

THE JOURNALIST AS MISSING LINK?

JOURNALISTS' PERSPECTIVES ON TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Nina Steindl

LMU Munich, Germany

Abstract

The present paper examines journalists' perspectives on political trust. By focusing on their trust in political institutions, differences in political trust along media types and news beats are further inquired. Previous research has suggested that trust is both related to political support as well as political engagement and is in a reciprocal relation with cooperation.

Thus, it is hypothesized that trust varies among journalists, depending on the degree of cooperation and proximity to the political system. Based on a survey among 775 journalists, representative for Germany, the data shows that journalists perceive the various institutions differently having the highest trust in the judiciary system, while politicians are perceived rather skeptical. Findings further reveal that journalists working for the broadcasting sector, those who report on local/regional issues as well as political journalists are the most trusting.

Keywords: journalist, political trust, political institutions, democracy, Germany

In the light of the ongoing debates about fading public trust in political institutions, the media and their coverage are often held accountable for its decline. The trends of reporting politics negatively and portraying politicians in skeptical ways, the cynical relationship between the media and politicians, or the political stance of journalists are often mentioned in this regard (Avery, 2009; Brants, de Vreese, Möller & van Praag, 2010; Gross, Aday & Brewer, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Reinemann & Baugut, 2014; van Dalen, Albaek & de Vreese, 2011). These tendencies are perceived as crucial because media coverage might indeed shape recipients'

beliefs (Floß, 2010; McCombs, Holbert, Kioussis & Wanta, 2011; Robinson, 1977). More specifically, Ariely (2015) found that the less restricted and the more professional a country's media environment is, the more the public does have the opportunity to be affected by what is reported. This also appears to be applicable for political trust: although findings are inconclusive about the specific direction, research has shown that there is indeed some relation between exposure to certain media types and various kinds of trust (e.g., Ariely, 2015; Avery, 2009; Becker & Whitney, 1980; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Hanitzsch, van Dalen & Steindl, 2016; Moy & Scheufele, 2000; Putnam, 1995).

Albeit journalists are the key element between media content and the putative increase in public mistrust, their perspective has often been neglected. Only a handful of studies deal with origins, determinants and consequences of the political trust of journalists (e.g., Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2014, 2012; Tsfati, 2004). Under the assumption that the media coverage is at least partly responsible for declining political trust among the public, one might argue that it is the journalists' trust that (unintentionally) influences the media content; hence, it is crucial to take into account the journalists' perspective. Also, previous research on journalists' individual attributes affecting news coverage suggests such influence: empirical evidence proves that the predispositions of the individual journalist such as their attitudes might affect professional beliefs as well as journalistic behavior (e.g., Donsbach, 2004; Flegel & Chaffee, 1971; Kepplinger et al., 1991; Starck & Soloski, 1977; Tsfati, 2004). Because scholars argue that both trust and political engagement as well as cooperation have a reciprocal relationship (e.g., Easton, 1975; Putnam, 1995), it is assumed that the individual journalists' working environment (concerning their degree of cooperation with and proximity to the institutions) is essential in determining their degree of political trust. Therefore, journalists' political trust might impact the news production process and, thereof, the media content. As first step to undo this package, we need to look at journalists' political trust in more detail and examine differences in political trust among journalists working within specific media environments.

Hence, the present study is concerned with the presumption that the degree of the individual journalists' cooperation with and proximity to the political institutions is a determining factor of journalists' political trust-levels. Therefore, based on a survey among 775 German journalists the present paper inquires *how much trust journalists have in national political institutions* and *how these trust-levels differ depending on the journalists' working conditions*.

What is trust – and what is it good for?

Despite the fact that there is no common theoretical stance on trust, researchers from various disciplines agree on a variety of aspects. These help to gain a better understanding of the origins, determinants and meaning of trust for the individual as well as within the context of society and the political system. Such aspects imply that trust is the foundation of every human interaction as it brings individuals together and enables social coexistence, just as it serves as fundament for democracy (Misztal, 2001; Moy & Scheufele, 2000; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Zmerli & Newton, 2008). More specifically, trust is based on experiences and expectations; it involves assessment and uncertainty, is oriented towards the future as well as reduces social complexity. Also, trust is supposed to be reciprocal with cooperation and, in turn, affects the individual's behavior (Deutsch, 1958; Luhmann, 1979; Misztal, 2001; Putnam, 1993; Rotter, 1967).

