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Audience Expectations and Trust in Online Journalism

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ABSTRACT
Audience trust towards journalism gives meaning to the work of journalists. Yet this trust is in decline, which is threatening both media businesses and the society at large. This development is the worrisome but still natural result of trust's intrinsic qualities. Trust is context-dependent: different situations evoke different expectations, the fulfilment of which defines what is "worthy of trust". Changes to the journalistic environment shift audience expectations and thus disrupt the existing trust. The Internet and the introduction of online journalism are major drivers of such change. In light of these changes we can ask: what does the audience expect from online journalism? This article explores the question using experimental focus-group interviews with young Finnish adults (aged 18–28; n = 34). The results suggest this audience segment has very traditional, even puritan ideals for journalism – and that Finnish online journalism is not always able to meet the audience's expectations.

KEYWORDS
Online journalism – trust – trustworthiness – audience

1. Introduction

For decades, the audiences' trust towards media has been declining in many countries (Trust in media 2016, 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer). This change has been observed particularly closely and for long time in the United States (e.g. Gallup, 2016; Gronke & Cook, 2007; Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016, p. 8–10), but also elsewhere (e.g. Livio & Cohen, 2016). Even in Finland, a country that is inhabited by one of the most news media-trusting nations, almost half of adult population (49 per cent) believes Finnish media publish at least moderate amounts of "fabricated, deceitful news" (Medialiitto, 2017). Concurrently, audiences' willingness to pay for journalism has withered (Chyi, 2012; Nguyen, 2010, p. 235–236; c.f. Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2016). How could the distrust be explained? Evidence suggests trust towards journalism is undermined by what is seen as its poor performance, e.g. a lack of objectivity or clarity (Coleman, Anthony, & Morrison, 2009; Gil de Zuñiga, Diehl & Ardévol-Abreu, 2016; Gil de Zuñiga & Hinsley, 2012; Livio & Cohen, 2016; Pjesivac 2017). Other research offers insights into the challenging conditions of contemporary journalism. Reporters work under increasing time pressure, spend less time on individual stories, check facts less carefully, and routinely copy stories from other media; new and more diverse skill sets are demanded from journalists; the use of outside ma-

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terial is increasing and overall content diversity declining – to name just a few (Brannon, 2008; Cassidy, 2007; Juntunen, 2011; Quandt & Singer, 2009; Witschge, 2013, p. 168–169).

Distrust may also be caused by a disconnection between journalists and their audiences. Studies suggest the two groups hold different views on what journalism ought to be like (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2010; Braman, 1988; Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, 2005; Tsfati, Meyers, & Peri, 2006; Willnat, Weaver, Wilhoit, 2017) and what topics it should cover (Boczkowski & Peer, 2011; Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, Walter, 2010; Jian & Usher, 2013). There is also contrary evidence, according to which journalists and the audiences hold fairly similar norms (Burgoon, Bernstein, & Burgoon, 1983). The latter is ostensibly explained by journalists' poor understanding of the audiences' expectations: they see audiences as more alien than they really are (Atkin, Burgoon, & Burgoon, 1983; Gladney, 1996; Rawlings, 1979).

The key argument of this article is that audience distrust does not (necessarily) result from the poor performance of today's journalism in any normative sense, but from the journalism's *incompatibility with audience expectations* (c.f. Grosser, 2016). The content of these expectations, as elaborated below, defines what is and what is not "trustworthy" in journalism. This article begins with a discussion on the nature and importance of trust, arguing it is volatile in the context of contemporary online journalism. The remainder presents an empirical study, which contrasted the expectations of young adults with the work practices of online journalists. The results demonstrate what this audience expects of journalism and which practices violate those expectations.

2. The definition of trust

Although trust is a familiar concept to most, its interpretations vary. We "trust" the sun to rise from the East, and we "trust" the local newspaper to report any event of significant public interest that transpired before the issue went to print. We intuitively understand the differences between the examples: our expectations differ across situations. Should an astronomical anomaly cause the sun to rise from a different edge of the horizon, we would surely feel shock but not betrayal. We understand heavenly bodies to operate according to the laws of nature, not personal whims. If they behave unexpectedly, it is due to our poor understanding of the forces that propel them; if a newspaper misses a crucial story, it is because of a human shortcoming. For clarity, the two conditions can be separated by using the term "confidence" for expectations of mechanical nature (Seligman, 1997, p. 7). True trust can only target something that is understood to have free will and freedom of action (Giddens, 1990, p. 33; Misztal, 1996, p. 18–19).

