

THE PRESS VERSUS THE PUBLIC

What is “good journalism?”

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For several decades, citizens have reported that they trust some news outlets over others largely because they perceive the industry to be biased in its coverage. On the other hand, journalists have a more positive perception of their work than does the public. Long-standing research on journalists confirms they see their profession as a public-service calling, featuring principal tenets that include being watchdogs and providing analysis of complex problems. Recent research on the public suggests poor perceptions of press performance are linked to reduced news consumption. Using two contemporaneous survey data from both US newspaper journalists and the US public, this research first sheds some light over what may constitute “good journalism” for the public and for journalists. Then, it compares news consumers’ views of the work being produced by the newspaper profession and the views held by the newspaper journalists themselves. Additionally, the present study explores the connection between the public’s perception of good journalism and their consumption of distinct modes of information: traditional news, citizen journalism, and infotainment. Findings indicate that newspaper journalists give significantly higher marks to their performance on the tenets of “good journalism” than do members of the public. Furthermore, there is a positive association between citizens who reported higher scores on journalists’ “good journalism” performance and the consumption of traditional news and infotainment programs. No association is found with respect to the likelihood to consume citizen journalism content. Implications of these findings and shortcoming of the study are also addressed in this paper.

KEYWORDS citizen journalism; good journalism; infotainment; news use; professional perception of journalism; public perception of journalism

Introduction

Research on journalists and their audience has long indicated news workers have a more positive perception of their work than does the public (Beaudoin and Thorson 2002; Braman 1988). Journalists see their profession as a public-service calling, with principal tenets that include being watchdogs and providing analysis of complex problems (Weaver et al. 2007). News consumers, however, perceive the industry to be biased in its coverage (Rouner, Slater, and Buddenbaum 1999; Morales 2012), and in today’s hyper-digital media landscape, public perception on credibility and believability continue to decline (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2010; Morales 2012). These poor perceptions of press performance create a dilemma for journalists and media managers because they have been linked to reduced news consumption (Tsfati 2010). At the heart of the problem is that journalists do not know how the public rates some of their core professional tasks, and whether the press values those same job roles. The answers to those questions will show whether journalists really understand the audience they claim to serve, and will point to avenues through which the press can work to redeem its credibility and

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invigorate public interest in the news. Such changes can lead to a citizenry that feels more strongly connected to its government and policy makers, and becomes a better-informed society and more engaged electorate (Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham 2007).

Because of the apparent divergence of opinion between news professionals and the public about the quality of journalists' work, this research examines what constitutes "good journalism" in the eyes of the public and the press. Using original survey data from newspaper journalists and a representative sample of the US public, this study compares news consumers' views of the work produced by the newspaper profession and the views held by newspaper journalists themselves. Furthermore, the study explores the connection between the public's perception of good journalism and the consumption of distinct modes of information: traditional news, citizen journalism, and infotainment.

Differing Views of "Good Journalism"

Decades of research on journalists confirms they hold two primary role conceptions: they should contribute to an informed society and serve as watchdogs for the public's interests (Beam, Weaver, and Brownlee 2009; Croteau and Hoynes 2001; Weaver et al. 2007). Journalists see their profession as an altruistic one in which they serve the public by providing information that helps them make sense of the world (Croteau and Hoynes 2001). This perception is heightened for newspapers, which have been the voice of the public since before the United States was founded (Nerone and Barnhurst 2003). Newspapers, more so than other media, are considered to have a responsibility to contribute to the public sphere. Print journalists, in particular, in the *American Journalist* surveys believed job roles centering on investigation and analysis were critically important parts of their work (Weaver et al. 2007). Other principal traits journalists value in their work include acting with autonomy, accuracy, and objectivity (Beam, Weaver, and Brownlee 2009; Braman 1988; Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Singer 2007; Weaver et al. 2007), as well as getting information to the public quickly and being watchdogs for the public (Weaver et al. 2007). These job roles are held as universal standards of the profession—Hanitzsch et al. (2011) found journalists in a multinational study saw it as essential that they were impartial watchdogs who provide reliable, factual news. Overall, journalists believe their organizations do a good job of informing the public (Weaver et al. 2007).

