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Reflecting, Regulating, Adapting: Metacognition's Role in Journalism Practices

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ABSTRACT

This article advances our understanding of transparency in journalism through the lens of metacognition. Drawing on a six-week intervention with eight U.S. newsrooms, the study analyzes journalists' reflective journals using the Eight Pillars of Metacognition and a three-stage interpretive method. Findings reveal that journalists used metacognitive strategies—such as self-monitoring, adaptation, discrimination, and mnemosyne—to question assumptions, revise workflows, and embed transparency into daily practice. Rather than treating transparency as a discrete output or static ideal, this study positions it as a situated epistemic practice that unfolds through internal reflection, institutional memory, and relational ethics. While existing scholarship critiques transparency's limited impact on public trust, this article argues that its unrealized potential lies in how it is practiced and internalized. Metacognition offers a conceptual bridge between normative ideals and newsroom work's messy, iterative realities. This reorientation from transparency-as-disclosure to transparency-as-reflection highlights the cognitive labor journalists perform to remain accountable in uncertain and constrained environments. The study contributes to journalism studies by theorizing metacognition as both a professional resource and a democratic imperative that equips journalists to navigate audience skepticism, institutional pressures, and the evolving demands of ethical practice.

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Journalism, often called the "first draft of history," is critical in shaping public understanding and societal trust. However, the profession is under siege, facing challenges such as declining trust, rising misinformation, and shifting audience expectations in the United States (Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, and Steindl 2018). Transparency has become an essential strategy to address these issues. Yet, while transparency is often framed as an institutional goal and ethic, reflected in corrections policies, ethical guidelines, and audience engagement initiatives, there is little focus on the internal cognitive processes journalists rely on to navigate these complex demands. Transparency has been promoted as a primary solution: making journalistic processes more visible will lead to increased trust. Transparency initiatives, such as corrections policies and audience engagement programs, are often

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framed as solutions to journalism's challenges. But what if the problem isn't transparency but how it is practiced and internalized? At the heart of transparency strategies lies a series of decisions shaped by external institutional standards and internal cognition. Without attention to the cognitive processes supporting these efforts, such initiatives risk being superficial or inconsistently applied. Though often implicit, these metacognitive processes are crucial to how journalists fulfill their public mission. Despite this, scholarship has largely overlooked metacognition as a framework for understanding journalistic practice, leaving a gap in examining the interplay between cognitive processes and external pressures.

This article responds to that gap not only by focusing on transparency but by considering metacognition as a broader professional resource. In addition to its relevance for trust and audience engagement, metacognition can support journalists in regulating bias, managing institutional constraints, adapting to new technologies, and developing a deeper awareness of political and economic influences on their work. These strategies promote sustained reflection and awareness, which in turn help journalists navigate both routine practices and moments of crisis. Viewed this way, metacognition contributes to journalism's normative goals by enhancing accuracy, ethics, and inclusivity across a range of professional contexts. This study addresses that gap by exploring how journalists use metacognition to navigate transparency-related challenges. This article examines how metacognition strategies emerge in journalists' reflections on transparency practices, addressing the question: How do journalists employ metacognition in their work? By positioning the eight pillars of metacognition (Drigas and Mitsea 2020) as a critical framework, I argue that metacognition provides a missing link that strengthens the implementation of transparency strategies by journalists. By fostering reflection, adaptability, and internal accountability, journalists enacting metacognition turn transparency into a lived, sustained practice.

The Transparency Imperative

Initially emerging in response to industry-wide credibility crises, transparency is now widely positioned as a professional norm and a strategic tool for rebuilding public trust. Normatively, transparency promises to align journalism with democratic values of accountability, openness, and responsiveness. As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2021) argue, transparency enables audiences to evaluate news not only by its content but by the integrity of the process behind it. This reframing of journalistic authority through transparency, from expertise assumed to practices disclosed, has proven especially appealing to understand how journalists enact these behaviors.

The professionalization of transparency can be traced through a range of developments in both industry and academia. Newsrooms have incorporated features such as "about the author" bios, sourcing details, behind-the-scenes reporting explainers, and visible corrections policies. Organizations such as Trusting News and the American Press Institute have institutionalized these features as best practices, and professional codes of ethics often include transparency as a key principle. In scholarship, transparency is usually seen as part of journalism's response to digital disruption: a way to assert credibility in a context where audiences can easily challenge reporting, sources, and motives (Karlsson 2010, 2020; Karlsson, Clerwall, and Nord 2017). Theoretically, transparency

draws from traditions of institutional trust and communication ethics. Scholars have connected it to procedural legitimacy, suggesting that audiences are more likely to trust journalism when they understand how it is produced (Kohring and Matthes 2007; Phillips 2010). Scholars also frame transparency as an epistemological shift: it redefines how knowledge is constructed and communicated in journalism, emphasizing process over product and aligning with critiques of objectivity (Zelizer 2022). As Koliska (2022) notes, transparency becomes a performance of authenticity intended to signal trustworthiness in an era of declining default trust.

Despite this conceptual appeal, empirical research paints a more ambivalent picture. Numerous studies have tested whether transparency interventions, such as disclosure boxes, sourcing notes, and editorial explainers, increase perceived credibility. Results are frequently mixed or null. Karlsson, Clerwall, and Nord (2017) found that varying transparency cues in experimental news articles produced only minor and inconsistent changes in trust. Masullo et al. (2022) conducted a multi-study test of "transparency boxes." They concluded that such interventions only affected trust under specific conditions: when the transparency was highly prominent and the outlet was already known to the audience. Koliska (2022) likewise observed that transparency features often go unnoticed by readers and, when they are noticed, may not be interpreted as intended. These findings complicate the assumption that transparency automatically increases trust. Karlsson (2020) shows in his survey-based study of Swedish news consumers that transparency's appeal is stratified: individuals who already trust journalism are most responsive to transparency, while skeptics remain unmoved or alienated by it. Latvala (2023) offers a more radical critique, arguing that transparency may sometimes undermine trust by highlighting the structures of control and selectivity that skeptical audiences reject. He suggests that transparency and trust may operate on opposing logic—trust requires vulnerability, while transparency emphasizes verification.

