

NOS NEWS NEED MODEL

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

There is an urgent necessity for the NOS to find connection with our audience. The competition is growing and for many people it's increasingly less obvious that the NOS is the main news source. In addition, the media landscape is changing rapidly. Nowadays, you don't have to watch the actual television screen to watch TV, or switch on the classic radio to listen to the radio. Media are merging more and more with the emerging technological developments. With a tablet or a laptop you can now watch and listen to anything at any place or time: the platform is no longer dominant for our choices.

What is more determining for our choices to consume a specific product, is one's motivation. What do you feel like at what time? Unfortunately, there are many and conflicting motivations to be found in the literature. For example; people indicate they want to know everything, but there is also a growing need for context. And people want to choose for themselves, but also appreciate when a selection is being made. News has to be personal, but we also want to share it with our friends and family. And facts are key, but we overlook stories that lack an emotional factor.

Because of these conflicting motives, many discussions in news rooms are polarizing. There's discussion about 'lowering the threshold for news' and journalists are afraid that they will have to consider the public as their customers (who are king). What is missing, are the correct words to conduct the discussion with. Not words to describe different news products, but words that give insight in the news needs of the audience.

THEORY

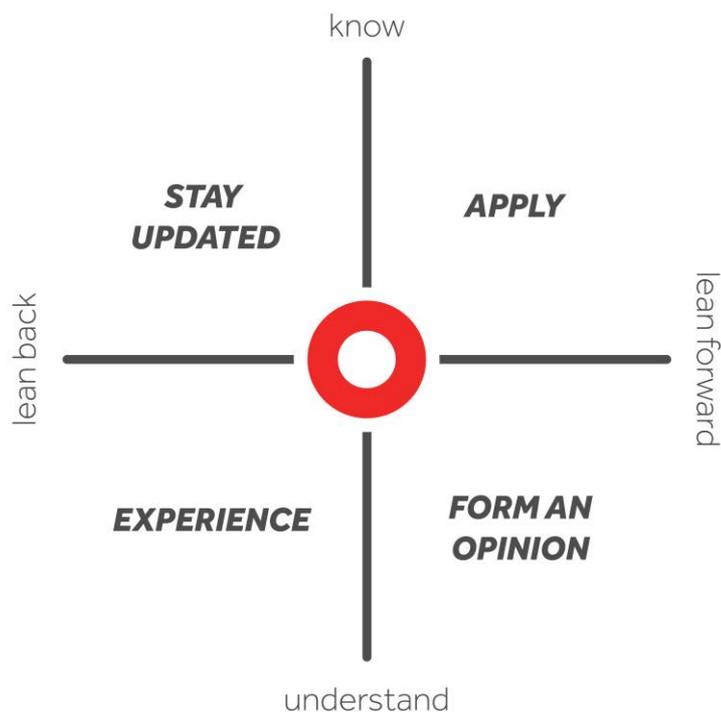
To map the needs of people, we used a matrix with two axes. The matrix was drafted based on extensive literature studies, trend analyses and focus groups with 36 respondents. The model has been tested under 1.500 respondents 2012 and 2015.

On the x-axis of the matrix, the level of cognitive effort is plotted one has to undertake to consume news. From *lean backward* on the left (the news is coming to you) to *lean forward* on the right (you make an effort). On the y-axis the level of news processing is plotted: from *know* above (you have some general information about something) to *understand* below (you understand the details).

This results in four news needs: stay updated (knowing and leaning back), apply (knowing and leaning forward), form an opinion (understanding and leaning forward) and experience (understanding and leaning back). On the next pages we discuss these four news needs and their place in current trends and developments.

It's important to remember that there's not people plotted in the matrix, but motivations. We don't talk about demographics (age, gender, residence), but about the different needs people have to consume news. Someone can have multiple motivations, you're not always exclusively bound to one of the segments of the matrix.

Time and place largely determine the motivation. In the morning 'stay updated' is more dominant, while in the evening more people are looking for an experience. The model recognizes this and is therefore not a determinant of linear products for static users. On the contrary, it gives room to modular products for a dynamic user.



STAY UPDATED

The first news need is *stay updated*. This is the most basic of news needs and has characteristics that fit traditional definitions of news.