The public, however, has differing views of how well journalists perform their work and what constitutes "good journalism." Research such as Heider, McCombs, and Poindexter (2005) confirmed the public values journalism roles like accuracy, objectivity, and rapid reporting. However, fewer than two-thirds of Americans believe news organizations do a good job of covering news and subjects that are important to them (Purcell et al. 2010). Instead, studies conducted in different US communities found residents placed less value on watchdog reporting and greater emphasis on civic journalism endeavors, suggesting that although the public values certain journalism roles, it does not place the same level of importance on them as do journalists (Chung 2009; Heider, McCombs, and Poindexter 2005). Such discrepancies are not unique to American audiences and journalists; one study of Israeli citizens and journalists found they, too, differ on the importance they place on certain journalistic practices (Tsfati, Meyers, and Peri 2006).

The driving force behind the US public's view of journalism today appears to be the perception of bias in reporting, which serves as a direct threat to journalistic notions

of objectivity and accuracy. For more than a decade, news consumers have reported declining impressions of credibility for news organizations, and in 2010, 82 percent of Americans said they had seen at least some bias in the news (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2010b). Similarly, a 2012 Gallup poll reported 60 percent of the US public had little to no trust in the media (Morales 2012). Clearly, the public does not have a particularly favorable view of journalism, but no clear picture exists of the journalistic features that the public does value or how they define “good journalism.” In essence, the norms of the newspaper profession continue to strongly influence the news industry’s standards of high-quality journalism, operationalized in this study as “good journalism” (i.e., getting information to the public quickly, being watchdogs for the public, acting with objectivity, and helping people through civic journalism endeavors) and dominate the news available for public consumption. The standards and features that normatively comprise *good journalism* may differ from those used in this study. Some scholars may include a broader list of features (for a discussion on good journalism, see Kieran 1998). However, we have purposively used core features of *good journalism* that are consistent across diverse journalism studies (Kunelius 2006; Franklin 2009; Hanitzsch et al. 2011).

“Good Journalism” and News Consumption

Dire reports about declining revenues and audiences across traditional media (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2011) seem to imply Americans have a dwindling appetite for news, which is not the case. People are “spending more time with news than ever before” (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2011) but they are doing it across platforms—nearly all Americans get their news in multiple ways (Purcell et al. 2010) with online showing the greatest gains in audience (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2011). An analysis of news content, however, found that most “new” news people receive comes from newspapers although that news is often co-opted or re-reported by other traditional media professionals and bloggers (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2010a).

These standards, at least in some cases, have influenced how bloggers and other citizen journalists approach their work. Political bloggers in particular report engaging in journalistic behaviors such as fact-checking, and interviewing and citing sources (Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2011; Tomaszeski, Proffitt, and McClung 2009). Bloggers who do those activities are more likely to see their blogs as a form of journalism (Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2011). Although some citizen journalists have expressed concerns about factual inaccuracies appearing in blogs, most of the bloggers believe blogs are accurate news sources and are more independent than journalists at traditional news organizations (Tomaszeski, Proffitt, and McClung 2009).

But what view does the public hold concerning mainstream media and citizen journalism? Research has shown that people who read newspapers tend to have positive feelings about those publications (Armstrong and Collins 2009; Beaudoin and Thorson 2002) and newspapers continue to be considered the most credible source of news, followed by other traditional news sources (Schafer 2010). In general, people who regularly consume media of any type are more likely to have positive perceptions of that particular medium (Armstrong and Collins 2009; Beaudoin and Thorson 2002; Schafer 2010; Tsfati 2010). Tsfati (2010), for example, found that news consumers with greater trust in

mainstream media were more frequent visitors to mainstream news sites. In contrast, the less people trusted traditional media, the more likely they were to visit non-mainstream sites like blogs. News consumers with lower institutional trust also are more likely to see bias in stories from traditional media outlets than from citizen journalists (Hopke et al. 2010).

These findings create a dilemma for researchers comparing public perceptions of news material produced by mainstream news organizations and by citizen journalists. In some studies, blogs and other citizen journalism endeavors are seen as less credible than traditional news materials (Schafer 2010; Siff, Hrach, and Alost 2008), especially when the audience is asked to contrast their fairness, believability, and overall quality (Siff, Hrach, and Alost 2008). Other research, though, has found that the audience makes little distinction in the credibility of traditional media versus blogs (Banning and Sweetser 2007; Johnson and Kaye 2004) and that some people believe citizen journalism sources are no more biased than mainstream media (Hopke et al. 2010). For some people, the level of trust in citizen journalism and professional journalism is nearly the same (Kaufhold, Valenzuela, and Gil de Zúñiga 2010). Most studies have simply assessed the public's beliefs about the credibility and bias found in some forms of citizen journalism and did not explore the connection between public sentiment of what constitutes "good journalism" and their consumption of user-generated media.