Furthermore, trust can only exist in an instance in which the trusted person's actions cannot or will not be controlled. Control is both a sign of mistrust and a limitation on the trusted person's freedom of action. Traditionally there has been a distance between journalists and their audiences, which implies both the possibility of and need for trust. Even though transparency has been hailed as the new guiding principle of modern journalism (e.g. Karlsson, 2011; Phillips, 2011), audiences are

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still reliant on journalists to provide that transparency. Even if airtight monitoring and control could be implemented, it would hardly be desirable. Double-checking journalists' work would render journalism pointless: its very *raison d'être* is to relieve audiences from this investigation.

Finally, trust can only be based on a prior commitment. The commitment can be either explicit (e.g. signing a contract) or implicit (e.g. assuming an established societal role) (Misztal, 1996). Trust based on implicit obligations can easily lead to misunderstandings. Even among journalists there are cultural and personal disagreements over priorities and responsibilities, as demonstrated by the Worlds of Journalism Study (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). It is safe to assume that also audiences hold conflicting expectations towards journalism.

In summary, trust is an expectation of beneficial behaviour, which is based on a prior commitment (or a perception of such), which the trusting directs at a sentient actor (or something that is perceived as such) that has freedom of action (or is perceived as such). For our purposes, the notion of the context-bound nature of trust is crucial: a change in context will change the essence of a particular trust relationship.

3. The importance of trust

Trust has intrinsic value to human life, regardless of expectations contained within. Anthony Giddens (1990, p. 92–100) stresses the importance of "ontological security" – the ability to anchor one's reasoning to things that can be trusted not to change. Rudimentary ontological security, however, is by most standards insufficient. Without trust towards one's fellow human beings' basic interactions will become strained if not impossible. Trust in and of itself is imperative for personal well-being (e.g. Putnam, 2000, p. 288–289).

Due to its ubiquity trust has also collective importance. "Generalized trust", the abundance of trust relationships within a group of people, is a catalyst of societal activity (Seligman, 1997). This aspect of trust is referenced, among others, in the writings of Émile Durkheim (1990/1893), Francis Fukuyama (1995) and Georg Simmel (1990/1900). Different terminologies and articulations aside, the aforementioned authors' basic reasoning is as follows: the more people trust each other, the more likely they are to co-operate and less likely to require control. Effortless and prolific co-operation facilitates vital economic and civic activity, smooth communication, and respectful politics. For example, trust has been used to explain Estonia's post-Soviet economic boom (Mathias, 2008).

Journalists also have a selfish reason to worry about the trust enjoyed by journalism: untrusted products sell poorly. Building a trusted brand is a way of promoting habitual consumption of a branded product – and "[h]abit is trust working at its most effective" (Morrison & Firmstone, 2000, p. 609). Methods of fostering audience trust in journalism have been approached more commonly through the concept of "credibility", i.e. the sum of qualities that make something appear trustworthy (for an overview of credibility literature, see Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Many things, like a journalist's gender or a type of by-line photograph, can affect the credibility of an article (e.g. Golan & Day, 2010, p. 122–123; Johnson & Wiedenbeck, 2009; Tsfati &

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Ariely, 2013). A clear distinction between credibility, trust, and trustworthiness should be made: credibility is a *perception*, trust a *response* to that perception, and trustworthiness a *quality* which the perception may or may not match.

4. Evolving expectations towards journalism

Audiences have a host of expectations towards journalism. To a large extent, they stem from what Nielsen (2016) calls "folk theories of journalism" – the audiences' "beliefs about what journalism is, what it does, and what it ought to do." Carlson (2016) uses the term "metajournalistic discourse", but it conveys a similar conclusion: public's understanding of journalism and its role in society are beyond journalists' control.

New technology has enhanced journalism's capabilities. Journalists have a faster and wider access to information than before, published news stories can be easily updated, and editorial space is practically infinite. The potential for interactive features is unprecedented. Arguably, audiences are well aware of these capabilities and will expect journalists to make use of them (Fenton, 2010; Nguyen, 2010).

