JYU DISSERTATIONS 150

Ville Manninen

Trust and Trustworthy Sourcing in Finnish Online Journalism

Divergences in Audience Expectations and Journalists' Practices

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella
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ABSTRACT

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Trust and trustworthiness are crucial components in human social life, and so too in journalism. Trust facilitates reciprocal relationships, such as those between journalists and their sources, or journalists and their audiences. Trustworthiness, being *worthy of trust*, stabilizes those relationships: unearned trust is at constant risk of collapse. Whether or not journalism is trustworthy is therefore an important consideration and the main research problem of this thesis.

In line with the literature on trust, I have operationalized trustworthiness as the fulfilment of expectations. To measure it, I have conducted research into both audience expectations and journalistic practices. The specific context of this study is mainstream Finnish online journalism and the expectations young Finnish adults (ages 18–28 years) have for it.

Online journalists' practices were investigated through newsroom ethnography. I observed the work of 21 online journalists from 7 Finnish mainstream newsrooms. This sample, gathered in 2013 and 2017 comprises the production processes of over 100 journalistic items. I probed audience expectations towards these practices through experimental focus group interviews. Finally, I focused on a key journalistic process that is largely hidden from audiences' view: sourcing.

Young adult Finns' general expectations for online journalism are remarkably conventional: journalism should be dispassionate, impartial, accurate, responsible, comprehensive and easy to understand. The work of Finnish online journalists barely accommodates these demands; it is fast-paced and desk-bound.

The sourcing practices I observed were mostly in conflict with the audience's expectations. Specifically, the information in over half of the observed news items was unverified; much of their content was copied from already-published media; and journalists rarely attempted to reach out to more than one source. Practice aligned with expectations in just one regard: observed news items mostly relied on highly credible sources.

In summary, the sourcing practices behind mainstream Finnish online journalism are not trustworthy to young adult Finns. The situation is worrisome, as the traditionally high trust Finns exhibit towards mainstream news media is liable to implode if untrustworthy practices are revealed to audiences.

Keywords: online journalism, trust, trustworthiness, sourcing

ABSTRAKTI

Manninen, Ville
Luottamus ja luotettavuus suomalaisen verkkojournalismin lähteyttämisessä. Eroavaisuudet yleisön odotuksissa ja toimittajien työkäytännöissä.
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Luottamus ja luotettavuus ovat kaiken sosiaalisen elämän peruselementtejä, ja ne kuuluvat siten myös journalismin keskiöön. Luottamus mahdollistaa vastavuoroisuuden esimerkiksi toimittajien ja lähteiden tai toimittajien ja yleisön välillä. Luotettavuus puolestaan vakauttaa nämä vuorovaikutussuhteet: perusteeton luottamus olisi jatkuvassa romahtamisen vaarassa. Onko journalismi luotettavaa vai ei on siis tärkeä kysymys ja tämän väitöskirjan keskeinen tutkimusongelma.

Olen määritellyt luotettavuuden aiemman tutkimuksen mukaisesti odotusten toteutumiseksi. Mitatakseni sitä olen tutkinut sekä yleisön odotuksia että journalistisia työtapoja. Tutkimuksen viitekehys on suomalainen, valtavirtainen verkkojournalismi ja nuorten (18-28-vuotiaiden) suomalaisaikuisten odotukset sitä kohtaan.

Tutkin verkkotoimittajien työtapoja toimitusetnografian menetelmin. Tarkkailin 21 verkkotoimittajan työskentelyä seitsemässä suomalaisessa, valtavirtaisessa uutistoimituksessa. Tämä vuosina 2013 ja 2017 kerätty näyte kattaa yli 100 jutun tuotantoprosessit. Tutkin yleisön odotuksia näitä prosesseja kohtaan kokeellisilla fokusryhmähaastatteluilla. Lopuksi keskityin kriittisen tärkeään journalistiseen prosessiin, joka kuitenkin jää yleensä piiloon yleisöltä: lähteyttämiseen.

Nuorten suomalaisaikuisten odotukset verkkojournalismia kohtaan ovat merkittävän tavanomaisia: journalismin tulisi olla neutraalia, puolueetonta, tarkkaa, vastuullista, kattavaa ja helppotajuista. Suomalaisten verkkotoimittajien on harvoin mahdollista täyttää nämä vaatimukset, sillä heidän työnsä on nopeatempoista ja pöydän ääreen sidottua.

Havainnoimani lähdekäytännöt olivat suurimmaksi osaksi yleisön odotusten vastaisia. Yli puolessa jutuista tiedot olivat varmistamattomia, suuri osa niiden tiedoista oli kopioitu jo aiemmin julkaistuista jutuista, ja toimittajat yrittivät vain harvoin tavoittaa useampaa kuin yhtä lähdettä. Odotukset ja todellisuus kohtasivat vain lähteiden valinnassa: jutuissa käytettiin yleensä uskottaviksi arvioituja lähteitä.

Yhteenvetona voidaan todeta, että suomalaisen, valtavirtaisen verkkojournalismin lähdekäytännöt eivät ole nuorten suomalaisaikuisten kannalta luotettavia. Tilanne on huolestuttava: suomalaisten toistaiseksi korkea luottamus uutismediaa kohtaan on vaarassa haihtua, mikäli epäluotettavat käytännöt paljastuvat yleisölle.

Avainsanat: verkkojournalismi, luottamus, luotettavuus, lähteyttäminen

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Only one name is printed on the cover of this thesis, but I alone cannot accept full credit for it – I could not have reached this point alone.

First and foremost, I owe a debt of gratitude to my supervisors Epp Lauk and Heikki Kuutti. They talked me into starting post-graduate studies and they talked me through them. Originally, I promised to finish my thesis in four years, but Epp and Heikki have helped me along for over six years. I greatly appreciate their commitment and compassion!

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Most of my studies were funded by working part-time as a research assistant at the University of Jyväskylä. Almost invariably, I was employed in one of Turo Uskali's countless research projects. Turo's good humor and kind leadership made it not only possible but also tolerable to juggle between paid work and my own research.

Over the years, I have come to know a number of colleagues and fellow post-graduate students. There is not a single person for whom I would wish ill – their companionship has made my many years at the University of Jyväskylä feel shorter and lighter than what they have actually been.

I entered academia over twelve years ago, but I did not do so as a blank slate. By that point, I already had spent most of my life at one kind of a school or another – and yet I was seeking even more education. This thesis is a testament to the inspiration instilled into me by my stellar teachers at Malvaa elementary school, Elomaa comprehensive school, and Mikkelin Yhteiskoulu high school.

Finally, my parents Seppo and Saara Manninen deserve my gratitude. I would not be here without their support and encouragement, and in fact, without them I would not *be*. Anything worth something I ever do is a merit to them.

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Jyväskylä 17.10.2019
Ville J. E. Manninen

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Information is necessary for most human endeavor, increasingly so the more complex the task. For running a democratic society, information is tantamount to oxygen (Lee-Wright, Phillips & Witschge, 2012, p. 3). As the amount of available information increases, the role of information gathering, filtering and dissemination systems becomes more pronounced. Journalism is only one of many such systems, but arguably among the most important. It is easily accessible throughout most of a person's lifespan (unlike educational institutions) and conveys information from far and wide (unlike social networks). The way journalism performs is, therefore, of crucial importance to modern democratic societies. Journalism's performance, broadly speaking, is also the subject of this thesis.

To be exact, this thesis investigates the performance of online journalism in relation to its audiences' normative expectations. A comparative outlook transforms the simple question over performance into a more complex question over trust and trustworthiness. Positive expectations, when present, imply trust and fulfillment thereof equals trustworthiness. Trustworthiness begets trust, which (as I will detail later) has many benefits for both its recipient and its holder (of which I will henceforth use the terms "betrusted" and "trustor"; I discuss this terminological choice in section 2.1.1). This thesis has particular interest in journalistic sourcing, which is a pivotal process in the production of journalism - and one usually carried out behind the scenes. This opaqueness requires trust on the audience's part. I ask: What does the audience expect from online journalists (sourcing-wise), how and why journalists select the sources they use, and do online journalists' sourcing practices conform to their audiences' expectations?

These questions form a single, central problem: Are online journalism's sourcing practices worthy of audience trust? The matter has exceptional general interest, as trust and trustworthiness are things that naturally pique our interest. Human social life is filled with choices between trusting and not trusting others, most of which are made intuitively. Consider, for example, stepping onto a bus:

this implies trust in its driver and confidence in the transport's mechanical reliability – yet we rarely stop to analyze this choice. The possibility to empirically gauge the trustworthiness of something as ubiquitous as online journalism is rare and likely welcomed by many. Further, investigating journalism's trustworthiness bears great practical utility. Findings concerning audience expectations and journalists' practices can be used to enhance journalism's trustworthiness. Alternatively, the thesis' results could be used to make journalism appear trustworthy even when it is not - a use which I strongly discourage. Either way, these findings can help journalism to appeal to its audience and thus deliver the information it seeks to transmit.

1.2 Disciplinary foundations

This research has been carried out within the paradigm of journalism studies. There has been some debate as to whether journalism should be considered a full-fledged discipline in its own right (e.g. Nash, 2013), or as an interdisciplinary field of research (e.g. Carlson, Robinson, Lewis & Berkowitz, 2018). In the context of the study at hand, the latter interpretation is clearly more relevant. I borrow heavily from sociology and social psychology in developing the concepts of trust and trustworthiness, but also make reference to works in epistemology, political science, economy, and of course communications. While my specific point of interest is Finnish online journalism, my methodology could be adapted to almost any social activity. Hence interdisciplinarity is a fitting, albeit vague, designation for the research at hand.

This thesis' mixed heritage is apparent in its design. The empirical research is grounded and descriptive, bordering on the pedestrian. This is often the wont of journalism studies, as researchers race to keep pace with journalism's rapidly changing realities. Producing timely descriptions of the six Ws (who, what, where, when, why and how) is a key concern for many journalists and journalism scholars alike. However, producing a kind of bookish meta-journalism is not the singular goal of this research. I also attempt to elaborate on the mechanisms and effects of trust in (and within) journalism on a macro level. This interest in inter-human dynamics carries the hallmark of sociology.

Lastly, this thesis has dual nature in terms of epistemology. While I must recognize that trust and trustworthiness are wholly subjective constructions, I contend that their mechanisms can be observed, described and even measured to an extent. As I explain below, trust is a contextually bound phenomenon comprised of various expectations. Each trust relationship is thus unique to a specific person and point in time. However, similar people in similar contexts entail similar expectations. While trust and trustworthiness can never be measured with complete accuracy, they can be approximated through tightening the focal lens. What "people" expect from "media" will be much more difficult to specify than what “young Finnish adults” expect from “Finnish online journalism”. These expectations, no matter how cacophonous, correspond to the behavior of trusted actors’. Behavior and expectations can then be compared to produce an assessment of trustworthiness. These assessments vary depending on differences in individuals’ expectations. Nonetheless, an assessment is possible. The inaccuracy caused by personal differences is a matter of reliability rather than of validity.

1.3 Aims of the thesis and research questions

Journalists, sources and audiences can be imagined as a triad where each party directs expectations towards the others (Figure 1). When these expectations are positive and meet certain other criteria, they form the basis for trust. For example, a newspaper reader might trust a journalist to be truthful in their reporting, while the journalist might trust the reader to remain a loyal subscriber. Thus, the relationship between the journalist and the reader entails two separate expectations in opposite directions.

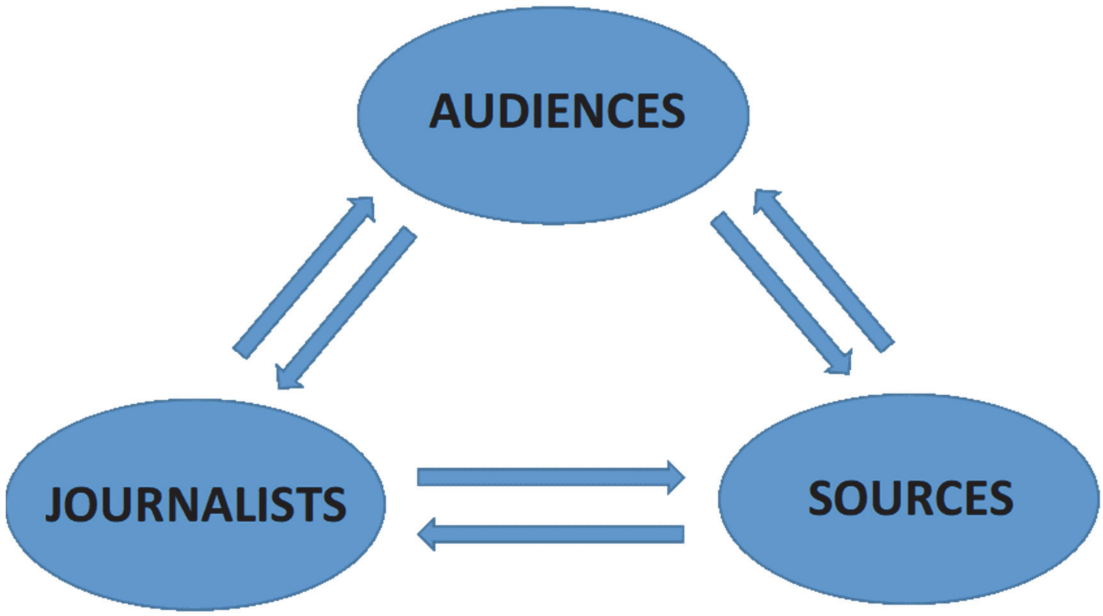

Figure 1 Possible trust relationships in journalism

All of the six (potential) trust relationships have important implications for society at large. However, some of these connections are more relevant for journalism than others. Audience-source relationships (e.g. how relatable a spokesperson is to the target audience) are central in political science, public relations and marketing research, but less so in the journalistic paradigm. Similarly, the trust journalists direct at their audiences is less important. It has been theorized that consumers' role in media would increase in the online era (e.g. Bruns, 2008), but for journalism this does not seem to be the case. The audience is still largely sidelined from participating in journalism, which implies very little is expected of them apart from consumership (e.g. Peters & Witschge, 2015, pp. 24-28). This leaves three trust relationships that are central to journalism: source-journalist, journalist-source, and audience-journalist (Figure 2).

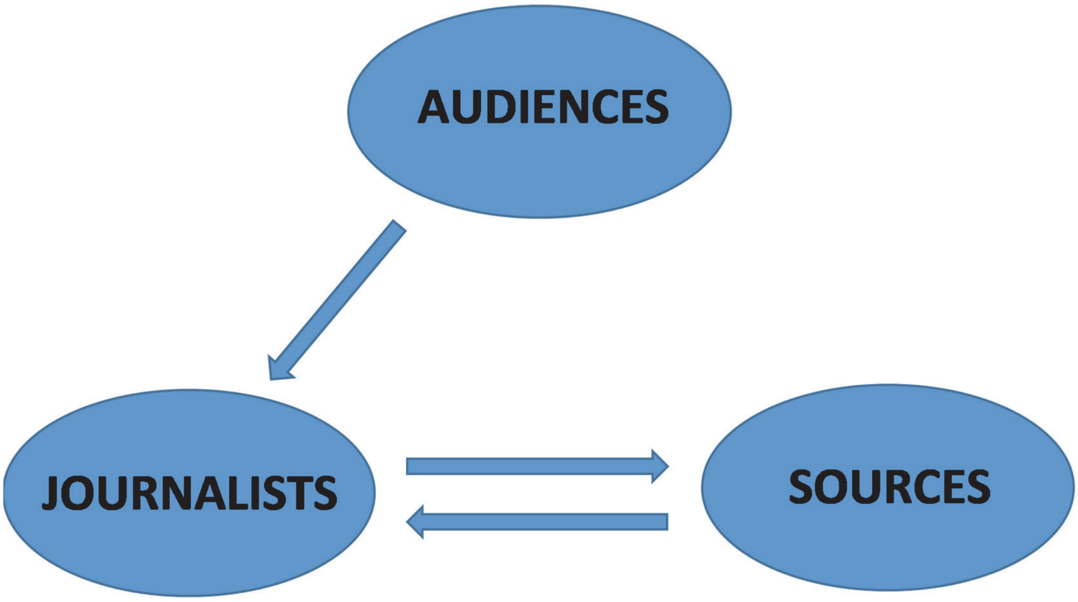

Figure 2 Relevant trust relationships in journalism studies

The first relationship affects what information is made available to journalists: if sources do not trust journalists, they are less likely to engage with them in good faith. The second affects what information journalists are willing to use, as information provided by trusted sources is likelier to be used by journalists (although trust in sources is not a requirement for source use, as I demonstrate in Study 1). Finally, the trust audiences have in journalists affects what information they are willing to consume, as trust in journalism is a predictor of news use (e.g. Tsfati, 2010). This thesis focuses on the latter two trust relationships and the expectations they entail. Sources' trust in journalists is excluded from this research, although I recognize it as an important area of research.

The main aim of this study is to assess the trustworthiness (as defined below in section 2.2) of Finnish online journalism. To be able to assess the trustworthiness of anything, one needs two kinds of information: first, information regarding the trustor's expectations, and second, information on the betrusted's performance (Coleman 2012, p. 37). Thus, this thesis consists of investigations into both the sourcing practices of Finnish online journalists and the expectations of their audiences.

RQ1: Is the sourcing of Finnish online journalism trustworthy to young Finnish adults?
RQ1a: What are the sourcing practices in Finnish online journalism?
RQ1b: What are young Finnish adults' expectations for sourcing practices in Finnish online journalism?

A secondary goal of this study is to investigate the role of trust in sourcing Finnish online journalism. This information is a by-product of the research required to answer RQ1, nonetheless it provides useful context for interpreting the results and discussing their implications.

RQ2: What is the role of trust in sourcing Finnish online journalism?

1.4 Overview of studies included in the thesis

This thesis comprises three articles, published between 2017 and 2019. The fieldwork was conducted in 2013-2017 with the most occurring in the final year. The methodologies and central findings of the articles are briefly described below.

Table 1 Studies included in the thesis

Study title	Aim of the study	Published in
Study 1: Sourcing practices in online journalism: an ethnographic study of the formation of trust in and the use of journalistic sources	To describe the sourcing practices and rationales thereof of Finnish online journalists.	*Journal of Media Practice*
Study 2: Audience expectations and trust in online journalism	To describe the expectations young adult Finns have for Finnish online journalism.	*Medialní Studia - Media Studies*
Study 3: If only they knew: Audience expectations and actual sourcing practices in online journalism	To describe to what extent Finnish online journalists' sourcing practices conform to their young adult audiences' expectations.	*Journalism Practice*

The chronological order of the studies is the same as their numerical order. Analytically, Studies 1 and 2 provide data, which are then synthesized in Study 3. Individually the initial two studies also contribute descriptive findings. These interrelations are summarized in Figure 3 (on next page).

Study 1: Sourcing practices in online journalism	
Research questions	RQ1a RQ2
Research methods	Observation and interviews
Main results	Online journalists work very fast and have highly streamlined sourcing practices. They routinely use sources they do not fully trust.

Provides data on sourcing practices

Provides impetus for the study of audience expectations

Study 2: Audience expectations and trust in online journalism	
Research questions	RQ1b
Research methods	Observation, interviews, and experimental focus group interviews
Main results	Young adult Finns have very traditional expectations for online journalism. The reality of online journalism is sometimes surprising to them.

Provides data on audience expectations *and* sourcing practices

Study 3: If only they knew	
Research questions	RQ1
Research methods	Comparative analysis of audience expectations and observed, journalistic sourcing practices.
Main results	For the most part, Finnish online journalists' sourcing practices do not meet their young adult audience's expectations.

Figure 3 Overview of studies and their interrelations

Study 1 is based on observations in Finnish online newsrooms and interviews with Finnish online journalists. The material was mostly collected in 2013, and in small part in late 2015 and early 2016. During this fieldwork, I observed the process of making online news and took detailed notes. I then interviewed the observed journalists over their sourcing-related decisions, asking them to recount and explain their choices. This study responds to research questions 1a and 2. The observations reveal a hectic work pace and highly streamlined sourcing practices. Interviews suggest trust is not the only reason behind online journalists' source selection; practical and sometimes cynical considerations often have more weight. The discovery of less-than-ideal routines gave me reason to suspect audiences might disapprove of online journalists' work practices, were they known – further underscoring the need to study audiences' expectations.

Study 2 is based on observations in Finnish online newsrooms, interviews with Finnish online journalists, and focus group interviews with young, Finnish adults. The newsroom ethnographic material was collected in early 2017. Group interviews with audience members were conducted during the latter half of 2017. This study mainly describes audience reactions to the newsroom practices observed earlier. It mainly seeks to resolve RQ1b, but also touches upon resolutions to RQ1a and RQ2. The newsroom observations align with the findings detailed in Study 1, while focus group interviews with audience members describe remarkably traditional expectations – that is, expectations that depart from reality.

Study 3 is based on the observational and interview data collected in Studies 1 and 2. It analyses two subsets of news items, the production of which were observed in 2013 and 2017. Each item is compared to a set of sourcing-related audience expectations, which were identified and described in Study 2. This analysis produces an answer to the study's main research question (RQ1): "Is the sourcing of Finnish online journalism trustworthy to young Finnish adults?" The answer to this question is largely negative, as most observed news items met audience expectations only partially.

1.5 Overview of the structure of the thesis

The thesis begins with a thorough introduction of the key concepts of *trust* and *trustworthiness*. I begin by discussing trust on an abstract level; the many ways scholars have tried to define it and its role in society (section 2.1). The concept may seem obvious in its vernacular sense, but as I will demonstrate, it is easily conflated with adjacent but functionally distinct concepts (such as confidence). Theoretical clarity is thus much needed, even at the risk of pedantry. Furthermore, much has already been written of trust, and to avoid confusion it is important to carefully point out where my thesis departs and where it borrows from earlier works. After reaching a definition of trust precise enough for application in this thesis, I will derive the concept of trustworthiness from it (in section 2.2). Along with trustworthiness, I will briefly discuss *credibility*, as it is both a related concept and staple feature in literature on trust, trustworthiness, sources, and journalism in general.

After defining the thesis' key concepts, I will discuss the idea of *online journalism* (2.3). There is valid reason to question whether it exists as something distinct from general journalism. However, I argue that it does – as a mode of journalistic work. Understanding this is requisite for properly contextualizing this thesis' findings: their implications are not limited to online newsrooms nor do they necessarily permeate every aspect of online desks' work.

Section 2.4 touches upon *sourcing* in journalism: what do I mean by the term, how will my thesis approach the concept, and why researching it is important. I will return to the more practical aspects of operationalizing "sourcing" later in the methodological section.

The final part of my thesis' theoretical section (2.5) aims at a holistic treatment of trust, journalism, and society. The three interact in many ways, but here I will focus on how journalism affects the other two. I will demonstrate how trust in journalism affects society and how journalism affects trust in other parts of society. Trust in journalism, trustworthiness of journalism, and generalized trust are closely intertwined. They are also precursors to the well-being of democratic societies – making their intersection an important area of study.

Section 3 describes the methodology and individual methods used in the three studies that this thesis comprises. This section proceeds from one method to another, not study-by-study. This means I will dedicate only a single paragraph to newsroom observation, even though I have used the method separately in both Study 1 and Study 2.

I discuss the main findings of my thesis in section 4. The three first sub-sections (4.1, 4.2 and 4.3) focus on individual studies (Study 1, 2 and 3, respectively). The sections will describe how Finnish online journalism is sourced and how online journalists rationalize their work; what young Finnish adults expect of Finnish online journalism; and how the observed work practices compare to audience expectations. The last sub-section (4.4) synthesizes the findings and discusses them in context. My argument here is that the online environment is particularly conducive to undermining audience trust in journalism.

Section 5 will summarize and discuss the thesis' findings, their merits (5.1), their shortcomings (5.2), and the new strands of inquiry they open (5.3).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND KEY CONCEPTS

2.1 Trust

2.1.1 "Trustor" and "betrusted"

In this thesis, I use the words "trustor" to denote *the person who trusts* and "betrusted" *the person or abstraction that is the recipient of trust*. Their combination is not standard in the English language, so their use requires justification.

Most compellingly, the more correct terminological pair "trustor" and "trustee" have established and widely recognized legal meanings. Some authors have, however, used these terms in the sociological sense described above (e.g. Becerra & Gupta, 2003; Misztal, 1996). This is not, however, the established terminology in trust literature – or rather, no established terminology exists. For example, Russell Hardin (2006) uses "truster" and "trusted", and Piotr Sztompka (1999) "truster" and "trustee".