Similarly unknown is whether the public's perceptions of "good journalism" are related to their consumption of programs that blend information and entertainment, known as infotainment (Jones and Baym 2010), such as late-night shows hosted by Jay Leno and David Letterman as well as "fake news" shows hosted by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. Studies such as Coe et al. (2008) have established that people with certain political ideologies are drawn to certain types of programs, such as *The O'Reilly Factor* and *The Daily Show*, and that they generally find those shows enjoyable and entertaining. Audiences have reported that watching late-night comedy shows has increased their political knowledge and learning (Xenos and Becker 2009) and exposure to late-night infotainment programs has been tied to consumption of traditional news (Young and Tisinger 2006).

The latter finding suggests viewers of late-night infotainment shows value at least some of the journalistic standards of the mainstream media. In particular, media ethicists have argued that Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert are not journalists, but through their respective shows they hold journalists accountable to the tenets of the profession by highlighting inaccuracies and subjective reporting (Borden and Tew 2007; Painter and Hodges 2010). Hoffman and Young (2011) concluded that the satire and parody of Stewart and Colbert's shows—with their focus on policy and issues, compared to the punchlines delivered in other late-night television programs—serve a function similar to traditional news programs.

Before late-night talk shows are discounted, though, it should be noted that audiences who report learning from those shows also use national news sources as learning tools (Young and Tisinger 2006). Journalists hold informing the public as one of their primary professional roles, and the public values receiving news and information even if that material comes from someone typically not recognized as a "journalist." Watching infotainment-type programs may ultimately help the public form opinions of what constitutes "good journalism."

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Based on this literature review, several hypotheses and research questions were developed to further understand the connection between what is good journalism for professional journalists and for citizens. They should also help to clarify the potential effects these perceptions may have on influencing news consumption patterns. By identifying how the public defines “good journalism” and comparing those ratings to journalists’ perceptions of their work, it will pinpoint discrepancies between these groups that are barriers to understanding and trusting each other. It also will provide journalists and academics with a broader understanding of the factors that contribute to declining press credibility and rising perceptions of media bias.

Additionally, this research builds on previous studies that examined public consumption of traditional media, citizen journalism, and infotainment for connections to political knowledge, political learning, and political participation. This study can help distinguish what may be the first step in those links—public perception of what is valuable in journalism and how those beliefs relate to consuming different types of media. Finally, this information will enrich the news industry in all of its forms by outlining how to strengthen the relationship with the public through producing better journalism that builds perceptions of the press as representative of a flourishing marketplace of ideas. In light of this discussion we propose the following hypotheses and research questions:

H1: The public will have consistent views on what is “good journalism” (i.e., getting information to the public quickly, being watchdogs for the public, acting with objectivity, and helping people through civic journalism endeavors).

The public will have a clear sense of what constitutes “good journalism.” That is to say they will have a very coherent and clear view of what makes news “good.” This, of course, remains detached from whether citizens align with journalists’ perception of what constitutes “good journalism,” and whether there is a gap between how well citizens believe journalists are fulfilling these tasks. Previous research has shown news consumers value several features of journalism, including getting information to the public quickly, being watchdogs for the public, acting with objectivity, and helping people through civic journalism endeavors (Chung 2009; Heider, McCombs, and Poindexter 2005). Therefore, we expect that all of those traits will be combined to form a single reliable factor that defines “good journalism” in the eyes of the public.

H2: Positive public perceptions about the main features of “good journalism” will be associated with greater professional media use.

Because previous findings established people who consume specific types of media have positive feelings about those particular news formats (Armstrong and Collins 2009; Beaudoin and Thorson 2002; Schafer 2010; Tsfaty 2010) and more frequently turn to those mediums for information (Tsfati 2010), it is expected that people who report higher ratings to journalists’ performance of job roles such as being watchdogs and verifying facts (which constitute “good journalism”) will be greater consumers of mainstream media.

RQ1a: How will public perceptions about the main features of “good journalism” be associated with use of citizen journalism?