Cultural expectations towards journalism may have also changed. The dissonance between old and new can be understood through Pierre Bourdieu's (1998, 2005) field theory. It describes society as consisting of "fields", which constitute different segments of social life (e.g. journalism). Each actor within a field has prestige, or "symbolic capital", only in relation to its competitors in that field, as measured by a logic particular to said field. When actors encounter each other, their relative positions are subject to renegotiation. For example, the introduction of fast-paced online news can make traditional broadcast journalism seem sluggish (Bogaerts & Carpentier, 2013, p. 67).

The Internet with its linking, embedding, and aggregation causes that products of different fields jumble together, thus potentially changing the rules according to which symbolic capital is earned. Clinging onto what once was the gold standard of journalism may earn only fractions of the prestige it once did. An often-cited example of this is the poll result according to which Americans consider the satirical *The Daily Show* more trustworthy as a news source than the established MSNBC television network (Jones, Cox, Navarro-Rivera, Dionne, Galston, 2014, p. 36). The Internet and social media seem to have acclimated their users to open partisanship and advocacy – if audiences expect everyone to have an opinion, traditional objectivity might seem factitious or even deceitful. Yet evidence to the contrary exists, suggesting audiences might still prefer the traditional form of journalism: accurate and impartial (*Brand and trust in a fragmented news environment,* 2016; Clerwall, Karlsson, Nord, 2016).

5. Changing performance of journalism

"The crisis of journalism" is a widely discussed topic, but going into the particulars of this discourse is not necessary here. Suffice to say that by "the crisis" (e.g. Blumler, 2010), authors broadly refer to the rapid changes journalism has experienced over past 20 or so years. Views of these changes range from tentatively positive (e.g. Lee-

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Wright, Phillips, Witschge, 2012) to nearly apocalyptic (e.g. Beckett, 2008; Scott, 2005). At the very least, journalism can be said to face many challenges in adapting to its new cultural, economic and technological context.

Some changes have affected journalism in a general fashion. Financial insecurity drains resources from newsrooms and shifts power relations. Surveys show that journalists feel the quality of their work decreasing and external pressures mounting (Gómez-Mompart, Gutiérrez-Lozano, Palau-Sampio, 2015; Strömbäck & Karlsson, 2011). The introduction of online journalism is a more specific change. It has a distinct form, its production is (commonly) segregated, and audiences have different expectations towards it (Agarwal & Barthel, 2013; Barnhurst, 2011; Costera Meijer 2013; Hartley & Ellersgaard, 2013, p. 58; Juntunen, 2011; Quandt, 2008). Online newsrooms are often understaffed compared to other newsrooms or editorial departments, which results in increased hurry (Juntunen, 2011, 55; Quandt, 2008, p. 86; Witschge, 2013). The rush is worsened and in part caused by a constant pressure to update, which exhausts journalists (Brannon, 2008, p. 107) and directs their attention to stories "that do not accord with their own standards of good journalism" (Usher, 2017, p. 8).

Within the profession, online journalism is not always seen equal to traditional forms of journalism. Online journalists' pay might be lower than their colleagues' in other departments, and they may be treated as second class journalists – if they are even seen as journalists (Colson & Heinderyckx, 2008, p. 150; Garcia, 2008; Vobič & Milojević, 2014). In 2013, the Nordic journalists' unions conducted a series of membership surveys, according to which journalists expect online journalism to contain more errors than other types of journalism (Rusila, 2013).

Finally, today's journalism is different from the past because journalists' conceptions of what journalism should be like is changing. Young, prospective journalists have different news consumption habits and through them will internalize professional roles different from their predecessors (Tandoc, 2014). The effects of this generational shift are likely to come earlier and stronger into online journalism, where the journalists are younger on average (Pöyhtäri, Väliverronen, Ahva, 2014, p. 34).

6. Method

Changes in journalism in parallel with changes in audiences' expectations can lead to discrepancies between the two. However, no direct evidence of this discrepancy (or its absence) yet exists. The article at hand reports on a small-scale, qualitative study conducted to fill this research gap. The study focuses on audience reactions to real-life journalistic praxis and end products. These reactions reflect the participants' expectations related to journalism and thus define what can be considered "trustworthy" in this particular context. The study consisted of two phases. In the first phase, stimulus material was gathered from three Finnish newsrooms (spring 2017). In the second phase (autumn 2017), the material was presented to and discussed by groups of young Finnish adults.