The terminological variety found in relevant literature leaves readers in doubt over whether different terms refer to different concepts or simply result from the respective authors' willingness to bend grammar. This is a relevant concern, as scholarship on trust is rife with competing terminologies and theoretical formulations. In turn, authors like myself are frustrated by having to navigate between different proofreaders, disciplinary loyalties, and conceptual clarity. Even this thesis is internally inconsistent: while Studies 2 and 3 use the terms "trusting" and "trusted", this summarizing report uses "trustor" and "betrusted". To be clear: this difference is due to stylistic preferences between publication venues and not conceptual differences between the terms.

2.1.2 The definition of trust

Trust is a central part of our daily existence, and people generally have a commonsensical understanding of it. Even the most cursory overview easily produces long lists of things we daily "trust": we trust to wake up where we fell asleep, we trust to find our refrigerators running and our groceries unspoiled, and we trust to find our newspapers duly delivered to our doorsteps. These mundane examples suffice to demonstrate the core quality of trust: it is an expectation of something that is in accordance with our interests. Replace aforementioned positive contingencies with negative ones and trust will be turned into something else, for example "fear". Replace the confident "expectation" with a less certain prediction and trust becomes something more akin to "hope". This definition, expectation of something beneficial, is common to most trust literature (e.g. Misztal, 1996; Seligman, 1997; Sztompka, 1999).

However, the vernacular use of the word "trust" is not sufficiently accurate. Most authors agree that trust requires a contingency of action on the betrusted's part. This limits trust to sentient actors, mainly human beings. If there is no freedom of action, there is no trust but rather "confidence" in, for example, the technical quality of a refrigerator (Giddens, 1990). This distinction might seem like hair-splitting, but its import becomes obvious when trust (or confidence) is broken: a malfunctioning appliance might leave us frustrated, while losing trust in a fellow human will evoke different, more visceral feelings. Some authors (e.g. Ilmonen & Jokinen, 2002) remind us that even free-willed actors have limited freedom, as their behavior is always constrained by factors beyond their decisions. A newspaper may be late not due to the carrier's whim, but an unrelated traffic accident. These externalities, however, do not remove the inescapable freedom inherent to all humanity. Even in the face of death, a person can choose between action and inaction - thus always retaining a level of agency. With regards to trust, this means people are by default eligible as recipients of trust. Reducing expectations towards people from trust to confidence would then require an ignorant or delusional trustor. Just as misguided minds can fail to recognize the agency of a person, it is also possible to (mistakenly) place trust in something that is not a contingent actor. For example, certain animistic faiths suppose natural phenomena, such as winds and rains, are controlled by spirits which can be convinced into helping the worshippers' cause.

Related to contingency is the trustor's inability (or unwillingness) to monitor the betrusted. Some authors consider it a requirement for trust (e.g. Seligman, 1997), or at least a condition that makes trust meaningful (e.g. Giddens, 1990). Lacking verification, the trustor has no choice but to trust – whereas with full monitoring and control trust becomes "unnecessary" (Ibid, p. 19). As the world becomes more complex and thus inscrutable, the role of trust in our daily lives increases:

> More often than ever before we have to act in the dark, as if facing a huge black box, on the proper functioning of which our needs and interests increasingly depend. Trust becomes an indispensable strategy to deal with the opaqueness of our social environment. (Sztompka 1999, p. 13).

Of course, monitoring alone does not imply distrust – but monitoring with the intent to control or mitigate harm does. Monitoring out of pure interest is conceivable (e.g. eavesdropping a journalist interviewing someone), but arguably rare enough to be dismissed here as a marginal phenomenon.

Literature on trust commonly distinguishes between two types of betrusted: individuals and abstractions (e.g. Marková, Linell & Gillespie, 2008; Sztompka, 1999). In the latter case, expectations stemming from individual-level encounters are generalized to a higher-level abstraction and then re-applied to other individual-level encounters. The medical profession is a frequently used example: the doctors I have seen have always given me good advice on health, which is why I assume this to be a commonly shared commitment of all doctors, which is why I expect any other doctor I encounter to warn me about the dangers of smoking. In other words, I trust doctors as a collective profession in matters of personal health. Other scholars argue that in terms of recipients, there really is only one kind of trust. According to this view trust towards abstractions is psychologically the same as trust towards individuals, only misattributed to impersonal entities. Incapable of truly trusting anything but other individuals, a person assigns human-like qualities to an abstraction in order to trust it. (Harré, 1999). This might explain why we sometimes feel betrayed by abstractions, for example when a newspaper unexpectedly changes its political endorsement. While a recently hired editor-in-chief may have made the decision, it is the paper that appears a disloyal turncoat – clearly an assessment fit to describe a person rather than an insentient organization. Even though possible, the stringent separation of trust in abstractions and individuals is not necessary, as the two rarely exist separately and can be difficult to disentangle (Seligman, 1997, pp. 18–19). The mechanism of trusting abstractions, however, is useful to bear in mind. The problems related to trusting abstractions are relevant to the way trust-constituting expectations are formed, discussed below.

To review, trust is an expectation of something beneficial a trustor directs towards a free, sentient actor (or in case of abstractions, a conglomeration of actors). It is also common to add the requirement of prior commitment as a precursor to trust (e.g. Giddens, 1990; Harré, 1999). This addition can be seen as the logical outgrowth of the definition of trust around the word "expectation": logically only a prior commitment gives reason to expect (rather than hope) a contingent actor to serve the trustor's interests. Like trust, the concept of commitment is less obvious than appears. For clarity, I will here use "commitment" to refer to the behavior a betrusted has committed to (or is seen to have committed to). The word "promise" stands here for all explicit, implicit, intentional and unintentional ways of signaling the willingness to fulfill commitments. Thus, promises imply commitments will be fulfilled in the future - but promises take many, sometimes ambiguous forms. First, a promise can be both explicit and literal, like the hourly wage mentioned in an employment contract. Secondly, explicit promises can be figurative, like the former New York Times slogan "All the News That's Fit to Print". Thirdly, promises can be implicit, i.e. conveyed through nonverbal cues, prior record of behavior, or common social norms (including laws).

For example, entering a romantic relationship is often seen as a promise of monogamy, even if this was never put into words. Since these trust-constituting promises can be communicated (and miscommunicated) in such many ways, it is possible and even likely to confuse them. Trust in abstractions serves as a multiplier to this confusion: individuals that constitute an abstraction may give different promises, and a trustor can mistake separate abstractions for one. To continue the medical analogy, some doctors may be willing to consult their patients on matters of social life, while others might limit their advice to medical issues; and a patient may confuse a psychologist with a psychiatrist, despite the two having different competences. To further complicate matters, some promises may be lost in transmission, received only partially or interpreted in an unintended way.

The practical implication of all this potential for confusion is the high likelihood of misplacing trust, i.e. baselessly expecting behavior that the betrusted is unable or unwilling to deliver. This predicts that people with different views on what journalism should be like will also have differing evaluations of it. For example, populists with a "misunderstanding of journalism's role in democratic societies" have less trust for it (Fawzi, 2019, p. 150). Similarly, conservative and liberal Americans differ by how trustworthy they perceive different news outlets – but their assessments still correlate with each other and with those of professional fact-checkers (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). This suggests the existence of a shared conception of what journalism is, mixed in and tempered by partisan ideologies.

Similar to trust in abstractions *versus* individuals, literature often distinguishes between trust based on personal experiences and hearsay. Authors use different terminologies, such as "earned" *versus* "ascribed" (Harré, 1999), "reflective" *versus* "primary" (Marková et al., 2008) and "experiential" *versus* "categorical" (Offe, 1999). The basic gist of these formulations is nonetheless the same. Combined with the distinction between abstraction vs. individual it forms a 2-by-2 matrix of trust types that is a staple of trust literature (more intricate formulations also exists, e.g. Misztal, 1996). However, I consider this conventional taxonomy to be unnecessary. All four trust types can be described as different, sometimes confused combinations of promises, expectations, and their sources. This stance is supported by survey results reported by Matikainen (2010, p. 68), according to which Finns' trust of online news media shows signs of all four trust "types".

2.1.3 The importance of trust

> Note that our trust is as essential to the success of the professions as is the professional's trustworthiness; if for any reason good or bad, I start distrusting my doctor and my lawyer, I essentially render them useless to me. (Newton, Hodges & Keith 2004, p. 171)

Trust is so pervasive to human interaction that it is difficult to envision co-existence without it. At the very least, we must trust our fellow humans not to try and harm us: if we could not expect as much, we would be unable to ingest food handled by others, fall asleep in others' presence, or even turn our backs lest we be stabbed. Without any trust for one another, humanity would find itself in a state of primordial war "of every man, against every man" (Hobbes & Tuck, 1651/1996, p. 88). Thomas Hobbes' classic *Leviathan* is usually interpreted as a defense and legitimation of a state's power over an individual, but it is also widely cited for its bleak vision of the fundamental human nature. According to Hobbes, people are inherently selfish, (reasonably) distrustful of each other, and in natural state destined to a life that is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" (Ibid, p. 89). This dystopian chaos is resolved only when people are subjugated by a greater power, i.e. the governing apparatus of a sovereign state. Hobbes' magnum opus is often contrasted with that of John Locke (Locke & Laslett, 1690/1988), which depicts humanity in a more positive light: according to it, people are wont to trust each other and cooperate, but the possibility of abusing this innate trust requires the creation of a punitive system (i.e. a sovereign state). Differences aside, both classic examples illustrate the importance of trust (or lack thereof) in maintaining stable societies. Trust, however, is not the focus of either Hobbes or Locke; instead, they theorize on the mechanisms of dealing with humanity's imperfections. These mechanisms are, in effect, substitutes for trust, which I will discuss in detail later. First, however, I will follow Barbara Misztal (1996, pp. 14-15) in warning the reader of the inaccuracy involved with discussing trust on a societal level.

Orlando Patterson (1999, pp. 155-157) calls the overall tendency to trust other people as "humanistic trust", which can be interpreted as trust towards an abstraction called "humanity". Any interaction with parts of humanity will reflect on our image of humanity as a whole, just as experience with one journalist affects our image of the entire profession. This example helps us see how different abstractions intersect and overlap: journalists are not only news professionals, but also representatives of their gender, ethnicity, generation, socioeconomic stratum et cetera. Thus, the commonly used concept of "generalized trust" as a non-specific, measurable characteristic of a person or a population is misleading. Trust is always specific and conditional, even if individual trust relationships can be difficult to disentangle. However, the term does have its merit as shorthand for the overall prevalence of trust relationships, which in turn have many positive effects on both individual and societal level. For an example, Ronald Inglehart (1999) contrasted economic data (among others) with survey responses to the question whether people could "generally" trust others. While Inglehart's analysis can tell little of who and in what regard do the respondents trust, it is clear that they benefit from trusting.

Generalized trust is crucial for social life, which in turn affects the general well-being of most humans (Putnam, 2000). Lack of trust limits the extent to which we are willing to interact with each other and creates heavy transaction costs when we do. In lieu of trust, people are forced to seek guarantees against abuse: systems for monitoring behavior and exacting punishment. In Hobbes' (Hobbes & Tuck, 1651/1996) and Locke's (Locke & Laslett, 1690/1988) formulations, the sovereign state is the ultimate guarantor of co-existence based on common standards. The law, however, is not the only source of commitments, and a tax-paid judicial system is not their only enforcer. The trust-substituting mechanisms are spread throughout society's fabric, and their costs can be both financial and social. A shopkeeper must pay for surveillance cameras and security guards to keep thieves at bay, and a suspicious parent must endure indignant responses from a teenager questioned about their recent whereabouts. If entrepreneurs could trust their patrons and parents their offspring, there would be less need to expend time, money, and energy to keeping a watchful eye on supposed betrusteds. This is how the cumulative effects of individual trust relationships translate into generalized trust on a societal level. Where trust is scant, doing anything will take more resources, and some actions will become unviable due to their poor cost-to-benefit ratio. For example, a corner store might never open, if the prospective entrepreneur cannot afford a CCTV system or an insurance policy against burglary. Or citizens may ignore political news if they cannot spare the time to fact-check the coverage for lies and inaccuracies.

Ilmonen and Jokinen (2002, p. 110) call trust backed up by guarantees as "systemic trust" (c.f. Sztompka, 1999, pp. 45-46). According to this formulation, the trustor expects the guarantees in place to be enough to compel the betrusted to honor their commitments. Systemic trust can also be interpreted through the model explained above: it is a combination of trust towards an individual betrusted (e.g. a customer at a shop) and the individuals or abstractions that are responsible for the guarantees in place (e.g. an insurance company or the judicial system). In my view, it is unnecessary to distinguish between systemic trust and other forms of trust. Just as people always have *some freedom*, people can never have *absolute freedom*. Even in high-trust relationships there are some mechanisms which compel the betrusted to honor their commitments. In business, the betrusted might risk losing the trustor's future business; in social life, friendships are on the line. If nothing else, the betrusted will risk having to bear the guilt associated with breaking trust. Thus, any trust relationship could be called "systemic" in that failing commitments almost always bears consequences for the betrusted.

To summarize, trust facilitates most prosocial human behavior by reducing its transaction costs. This frees resources (e.g. money, time, energy) for more interactions and stretches the boundaries of what is possible. Describing trust as "social lubricant" (Misztal, 1996, p. 77) is thus fitting: in mechanics, lubrication reduces friction, which in turn improves efficiency and protects machinery from wear. For journalism, trust is even more important. If it loses its audiences' trust, it ceases to have any value to them. Indeed, journalism that cannot be trusted without personal double-checking is useless as journalism.

2.2 Trustworthiness and credibility

Generalized trust benefits societies, but only when people are more likely to respect their commitments than to neglect them. In the words of Robert Putnam (2000, 136): "*Generalized reciprocity is a community asset, but generalized gullibility is not*" (emphasis in original). That is, trust is not always desirable. As Locke (Locke & Laslett, 1690/1988) observed, some people are inclined to take advantage of others and trusting them without guarantees would harm rather than benefit the trustor. Hence, people must try and evaluate whether someone is worthy of their trust, or *trustworthy*.

In this study, I use the term "trustworthy" to describe the condition in which the behavior of the betrusted (e.g. a journalist's) conforms to the trustor's (e.g. a newspaper subscriber's) trust-constituting expectations (e.g. the journalist will report on local politics impartially). Defining trustworthiness through expectation fulfillment means nothing is universally trustworthy, as expectations are always context-bound (for elaboration see Sztompka, 1999, p. 55). Trustworthiness is a fleeting virtue. Changes in and around either the trustor or the betrusted can shed strange new light upon previously lauded behavior. This also means that where change persists, trustworthiness is perishable and decays without constant maintenance. To remain trustworthy in a changing environment, the betrusted must constantly recalibrate their behavior and the expectations of those who trust them.

This use of the term "trustworthy" is not standard, and is often conflated with the term "credible". For example, Grosser, Hase and Wintterlin (2019) use the terms "trustworthiness" and "perceived trustworthiness" interchangeably. Misztal (1996, p. 120) uses "trustworthiness" in the same sense as "reputation." This confusion has had the unfortunate effect of keeping much of the research on online news focused on the superficial quality of credibility, rather than going into the intricacies of trust and trustworthiness (Rosas, 2013, p. 185). I prefer the more literal formulation, described above, in which trustworthiness is defined as "being worthy of trust".

A certain strain of credibility research also uses "trustworthiness" to denote one of the components that make up credibility. This terminology originates from Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953), but it is still prominent even in modern literature (e.g. Miller & Kurpius 2010). In the current study, I use "credibility" in its vernacular sense: as the *impression of being trustworthy*. In other words, by credibility I refer only to those features that are externally observable, while trustworthiness encompasses both overt and hidden qualities.

While conceptually distinct, credibility is still closely linked to trust and trustworthiness. If something is trustworthy, it should also appear so (i.e. be credible), and credibility should then result in trust. Put simply, "credibility is a *perception*, trust a *response* to that perception, and trustworthiness a *quality* which the perception may or may not match" (Study 2, p. 11; emphasis in original). Empirically, the connection between expectation fulfilment and trust has been concisely demonstrated by Coleman, Anthony and Morrison (2009, p. 2), who interviewed the British publics over their views of journalism: "When we encountered distrust in the news—which we frequently did—it was because people felt that their expectations were not shared by news producers."

While connected, the concepts are not inseparable. Trust and credibility can exist without trustworthiness, and trustworthiness can prevail even when mistrust and suspicion reign. This dilemma is the impetus for the study at hand: looks can be deceiving.

2.3 Online journalism

Since its introduction to the public, the internet has penetrated practically all walks of life. Naturally journalism, too, is affected. The internet is becoming an ever more important delivery platform for journalism, and journalists have adopted it as a professional tool (Fortunati et al., 2009). However, the internet's ubiquity places the concept of "online journalism" under suspicion: if all human life is permeated by internet, is all journalism now online journalism? Consider, for example, the late 1990's definition of *computer-assisted journalism* as the use of computers and "the World Wide Web" in newsrooms (Garrison, 2001). Today this notion seem quaint in its redundancy: practically all journalism passes through computers at some point, and rare is the journalist who does not use the internet in their work.

Much of journalism scholarship assumes online journalism to exist as a distinct genre or field of work. Taking it as a fact could have been an issue, had comparative studies not found significant differences between online journalists and other sub-groups' work practices (Juntunen, 2011; Machill & Beiler, 2009; Quandt, 2008; see also Cohen, 2019 on "digital journalists"; c.f. Strömbäck, Karlsson & Hopmann, 2012). Online journalists also seem to have an understanding of themselves as a distinct professional group (Agarwal & Barthel, 2015; Hartley, 2013; Vobi & Milojevi , 2013) and they are often organized into separate editorial units (Juntunen, 2011; Quandt, 2008). The definition of online journalists, however, is not clear-cut and even terminologies vary both within academia and the industry itself. This means different sampling strategies may yield different results. News website journalists likely are more akin to newspaper copywriters than to magazine feature writers. Differentiating between online and non-online content is even more difficult than distinguishing professional groups, as same stories can appear on many media platforms. If mere availability on the internet is considered the only definition of online journalism, the concept certainly is redundant. Any meaningful definition of online journalism thus needs to account for the production process as much as for dissemination platform.

When recruiting journalist-participants for Studies 1 and Study 2, I reached out to newsrooms and asked to contact their "online journalists" ("verkkotoimittaja" in Finnish). In many cases, I was informed that no such title exists in their work community. This is consistent with results from the Worlds of Journalism study, in which less than 5 per cent of Finnish journalists said they worked in an "online newsroom" (Väliverronen, Ahva & Pöyhtäri, 2016). However, when I specified I wished to research "journalists, who create stories primarily for online publication" all newsrooms were able to designate suitable participants. As I learned through interviews (see Study 1 for more details), being an online journalist is not always a permanent position in Finnish newsrooms. For some journalists, staffing the online-priority, breaking news desk is just a one-off stint or a recurring phase of workforce rotation. In light of this, online journalism could be best described as a mode of journalistic work, rather than a specific type of journalistic product or a field of professional specialization. There are journalistic products that exist purely for and on the internet just as there are purely online journalists - but there are also zones and moments of online journalism amidst other journalistic work. Ergo, online journalism is journalistic work (and products thereof) specifically adjusted to the affordances of the online environment.

The internet offers many new opportunities in creating and presenting journalism. However, new technical affordances do not seem to be the aspect driving online journalism, a review by Steen Steensen (2011) found. Rather, online journalism is defined by the hurry left behind by disappearance of the deadline (Ibid; Klinenberg, 2005; Reinardy, 2010; Quandt 2008). The online "news hole" is infinite, unlike those of hourly newscasts or daily papers. Furthermore, journalism created for online dissemination needs to be clickable, commentable and shareable. In short, online journalism has to be made rapidly, appealing, and *en masse*. Considering these criteria, it is no surprise that online journalism is thought to be less accurate (Bogaerts & Carpentier, 2013; Cassidy, 2007; Rusila, 2013), and that online journalism has a lower status within the journalistic hierarchy (Erzikova & Lowrey, 2017; Vobi & Milojevi , 2013).

The distinctive conditions of the online environment seem to call for normative evolution (see Study 2, page 10 for elaboration). Audiences seem to expect different things from online news than from printed or broadcast news (Meijer, 2013). Journalists themselves, however, are still undecided on whether online journalism should have a distinctive style and separate guidelines (Lee & Treadwell, 2013). This, along with the issues described above, suggests online journalism is still an amorphous area of journalism - different in many practical ways, but its status formally and culturally ambiguous. Such a state is highly conducive to the kind of confusion of trust-constituting expectations as described above (in section 2.1.2).

2.4 Journalistic sourcing

Sourcing can be seen as one of the defining components of journalism. Anchoring an account to some form of evidence, direct or indirect, equals an attempt at conveying verifiable facts. This pursuit of truthfulness distinguishes journalism from fiction. Only on rare occasions can journalism make do without sources; this usually requires the journalist to witness the reported event in person. Beyond these cases, it is the available sources that circumscribe what journalists can (honestly) report. Thus, the processes of searching, evaluating and selecting sources are crucial in assessing journalism's performance. In this thesis I have defined sourcing as any and all action by journalists through which they seek to discover sources, gain access to sources, evaluate sources, or select (or discard) sources for journalistic use. This abstract process of *sourcing* is further divided into more specific *sourcing practices* – I explain their origin and operationalization below in section 3.

This thesis examines journalistic sourcing from two perspectives. Study 1 looks at sourcing from the practitioner's viewpoint: it describes Finnish online journalists' sourcing practices and their rationales. This approach is fairly common in journalism studies. The questions over what sources journalists use and why are interesting to scholars not only for descriptive purposes, but also because of their potential in critical media studies. This kind of research can, for example, bring attention to the underrepresentation of women as news sources (e.g. Zoch & VanSlyke Turk, 1998) or journalists' reliance on press copy tainted with vested interests (e.g. Lewis, Williams & Franklin, 2008). Most of these studies have at least an implicit normative underpinning, for example in favor of gender equality or enterprise reporting. While widely appreciable, these norms do not automatically translate into trustworthiness. To a sexist audience, overrepresentation of one gender can be a requirement of trustworthiness. Research interested in trust and trustworthiness—rather than some external norm—must account for audiences' expectations.

Study 2 investigates audience expectations towards journalistic processes, sourcing among them. This type of research is uncommon, which is easy to understand from a methodological perspective: Investigating opinions on opaque parts of the journalistic process (e.g. searching for sources) requires more fieldwork and less natural experimental designs. In comparison, researching audience's views on journalism's overt qualities, for example cited sources (e.g. Kruikemeier & Lecheler, 2018), is much more straightforward.

Regardless of motivation, the research emphasis on journalism's overt features has left behind an unfortunate lacuna of knowledge regarding some of trust's key components. Lacking information affects not only academiae, but also practitioners and their audiences. Sourcing is an opaque, "backstage" process and audiences have no choice but to trust journalists with it. At the same time, journalists have little clue as to what their audiences expect from journalistic sourcing, since audiences can hardly give feedback on something they are unaware of. In other words, both the trustors and the betrusted are acting blindly. On audiences' part, this blindness is prerequisite for trust, but a liability for journalists. As I have discussed above (and in Study 3), this obscurity is liable to undermine trust by allowing expectations and practices to drift apart.

2.5 The intersection of trust, journalism and society

As we have seen, generalized trust and the functioning of society are closely intertwined. Journalism and society, and trust and journalism are similarly connected. Describing each relationship in detail is well beyond this thesis, which focuses on the praxis of (online) journalism. Hence, I will focus on the ways in which journalism influences trust on a societal level. Journalism's role can be discussed on three levels: journalism as generic human activity, journalism as representations of reality, and journalism as a bulwark of democracy. This order of perspectives proceeds from general to specific.