Rotter (1967, p. 651) assumes trust to be “an expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon.” This understanding of *interpersonal trust* is rooted in Rotter's social learning theory according to which the individual establishes patterns of expectations and attitudes during life. These attitudes are based on experiences and, thus, determine learning and behavior: for the level of trust of individuals it is essential that what is being learned is “significantly affected by the degree to which they believe their informants without independent evidence” (Rotter, 1967, p. 651). Besides that, the motivational relevance to trust, the opponent itself as

well as the predictability of a specific action or situation are central for building trustworthy behavior. Deutsch (1958, p. 266) noted in this regard that the “individual may be said to have trust in the occurrence of an event if he expects its occurrence and his expectation leads to behavior which he perceives to have greater negative motivational consequences if the expectation is not confirmed than positive motivational consequences if it is confirmed.” In sum, the decision on whether or not to trust is based on various, partly overlapping, internal and external factors connected to the personality of the trusting individual, the situational context as well as the characteristics of the relationship with the opponent (e.g., Petermann, 2013).

While interpersonal trust focusses on trust between individuals or groups, the term *institutional trust* refers more specifically to the socio-political sphere. Misztal (2001, p. 374) argues that the survival of the societal and political system „depends upon a just and fair institutional order” in which „cultural dispositions and legal norms foster tolerance, cooperation and a sense of personal and social responsibility for others.” Easton (1975) further argues that trust is the willingness of the individual to believe that the rules and regulations of the socio-political system provide outcomes that are just and fair to everyone. Thus, trust is necessary for the implementation of the decisions made by the political regime and, therefore, refers to the “symbolic satisfaction with the processes by which the country is run” (Easton, 1975, p. 478). Easton (1975) further argues that individuals would trust since they perceive “that their own interests would be attended” (p. 477); that level of trust would remain as long as they believe that the political regime or its institutions respectively are producing “beneficial results” (p. 449). Similarly, Müller (2013, p. 40) argues institutional trust depends on “the belief that the perceived institutional performance conforms to the expectations of the individuals”. As it is trust that links individuals to institutions it is perceived as one principle element for the functioning of the whole democratic system

(Misztal, 2001; Moy & Scheufele, 2000). Therefore, it has a stake in political participation, support and engagement (Easton, 1965, 1975; Putnam, 1993, 1995).

In sum, institutional trust refers exclusively to trust in the country's institutions, including not only political but also social institutions such as health care or the educational system.

However, more of interest in the context of the present study is the understanding of *political trust*. As distinct from institutional trust, political trust can be seen as sub-form as it refers to the political institutions only. Research on trust in the political institutions vary tremendously in regard to what institutions are meant when talking about institutional or political trust: some understand or measure it as trust in the government or trust in the parliament; others focus on trust in political parties – and some use a combination of various kinds of institutions (e.g., Fuchs, Gabriel & Völkl, 2002; Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2014; Klingemann, 1999; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Walter-Rogg, 2005). While research is inconclusive about the most useful categorization of political institutions (for an overview see Walter-Rogg, 2005), the present study includes the government, the parliament, the political parties and politicians as well as the implementing institutions of the police, the judiciary and the military. Albeit these institutions serve the democratic system with various functions, they are all part of the political system at large. Hence, *political trust* is defined here as *the belief that the future performance of the political institutions will conform to the expectations of the individual journalist*. Based on this understanding, the present paper is interested in the trust of journalists in the German political institutions.

Journalistic cooperation with the political system

As mentioned before, the situational context and the characteristics of the relationship with the opponent are influencing individuals' levels of trust. Furthermore, trust implies that cooperation with others is a necessary precondition – be it the cooperation within the private context, in public life, or in business. Thus, to understand differences in political trust among

journalists, the structuring of the journalists' immediate working environment and journalistic cooperation with the political system need to be elaborated.

Putnam (1993) examined the role of political participation for making democracy work. He found that there are positive associations between political participation through involvement in community groups, and democratic government. In this regard, interpersonal trust is a crucial characteristic of civic engagement since it reflects the characteristics of social life, facilitates coordination, and finally enables individuals to interact effectively. This relation is due to the fact that "the more we connect with other people, the more we trust them, and vice versa" (Putnam, 1995, p. 665). Without cooperation, or without being connected to others, trust would not matter as it would be the trusting individuals that are more likely to engage and participate (Cappella, 2005; Uslaner, 1998). More precisely, Cappella (2005) noted that if the actions of the government would not affect the daily life of the people there is no connection between them; in turn, trust would not be an issue. Contrarily, "mistrust implies that the self-interest of political actors is their primary goal and that the common interest is secondary at best or played out only for its political advantage" (Cappella, 2005, p. 392). Against this backdrop, various aspects of the journalists' working conditions might be able to shape political trust. The present paper lies its focus on three aspects and examines how trust varies depending on the newsroom environment, on the topics the journalist deals with in everyday working life, as well as on the media type.