It is not clear whether the public considers blogs and other forms of citizen journalism to be representative of “good journalism.” Some studies have found news

consumers to be critical of blogs, particularly in regard to the accuracy of the information they report (Siff, Hrach, and Alost 2008), while other research indicates readers see blogs as equally credible and believable—sometimes more so—than traditional media (Banning and Sweetser 2007; Johnson and Kaye 2004; Kaufhold, Valenzuela, and Gil de Zúñiga 2010). For this reason, a research question was posed to explore a possible connection between feelings about what constitutes “good journalism” and the frequency of using citizen media to get news.

RQ1b: How will public perceptions about the main features of “good journalism” be associated with the use of infotainment?

Although a great deal of research explores the links between political knowledge, political participation, and consumption of infotainment programs (Hoffman and Young 2011; Kaufhold, Valenzuela, and Gil de Zúñiga 2010; Young and Tisinger 2006), no known research analyzes the relationship between conceptions of “good journalism” and the frequency of watching late-night television talk shows and “fake news” shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. As with RQ1a, a research question was posed to examine whether such a relationship exists.

RQ2: What is the gap between journalists’ views of their work and the public’s views?

With declining ratings of press credibility (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2010b), it seems likely that journalists and their audience have differing views of what amounts to “good journalism.” Little current research, however, compares news professionals’ assessments of their own performance to news consumers’ views of the execution of those job roles. This research question examines whether a disconnect exists between these two groups and, if so, it will highlight which features draw the greatest disagreement.

Methods

This study employs two original survey datasets contemporaneously collected in 2010. In order to test the hypotheses and research questions proposed in this study, it is necessary to assess both journalists’ perceptions of their work and the public’s views on journalistic traits as well as their news consumption patterns. To that end, an online survey was sent to journalists working full-time at daily newspapers in the United States. The journalists’ contact information was available on a commercial database with information on about 25,000 daily newspaper journalists. Of that group, 5000 journalists were randomly selected to represent proportional breakdowns by circulation size. For example, *Editor & Publisher* (2010) reports that 28 percent of newspapers in the United States have circulations of 10,000–25,000; therefore, 28 percent of the journalists who received the survey worked at those smaller publications. Likewise, only a little over 3.3 percent of newspapers have circulations of more than 250,000, so journalists working at those publications represented 3 percent of the 5000 surveys sent out. Overall, 967 journalists completed the survey. A few surveys had to be omitted because they did not meet the criteria for inclusion, such as being employed full-time at the news organization. The final sample consisted of 927 journalists. Accordingly, based on the American Association of Public Opinion Research’s RR3 calculation (AAPOR 2008), the response rate was 19.3 percent,¹ which is consistent and up to standard rate for prior Web-based surveys (Goritz, Reinhold, and Batinic 2002).

Relatedly, a second survey including the same questions was obtained from a representative sample of the US adult population, which was drawn from a two-wave national panel administered by the Community, Journalism & Communication Research (CJCR) Unit at the School of Journalism at University of Texas—Austin. Both waves of the study were administered using Qualtrics, an online surveyor. The first wave of the survey was given to US adults from across the country between late December 2008 and early January 2009. For a more accurate representation of the US population, the CJCR based this national sample on two US Census variables, gender (50.2 percent men and 49.8 percent women) and age (30 percent 18–34; 39 percent 35–54; 31 percent 55+). The procedure of matching online samples with census data to provide a more accurate representation of the population has been validated by previous research (Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Jung, Kim, and Gil de Zúñiga 2011; Kaufhold, Valenzuela, and Gil de Zúñiga 2010). Of the 8568 participants, 1159 completed the survey. The response rate for the first-wave panel was 23 percent, based on the AAPOR's RR3 calculation. In the second wave of the survey, conducted in July 2010, 312 of the original interviewees completed the questionnaire, for a retention rate of 27 percent (for more detail, see Appendix A). The analyses reported here were confined to respondents interviewed for the second wave, which assessed perceptions of good journalism, journalists' roles, as well as news consumption patterns. The first wave did not include these items. Considering the second wave of respondents was also reasonably representative of the US population except for gender (skewed toward females), and more importantly for education, the study introduced a weight. That is, all analyses were performed using a weight in which the different education levels were exact to the proportion provided by the US census.