The first perspective, *journalism as generic human activity*, is the most general one. This perspective does not presuppose anything of the nature of journalism, and any area of human activity could be viewed through the same lens. Any activity constantly alters or reinforces the image of its performers and abstractions they are part of. For example, consider a newspaper journalist who gets caught fabricating stories. The journalist's actions have tarnished not only their own name, but also the image of their employer. In small part, the journalist's transgression will have damaged the image of newspapers and journalists everywhere - and ultimately, that of all humanity. Similar harm could just as well be done by a corrupt politician, a thieving housemaid, or a drunken bus driver: actions of one will impact the image of many. The magnitude of this impact, however, differs between kinds of betrusted. Politicians' moral failures will be observed by thousands if not millions, where as a housemaid's petty crimes rarely gain an audience beyond their employer's circle of acquaintances. On this spectrum of prominence, journalists fall somewhere between public figures and private individuals. Though journalists' personal lives are rarely under open scrutiny, their work is public and some of them become local or even national celebrities. Thus, the way journalists conduct themselves, especially in their professional lives, is likely to have an impact on the way people perceive humanity. If journalists appear untrustworthy, their audience must either accept people generally tend to be untrustworthy - or in their minds distance journalists from the abstraction of humanity.

The second perspective, *journalism as representations of reality*, is specific to the concept of journalism. As individuals, we can directly experience only small parts of the universe. Yet we usually have some understanding of things beyond our immediate surroundings, stemming from gossip concerning our neighbors or textbook descriptions of distant planets. Even works of fiction can change our views of the world (Lewandowsky et al., 2012). In the words of Walter Lippmann (1922), we experience most of the world as "pictures in our heads". These pictures are perceptions of the world we have not gathered through our own senses, but which have been painted for us by others. The pictures have many sources, but for the purposes of this thesis I will concentrate on journalism. Like all mass media, journalism reaches scores of people at once, contributing to creation of a commonly shared understanding of the world. Journalism can be seen as particularly influential, as it is commonly understood as a conduit of facts, in contrast to fiction. The way journalism represents humanity will affect the generalized trust present in a society. This influence is demonstrated by recurring studies on people's fear of crime, which is then compared to actual crime rates and journalistic representations of crime (e.g. Lowry, Ching, Nio & Leitner, 2003). By emphasizing crime over less titillating events, journalists tend to over-inflate their audiences' fears. The importance of journalistic representations is also expressed in the spiral of cynicism theory (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). It suggests journalists' negative representations of politics can backfire and decrease their audience's trust not only towards politics but also towards journalists themselves (c.f. Aarts, Fladmoe & Strömbäck, 2012). In short: journalism's representations of humanity will affect how willing journalism's audiences are in trusting one another.

The third perspective, *journalism as a bulwark of democracy*, is the most specific, as it is anchored to a particular ideal of journalism. It is common to envision journalism and democracy as coexisting in a vital symbiosis (e.g. Carey 1999, p. 51). This, however, is true only when certain definitions of "democracy" and "journalism" are considered (see Strömbäck, 2005 for further discussion and Zelizer, 2013 for a critique of the journalism-democracy connection). As the classic *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956) describes, journalism does not presuppose democracy or promote it by default. It just so happens a pro-democracy tendency has, for historical reasons, become the norm in Western journalism (Schultz, 1998, pp. 47-48). Today, journalism's pro-democracy commitment is well established, and it is commonly referred to in various ethical codes adopted by journalists around the world (Himelboim & Limor, 2010). This is also the case in Finland, where the self-regulatory Guidelines for Journalists (n.d.) begin with an explicit reference to freedom of speech and democracy. Thus, expectations towards journalism are generally underpinned by a democratic ideal - and these expectations have important implications for society. In order to help sustain democracy, journalism should keep citizens informed over topics of public interest – after all "[i]nformation is to democracy what oxygen is to fire" (Lee-Wright et al., 2012, p. 3). Offering a plurality of viewpoints and facilitating public deliberation can also be seen as a part of journalism's pro-democracy remit. Failing these expectations will cause harm beyond undermining generalized trust, at worst crippling the democratic system itself. As a recursive twist, journalism's pro-democracy effects are contingent on the trust it enjoys. The dependency becomes apparent through a comparison to a power grid engineer. A trustworthy engineer will maintain a functioning power grid regardless of consumers' trust. Refrigerators, microwave ovens, and computers will continue to run even if their users live in perpetual fear of power outages. In contrast, trust is paramount for journalism to deliver its service: a message ignored is a message wasted, no matter how expertly crafted and pure in intent. For (contemporary Western) journalism to meet audience expectations, it must be both trustworthy and trusted.

To summarize, the way journalists behave and the way journalism represents the world both affect how much we trust each other. In addition, journalism's trustworthiness defines what benefits journalism offers its audiences, while the audiences' trust for journalism affects how much of those benefits are eventually enjoyed.

3 METHODOLOGY

This thesis' methodology comprises two analytical tracks: the study of journalistic praxis and the study of audience expectations. Individually they produce answers to RQ1a and RQ1b, and when merged they answer the thesis' main research question (RQ1). In practical terms, the thesis relies on three distinct methods of data gathering: observations, semi-structured interviews, and experimental focus-group interviews. Face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded and focus group interviews were video-recorded. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and anonymized. Transcripts were analyzed through applied thematic analysis (Guest, McQueen & Namey, 2012).

I observed and interviewed online journalists for both Study 1 and Study 2. I was able to access 7 Finnish newsrooms and recruit a total of 21 Finnish online journalists (as defined above in section 2.3) to participate in the studies. The news organizations in question were the daily, national broadsheet *Helsingin Sanomat*; the daily, regional broadsheets *Keskisuomalainen* and *Aamulehti*; the tri-weekly, national broadsheet *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*; the daily, national tabloid *Iltalehti*; the national public service broadcaster Yleisradio, and the online-only news website *Uusi Suomi*. Research took place at the respective organizations' main newsrooms in Helsinki (*Helsingin Sanomat*, *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, *Iltalehti*, *Uusi Suomi*, and Yleisradio), Jyväskylä (*Keskisuomalainen*) and Tampere (*Aamulehti*).

The participating newsrooms represent popular, mainstream journalism in the Finnish context. *Iltalehti*, Yleisradio and *Helsingin Sanomat* are among the four most popular online news sources (Digital News Report, 2018), while *Aamulehti* and *Keskisuomalainen* represent the still-popular genre of regional news dailies – the two have the most popular and fourth-most popular websites, respectively, among regional papers (FIAM, 2019). *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus* is a national special interest newspaper targeted at people living in the countryside. Its print circulation and online popularity are comparable to those of *Keskisuomalainen* (FIAM, 2019; Media Audit Finland, 2018). *Uusi Suomi* is Finland's most popular online-only news source (FIAM, 2019). Like the overwhelming majority of Finnish news organizations, the participating newsrooms subscribe to the self-regulatory Guidelines for Journalists (n.d.). The newsrooms also represent the dominant news media conglomerates in Finland (Ala-Fossi et al., 2018). Thus, the sample should be fairly representative of Finnish (online) journalism, at least as far as the audiences' perceptions are considered.

All observations focused on the newsrooms' "online-first" branches (as identified by their managers). The newsrooms' organization and nomenclature differed: some had dedicated online news desks, some only a single journalist assigned to update the newsroom's website. *Uusi Suomi* was the sole online-only newsroom in the study, but its staff at the time was small enough to be likened to an online desk within a larger newsroom.

During observations, I "shadowed" a volunteer journalist by sitting next to them at their desk and taking detailed notes on their work process (e.g. visits to a website). After the end of the agreed period of observation, I interviewed the observed journalist, asking them to describe the work they had put into each news item. The interviews took place at secluded locations within the newsrooms, such as conference rooms or closed offices. In one case, lacking access to such a space, the interview was conducted in an empty corner of the workplace cafeteria.

I specifically asked the journalists to indicate why they "trusted" a particular source they utilized, or why they "did not use" a source I saw them peruse. Here I have used the word "trust" in a different sense than explained above (in section 2.1.2): as an action rather than as an expectation. I have since turned to a less material and more cognitive conception of trust. This theoretical shift between different phases of my research is liable to cause some confusion, as the findings presented below will appear to defy the logic of trust both in its vernacular sense and in the sense specified in section 2.1. When my interviewees spoke of "trusting their sources" they usually did not refer to an unspecified, universal trust, the concept of which I criticize in section 2.2. Rather, they spoke of various contextual trusts which I failed interrogate in explicit terms grounded in material expectations. However, these expectations can be tentatively inferred post hoc, as I have done in section 4.1. This discussion over outspoken rationales and underlying expectations is absent from Study 1, but I have included it below in order to bridge this self-inflicted theoretical divide. As I will demonstrate, the same action (i.e. using a source in a news item) can have various rationales, which then implicate a range of expectations.

Newsroom observations and journalists' interviews took place in the spring of 2013 (n=15) and early 2017 (n=6). The latter round of fieldwork involved three newsrooms I had already visited in 2013: *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Iltalehti*, and Yleisradio – a broadsheet, tabloid and a public service broadcaster. All six participants in this round of observation were new to the study. The method was almost identical on both rounds, with some variation in interview guides and observation period lengths. Most of these results are presented in Study 1, which does not include the data gathered in 2017. However, results from this latter round of observations mostly aligned with earlier findings and thus are not presented separately. The one notable variance between the two rounds of fieldwork observations was the time journalists spent on each news item, with averages of 20 minutes in 2013 and 70 minutes in 2017. The difference is partially explained by a smaller sample of items being observed in 2017, skewed by one outlier news item. Furthermore, the 2013 sample includes news items from seven newsrooms, while the 2017 sample was collected only from three newsrooms. There is still a possibility of an actual shift in work practices between 2013 and 2017. If we limit the comparison to only those three newsrooms that were studied in both years and exclude the outlier, we can still notice a change from an average production time of 33 minutes (in 2013) to 49 minutes (in 2017). However, the difference should be considered inconclusive, as the samples are quite small. The distribution of production times at the three newsrooms, in both 2013 and 2017, is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

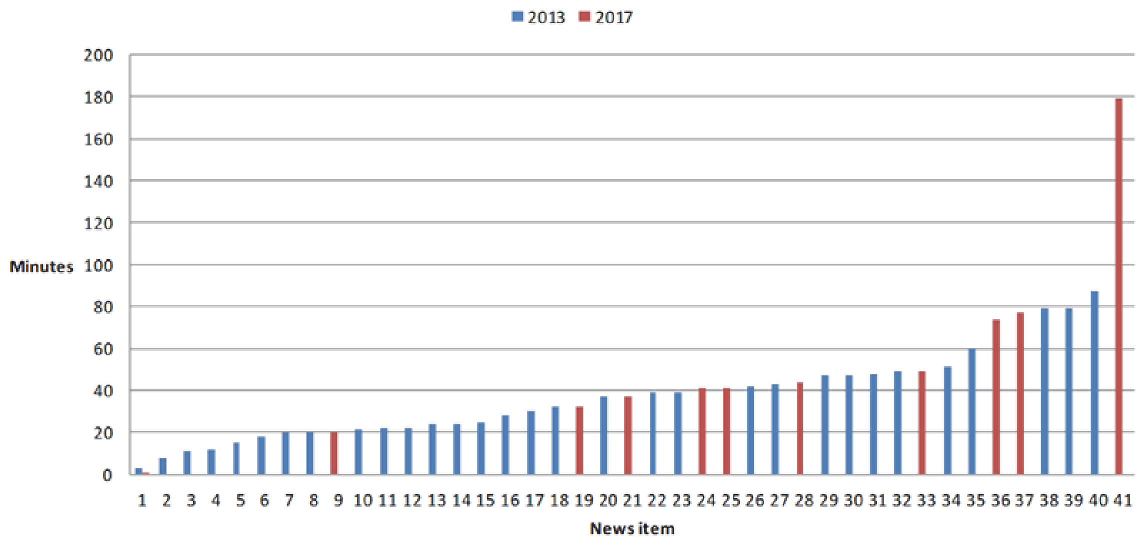

Figure 4 Time spent per news item at *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Iltalehti* and Yleisradio

For Study 2, I recruited and interviewed nine focus groups of young Finnish adults (aged 18-28 years), totaling 34 participants. These groups consisted of classmates, friends, and people otherwise familiar with each other. They largely represent the demographical norm for this age group. There were two notable groups I was unable to recruit: men in full employment and military service conscripts. Demographically the sample was skewed towards less affluent population segments (due to overrepresentation of students and the unemployed) and women (comprising 68 per cent of participants). The sample still represents a heterogeneous mix of young adults from distinct social backgrounds (see Study 2, pages 14 and 15, for a more detailed description).

Each focus group interview was primed by a warm-up discussion over the participants' media routines and preferences. While this was not a systematic survey of the participants, their descriptions place their habits in line with their peers. First, their preferred news sources match those among the Finnish respondents of Reuters Digital News Report (2018). Second, many participants emphasized social media as a channel for discovering and accessing news, as is common especially among the younger respondents in Finland and abroad, for example in neighboring Sweden (Ibid). Third, all participants followed news to some extent, and all did so primarily online. While older Finns are still steadfast newspaper readers (and some of the participants of the current study were as well), the Finns' most heavily used medium is the internet and catching up with news is its most common purpose (Ibid; Official Statistics of Finland 2019). Most participants described their news consumption in ways that could be termed as "snacking": marked by quick but frequent sessions of browsing the newest, most interesting headlines in a moment of spare time, typically via a mobile device (e.g. Molyneux 2018). As far as news habits go, the participants appear quite representative of their age group in Finland.

Most focus group interviews were arranged at the participants' places of education: a university, a high school, a vocational school, and a civic center. Two focus groups were held in a university classroom per the participants' preference, even though only some of the participants were university students. The participants were seated at a table or on a sofa next to each other, facing me and a camera. A multi-directional microphone was placed between me and the participants. I had the stimulus material next to me on a table, from where I handed it out at appropriate moments.

I presented the focus groups with printouts of news items the production of which I had observed earlier that year. The participants were also given detailed information on how those news items had been created, as observed by me. Finally, I asked the participants to discuss how they perceived the described journalistic processes in comparison to their outcome. This technique was chosen to detect the participants' tacit expectations for journalism by comparing their reactions before and after revealing the journalistic process to them. A more detailed description of the focus group interviews' structure is included in Study 2.

Most participants engaged with the questions openly, but a few were apprehensive. Groups A1 and A2 (unemployed) contained both quiet and talkative individuals, while groups C1 and C2 (high school students) appeared mostly reserved except for one talkative participant (C1-3). In all cases the less-talkative participants were young women, which hints at their behavior being the result of the interviewer's age and gender. Young men in groups A1, A2, B1, B2, E1 and E2 did not show similar signs of hesitation. It is worth noticing that there were also young women who confidently took part in the discussions – the observed differences may thus result from a combination of the participants' personality traits combined with my age, gender and academic background. Unfortunately, this effect cannot be completely erased: similar effects could have occurred elsewhere in the sample even if a different researcher had conducted the interviews. However, considering the subject of the discussions (general interest news) it is unlikely the participants felt prohibited from expressing their views to me, even if some were reticent due to social factors.

Whenever appropriate, I encouraged all participants to take part in the discussions, but I avoided pressuring anyone with direct questions. The following excerpt from focus group C1 is illustrative of a conversation segment that had to be gently prompted forward. Here, the group is discussing a process description of a news story that took 20 minutes to produce and used only foreign websites as sources. After I asked the group for their impressions, participant C1-3 initiated a long monologue, which participant C1-2 affirmed with an amused "mmh". At this point I tried to expand the conversation to the rest of the group.

VM: Tuliko muilla samanlaisia fiiliksiä? [2] hymähtelee.
Did others feel the same way? [C1-2] is laughing.

C1-2: Joo, aika lailla. Ja siis mä tiiän ton Mashable-sivuston... Ja ei se nyt nii luotettava aina välttämättä oo. Sieltä tulee joskus jotai tosi... Niinku semmosia juttu mitkä voi olla keksitty, tai jotain tulevaisuuden juttuja voi olla siellä kans, ni... Mä en tiedä, sit ku täs lukee "toimittajan mukaan luotettavia"... Mmh. [kohauttaa olkapäitään] En mä tiedä, et onks se niinku sen mielestä.
Yeah, pretty much. And, like, I know that Mashable-website… And it's not always that trustworthy, necessarily. Sometimes they put out some really… Like something that could be made up, or some future-stuff could be there as well, so… I don't know, like when it says here "trustworthy according to the journalis"… Mmh. [shrugs] I don't know, like is it just in their mind.

VM: Niin, tosiaan [epäröi] se on hänen, hänen oma arvionsa, että... Näin on. Mites [C1-1], [C1-4]?
Right, indeed… [hesitates] its their, their own assessment, that… That's the case. What about [C1-1], [C1-4]?

C1-1: No varmaan just toi ku siin on käytetty vaan ulkomaalaisia, noita lähteitä. Et ei ollenkaan tota toista suomalaista, niin tota... En mä tiiä sit kuin luotettava toi...
Well probably because it has only foreign ones, those sources. Like, not the Finnish one, so… I don't know how trustworthy that is.

VM: *Mm.*

C1-4: Nii, sama, et pystyykö se sit noita englanninkielisiä niin hyvin tulkitseen, että...
Yea, same, like can they interpret those English ones so well, that…

C1-3: *Mm.*

C1-4: Mut se on niinku kuitenki hyvä, et se on sen WhatsAppin, sen sovelluksen verkkosivuilta kattonu siitä, että... Et kyl siihen sit voi luottaa, varmaan.
But, like, it's still good that they've looked at WhatsApp's, that application's website, so… So it can be trusted, probably.

VM: *Mm.*

C1-4: Mut kakskyt minuuttia on aika lyhyt aika tämmösen kirjottamiseen.
But twenty minutes is a pretty short time to write something like this.

VM: Oliks toi aika semmonen mikä yllätti teitä kaikkia, vai...
Was that time something that surprised you all, or…

C1-2: No tavallaan se ei yllättäny, ku luki tän oikeen tekstin, mut on se nyt... Sinänsä tosi tosi pieni aika, mitä kaikkee se on tossa tehny kahessakymmenessä minuutissa.
Well in a way it didn't, when you read this original text, but it's still… Really it's a short time, considering all they've done in those twenty minutes.

C1-4: *Mm. [nods]*

C1-2: Oisin mä olettanu et siin ois menny edes nelkyt viis minuuttia tai tunti, tunti [epäselvää]
I would've expected for that to have taken at least forty-five minutes or an hour, an hour [mumbles]

In groups A1 (unemployed), C1 and C2 (high school students), the discussions were fairly structured and interviewer-led. While participant C1-3 actively initiated turns, neither she nor the other participants actively engaged other participants but rather directed their speech at me. Group A2 (unemployed) and E1 (vocational school students) contained few active participants who actively engaged each other, and sometimes the other participants, with idle chatter. While this made the interviews more relaxed, it also drew out their length without providing much data pertinent to the research questions. Groups B1 (university students), B2 (employed group of friends), D1 (university and technical university students) and E2 (vocational school students) were active in discussing the topics among themselves, with me having to only occasionally move the conversation forward.

The analysis of these discussions revealed 18 normative expectations young Finnish adults seem to have for online journalism. These norms were identified by clustering interview segments that imply normative expectations. For example, the following segment from group A1 discusses a news story, based on an article from the British tabloid, *The Daily Mail*. Here I had just asked the participants to share their impressions of the story.

A1-1: No just tuo, et se on vaan niinku... Tavallaan uudelleen otettu *Daily Mail* –artikkeli, sillein...
Well precisely that, that its just… In a way its just a Daily Mail *article that's been repurposed, so…*

VM: Pidätkö sitä...
Do you think it is…

A1-1: Laiskana, sellasena niinku että otetaan tollanen vähän niinku turha viihdeuutinen toiselta tällaselta viihteellisiä uutisia tekevältä lehdeltä ja sitten vaan... No, periaatteessa vaan käännetään se suomeks, lisätään siihen joku oma pikku juttu.
Lazy, like you take an old, kind of a pointless entertainment story from another light news-making paper and then just… Well, basically just translate it into Finnish, add some little original thing to it.

The above segment shows participant A1-1's disappointment with the small effort the journalist has put into the news story – implying news stories should be both original and well researched. This theme continues in the following excerpt from group E2. Here, participants E2-2 and E2-3 are discussing a story largely based on a series of earlier articles by the same news organization, including a video clip of the news event. This discussion was preceded by a short exchange between E2-3 and E2-1 over whether the story's rapid production speed was due to the journalists' virtuosity or their slapdash attention to detail.

E2-3: On se silti aika löyhä peruste, että jättää noin paljon tietoo seulomatta kunnolla läpi, ja tehä puolessa tunnissa vaan joku pikanen juttu, joka on puoliks kopioitu vanhasta.
It's still a pretty weak justification to leave that much information unsifted properly, and just make a quick story in half-hour that's half-copied from old stuff.

E2-2: No siis toi on varmaan niinku just ihan normaali käytäntö, et tehä toi juttu tolleen, ja siis... Öö, just se että niittenhän pitää saaha se tieto mahollisimman nopeesti ihmisille, sehän on niiku niitten etu, et me vaan... Niinku mitä nopeemmin saa sen... [epäselvää]
Well, like, that's probably normal practice, to do that story like that, and… Uh, just that they need to get that information out as fast as possible to people, that's their benefit, so that… Like the faster you get it… [mumbles]

E2-3: Mut se, et jos se tiedon autenttisuus on kyseenalainen, niin onks sekään nyt sitten lukijalle hyvä juttu, että oikeestaan... Et mun mielestä tässä niinku jutussa ainoo hyödyllinen--
But if the authenticity of the information is questionable, is it really a good thing for the reader? Really… So I think the only useful part of this story--

E2-2: Ja sit näissä nettiuutisissa on aina se, että nehän voi olla sitten laajemmalti siinä lehessä, tai sillein, että--
And in these online news is always the possibility, that they're presented more broadly in the paper, or the like--

E2-3: Sekin...
That too…

E2-2: Yleensähän noi on vähän tiivistettyjä noi. Tai riippuu vähän sivustostaki, mut...
Usually those are pretty condensed, those. Well it depends on the website, but…

E2-3: Niin.
Yeah.

VM: *Mm.*

E2-3: No mutta et tossa tuo videopätkä, on oikeestaan nyt niinku osottautuu tärkeimmäks tietolähteeks tässä koko uutisessa. Et oikeestaan, et...
But still, that video clip there, it's proving to be the most important information source in this entire story. So really…

E2-2: [naurahtaa] Sillä nyt meni usko kaikkeen, että "en enää lue yhtäkään uutista!" [naurahtaa]
[laughing] He's lost all faith in everything, like "I'm not going to read a single news story anymore!" [laughing]

Above segment shows a friendly disagreement between participants E2-3 and E2-2. The former is frustrated with the seemingly low effort put into the news story, while the latter is trying to defend the practice. Despite the disagreement over whether the journalist's actions were defensible in *this case*, the two seem to agree over what good journalism should be like *in general*: based on thorough, original investigation. Deviating from this norm is only acceptable under mitigating circumstances, for example if information needs to get out fast or if the story is presented in full later.

These two segments, as well as many others, reflect an underlying expectation according to which good journalism should not plagiarize Other Media (see Study 2, pp. 16-17 for details). They also relate to the theme Time and Effort (see Study 2, p. 17 for details) – namely to the expectation that journalism expends liberal amounts of both. I describe and discuss all 18 themes in Study 2.

In Study 3, I analyzed the sourcing processes of 36 news items, observed at three newsrooms in 2013 and 2017. The three newsrooms chosen for this sample publish some of Finland's most popular news websites, thus representing popular mainstream online journalism in the country. These news organizations are the aforementioned *Helsingin Sanomat* broadsheet, the tabloid *Iltalehti* and the PSB Yleisradio. The observed news items were produced by twelve different journalists, four from each newsroom. I observed the production process of each item and discussed it with the journalist in the same way as I did in Study 1.

Study 3's analysis is based on the comparison of audience expectations (expressed in focus group interviews conducted in Study 2) and real-life journalistic practices (captured in journalists' interviews and observational notes collected in Study 1 and Study 2). Four of the 18 expectation categories discovered in Study 2 involved sourcing: *Source Choice*, *Source Sufficiency*, *Fact Checking*, and the use of *Other Media* as sources. I operationalized those four expectation categories into explicit criteria (detailed in Study 2). For example, the use of already published media content as the news item's main information source was interpreted as expectation-breaking practice in the *Other Media* category. I then analyzed the sample of 36 news items against these criteria: do the items meet or fail those expectations? Each item was given four dichotomous evaluations, either a "pass" or a "fail" in each of the four categories. The sum of these values produced simple, numerical values describing the extent to which the audience's expectations were met. The result of this analysis is presented in a Table in Study 3 (p. 10).