Besides other factors, Putnam (1995) found in his studies that people living in large-scale environments (such as residents of metropolitan areas) are least trusting, while the small-scale environment (such as people living in rural areas) seems to foster trust due to the greater possibility of cooperation. Also, Brehm and Rahn (1997) found a similar pattern. They were able to identify the reciprocal relationship between civic engagement or participation and interpersonal trust arguing that the influence from participation on trust is even stronger than the other way around. Overall, these findings imply that people have the most trust in small-

scale environments, which can be traced back to proximity and cooperation. Transferring these findings to the journalistic context it is assumed that journalists reflect their immediate environment based on the size of the newsroom they work in. Thus, the first hypothesis reads as follows:

Journalists working in small newsrooms have a higher degree of political trust than journalists working in large newsrooms (H1).

In accordance to Petermann (2013) and Putnam (1993, 1995), the situational context of the cooperation with a specific opponent is highly relevant for the trust-decision. In the context of journalism, it is therefore assumed that trust varies among journalists depending on their level of cooperation with political institutions. Journalists have experiences with political institutions in specific ways: especially political journalists but also journalists who report on the local or regional level regularly enter political institutions, talk to politicians and interact with them. They face “institutional deficiencies and political-administrative misconduct” from horse’s mouth (Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2012, p. 797). At the same time, journalists and politicians are in a relationship that is often determined by the perception that the counterpart is not reliable and does not have integrity (Brants et al., 2010). Therefore, it does not come as surprise that the public and journalists differ in respect to their levels of cynicism and political trust (Brants et al., 2010; Donsbach, 2004; Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2014). As shown before, one reason for that might be that journalists, especially political journalists but also journalists that report on local and regional issues, are regularly in contact with political institutions. That such immediate experiences make a difference indeed was shown by Reinhardt (2015); he found that first-hand experiences in regard to Hurricane Katrina evacuees (the “survivors”) have the highest trust in the federal government, while those individuals using second-hand information based on their attention to media coverage of the Hurricane (the “observers”) have higher trust in local officials, while trust decreases the higher the level of government is.

Therefore, it seems natural to assume that journalists have higher political trust than the public because of the higher degree of proximity or cooperation with the political system which is, in turn, expected to foster political trust. First hints confirming these assumptions can be derived from Hanitzsch and Berganza (2014). They found that – at least within the German context – it is the journalists that are politically more trusting than the public. Hence, in accordance with Putnam’s (1995) approach one could argue that the more journalists interact with the political institutions, the more they will trust them. Thus, it appears to be reasonable to believe that journalists vary in their trust-levels along the news beats and topics they work on, depending on their degree of cooperation and proximity to the political system. Thus, the second hypothesis reads as follows:

Political journalists and journalists working on local/regional issues have a higher degree of political trust than journalists working on other topics (H2).

Regarding the accusations that media coverage is accountable for a decline of public trust, it is important to reflect on previous research providing evidence that there is indeed some relationship between news consumption and trust (e.g., Ariely, 2015; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Hanitzsch, van Dalen & Steindl, 2016; Putnam, 1995). Presumably, studies suggest that the exposure to certain media types influences political trust in different ways (Avery, 2009; Becker & Whitney, 1980; Moy & Scheufele, 2000). However, findings are inconclusive: Cappella (2005, p. 393) explains that “[w]hen the coverage of politicians and their policies is framed continually as self-interested and seldom in terms of the common good [...] the public’s experience of their leaders is biased toward attributions which induce mistrust.” Additionally, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) noted that mainstream media coverage, especially strategically framed news would activate public mistrust. At the same time, Putnam (2000) argues that the increased consumption of television viewing would have caused the vigorous decline of public trust within the United States; Uslander (1998), however, was not able to find such a connection. Also, Becker and Whitney (1980) found a different pattern:

They detected that newspaper readers are politically more trusting than television viewers. On the other hand, Avery (2009) found that newspaper readers become politically more trusting in institutions after being exposed to newspaper coverage, which might be an indicator that the exposure to various media types also come along with various consequences for trust. Under the assumption that it is the exposure to different media types that evolves different levels of political trust among the public, it is also assumed that journalists' trust varies along the various media types; as a consequence, their levels of trust might affect the audience in specific ways. However, research is not conclusive on any specific patterns here. Thus, it is necessary to elaborate on an explanatory level for which it is asked:

How does the political trust differ along the media type journalists work for (RQ1)?

Method

The paper is embedded in the second wave of the *Worlds of Journalism Study*¹ (WJS), which contains a variety of questions on journalistic work. To examine the proposed research question and hypotheses, data from this representative survey collected with a standardized questionnaire among German journalists were used.