Measures

Controls. Scores of studies have linked the consumption of news with variables that may confound the relationship of the US public sought in this study. For instance, demographic factors are all related to increased news consumption such as income or age (Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela 2010). Similarly, strength of partisanship and levels of political efficacy have also been identified as being positively associated with news consumption (Bachmann et al. 2010; Gil de Zúñiga and Rojas 2009). Accordingly, all these variables have been controlled for in this research.

Demographics. A variety of demographic variables were included for control purposes in the US public data. The respondents' age (mean = 50.49, SD = 10.79) and gender (male = 28 percent, female = 72 percent) were asked in the survey. Survey respondents were also asked about their highest level of formal education attained, which ranged from 1, indicating "less than high school", to 8, indicating "doctoral degree" (mean = 3.15, SD = 1.54, median = college degree). Income was measured with nine categories, with 1 indicating under \$10,000 and 15 indicating over \$100,000 (mean = 5.17, SD = 2.58, median = \$40,000 to <\$50,000).

Political efficacy. Respondents' for the US public's internal political efficacy was measured with four questions by asking respondents whether they agree or disagree with the following statements: "People like me can influence government," "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics," "I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country," and "No matter whom I vote for, it won't make a difference." Again, a 10-point response scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree"

to 10 = "strongly agree" was used. The last item was reverse coded and then combined with the other three items to form an index for internal political efficacy ($\alpha = 0.72$, mean = 65.7, SD = 8.1).

Strength of party identification. Respondents in the American public dataset were asked to rate their party identification using a seven-point scale ranging from very liberal (coded as 1; 8.7 percent of respondents) to very conservative (coded as 7; 13.2 percent of respondents), with the midpoint (coded as 4) being neither liberal nor conservative (29.1 percent of respondents). This item was subsequently folded into a four-point scale (that is, scores 1 and 7 were recoded to 4, 2 and 6 to 3, 3 and 5 to 2, and 4 to 1), so now the new created index ranges from no partisanship (1) to strong partisanship (4) (mean = 2.6, SD = 1.1).

Independent Variable

Good journalism traits. The main independent variable in this study encompasses many journalistic traits that have been discussed in the literature section above as the main features of good journalism. On a seven-point Likert scale, citizens were asked how well they think journalists were doing in areas (eight items) such as being objective, covering stories that should be covered, helping people, getting information to the public quickly, providing analyses and interpretation of complex problems, verifying facts, giving ordinary people a chance to express their views and being the watchdog for the public ($\alpha = 0.95$, mean = 30.3, SD = 12.2). This same set of questions was asked to the professional journalist participants in order to address the final research question of the study ($\alpha = 0.78$, mean = 55, SD = 7.6).

Criterion Variables

News use. News media use in the US public dataset was obtained by capturing how often people use traditional media online and off to get information about current events, public affairs, and politics. Once again, using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from never to every day, subjects reported their news consumption patterns including: local television news viewing, national network news such as ABC, CBS, etc., cable news such as CNN, Fox News or MSNBC, national newspapers in print and local newspapers in print offline, and finally, national newspapers and local newspapers online. An index for news media use was constructed by averaging the scores from these eight items ($\alpha = 0.68$, mean = 34.9, SD = 8.7).

Infotainment. Respondents for the US public were also asked two items in order to rate how much attention they paid to political news shows such as *The Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report*, and to late night shows such as David Letterman or Jay Leno (inter-item $r = 0.29$, mean = 4.9, SD = 2.8).

Citizen news media use. This question tapped the notion of news content created by citizens to be consumed by other US citizens, which is considered citizen journalism. Building on the scale proposed by Kaufhold, Valenzuela, and Gil de Zúñiga (2010) and using a 10-point scale ranging from "never" to "all the time," survey respondents were asked how frequently they took part in the following (five items) activities that related to news content they deemed to be citizen journalism: visit a citizen journalism site such as CNN's iReport, read blogs that you considered to be citizen journalism, watch videos you considered to be citizen journalism, read news that you considered to be citizen

journalism, and read content on Twitter that you considered to be citizen journalism ($\alpha = 0.93$, mean = 11.2, SD = 9.9).