Part of the problem lies in the conceptual ambiguity of transparency itself. Scholars distinguish between disclosure transparency, which involves offering explanations or details about the journalistic process, and participatory transparency, which involves involving audiences in news production; yet, few studies rigorously test these forms comparatively (Karlsson 2010). Transparency remains largely externally oriented: it asks journalists to show their work but not necessarily to reflect on it. As Ramaker, van der Stoep, and Deuze (2015) observe, many journalists experience reflection as time-consuming or culturally unfamiliar, leading to shallow or inconsistent implementation of transparency features. This disconnect between the normative value of transparency and its empirical impact has led scholars to call for more robust internal frameworks. As Chadha and Koliska (2015) argue, technological affordances have enabled surface-level transparency without meaningful changes to journalistic decision-making or newsroom culture. Transparency in this form becomes a ritual or branding tool, what Karlsson (2010) terms "rituals of transparency," rather than a genuine engagement with audience concerns. Critics worry that this approach risks performativity: transparency becomes something journalists do about the work, not within it. These shortcomings invite a crucial shift in emphasis: from transparency as procedure to transparency as practice—from what journalists disclose to how they think. To bridge this gap, this study turns to metacognition, a well-established educational and cognitive psychology construct that has yet to be fully integrated into journalism scholarship. If transparency is to serve not merely as a surface-level

gesture but as a sustained commitment to public accountability, then it must be rooted in how journalists reflect, regulate, and adapt their decisions in real time.

Metacognition and Journalism

Metacognition, broadly defined as thinking about one's thinking, has long been recognized in cognitive and educational psychology as a critical capacity for self-regulated learning, problem-solving, and decision-making (Flavell 1979; Schraw and Dennison 1994; Zimmerman 2002). Traditionally, metacognition is understood as comprising two core dimensions: metacognitive knowledge—awareness of one's cognitive strengths, limitations, strategies, and task demands—and metacognitive regulation, or the ability to plan, monitor, and adjust one's cognitive strategies while engaged in a task (Schraw 2001). These components are often operationalized through planning, monitoring, evaluating, and strategy adjustment—skills that enable learners or professionals to adapt to novel or uncertain situations.

While this framing is foundational, it risks treating metacognition as a purely internal, individualistic, and rational function. More recent scholarship emphasizes that metacognitive processes are deeply influenced by context, time pressure, material environments, and social interaction (Efklides 2008; Jain, Bajaj, and Singh 2023; Raelin 2007). In high-pressure professions, metacognition enables rapid ethical judgments, awareness of uncertainty, and strategy adjustment under ambiguous or emergent conditions (Nelson and Narens 1990; Schön 1983). For example, in clinical decision-making, metacognition supports diagnostic reflection, and in aviation, it enhances situational awareness and error prevention. Metacognition also includes metacognitive experiences—subjective feelings like uncertainty, confusion, or confidence—that cue reflection and regulation (Efklides 2008). These experiences often trigger deeper engagement, encouraging professionals to pause, re-evaluate, or seek verification (Guigon, Villeval, and Dreher 2024).

Metacognitive competence cannot be fully understood as an isolated cognitive function. Following Schön (1983), this study adopts a practice-based epistemology, viewing metacognition as part of knowing-in-action, a dynamic, situated process enacted through professional routines, social interaction, and material tools. In this perspective, reflective awareness is not limited to moments of abstract contemplation; it is enacted in the flow of work, often under time constraints, and frequently without full conscious awareness (Nicolini 2011; Schön 1983). Practice theory helps bridge the growing gap between how journalism is taught (as a codified set of ethical obligations) and how it is practiced (as a complex, often ambiguous field of choices under pressure). Schön (1983) described this complexity in his critique of "technical rationality," proposing instead the concept of reflection-in-action, a form of situated, intuitive thinking that arises in response to unpredictable problems. This knowing is "tacit," he writes, and professionals often "know more than they can say" (Schön 1983, p. viii) by embedding the act of a "reflective conversation with the situation" (Schön 1983, 78).

Nicolini (2011) extends this argument, asserting that practice is the site of knowing, where cognition is dispersed across people, tools, norms, and embodied routines. In this framework, knowing is not a mental state but an enacted, adaptive performance

"less about having or containing and more about tuning into an ongoing practical regime" (617). Raelin (2007) further reinforces this shift, proposing an "epistemology of practice" grounded in experience, social learning, and critical reflection. He distinguishes between first-order learning (routine), second-order learning (self-corrective), and third-order learning (transformational), the last of which occurs when professionals begin to reframe the premises of their work. This aligns closely with the goals of the intervention studied in this paper: helping journalists move beyond habits and surface-level corrections to engage in deeper questioning of how they think, what they assume, and who they are becoming. In this context, metacognitive work is not simply about choosing the right method; it is about becoming the kind of journalist who questions, adapts, and responds. Expanding further, Dall'Alba and Barnacle (2015) argue that professional education must cultivate "knowing who," an ontological orientation that shapes how individuals become ethical practitioners in their field. In journalism, where professional norms often evolve under pressure, such metacognitive reflection offers a means of resurfacing assumptions and reorienting one's practices in line with public responsibility. Metacognition, in this sense, is not merely introspection—it is a process through which journalists negotiate tensions, discomfort, and ethical discordance in their daily work. Jenlink (2009) captures this dynamic by believing that practitioners carry embodied memories of their routines, but it is only through structured reflection that those memories become open to revision and renewal.

Although metacognition isn't often explicitly studied in journalism, its importance becomes evident when considering Ryfe's (2024) argument that journalistic roles are fluid and situational. Journalists must continuously adjust to shifting expectations and contexts. Metacognition provides a framework for understanding how they internalize these evolving roles, bridging the gap between role conception and performance. By fostering reflective practices and aligning actions with professional values, metacognition can help journalists navigate the complexities of their work while addressing challenges like declining public trust. Assessing metacognitive processes in journalism presents methodological challenges but offers valuable insights into transparency. Fleming and Lau (2014) propose measures of metacognitive sensitivity and bias that could be adapted to evaluate how journalists monitor their decision-making, manage cognitive biases, and respond to audience feedback. Such studies could illuminate the cognitive processes underpinning journalistic ethics and enhance our understanding of how practitioners navigate the competing demands of their profession. This study builds on these traditions by conceptualizing metacognition as a situated, reflexive, and ethical mode of professional knowing.

Method

This study employs newsroom reconstruction as a methodological approach to examine journalists' reflections and metacognitive processes. It builds on the logic of reconstructive interviews (Reich and Barnoy 2020) but differs in its collective, longitudinal design. Rather than reconstructing a single reporting decision post hoc, participants engaged in a sustained multi-week process of guided reflection that foregrounded cognitive shifts over time. As Johnson (2025) argues, this method bridges the gap between self-reported practices and observable journalistic content. This approach is particularly

well-suited for studying professional metacognition in action, as it enables analysis of how journalists monitor, evaluate, and revise their thinking in real-time newsroom contexts.