According to the conceptual framework of the WJS, as “journalists” were those defined that work as professional journalists (1) for news media, which are those newsrooms producing their own news program, and (2) who earn at least 50 percent of the income in journalism or in the media industry in which the individual is involved in producing journalistic content, editing journalistic content, or do editorial supervision and coordination (Worlds of Journalism Study, 2012, 2016).

To draw an informed picture of the media organizations and distribution of journalists working along the various media types in Germany, we used a variety of sources to gain a

¹ For further information, see project homepage: www.worldsofjournalism.org

better understanding of the national media landscape. Therefore, sources such as annual reports of media organizations, national media directories, databases such as the *German Audit Bureau of Circulations* (IVW) or information provided by the German journalists unions were used to collect data about reach, ownership, newsroom structure and size as well as the number of journalists working within the newsrooms. The sampling method followed a stratified random sampling strategy for the newsrooms, and a systematic sampling for journalists within the newsrooms drawn from the first step of the sampling procedure. The survey was conducted between November 2014 and August 2015 via telephone interviews and online survey, leading to 775 valid interviews with journalists working for German media outlets (combined response rate 34.9%).

For the present analysis, data of journalists working for the print-sector (consisting of daily newspapers, weekly newspapers and magazines), the broadcasting-sector (consisting of public and private television as well as radio stations), news agencies, and online stand-alone media will be used.

Measures

Political trust. To measure political trust, we raised a question used in various studies before, such as the World Values Survey: “Please tell me on a scale of 1 to 5 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions”. To measure trust in political institutions, the items “the parliament”, “the government”, “the political parties”, “politicians in general”, “the judiciary / the courts”, “the military” as well as “the police” were used. Items were measured on a five-point scale reaching from “no trust at all” (1) to “complete trust” (5).

Size of newsroom. Based on the sampling strategy, we were able to identify and differentiate small and large newsrooms. Therefore, we included a variable in the dataset that indicated whether the interviewed journalist works for a small or large newsroom. Since every media type has its own particularities according to the size of newsroom that is typical for the

specific media type, we calculated the average number of journalists working in newsrooms within each media type. Based on that average number, we differentiated small and large newsrooms on whether the number of journalistic employees lies over or under the average of the specific media type.

News beat. The questionnaire asked journalists to indicate on what topics or beats they work. The majority of interviewees indicated to be concerned with specific issues in their everyday working life (n=464). To test the hypothesis that the journalists' work on political issues as well as on issues that indicate a higher proximity (local/regional issues), the news beat variable was recoded and is used to look into three different groups of journalists. For one, the paper is interested in political journalists. As van Dalen (2012, p. 470) noted, the political journalist is understood as someone "who report, analyze or comment on national politics." However, processes of transition and structural changes (such as the introduction of integrated newsrooms or cross-media production and distribution) that occurred during the past years brought up the need to define the political journalist on a broader range. Because it is no longer possible to operationalize the political journalist as someone who works on the political beat, as the lines between the beats have started to blur (Blum, 2005; Lünenborg & Berghofer, 2010), the present paper is regarding journalists that report, analyze and comment on political processes, current affairs and social issues on different levels. In terms of operationalization, we use data of those journalists who indicated to work on "news and current affairs", "politics", "domestic politics" and "foreign politics" as political journalists (n=74, coded as 1). Furthermore, as it was also hypothesized that journalists working on local and regional issues would have varying trust-levels as of their degree of proximity, we will further use a second category which includes journalists working on "local/regional issues" (n=76, coded as 2). All other issues or beats were recoded into the category "other", and includes journalists working on "sports", "arts and culture", "health", "entertainment", or "other" specified topics (n=314, coded as 0).

Sample description

Overall, 775 valid interviews with journalists are used for analysis. Across the sample, the average age of the interviewed journalists was 45.58 years ($SD=10.50$), and they further indicated to have on average 19.52 years of working experience ($SD=10.33$). Of all journalist interviewed, 310 were female (40.1%). Furthermore, interviewees were well educated with 75.3 percent indicating to hold a university degree (Bachelor's degree or higher). Most of the journalists interviewed showed a slight tendency towards the left regarding the political stance ($n=691$; $M=3.96$; $SD=1.32$). Across the sample, the majority (74.5%) hold a full-time position, 7.9 percent indicated to work on a part-time position, and further 17.7 percent of the interviewees indicated to work as freelance journalist.