- People that want to stay updated, are looking for a selection from the enormous amount of information that they get served every day. To prevent getting an information overload, they're looking for a filter to the news.
- People who want to be stay updated, are looking for information that they can share with other people. With colleagues, friends, family; you want to talk about (more or less) the same topics. Stay updated is therefore a very social news need and is focused on communality.
- The communality can also be seen in the relevance that is needed within this news need. People want to know why they need to know certain news facts. Why is it important for your personal situation? This relevance is usually something collective, but it can also be about an individual or a sub group (relevant sports news is very different for a football fan and a basketball fan).
- Another important theme within this news need is trustworthiness. If you only get a selection of the news, you want to be sure that this selection is correct and that you don't miss anything. Therefore you need to trust the source.
- And last but not least, when you're in the stay updated motivation, you're looking for routine and convenience. Your life is busy enough as it is, so it's nice that the news is adjusting itself to your rhythm and busy schedule. People that want to stay updated therefore show a lot of routine behavior (watching the breakfast news every day, checking the app during lunch and listening to the latest radio bulletin before going to bed).

APPLY

The second news need is *apply*. In comparison to stay updated, to apply is a more undertaking news need. You make more effort to consume the news. And where stay updated is the more traditional news need, apply is technology driven. When you want to apply news, you want to get exactly that news that is of interest to your specific situation. It's news you can use. You don't need to apply all the news, but only those topics that matter to you. The nominal numbers of people with this need are lower than with stay updated, but their intensity of usage is higher.

- To apply news is a personal matter; you have an individual focus. You don't want to consume news so you can talk about it with others, you need it in a very practical way in your specific life.
- The news also needs to be custom made. This can be done via technology that helps you to make a selection; my phone has information on my location; it can filter our geographically relevant news for me. You can also make the selections yourself ('find out how much your mortgage will rise due to the crisis').
- When you want to apply news, you're looking for practical information. Is the road closed? Will I receive more tax returns? Will it rain? It's not about opinions or multiple viewpoints, but about practicality.
- Control is pivotal with the need to apply. I want to be able to make my own choices and choose my selection. The control also needs to be constant; any device, any place, any time (ADAPAT). This makes the news need very technical, as the right distribution is key.
- When people want to apply news, they want to use the information, not possess it. A newspaper doesn't need to be bought, the information from the newspaper just needs to be accessed.
- The news that fits the need best is short, factual information. No long reads, but short snippets of information. It can be either text, audio or video; whatever is most practical given the situation.

FORM AN OPINION

Then the third news need: to form an opinion. People are still quite cognitively active and don't just want to know the information, but also understand it. And this is not just about big, serious topics, but also about smaller, apparently less significant themes.

- An important focus is that people want to think for themselves about what is true. They don't believe there is just one truth and don't like it when news is brought as if there was.
- This fits into the trend that people are increasingly critical and skeptical. This is sometimes referred to as 'generation why'. We don't accept the answers that are being given and keep asking questions.
- People are also growingly skeptical towards classical institutions like banks, governments, phone companies and broadcasters.
- To form their own opinion, people want to search and compare various news sources. What does the BBC say about this? And Al Jazeera? And why is there a difference between their stories? Help with making these comparisons is appreciated, for example with indispensable Google.
- Because people are fairly critical and skeptical within this news need, all sources are equally important. Institutes and organizations are not necessarily more relevant. User Generated Content (UGC) – information from normal people – is equally important.
- There's also space to develop stories together with the audience. This can be done actively (like with UGC) and passively (big data and data journalism).

- What's important for every source, is that it's transparent. The user wants to know how information is processed and how a story has been developed. Open journalism is a good example hereof; it provides insight in the production process of news and acknowledges that it's not about The Truth, but about a certain viewpoint on the situation.
- A trend that fits nicely with this news need, is that people have more appreciation and interest in the process, and not just the product. We don't just want a coffee, we want to see a barista at work.

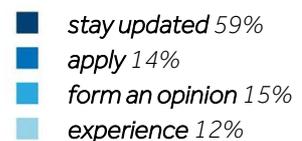
EXPERIENCE

The fourth and last news need combines the understanding with leaning back. This is the most 'emotional' news need, as it combines feelings with information. The motivation is rather dormant still, as people don't logically combine it with 'serious' journalism. But the motivation is growing.