The study was conducted in the United States with eight newsrooms. Participating journalists were identified through Trusting News's network and selected based on their engagement with trust-related initiatives or interest in newsroom transformation. The newsrooms applied to be part of this intervention cohort and were paid $250 for their participation. Criteria for inclusion included diversity of newsroom size (ranging from 2 to 25 full-time editorial staff), organizational structure (nonprofit, legacy local, and digital-first outlets), and stated interest in trust-building. Each newsroom served audiences with distinct demographic, geographic, and political profiles, including urban Black communities, rural regions, and Indigenous-serving media. Participating outlets included (Table 1):

This range helped to examine how trust and transparency practices are enacted across diverse relationships between journalists and their audiences. Over six weeks, the selected newsrooms documented their experiences through weekly journaling prompts. These tools guided participants to critically evaluate their workflows, focusing on decision-making processes, audience engagement strategies, and trust-building efforts. The kits also included best-practice guides and examples, reinforcing the emphasis on applied learning and adaptability.

Data Collection

The primary dataset consisted of newsrooms' weekly reflective journals (Ramadhanti et al. 2020). Each newsroom received the Trusting News Trust Kits they signed up to work through; however, all followed the same implementation schedule. Descriptions of the kits are included below:

- Transparency Trust Kit: Journal prompts focused on identifying areas for improving transparency in newsroom practices, understanding audience perceptions, and exploring strategies to integrate transparency into daily coverage.

Table 1. Newsrooms.

	Description	Location	Audience
A	A nonprofit Indigenous-led outlet in the	Mountain West	Serving tribal and rural communities
B	A volunteer-driven community radio station	Pacific Northwest	Progressive, local community
C	A Black press newsroom	Southern U.S.	Urban communities
D	A regional daily newspaper in the with a medium-to-large professional staff	Northeastern U.S.	Suburban and urban communities
E	An agriculture-focused digital-only outlet	National	Farmers in California and the Southeast
F	A regional daily	Northwestern U.S.	general metro/suburban
G	A community-driven newsroom with a very small staff	Southeastern U.S.	Hyperlocal community
H	A small-town newspaper	Pacific Northwest	Rural community

- Corrections Trust Kit: Prompts encouraged participants to review newsroom policies on corrections, identify barriers to implementing correction workflows, and articulate goals for enhancing accuracy and accountability.

Trusting News developed the Transparency and Corrections Trust Kits as self-guided tools designed to help journalists build trust with their audiences. These kits offer step-by-step guides that break down trust-building strategies into actionable steps, enabling journalists to explain their mission, ethics, and decision-making processes transparently. They were created based on insights gathered by Trusting News since 2016, through collaborations with partner newsrooms, focusing on steps journalists can take to demonstrate credibility and actively earn trust. While drawing on industry input, they have not been previously tested in academic research. The lead researcher and Trusting News collaborated to develop this Trust Kits intervention on a foundation of metacognitive learning theory (Flavell 1979; Schraw and Dennison 1994), reflective practice (Ramadhanti et al. 2020), and transparency (Karlsson 2010), thus adapting the Trust Kits to align with the reconstruction-style questioning. Journalists used these kits and associated journaling questions to guide internal discussion and capture individual and organizational reflections. Each kit's guide provided specific weekly tasks and prompts to elicit metacognitive engagement. Prompts were designed to align with dimensions of metacognition, such as: "What assumptions about audience knowledge guided your reporting this week?" or "How has your thinking around corrections changed over time?" Participating newsrooms were instructed to capture individual insights and team-level reactions, and we encouraged using "I," "we," and direct quotes from peers to reflect this range.

Data Analysis

The analysis was designed to surface how journalists made meaning of transparency through structured reflection. We used a three-stage inductive approach as the primary analytical framework to trace how journalists constructed and revised their professional practices through reflective engagement (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2012). This method allowed us to retain participants' language in the early phases while generating theoretically significant insights in the later stages. The Eight Pillars of Metacognition (Drigas and Mitsea 2020) provided an analytic overlay, helping us interpret how cognitive, emotional, and procedural processes shaped newsroom adaptation (Table 2).

We began by reading journal entries to identify common phrases, practices, and dilemmas. These readings generated a wide array of first-order codes, often preserving participants' phrasing to reflect how they articulated transparency work. Examples included comments like "transparency isn't second nature yet" and "we never talked about corrections until now," capturing their emergent awareness and shared uncertainty. In the second phase, the Eight Pillars of Metacognition serve as an interpretive scaffold to organize second-order categories of cognitive activity. These pillars provided a structured framework for interpreting professional reflection and decision-making. We also noted recurring journalistic practices aligned with each pillar (e.g., revising correction language, holding team reflections, rethinking transparency framing). This allowed us to build connections between the metacognitive framework and journalists' everyday practices to navigate ethical and operational uncertainty. In the third phase, we identified broader

Table 2. Mapping journalistic practice to the Eight Pillars of metacognition (Drigas and Mitsea 2020).

Pillar	Definition	Journalistic Indicators	Examples
Theoretical Knowledge	Awareness of cognitive processes, mental tools, and their functionality. Understanding how cognition operates, including strengths and limitations.	Identifying cognitive biases in reporting, questioning one's ethical framework, articulating standards of fairness or accuracy.	"I realized I didn't fully understand the difference between transparency and justification—we've been using the terms interchangeably."
Operational Knowledge	Practical understanding of cognitive abilities in real-world contexts. Recognizing constraints and applying strategies effectively.	Recognizing when editorial norms (like "balance") constrain story framing; understanding how deadlines affect verification.	"We knew a two-source minimum wouldn't work on deadline, so we adapted with more transparent attribution."
Self-Monitoring	Real-time awareness and evaluation of cognitive states. Involves identifying emotional reactions, biases, and errors to adjust thinking or behavior.	Noticing moments of uncertainty, emotion, or bias during coverage; adjusting language or angle mid-task.	"Halfway through the interview, I caught myself leading the source too much—I backed off and rephrased."
Self-Regulation	The ability to intentionally modify cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. Supports goal-setting, deliberation, and consistency.	Modifying how or when a correction is issued; revising decisions after editorial disagreement.	"We delayed publication to double-check the claim—even though we were under pressure to publish."
Adaptation	The capacity to modify strategies in response to new challenges or information. Crucial for sustained engagement in dynamic environments.	Shifting strategy based on audience feedback; refining transparency language after misunderstanding.	"After readers pushed back, we rewrote our transparency box in plainer language."
Recognition	Identifying and interpreting relevant external factors and internal reflections. Tied to understanding audience knowledge gaps or newsroom blind spots.	Seeing how audience assumptions differ from newsroom assumptions; acknowledging gaps in understanding.	"I realized our framing assumes everyone knows the legal terms—we need to define them better."
Discrimination	Evaluating which cognitive or emotional responses are useful. Distinguishing between noise and actionable input.	Filtering out noise (e.g., trolling) from valuable criticism; prioritizing corrections that build trust.	"We stopped responding to every angry comment and focused on thoughtful critiques."
Mnemosyne	Connecting past experiences to present problem-solving. Enables pattern recognition and long-term growth.	Referencing previous corrections to inform current ones; applying past lessons to improve transparency language.	"We went back to a correction we issued last year—it helped us frame this one better."

themes that emerged across pillars. These themes linked findings to wider theoretical conversations about transparency, trust, and journalistic agency. This stage deepened the interpretive analysis by situating the metacognitive patterns observed within a broader discourse of professional identity and audience relationship-building.