The method was chosen in order to ground the focus groups discussions in empirically observed journalistic practices and outcomes of journalists' work. Previous

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studies in Finland (Kunelius, 2000), United Kingdom (Coleman, Anthony, & Morrison, 2009) and Sweden (Karlsson, Clerwall, & Nord, 2016) have touched upon the topic, but employed traditional semi-structured interviews with audience members. Their results discovered very traditional conceptions of "trustworthy" or "good" journalism. This might lead to suspect participants being prone to repeating conventional wisdoms if the discussions remain on a general level. By using real-life examples of journalistic work, I hoped to elicit more spontaneous and sincere reactions.

Phase 1

The stimulus material used in this study consisted of pairs of online news articles and related observational data. In total, I created ten of these pairs by observing and interviewing Finnish online journalists (n = 6) working for three Finnish news organizations. The newsrooms in question were the public service broadcaster Yleisradio, the country's leading broadsheet newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, and a major daily tabloid, *Iltalehti*. At the time of study, the aforementioned organizations' websites were among the four most popular in Finland according to the analytics company TNS Metrix.

I observed two volunteer journalists from each newsroom for 2–4 hours (total of 18 hours and 30 minutes). I closely accompanied the journalists throughout the observations, excluding lunch and bathroom breaks. I took detailed notes on the journalistic process, for example on phone calls and visited websites. I avoided discussion during the observation, unless initiated by the journalist. The journalists were interviewed immediately after the observation (in one case the following day). I asked them to confirm the observation notes and provide additional information on their thought processes. I also asked the journalists to identify all factors they considered significant in shaping the article(s). These observations provided part of the stimuli used in the second phase of the study. Observing journalists' work allowed me to relay to audience members information that is normally hidden from them. This observation-based stimuli was necessary for studying audience reactions to (and thus, expectations for) the observed work practices.

During observation, the journalists completed from one to three journalistic pieces each, covering crime, economy, science, technology, and miscellaneous news events. The average time spent per piece was approximately 70 minutes across the entire sample. The journalists were deskbound during the observations and only contacted their sources via e-mail or telephone. These findings largely align with earlier (and more extensive) observations in Finnish online newsrooms (Manninen, 2017).

All journalists were observed without them being fully aware of how the observed data would be used. Each participant was debriefed after the interview and given the choice to opt out of the study. Their respective authors described the articles as routine work, and all participants gave their informed consent. The participating organizations' managements had prior knowledge of the study's methods and aims.

When all observed articles had been published, screen captures of them were taken from the organizations' websites. They included all website content surrounding the story proper, as viewable within a desktop web browser. Comments have been

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found to influence credibility assessments (Pjesivac, Geidner, & Cameron, 2018), but comment sections were removed here in order to focus on editorial practices. These screen captures were scaled and/or rearranged to fit on a single-sided A3 sheet of paper.

Each of the ten articles was paired with a written summary of the journalistic process behind it. These summaries were based on observational notes and the journalists' interviews. They consisted of paragraphs entitled "Topic", "Used sources", "Sources that were not used", "Other" and "Total time spent on the story". The first paragraph described how the newsroom came to work on the story (e.g. through a press release), the second listed each information source the journalist had utilized and the third section listed sources the journalist had dismissed. Under "Other", I added my own observations and all factors mentioned as significant by the journalist. The final paragraph stated the total time used to produce the article (e.g. "2 hours 59 minutes").

Phase 2

The main thrust of this study builds on focus group interviews with young Finnish adults, aged 18–28. This focus was chosen as the young age correlates with the increased Internet use (Statistics Finland, 2016). Thus, younger people should be the first to adopt the (potentially) new, Internet-borne norms and expectations for journalism. In this study, the sample's age range begins with legal adulthood, where many new rights and responsibilities begin – potentially also sparking a more "adult" interest in news. This is also the age when the Finns begin moving out of their childhood homes: in 2016, most under-18 Finns (98 per cent) lived with their parents, while less than 6 per cent of those over 18 did (Statistics Finland, 2017a, 2018a). In this study, the end of youth is based on Finnish law, where turning 29 ends a citizen's eligibility to certain unemployment provisions targeted at "youth".