Statistical Analysis

Hypotheses and research questions were tested by employing two-factor analyses (principal axis factoring) with varimax rotation to identify whether or not there was a unique dimension of the features that represent good journalism and whether they were similar when comparing the view of journalists and that of the public. Next, the study used zero and partial correlations to test the associations between the independent variables of interest and the three dependent variables. Additionally, we also used three sets of ordinary least squares (OLS) hierarchical regressions, one for each dependent variable, in order to test whether public perceptions about the main features of “good journalism” were associated with greater media use. The independent variables were entered causally in separate blocks: demographics, political antecedents, and main features of good journalism, to assess the impact of each block of variables on each dependent variable: traditional media use, citizen journalism, and infotainment news content. Finally, in order to test the gap between journalists’ views of their work and the public’s views independent sample *t*-tests were also performed.

Results

Results for the first hypothesis indicate the general public has a very similar view about what is good journalism. Factor analyses revealed a unique factor (Eigen value = 5.79, explaining a total variance of $R^2 = 72.4$ percent; see [Table 1](#)).

TABLE 1
Factor analysis of “good journalism” practices held by the US public and by US journalists

	I	II	III
	US public	US journalists (uphold fairness)	US journalists (ensure accountability)
Being a watchdog for the public	0.906	263	0.732
Providing analysis and interpretation of complex problems	0.880	0.004	0.880
Verifying facts	0.874	0.657	0.029
Covering stories that should be covered	0.857	0.575	0.499
Being objective	0.853	0.704	0.056
Helping people	0.786	0.556	0.180
Giving ordinary people a chance to express their views	0.764	0.635	0.203
Getting information to the public quickly	0.690	0.588	0.406
Eigen values	5.79	3.14	1.04
Variance (%)	72.4	39.3	13.04

Extraction method: principal axis factoring. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization. Primary loading of a variable on a factor is indicated in bold. $N = 312$ for citizens’ survey and $N = 915$ for journalists’ survey.

Being objective, covering stories that should be covered, help people, getting information to the public quickly, providing analyses and interpretation of complex problems, verifying facts, giving ordinary people a chance to express their views and being a watchdog for the public were all facets that represented journalism to the public. Turning to the next hypothesis, we posed that positive public perceptions about the main features of “good journalism” were associated with greater professional media use. This hypothesis also was successfully tested ($\beta = 0.192$, $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$). This model explained a total variance of 21 percent with the block of good journalism features adding an incremental 3.5 percent ($R^2 = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.035$, $p < 0.001$, respectively). Similarly, this study wanted to test whether there was a similar association between positive public perceptions about the main features of “good journalism” and other formats of information acquisition: citizen journalism and infotainment. As for the former, this research did not find a statistical relationship ($\beta = 0.091$, $p = 0.19$; $r = 0.09$, $p = 0.18$). That is, having a more positive view about the way journalists perform their job in relation to the central features of good journalism has no effect on the amount of citizen journalism subjects tend to consume. Conversely, there was a positive and statistically significant relationship with respect to people’s perceptions about the main features of good journalism and consuming more infotainment content ($\beta = 0.250$, $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$). This model predicted 18.4 percent of the total variance (with $\Delta R^2 = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$; for the final block, see Tables 2 and 3).

The final research question seeks to shed light on whether there is a difference between journalists’ views of their work and the public’s views. Independent *t*-test results indicate that gaps persist between the public and the professional journalist (see Table 4). For each one of the items that explore the features of good journalism, there is a statistically significant gap in the assessment provided by the newspaper journalists and the public. In every count, the public reported lower scores than the journalists (see Table 4 for complete results). The smallest difference (−2.06) was at the rapid delivery of information to the public (public mean = 4.20, journalists mean = 6.27; mean difference $p < 0.001$). In contrast, the largest gap rested on the objectivity item (−2.99). The public gave the lowest score for that item while journalists considered it to be the second highest on their list (public mean = 3.46, journalists mean = 6.46; mean difference $p < 0.001$).

TABLE 2
Zero-order and partial correlations among independent and criterion variables

	1	2	3	4
1. Good journalism traits	–	0.09	0.33***	0.26***
2. Citizen journalism	0.08	–	0.38***	0.37***
3. Infotainment	0.28***	0.30***	–	0.33***
4. News use	0.21***	0.31***	0.26***	–

Cell entries are two-tailed zero-order Pearson’s correlation (top diagonal) and partial correlations (bottom diagonal) with controls for age, gender, education, income, race, strength of partisanship, and political efficacy. $N = 234$ for partial correlation; $N = 312$ for zero-order correlations.