Findings

Through their reflections, journalists highlighted the strengths and limitations of their current practices, offering valuable insights into how cognitive processes shape newsroom decision-making. The findings reveal a varied engagement with the pillars, with

some, such as self-monitoring and self-regulation, emerging as central to addressing immediate challenges, while others, like mnemosyne and discrimination, present opportunities for deeper integration into newsroom workflows. To guide the reader, the findings are organized around the eight pillars of metacognition, providing an understanding of the cognitive and professional dimensions of Trust Kits' implementation. Each pillar offers a lens for understanding journalistic practice as a layered process that reveals how reflection, adjustment, and learning unfold across distinct but interrelated stages of metacognitive engagement.

Theoretical Knowledge

Theoretical knowledge encompasses journalists' foundational understanding of transparency practices. Journalists frequently express uncertainty about the theoretical foundations guiding their transparency practices. For many, these principles are not articulated internally, leading to inconsistent or improvised approaches. A newsroom serving a metropolitan and suburban audience in the Northwestern United States reflects, "We've never formalized what transparency really means for us, so this exercise is making us question the basics of our editorial processes." This moment of reflexivity highlights how the Trust Kit prompted journalists to examine assumptions that had previously gone unchallenged. Similarly, a rural community newspaper in the Pacific Northwest notes, "Our understanding of corrections has always been ad hoc. This kit is helping us see why a formalized approach matters." Here, theoretical knowledge does not exist in the abstract but becomes visible as journalists recognize the consequences of its absence.

In contrast, some newsrooms demonstrated an emergent grasp of transparency as a normative construct. Across the dataset, theoretical knowledge remained uneven, with smaller and under-resourced newsrooms reporting the greatest need for explicit scaffolding. These findings reinforce the importance of shared vocabulary and internal frameworks to support consistent application and institutional alignment. A national agriculture-focused media organization serving farming communities across the United States effectively connected theoretical understanding to practice: "Transparency is about more than just being open; it is about helping the audience see the 'why' behind what we do." This articulation moved beyond a compliance model toward an ethos of justification. Yet such clarity was the exception rather than the rule. The overall unevenness in theoretical knowledge suggests a need for explicit foundational training, particularly in resource-limited, smaller newsrooms. This indicates that establishing a shared vocabulary and clear principles around transparency could unify newsroom approaches, enhancing consistency and intentionality—something the Trust Kits aim to do.

Operational Knowledge

While theoretical questions centered on the "why," operational reflections revealed the "how" and often the limits thereof. Journalists repeatedly described the tension between aspirational transparency and daily production demands. A national outlet serving agricultural communities acknowledged, "It's one thing to talk about transparency, but another to find the time and staff to implement it effectively." This recognition

was echoed by a Northwestern regional daily: "Some of our workflows just aren't designed for this kind of openness." These comments point not to resistance but infrastructural misalignment, a recurring theme across multiple sites.

Yet even within these constraints, journalists sought practical openings. A Southern-Black press newsroom noted a critical turning point: "We realized we needed to overhaul our workflow to include a step where corrections are discussed explicitly before publication." This proactive redesign moved corrections from a reactive to a preventive posture. In the Pacific Northwest, a community radio station without a traditional corrections page reimagined transparency through on-air dialogue and post-broadcast annotations. Elsewhere, a hyperlocal newsroom adapted its corrections policy to suit digital-first publishing better, noting that online errors often required faster acknowledgment and more explicit audience-facing language. These reflections show that operational knowledge, while uneven, is not lacking in will, but in infrastructure. Journalists demonstrated a willingness to adjust when provided with models and tools, emphasizing the importance of embedding transparency into the muscle memory of newsroom routines rather than treating it as an external add-on.

Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring emerged as one of the most widely cited and actively practiced metacognitive pillars across the newsroom reflections. Newsrooms frequently described how becoming more attuned to their tendencies prompted them to reassess their decisions during reporting, editing, and audience engagement. In several cases, this awareness did not occur in hindsight but surfaced in the moment, offering a critical opportunity for mid-process adjustment. At a volunteer-driven community radio station in the Pacific Northwest, journalists reflected on how the Trust Kit process showed a hiccup in their approach: "We realized that our corrections disproportionately focused on technical errors but rarely addressed issues of framing or representation." This shift from technical to ethical reflection suggests that self-monitoring enables practitioners to identify what needs correction and why those patterns have persisted. Likewise, in a regional daily newspaper in the Northeast, journalists described catching themselves mid-discussion using insider jargon likely to confuse or alienate readers, prompting immediate revision to prioritize clarity and accessibility. These examples illustrate how self-monitoring became an editorial muscle that could be exercised in real time to realign practices with core journalistic values.

Importantly, this form of reflection was not confined to internal dialogue. A small community-driven newsroom in the Southeast described how audience feedback acted as a metacognitive trigger: "When readers reached out with feedback about our transparency efforts, we took it as a cue to re-evaluate our messaging." In this case, self-monitoring was not just individual but relational, facilitated by external cues that prompted the newsroom to revisit its language and tone. This signals a shift in newsroom orientation, not simply asking whether a correction is accurate, but whether the framing, delivery, and rationale resonate with the public's expectations and understanding. At the same time, newsrooms acknowledged the difficulty of sustaining self-monitoring practices under routine deadline pressure. A national agriculture-focused outlet noted, "In the rush to publish, self-monitoring can fall by the wayside, but that's when the most mistakes

happen." A rural local paper in the Pacific Northwest echoed this sentiment, describing how the demands of daily output often overrode the intention to reflect more deeply on language or editorial framing. These tensions underscore the need to institutionalize self-monitoring not merely as a personal value but as an operational priority supported by time, workflow, and leadership.

