Not Everybody's a **Journalist**

Subjective Beliefs and Professional Ethos —
On the Differences Between Audiences and Journalists

UNIVERSITÄT PASSAU

Dr. Michael Harnischmacher |
Center for Media and Communication |
michael.harnischmacher@uni-passau.de |

Research Question

The Search for a "Journalism Ethos":
Are there differences between journalists and audiences in terms of subjective beliefs regarding media proficiency and do they influence media usage and trust?
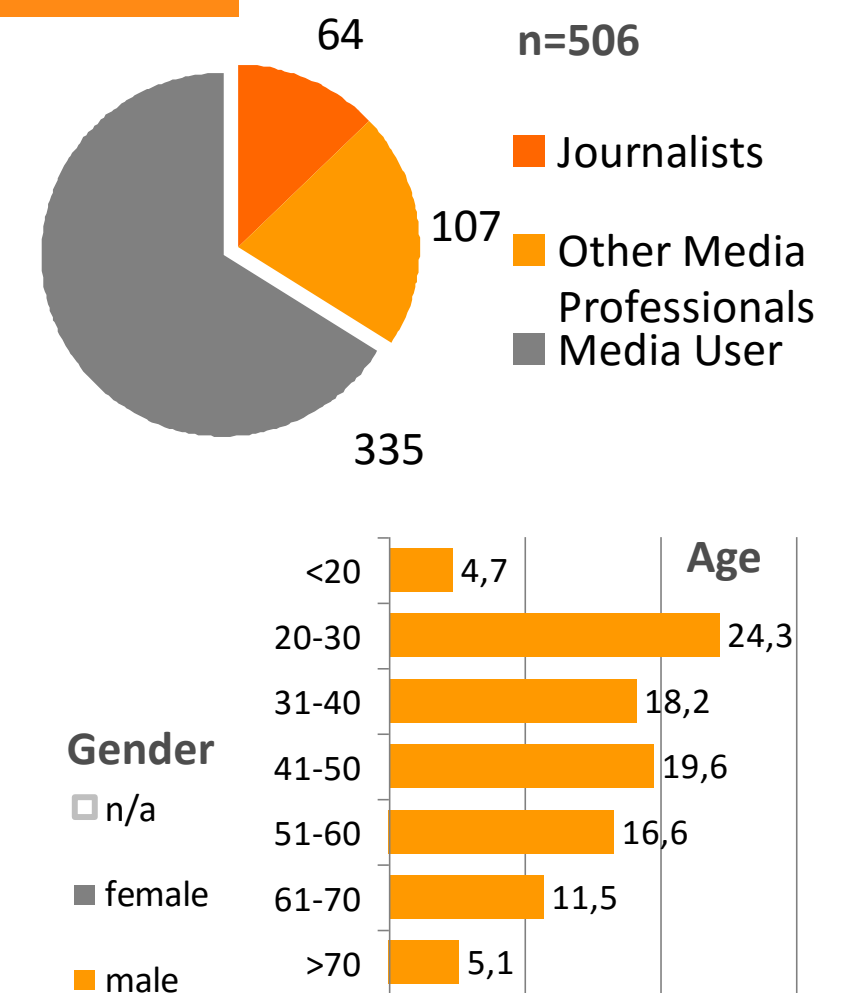
What we found...

In a nutshell

Although journalistic tasks — like searching for, selecting and publishing information — have become commonplace among the audience in everyday life to a point where some scholars see journalism disappear (John Hartley's famous "Everybody's a journalist"), journalistic beliefs are not shared by the everyday prosumer.

What we did...

Online survey of local audiences, journalists, PR professionals and alternative communicators in a local media environment (midsize city, 105.000 inhabitants). A call for participation in the survey was issued via different media. All but one local medium participated with their staff (journalists & freelancers). 140 PR and media professionals of companies, associations and public institutions were contacted personally.

n=506

- 64 Journalists
- 107 Other Media Professionals
- 335 Media User

Age
- <20 : 4,7
- 20-30 : 24,3
- 31-40 : 18,2
- 41-50 : 19,6
- 51-60 : 16,6
- 61-70 : 11,5
- >70 : 5,1

Gender
- n/a : 3,6
- female : 46,6
- male : 49,8

Questionnaire testing seven scales of *journalistic professional beliefs*:

1. "Gatekeeping" [5 items, α .85] ("I am able to find information to complex issues on my own.")
2. "Information assessment" [5 items, α .83] ("I can distinguish between true and false information.")
3. "Pluralism" [4 items, α .70] ("For me, it is important to have many sources of information")
4. "Autonomy" [4 items, α .70] ("I want to have a say in where I get my information from")
5. "Submissiveness to authority" [2 items, α .58] ("Experts can best determine what's wrong or right")
6. "Communicative efficacy" [2 items, α .55] ("My comments, remarks, have an effect")
7. "Handling complex information" [2 items, α .35] ("With too much information, I tend to lose track")

Journalists stand out

Audiences differ in their media proficiency beliefs from media professionals (PR professionals and journalists) in a number of beliefs:

- Gatekeeping (d=.4, p<.001)
- Pluralism (d=.4, p<.001)
- Autonomy (d=.2, p<.05)
- Communicative efficacy (d=.4, p<.001)

However, a closer look shows that not all media professionals think alike - **the journalists clearly stand out**! The results indicate that in terms of their beliefs, audiences and PR professionals are much more alike, and they differ from the journalists:

- Gatekeeping (d=.7, p<.001)
- Pluralism (d=.8, p<.001)
- Autonomy (d=.4, p<.05)
- Efficacy (d=.8, p<.001)
- Information assessment (d=.6, p<.05)

We could call this „professional journalism ethos"...

Effects on Audiences

Subscribing to „journalistic" media proficiency beliefs has effects on audiences, which are not prevalent among journalists:

*Especially **trust in new media as sources of information** is being influenced by these beliefs!*

A **high confidence in ones communicative efficacy** (median split: high [n=338] / low [n=104]) results in

- **higher trust in alternative online-sources** [hyperlocals, blogs] in the categories* theme selectivity (d=.4, p=.000) and accuracy (d=.3, p<.05).

Respectively, **trust in alternative online-sources** is being predicted by communicative efficacy belief (R=.18, ß=.179, p<.001).

A **high confidence in ones ability to assess information correctly** (median split: high [n=227] / low [n=215]) results in...

- … **higher trust in search engines** in the categories* theme selectivity (d=.2, p<.05), fact selectivity (d=.3, p<.001) and accuracy (d=.3, p< .001)
- … **higher trust in the websites of associations** in the categories* theme selectivity (d=.2, p<.05) and fact selectivity (d=.2, p<.05)
- … **higher trust in company websites** in the category* fact selectivity (d=.3, p<.05)

In addition, **trust in search engines** is being predicted by gatekeeping belief (R=.21, ß=.137, p<.01) and information assessment (R=.21, ß=.226, p<.001).

So, being an "active" **user** of new media **does not** automatically make you a journalist.

References

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