*** $p < 0.001$.

TABLE 3
OLS regression models predicting diverse media consumption

	News use	Infotainment	Citizen journalism
Block 1: Demographics			
Age	0.136*	0.185***	-0.109*
Gender (male = 0)	-0.008	-0.009	0.050
Education	0.029	0.103†	-0.47
Income	0.057	0.015	-0.039
Race (white = 0)	-0.062	-0.012	0.059
ΔR^2 (%)	3.9**	5.8**	1.0**
Block 2: Political antecedents			
Strength of political identification	0.090†	-0.136***	0.020
Political efficacy	0.263**	0.197***	0.405***
ΔR^2 (%)	8.3***	6.6***	16.2***
Block 3: Journalism			
Good journalism traits	0.192***	0.250***	0.091
ΔR^2 (%)	3.5***	6.0***	0.6
Total R^2 (%)	15.7***	18.4***	17.8***

$N = 312$. Cell entries are final-entry OLS standardized beta (β) coefficients.

† $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Discussion

This research had three specific aims: (1) to determine how the press and the public assess “good journalism;” (2) to identify areas of disconnect in journalists’ perceptions of their work and the public’s views on those same traits, which included being objective, covering stories that should be covered, helping people, getting information to the public quickly, providing analyses and interpretation of complex problems, verifying facts, giving ordinary people a chance to express their views, and being watchdogs for the public; and (3) to learn about the relationship between the public’s perceptions of “good journalism” and their media consumption habits via traditional media, citizen journalism, and infotainment content.

TABLE 4
Gap between journalists’ views of their work and the public’s views

	Public		Journalists		Mean difference	t -Test p values
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Helping people	3.51	1.65	5.89	1.19	-2.37	0.001
Being objective	3.46	1.78	6.46	1.05	-2.99	0.001
Covering stories that should be covered	4.02	1.83	6.57	0.77	-2.54	0.001
Getting information to the public quickly	4.20	1.80	6.27	1.00	-2.06	0.001
Providing analyses and interpretation of complex problems	3.77	1.79	6.09	1.18	-2.32	0.001
Verifying facts	3.84	1.82	6.11	1.26	-2.27	0.001
Giving ordinary people a chance to express their views	3.79	1.81	5.91	1.24	-2.11	0.001
Being a watchdog for the public	3.60	1.87	6.41	0.99	-2.81	0.001

Independent sample t -test with $N = 312$ for citizens’ survey and $N = 927$ for journalists’ survey.

Factor analysis revealed that while the public's assessments of the newspaper profession's performance of several job roles aligned into a single scale, the journalists' perceptions of their work split into two categories. This suggests the groups have somewhat different views of what constitutes "good journalism." Journalists seem to conceptualize their work in layers, as indicated by the two categories produced in the factor analysis (see [Table 1](#)). These clusters emphasize journalists' perceptions of their work as upholding fairness and ensuring accountability, whereas the public does not appear to recognize such nuances. This gap in the groups' perceptions of journalists' job traits highlights their widely divergent views of how well journalists perform their work.

Of all the items on the job roles scale, the newspaper journalists said it was very important to do each of those tasks, with getting stories covered that should be covered, being objective, and getting information to the public quickly at the top of the mean scores list. In comparison, the public's best-rated traits were getting information to the public quickly and getting stories covered that should be covered. But those highest means reflected public sentiment that was barely lukewarm. One of the main tenets of the journalism profession—being objective—ranked dead last in public perception, which echoes previous studies that found public disdain for perceptions of bias in the press (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism [2010b](#); Rouner, Slater, and Buddenbaum [1999](#)). The public does not think journalists are doing a very good job at their jobs, despite journalists' high regard for their own work. This disparity highlights the print media's lack of understanding public perception and the industry's apparent inability to respond in ways that would bolster news consumers' faith in the quality of journalists' work.