The reflections on self-monitoring highlight its dual role as both diagnostic and developmental. It cued journalists to pause, question assumptions, and recalibrate before missteps required public correction. In this way, self-monitoring improved individual performance and offered a model for how transparency can be enacted in the moment, not just explained after the fact.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation emerged as a crucial bridge between reflective insight and sustainable change. Where self-monitoring often prompted awareness, self-regulation translated that awareness into practice, allowing journalists to revise their approaches to transparency in intentional and usually proactive ways. Across newsrooms, this pillar was operationalized through individual behavior and collective efforts to embed reflection into institutional routines. In a regional daily newspaper in the Northeast, journalists described how corrections had evolved from short acknowledgments to more robust disclosures that explained both the error and the newsroom's internal response: "When we issue corrections, we don't just state the error. We explain what went wrong and how we're addressing it." This deliberate shift reframed the correction as an opportunity for accountability, not just technical accuracy. Similarly, a journalist at a Black press newsroom in the Southern United States described a moment of emotional regulation, recalling how instinctive defensiveness in response to public criticism gave way to re-evaluation and acknowledgment: "I took a step back, re-evaluated the feedback, and realized they had a point." These reflections illustrate how self-regulation often requires a pause—a cognitive and emotional recalibration—that allows journalists to shift from reactive habits to reflective engagement.

Several newsrooms described more formalized adaptations that institutionalized these practices. A small, community-driven newsroom in the Southeast and an Indigenous-led newsroom in the Mountain West integrated transparency prompts and correction reviews into regular editorial meetings, transforming self-regulation from an individual responsibility into a shared newsroom habit. In the Pacific Northwest, a volunteer-driven community radio station has adjusted its correction protocols to better reflect community feedback, prioritizing equity alongside accuracy in its editorial responses. In these cases, self-regulation was scaffolded through shared practices and workflows, demonstrating viability even in under-resourced or nontraditional newsrooms. Still, journalists across multiple sites emphasized the fragility of these gains under deadline pressure. A national agriculture-focused outlet noted the difficulty of slowing down in fast-paced environments: "There's always pressure to move quickly, but self-regulation means slowing down enough to get it right." This tension between the aspiration to reflect and the realities of production was among the most persistent challenges described. Even in newsrooms with firm commitments to transparency, self-regulation required deliberate time, space, and leadership support to move from theory to habit. What

emerges across these reflections is not just evidence of behavioral change but a reimagining of how journalistic integrity is enacted through daily choices. Self-regulation was not framed as perfectionism, but as a discipline—a repeated effort to align newsroom processes with the values they claim to uphold.

Adaptation

Adaptation surfaced as a dynamic and iterative process across newsrooms. It was not framed as a one-time fix but a continual negotiation between professional ideals, organizational constraints, and audience expectations. Through their reflections, journalists described a range of adaptations, from editorial workflow adjustments to language revisions and audience engagement strategies, demonstrating how change often emerged not from sweeping transformation but from incremental recalibration. At a national agriculture-focused media organization, staff described how feedback from readers prompted a reconsideration of how transparency was communicated: "After readers pushed back, we rewrote our transparency box in plainer language." This shift reflects an attentiveness to what was being shared and how it was being understood, a hallmark of adaptive thinking. Similarly, a small community newsroom in the Southeast restructured its corrections process to be more responsive on digital platforms, recognizing that online readers expected speed and clarity in acknowledgment. In both cases, adaptation reflected a responsiveness to context, with journalists modifying routines to better align with the real-time demands of their audiences.

For other outlets, adaptation required navigating more structural constraints. For instance, a regional daily newspaper described the need to prioritize sustainable transparency initiatives, given the limited staffing. Rather than abandoning the work, they focused on practices that could realistically be maintained without overburdening the team. A volunteer-driven community radio station took a similar approach, reshaping its correction protocols to match the realities of a non-traditional newsroom model. These examples illustrate how adaptation was not about conforming to a singular transparency standard but tailoring solutions to organizational capacity. Importantly, adaptation was also closely tied to reflection on editorial norms. A small-town local paper emphasized the importance of adapting transparency language when covering politically sensitive stories, signaling a move from blanket policies toward more context-specific approaches. Meanwhile, a Black press described a shift toward proactive corrections, developed iteratively over time as the newsroom learned from past missteps and ongoing community conversations. This suggests that adaptation, while often catalyzed by external pressures, was most effective when undergirded by internal reflection.

In a regional daily newspaper in the Northeast, audience feedback played a formative role in refining transparency practices: "We've become more transparent about our corrections process, not just the errors themselves. This change has been driven by the feedback we've received from our readers." Across these cases, adaptation revealed itself not as a reactive adjustment but as a form of dialogic professionalism that positioned the journalist in an ongoing relationship with community and practice. These reflections across newsrooms illustrate adaptation as a core metacognitive function: the mechanism through which reflection becomes evolution. Whether in response to feedback,

constraints, or editorial complexity, adaptation offered newsrooms a way to refine their practices without abandoning their principles.

Recognition

Recognition emerged as a vital capacity through which journalists reoriented their transparency practices in response to community needs. Unlike self-monitoring, which focused on internal awareness, recognition often entailed an outward gaze: an attunement to how journalistic decisions interact with public trust, audience perception, and historical patterns of representation or exclusion. Across newsrooms, recognition was frequently sparked by moments of misalignment between newsroom assumptions and audience expectations. For example, in a Southern-based Black press outlet, journalists recognized that their readers often felt left out of editorial explanations or corrections. This prompted reconsidering how transparency was framed and who it served, ultimately shaping new approaches to audience communication. Similarly, in a small suburban newsroom, feedback about language clarity led the team to revise how they contextualized decisions: "We realized our framing assumes everyone knows the legal terms. We need to define them better." These moments of recognition often transformed routine editorial habits into points of reflection about accessibility, voice, and inclusivity. For a national agriculture-focused media outlet, recognition meant identifying recurring challenges in the audience's misunderstanding of sourcing and corrections. This led to a more deliberate effort to explain editorial decisions in plain, accessible language. At a regional daily newspaper in the Northeast, journalists described learning from patterns in reader feedback, shifting their approach to highlight better what kinds of transparency mattered most to their audience. Rather than treating audience engagement as a post-hoc necessity, these newsrooms began anticipating their audiences' needs, confusions, and priorities, embedding those recognitions upstream into decision-making processes.