Findings

Before looking for differences among journalists in various working environments, it is essential to first gain some insights about how the journalists perceive the various political institutions. Data indicate that journalists indeed perceive differences between them: the interviewees indicated to have most trust in the judiciary and the courts ($n=733$; $M=3.60$; $SD=.81$) as well as in the police ($n=735$; $M=3.54$; $SD=.78$). Furthermore, while trust in the government ($n=730$; $M=3.06$; $SD=.84$) and in the parliament ($n=727$; $M=3.26$; $SD=.84$) is moderate, trust in the military is lower ($n=698$; $M=2.84$; $SD=.93$). Especially, trust in the political parties ($n=730$; $M=2.56$; $SD=.78$) and in politicians in general ($n=730$; $M=2.63$; $SD=.73$) are among the lowest trust-levels.

Secondly, the paper asked for differences in journalists' trust depending on the specific working conditions. More specifically, we will look into the role of the newsroom, into the topics journalists work on in their everyday working life and further into the trust-differences in regard to media types. In doing so, an index of political trust (based on the above-

mentioned items) was calculated (Cronbach's alpha .84) first, which was used for the following analyses.

The first hypothesis assumed that journalists working in small newsrooms would have higher political trust-levels than journalists working in large newsrooms (H1). Although findings indicate that the groups vary significantly ($F=5.66$; $p=.01$), mean scores show a reversed pattern than assumed from the theoretical assumptions: journalists working in small newsrooms ($n=332$; $M=3.03$; $SD=.59$) are significantly less trusting than journalists working in large newsrooms ($n=327$; $M=3.14$; $SD=.58$).

Thus, hypothesis 1 needs to be rejected.

Also, it was assumed that journalists who work on local and regional issues, just as journalists that work on political issues would be more politically trusting than their colleagues working on other topics (H2). In regard to the news beat, data show that journalists are significantly more trusting when working on local/regional issues ($n=67$; $M=3.24$; $SD=.60$) and on political issues ($n=69$; $M=3.13$; $SD=.61$) than on other issues ($n=272$; $M=3.03$; $SD=.58$) ($F=3.66$; $p=.02$).

Therefore, the second hypothesis can be confirmed.

Furthermore, it was also asked for trust-differences among journalists that work for different media types (RQ1). Data indeed reveal that journalists' trust-levels vary significantly along the media types ($F=2.76$; $p=.04$): journalists working for broadcasting stations have the highest trust-levels ($n=186$; $M=3.13$; $SD=.54$), followed by their colleagues in news agencies ($n=28$; $M=3.05$; $SD=.60$) and the printed press ($n=133$; $M=2.99$; $SD=.61$), whereas online-journalists are least trusting ($n=8$; $M=2.64$; $SD=.94$).

Discussion

First, the journalists' trust in the German political institutions was examined. Findings revealed that journalists have the most trust in the implementing institutions of the judiciary

system and the courts as well as in the police. At the same time, trust in representing institutions is rather low. In particular, data showed that the political parties as well as the German politicians receive least trust. Interestingly, in comparing the trust-levels with findings from the first wave of the *Worlds of Journalism Study*, the trust of German journalists in political parties and in politicians in general have slightly increased over the past years (e.g., Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2014). However, in the journalists' view they are still the least trusted institutions. Previous research pointed to the skeptical relationship between journalists and politicians (e.g., Brants et al., 2010). As noted before, the relationship with the opponent, the expectations the individual has as well as the motivations that are inscribed to the opponents' future behavior are factors that might shape individual's trust (Cappella, 2005; Deutsch, 1958; Petermann, 2013). Therefore, the relationship between journalists and politicians might influence the journalists' trust in political institutions, specifically in politicians. For instance, Fuchs, Gabriel and Völkl (2002) understand trust in institutions as expansion of trust in political actors. They argue that it would be reasonable that long-term experiences made with political actors might spill over and influence the evaluation of the political institutions and even the perceptions of the political system in general. Contrarily, Gabriel (2005) argues that this process might rather be conversely: trust in political actors result from trust in political institutions. Yet, he also sees the importance of long-term (positive or negative) experience with specific actors that lead to a spill-over of trust in institutions. Therefore, further analysis should regard the years of working experiences journalists have been in journalism to see whether or not there are differences between those who are more experienced with political institutions and those who are not.

This discussion reveals two limitations of the study. First, for measuring trust in the political institutions an index including all institutions was calculated. As mentioned before, the public perceives differences in political trust with regard to the various institutions depending on their different functions. Thus, there might be even more differences between the journalists

when asking for trust the political system (e.g., the democracy), the institutions and the actors separately. Second, as Walter-Rogg (2005) already argued the status of the specific politician is relevant for trust: it is reasonable to assume that the positive evaluation of the party leader has consequences for the trust in this particular party as well as in political parties in general. Therefore, a differentiated analysis of trust in politicians the journalists know personally, trust in political actors in general, and trust in politicians from specific parties might deliver fruitful insights to discover the low levels of trust in politicians. Also, specific longitudinal data are needed to draw assumptions on a possible spill-over effect from trust in politicians to trust in other institutions or the democratic system as a whole.