The study aimed to capture as varied views as possible and employed a purposive, maximum variation sampling. Participants were sought from a mid-sized Finnish city. Recruitment posters were disseminated onto public billboards and to selected locations (e.g. college campuses and civic centres). I also collaborated with teachers and youth unemployment councillors to recruit participants. All participants were volunteers and they were compensated with a gift certificate to a movie theatre (value of 9.95 euros).

Interviews were carried out from August 2017 to December 2017. In total, nine groups of 3–4 persons each participated in the study (n = 34). Two groups consisted of unemployment services' clients, two of secondary school students, two of vocational school students, one of university students, and one of both university and technical university students. One group consisted of people working in education. The sample is varied enough not to be a pure convenience sample, although it is not statistically representative of the Finns in this age group. It included disproportionately high numbers of women (68 per cent, whereas 49 per cent of all 18–28-years-old Finns are female), students (68 per cent vs. 24 per cent) and unemployed (24 per cent vs. 11 per cent), while also being slightly younger (average age of 22 vs. 23 years) than the target demographic (Statistics Finland, 2018a, 2018b). Fewer participants

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had completed second or third-level degrees and their average income was lower than what random sampling would predict. Much of these discrepancies result from the difficulty of recruiting older, employed participants.

Each group discussed three stimulus pairs (an article and a summary of the process behind it), one from each newsroom. The pairs were systematically rotated, and all groups discussed different combinations of stimuli. The interviews comprised a warm-up exercise and two main sections.

For warm-up, participants were asked to describe their daily news consumption habits. The participants' preferred news sources were the same as those most popular among the general population (Digital News Report, 2018). Participants told of getting their news almost exclusively online, often through coincidental exposure on social media. The participants' pronounced reliance on the Internet and social media is in accordance with country-level survey data (Reunanen, 2017; Statistics Finland, 2017b; Yleisradio, 2018).

For the first main section, the participants read an article after which they were asked to give their initial impressions. Then they were asked to discuss the article's journalistic quality in general, and finally its "trustworthiness" (the word was not defined for the participants). This round of discussion probed the participants' reactions to the "frontstage" of journalism: media content.[1]

The next round of discussion focused on the "backstage" of journalism. The participants were asked to direct their attention back to the first stimulus article and then given a written summary of the journalistic process behind the article. They were told by whom and how the information had been gathered and instructed to read the summary. Then, the participants were again asked to give their initial impressions and general remarks. After that they were asked to indicate whether the journalistic process contained something unexpected – and whether it increased or decreased the perceived "trustworthiness" of the article. The journalistic process behind each of the three articles was discussed individually in this manner.

Analysis

I transcribed and anonymised the focus group discussions; then, I analysed them using what Guest, McQueen & Namey (2012) label as the "applied thematic analysis". I read the transcripts several times, and created a codebook of prominent themes. Subsequently, I coded the transcripts and grouped mutually interrelated themes into four categories: Topic, Sources, Process, and Presentation. The fifth category, "General Nature of Work" was included in the coding process but removed from the subsequent analysis, since it included only a few unrelated remarks.

[1] The terms "frontstage" and "backstage" are used here to differentiate between aspects of journalism that are and are not observable to the audience. This terminology is adapted from Erving Goffman (1959), who used "front" and "backstage" to describe the different ways people present themselves in different social settings. The terms are used here in a similar manner, but more specifically – with regards to journalists' professional performance.

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7. Results

The results of the focus group discussions are arranged below into four main categories. The story's topic and selection thereof will be discussed first, followed by the source selection and various "backstage" work processes. The last segment will deal with the articles' presentation.

Topic

This category consists of four themes: Topic, Story Angle, Social Responsibility, and Point of Departure. The choice of the topic was discussed in conjunction with almost every article. The participants appreciated some topics and deemed others uninteresting yet valuable. Some articles, however, were denigrated as "pointless" – not worthy of journalistic attention. This critique is consistent with an earlier study from Finland (Vesa, 2010). Minor incidents with humorous or outrageous details, celebrity stories and puff pieces were almost unanimously castigated. Conversely, the participants valued the topics they considered to bear societal importance or contain personally useful information. This supports the finding according to which audiences prefer "hard news" online (Pearson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2018).