Recognition also operated at the level of newsroom-community relationships, especially in organizations rooted in specific cultural or geographic contexts. A nonprofit Indigenous-led newsroom in the Mountain West region explicitly framed transparency as integral to rebuilding trust within tribal communities historically underserved or misrepresented by mainstream media. In the Pacific Northwest, a volunteer-driven community radio station highlighted how community members raised concerns about the lack of transparency in stories involving representation, prompting a shift in how editorial decisions were explained during broadcasts. These reflections demonstrate how recognition sharpened the newsroom's sense of responsibility, not just to accuracy or professionalism, but to relational ethics grounded in place and history. In other cases, recognition helped newsrooms identify internal patterns of failure or inconsistency. A regional daily newspaper in the Northwest described tracking recurring error types over time, leading to targeted workflow and story planning improvements. Here, recognition served a systemic function, allowing staff to move beyond isolated corrections and toward proactive quality control. These reveal recognition as a form of cognitive awareness and a critical practice of journalistic humility. It required stepping outside the newsroom's internal logic to see how the public interpreted, misread, or resisted editorial choices. This pillar speaks directly to the shifting relationship between journalists and

their imagined audiences, challenging professionals to move beyond assumptions and meet their communities collaboratively.

Discrimination

Discrimination emerged as a quieter but no less significant metacognitive pillar in journalists' reflections. While not as frequently cited as self-monitoring or adaptation, discrimination revealed itself when journalists exercised judgment about what to correct, clarify, or communicate, especially when under pressure to respond to audience feedback or organizational demands. Its importance lay not in its volume, but in its strategic clarity: journalists who engaged this pillar described it as essential to maximizing impact while avoiding burnout or dilution of trust. In a Pacific Northwest newsroom, staff described how not every audience correction could be treated equally: "We've learned to prioritize which corrections require immediate public acknowledgment versus those we can address internally. Not every error needs the same response." This practical discernment resonated across newsrooms of all types and sizes. A national agriculture-focused outlet noted, "We're realizing that being transparent doesn't mean explaining everything; it's about explaining what matters most to the audience." In both cases, discrimination was framed not as withholding information but as focusing transparency on areas most likely to reinforce trust and clarity. This idea of editorial triage, making distinctions between degrees of error, surfaced in a Northeastern regional daily, where journalists explained, "We're getting better at identifying which errors need a detailed explanation and which can be corrected with a simple note." Such decisions were operational and ethical, requiring teams to assess what kinds of mistakes carried implications for credibility and which could be addressed more quietly. Similarly, a Southern Black press newsroom described filtering through feedback to prioritize what mattered most to community relationships: "We've started focusing on the issues that impact trust the most, rather than trying to address every single comment."

Other newsrooms emphasized discrimination in internal resource allocation. A Southeastern suburban newsroom reflected, "It's about being selective and strategic, not just reactive," indicating that discrimination was also about pacing and sustainability. A Pacific Northwest community radio station noted that, as a largely volunteer-based organization, they had to concentrate limited capacity on transparency initiatives that offered the most return in audience understanding and accountability. This strategic focus was echoed by a Northwestern regional daily, where the team began distinguishing between minor typos and more substantive editorial missteps to avoid overcorrecting and undermining their editorial authority. Finally, an Indigenous-led newsroom in the Mountain West framed their use of discrimination as a form of ethical stewardship: "We have to think very carefully about where we focus our transparency, we can't afford to lose our community's trust by chasing every small mistake but missing the bigger patterns." These suggest that discrimination, while under-articulated, functioned as a core newsroom competency. It enabled journalists to draw boundaries around their transparency efforts, protecting audience trust and internal bandwidth. Importantly, discriminating was not portrayed as a retreat from openness, but as an intentional, values-driven sorting process that aligned newsroom resources with community needs and ethical priorities.

Mnemosyne

Mnemosyne surfaced as a less common but strategically potent form of metacognitive engagement. While not as routinely cited as pillars like self-monitoring or adaptation, when journalists did reflect on prior actions, policies, or feedback, the result was often a more intentional, consistent approach to transparency. In several cases, mnemosyne took the form of archival practice.

A community-focused Black press newsroom noted, "We've started keeping a corrections log, which helps us see where we've improved and are still falling short," linking retrospective reflection to active performance tracking. At a regional daily in the Northeast, institutional history provided a framework for internal policy development: "Looking back at our historical handling of corrections, we realized consistency was lacking." These examples demonstrate that mnemosyne is not just an abstract form of recollection—it underpins procedural improvements and ethical coherence over time. In smaller and resource-constrained newsrooms, memory was often a communal asset rather than a formal system. A Southeastern suburban newsroom reflected on prior lapses in transparency and made deliberate adjustments to align future practices with long-standing organizational values. A national agriculture-focused outlet took this further by archiving examples of transparency best practices for onboarding new team members, using memory as both a pedagogical and cultural tool. In more volunteer-driven and community-based contexts, memory serves to correct past harms and anticipate future needs. A Pacific Northwest community radio station explained how historical audience feedback, particularly regarding issues of representation, now informs the framing of corrections in current broadcasts. Likewise, a nonprofit Indigenous-led newsroom in the Mountain West drew on its collective memory of community mistrust to shape transparency strategies prioritizing relational repair over procedural minimalism. Even in newsrooms with more robust staffing, such as a regional daily in the Northwestern United States, reflection on past errors became a resource for building forward-looking transparency efforts: "We've started integrating examples from past corrections into our weekly meetings. It helps us catch patterns before they repeat." A rural small-town newspaper in the Pacific Northwest reported maintaining documentation of past editorial decisions to ensure consistency, particularly during staff turnover.

Across these sites, mnemosyne offered an underutilized but essential scaffolding for transparency work. It enabled journalists to correct or explain, learn, and evolve their work. In this sense, institutional memory became a site of ethical inheritance, providing the continuity needed to sustain transparency as a living, iterative practice. Fostering mnemosyne may be especially critical in an industry characterized by flux, burnout, and the loss of long-term personnel. When embedded structurally, memory is not nostalgic—it is strategic, offering a way to convert reflexive awareness into long-term accountability.

Discussion

Metacognition has long been recognized as a cornerstone of effective decision-making and adaptive learning (Zimmerman 2002). In the context of journalism, it offers a lens through which to understand how practitioners navigate the cognitive complexities of

their work. This study's findings illustrate that metacognition is not an abstract concept but a tangible set of practices journalists employ to evaluate and improve their reporting. Metacognition provides a conceptual bridge between normative ideals and the messy, iterative realities of newsroom work. Journalists' explicit engagement with the eight metacognitive pillars suggests that transparency need not be viewed solely as a performative ideal, but rather as a nuanced practice embedded in reflective newsroom routines. This reorientation from transparency-as-disclosure to transparency-as-reflection highlights the cognitive labor journalists perform to remain accountable in uncertain and constrained environments.