In regard to the differences in trust-levels depending on the journalists' working conditions, data showed that journalists working in large newsrooms have higher political trust-levels than journalists working in small newsrooms, which was contrary to what was expected out of the literature review (H1). Although findings indicated that there are significant differences between small and large newsrooms, the ratio was reversed. As explanation for this reversed pattern, it is arguable that journalists working in larger newsrooms have more often the possibility to physically encounter institutions as resources for research might be rather available in larger than in smaller newsrooms. This would, again, lead to the assumption of a higher degree of cooperation with and proximity to the institutions.

At the same time, we found that the present findings regarding the issue focus (H2) are in line with research on political engagement and cooperation: data showed that political journalists as well as journalists that work on local/regional issues have more political trust than journalists working on other issues such as sports or culture. Putnam (1993, 1995) already argued that trust is a crucial characteristic of civic engagement as it reflects the characteristics of social life and enables individuals to interact effectively. The findings presented account that these assumptions hold true for the journalistic context in regard to the issues journalists deal with: the closer the proximity (in the meaning of regularly dealing with political issues

and concentrating on local and regional issues), the more political trust journalists have. The data even indicates that the local and regional aspect is even more important than dealing with political issues per se. For one, this might be because the cooperation or the personal involvement is assumed to be much higher in the local/regional context; for the other, because local/regional issues often deal with political topics but on the much closer local and regional level. This finding might be an indicator for the importance of experiences and cooperation with the institutions for political trust. Overall, the rejection of hypothesis one as well as the confirmation of hypothesis two reveal that according to the theoretical approach on cooperation and based on the assumption of proximity hold true, though not in regard to the physical proximity but rather in regarding the engagement with the topics journalists deal with in their everyday working life.

As previous research such as the studies provided by Avery (2009) or by Becker and Whitney (1980) showed the public differs in political trust depending on their media diet. Therefore, it was assumed that journalists might (unintentionally) influence the media content to leave such a specific pattern with their recipients. Therefore, also differences in trust along the various media types were inquired (RQ1). Data indicated that it is the broadcasting journalists that reported the highest political trust-levels, while printed press journalists were more skeptical. In this regard, it can be hypothesized that journalists might transfer their skepticism into the media content, which might make it appear more reliable to the audience which could also explain why (at least in the U.S.-context) newspaper readers become more trusting in political institutions after newspaper exposure (Avery, 2009). In this regard, it would be of interest to also regard survey data among the German public to see if the suggested assumption, namely that it is the printed press consumers that are most trusting, also holds true for the German context. Interestingly, it is the journalists working on the online sector that appeared to be most skeptical. Tsfaty and Cappella (2003) already found that the public prefers online, non-mainstream news when they are less trusting. Future research should keep this in mind and

also focus on questions such as the reasons that made these also most skeptical journalists make them work in the online sector.

Conclusion

In the light of the discussion of declining public trust in the political institutions, and the media who were held responsible for it, the paper argued that it became crucial to take into account the journalists' perspective on political trust. Based on a survey among 775 German journalists, it was asked how much trust journalists have in the national political institutions, and how the journalists' immediate environment and the cooperation with the political institutions influence their trust.

In short, data indicated that journalists perceive the various institutions in Germany differentially: while they appear to have the most trust in what is called implementing institutions, they are less trusting in representative institutions, in particular in the German politicians. Furthermore, data also revealed that journalists working on local/regional and political issues as well as journalists working in large newsrooms are more politically trusting. Overall, it is less the spatial proximity but rather the issue proximity that counts for political trust. Besides that, also broadcasting journalists have higher political trust-levels, while online-journalists exhibit the lowest political trust. This is of interest because it is also the skeptical recipients that rather turn to online sources than to the mainstream media. Here, further research is needed to elaborate on what determinant factors shape the journalists' trust in the various media types.

Albeit research suggests that it would not be the journalists that became more cynical over time, but that it would rather be the change of institutional and cultural order that turned to stricter standards (Müller, 2013; Schudson, 1999). The findings of the present study revealed that at least the trust in politicians and in political parties slightly increased over the past years and yet, they are still the least trusted institutions among German journalists. However, this is

not an alarming result. On the contrary, it is the “healthy skepticism toward power holders” that “has always been part and parcel of their professional luggage” because it helps journalists to fulfill their assignment (Brants et al., 2010, p. 36). Journalists need to be skeptical or mistrusting to keep their duty of being critical and monitor those in power to enable recipients to participate and make elaborated political decisions (e.g., van Dalen, 2012). In the end, it is an advantage for any democratic society that journalists “are unwilling to rely exclusively on official statements as they once did. Their own professional culture pushed them to be analytical and judgmental” (Schudson, 1999, p. 1007).