4 FINDINGS

I will discuss the findings of my thesis below. The structure of this presentation follows the chronological and analytical order of the research. First, I will detail how Finnish online journalists source their stories (answering RQ1a). This section (4.1) will also answer RQ2, by describing the role of trust in Finnish online journalists' sourcing processes. In the next section (4.2), I will describe what young Finnish adults expect from the sourcing processes of mainstream Finnish online journalism, thus answering RQ1b. In section 4.3, I will present results from an analysis of 36 online news items' sourcing processes, which provides the answer to my main research question, RQ1. Lastly, I will synthesize the findings into a discussion of the effects the online environment has on journalism, trust in journalism, and generalized trust in society (as theorized in section 2.5).

4.1 Sourcing practices in online journalism

Study 1 confirmed earlier research on the online journalism praxis: it is fast-paced and overwhelmingly desk-bound (e.g. Quandt, 2008). I observed the creation of over 100 news items from start to finish, but only one involved the journalist leaving the newsroom. In most cases, the participating journalists sourced their stories exclusively through the internet, only sometimes supplementing this material with telephone interviews. The observed journalists also worked quite fast: their average output was 6 news items in an 8-hour shift - up to an impressive 27 items in one instance. This puts the average time spent per item at around 20 minutes (interruptions excluded), while the longest process took 2 hours and 59 minutes. This pattern of time use naturally delimits which sourcing practices are viable. Approximately half of all observed news items were sourced solely from either a press release or a single story published by other media, which aligns with an earlier study on Finnish online journalism (Juntunen, 2011). Even most multi-source news items comprised some form of pre-packaged content - original research was rare. As my subsequent research (Study 2) would show, this goes against what many audience members consider acceptable journalistic practice.

The interviews I conducted with the observed journalists shed light on the rationales behind their sourcing practices. I have named these outspoken rationales of source use as *trust discourses*. One of the most distinctive ways of looking at sources was to trust them unquestioningly. I named this way of reasoning as the *ideological trust discourse*, as it seems to hinge on a shared understanding of normalcy and deviance. Recurring polls and surveys show that the police and emergency services are consistently among the most appreciated and trusted professions in Finland (e.g. Reader's Digest, n.d.; Lähteenmäki, 2017). These are also the most common ideologically trusted sources observed by this study. Intuitively relying on particular sources implies a very deep and inclusive trust, where positive expectations are both multiple and ephemeral. When discussing certain sources as being trustworthy by default ("If I can't trust the police, I don't know whom I can!"), my interviewees did not specify their expectations but seemed to trust in the sources' general agreeability. With little to no heed to context, this amorphous mass of positive expectations leads to an impossible requirement: the betrusted would have to be both omniscient, omnipotent and inexhaustibly benevolent to be trustworthy to all people in all situations.

The most commonly observed trust discourse was that of *pragmatic trust*. Through it, journalists described the usability of sources in terms of adequacy in the face of many practical constraints. For example, a journalist strapped for time might call an expert they have consulted before - maybe the expert has made a name for themself (increasing the credibility of the news story) and is known by journalists as a willing commentator (reducing the risk of wasting the journalist's time). This trust discourse implies expectations centered on the journalists' resources and the cost-to-benefit ratio of using the source. Rather than trusting the source to be the most knowledgeable, honest and impartial possible, the journalist trusts the source to be worth the effort of consulting. Of course, this often entails an expectation of at least a modicum of truthfulness and accuracy. In addition, however, the journalist expects availability, readiness to cooperate, and usable quotes or sound bites. As we can already see, these expectations are more specific and less idealistic than those implied by the ideological trust discourse.

Perhaps the most peculiar way of discussing the use of sources is the *cynically pragmatic trust discourse*. Here the use of the word "trust" is most misleading, as this kind of source use appears to entail neither trust nor expectations. This discourse was not all that frequent in the interviews I conducted, but it appeared distinctively in relation to two types of sources: news items published by competing media and politicians. The main rationale in this discourse is that the source's trustworthiness does not matter. No matter how blatant the lie or misleading the information, its effects are seen to pass over the journalist and their employer. If a news organization openly cites a competing newspaper on erroneous information, any fault will be attributed to the competitor, one of my interviewees explained. This approach is similar to the "strategic ritual of objectivity", whereby reporters use direct quotes to express opinion while avoiding blame for partisanship (Tuchman, 1972). Whether or not journalists truly are able to dodge responsibility is irrelevant, as the decision to use those sources is made in this belief. The journalist engaging in cynically pragmatic trust utilizes sources due to their face-value rather than their putative capacity to meet expectations. A competitor's story might bring in readers, even if its accuracy was in doubt, and a politician's stance is worth reporting, even if it was misinformed. This belief in the ability to dodge blame clearly shuts the door from *trust* (as defined above). Instead, this discourse seems to imply *confidence*, as defined by Adam Seligman (1997), in that the journalism-audience dynamic will function in a particular manner, i.e. audiences will blame the originator of false information and not its disseminators.

Consensual trust discourse refers to source use rationales that are based on the conformity of information in relation to other sources. For example, a journalist might look at several other news websites to see whether they use the same wording of a particular quote. This practice has its issues: misinformation from a single source can spread far and wide, and its frequent appearance may become wrongly interpreted as an educated consensus. In terms of trust, however, the consensual trust discourse is appropriately grounded in context-sensitive expectations, hence using the word "trust" here is accurate. There are two compelling explanations as to how a piece of information might proliferate. It may have originated from a credible source, or the information in itself could be widely believable. This implies two possible expectations that can underlie consensual trust. First, journalists might assume the concordant sources to be knowledgeable enough to have chosen the same, high-quality originating source. Here the expectation would be that the source (utilized by the journalist) has done due diligence in seeking out the objective truth of the matter (as confirmed by the same information appearing in other sources). Second, journalists may believe the apparently convincing nature of the information will be enough to frame potential errors as "honest mistakes". The latter explanation, if true, is very much like the cynically pragmatic trust discourse (and thus implies confidence rather than trust). Unfortunately, this distinction can only be hypothesized post-hoc, as my interview framework at the time did not include discussing expectations (see section 3 for details).

The fifth and final trust discourse is that of *contextual trust*. It refers to context-specific assessments of sources' willingness to aid the journalist through specific behavior. Usually this means simply truthfulness or full disclosure, but depending on the situation it could also entail not sharing the information with other media outlets, or proactively contacting the journalist with new information. An indicative way of describing this rationale, as put by one of my interviewees, was "I didn't see any reason why [the source] would lie about this case". The turn of phrase demonstrates two crucial points: the journalist recognized the possibility of deception, but still expected the source not to lie. The assessment is based on both the content of expectation (truthfulness) and the context of the situation (a particular news event). This is, in essence, what normal inter-human trust is. In a journalistic sense this is also the most professionally sound rationale for source use, as it involves context-sensitive assessment of the source's motives.

In summary, online journalists rationalize their source use in many ways, of which only some imply trust in those sources (as defined in section 2.1.2). Furthermore, some of that trust is blind – a practice which departs from the classical norm of journalism as the "discipline of verification" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Online journalists work rapidly, which is accommodated by the sources they select (e.g. press releases) and the rationales they present (e.g. confidence in their ability to escape blame). As the next section will demonstrate, many of these sourcing practices and their justifications go against what young Finnish adults expect from journalism.

4.2 Audience expectations for online journalism

Study 2 explored young adult Finns' expectations for online journalism. It identified 18 distinct expectations, all of which I detail in Study 2. Below I will focus only on the main subject of this thesis: sourcing practices. Sourcing-related expectations are discussed below under four themes: *Source Choice*, *Source Sufficiency*, *Other Media* and *Fact Checking*.

The theme *Source Choice* covers the audience's views on which sources are permissible in journalism and which are not. Sources the audience are willing to accept tend to be "official" in some sense: they include, among others, the police, court documents and financial reports. For example, the following excerpt from group B1 shows a discussion over a crime story. The participants seemed to have been suspicious of the story, but their doubts had been assuaged by learning of its sources.

B1-4: Syyttäjänvirasto on ainakin tässä, niinku mainitaan yheks jutuks. [kohauttaa hartioitaan] Että, eei, kai se... Kyllä se voi olla, voisi olla luotettava. Mediana en vaan hirveesti luota iltapäivälehtiin.
The national prosecution authority is here, like mentioned as a thing. [shrugs] So, I suppose it's not… It can be, could be trustworthy. It's just that I don't really trust tabloids as media.

B1-1: Ei herää sillein epäilyksiä kauheesti, että...
It doesn't rouse suspicions like that, so…

VM: *Mm.*

B1-3: Niin, joo, munkin piti sanoo, että lähinnä tässä, tää... [epäröi] Nää tiedot niinku perustuu lähinnä virallisiin oikeudenkäyntiasiakirjoihin, niin sellaset ei yleensä niinku oo... [epäröi] Tässä jää nyt sillain hirveesti mitään, sellasta minkä vois katsoo olevan toimittajan omaa tulkintaa, että... Ja sit tämmöset rikosjutut perustuu näihin... Näihin

julkisiin asiakirjoihin eikä niistä sillain ehkä tarvii miettiä, että... Että jotenkin vääristelis sitä, mitä niissä todetaan. Että lähinnä niinku kans todetaan se, mitä niissä lukee, usein tällasissa rikoisjutuissa.
Yeah, right, I was going to say that here, mostly, this… [hesitates] This information is based on, like, official court documents, so those are usually not… [hesitates] There isn't really much anything that could be seen as the journalist's own interpretation, so… And these crime stories are based on these… These public documents, so I guess you don't have to think about them like that… That [the stories] would distort what's being said in [the documents]. Like, crime stories like these, they mostly just repeat what's written in [the documents].

Some established media sources also fall under the rubric of credibility, e.g. the BBC or YLE. These sources rank high on the "hierarchy of credibility" (Becker, 1967). Conversely, some types of sources were seen as suspicious and their use bad journalistic practice. For example, using Wikipedia sometimes elicited laughter (groups A2 and C2) and dismay (groups C1 and E1), with participant C1-3 describing its use as a "hair-raising" source. Similarly, using Facebook for anything other than contacting a potential source was seen dubious. This is consistent with earlier finds on audiences' credibility assessments (Henke, Leissner & Möhring, 2019; Kruikemeier & Lecheler, 2018; Miller & Kurpius, 2010). The audiences' preference of sources is likely to be uncontroversial to journalists. Sources that are credible to the audience are often credible to journalists (as illustrated by the ideological trust discourse). Many institutional sources have established communication protocols, making them both credible and practical to utilize. Routinized reliance on high-credibility sources can be an issue in terms of plurality of opinion and holding the powerful accountable, but in terms of audiences' trust in journalism this practice should not be an issue.

Source Sufficiency refers to the audience's assessments on whether the journalist has used sufficient sources. These news item-specific evaluations vary from participant to participant, but there seems to be a consensus on abstract norms. First, all involved parties to a news event should be consulted (e.g. the defendant and the plaintiff of a court case). Second, official sources should be consulted whenever available (e.g. the prosecutor, judge, and the police). While citing "both sides" is a standard procedure in journalism, even to a fault (e.g. Koehler, 2016), inclusive sourcing in online journalism is not a given. In the following excerpt, participant A2-3 assesses a news story based on an eye-witness interview and a number of older news articles.

A2-3: No toisaalta niinku ymmärrettävää, jos ei niinku oo muuta kun yks haastateltavan [sic] lähde. Ja sit niinku... En mä tiiä onks se nyt hyvä vai huono, mutta tuota ni se on toisaalta parempi että on enemmän haastateltuja kun se, että toisten kirjoitusten perusteella tehty.
Well on the other hand its, like, understandable, if you don't have anything else other than one interviewee as a source. And then… I don't know if it's

good or bad, but on the other hand its better to have more interviews than [the story] is based on other texts.

We can notice how the participant is on the fence regarding the legitimacy of the journalist's actions. What is clear, however, is the underlying norm of good journalism: comprehensive sourcing. This is expressed more overtly in the following excerpt from participant D1-2. Here the participant has just learned which few sources a financial news story had been based on – and how the journalist had been unable to contact many of the key actors in the story.

D1-2: Kyl se minun mielestä ehkä vähän... Vei sitä luotettavuutta pois, koska tässä [prosessikuvauksessa selitetään, että miten tavallaan vai-- miten vaikeeta sen on saada ihmisiä kiinni ja miten vähän se loppujen lopuks sai niin kun... Näkökulmaa niiltä ihmisiltä, ketkä, keitä tää asia kosketti sitte enemmän
I think it may have… Reduced the trustworthiness a bit, because this [process description] explains how – How difficult it is for them to get a hold of people and how little they got in the end… Like, the perspective from those people who, whom this event touched the most.

Approximately half of the news items observed for the current study were based on only one source. This is likely due to online journalists' need to publish quickly - as soon as they have what they believe to be "enough". Finding, contacting and utilizing additional sources will always take some time, and in some cases, simply identifying all involved parties could be laborious. Willingness to forgo this effort in exchange for quicker publication may be an issue for online journalism, as the audience seems to expect traditional diligence.

By *Other Media* I refer to the audience's opinion on using already-published media content as sources. As I observed earlier (see above section 4.1), this is quite common in Finnish online journalism. Unfortunately for journalists, the audience largely disapproves of this practice. This negative evaluation stems from two expectations for (online) journalism. First, the audience expects news items to bring something new to the public information sphere - whereas online journalists may acquiesce to procuring content that is new to their publication. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from group E2. Here the participants are discussing a follow-up news story, which largely replicated a competitor's article on the event.

VM: Ja entäs [E2-3], kun sanoit, että yllätti, että tästä on aikasemminki jo tehty juttu, niin piditkö hyvänä vai huonona asiana?
And what about [E2-3], when you said it was surprising to hear there's already been a story on this topic – did you think it was a good or a bad thing?

E2-3: No... Kyllä ne... Menee siinä mielessä positiivisen puolelle, että näinki turha juttu, niin... [epäröi] Tulee selvyyttä siihen, että se on ihan oikeesti turha juttu.
Well… They… Go on the positive side in that sense, that a pointless story like this… [hesitates] It becomes clear, that it really is a pointless story.

E2-2: *[laughs]*

E2-3: Siellä niinku varmaan firman puolellakin tiietään, että vittu mitä paskaa tämä on.
I bet they know, like at the company, what kind of fucking shit this is.

VM: Okei.
Okay.

E2-3: Mä vaan, mä vaan niinku... Samastun tän jutun kirjottajan tuskaan, että ku se on joutunu tekemään niinku... Turhaa työtä. Mut, mutta varmaan naureskellu siinä, että no, on mulle tullu just 41 minuuttia palkkaa siitä, et mä en oo tehny periaattees yhtään mitään.
I'm just like, I… feel the pain of the person who wrote this story, having to do, like… pointless work. But, but they've probably laughed about getting paid for forty-one minutes for doing basically nothing.

E2-4: Se et jaksa--
You don't bother –

E2-3: Ja vielä, että pomolla on vastuu siitä, eikä itellä, niin... On se siinä mielessä ihan koomista.
And also, that the boss has responsibility for it and not you yourself, so… In that sense it's pretty comical.

In the above segment, participant E2-3 directs heavy criticism against the journalist's editor, who had asked the journalist to write the story. The topic itself, an outbreak of diarrhea, had seemed silly to begin with – and now it had turned out to be a rehash of old news. In the eyes of this participant, churning out stories with little new information to contribute is "fucking shit". A second reason to reject "copycat journalism" (Preston 2009, pp. 56-67) is that the audience expects journalists to verify their information. Instead of systematic verification, online journalists are sometimes partial to letting others shoulder that responsibility. This is best exemplified in the cynically pragmatic trust discourse, described earlier in section 4.1 (for more details, see Study 1).

As mentioned above, the audience expects journalists to carry out *Fact Checking* on their information. This expectation is well founded, as it is part of the self-regulatory Guidelines for Journalists (n.d.), to which all major journalistic organizations in Finland are committed (including all that took part in this study).

This is consistent with findings from Spain, Germany, UK and USA, where audiences want news to be "thoroughly researched and checked" (Kantar 2016, p. 10). In my study, audience members' views on what counts as fact checking varied, but at the very least it involves the search and perusal of additional sources. In the following excerpt, group C2 discusses a piece of court news, for which the journalist had spent a notable amount of time by calling sources, reading documents and earlier news stories.

C2-1: Mm. [nyökyttelee] Ja kyllähän tässä periaatteessa näkee sen, että oikeesti kaikki faktat on tarkistettu ja sillon siihen on mennyt enemmän aikaa. Kun sitten et jos tehään hirveen nopeesti, ni sillon ei ehkä oo niinku... Kaikki tiedot niinku niin varmistettuja.
Mm. [nodding] And you can basically see here that all the facts really have been checked and that's taken more time. When if you work really quickly, then maybe you don't like… Get all the information verified that well.

VM: *Mm.*

C2-3: Tai sitten on vaan just kopioitu [naurahtaa]
Or then it's just copied. [laughs]

C2-1: Nii.
Yeah.

C2-4: Ja sit just se, että jos täs on ollu taustalla vielä se, et tää on ehkä ollu kiire saaha tää uutinen niinku ulos, mut *silti* [painottaen] se on käyttäny aikaa niinku tohon taustatyön tekemiseen noin paljon, ni se on kuitenki niinku hyvä juttu. Tai lisää just sitä luotettavuutta, sitten.
And then, if the background here is that they need to get this news out, but still *[with emphasis] they've used time, like, to do so much background work, then I think it's a good thing. Or that it adds to trustworthiness, then.*

In Study 3 I have operationalized fact checking as seeking additional primary sources, but it is possible some other audience members could accept secondary sources for this purpose. Regardless, some form of verification seems to be both appreciated and expected as a given by the audience. The tacit nature of this expectation is apparent in how the theme came up in the focus group discussions. Whenever the stimulus material mentioned fact-checking processes, the participants lauded them. When fact-checking was not mentioned (meaning that no such processes had taken place), the participants usually did not realize its absence and did not touch on the topic. This suggests that audiences assume news information to have been fact-checked, even if this is not explicitly stated in the news item (c.f. Kruikemeier & Lecheler, 2018).

In summary, the audience (18-28 year-old Finns) expects online journalism to be the result of original investigation, for it to be extensively and expertly sourced, and thoroughly verified. These expectations are quite high and may stem from unrealistic conception of what (online) journalistic work is like. One possible source of this misinformation is popular fiction, in which "we find a rather consistent, if mythical portrayal: the heroic image of the journalist defending the truth against the many dragons of darkness in the modern world" (Dahlgren, 1992, p. 1). As the following section will demonstrate, run-of-the-mill online journalism is unable to consistently meet these rather high demands.

4.3 Trustworthiness of online journalism's sourcing practices

Study 3 compared online journalists' observed sourcing practices (from Study 1 and Study 2) to their young adult audiences' expectations (from Study 2). The comparison shows most expectations go unmet.

Most notably, only 4 of the 36 analyzed news items met all four sourcing-related expectations (Study 3, pp. 8-9). These four items used high-credibility sources, did not rely on previously published media content, attempted to reach out to more than one involved source, and verified the information from a primary source. At the other end of the spectrum, two news items failed in all four thematic categories. Unfortunately, failing expectations was generally more common than meeting them: 17 items met only one of four expectations, and additional 9 met two out of four. Thus, the vast majority of news items failed at least half of the audience's sourcing-related expectations. The result is fairly consistent across the three newsrooms in the context of average expectation fulfilment rate (ranging from 41 to 50 per cent) and years (40 per cent in 2013 and 52 per cent in 2017). The news items' observed tendency to fail audience expectations is sufficient to answer the question over whether Finnish online journalism is sourced in a trustworthy manner as far as young Finnish adults are concerned (and the answer is "mostly not"). Before making any conclusions, it is illuminating to discuss the particular expectations in more detail.

The most frequently met expectation involved *Source Choice*, in other words the use of high-credibility sources. Most analyzed news items (30 out of 36) met this criterion. This was the case in all three newsrooms, with 75, 77 and 93 per cent of news items passing this test, respectively. As discussed in the previous section, this expectation is the least likely to conflict with online journalists' practices and heuristics. Relying on high-credibility sources is intuitive and often convenient for journalists, and the audience takes no issue with this practice.

In contrast, the expectations under the *Source Sufficiency* theme were rarely met - not even a quarter of any newsroom's items passed this test. The newsrooms' success does seem to have improved in this regard, as the average success rate rose from 11 per cent in 2013 to 30 per cent in 2017. It is still the worst performing expectation category for either year and for each newsroom. This suggests that even attempting to reach out to more than one involved party (as the expectation was operationalized) goes against the standard workflow of online journalism.

The use of already-published media content declined from 2013 to 2017, improving the newsrooms' collective average success rate in this regard from 38 to 60 per cent. In other words, in 2017 most news items no longer relied on *Other Media*. Comparison by newsroom suggests a common practice, where approximately half (from 43 to 50 per cent) of news items are original and approximately half borrow from either competitors' websites or the newsrooms' own archives. These sources are very easily accessible and require little to no cognitive strain in the form of trustworthiness assessment: colleagues from the same newsroom are trusted *per se*, and the use of competing media offers the possibility of shifting the blame for potential mistakes. While using *Other Media* has obvious advantages for online journalists, the audience views this practice negatively. Open attribution flags this transgression for audiences, while not attributing information to their sources is a different kind of expectation breach (as detailed in Study 2, pp. 19-20). Routinely using already published media content as a source is thus unadvisable, if the goal is to maintain audience trust.

As with the other three expectation categories, the success rates in the *Fact Checking* category improved from 2013 to 2017. Still, even in 2017 half of analyzed news items were unverified (compared to 77 per cent in 2013). As with *Source Sufficiency*, *Fact Checking* requires additional time and effort - and worse, its value is not apparent in the product. If a journalist consults several sources, they are at least able to add new information, viewpoints or quotes to their story. If verification succeeds, the news item requires no changes and can be published as planned; if verification debunks the initial information, the item will need to be altered or left unpublished. Unless specifically highlighted by journalists, audiences will perceive no difference between a verified and unverified news item. Spending limited time on fact checking might then be difficult for online journalists to justify, to both themselves and their employers. It is also possible that online journalists' conception of journalism has shifted towards an iterative, collaborative newsflow, wherein unverified information is later corrected through exposure to audiences' critical eye (e.g. Hermida, 2015; Joseph, 2011).

In summary, very few of the analyzed news items conformed to all or even most of the four sourcing-related expectations young Finnish adults have. This was the case in both 2013 and 2017, although the situation seems to have improved over those four years. The samples' sizes, however, prohibit drawing such a conclusion. Any possible upturn notwithstanding, the results suggest there is a wide chasm between the audience's image of, and expectations for, both online journalism and the actual practices of online journalism.

4.4 Trust, trustworthiness and journalism in an online era

As I have demonstrated in Study 3, the sourcing practices of online journalism do not conform to the audience's expectations. While young Finnish adults expect carefully and extensively sourced journalism, Finnish online journalists' practices are much more streamlined and less reflective. This means the audience's trust towards online journalism is liable to deflate if these realities became manifest. Unfortunately for journalists, the online environment is conducive to such a collapse.

Journalists have less control over their public image than before. As described by Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (2016), audiences rely on "folk theories of journalism" for their understanding of what journalism is and what it should be. These theories stem from audience members' experiences with journalism, but also from popular culture and rumors. This has been the case ever since the concept of journalism was formed, but the internet has facilitated a manifold increase in the amount and variety of input into these theories. An amateur writer in the 1950's may have called themself a journalist, but their ability to reach large audiences was limited - as was their impact on the public image of what "a journalist" is and does. Today, millions of self-styled journalists and journalism critics can contribute to the public understanding of journalism. These theories are able to disseminate far and wide over the internet, potentially globalizing originally local conceptions - and contestations. Consider, for example, the critique some American news outlets have faced over their coverage of the presidency of Donald Trump. The ongoing feud between the President and some American media has become a developing news event in its own right, covered around the world - which in turn has stoked claims of media bias against not only Trump but generally against Trump-minded politics. Both journalism and folk theories thereof are now easily transported across previously less permeable borders. A news item that was originally written for a small, specialized audience may be shared online to millions who are unaware of the original publication's context (e.g. political satire may be shared as outrageously biased news). Furthermore, most online news readers seem to be unable to recall the news source they reached through clicking a link, potentially increasing the confusion (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel & Shearer, 2016). This "context collapse" is not an online-exclusive phenomenon, but it certainly is exacerbated by the internet's reach (see Davis & Jurgenson, 2014 for an overview). All this contributes to making audiences' expectations towards a particular news item, journalist, outlet or even a medium ever more difficult to anticipate.