To explore how metacognition operated within this intervention, the discussion proceeds through three focal areas that emerged from the data. First, it examines how journalists developed across the eight pillars of metacognition during the six-week Trust Kit process, offering a view into how metacognitive practices were learned and enacted. Second, it analyzes how journalists' evolving sense of their audiences shaped their ethical decision-making and transparency strategies. Third, it examines how clarity and memory, two less-explored yet foundational aspects of metacognition, contributed to journalists establishing lasting newsroom routines. Together, these areas illuminate how metacognition evolves from an abstract concept to a lived professional practice.

Metacognitive journalism must be understood not merely as thinking about thinking, but as a mode of being and doing —a cultivated disposition of responsiveness, ethical attentiveness, and continual adaptation embedded in practice. In this sense, metacognition is not a solitary mental event but a relational, embodied, and materially mediated process. For journalists striving to enact transparency, reflection is not a separate task; it is an intrinsic part of how they report, correct, explain, and adapt in real-time. However, this assumes positive, restorative, and proactive intentions. Journalism is a relational profession: it is shaped by audiences, editors, technologies, and cultural norms. Therefore, metacognitive engagement must be cultivated in individuals and practices through reflective routines, correction protocols, and collaborative discussions of ethical dilemmas.

Metacognitive Intervention Across the Trust Kit Intervention

Throughout the six-week intervention, newsroom participants demonstrated progressive development across the Eight Pillars of Metacognition (Drigas and Mitsea 2020). While individual entries reflected variation in editorial roles, institutional priorities, and resource constraints, a collective developmental arc became evident. Early reflections revealed gaps in Theoretical Knowledge, with many journalists struggling to define transparency or corrections beyond vague notions of "doing the right thing." Several newsrooms admitted they had never formalized such policies, nor interrogated how these ideals translated into everyday work. At this early stage, metacognition surfaced primarily through Self-Monitoring and Recognition, journalists identified moments of uncertainty, caught themselves making assumptions, or described feeling uneasy about their framing, but often lacked the tools or language to act on that awareness. As participants moved into the middle of the intervention, their reflections became more tactical. Journalists began experimenting with Operational Knowledge and Adaptation, testing new strategies for workflow integration, transparency copy, and editorial framing. These middle

weeks also revealed increasing Self-Regulation, particularly in how participants paused production timelines to reassess accuracy, intention, or audience understanding. Rather than defaulting to reflexive journalistic routines, participants described interrupting their practices, a critical marker of what Raelin (2007) terms second-order learning, where professionals move from habituated action to strategic revision.

By the final weeks, most newsrooms demonstrated maturation across all eight pillars. Discrimination emerged through a more apparent prioritization of audience feedback; journalists reported being more selective about which critiques warranted discussion at the newsroom level. Mnemosyne, meanwhile, became an active resource rather than a latent memory. Several teams began archiving feedback loops, referencing past corrections, and using institutional memory to guide real-time decisions. Transparency was no longer treated as a single act or retroactive gesture. It became embedded in newsroom epistemologies, shaping how participants anticipated, navigated, and reflected on their professional judgment.

A regional daily newspaper in the Northeastern United States with a medium-to-large professional staff, illustrates this trajectory. In week one, their journal reflected: "We've always issued corrections, but we've never talked about them." This admission, framed not as defiance but as cultural inertia, revealed low engagement with Mnemosyne and Theoretical Knowledge. Corrections were understood as necessary yet functionally invisible; their epistemological or relational significance remained unarticulated. The early entries from this newsroom were marked by caution and modest goals. They wrote, "We're not trying to reinvent anything; we just want to be a little clearer with readers." Even this modest ambition, however, laid the groundwork for deeper reflection. By week three, metacognition began to materialize in newsroom routines. A pitch meeting prompted reflection on assumed knowledge: "We caught ourselves using phrasing that would've made sense to insiders but not readers. We paused and rewrote on the spot." This moment, though brief, reveals how Self-Monitoring and Recognition have moved from a reactive to an anticipatory approach. The newsroom not only identified issues after publication but also adjusted the framing in real-time. Importantly, the revision was not framed as a correction of error but as a recalibration of audience expectations—a signal that participatory transparency, as Karlsson (2010) and Latvala (2023) argue, requires not just disclosure but real-time audience attunement. By week six, the newsroom had implemented what one editor called a "second layer of editing"—not focused on grammar or structure but on public-facing clarity. They developed an internal document to track reader feedback, correction trends, and examples of strong transparency framing. As another journalist reflected, "It's not just about fixing errors. We're more transparent now about the why of how we cover things." That phrase—the why of how—marks a discursive shift. Transparency was no longer a procedural disclosure but a site of meaning-making. Here, Self-Regulation, Adaptation, Recognition, and Mnemosyne converged. The team drew on past feedback, collaboratively developed new practices, and redefined the boundaries of journalistic authority, not in terms of omniscience, but in terms of responsive process.

Thus, the case of this newsroom captures the dual promise and limit of transparency as metacognitive labor. The promise lies in transformation: moving from unexamined routines to deliberate, iterative engagement. One reflection noted that the limit lies in reach: "We've changed how we work, but I'm not sure our audience sees that." This

tension reinforces the argument advanced by Latvala (2023) and Karlsson (2020): that transparency may function more as an internal accountability mechanism than an external trust-building tool. In this light, the intervention's greatest impact may not lie in changing audience perceptions but in equipping journalists with the cognitive tools to navigate trust work more ethically and sustainably. Transparency is not just a strategy —it is a situated practice of thinking, adjusting, and remembering in public. And yet, this evolution also highlights a crucial tension: even as journalists grew more reflexive, the burden of transparency remained internal. There is no guarantee that these carefully crafted revisions were legible to audiences, nor that they restored trust. As Koliska (2022) and Masullo et al. (2022) remind us, transparency interventions often fail to resonate because audiences miss them, distrust them, or reject the framing altogether. In this sense, the newsroom's success in embedding transparency as a metacognitive practice may exceed its impact as a persuasive act. Transparency becomes a ritual not of audience conversion, but of professional becoming—a way for journalists to assert care, credibility, and ethical orientation even in the face of public ambivalence, which I argue is one of the most critical outcomes of this project.

Journalists and Their Imagined Audiences

This study contributes to the complexity of how journalists conceptualize their audiences and shape their professional practices, thereby deepening existing scholarship on imagined audiences (Nelson 2021) and reflective professional learning (Ryfe 2024). Across participating newsrooms, structured metacognitive engagement prompted journalists to critically reexamine their assumptions about audience expectations, trust, and feedback, revealing how metacognitive awareness informs editorial choices, workflow strategies, and ethical priorities. For instance, journalists who engaged in self-monitoring often recognized and challenged habitual biases in their reporting, sometimes acknowledging when corrections disproportionately addressed factual rather than representational concerns. Others used reader feedback not only to correct discrete mistakes but also as a reflective prompt to reconsider how transparency was presented or explained to their audiences. These practices illustrate Schön's (1983) concept of reflection-in-action, where ethical and strategic decisions evolve in real time based on internal awareness and external cues.