Previous research suggests that when audience members do not have a high regard for news organizations, they are less likely to trust those organizations and are more likely to turn away from news information from traditional media (Schafer [2010](#); Tsfati [2010](#)). Similarly, this study found that people who were more positive about journalists' jobs—people who saw news workers as performing "good journalism"—were more likely to be regular news consumers. Those people not only were more frequent users of traditional media sources, they also were more likely to include infotainment in their news diets. Conversely, the relationship with citizen journalism turned out to be non-existent. This finding may highlight the differences between the tenets of good journalism and their relationship with information generated by regular citizens, or may simply highlight the difference between professional journalism and citizen-driven information. In any of these two instances, future research should help clarify under what circumstances the public may hold citizen journalists accountable for performing activities closer to the tenets of good journalism.

Taken together, the findings of this study identify several areas in which the press can endeavor to improve in the hope of restoring credibility in the eyes of the public. None of the profession's job traits scored well in public perception; of particular concern should be the low rankings for being objective and being watchdogs for the public. These two traits are the bedrock of American journalism and may reflect the public's frustration with an increasingly polarized press. Public contempt with press performance fuels reduced media consumption, which has a host of negative implications for a healthy democracy. Chief among those concerns is a spiraling decline of knowledge and participation that can result in a disengaged, anemic electorate, as well as the potential that news organizations themselves will continue to wither, giving way to self-interested partisan rhetoric devoid of meaningful analysis and context.

As with all research, this study has a number of limitations. The data from the participating journalists and members of the public is cross-sectional, so causality should not be strictly assumed or interpreted from the findings. Although the model infers that perceptions of journalism job traits will influence news consumption (which is based on psychology studies that posit perceptions lead to behaviors, such as Glasman and Albarracin's (2006) meta-analysis of such relationships, it may be plausible that news consumption reinvigorates public perceptions of journalists' job performance. Additionally, this research focused specifically on newspaper journalists' perceptions of their work and the public's views of the newspaper industry. As noted in the review of literature, newspapers generally are considered to have the greatest obligation among media to uphold journalistic tenets and to engage contributions to the public sphere and democracy. Future research should compare job role conceptions of news workers across media industries and should inquire about public perceptions of various types of journalism. Finally, obtaining qualitative data from journalists and the public through focus groups and in-depth interviews would enlighten our understanding of the issues being studied in this research (Eysenbach and Kohler 2002; Kvale and Brinkmann 2008). Limitations notwithstanding, the results of the study contribute to the existing literature in a number of ways. First, the paper advances the operationalization of what "good journalism" is in the eyes of newspaper journalists and the public. Second, it establishes the gap between how well news professionals judge their work on certain journalistic features, and how well the public thinks newspaper journalists are performing those roles. Lastly, the study also demonstrates the value of systematically including the public's perception of journalists' performance as it will predict the level of engagement with news consumption in an array of different venues (i.e., traditional media use and consumption of infotainment content). Future research should continue to explore the modest but important relationships discovered in this study as an informed citizenry is at the heart of both a healthier and a more participatory democracy.

NOTE

1. The formula for RR3 is $(\text{complete interviews})/(\text{complete interviews} + \text{eligible non-response} + e)$ (unknown eligibility), where e was estimated using the proportional allocation method, i.e., $(\text{eligible cases})/(\text{eligible cases} + \text{ineligible cases})$.

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Appendix A*Demographic Profile of Study Survey and Other Comparable Surveys*

	CJCR study survey, December 2008 to January 2009 (%)	CJCR study survey, second wave, Summer 2010 (%)	Pew Internet & American Life Project, post-election survey, November to December 2008 (%)	US Census community population survey, November 2008 (%)
Age				
18–24	3.5	1.1	6.0	12.5
25–34	18.9	12.5	9.9	17.8
35–44	21.6	22.9	13.5	18.4
45–64	50.5	53.5	40.5	34.6
65 +	5.5	10	30.2	16.6
Gender				
Male	33.0	35.4	47.2	48.3
Female	67.0	64.6	52.8	51.7
Race/ethnicity				
White	84.4	88	79.8	68.5
Hispanic	4.5	4.7	6.1	13.7
African American	5.0	3.6	9.2	11.8
Asian	3.0	2.6	1.3	4.6
Education				
High school or less	15.4	10.6	38.4	44.6
Some college	28.1	29.6	27.7	28.3
College degree	37.2	24.8	19.8	18.1
Graduate degree	19.2	35.1	14.1	9.0
Household income				
< \$49,999	41.1	37.5	51.2	42.0
\$50,000–99,999	37.9	34.3	31.8	35.3
\$100,000 +	21.0	28.3	17.1	22.7