The online environment also offers audiences an accessible and wide-reaching platform to practice journalism critique and conduct their own investigations. Cross-checking news items with other outlets' coverage can easily reveal plagiarism and omissions. Even more extensive research is possible through online-accessible sources. Most audience members are not likely to be interested in double-checking journalists' work, but even one online-sleuth can be sufficient to call out a news outlet about a mistake. Depending on how acerbic the criticism is, a relatively small error may rise to become a symbol of journalism's failure. My research in Study 2 provides an example: A journalist had replicated a news item they had read from a competitor's website by interviewing the same sources on the same topic. From a purely informative viewpoint the resulting news items was no worse than the original, but the focus group I told of this process was disappointed. On this occasion, I the researcher, disclosed the journalist's transgression, but a keen-eyed reader could have guessed as much just by comparing the two news items. Getting caught for not upholding journalism's (perceived) commitments is more likely than ever.

As I observed above (in section 2.3), online journalism often lacks resources. Evidence of this is discussed further in Study 1 (pp. 213-215), but to summarize: the internet has an insatiable hunger for content, which is still difficult to monetize. For-profit news companies will have to compete for advertising revenue with corporate behemoths like Google or Facebook, which rely on algorithms or their users for value creation. Value chains starting from salaried journalists have a hard time maintaining sustainable profits. While in many places struggling with declining revenues, traditional media platforms (i.e. radio, television, print) still have better cost-to-profit ratios than online news. Ergo, online departments or online-only outlets will often have to make do with less resources - in other words, put out more content with less people. Theoretically publicly funded news outlets should be in a better position to cross-subsidize their online desks. One of the newsrooms that participated in this study, both in 2013 and 2017, is just such a public service - but its practices were very similar to its two, for-profit competitors (as shown by the results presented above and in Study 3). It is also possible that the online environment's affordances make it a tempting sector in which to minimize expenses. New technology offers many tools to spare resources or at least obscure the effects of overextension. Content syndication, user generated content, and "churning" agency copy, press releases and competitors' content into news can make even an understaffed news website appear feverishly productive. However, stoking audiences' expectations while being unable to meet them is an untenable position for journalists. Eventually the facade will topple, resulting in an implosion of audiences' trust towards online journalism. The shockwaves from such a crash will weaken as they spread outward, but their eventual reach and effects are unpredictable. The failure of one online journalist will reflect first on their employer, then on other online journalists and other online news outlets, then on journalists and journalism generally - maybe even denting our collective image of humanity in general (as per theorized in section 2.1.2). If audiences want traditional journalism (but online), they should not be offered online journalism masquerading as something else.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Theoretical and practical contributions of the thesis

Depending on the conceptualization, measuring either trust or trustworthiness is inaccurate at best and impossible at worst. Typical issues stem from imposing the researcher's concept of trust on the research participants (i.e. assuming expectations) and from failing to define trust (i.e. treating trust as an abstraction). These issues can be avoided by anchoring trust into the trustor's expectations and trustworthiness into the actions of the betrusted. This is precisely the approach my thesis adopts. Expectations-based concepts of trust and trustworthiness are highly practical in their simplicity and universality. Any conceivable interaction that might be intuitively described as involving trust or trustworthiness can be elaborated and explained through this model. This makes the concepts widely helpful in methodological design.

This thesis has less to offer in terms of theory building. Much has already been written about trust and its definitions, and more is likely to come. In the sarcastic words of Russell Hardin (1999, p. 26), trying to insist on a "true" definition of trust is "whistling nonsense", of which there still is "a grand tradition in social thought, a tradition that may be both older and more copious than any more nearly analytical tradition". I make no pretense regarding my work's contribution in this regard: my conception of trust is a simplified model based on the writings of others (c.f. Hardin 1999; Sztompka, 1999). Still, these expectations-based definitions of trust and trustworthiness have practical potential, which has to date largely been ignored.

Within the field of journalism studies, my research provides on many accounts confirmation of and updates to earlier findings. This is not the first time newsroom ethnography has described the strained working conditions of online journalists (e.g. Machill & Beiler, 2009), nor the first time surveys or interviews have mapped audiences' norms for journalism (e.g. Coleman, Anthony & Morrison, 2009). Few of these studies have taken place in Finland, especially in recent years, so in this regard my thesis may be taken as a rote filling in of a local research gap. However, studying both audience members' and journalists' preferences within a single study is rare (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2010, p. 422). To my knowledge, this is the first time both aspects have been integrated into a study of journalism's trustworthiness. The result of this analysis is quite striking: much of the online journalism published by some of Finland's most established news organizations is sourced in ways young Finnish adults find objectionable. This should be enough to spur further studies in this direction to confirm, expand and explain the finding. Beyond the field of journalism studies, this research offers a proof-of-concept of a methodology recommended by Stephen Coleman (2012, p. 37) for the study of trust. While the methods themselves still require development (especially in terms of scaling them for a larger scope), I consider the general logic of the project proven as viable.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, this study contributes to journalists' and audiences' mutual understanding. Through these findings journalists are able to learn what young adult Finns expect from online journalism, and audiences can gain insights into the realities of mainstream Finnish online journalism. Realism is the basic requirement for having one's expectations met, and meeting those expectations will be much easier if the betrusted knows what they are. I hope these results will also help journalists to realize how oblivious their audiences can be over things journalists themselves consider obvious. For example (presented also in Study 2), some audience members were surprised to learn of press releases and that sources may initiate contact in order to pitch stories. Other misconceptions are likely to exist, if such mundane parts of journalistic work come as surprises. This makes practicing journalism akin to walking through a minefield: an unsuspecting disclosure of seemingly standard procedure might trigger an outcry. Any belief that audiences know journalism thoroughly and by consumption condone it may turn out to be naïve. This gives journalists and journalistic organizations an impetus to develop a more intimate understanding with their audiences, not only through academic studies but also by ways of market research and public relations. This need is evident in data from the United States, where audiences' trust in journalism is in decline (e.g. Hanitzsch, Van Dalen & Steindl, 2018) and where journalists and audiences have different ideas of what "proper journalism" is like (Willnat, Weaver & Wilhoit, 2019).

5.2 Limitations of the study

There are several limitations to the study at hand that deserve discussion. Most significantly, it is limited by its scope - and in more ways than one. Over its different phases, this research has involved a little over 100 news items, 21 journalists, 7 newsrooms, and 36 audience members. My efforts of systematic, purposive sampling notwithstanding, the samples are small and there is a chance that my results are skewed by some unidentified factor. Even if this was not the case, these results would only represent a part of Finnish online journalism (albeit a significant one) and a particular Finnish population segment (i.e. young adults). Of course, what young Finnish adults think of mainstream Finnish online journalism is interesting and useful information in itself, but generalizing these findings beyond this particular context is impossible. Finland is an extreme (although not an outlier) case of news media trust among audiences (Digital News Report, 2018) with a “democratic corporatist” media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), strong albeit embattled tradition of widespread newspaper readership (e.g. Nordenstreng & Nieminen, 2017), high internet penetration and digital literacy (Manninen 2018), and an impressive track record as a champion of freedom of expression (Reporters Without Borders, 2019). These and countless other factors will have influenced Finns’ expectations for journalism, likely making them -if not unique- at least idiosyncratic. Indeed, removing any understanding of trust and trustworthiness from their specific context will render that understanding moot (as explained in section 2.1.2). This context has also temporal qualities, meaning that these findings have a limited shelf-life: even though Finns’ expectations for journalism seem to be fairly consistent over time (see Study 2, p. 20), they cannot be relied on to stay unchanged indefinitely.

This study’s scope is also limited by its narrow definition of journalism. I have investigated individual news items and the processes behind them, which can be considered the core of journalism and journalistic praxis. Nonetheless, this core does not fully capture journalism as it exists in society. Things like social media presence, comment moderation, letters to the editor, editorial opinion, material presence (e.g. location of offices) and even journalists’ conduct in personal life are all part of how journalism interacts with and is experienced by audience members. Furthermore, journalism can have value beyond its journalistic quality, for example as a form of entertainment. These are all things that can involve audience expectations and thus contribute to the level and nature of trust audiences have in journalism. This thesis has demonstrated what sourcing practices young Finnish adults expect from mainstream Finnish online journalism, but it has barely scratched the surface of their expectations towards journalism as a whole. Looking beyond individual news items will be methodologically difficult, but necessary to fully understand audiences’ trust or distrust in journalism. This is an important caveat to practitioners reading this thesis: what is presented above (and in Study 2) is not a comprehensive guide to being trustworthy journalists - not even in the very confined context of young Finnish adults and mainstream Finnish online journalism.

5.3 Directions for future research

My thesis has looked at the trustworthiness of sourcing practices in a particular context (mainstream Finnish online journalism and Finnish young adults). A natural direction to expand this research would be to replicate the study with a different focus (e.g. topic selection) or within a different context (e.g. Swedish print journalism and Swedish pensioners). Furthermore, varying one of the two contextual factors would allow for a comparative element. These kinds of comparative studies could confirm or debunk many prolific hypotheses regarding differences between types of journalism (e.g. online vs. print) and demographic segments (e.g. young vs. old).

As I have remarked above, the results of this study are only tentative due to limitations of scope. Hence, a large-scale replication of the current research would be useful. Considering how laborious my methods were, it might be also be productive to search methodological innovations. New methods, through which similar analysis could be conducted while expending less effort per data point, would surely be welcomed by scholars beyond the field of journalism studies. Failing this, more traditional audience research or newsroom ethnographies could still be used along with my findings to triangulate the fact of the matter. At the very least the study of trust and trustworthiness in journalism should continue with the aim of establishing A) what are the audiences' expectations for journalism B) if and how they are changing, and C) how journalistic praxis compares to them. An ideal situation would entail intermittently updating this situational awareness, so that journalists might react accordingly - and so maintain their audiences' trust.

SUMMARY

Introduction

Journalism is important to modern societies: it provides citizens with useful information about parts of the world to which they have no direct access. This inaccessibility also means audiences have little chance to verify the news they read, listen and watch. In other words, audiences have no choice but to *trust* journalism – or disregard it entirely. The question, then, is: should they?

Finns are largely trusting of mainstream news media. Even the least trusting population segment (young adults) are more trusting than most people in other countries are. (Newman et al., 2018). This suggests Finnish mainstream news media are of particularly high quality, or that Finns have a particularly rosy impression of them.

So far there have been no studies that could resolve whether the media is worthy of their audiences' trust, i.e. *trustworthy*. This is the wider research gap my thesis aims to fill, with a specific focus on young Finnish adults (ages 18-28), mainstream Finnish online journalism, and journalistic sourcing practices. My research questions are:

RQ1: Is the sourcing of Finnish online journalism trustworthy to young Finnish adults?
RQ1a: What are the sourcing practices in Finnish online journalism?
RQ1b: What are young Finnish adults' expectations for sourcing practices in Finnish online journalism?

RQ2: What is the role of trust in sourcing Finnish online journalism?

This focus targets an interesting intersection of factors. First, the younger Finns are, the more they rely on online news and the less they trust mainstream news media (Ibid). Second, mainstream newsrooms produce the most widely consumed online news and thus contribute most to the public image of journalism. Third, sourcing is one of the most opaque yet important journalistic processes – thus requiring significant audience trust. This research focus, then, can help detect divergences between expectations and realities that most threated mainstream online journalism's status in its audiences' eyes.

Theory

The concepts of "trust" and "trustworthiness" are at the heart of this thesis. Defining them beyond their commonsensical meanings is necessary, especially since the terms' vernacular use is often inaccurate.

At the core of trust, are (positive) expectations. These expectations must be reasonable (in that they are based on a perceived commitment), aimed at a contingent actor, and entail a risk for the person holding those expectations. These conditions exist in most literature on trust, although in different terminologies and levels of elaboration. If any of these conditions were not met, the situation would be better described as something other than “trust”, for example “hope” or “confidence”.

It is clear from the above definition that trust (or lack thereof) is the proper concept for discussing journalism: journalists are human and thus their actions are contingent, and trusting journalism certainly involves risks for audiences. Whether or not the audiences’ expectations for journalism are “reasonable” (as defined above) can vary, but it is likely most people will reserve unreasonable expectations to other (e.g. religious) contexts.

Trust is important to human social life because it allows interaction with less (or no) guarantees. Consider, for example, a newspaper reader who does not expect journalists to be truthful in their reporting. To stay informed about local politics, the skeptic would have to double-check everything they read in the paper, perhaps by attending town hall meetings, interviewing political candidates and polling voters in person. In many cases, a layperson would be unable to verify everything. Distrusting the newspaper’s information would equal dismissing the benefits it provides, be it better voting decisions or livelier chats at the water cooler. Trusting other people and abstractions they constitute, then, is highly beneficial – but only as long as the recipients of trust are worthy.

My definition of “trustworthiness” is very straightforward, even literal. This is a departure from much of scholarly literature, in which trustworthiness is often conflated with or incorporated into “credibility” (e.g. Hovland, Janis & Kelley 1953). Simply put, in this thesis an actor is trustworthy, when it meets the trust-constituting expectations a person (or a group of people) have for it. In this case, the focus is on the expectations young Finnish adults have for the sourcing practices of mainstream Finnish online journalism.

To summarize: people will benefit from trusting trustworthy actors. Whether an actor is trustworthy depends on what is expected of it and whether those expectations are met. Thus, investigating trustworthiness must include both the study of expectations and performance.

Methodology

This thesis consists of three individual studies. The first study investigates the performance (of mainstream Finnish online journalism) and the second expectations (young adult Finns have for it). The third study compares practices to expectations to evaluate the trustworthiness of mainstream Finnish online journalism’s sourcing practices.

To gather information on online journalists’ practices, I conducted ethnographic observations at seven Finnish newsrooms. I accompanied volunteer online journalists by sitting next to them at their desk, observing their work and taking detailed notes (e.g. on which websites they visited). I interviewed each participating journalist after a previously agreed-upon observation period. I asked them to explain their work process for each news item they had completed, using my observation notes to elicit elaboration on otherwise neglected details. I conducted this research in two waves, in 2013 and 2017. Altogether, this study involved 21 journalists and captured the production processes of over 100 news items.

To investigate what young Finnish adults (ages 18-28) expect from Finnish online journalism, I conducted a series of experimental focus-group interviews. I prepared a set of stimuli by printing out a selection of news items the production of which I had observed. I paired each item with a detailed, written description of how that news item had been produced (e.g. recounting sources and the time spent on the item). I recruited nine focus groups representing different socio-economic groups, each comprising 3 or 4 participants (totaling 34 participants). The groups were asked to read and discuss three news item printouts, each from a different mainstream news outlet. After soliciting initial evaluations, I presented the groups with details on the production processes of the news items. The participants' subsequent reactions revealed tacit expectations this audience segment has for journalism's hidden processes. A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts identified 18 distinct expectations, four of which related to sourcing.

To assess the trustworthiness of the sourcing practices in mainstream, Finnish online journalism, I compared the audience's sourcing-related expectations to the sourcing practices I had observed. I selected a sample of news items (n=36) from three major newsrooms and both waves of fieldwork. I analyzed the items' sourcing processes against criteria I based on the audience's sourcing-related expectations, scoring the news items either as "passing" or "failing" a particular expectation.

Conclusions

This thesis' findings can be divided into three: they describe the sourcing practices of Finnish online journalists, describe young Finnish adults' expectations for mainstream Finnish online journalism in general, and reveals whether mainstream Finnish online journalism's sourcing practices are trustworthy to young Finnish adults.

First, Finnish online journalists work in restrictive conditions. Their work is piecemeal and frequently interrupted, and they rarely leave their desk. Most importantly, online journalists work fast and through highly streamlined processes. Use of pre-produced material is common and original investigation rare. These findings are unsurprising, as they confirm earlier studies from both Finland and other countries (e.g. Juntunen, 2011; Quandt, 2008). When selecting sources, online journalists base their decisions on a handful of outspoken rationales, or *trust discourses*. Only some imply trust in the source; online journalists also use sources they distrust, or whose trustworthiness is in doubt.

Second, young Finnish adults have surprisingly conventional expectations for mainstream Finnish online journalism. Traditional journalistic virtues, such as objectivity, comprehensiveness and "hard news" values still hold strong. In terms of sourcing, the young adult audience expect original investigation, highly credible sources, reaching out to different "sides" of a story, and verification of information.

Third and last, the observed sourcing practices in mainstream Finnish online journalism do not conform to the young adult audience's expectations. Most of the analyzed news items failed most of the investigated expectations. Only the expectation of high-credibility sources was more often met than not. In other words, *this type of journalism is not trustworthy to this audience segment*.

Above findings are worrying. They imply young adult Finns' trust in mainstream Finnish online journalism rests upon misconceptions. They expect journalism to be something it is not. Perhaps these expectations were excessive to begin with – unreachable ideals originally meant as guiding principles rather than par for the course. Regardless, mainstream Finnish online journalism appears to be in a perilous situation: if audiences were to discover its true nature, their trust could collapse.

The matter requires urgent resolution, as the online environment is particularly conducive to revealing journalism's former trade secrets. The internet makes it easy for readers to investigate a news story's origins, conduct their own research, and disseminate their critique. It will be difficult for journalists to demand audiences' trust, if their inability to uphold that trust is obvious.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Johdanto

Journalismi on tärkeää moderneille yhteiskunnille, koska se tarjoaa kansalaisille hyödyllistä tietoa asioista, joihin heillä ei ole suoraa kosketusta. Tämä etäisyys myös tarkoittaa, ettei yleisön ole mahdollista varmistaa kuluttamansa journalismin laatua. Toisin sanoen, yleisö voi vain *luottaa* journalismiin – tai sivuuttaa sen tyystin. Kysymys kuuluukin: miten heidän kannattaisi toimia?

Suomalaiset pääasiassa luottavat valtavirtaiseen uutismediaan. Jopa vähiten luottavaiset yleisöryhmät (nuoret aikuiset) luottavat uutismediaan enemmän kuin keskimääräinen väestö muissa maissa. (Newman ym., 2018). Tästä voisi päätellä suomalaisen valtavirtamedian olevan erityisen laadukasta, tai suomalaisilla olevan poikkeuksellisen ruusuinen kuva siitä.

Tutkimus ei ole toistaiseksi voinut osoittaa, onko media yleisönsä luottamuksen arvoinen, eli *luotettava*. Tämä tutkimusaukko on väitöstutkimukseni laajempi kohde. Erityisesti tutkimukseni kohdistuu nuoriin (18-28-vuotiaisiin) suomalaisaikuisiin, valtavirtaiseen suomalaiseen verkkojournalismiin, sekä journalismin lähdekäytäntöihin. Tutkimuskysymykseni ovat:

TK1: Onko suomalainen verkkojournalismi nuorten suomalaisaikuisten kannalta luotettavasti lähteytettyä?
TK1a: Millaisia ovat suomalaisen verkkojournalismin lähdekäytännöt?
TK1b: Mitä nuoret suomalaisaikuiset odottavat suomalaisen verkkojournalismin lähdekäytännöiltä?

TK2: Mikä on luottamuksen rooli suomalaisen verkkojournalismin lähteyttämisessä?

Tämä tutkimusfokus osuu eri tekijöiden mielenkiintoiseen leikkauspisteeseen. Ensiksin suomalaiset käyttävät sitä enemmän verkkomediaa mitä nuorempia he ovat – mutta myös luottavat valtavirtamediaan vähemmän (Ibid). Toiseksi, valtavirtaiset toimitukset tuottavat suosituimmat verkkouutiset ja siten vaikuttavat eniten yleisön mielikuvaan journalismista. Kolmanneksi, lähteyttäminen on yksi läpinäkymättömimmistä mutta samalla tärkeimmistä journalismin työvaiheista. Keskittymällä näiden tekijöiden risteyskohtaan tutkimus voi tunnistaa nykyjournalismin tärkeimpiä ongelmakohtia: yleisön odotusten ja toimittajien työtapojen ristiriitoja, jotka eniten uhkaavat valtavirtaisen verkkojournalismin arvovaltaa.

Teoria

"Luottamuksen" ja "luotettavuuden" käsitteet ovat väitöstutkimukseni keskiössä. Käsitteiden huolellinen määrittely on siis tarpeen, semminkin kun niiden puhekielinen käyttö on usein harhaanjohtavaa.

Luottamuksen ytimen muodostavat (positiiviset) odotukset. Näiden odotusten tulee olla järkiperäisiä (eli koettuun sitoumukseen perustuvia), kohdistua vapaatahtoiseen toimijaan, ja sisältää odottajaan kohdistuva riski. Nämä ehdot esiintyvät käytännössä kaikessa luottamukseen liittyvässä tutkimuskirjallisuudessa, joskin niiden esitystavat ja –tarkkuudet vaihtelevat. Jos yksikin ehdoista jäisi täyttymättä, ei odotus voisi johtaa luottamukseen, vaan esimerkiksi "toivoon" tai "luottavaisuuteen".

Edellä esitetyn perusteella on selvää, että luottamus (tai sen puute) on journalismin kannalta oleellinen käsite. Ihmisinä toimittajilla on vapaa tahto ja siten heidän toimintansa luottajan hallitsemattomissa. On myös ilmeistä, että journalismiin luottaminen muodostaa yleisölle riskin. Se, onko yleisön luottamus journalismia kohtaan yllä kuvaillulla tavalla "järkiperäistä" voi vaihdella yksilöstä toiseen – mutta todennäköisesti ei-järkiperäinen luottamus rajoittuu muihin, esimerkiksi uskonnollisiin konteksteihin.

Luottamus on tärkeää ihmisten väliselle kanssakäymiselle, koska se mahdollistaa yhteistyön vähemmillä takuilla. Ajatellaanpa esimerkiksi sanomalehden lukijaa, joka ei odota toimittajien pitäytyvän totuudessa. Pysyäkseen ajan tasalla paikallispolitiikasta, epäilijän tulisi varmistaa uutisten sisältö henkilökohtaisesti, esimerkiksi osallistumalla kunnanvaltuuston kokouksiin, haastattelemalla vaalien ehdokkaita tai järjestämällä puolueiden kannatuskyselyjä. Monessa tapauksessa maallikon olisi mahdotonta tarkistaa kaikkia tietoja. Epäluottamus lehtitietoja kohtaan tarkoittaisi siis niiden hyötyjen menettämistä, oli kyse sitten paremmista äänestyspäätöksistä tai kiinnostavammista kahvipöytäkeskusteluista. Ihmisiin ja heistä muodostuviin kokonaisuuksiin luottaminen on siis erittäin hyödyllistä – mutta vain siinä tapauksessa, että toimijat ovat luottamuksen arvoisia eli luotettavia.

Käytän väitöstutkimuksessani "luotettavuudesta" (engl. trustworthiness) hyvin suoraviivaista määritelmää. Suomeksi ilmaisu on helppo ymmärtää sen puhekielisen merkityksen kautta. Sanan englanninkielinen muoto "trustworthy" on hankalampi, sillä osa tutkimuskirjallisuudesta sekoittaa sen uskottavuuden (engl. credibility) kanssa (esim. Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). Minä kuitenkin tarkoitan luotettavuudella yksinkertaisesti sitä, että luottamuksen kohde täyttää siihen kohdistuvat odotukset. Luottamuksen kohde on tällöinen luottamuksen arvoinen – englanniksi siis kirjaimellisesti "worthy of trust". Tässä väitöstutkimuksessa kyse on nimenomaan nuorten suomalaisaikuisten valtavirtaisten suomalaisen verkkojournalismin lähdekäytäntöihin kohdistuvista odotuksista.

Tiivistäen: ihmiset hyötyvät luottaessaan luotettaviin ihmisiin ja kokonaisuuksiin. Toimijan luotettavuus puolestaan riippuu siihen kohdistuvista odotuksista ja niiden täyttymisestä. Luotettavuuden selvittäminen vaatii siis sekä odotusten että toiminnan tutkimista.

Metodologia

Tämä väitöstutkimus koostuu kolmesta osatutkimuksesta. Niistä ensimmäinen tutkii (valtavirtaisen suomalaisen verkkojournalismin) toimintaa ja toinen (nuorten suomalaisaikuisten siihen kohdistuvia) odotuksia. Kolmas osatutkimus vertaa toimintaa odotuksiin ja tuottaa siten arvion (valtavirtaisen suomalaisen verkkojournalismin lähdekäytäntöjen) luotettavuudesta.