The participants continued to emphasise civic sensibilities with regard to the Story Angle theme: the focus of the articles should be on the events and phenomena, rather than on individuals. The articles which expanded from singular events into broader issues were applauded. Furthermore, the story angle should not betray an "attitude". This expectation of objectivity is in direct opposition to the (putative) online-era norm of honest subjectivity (Hedman, 2016, p. 2).

The theme of Social Responsibility refers to some participants' worry over misguided interpretations articles may encourage. For example, an article on the health benefits of wine might lead readers to ignore health issues related to alcohol. The articles' tone was also seen to have wider implications, as some articles were commended for their conciliatory approach and for "not inciting anything", as participant A2-4 put it. In part, this expectation, too, harks back to the pre-Internet norm of objectivity.

The Point of Departure refers to how and why a particular story originated. Some participants displayed mild surprise upon learning that companies and institutions proactively send out press releases which lead to stories. None had objections against using press releases, but lifting topics from competitors was harshly criticised as "lazy". The reactions suggest that the participants may have an idealised conception of news' origin: that they are exclusively born out of original investigations. Another aspect of this theme is the "why" of stories. Selecting topics based on their potential to attract readers (or "clicks") was seen as morally questionable. The participants seemed to expect journalists to choose topics solely based on the noble pursuit of educating and informing the public.

Sources

Three source-related themes emerged: Source Choice, Source Sufficiency and Other Media. The first theme includes discussions over the journalistic acceptability of different sources. Generally, sources used in the stimulus articles were accepted. These

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consisted mostly of "official" sources such as financial and court documents, press releases, research reports, and statements made by authorities – in line with Miller & Kurpius (2010). The participants expressed concern over the use of second-hand information, Facebook pages, Wikipedia, and unrecognised foreign websites. As for media, some established news organisations were named as acceptable sources (e.g. the BBC). Tabloid papers or other "sensationalist" sources were considered unfit.

The participants were not always unanimous on whether the Source Sufficiency was reached. However, the criteria were uniform on an abstract level. According to the participants, journalists should ask for comment from all interested parties, not rely on a single eye-witness, and consult authorities whenever possible. Generally speaking, the ideal sourcing practice seems to be a broad investigation that involves every possible source. Not all sources need to be included – but they should be at least consulted.

Many of the stimulus articles made use of Other Media – the articles published by other newsrooms or older stories published by the same newsroom. While some media sources were seen as trustworthy, their use could still be viewed negatively. One participant wondered whether using other media was even legal and another expressed their open disgust towards the practice:

> *"So he'd read this and that and decided 'OK, I'll just copy an old story and that's it.' Fucking eww. [...] He's being paid for that work; he should at least do it properly."*
>
> (Participant E2-3)

The critique against using other media involves two points. First, the practice forgoes original investigation and verification, undermining the story's epistemic strength. Second, copying stories does not add to a shared pool of information, reducing its value as a public good. Since the use of outside material, other media included, is known to be common in journalism (e.g. Saridou, Spyridou, & Veglis, 2017), this finding hints directly at journalism's "untrustworthiness" in the sense defined above.

Process

The themes in this category deal mostly with the "backstage" of journalism. The participants' reactions coalesced into five themes: Time and Effort, Fact Checking, Proofreading, Updating, and Non-Journalists' Rights.

Time and Effort was one of the most frequent themes. Most notably, the participants were surprised to discover how fast online journalism is produced (the stimulus articles took approximately 20–180 minutes to produce). Still, the processes were mostly deemed sufficient: being able to put in respectable effort in a short time made the journalists appear "efficient", "skilled", "professional" and "experienced". In general, the participants seem to imagine journalism as a laborious process of producing new information. This is exemplified by the surprise some participants expressed when the journalistic process did not include hidden tribulations:

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> *"Somehow it was surprising that [...] this story had in it absolutely everything that was done. It surprised me that [the journalist] hasn't done anything more than what can be read here."*
>
> (Participant B2-2)

It seems likely that this conception stems from popular depictions of investigative journalism, rather than realistic understanding of routine online journalism. These unrealistic audiences' conceptions may bestow journalism a heroic aura which, in turn, reproduces the over-inflated expectations.