There might be an increasing trend of negativity in media coverage. However, in the light of current societal developments and discussions about the “liar press” in Germany, data prove that journalists are skeptical towards the political institutions. These findings weaken arguments such as that the media would be the political elites’ henchmen. In this regard, one major issue seems to be indeed what Kioussis (2002, p. 569) already noted, namely that trends such as negativity in the content “may not only shape individuals’ perceptions of the ‘objects’ that are being covered, but also may affect the perceptions of the disseminators of such information.”

Future research should regard journalists, media content and recipients in one study to examine (1) if patterns of trust find their way into the media coverage, (2) what the reasons for such an influence would be and how these patterns would look like as well as (3) to receive empirical evidence of the assumption that the news coverage is truly affecting its recipients in the way the media are accused for these days.

Literature

- Ariely, G. (2015). Trusting the Press and Political Trust: A Conditional Relationship. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 25(3), 351-367.
- Avery, J. (2009). Videomalaise or Virtuous Circle? The Influence of the News Media on Political Trust. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 14 (4), 410-433.
- Becker, L. & Whitney, D. C. (1980). Effects of Media Dependencies. Audience Assessment of Government. *Communication Research*, 7 (1), 95-120.
- Blum, R. (2005). Politikjournalismus (pp. 346–348). In S. Weischenberg, H. Kleinsteuber & B. Pörksen (eds.), *Handbuch Journalismus und Medien*. Konstanz: UVK.
- Brants, K., de Vreese, C., Möller, J. & van Praag, P. (2010). The Real Spiral of Cynicism? Symbiosis and Mistrust between Politicians and Journalists. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 15 (1), 25-40.
- Brehm, J. & Rahn, W. (1997). Individual-Level Evidence for the Causes and Consequences of Social Capital. *American Journal of Political Science*, 41 (3), 999-1023.
- Cappella, J. N. (2005). The Creation and Dissolution of Public Trust in the New Media Environment (pp. 385-414). In P. Rössler & F. Krotz (eds.), *Mythen der Mediengesellschaft – The Media Society and its Myths*. Konstanz: UVK.
- Cappella, J. N. & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *The Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Deutsch, M. (1958). Trust and suspicion. *Conflict Resolution*, II (4), 265-279.
- Donsbach, W. (2004). Psychology of News Decisions. Factors behind journalists' professional behavior. *Journalism*, 5 (2), 131-157.
- Easton, D. (1965). *A System Analysis of Political Life*. New York: Wiley.
- Easton, D. (1975). A Re-assessment of the concept of Political Support. *British Journal of Political Science*, 5, 435-457.

- Flegel, R. & Chaffee, S. (1971). Influences of Editors, Readers, and Personal Opinions on Reporters. *Journalism Quarterly*, 48, 645-651.
- Floß, D. (2010). *The Impact of Mass Media on Political Support. A Preferences-Perceptions Model of Media Effects*, Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Fuchs, D., Gabriel, O. & Völkl, K. (2002). Vertrauen in politische Institutionen und politische Unterstützung. *ÖZP*, 31 (4), 427-450.
- Gabriel, O. (2005). Politische Einstellungen und Politische Kultur (p. 459-522). In O. Gabriel & E. Holtmann (eds.), *Handbuch politisches System der BRD*, München: Oldenbourg.
- Gross, K., Aday, S. & Brewer, P. (2004). A Panel Study of Media Effects on Political and Social Trust after September 11, 2001. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 9 (4), 49-73.
- Hanitzsch, T. & Berganza, R. (2012). Explaining Journalists' Trust in Public Institutions across 20 countries: Media Freedom, Corruption, and Ownership matter most. *Journal of Communication*, 62 (2012), 794-814.
- Hanitzsch, T. & Berganza, R. (2014). Political Trust among Journalists: Comparative Evidence from 21 Countries (pp. 137-156). In M. Canel & K. Voltmer (eds.), *Comparing Political Communication across Time and Space. New Studies in an Emerging Field*, London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hanitzsch, T., van Dalen, A. & Steindl, N. (2016). The Erosion of Trust in the Press an 'Spillover' Effect: A comparative and Longitudinal Analysis. *Paper presented at ICA*, Fukuoka, June 2016.
- Kepplinger, H. M., Brosius, H.-B. & Staab, J. F. (1991). Instrumental Actualization. A Theory of Mediated Conflicts. *European Journal of Communication*, 6, 263-290.
- Kiousis, S. (2002). Killing the Messenger: an exploration of presidential newspaper coverage and public confidence in the press. *Journalism Studies*, 3 (4), 557-572.