Tutkin verkkojournalistien toimintaa etnografisen tarkkailun keinoin. Seurasin vapaaehtoisten verkkotoimittajien työtä istumalla heidän kanssaan työpisteellä ja tekemällä yksityiskohtaisia muistiinpanoja heidän työstään (esimerkiksi heidän vierailemistaan verkkosivuista). Haastattelin jokaista tarkkailtua toimittajaa heti sovitun tarkkailujakson jälkeen. Pyysin heitä kuvailemaan ja selittämään jokaisen valmiiksi saamansa jutun työprosessin. Tarkkailumuistiinpanojeni avulla pystyin ottamaan puheeksi myös sellaisia työvaiheita, jotka toimittajat olisivat muuten sivuuttaneet haastattelussa. Toteutin tämän tutkimuksen kahdessa aallossa vuosina 2013 ja 2017. Siihen osallistui yhteensä 21 verkkotoimittajaa seitsemästä toimituksesta, ja aineisto kattaa yli 100 uutisjutun työprosessit.

Tutkin nuorten (18-28-vuotiaiden) suomalaisaikuisten odotuksia verkkojournalismia kohtaan kokeellisin fokusryhmähaastatteluin. Valmistelin haastatteluja varten herätemateriaalia, joka koostui eräiden tarkkailemieni verkkouutisten tulosteista sekä niiden työprosesseja kuvaavista tulosteista. Prosessikuvaukset yksilöivät esimerkiksi kuhunkin uutiseen käytetyt lähteet ja siihen kuluneen ajan. Haastatteluihin osallistui yhdeksän 3-4 osallistujan ryhmää (n=34). Ryhmät edustivat laajalti eri sosioekonomisia väestöryhmiä. Aluksi ryhmät lukivat kolme eri lähteistä olevaa verkkouutista ja keskustelivat niistä. Ensivaikutelmien jälkeen annoin ryhmien luettavaksi prosessikuvaukset ja pyysin ryhmiä keskustelemaan niistä. Osallistujien reaktiot aiemmin näkymättömiin toimitustyön vaiheisiin paljastivat tämän yleisöryhmän sanoittamattomia odotuksia journalismia kohtaan. Litteroitujen haastattelutallenteiden teema-analyysi tunnisti 18 erillistä odotusta, joista neljä liittyi lähteyttämiseen.

Arvioin valtavirtaisen suomalaisen verkkojournalismin lähdekäytänteiden luotettavuutta vertaamalla havaintojani toimitustyöstä ja yleisön odotuksia. Valitsin 36 uutisen otoksen, jonka olin kerännyt kolmesta valtavirtaa edustavasta toimituksesta vuosina 2013 ja 2017. Johdin yleisön lähteyttämistä koskevista odotuksista kriteeristön, johon vertasin uutisten työprosesseja. Jokainen uutinen siis joko ″täytti″ tai ″petti″ odotukset neljässä lähteyttämiseen liittyvässä odotuskategoriassa.

Johtopäätökset

Tämän väitöstutkimuksen tulokset voidaan jakaa kolmeen osaan: ne kuvailevat suomalaisten verkkotoimittajien lähdekäytäntöjä, kuvailevat nuorten suomalaisaikuisten odotuksia valtavirtaista suomalaista verkkojournalismia kohtaan, sekä paljastavat ovatko valtavirtaisen suomalaisen verkkojournalismin lähdekäytännöt luotettavia nuorten suomalaisaikuisten kannalta.

Ensiksi, suomalaiset verkkotoimittajat työskentelevät rajoittuneissa olosuhteissa. Heidän työnsä on rikkonaista ja työpöydän ääreen sidottua. Heidän työlleen leimaavinta on kiire ja työprosessien virtaviivaisuus. Valmiiksi tuotetun materiaalin käyttö on yleistä, kun taas omalle tutkimustyölle jää vain vähän aikaa. Nämä havainnot eivät ole yllättäviä, sillä ne lähinnä vahvistavat aiemmin Suomesta ja muualta maailmasta saatuja tuloksia (esim. Juntunen, 2011; Quandt, 2008). Lähteitä valitessaan verkkotoimittajat perustavat päätöksensä pieneen joukkoon tunnustettuja järkeilytapoja eli *luottamusdiskursseja*. Vain osa näistä diskursseista nojaa lähteitä kohtaan tunnettuun luottamukseen; verkkotoimittajat käyttävät myös lähteitä, joihin eivät luota tai joiden luotettavuutta epäilevät.

Toiseksi, nuorten suomalaisaikuisten odotukset valtavirtaista suomalaista verkkojournalismia kohtaan ovat varsin tavanomaisia. Perinteiset journalistiset arvot, kuten objektiivisuus, kattavuus, ja ”kovat” uutiskriteerit ovat yhä arvossaan. Lähteyttämisen osalta nuori aikuisyleisö odottaa itsenäistä tutkimustyötä, uskottavia lähteitä, jutun eri ”puolien” kuulemista, sekä tietojen tarkistamista. Kolmanneksi, valtavirtaisessa suomalaisessa verkkojournalismissa havaitsemani lähdekäytännöt eivät vastaa nuorten suomalaisaikuisten odotuksia. Suurin osa analysoimistani uutisista petti suurimman osan odotuksista. Vain uskottavien lähteiden käyttöä koskeva odotus täyttyi useammin kuin tuli petetyksi. Toisin sanoen, *tämän tyyppinen journalismi ei ole tämän yleisön kannalta luotettavaa*.

Yllä mainitut havainnot ovat huolestuttavia. Niiden perusteella näyttää siltä, että nuorten suomalaisaikuisten luottamus valtavirtaista suomalaista verkkojournalismia kohtaan perustuu virheellisille käsityksille. He odottavat journalismin olevan jotain muuta kuin mitä se on. Kenties odotukset olivat alun perinkin ylimitoitettuja – pikemminkin suuntaa-antavia ihanteita kuin arkisen työn rajaehtoja. Joka tapauksessa valtavirtainen suomalainen verkkojournalismi on nyt vaarallisessa tilanteessa: jos yleisöt havaitsevat sen todellisen luonteen, on heidän luottamuksensa vaarassa romahtaa.

Tilanne vaatii pikaista korjausliikettä, sillä entiset ammattisalaisuudet paljastuvat ja leviävät helposti internetissä. Yleisön on aiempaa helpompaa jäljittää uutisen alkuperä, tutkia tapahtunutta itse, sekä saattaa kritiikkinsä muiden tietoon. Toimittajien on vaikea vaatia yleisöiltään luottamusta, mikäli on ilmiselvää, ettei luottamusta tulla kunnioittamaan.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

SOURCING PRACTICES IN ONLINE JOURNALISM: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE FORMATION OF TRUST IN AND THE USE OF JOURNALISTIC SOURCES

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Sourcing practices in online journalism: An ethnographic study of the formation of trust in and the use of journalistic sources

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Abstract:	Arguably one of the most important factors of journalistic quality is careful source selection. Studies on online journalism have revealed working conditions which may lead to poor sourcing practices. This article seeks to answer the following questions: What sources do online journalists use, and how do they rationalize their sourcing practices? A total of 17 Finnish online journalists in 7 newsrooms were observed and interviewed over their practices of source searching, evaluation, and use. The study revealed five distinctive rationales of source use, which I call trust discourses: the ideological, the pragmatic, the cynically pragmatic, the consensual, and the contextual trust. Different trust discourses are associated with different source types, influences, and forms and degrees of source critique. The results reveal-among other things-the online journalists' largely unquestioned trust of official sources and the cynical re-purposing of content from other media. The study provides accurate first hand observations on the sourcing practices and the results thereof of online journalists, and provides a viable framework for the further study of sourcing practices in online journalism.

Sourcing practices in online journalism:
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Journal of Media Practice

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KEYWORDS: Online journalism, trust, news sources, source credibility, sourcing practice, trust discourses

Introduction

More information than ever is made available to the public, yet making sense of it has never been more difficult – a well-worn cliché which still rings true. The near-universal, near-ubiquitous reach of the internet exposes any net-goer to a wealth of both information and disinformation. Much of the nonsense can be identified as such with even the most rudimentary media literacy skills, but also well disguised misinformation abounds online. Some of it is spread in good faith by gossiping social media users, some is planted by mischievous pranksters, and some is purposefully propagated by partisan activists, agents of terrorist organisations, or even sovereign states.

In a maelstrom of contradictory accounts capable investigators and explainers are in high demand. For some time now this task of sense-making has been suggested as the new *raison d'être* for professional journalism – in contrast to its earlier occupation of putting out carefully hand-picked assortments of information (e.g. Singer 2006). Unfortunately, journalists themselves are subject to the same dangers that threaten the public at large. Are they able to navigate their way through the rip tides of the online information environment and produce trustworthy content for others? The currently available evidence suggests no: online newsrooms appear to be understaffed, overworked, and dependent on press releases and other media.

What truly goes on within the walls of newsrooms, or online newsrooms for that matter, is woefully under-researched. To alleviate the issues supposedly plaguing online newsrooms we must identify the problems and their root causes. The underlying assumption of this article is that online journalists' sourcing practices differ from other journalists due to the specific conditions of online journalism. In this study I focus on the sourcing practices in Finnish online newsrooms. I begin by reviewing the aforementioned context: the distinctive features of online sources and the working conditions of online journalists. I will then present the findings of an empirical, ethnographic study conducted in seven Finnish online newsrooms in early 2013. As a result, five distinctive rationales to source use and evaluation were discovered.

The internet as a journalistic environment

The internet is a convenient resource for the overburdened journalist. Its use as an information source, however, bears many risks. Much of online content is dubious in nature, and sometimes even journalists get led astray (Klinenberg 2005, 56; Metzger 2007). This is not to say that traditional sources would not be wrought with similar problems; the internet merely lowers the access threshold for those seeking to mislead, and makes it easy to veil the source's true nature.

These issues were identified from early on, and much debate has since followed. John Fritch and Robert Cromwell (2000, 500) formulated the core problem roughly as follows: information published online is not always accompanied by sufficient information on its author, and even if said information was given, the disclosure could be a lie, and because online publishing is open to practically everyone, the chances of running into a hoax are higher online than in other forms of media. Even information published with pure intent can mislead readers, if they are unable to put the source's motivation and expertise into context (Greer 2003, 12; Metzger, Flanagin and Medders 2010, 414–415). The issues are common to all media, but in the case of online media their risks are amplified by the sheer volume of available content combined with the lack of consistent gatekeeping. Empirical findings confirm that the online environment bears risks that are, if not exclusive, at least distinctive to it. For example, news based solely on citations from other media (all too common online) are problematic: inattentive readers will evaluate the information based on the proximate source (i.e. the source that the information is received from), rather than on the originating source (Kang et. al. 2011).

Problems associated with the online environment are not insurmountable, or even fully new – rather they are variations of age-old issues relating to trust and trustworthiness. A number of procedures and routines have been proposed to help both journalists and laypeople to exercise proper source criticism online. However, the existence of media literacy does not directly translate into the exercise of it. In practice most internet users do not verify the information they assume, and even those who do, usually do so with the least possible effort (Flanagin and Metzger 2000, 531–532; Metzger 2007, 2089). Despite recognizing the dangers, most internet users form trust to online sources fast, and base their trust on only few factors (Greer 2003, 26; Lucassen and Schraagen 2012, 1). Some people claim to verify online information they use, even when they do not (Flanagin and Metzger 2007, 334). In short, the issues related to online sources are widely recognized, but this is not reflected by practice.

Scant research has been done on journalists in this respect. Does the same apply to them as what applies to the larger public? So far the question has not been answered, but some hypotheses can be made: Since basic media literacy skills should have saturated most societal strata (at least in high internet usage countries, such as Finland), the crucial question is whether or not the safeguards are implemented. Critical source analysis requires motivation, which is contingent on many factors such as personal bias over the topic, personal disposition to analytical thinking, and the need for information. (Dochterman and Stamp 2010a, 2010b; Metzger, 2007; Vraga et. al. 2011; Wathen and Burkell 2001).

These, and many other sources of influence are structured in the *hierarchy of influences* model compiled by Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese (1996). The model categorizes five different levels of influence sources that can affect the journalistic end product: the ideological, the extramedia, the organisational, the routine, and the personal level. The model is theoretical in nature, and lends itself to contemporary analysis even despite the fact that it was originally published in a very different media landscape. For example, disposition to analytical thinking is an influence source residing on the personal level of the hierarchy, while the need for information can be seen as an organisational influence, if hurry is the result of an understaffed department. The hierarchy is created by the flow of influence through the levels. Ideology is pervasive throughout society, including extramedia conditions such as competition, which affects the organisational level – for example the amount of journalists a newspaper can afford to hire. The number of journalists affects, among other things, the way their work routines are set up. Finally, the streams of influence culminate in the work produced by the journalist, who adds his or her personal touch to the mix according to personal knowledge, interest, passion, conscience, belief and whim (Tanikawa 2016). To understand why a journalistic product is what it is, one must look at the influences under which it was produced. There are reasons to assume that the influences in online journalism are different from other media.

After the internet's introduction to the public in mid-1990's it was laden with great expectations of improving journalism. Not only did it offer new, practical tools for information gathering, but also a more flexible medium for publishing. Some of the more utopian beliefs held that the opportunity to publish at will would rid journalists of deadlines and lead to more patient journalism (e.g. Pavlik 2001). Since then changes have indeed taken place, but not as fast or as positive as had been hoped (Quandt 2008a; Scott 2005).

One of the most prominent ideas of journalism's future was that of the multimedia journalist (e.g. Deuze 2001, 15; 2004). Journalism would, for large parts, be produced by journalists detached from traditional newsroom hierarchies. They would produce and edit text, audio, and video, maybe even create code and mash up different forms of media. (Quandt 2008b, 95; e.g. Dua 2009). Reality has not met these expectations. Even though experimental takes on journalism exist, most online journalism is conventional. Be it text, audio or video, online journalism treads the trails blazed a long time ago by pioneers of newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. (Deuze 2003, 219; Quandt and Singer 2009, 137; Quandt 2008a, 718–720; Scott 2005, 110). The reason to this disconnection between the near-infinite possibilities and the modest progress so far is unclear. Journalists may be lacking technical skills, or newsrooms may be optimizing their output to the conventional tastes of the public (Brannon 2008, 109–111; Domingo 2008, 115; Quandt and Singer 2009, 137). Or it could be that the realities of online news work prevent resource intensive experiments.

The internet has, nonetheless, expanded and replaced parts of the journalists' toolkit. It is used to seek information and contacts, and stay in touch with sources. In many ways, the internet is used in very similar manner as earlier tools of the trade (Quandt 2008b, 95). The internet has streamlined existing production models rather than revolutionized them. The increase of productivity has been realized as *more* products, instead of *better* products. Time is of the essence, and with no temporal or spatial limits to content, there's never time to waste – any excess could be put toward creating more content. In addition, online newsrooms are expected to react to developing news stories on a very short notice. In practice this requires the constant monitoring of, for example, e-mail and competitors' websites (Granado 2011; Quandt, 2008b, Witschge 2013). Today, one might add various social media as something to monitor. As a result online journalists are extremely busy and tied to their desks (Brennen 2009, Juntunen 2009; Quandt 2008b; Scott 2005). These working conditions force online journalists to rely heavily on the sources most conveniently available to them. These include press releases, news websites, wire services, and content produced by affiliated media outlets. (Colson and Heinderyckx 2008, 144; Granado 2011; Juntunen 2011; Klinenberg 2005; Scott 2005).

The conditions described above are problematic for what might be generally referred to as 'journalistic quality'. The reliance on convenient sources allows non-journalistic actors and motivations to further influence the journalistic product. Earlier studies indicate that online journalists are not blind to the issue, but rather frustrated with their inability to uphold their own standards of quality and independence (Gladney, Shapiro and Castaldo 2007; Juntunen 2011; Mitchelstein and Boczkowksi 2009; Quandt and Singer 2009; Strömbäck, Karlsson and Hopmann 2012; Witschge 2013; c.f. Colson and Heindryckx 2008, 150). As a result, journalists in general believe errors of various kinds are more prevalent in online news than in other forms of journalism (Cassidy 2007, Rusila 2013). Some journalists appear to accept and advocate the change of standards online (Lee and Treadwell 2013; Singer 2006; Reinardy 2010; Robinson 2009) while many still prefer to stick with tradition (Fortunati et. al. 2009).

The issues mentioned above do not suggest that online journalists are incompetent, or incapable of exercising proper source critique. However, the described conditions give reason to assume that online journalists are at a heightened risk of using sources that are fraudulent, distorted or inaccurate. Hence I put forward the following questions:

RQ1: *What sources do online journalists use?*

RQ2: *Why do online journalists use the sources they do?*

Method

The question of *why* online journalists choose to use certain sources is vital to the evaluation of their journalistic process. First, however, we must know *what* sources are being used and what are not. This is both the logical and the chronological structure of this study. The research method can be described as ethnographic. The research consisted of periods of observation followed by semi-structured interviews with the observation subjects, Finnish online journalists.

Newsroom ethnography tradition is sometimes divided into two waves. The first wave, it is said, rose in the 1970s and broke in the following decade. Researchers such as Gaye Tuchman and Herbert Gans were some of the most prominent names of the trend. Describing this strand of research Simon Cottle (2000) called for a second wave of newsroom ethnography. Chris Paterson (2008, 3) has since declared the second wave begun, describing it as especially interested in new technology and the changes it has brought. In this sense, the study at hand can be seen as an extension of the 'second wave' of newsroom ethnography. This distinction is of little significance, but the demarcation specifically into *newsroom* ethnography is. The realities of news work rarely allow for such long periods of embedded observation that are considered the ideal in traditional ethnography (for an exception, see Schlesinger 1978). In this study, the observation periods lasted for a single work shift, usually little over seven hours, while participant observations in cultural anthropology may have lasted even for years (Davies 2008).

Initially, fifteen Finnish online journalists were observed and interviewed in seven newsrooms. Three of the newsrooms were those of daily mid-market newspapers (*Helsingin Sanomat*, *Aamulehti*, and *Keskisuomalainen*); one of a mid-market special interest newspaper published every other day (*Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*); one of a daily tabloid (*Ilta-Sanomat*); one of a pure-player news website (*Uusi Suomi*); and one was the national broadcasting corporation YLE's central online newsroom. The number of observed journalists from each newsroom varied between one and three. The observations and interviews were conducted in January, February and March of 2013. Two newsrooms were re-visited in late 2015 and early 2016 for single observation periods and interviews. The 'retakes' were used to confirm the data obtained earlier, and this data is excluded from the following analysis.[1]

The observations were designed to cover one entire work shift, which was spent observing a single journalist. This was achieved by most parts: some observation periods were cut short from the standard shift. The shortest observation lasted 3.5 hours, while the longest lasted 9 (the average having been 7.5 hours). In total, the observations spanned 109 hours and 48 minutes, during which 113 individual pieces of journalism were produced and published. The observed online journalists also edited and published material prepared earlier by their colleagues, but this study was limited to any journalistic product the production of which could be observed from the beginning to the moment it left the journalist's hands as a finished product. Some pieces were excluded from the data as non-journalism in the sense that they did not evoke the news organization's prestige to claim truth value (such as user comment compilations).

The observations and interviews were informed by the *hierarchy of influences* model (Shoemaker and Reese 1996). I have used the model both as a clue in data collection and as a reference point in the final data analysis.

During observations three kinds of data were systematically collected: All journalistic products and their sources (both actual and prospective) were catalogued, and the time spent on each individual piece (with the accuracy of minutes) recorded. The journalists' work was followed in person. The journalists were aware of the research, but the focus on sourcing practices was not mentioned until the end of each observation. The observees were asked to try and work as they naturally would. Casual conversation with the researcher was allowed, if the observees felt more comfortable doing so. During the observation conversations were not initiated by the researcher, unless some aspect of the journalist's work needed clarification.

All interviews, except for one, were arranged immediately after the observed work shift. Some shifts were finished early so that the interviews could be conducted during regular working hours. In other cases the interviews added to the observees' time spent at work; it was not confirmed whether or not the interviewees received pay from this time. The observed shifts' timing varied from early morning to night shifts. It is possible that receiving or not receiving pay, and the interviews' timing affected the journalists' willingness to elaborate their answers, but very few indications of this were observed.

All interviews followed the same basic structure: first the interviewees were asked about their educational and occupational history, and of their current duties as an online journalist; then they were asked to recount each piece they produced, the sources they used and the sources they discarded, and to elaborate their reasoning behind each decision. At the end interviewees were asked whether the observed shift had been a typical one, and if they wanted to add anything to the interview.

The method of using observations as the basis for reconstruction interviews proved fruitful, if also laborious. On many occasions the journalists did not actively remember all the sources they had investigated during the journalistic process, but recalled them upon a cue. Some journalists produced high volumes of individual pieces, up to 27 during a single shift, which makes the patchwork recollection understandable. Having the observation notes at hand made it possible to remind the journalists of details that would otherwise have been lost, capturing the journalistic process more fully. The method, however, is not without potential problems, many of which can be illuminated by comparing it to the blind reconstruction interviews employed by Zvi Reich (2011). Reich researched the sources used by Israeli journalists by first pre-selecting a number of relevant news stories, and then asking their writers to randomly select some for closer examination. Then the journalists were asked to recount the sourcing process of each randomized story with the interviewer never knowing which exact stories were in question. By deliberately denying the researcher access to identifying information, Reich was able to protect journalistic source confidentiality. As illustrated by my experiences, this method may fail to capture the process in its entirety. The upside in Reich's method is that it allows journalistic pieces of sensitive nature to be included in the research. Journalists might be unable to freely discuss confidential sources with a researcher in an *a posteriori* interview, and they (or their sources) are likely to feel inhibited to discuss sensitive matters in the presence of a researcher.

In my study directly observable sources were notified of the study and asked for permission, although such instances were rare. In each situation the source consented to being observed during his or her interaction with the journalist. It seems likely that online journalists very rarely deal with sensitive live-interview situations (as none were observed during the production of the 113 observed pieces). This occupational trait makes online journalists better subject of observation research than, say, investigative journalists. Still, aforementioned issue should be taken into account when considering this approach.

The interviews lasted from 19 to 38 minutes each. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The interviews were used to glean qualitative data on source evaluation and on general aspects of online journalism as a profession. The observation notes (confirmed by interviews) were used to collect quantitative data on online journalists' use of time and different source types.

Results: General aspects of working in online journalism

Before going into the main results of the study, some general notes on the work of Finnish online journalists are worth presenting. These supplementary findings largely confirm earlier research on the nature of online journalism. It should be noted, however, that the sample size was far too small to alone afford broad generalizations, but convergence with existing scholarship suggests the observations' commonality.

Firstly, while the age range of interviewed online journalists was from 22 to 54, most of them were what could be called 'young adults': ten out of fifteen were 27 to 30 years old. The same goes for career length: while some had worked as journalists for decades, most had done so for less than five years. All participants were in permanent employment and all but one had studied (or were studying at the time of observation) communication. It could thus be said that most online journalists observed in this study were at the early stages of their careers as journalists. Out of the three more experienced journalists one held a middle-management position which included cross-media duties, and one was rotated from print for a period of online work – only one experienced journalist was working exclusively for online publication. Two reasons come to mind: online work might be treated as a transitional position on a career leading to something more respected, or younger journalists have (either factually or supposedly) better technical skills than older journalists. Existing evidence from other countries suggests that the prior explanation is more likely (e.g. Hartley 2011; Vobič and Milojević 2014).

Online journalists' comparatively young age and short journalistic work histories do not necessarily decrease the quality of journalism they produce. There are, however, other aspects of their work that are almost certain to do so. An especially striking feature of the observed journalists' work is its broken structure. Most observees were tasked with highly varied duties beyond the production of journalism. For example, they might: update and illustrate pieces prepared by their colleagues, edit and re-purpose pieces produced for a different medium, answer and redirect calls, moderate comment sections, engage audience in social media, reorient the organization's web page according to visitor metrics, and actively scan competing media for story ideas. The observed online journalists would usually focus on a single task only for a short period of time – an observation that echoes the measurements done earlier in German online newsrooms (Quandt 2008b, 86). In my study, the journalists used less than half of their shifts (mean value of 2 hours and 45 minutes, or 39 per cent) on producing content, when interruptive actions (such as checking social media accounts or answering phone calls) were deducted from the total production time. Even at best, 66 per cent of a shift was used for content production. Still the observees produced on average 7.5 (mean value, median value of 6) journalistic pieces per shift. This brings the mean value of time spent on a single piece to roughly 28 minutes. While some stories took over an hour to produce, most were researched, written and published in a matter of minutes – some even in two minutes or less!