Fact Checking was a theme that came up exclusively when mentioned in the stimuli. When brought up, it was unanimously lauded. Participant C2-1 described it as the journalists' "responsibility" to make sure that "the facts are right". Another participant, E2-3, noted that verifying information is the job "journalists are being paid for" – and verification should be carried out even when the information has been published before, participant E2-2 added.

Proofreading refers here to the process of checking an article for grammar errors and other mistakes but also to editing, checking and commenting. It covers all forms of pre-publication review by people other than the author. Thus, this checking can (and according to many participants, should) take place both in and outside the newsroom. Giving an interviewee the possibility to check the article before publication was universally seen as a positive thing, just as traditional editorial proofreading was.

Updating a once-published story is a practice that can inhabit either the journalistic backstage or the frontstage. Some of the stimulus articles were updated and/or corrected without disclosure, while others informed readers of changes. As one might expect, full disclosure was preferred by the participants. Changes were viewed either neutrally or appreciatively, as participant D1-2 exemplifies:

> *"On the other hand, it also tells us that the story means something to [the journalist] even afterwards – that they're not just 'okay, done' and just... Send it out and let it go."*

The acceptance and appreciation of post-publication updates and corrections is the only finding that seems to support the idea that the Internet environment changes journalistic norms.

The theme of Non-Journalists' Rights refer to both the journalistic frontstage and backstage. It pertains to journalists' obligations towards the people in their articles: informants and objects of reporting. The participants suggested journalists should accept interviewees' requests not to publish comments and that interviewees should be able to preview articles before publication. Both of these obligations go beyond the rights guaranteed by Finnish law or the self-regulatory Guidelines for Journalists. It is unclear whether these are newly adopted ideals, but they certainly are in conflict with journalists' own professional norms. On other aspects the participants' views were in line with conventional journalistic ethics: criminal suspects should not be labelled before they are found guilty, and people should not be endangered by publishing personal details.

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Presentation

The last thematic category deals almost exclusively with the frontstage of journalism. A total of six themes emerged from this commentary: Headline, Style, Textual Quality, Scope, Illustration, and Citations. The Headline was one of the most common themes and was also characterized by great unanimity. According to the participants, articles' headlines should clearly reflect the contents of the text with no exaggeration, opinion, appeal to emotion, or room for misunderstanding. The use of misleading or uninformative headlines, so called "click baiting", was almost universally despised.

The Style refers here to both the journalistic text's narrative style, but also its attitudinal underpinnings. "Dramatizing", "shocking", appealing to emotion, exaggeration, and digressing from the main topic were all seen as a bad journalistic form. Furthermore, the participants seem to idealise a particular style of journalistic text, often associated with so-called "hard news" (Reinemann et al., 2012). They were also clear on journalists' perceived obligation to withhold personal opinion: "taking a stance" was viewed negatively, while "neutrality", "objectivity", "impartiality" and "factualness" were lauded. Again, this expectation is remarkably conventional.

The Textual Quality was usually brought up by a perceived lack thereof. According to the participants, journalism should be easy to read and understand, "go straight to the point" and avoid vernacular or "folksy" expressions. Interestingly, even the backstage processes of using a dictionary or asking for grammar help were viewed negatively, as they implied lacking expertise. The participant C2-3 said:

> *"It amuses me that [the journalist] has looked for grammar and spelling instructions and been asking about them. Or like... Of course it's good to make sure, but somehow [...] when you see it on paper, it instantly gives the image that... They don't know how to write or something."*

The quote exemplifies the high literary standards the participants expect from journalists.

The theme of Scope is difficult to interpret into normative instructions. The participants appeared to hold wildly different views on the stimulus articles' scope: the same article could be seen as too broad or too narrow. Apart from the subjective assessments, one generalizable criticism emerged: background information should never be omitted, if it is needed to properly understand the story. This point was raised in association with a science article without methodological explanation and a courtroom report without summary of the crimes in question.