Journalists' adaptive strategies also reflected metacognitive regulation at the organizational level. Some newsrooms revised correction workflows to incorporate explicit reflection points, such as pre-publication accuracy checks or post-publication error reviews. In contrast, others adjusted their audience-facing messaging to communicate editorial intentions more effectively. These findings echo Coddington, Lewis, and Bélair-Gagnon's (2021) argument that journalists' perceptions of their audiences are not static but dynamically constructed through newsroom routines and professional discourse. The Trust Kits prompted newsrooms to externalize and interrogate these perceptions, surfacing previously unexamined assumptions and reframing their imagined audiences as passive recipients and collaborators in trust-building. This suggests that metacognitive interventions can function as a bridge between internal reflection and external transparency. By making audience considerations explicit and linking them to internal processes, such as workflow design, content framing, and corrections management, newsrooms can

foster more intentional, audience-aware journalism. However, the findings also reinforce that even the most reflective journalists cannot overcome all trust barriers. Audience skepticism, information overload, and ideological polarization influence how transparency is perceived. Thus, while metacognition enhances how journalists think about and enact transparency, it must be complemented by deliberate communication strategies that clarify purpose, foster dialogue, and directly address audience misperceptions.

Clarity and Memory as Core Tenets for Stronger Journalistic Practices

The findings of this study offer insights into the role of institutional memory, captured in the metacognitive pillar of mnemosyne, in sustaining transparency practices over time. Several newsrooms implemented practices that explicitly leveraged past experiences to inform present and future decision-making, including corrections logs, archival documentation of transparency-related dilemmas, and reflective discussions about historical audience feedback. These routines supported continuity, reduced the likelihood of recurring errors, and created pathways for onboarding new staff into established transparency norms. For example, newsrooms maintained formal corrections logs to identify error patterns, some of which became a regular reference point during editorial meetings. Another used archived transparency cases to train incoming journalists, fostering a shared organizational vocabulary around ethical decision-making. These examples demonstrate how Mnemosyne functions not only as a tool for memory retention but also as a strategic, future-oriented aid for organizational learning and consistency.

These practices align with Dall'Alba and Barnacle's (2015) concept of "knowing who," in which professional development extends beyond technical skills into cultivating an ethical identity through reflective awareness. In this sense, institutional memory becomes a repository of actions and a space where journalists negotiate and reshape what it means to act transparently and ethically over time. Similarly, Jenlink's (2009) notion of the "mirror of theory" and the "memory of practice" is instructive here: the reflective infrastructure built by newsrooms allows them to revisit and revise what has been internalized as normative practice, keeping ethical responsiveness alive and adaptive. This integration of past knowledge into current decision-making closely aligns with the process-oriented epistemology of Nicolini (2011), who emphasizes that professional knowledge is dispersed across people, routines, and material tools. Correction logs and documentation archives serve more than as bureaucratic record-keeping: cognitive artifacts that extend journalists' reflective capacity, anchoring metacognitive engagement within everyday workflow. Mnemosyne, then, supports the transformation of ephemeral reflection into durable organizational knowledge.

While these practices suggest a promising model for long-term improvement, the findings also reveal a methodological limitation. These reported gains were based on journalists' self-assessments rather than independent evaluation. As such, the evidence of improvement remains subjective. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, triangulating newsroom self-reports with external measures such as audience feedback trends, digital engagement analytics, and third-party credibility assessments to evaluate the actual impact of reflective infrastructure on audience trust.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this study confirms that metacognition is about thinking more effectively and improving oneself. For journalists navigating an increasingly complex media environment, metacognition offers a roadmap for aligning thought with action, ethics with execution, and audience insight with institutional purpose. The Trust Kits demonstrate how structured opportunities for reflection can transform newsroom practices, enhance professional identity, and deepen journalism's public service mission. In times of uncertainty and transformation, metacognition offers a resilient framework for fostering trust, integrity, and democratic accountability. These findings underscore the importance of embedding structured reflection into newsroom culture, not as an ancillary task, but as a core professional practice that can make transparency more actionable and sustainable. Transparency remains foundational to journalistic ethics; however, this study reveals that it is often implemented unevenly due to structural constraints, including time pressure, resource scarcity, and audience disengagement. While metacognitive engagement enhances transparency from within, it cannot unilaterally resolve entrenched audience distrust or the algorithmic and ideological forces that shape news reception. Rather than proposing metacognition as a panacea, this study positions it as a necessary but partial solution that strengthens internal practice and enables journalists to meet external challenges with integrity more effectively. The shift from transparency as disclosure to transparency as reflection represents an epistemological reorientation in journalism, one that can foster a deeper understanding among the audience, even if it cannot guarantee public trust.

Metacognition offers a responsive framework for navigating these complexities associated with transparency. While this study focuses on transparency, the implications of metacognitive practice extend beyond this domain. Metacognition enables journalists to critically examine the institutional pressures, routines, and biases that shape their work. This includes recognizing political, economic, and technological influences on news production, as well as understanding how personal beliefs and organizational norms influence ethical decision-making. When practiced consistently, metacognition can help sustain journalism's watchdog role, encourage deliberative reporting, and reinforce democratic commitments even outside moments of acute crisis. The professional implications of metacognition are clear for journalism educators, trainers, and newsroom leaders. Metacognitive practices should be taught, modeled, and resourced as integral to the practice of ethical journalism. This includes formalizing correction protocols, integrating reflection routines into editorial meetings, and creating space for collaborative review of transparency practices. These routines must be tailored to newsroom scale and mission—what works for a regional daily may need adaptation for a volunteer-run community outlet. Yet across contexts, the goal is to make reflection habitual, intentional, and integral to professional identity.

Future research should continue to investigate how metacognitive practices vary across different organizational types, journalistic roles, and sociocultural contexts. Comparative studies could illuminate how reflection scales differently across high-pressure newsrooms and smaller, community-based outlets. Technological interventions, such as tools that support tracking editorial decisions or prompt self-assessment, can also augment metacognitive engagement, but they must be designed to complement

rather than supplant human judgment. Future work could utilize experimental and survey-based methods to investigate whether correlations exist between more metacognitive-driven transparency work and audience outcomes.

Author contributions

CRediT: **Emma Gran:** Data curation, Resources; **Stephen Cohn:** Data curation.

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