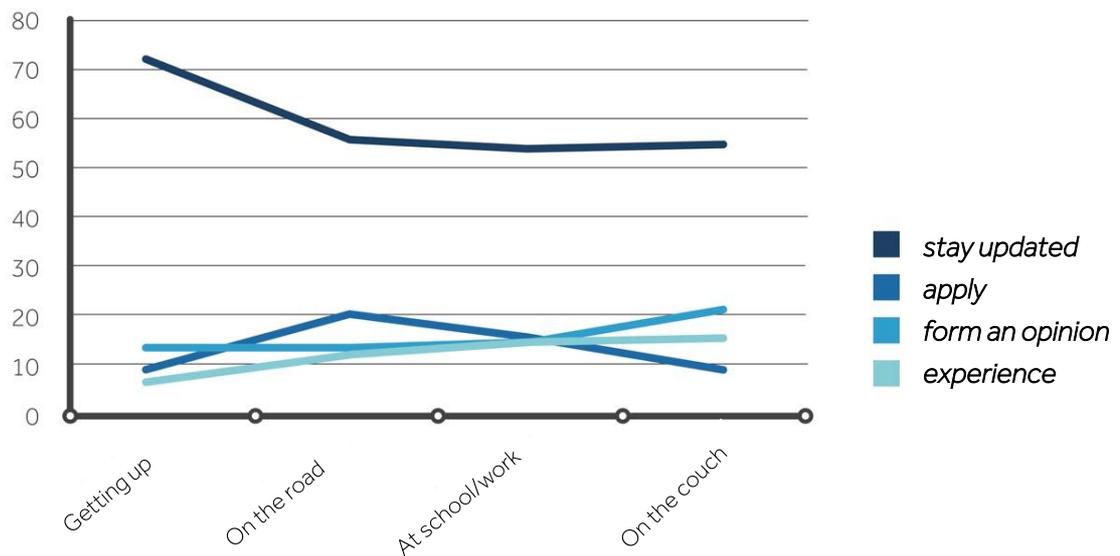
- People are looking for an involved experience. They want to be drawn into a story and feel something. This can be anger, fear, sadness, incomprehension; as long as it evokes an emotion.
- The way a story is told is very important for this news need: you'll get a high attention value from the audience by using unique ways of storytelling. You can draw the attention of people with unique audio, video, images; even if people are not even that interested in the topic (surprise them).
- In this news need, the challenge is to address core needs in a creative way. The form does not need to be limited to something we already know. An example outside the realm of media: people want a unique travel experience for a low cost – AirBnB is developed. A media example: Netflix (and not having to wait a long time between screenings of a serial).
- Beautifully made productions are appealing and stand out. The topic is important, of course, but the form is selling the content. This matches with the trend of beautification: normal things become pretty. And we expect them to be.
- News can also be fun and interactive within this news need. Serious gaming is a good solution for people that are looking for an experience.
- Positive news is also something that people refer to within this news need. And that's not just news about cats saved from a tree, but stories with a hopeful storyline or some constructive elements (and not just war and death).
- The authenticity of the sender is crucial to evoke an experience. You have to believe what's being told. And the sender really has to want to tell the story, it almost has to be a necessity. When the story is not told sincerely, the involvement of the audience will be low.
- For an optimal experience, it's important you can share the story. It's a lot more fun to share a wonderful experience with somebody else than all alone.

PERCENTAGES AND FLOW

As said, the news needs vary throughout the day. And although the needs are very personal, there are some general characteristics to mention. First, there is the size of each news need. We found that 'stay updated' accounts for 59% of the total news need. 'Apply' for 14%, 'form an opinion' 15% and 'experience' 12%. As stay updated has such a big portion of the total need, we sometimes refer to it as the 'basic news need'. It's often also the first news need, that can lead to other needs.



If you look at the flow during the day, you see that stay updated is continuously the biggest news need. But in the morning, when people get up, the difference is even bigger than during the rest of the day. Form an opinion and experience both grow during the day and are biggest in the evening, when people are at home relaxing. The need to apply news is quite constant during the day, with a small peak when people are on the road.



USE THE MODEL

When thinking about the news needs of the audience, the journalist recognizes there is no *one size fits all*. Different people have different needs at different times. A news organization can make the choice either to focus on one of the needs (and perhaps also a specific demographic) or to cover all news needs. It also shows that journalists don't have just one role to play. They sometimes need to be very technical (to address *apply*), sometimes very guiding and reflecting (*form an opinion*). Different skills are needed for each news need and perhaps not one person can cover all. There's also not one method to measure the success of your format. For news aiming at the news need stay updated has different metrics than experience, for example. For stay updated reach is very important, but for experience the involvement is very relevant.

The *NOS News need model* can be used by journalists and journalistic organizations that want to make better news that fits the specific needs of each audience. It can be used on a day to day basis by editors, but is also an instrument to make strategic choices. It 'forces' news rooms to consider the audience from a whole new perspective.

More about news needs will be published in the book *News Needs*. A NOS book on news use, in April 2016. For more information, please mail maike.olij@nos.nl.

