructive Journalism ($n = 200$)		Conventional Journalism ($n = 200$)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
News Avoidance	2.64	0.78	2.97	0.81
Future News Consumption Intentions	3.63	0.74	3.39	0.77

4.5 Hypothesis Testing

- H1: Effect of Constructive Journalism on News Avoidance

The first hypothesis was that constructive journalism has a significant effect on news avoidance in comparison with conventional journalism. In order to test this hypothesis, an independent-samples t -test was used to compare the mean News Avoidance scores for the two experimental conditions. The participant's mean scores for News Avoidance for the Constructive Journalism condition were found to be lower than the Conventional Journalism condition, as shown in Table VII. These differences were statistically significant ($t(398) = -4.15$, $p < .001$). The effect size showed a medium practical effect (Cohen's $d = 0.42$). Thus, it was concluded that H1 is supported.

TABLE VII. INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T-TEST FOR NEWS AVOIDANCE

Group	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	p -value	Cohen's d	Decision
Constructive Journalism	2.64	0.78						
Conventional Journalism	2.97	0.81						
Statistical Comparison	—	—	-0.33	-4.15	398	< .001	0.42	H1 Supported

- H2: Effect of Constructive Journalism on Future News Consumption Intentions

The second hypothesis was that constructive journalism was able to significantly boost news consumption intentions in the future relative to conventional journalism. An independent-samples t -test was used to compare the Future News Consumption Intentions between the two conditions in the experiment. The results of this study are shown in Table VIII, which indicates that the participants in the Constructive Journalism condition had higher mean scores for Future News Consumption Intentions ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.74$) than the Conventional Journalism condition ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.77$). The difference between the two groups was statistically significant ($t(398) = 3.18$, $p = .002$). An effect size that was calculated (Cohen's $d = 0.32$) was in the small to moderate range. Therefore, a Yes was given to H2.

TABLE VIII. INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T-TEST FOR FUTURE NEWS CONSUMPTION INTENTIONS

Group	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	df	p -value	Cohen's d	Decision
Constructive Journalism	3.63	0.74						
Conventional Journalism	3.39	0.77						
Statistical Comparison	—	—	0.24	3.18	398	.002	0.32	H2 Supported

5. DISCUSSION

The present study analyzed if this constructive journalism would affect news avoidance and future news consumption intention by using a randomized controlled experiment. The results showed that constructive journalism was correlated

with less news avoidance and higher intentions to continue consuming digital news than conventional journalism. The findings have empirical evidence for the claim that solution-oriented reporting can positively influence the audience engagement in the modern news landscape.

The first result shows that constructive journalism can help to alleviate audiences' news avoidance. Constructive reporting focuses on more than just identifying problems; it includes factual data, background information, and solutions that can help reduce information overload and a sense of helplessness. This is aligned with earlier research which indicated that consistent consumption of negative news can lead to news avoidance, while news that is more balanced and meaningful regarding public issues is likely to bring people back, causing them to revisit news consumption [18], [21]. The second finding shows that constructive journalism has a positive impact on future news consumption intentions. While the impact was not as strong as with news avoidance, the findings indicate that even "solution-oriented" news reporting may boost the commitment of audiences to continue consuming digital news. This outcome aligns with prior studies that have put forward the positive effects of constructive journalism on news perceived value and relevance, subsequently strengthening audiences' long-term engagement with news [19] and [22].

This study contributes to the previous literature from a theoretical point of view by offering experimental evidence that the framing effect in journalism exerts a short-term effect on audience attitudes and a longer-term effect on behavioral intentions. The present study was unique in that it not only examined emotional reactions to news but also news avoidance and future news consumption intentions were studied within a randomized experimental design. In practice, the conclusions indicate that constructive reporting should be considered for use in digital news, as it could decrease the tendency of audience disengagement and increase their news engagement without losing journalistic values.

The contributions made are not without some limitations, however. The experiment assessed the participants' reaction to a single news article, and only one news topic was used in the experiment, which might reduce the generalizability of the findings. In future research, a few news domains should be explored, a cross-cultural experimental design should be used to find out if the results hold true across various audiences and media contexts, and multiple news domains should be compared to see if there are different results observed in various news domains. In sum, the results suggest that constructive journalism is a promising journalistic style for increasing news uptake and positive engagement with news. With worries over the declining audience for news media increasing, a positive approach to news reporting could be a good solution for a healthy and sustainable news and media relationship.

6. CONCLUSION

The effect of constructive journalism on news avoidance and news consumption intentions in the future was investigated by conducting a randomized controlled experiment. The findings revealed that participants who were exposed to positive news showed less news avoidance, and higher intentions to continue consuming digital news when compared to the participants who were exposed to the conventional news. The findings suggest that solution-oriented news framing has positive effects on the audience's engagement in digital news environments, thus offering empirical evidence. The study is relevant for journalism and communication research because it further supports our knowledge about the phenomenon of constructive journalism with the use of an experimental design and addresses two important behavioral outcomes (news avoidance and future news consumption intentions) at once. Based on the results, it is recommended to consider adding the elements of context and solution-oriented approach in news reporting, which is expected to enhance the audience's involvement in the reporting process without losing the journalistic principles. Practically, the outcomes showed that it would be useful for news media to incorporate constructive reporting techniques in their news selection processes to foster audience engagement and prolong news consumption. Constructive journalism is not a substitute for traditional journalism, but it can be used in conjunction with it to highlight the problems in society and provide credible solutions and alternative possibilities. While the present study offers insights, further research is needed with varied news content, media vehicles, and cultural contexts with a longitudinal and cross-cultural experimental design. Other measures of outcomes of journalism may also be explored through further studies, such as trust in journalism, emotional well-being, and civic engagement, to further the understanding of the long-term impacts of constructive journalism.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

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