

“Same Same But Different”

Comparing journalists' and users' understandings of traditional and new role conceptions

The journalism/audience-relationship is undergoing fundamental transformations. One symptom of this shift is the proliferation of new means of audience participation in journalism which digital media and most recently “social” or “participatory media” have accelerated. But online news outlets and social media channels not only afford new participatory practices, but might also change expectations of how journalism should change (or remain stable) under these shifting conditions; that is what journalists *want or feel obliged* to do and what journalists *should* do according to their audience.

These developments are at the heart of a project which conducts four case studies on the journalism/audience-relationship in different German journalistic news outlets. More specifically, we compare journalists and audience members of these journalistic outlets with respect to their practices as well as to their attitudes and expectations regarding the role of journalism and audience participation. By using the same operationalization for key variables such as (assumed) motivations for participation or professional (self-)image, we cannot only compare (in-)congruencies between practices and expectations of journalists vs. audience members within the case studies, but also across different journalistic outlets.

The proposed paper's focus is on one particular aspect of journalistic and audience expectations: the (in-)congruencies between journalists' professional self-image – being one of, if not *the* classic concept in journalism studies – and the external image their audiences hold regarding professional journalism. Here, we demonstrate the value of our theoretical and methodological approach by comparing the case studies on a daily newscast (DN) and a weekly TV talk show (TS). Both included online surveys as well as in-depth interviews with journalists (DN sample: survey n=63/interviews n=10; TS sample: survey n=10/interviews n=7) and audience members (DN sample: survey n=4.686/interviews n=6; TS sample: survey n=354/interviews n=7). To measure journalists' professional self-image and the external image among their audiences, the same item battery was included in all online surveys. It consisted of 12 items which Weischenberg et al. (2006; 2012) used in a series of representative surveys among journalists in Germany, supplemented by seven items addressing new facets of journalistic practice related to participatory media.

First of all, our findings show that “classical” journalistic role conceptions are still in place at the daily newscast and the weekly talk show, both among journalists and their audiences. In both case studies we find rather large congruencies regarding traditional tasks related to news journalism such as “to inform as objectively and precisely as possible” or “to explain and convey complex issues”. Thus, journalists want to do what they, according to their audience, should do. However, the in-depth interviews with the journalists also revealed differences in how these abstract goals are actually understood and practically pursued. For example, talk show journalists in contrast to newscast journalists regard the talk guests' opinions as the information to be delivered and strive to achieve objectivity by a well-balanced cast of talk guests representing many different perspectives.

The findings also suggest that new participatory, curating and conversational aspects of journalism have become part of journalists' and audience members' conceptions of a journalist's role to a different extent, e.g. "point to interesting topics and further information" is seen as more important than "provide people with the opportunity to publish their own content". In addition, we find larger incongruencies between journalists and their audiences in both case studies for these participatory role aspects. This indicates that stable mutual expectations have not been formed yet – neither among journalists regarding their own professional self-image, nor among audience members regarding their expectations on participation in times of profound changes to journalism.