The inability to leave the newsroom for information gathering, mentioned in earlier research (e.g. Juntunen 2011), was also noticed in this study. In only one of the seven observed newsrooms online journalists left the office for work. This desk-boundedness was also reflected in the sources they used. Roughly one quarter of all observed journalistic pieces (*n*=113) was based solely on press releases and another quarter solely on other media. Even most of the multi-sourced pieces combined sources such as press releases, telephone interviews with senders of said press releases, and older stories published by the journalist's own organization. Everything mentioned above confirms online journalists' dependency on pre-produced content.

One final observation is worth mentioning: the online journalists have seemingly high autonomy and broad editorial mandate. Most observees were not only allowed but also expected to decide on a piece's publishing – whether it was fit to publish, and even *when* it should be published. In some newsrooms the on-duty online journalists also served as sub-editors for the stories pouring in from wire services and, for example, from print journalists within the same organization. The added responsibility may or may not put extra pressure on the online journalists, but the lack of editorial supervision over the online journalists' own pieces is problematic. Even if an online journalist would recognize the need for advice, he or she might be unable to consult a senior journalist. Especially when associated with print newsrooms online journalists are more likely than others to work alone late in the evening or early in the morning. It is common for Finnish journalists to quote a rule-of-thumb of 'always having two pairs of eyes go through a story' before publishing (e.g. Manninen 2014), but in online journalism this review routine appears to be compromised. This observation matches existing literature on the topic (e.g. Lee-Wright, Phillips and Witschge 2012, Russial 2009).

Results: Five trust discourses

After interviewing the journalists about the sources they did (and did not) use, five distinctive rationales for source use were identified. I call these clusters of explanations generally as 'trust discourses'. Each discourse has a distinctive pattern of common journalistic sources, and influence source tiers as described by Shoemaker and Reese (1996). That is to say: the use of different journalistic sources is rationalized differently, and different types of influences shape those rationalizations. My typification bears resemblance to existing literature on trust and credibility, to which I will make reference when appropriate. The trust discourses presented here, however, are not formulated from existing theories. Instead they emerge from the material, which in turn was influenced by the aim to research specifically journalistic source selection. In some part, journalistic rationales for source selections seem to defy the general logic behind trust as a psychosocial phenomenon, which is why I chose not to force the observations into existing categorizations. Much of the results could indeed be interpreted through other theoretical lenses, but with the cost of having to prune some ill-fitting findings. Yet it is my understanding that these misfit findings, which are on the border of existing scholarship's notion of 'trust' and 'credibility', are of the greatest significance to this study's topic. Hence, I have formulated a new, five-point categorization presented below.

Ideological trust

When asked why they chose to use a specific source, online journalists often gave a rationale that can be reduced to the rhetorical question: 'Why wouldn't I?'. I have named this trust discourse as ideological trust, which echoes Shoemaker and Reese's ideological level of influence. Of course, the etymology and the theoretical provenance of the term can be traced much further back. In short, the hegemonic ideology of a society dictates which things are seen as natural and which deviant. According to Shoemaker and Reese the ideological level of influence affects news work by defining the things that can and should be covered by routine, and which things are newsworthy only when they deviate from the 'norm'. An understanding of ideological trustworthiness is only a short step away from the idea of ideological normality.

During the interviews many interviewees admitted that they had never even considered doubting certain sources. By and large these sources were press releases sent out by public officials, especially the police and rescue services. This mirrors the hegemonic ideology of the Finnish society: in the annual Reader's Digest survey, police and firemen are practically uncontested when ranked by respect and trustworthiness (Tiina Suomela, personal communication on 4.9.2015). When prompted to the issue, some interviewees began to ponder their unquestioned trust of the authorities. Some agreed that as journalists they might be too trusting, while others argued that not trusting the authorities would make their work near-impossible.

Some interviewees cited earlier experience as a reason to trust the authorities in question as sources. These notions, however, seemed to come as afterthoughts. By and large the authorities' trustworthiness was assumed, not learned through experience. This relates the ideological trust discourse to a categorization common in existing trust literature: ascribed trust. The phenomenon has been described with different names, and ascribed (in contrast to 'earned') trust is used by Rom Harré (1999). This divide describes whether trust is based on the truster's direct experiences of the trustee, or not. While the interviewed online journalists may have had direct experiences with the authorities in question (be they branch offices or individual people), their trustworthiness as sources was clearly based on their status as authorities – and not just any authorities, but authorities that are ideologically trusted in Finnish society. The ideological trust discourse is well crystallized in the following quote by one of the interviewees: 'If you can't trust the police, I don't know whom you can'. This trust discourse should not be seen as exclusive to public authorities, even if they are the source category that most commonly evokes this trust discourse in the Finnish context. In other cultures, journalistic or otherwise, different sources may be seen *trustworthy by default*.

Pragmatic trust

The observed online journalists used public authorities widely as sources, but not all expressed the same unquestioned belief in their trustworthiness (as described above). Instead, some interviewees used public authorities (and some other sources) despite having reservations. In these cases the online journalists recognized the possibility of false information, but they evaluated the sources to be *trustworthy enough* to be used. Three interlocking reasons were identified within this discourse: the source's expertise, its availability, and previous experiences with the source. Expert status makes people and institutions usable sources, as citing them makes the story appear more credible to the audience (Miller and Kurpius 2010). The availability factor is related to the critique-discouraging effect of need for information: sometimes a journalist is limited to the available sources, if the ideal sources are not accessible (or are not accessible conveniently enough). The expertise and availability factors often combine in public authorities: they commonly are the expert sources on topics of interest, and they often have routine contact procedures for the media. In the words of an interviewee: 'They [a government institution] make these studies, and I would go ahead and trust them. If I didn't, where else would I get this kind of information?'. Finally, previous (positive) experiences with some sources make them more likely to be used again. The latter point, naturally, relates to the concept of earned trust as Harré (1999) calls it. A lack of these qualities in a source leads to journalists' aversion to it, which can be observed, for example, as reluctance to use alternative online sources such as commoners' blogs (Volkmer and Firdaus 2013).

Aforementioned factors are all heuristic patterns, which allow online journalists to quickly fall back on certain 'pre-selected' sources. This is especially useful in the modern 'information blizzard' faced by journalists (Phillips 2010, 90). Those sources may not fully convince the journalist, but they are nonetheless considered good enough to publish: they are time-proven, widely recognized, or easily available. The common, distinctive quality of all these evaluations is their practicality, hence the name *pragmatic* trust. The journalists are not necessarily trusting of the sources' *truthfulness*, but rather their *usefulness* in the journalistic process. This usefulness is determined both by the journalists' needs and the source's qualities, which define the pragmatic discourse as being affected by the *routine level* and the *extramedia level* of influence in the Shoemaker and Reese (1996) hierarchy of influences. This means that source selection founded on the pragmatic trust discourse is always to some extent influenced by non-journalistic actors and motivations (e.g. savvy PR departments can use press releases to subsidize a particular topic or a preferred take on it).

Cynically pragmatic trust

In some cases, the practical nature of source selection can go as far as being downright cynical. The interviewees occasionally ignored a source's truth value, arguing that it *did not matter*. A few online journalists even expressed open distrust of the sources they used. The use of the word 'trust' in this context is clearly a stretch – but permissible in the sense that the observees still were confident enough to use those sources in their stories. A similar phenomenon, called system trust, is described in existing literature on trust (e.g. McEvily et. al. 2006, 53). System trust is partially based on the deterring effects of formal or semi-formal systems. For example, the legal and social sanctions associated with theft decrease the likelihood of shoplifting, which allows shopkeepers to maintain trust towards their patrons. The cynically pragmatic trust discourse operates in a similar manner. Lying to the press bears risks of sanctions to the sources (bad publicity), but in addition to the punitive effect, a different system alleviates the journalists' risks associated with relying on those sources (by using citations to shift responsibility). The latter mechanism relates to 'the ritual of transparency' (Karlsson 2011, 100–102). In line with Karlsson's formulation, sources subject to this form of trust were in this study always prominently cited, often starting from the stories' headlines.

The interviewed online journalists gave two main reasons for using sources they were distrustful of: intrinsic news value and lack of alternatives. Statements by politicians and some other publicly prominent figures have intrinsic news value regardless of their truthfulness. Similarly, the interviewees saw some breaking news to be of such importance (or occasionally, of such entertainment value), that they deserved retransmission even if the story had to be copied entirely from a competitor. The two most prominent source categories, the use of which was justified by the cynically pragmatic discourse, were politicians and single competing media organizations. In terms of the hierarchy of influences model, this trust discourse is shaped by the *routine level* (with regards to citation practices) and the *ideological level* (in determining intrinsic news value). *Extramedia level* has slight influence to what topics emerge (or exist, for that matter), but after a story has broken outside actors have little agency to promote certain views over others via cynically pragmatic trust, as quotability and intrinsic values are the only qualifying factors.

Consensual trust

When the observed journalists used multiple media sources for a story, they saw necessary to evaluate both the sources and the presented information (in contrast to the cynically pragmatic trust associated with using single media sources). In these cases, consensus among sources was used as a qualifying factor for the use of particular source or information. Even if the consensual trust discourse was in this study observed almost exclusively in relation to (multiple) media sources, nothing suggests that the discourse could not apply to other source types as well. The reliance on consensus among a multitude of outside sources makes the *extramedia level* of Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchical model the most influential one to this discourse. It should be noted that despite its name the term 'extramedia' refers to all factors outside a particular media organization, not only to factors outside the media as a whole.

As a departure from the other discourses, consensual trust is applied more on the information itself rather than on its source. In this sense, the discourse is similar to the epistemological coherence theory (e.g. Johnson 1992). It refers to the human propensity to hold as truths claims that are in accordance with existing information. Consensual trust discourse operates in the same way, but with a more limited range of reference points, as it applies only to other journalistic sources (i.e. sources *used in* journalism, not necessarily sources that *are* journalism). In addition to pieces of information, the consensual discourse can also be used to justify the use of specific sources. An interviewee elaborated the logic as follows: if a source of unidentified trustworthiness presents the same information as other sources, that source, too, can be considered trustworthy.

Contextual trust

The last of the five trust discourses is arguably the one best suited to journalistic pursuits. By contextual discourse journalists are able to, *in bona fide,* justify the use of sources they by default find questionable. Within the contextual discourse a source is deemed trustworthy only after the source's interests in the story have been reviewed. That is to say: a source is only trustworthy 'under the circumstances'. In contrast to the consensual discourse, the contextual discourse is based on the qualities of the source rather than on informational concomitance with other sources. Politicians, corporations and advocacy groups may all be trustworthy sources if they have no interest to mislead (or rather, if they are perceived as such).

The interviewees based the contextual trust discourse broadly on two reasons: either the source had compelling reasons to be truthful, or it had no apparent reasons *not* to be truthful. The latter explanation (lack of incentives to deceive) was more common, and it was often cited in relation to political sources. The prior qualification often concerned experts on a particular topic who were trusted because trustworthy behaviour (in relation to that topic) was seen to be in the expert's own best interest. The role of expertise in this discourse is reminiscent of the pragmatic discourse, but the two differ in their temporal qualities. Trust in the contextual discourse is born and exists only within the context of a particular media event, where as the pragmatic discourse bestows experts with legitimacy also between stories. Continued trust formed by the pragmatic discourse enables the journalists to form time-saving routines, while temporary trust formed by the contextual discourse requires journalists to re-evaluate potential sources in relation to each new situation.

The contextual discourse is affected by most levels of the Shoemaker and Reese (1996) hierarchy of influences. The evaluation of each story's context is reliant on many things, such as 'common knowledge' (*ideological level*), outside sources (*extramedia level*), methods of investigation (*routine level*), and the journalist's personal biases (*personal level*). The contextual discourse is the most cognitively laborious form of trust formation, and so it is only natural that many different influences come into play. Only the organisational level (located between the routine and extramedia levels) should be excluded as a notable source of influences. It is barely foreseeable how a source might become more or less trusted depending on how the news organisation is arranged. Shoemaker and Reese themselves describe this level of influence being able to, for example, affect what kind of stories are published: a financially unstable newspaper may be compelled to appease major advertisers or wealthy audience segments. In theory, this influence could also project onto source selection, but no evidence of it was observed during this study.

Discussion and conclusion

Above I have described five *trust discourses*, which are the outspoken rationales behind (Finnish online) journalists' source use. All observed source use decisions can be described with these five discourses. Sometimes source use was based clearly on a single discourse, but more often than not two or even more discourses overlapped within a single instance of source use. This fits in with Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchy of influences model, in which different tiers of influences are stacked upon each other

The study of trust discourses is twice useful because of their connection to influence sources. Firstly, such studies allows the mapping of source use and evaluation thereof. Secondly, the manifestation of different discourses could be used as an indicator of what influences are in effect. An additional, practical application of the categorization might be found in journalistic self-reflection both in professional life and journalism education. The following table (1) presents the five trust discourses and the tiers of influence most common to them, along with the discourses' other main characteristics.

This study was small-scale and qualitative in nature. It was conducted in a specific professional and societal environment, and at a specific time. For these reasons the study's generalizability can be debated, but it is my belief that while the proportions of different trust discourses may vary, the discourses themselves are common to all journalists. This opens a new, relevant line of inquiry: quantitative and comparative application of the trust discourse model. As I have argued: different work pressures are likely to evoke different trust discourses, the study of which could provide a new platform for the comparison and classification of different journalistic environments.

A final, methodological caveat: this five-point categorization was based on journalists' own, outspoken rationalizations of their source use. As with all interviews, the results are, or at least may be, detached from the reality of the research topic – the thought processes of journalists. Their answers may have reflected the perceived journalistic standards rather than their actual thoughts. It was my interpretation that in some instances the interviewees made efforts to rationalize their seemingly blind trust with previous experiences (see the paragraph on ideological trust). It is also possible that I misinterpreted the interviewees' non-verbal cues. The potential misinterpretation of source use instances by the researcher poses a problem for quantitative applications. For the current, qualitative study the issue is smaller: while single source use instances may fall under wrong categories, it is unlikely (although possible) that entire categories would remain unnoticed because of it. Luckily the validation of the categorization is a simple, if work-intensive, matter of testing it at different newsrooms and by different researchers.

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[1] One of the two observed online journalists wrote 7 stories during the observed shift. The other wrote (self-reportedly) three stories during the first few, unobserved hours of the shift, while spending the rest of the shift researching an unfinished piece and updating older pieces. While the observed work of the two journalists were markedly different, they both fit within the variety observed in the 2013 sample. By personal traits they hit the 2013 average in age, work history and education. Both journalists made a point about organisational changes having been done within the past few years and new changes being in the planning. This suggests that the observed, persistent features of online journalism are not the result of organisational factors, common to most if not all online newsrooms, but of the online medium itself.

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TABLE 1 Characteristics of trust discourses

Trust discourse	Basic nature	Temporal quality	Tiers of influence	Commonly observed source types
Ideological	The source is trustworthy *by default*.	Persistent.	Ideological level.	Authorities
Pragmatic	The source is trustworthy *enough*.	Persistent.	Routine level. Extramedia level.	Authorities, experts, institutions.
Cynically pragmatic	The source's trustworthiness is *irrelevant*.	Persistent.	Routine level. Ideological level.	Single media sources, politicians.
Consensual	The source and/or information is trustworthy, because *other sources confirm* the information.	Temporary.	Extramedia level.	Multiple media sources.
Contextual	The source is trustworthy *in this case*.	Temporary.	Ideological level. Extramedia level. Routine level. Individual level.	Corporations, NGO's, politicians.

II

AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS AND TRUST IN ONLINE JOURNALISM

by

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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 material 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 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 &

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-

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 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 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 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.

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 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:

"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.

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 originators; 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 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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III

IF ONLY THEY KNEW: AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS AND ACTUAL SOURCING PRACTICES IN ONLINE JOURNALISM

by

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Abstract

This article answers the question “Are the sourcing practices in Finnish online journalism trustworthy?” Here, trustworthiness is operationalized as the fulfillment of audience expectations towards sourcing practices. To this end, expectations of young Finnish adults (aged 18-28) were compared to the observed practices of Finnish online journalists. A total of 36 news items (from 12 journalists working in three newsrooms, published in 2013 and 2017) were analyzed. The analysis indicates that online journalists’ sourcing practices largely do not conform to this audience segment’s expectations. Namely, the audience expects more comprehensive investigation and thorough verification than what is common practice in online journalism. The use of high-credibility sources is both expected and commonplace. The results imply that transparency may be harmful rather than beneficial to journalism’s credibility, as the unveiled practices do not always meet audience expectations.

Keywords: online journalism, sourcing, trust, trustworthiness

Introduction

This article examines the sourcing practices of online journalists from the audience’s viewpoint. I ask whether a particular audience segment (young adults) would condone journalists’ practices, if they knew how news are sourced. This normative perspective –anchored to audience expectations– is rarely explored, perhaps as an infringement on the profession’s autonomy. When research does consider the audience, it almost always does so with regards to the evident features of a journalistic end-product, such as the choice of topic (e.g. Boczkowski & Mitchelstein 2013). However, the unseen “backstage” processes of journalism are at least as important, and among them sourcing is arguably the most important. It affects what information and opinions are (and can be) transmitted, and it does so largely beyond audience’s scrutiny. On these hidden parts, journalism is a “credence good” (McManus 1994, 65-66): the audience has no way to ascertain its actual quality, even after enjoying the product. What goes on in the backstage usually stays hidden. A glimpse behind the curtains might be disillusioning – at worst breaking the trust journalists need to maintain an audience (e.g. Young 2016).

Trust, put very generally, is expectation of future behavior consistent with the trusting party’s interests (Misztal 1996). Much has been written about trust in journalism, and decline thereof (e.g. Ladd 2011, Müller 2013). Generally trust in journalism is seen as a positive phenomenon, something worth encouraging among citizens, most prominently for civic reasons (e.g. Brants 2013). Furthermore, audience trust is a “business imperative” for publishers (Young 2016, p. 1) and public relations professionals alike (Jackson & Moloney 2015). Trust, however, is not omniscient: it can only be based on the outward expressions of desirable characteristics, i.e. credibility (for a broad overview of general credibility studies, see Pornpitakpan 2006). This means trust can be misplaced and subsequently broken, if expectations are not met. I call the quality of consistently meeting expectations as “trustworthiness”[1]. Considering the virtue of expectancy fulfillment, the study presented in this article asks:

Do sourcing practices of online journalists meet audience expectations?

This question is investigated in the specific context of Finnish online journalism, and the expectations young Finnish adults (ages 18-28) hold for it. Younger demographic groups are typically the most prolific users of online news (Mitchell et al. 2018), and investigating their attitudes may be useful in predicting future trends in the wider population. Furthermore, my earlier study (Manninen 2018) on young adult Finn's normative expectations for journalism suggests their ideals are aligned with those of older Finns (Kunelius 2000). Cross-national generalizations, of course, cannot be derived from such localized data.

Finland is a Western democracy, and its media system is considered representative of the democratic corporatist type in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) model. Finland has a strong public service broadcasting system and widespread newspaper readership. Availability and uptake of internet connections is high, and internet has since 2014 been the most heavily used medium. News use is one of the central purposes of Finns' internet use. (Official Statistics of Finland 2018). Trust in news is appears high (Digital News Report 2018), although some contrary evidence also exists (Herranen 2017). Studying young Finnish adults thus opens a window into the expectations of some of the most online savvy, yet trusting news consumers.

For sake of brevity, the term "the audience" (unless otherwise specified) will henceforth refer to this particular audience segment, while the general "audiences" will refer to the word's abstract meaning. The study is based on observational data on the sourcing practices of online journalists, which is compared to the audience's expectations, which were uncovered earlier through focus group interviews. The research responds to the call made by Kruikemeier and Lecheler (2018, 644) for "news consumer studies based on real events and news coverage, as well as content analyses examining the use of different journalistic sourcing techniques."

This article begins with a brief introduction into journalistic norms, explaining why audiences' opinions matter. Second, the article looks into what we know of audiences' expectations and whether they differ from journalists' own norms. Then, this article will present an empirical study, which juxtaposes the real-life work practices of Finnish online journalists with the norms of young Finnish adults. The article will close with a discussion on the results and their implications for both journalism and journalism studies.

Normativity and trustworthiness in journalism

Normativity is arguably the central dilemma of journalism. The question over what journalism should be like has been around as long as journalism itself, and attempts at answering it have been made for equally long. Much of these answers have been imposed upon journalism from the outside – much to the practitioners' frustration.

To crudely sum up centuries of discourse (see Christians 2009 for a more complete summary), much of the normative formulations imposed by society are functionalist in nature. In other words, journalism is seen to be "good" when it serves the society in some way, for example by facilitating political decision-making (e.g. Ladd 2011, 203-206). The exact definition of this "public interest" can and is debated endlessly, but in practical terms a wide consensus appears to exist on what the society wants from "the press" (McQuail 2010, 165). This includes, among other things, the presentation of diverse and high quality information (ibid). While these demands are often made, both formally and informally, they are less often enforced. To use Finland as an example, the national legislation restricts media (and journalism) mainly to prevent harm (e.g. against invasion of privacy). Positive regulation is kept to a minimum – there is no law, for example, that would oblige a newspaper to publish new government decrees.

Media professionals in general are loath to accept restrictions on their work. Journalists in particular feel that control from without goes against the basic tenets of journalism. Instead, journalists' associations and unions have formulated a plethora of self-regulatory ethical codes. These codes enshrine an idealized form of journalism, as imagined by journalists themselves. Study of journalists' ethical codes has revealed that journalists across the world share many values, e.g. truthfulness of information (Hafez 2002, Laitila 1995). While mostly practical, many (but not all) of these codes also allude to safeguarding democracy and public interest. For example, the Finnish Guidelines for Journalists begin by underscoring the value of freedom of speech as a cornerstone of democracy. In other words, also journalists themselves like to picture their work as serving the larger society.

The normative foundation of journalism, then, seems to be shared by both audiences and journalists – in Western democracies, at least. According to this vision, journalism should serve the public interest and democratic social order. Yet a mutually accepted goal is not enough. Audiences' perspectives on journalism praxis should be taken into account for reasons of trust and trustworthiness.

It is common to presume trust in journalism to be beneficial to societies, and democratic societies in particular(Ladd 2011, 6-9). However, the evidence is mixed: Jonathan Ladd (2011) found trust in media to increase political knowledge, while Jan Müller's (2013) analyses suggest trust has no significant effect on political learning or activity. Müller concluded that it is natural for emancipated citizens to be apprehensive towards media, while Ladd suggested distrust leads to resisting new information. The two authors rely on different data, but it is unclear what the source of their conflicting results is. Lacking conclusive evidence, the current study leans on the conventional wisdom on trust in journalism: For journalism to be able to render its services to society, it requires the trust of its audiences. Losing it will leave information ignored, opinions unheard, and public discourse stunted. In the words of John McManus (1994), journalists without an audience are "preaching to an empty church" (169). Gaining and maintaining trust hinges on whether the trusted are able to meet expectations set for them. "The more they succeed in meeting such expectations, the more likely it is that trust in them will prevail; the more that such expectations are disappointed, the greater the risk to relationships of trust" (Coleman 2012, 37). Thus, recognizing (and to an extent respecting) audiences' expectations has instrumental value in journalism, even if one rejects their wishes as its normative foundation.

It is conceivable to foster trust without actually being trustworthy. A credible façade is enough to evoke and maintain trust – but only as long as that façade is held together. However, this tactic is extremely risky: if the trusting came to realize the deception, trust would vanish and leave behind feelings of anger and betrayal. A less volatile and much more ethical approach to gaining trust is through trustworthiness (i.e. being *worthy of trust*). In journalism's case, this entails finding out whether audiences' expectations and journalists' performance match, adjusting either or both accordingly, and finally making sure audiences are aware that their expectations are being met. The study at hand tackles the first part of this agenda.

Is there a chasm between journalists and their audiences?