Illustrations were frequently mentioned but rarely discussed at length. Most common was the critique of using stock photos. Original footage was described as "evidence", the use of which enhances articles' epistemic value. This perceived purpose is also reflected in the participants' stance on image editing. Videos should not be cut or images cropped – neither for conciseness nor to remove gory details.

The Citations refer to the ways how journalists introduce and refer to their sources. Here, too, the participants only briefly touched upon the theme. In short, sources should be clearly introduced and information attributed to its right origina-

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tors; verbatim quotes are preferred to paraphrasing; and direct hyperlinks should be used whenever possible.

8. Conclusions

This article departed from the definition of trustworthiness as the fulfilment of certain types of context-bound expectations. This formulation led to the question of audiences' contemporary expectations towards online journalism, which were explored through a two-phase study. In the first phase, I used ethnographic methods to create descriptions of the work of online journalists, while the second phase investigated audience reactions to these work practices. The latter phase, in particular, produced rich data, which was thematically analysed for normative evaluations of journalism.

This research did not attempt to reach statistically generalizable results, but to serve as a preliminary investigation which might inspire and support further studies on the matter. It is based on a small non-probability sample, which is demographically skewed. However, demographic qualities have recently been found to have only "negligible" predictive power regarding news media trust (Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, & Steindl, 2018). Major demographic segments of the target population are represented in the sample, and data saturation was reached quickly. Thus, it is likely that the opinions expressed by participants represent the majority of opinions among the target population. A more important consideration is the sample of stimulus articles, which consisted of common and uncontroversial topics. This sample represents the everyday workflow of Finnish online journalists, but leaves out more rare and potentially more influential stories. Discussions grounded in divisive stimuli would probably allow more thorough exploration of audience perceptions of media bias. Unfortunately, observing the production of these less frequent stories is – at least with the method employed here – contingent on luck. Considering these shortcomings, future research on the relationship between audience expectations and journalistic performance should pursue two directions: first, studies should strive for more generalizable results, and second, research could explore audience expectations and reactions in more controversial contexts.

The results depict surprisingly conventional expectations, following the lines of similar studies elsewhere (Coleman, Anthony, & Morrison, 2009; Karlsson, Clerwall, & Nord, 2016). They can be summarised by quoting Risto Kunelius, who nearly two decades ago sought to find out what Finns considered "good journalism". In his words, "the basic definition is almost like from a journalism textbook." (Kunelius 2000, p. 14). Kunelius' team interviewed people such as public officials and marketing professionals; the participants in the study at hand were mostly young students and unemployed individuals. Yet their expectations towards journalism are quite similar: it should relay information of public significance in an objective, realistic and expert fashion. These findings suggest the Finns' "folk theory of journalism" is stable across time, and uniform across social class and age.

The stability of audience expectations suggests that untrustworthiness – where perceived – is not due to journalism failing to keep up with changing norms. The most Internet-reliant population segment still holds journalism to the promises given by

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journalists during the heyday of printed press. This may be a relief to journalists: their Bourdieusian field is not so easily encroached upon. Reporters need not emulate talk show wit to maintain their audiences' trust, live-blogging speed is no substitute to accuracy, and transparency is *not* "the new objectivity" as famously suggested by David Weinberger (2009). Many of the old "hard news" norms have been widely – and at least in part, rightly – criticised (e.g. ibid), but it seems this critique has not been enough to change the (young Finnish) audience's expectations. Decline in public trust towards journalism, then, must be explained through changes in journalism's performance (or audience perception thereof). In this sense, the present study is helpful in providing a list of qualities and practices at least this particular audience expects to find in online journalism. Where the above qualities are perceived to be lacking, the audience experiences its trust in journalism violated.

To reconcile the dissonance between expectations and reality, either or both has to be altered. Journalism can hardly conform to all expectations, but there are many cases in which audiences have valid demands. For example, being transparent about updates and changes to an article is little more than a technicality – but unevenly implemented by journalists. On the other hand, verification of information is a noble ideal – but double-checking *everything* is usually impossible. Yet verification is something audiences have come to expect, even if mistakenly. Journalism should articulate more clearly what can be expected of it and then rigorously honour those promises. In some cases, this might require admitting newsrooms' resources are not enough to match the glorified image of journalism the profession likes to celebrate. In others, it might suffice to let audiences know what is already being done.

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