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

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...

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 prosurer.

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 prosurer.

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.

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 ability to assess information correctly (median split: high [n=338] / low [n=104]) results in...

- ... higher trust in search engines in the categories* theme selectivity (d=.2, p<.001), 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).

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<.001), 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).

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

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

References

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