In order to investigate the trustworthiness of journalism –or anything, for that matter– one must compare the *bona fide* expectations of the trusting party and the actual performance of the trusted party. In journalism, the chasm between audiences and journalists has long been under debate: are journalists connected to their audiences' needs and desires – and should they even care about audiences' appetites? The most prolific stream of this discourse focuses on topic selection. Journalists are often found to see news value in events audiences consider boring, while audiences seem to yearn for sensation (e.g. Kleemans & Hendriks Vettehen 2009, 236-237; McManus 1994; Tewksbury 2003).

Several studies have observed a divide between audiences' and journalists' news values (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Walter 2011; Boczkowski & Peer 2011; Lee, Lewis & Powers 2012), while Singer (2011) observed both commonalities and differences. A study by Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013) found that journalists' and audience's interests are divergent by default, although this "news gap" closes during certain attention-grabbing news events, like elections. The gap may be quite large, as demonstrated by Lee and Chyi (2014), who found that only some one-third (36 per cent) of mainstream media content was "noteworthy" to the American audience. The finding prompted the authors to recommend journalist pay closer heed to audiences' preferences – or risk going out of business (ibid).

Beyond choice of topic, Willnat, Weaver and Wilhoit (2017, 8) have compared audiences' and journalists' conceptions of "the proper roles for the news media", finding "somewhat divergent views". An earlier study by Heider, McCombs & Poindexter (2005, 962) had already concluded that journalists and audiences "are on separate tracks headed in different directions". In contrast, van der Wurff and Schönbach (2014) found journalists' and audiences' normative views to be similar on most parts. The conflicting results are not new: Burgoon, Bernstein and Burgoon (1983) reported that newspaper journalists and their audiences share similar values, while Braman (1988) found the opposite. On an international level, Himelboim and Limor (2010, 89) compared 242 journalists' ethical codes to press theories and concluded the codes present "ideals that fail to reflect some of their most fundamental expected roles in society."

Yet another split between audiences and journalists appears to exist regarding perceptions of journalistic performance. In the United States audiences see journalism in a more negative light than journalists' (Gil de Zuñiga & Hinsley 2013), while in Israel the roles are reversed: there journalists find their own performance lacking while audiences are more content (Tsfati, Meyers & Peri 2006).

Regardless of conflicting results, even the *possibility* of a journalists-audience divide in normative conceptions should be taken seriously. The perception "that journalists do not live by their professional standards" is part of the larger phenomenon of media skepticism (Tsfati & Cappella 2003, 506), which in turn may dilute the civic benefits of journalism. Next, I will turn to what is known of audience perceptions on journalism's "professional standards" regarding sourcing practices.

Audiences' expectations towards sourcing in journalism

Audiences' expectations towards journalistic practice have usually been studied on a fairly abstract level. For example, a series of surveys in 38 countries indicated that most audiences want news media to be "unbiased" (Mitchell et al. 2018). Audiences' members are rarely asked how the practicalities of journalism should be carried out, but some attempts have been made in this direction. In the United States, The Media Insights Project sought to "develop actionable characteristics" of trusted journalism by surveying Americans over what factors lead them to trust a news source. This study found, among other things, that audiences expect (trusted) journalism to "present expert sources and data" and "get facts straight". (Young 2016). Also Bakker, Trilling and Helfer (2013) found audiences to prefer expert sources. As a source, social media seems to be rejected by both audiences (Kruikemeier & Lecheler 2018) and journalists (ibid; Heravi & Harrower 2016; c.f. Paulussen & Harder 2014). Similarly, Grosser, Hase and Winterlin (2017) advise against using user generated content (UGC), as it is liable to undermine journalism's credibility in audiences' eyes. An earlier study in Finland also suggests audiences care little for UGC but are interested to hear from knowledgeable and/or involved sources (Ahva et al. 2011). In short: audiences expect journalism to make use of highly credible, expert sources and steer clear of social media sources and user generated content.

Studies on verification are more ambiguous. Kruikemeier and Lecheler (2018, 637) suggest audiences do not automatically assume journalistic information to be verified. A different study, however, suggests the opposite (Grosser, Hase & Winterlin 2017, 14). Expectation of verification is also hinted at by Karlsson, Clerwall and Nord (2017, 161) who found that Swedes expect journalists to "get their stories right straight off the bat". Some studies suggest verification is still the norm for journalists (e.g. Shapiro et al. 2013), while others have found journalists are increasingly replacing pre-publication verification with post-publication corrections (Hermida 2012, 2015; Joseph 2011; Lewis, Williams & Franklin 2008).

A study in Finland investigated how young adults perceive real-life journalistic practices and resulting journalism (Manninen 2018). This study discovered a number of normative expectations this audience segment (ages 18–28) hold for Finnish online journalism. The issues raised were largely the same as the ones discussed by earlier studies, underscoring their salience. In terms of sourcing practices, the audience appears to value the use of high-credibility sources, broad and all-inclusive sourcing, and pre-publication verification. (Ibid). This normative foundation, localized to Finnish online journalism, is used as the analytical framework for the current study.

Method

This study is based on the observation of and interviews with 12 Finnish online journalists, conducted in 2013 (N=6) and 2017 (N=6). This data covers the production of 36 journalistic items (26 in 2013 and 10 in 2017). It originates from two separate studies, which utilized similar methods to study the production of online journalism (Manninen 2017, 2018). Only comparable data from the two studies have been used, i.e. information on sourcing practices in three particular newsrooms.

Here, 'online journalists' are defined as journalists who produce journalistic content "primarily for online publication". Each newsroom was asked to indicate journalists in their employ that fit the description, who were then asked to volunteer to be observed and interviewed. The newsrooms included one public service broadcaster, one daily broadsheet newspaper, and one daily tabloid. At the time of study the newsrooms' websites were among the four most visited in Finland, according to the analytics company TNS Metrix. To maintain anonymity, I will refer to the newsrooms with the letters X, Y and Z, and to the journalists with their respective newsroom codes accompanied by a running numbering (e.g. Z-1). Two journalists from each newsroom participated in 2013 and another two each in 2017.

Each participant was continuously observed for 132–525 minutes (observation periods were longer in 2013 than in 2017; averages of 427 vs. 187 minutes, respectively). The observation procedure was identical in both studies: the researcher accompanied journalists to all work-related functions (breaks excluded) and took detailed notes on their work. Casual conversation was reciprocated but not initiated by the researcher. Participant journalists and their colleagues were informed that a study on "the work practices of online journalists" was underway – the precise goals of the studies were disclosed to participants only after observation. Three kinds of information were systematically recorded in field notes: a list of completed journalistic items, the sources perused in relation to each story, and the time spent on each item (with the accuracy of full minutes). All news items that were observed from start to finish are included in the study at hand. The sample of news items is thus akin to a clustered, stratified random sample – seeking to represent the output of Finland's leading online newsrooms on an average day (no major news events took place during observations). The sample includes a wide variety of news topics, from local soft news (e.g. a case of suspected animal abuse) through business (e.g. a bankruptcy) to politics (e.g. a member of the European Parliament being reprimanded). Most news items were short news briefs, but the sample also included a few longer feature pieces.

Participating journalists were interviewed soon after the observation, typically immediately after (but in few cases the following day). Interviews were semi-structured, with slightly different question frameworks used in 2013 and 2017. In both studies, interviewed journalists were asked to detail the journalistic process behind each item they had completed under observation. Observation notes were used to confirm these descriptions and elicit elaboration on neglected details. The journalists were also asked to confirm whether or not the observed work practices were representative of their daily routines (no participant suggested the observed work was unusual beyond normal variation). These interviews lasted from just 12 to 36 minutes, depending on the amount of meaningful observations. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for later analysis.

The interview transcripts were analyzed by comparing the journalists' work practices to the audience's expectations identified in one of the aforementioned studies (Manninen 2018)[2]. In this study, production of journalistic items was observed at three mainstream newsrooms and the observation findings were discussed in focus groups comprising audience members. Groups of young Finnish adults (ages 18-28) were recruited from various educational institutions, unemployment services and through flyers disseminated to public places. The participants represented all major educational backgrounds typical of this age group (from only primary level education to tertiary level graduates). Most were either students or unemployed, although one focus group consisted of young adults in the beginning of their work careers. Compared to other Finns of their age, the participants were less affluent - mainly due to the underrepresentation of fully employed participants. All participants confirmed that they had not worked as journalists, although two participants had some knowledge of the work through relatives or through visiting a newsroom during school. These pre-existing groups (e.g. classmates, colleagues) were asked to give their initial impressions on the quality of the observed news items, after which they were given detailed information regarding the news items' production. The participants (n=34) were then asked to further discuss whether the production process conformed to their expectations. This two-step discussion format was chosen in order to highlight potential discrepancies between how a news item appears and its true provenance. It also demonstrated that the audience routinely assumes certain journalistic processes (e.g. verification) even when they are not overtly mentioned in the news text.

Applied thematic analysis (Guest, McQueen & Namey 2012) was used to identify 18 categories of expectations young Finnish adults have for journalism (e.g. informative headlines). Four of these expectations relate to sourcing and are used as the normative standard in this study. While different participants highlighted different expectations, there was no noticeable disagreement over the expectations' validity. Similarly, there was no discernible difference in opinion across focus groups, suggesting journalistic ideals are not socioeconomically differentiated (c.f. Hartley 2018), or that extant differences are mitigated by some other factor (such as shared primary education or the example set by public service media). Further, same expectations seemed to be applied to all news items, regardless of their section on the website (e.g. politics, economy, lifestyle) or other discernible features (e.g. length). It is then reasonable to assume the expectations are fairly universal among young Finnish adults and represent their normative understanding of general, mainstream Finnish online journalism. The procedure thus follows Coleman's (2012, 37) recommendation of investigating trust through methodology that begins "by asking people how they expect the object of study to perform and derives an understanding of trust from perceived discrepancies between expectation and performance". Within the confines of the aforementioned context (the expectations of young Finnish adults on Finnish, mainstream online journalism) this methodology should be able to measure the trustworthiness of its object.

Each journalistic item in this study (n=36) was assigned a dichotomous value in four expectation categories, depending on whether or not the expectations were met. If an item met the expectations, it was coded with "1" in that category, while "0" designated a failure to meet the criteria (essentially, "pass" or "fail"). The four expectation categories are operationalized as follows.

Audience expectation categories

Source Choice is seen to conform to the audience's expectations, if the article meaningfully includes information that is corroborated or supplied by a source that ranks high in the "hierarchy of credibility" (Becker 1967). These high credibility sources are, for example: court documents, financial reports, press releases, police officers and public officials. Certain types of established media organizations are also acceptable: public service broadcasters, broadsheet newspapers and news agencies. Low credibility sources include, for example, social media, "people on the street", and tabloid media.

Source Sufficiency is achieved when the journalist has reached out to "all interested parties" of a news event. What, exactly, this includes is dependent on the context – and beyond a court case, difficult to establish conclusively. Sourcing is here considered sufficient when a journalist has contacted or attempted to contact at least two different, involved sources. For example, citing two newspapers on a highway pileup would not be considered sufficient, while interviewing two involved motorists would be. If a news event obviously has only one involved party (which is conceivable although rare), using it alone as a source is considered sufficient. An attempt at contacting a source is here considered just as valid as successfully contacting one, as it is impossible to accurately ascertain when a true *force majeure* has prevented reaching a source and when the journalist has given up too easily. This coding practice produces a "pass" condition easily, in turn resulting in a conservative estimate of the prevalence of sub-par practices.

The expectations toward *Other Media* are simple: other media should not be used as the principal source of information. It may be used to provide background information on new developments, but the core content of an article should originate from a primary source.

Verification is expected of journalism, and it is considered to have taken place when the core information of an article has been corroborated by an independent, primary source. This includes situations in which a journalist discovers a news event through a non-primary source and then proceeds to confirm that information from a primary source, but *not* situations in which the news event is initially discovered through a primary source and no further primary sources are sought. In other words, verification is the act of using *additional*, primary sources in order to improve the epistemic strength of an article. This variable may overlap with Source Choice, as high credibility sources can also be primary sources in a news event.

For the most part, the audience's expectations were salient enough for straightforward operationalization. For example, all the conditions comprising the *Source Choice* category were explicitly mentioned in the focus group interviews (e.g. that police officers are credible sources). However, some conditions had to be derived from focus group reactions to specific journalistic processes. This is exemplified by the *Verification* category, in which the exact definition of "verification" was formulated to match the journalistic practices the audience deemed acceptable. None of the participants verbalized such an elaborate definition of what verification is, but this is what participants appeared to recognize as verification.

Results: Sourcing practices in online journalism

Most online news items analyzed in this study failed to meet the audience's expectations. Only four of the 36 items scored a "pass" in all four categories of sourcing practice expectations (items number 11, 12, 16 and 35). In addition, four items fulfilled three expectation categories (items 13, 27, 28 and 31). At the other end of the spectrum, two news items failed in all four expectation categories – both of these items were published by the same news organization (items 7 and 34). Most commonly the analyzed items (17 out of 36) met the audience's expectations in one category but failed them in all others.

Sourcing practice patterns appear remarkably similar across the three newsrooms visited for this study. Use of high credibility sources was very common in each newsroom, and at least three quarters of news items in each fulfilled expectations regarding Source Choice. In contrast, the most poorly performing category for all three news organizations was Source Sufficiency: at most, only a quarter of news items met these criteria. For newsrooms X and Z, Verification was the second-most poorly performing category (with only 25 and 20 per cent of items having been verified, respectively). For newsroom Y, slightly more items met the criteria regarding Verification (46 per cent of items getting a "pass") than Other Media (38 per cent). However, this latter difference should be considered negligible due to the small sample size.

The three newsrooms' output met, on average, from 40 to 50 per cent of the audience's sourcing-related expectations. Items were more likely to fail expectations than to meet them in all but one category: Source Choice. Both the best and worst performing expectation categories are the same for all three news organizations. There are also notable similarities in the "pass" rates of the two middling categories, Other Media and Verification. The newsrooms' "pass" rates in the Other Media category all fit within a 12 percentage point range (38–50). A notable difference between newsrooms appears only in the Verification category, where two organizations' (X and Z) items have very low "pass" rates, while the third newsroom (Y) does better, with almost half of its news items being verified. The results (grouped by newsroom) are condensed in Table 1.

[TABLE 1]

The results remain consistent even when analyzed by year, instead of by news organization. This is particularly important, as the expectation categories originate from focus group discussions regarding the sub-sample of news items observed in 2017. The expectation fulfillment rates in the four categories are similar for news items published in both 2013 and 2017. Audience-set standards for Source Choice are met most commonly, followed by Other Media, Verification, and Source Sufficiency. Overall, the similarities between newsrooms and between years suggest these findings might represent overarching trends in online news production.

Next, I will briefly present few illustrative examples from the data. To begin with an exemplary item, news item number 11 fulfilled all of the audience's expectations. Here, the journalist received an e-mail tip-off from a disgruntled consumer, who had had trouble having their cellphone repaired. The journalist interviewed the customer, a representative of the repair company, and a consumer advisor. Consumer advisors are public officials, which makes them high-credibility sources (meeting expectations towards Source Choice). The journalist had also contacted all relevant parties to the news event. The journalist did not rely on Other Media and instead verified all relevant information from different sources.

In contrast, news item number 7 failed in all categories. Here, the journalist read a news item published online by a foreign tabloid newspaper. The journalist then used Google Translate to translate the news item, which the journalist then read and re-wrote in Finnish. The journalist used a low-credibility source, sought no additional sources, verified none of the information, and based the story wholly on Other Media.

News item number 30 can be used as an example of the most typical type of sourcing process. The journalist was tasked with writing a follow-up to an earlier story, involving a case of suspected animal abuse. The basic information for item 30 came from an earlier story, written by the journalist's colleague. The journalist conducted an original interview with a spokesperson for an animal welfare association – seen as a credible source on issues related to animal abuse. However, no additional sources were sought and no information was verified. This pattern is consistent throughout much of the sample: journalists tended to seek out highly credible sources and forgo additional sourcing and vetting.

Discussion

The results indicate there is at least local discrepancy between (sourcing-related) expectations of young Finnish adults and the actual performance of (Finnish online) journalism (as produced by newsrooms X, Y and Z). Expectations of only one of the four categories investigated in this study were commonly met. This suggests online journalism is in large parts untrustworthy, as defined above. Yet Finns are peculiarly trusting of news media (both online and traditional), as indicated by the annual Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2018). While the study shows younger Finns are less trusting than older, this is in line with other countries – and even younger Finns still trust the media more than the overall population in most countries (Ibid). This seemingly unwarranted trust might be explained by the expectations' place on the journalistic "stage", either in front of or behind the curtains.

The most commonly fulfilled expectation –that of using highly credible sources– is typically something proudly displayed on the frontstage. While leaving sources uncredited is conceivable, it is common journalistic practice to cite at least one source by name. The study at hand demonstrates that these are usually high-credibility sources, which is consistent with earlier works on journalistic sourcing (e.g. Lecheler & Kruikemeier 2016, 160; Schudson 2003, 134-153). This practice reveals to audiences the most favorable part of the sourcing process (i.e. the part that is likely to best conform to their expectations).

The current study suggests additional sources are rarely searched for, let alone used. This is understandable considering the high time pressures online journalists are under (Quandt 2008), but reliance on single sources is not inevitable. A comparison of nine countries found that in most countries online news items used on average more than one source (Tiffen et al. 2014). In theory, audiences should notice the absence of a source just as well as it notices the presence of one. In practice, omissions are less obvious unless audience members have specialized knowledge on, or particular interest in the news event. Only a small segment of audiences for any single news item is likely to notice shortcomings regarding Source Sufficiency. However, over time more audience members will likely encounter news items they can recognize as insufficiently sourced.

The use of Other Media overlaps with Source Choice, and it, too, can be displayed on the frontstage or kept hidden in the backstage. Using Other Media –also called "copycat journalism"– is common if not unavoidable in modern journalism (Preston 2009, 56-57). Results from the current study suggests the practice of recycling information from already published news items is common in Finnish online journalism, which supports earlier findings from Finland (e.g. Juntunen 2011) and elsewhere (e.g. Saridou, Spyridou & Veglis 2018). While journalists can easily omit mentions of Other Media from their work, the online environment is conducive to uncovering plagiarism. A study into the news practices of American millennials suggests young news users are keen to "go down the rabbit hole" and independently investigate news events (Burkey 2018, 8-9). Copyingwill become obvious if (and when) the original news item contains a mistake that inexplicably replicates throughout media. The likelihood of such contagious mistakes increases online (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2014, 106-107), where journalism is more fast-paced and "churnalism" more common (e.g. Boumans et al. 2018; Mabweazara 2011). Verification would be crucial in pruning out incriminating mistakes – but based on this study verification seems to be exception rather than rule online.

According to Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2014, 98), the "discipline of verification" is the essence of journalism, the one thing that separates it from other mass communication. However, only a minority of the news items analyzed in this study were verified, even though the criteria were interpreted loosely. Though unfortunate, the result is supported by earlier research. For example, a large-scale study in Germany found that out of all investigated sub-groups, online journalists spent the least time on research (Machill & Beiler 2009). Failing expectations in this regard would likely be evaluated harshly, should audiences discover this reality. Verification, however, is distinctly a "backstage" process: audiences have no choice but to trust verification has taken place. Kruikemeier and Lecheler (2018, 644) have called for journalists to increase the transparency of their verification practices. The recommendation is based on an assumption that journalists *do* verify information, but since it goes unmentioned audiences have a needlessly poor image of journalism's trustworthiness. This view is the polar opposite of what the current study suggests: that journalists rarely verify information even though the audience expects them to do so. If the latter is true (and I contend it is), increased transparency would reveal sub-par practices and only undermine journalism's credibility. Regardless, Kruikemeier and Lecheler's recommendation should be considered in newsrooms where practices already align with audiences' expectations. Highlighting verification (or any other process expected of journalism, for that matter) will not harm the opinion of those who already trust the news outlet, but it might assuage the doubts of skeptical audience members. There is, however, a risk involved with drawing attention to verification: increasing its salience may sensitize the audience to notice lack of verification (or visible assurances thereof).

The above results do not mean journalists are failing their audiences, necessarily. There are many conceivable and understandable reasons for journalists to diverge from idealized norms. Let us consider, for example, verification. When interviewing a veteran journalist as part of the 2013 round of observations (Manninen 2017), I was told that their work would become "impossible" if they had to verify every bit of information. Implementing universal verification would require (lacking additional resources) drastic cuts to the volume of output, leaving much unreported. It is reasonable to argue that relaying unverified information serves the public better than completely withholding that information. However, journalists are seen to have committed to trying to verify information before publishing it. In Finland, this commitment is factual and explicit: according to the self-regulatory Guidelines for Journalists, section 10: “Information obtained must be checked as thoroughly as possible, including when it has been published previously.” This is not a question of whether journalists are doing “wrong”; it is a matter of whether journalists perform according to what audiences –quite legitimately– expect of them. Even the most reasonable practices will be judged untrustworthy, if they deviate from what the trusting party has been promised.

Conclusion

This study investigated whether the sourcing practices in three, major Finnish online newsrooms conform to the expectations of their young adult audiences. The results indicate they largely do not. In other words: at least to this particular audience segment mainstream Finnish online journalism is not fully trustworthy.

Four particular categories of expectations were investigated, and only one was more often satisfied than not. Namely, at least three-quarters of news items at each participating newsroom made use of high-credibility sources. Most news items in all newsrooms copied at least some information from previously published news items, did not reach out to all (or any) involved parties, and did not verify the information about to be published. This leaves the newsrooms at risk: if the audience catches a glimpse of what goes on in the backstage of journalism (or rather: what does not go on), they might lose trust in journalists. Adding transparency to journalism cannot be recommended until what lies beyond the curtain is in presentable order. Journalistic shortcomings are bound to surface even without journalists’ naïve openness. New technology has greatly enhanced audiences’ possibilities to conduct their own investigations and spread their findings. It is now more likely than ever for journalists to be caught and called out for ignoring sources, copying stories, and neglecting verification. The discrepancy between expectations and reality must be resolved before unwarranted trust implodes into realistic distrust.

There are two ways to close the gap between audiences’ expectations and journalistic practices: by either altering practices or reshaping expectations. Journalists will do wisely to hear audiences’ opinions, but I propose they retain the final say on how to best carry out the work. As a counterbalance, I would burden journalists with the responsibility of both upholding their norms and communicating them to audiences. If audiences have unrealistic expectations, journalists should consider what in their actions have caused such misconceptions. To be stable, trust must be based on a mutual understanding of commitments.

This study is limited by its modest scope and context-boundedness. The former shortcoming is compensated by the apparent commonality of its findings across different journalists, newsrooms and years. The results give an idea of which practices are most common and which are more rare – but they cannot describe exactly *how* common or rare they are. More precise data on the occurrence of different praxis will require more rigorous, quantitative methods. The sample of observed news items also limited the practices that could be discussed by the audience, which in turn limited what expectation categories could be applied in the final analysis. The sample of news items likely is representative of the daily grind of online news work in these three newsrooms, but it cannot capture online journalism in its entirety. Irregular practices, for example using anonymous sources or whistleblowers, were beyond this study. Their potential effects on journalism’s trustworthiness thus remain unresolved.

The limitation of the study's context cannot be mitigated and must be taken as is. Trust can only be investigated in a particular context, which means the study's results cannot be reliably generalized beyond young Finnish adults and the online journalism produced by newsrooms X, Y and Z. Even if young Finnish adults do seem to hold the same journalism norms as older Finns did some 20 years ago (Manninen 2018), we cannot assume older Finns' ideals have remained static. Expanding our knowledge on audiences' (be they Finnish or other) expectations thus requires a series of replication studies – or at least some other corroborating evidence. Considering how laborious the methods used in this study were, producing more generalizable results would likely require new methodological innovations in this regard. I strongly advocate pursuing such discovery. In particular, methods for reliable, large-scale and unobtrusive data collection on journalistic practices would be most welcome. Combining these methods with quantitative audience studies could yield valuable insights for news organizations, journalists' professional organizations, and regulators alike. The comparison of expectations and realities is crucial to understanding trust in any context, and journalism is certainly an area in which understanding of trust is much needed.

[1] Expansive literature on credibility uses the term 'trustworthiness' to indicate one of the two main components of credibility (originally proposed by Hovland et al. 1959). I have here chosen to go against this convention and interpret the term more literally as the state of being "worthy of trust". Credibility is discussed only briefly within this article, but the reader should bear the terminological difference in mind when further exploring the literature.

[2] The normative criteria used in the study at hand, and part of the news items analyzed in it (10 out of 36) stem from my earlier study, i.e. Manninen (2018).

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