- Klingemann, H.-D. (1999). Mapping Political Support in the 1990s: A Global Analysis (pp. 31-56). In P. Norris (ed.), *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*, Oxford: University Press.
- Lünenborg, M. & Berghofer, S. (2010). *Politikjournalistinnen und -journalisten. Aktuelle Befunde zu Merkmalen und Einstellungen vor dem Hintergrund ökonomischer und technologischer Wandlungsprozesse im deutschen Journalismus*. Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin.
- Luhmann, N. (2014). *Vertrauen. Ein Mechanismus der Reduktion sozialer Komplexität*, 5th edition, Konstanz: UVK.
- McCombs, M., Holbert, R., Kioussis, S. & Wanta, W. (2011). *The News and Public Opinion. Media effects on civic life*, Malden: Polity Press.
- Mishler, W. & Rose, R. (2001). What are the origins of political trust? Testing Institutional and Cultural Theories in Post-Communist Societies. *Comparative Political Studies*, 34 (1), 30-62.
- Misztal, B. (2001). Trust and cooperation: the democratic public sphere. *Journal of Sociology*, 37 (4), 371-386.
- Moy, P. & Scheufele, D. (2000). Media Effects on Political and Social Trust. *J&MC Quarterly*, 77 (4), 744-759.
- Müller, J. (2013). *Mechanisms of Trust. News Media in Democratic and Authoritarian Regimes*, Frankfurt/ New York: Campus.
- Patterson, T. E. (1993). *Out of order*. New York: Knopf.
- Petermann, F. (2013). *Psychologie des Vertrauens*, Göttingen: Hogrefe Verlag.
- Putnam, R. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R. (1995). Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 28 (4), 664-683.

- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Reinemann, C. & Baugut, P. (2014). Alter Streit unter neuen Bedingungen. Einflüsse politischer Einstellungen von Journalisten auf ihre Arbeit. *Zeitschrift für Politik*, 61 (4), 480-505.
- Reinhardt, G. Y. (2015). First-hand Experience and Second-Hand Information: Changing Trust across Three Levels of Government. *Review of Policy Research*, 32 (3), 345-364.
- Robinson, M. J. (1977). Television and American politics. *The Public Interest*, 48, 3–39,
- Rotter, J. (1967). A new scale for the measurement of interpersonal trust. *Journal of Personality*, 35, 651-665.
- Schudson, M. (1999). Social origins of Press Cynicism in Portraying Politics. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42 (6), 998-1008.
- Starck, K. & Soloski, J. (1977). Effect of Reporter Predisposition in Covering Controversial Story. *Journalism Quarterly*, 54, 120-125.
- Tsfati, Y. (2004). Exploring Possible Correlates of Journalists' Perceptions of Audience Trust. *J&MC Quarterly*, 81 (2), 274-291.
- Tsfati, Y. & Cappella, J. (2003). Do people watch what they do not trust? Exploring the association between news media skepticism and exposure. *Communication Research*, 30 (5), 504-529.
- Uslaner, E. M. (1998). Social Capital, Television, and the „Mean World“: Trust, Optimism, and Civic Participation. *Political Psychology*, 19 (3), 441-467.
- van Dalen, A. (2012). The people behind the political headlines: A comparison of political journalists in Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom and Spain. *The International Communication Gazette*, 74 (5), 464-483.

- van Dalen, A., Albaek, E. & de Vreese, C. (2011). Suspicious minds: Explaining political cynicism among political journalists in Europe. *European Journal of Communication*, 26 (2), 147-162.
- Walter-Rogg, M. (2005). Politisches Vertrauen ist gut – Misstrauen ist besser? Ausmaß und Ausstrahlungseffekte des Politiker- und Institutionenvertrauens im vereinigten Deutschland (pp. 129-156). In W. Gabriel, J. Falter & H. Rattinger (eds.), *Wächst zusammen, was zusammengehört? Stabilität und Wandel politischer Einstellungen im wiedervereinigten Deutschland*, Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Worlds of Journalism Study (2012). *Field Manual. Instructions for Field Research*.
http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Field_Manual_1.3.pdf.
- Worlds of Journalism Study (2016). *The WJS 2012-2015. Conceptual Framework*.
<http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/research/2012-2015-study/conceptual-framework/>.
- Zmerli, S. & Newton, K. (2008). Social Trust and Attitudes toward Democracy. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72 (4), 706-724.