



What is good journalism?

Comparing Israeli public and journalists' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The frequent referencing of service to the public interest as a core professional journalistic value raises the question of the correspondence between the perception of journalists and the public as to what constitutes good and bad journalism. In this study, a sample of Israeli journalists and a sample of the Israeli public were asked a series of questions about the core values and practices of journalism. Results suggest four major conclusions: first, Israeli journalists have a clear, relatively uniform perception of what constitutes worthy journalism. Second, journalists and the public differ in the degrees of significance they assign to various journalistic norms and practices. Third, the public is slightly more positive in its overall assessment of the Israeli media in comparison with the journalists. Finally, the two general assessments are constituted by different, or even opposing, components.

KEY WORDS ■ Israel ■ journalistic values ■ public opinion

Journalists are often depicted as 'watchdogs' or 'advocates'. Both metaphors imply that journalists should operate 'on behalf of the public', provide it with information necessary for democratic decision-making, defend society from corruption, and deal with issues that the public cares about. Similarly, journalistic discourse often uses the rhetoric of mission, duty and service when discussing the relationship between journalists and their audiences. As a typical journalistic code of ethics declares: 'The public's right to know about matters of importance is paramount. The newspaper has a special responsibility as surrogate of its readers to be a vigilant watchdog of their legitimate

public interests' (Associated Press Managing Editors, 2004). Correspondingly, when journalists are asked about the factors that determine their professional satisfaction, they emphasize the importance of knowing that they are helping people and servicing the public's interests (Weaver, 1998).

Beyond these examples, various competing models of journalistic practice could be conceptualized through their interpretation of the public-interest theme: the objective-neutral model positions journalists as emissaries of the public due to their skills and training. According to this model, journalists betray their service mission if they let their personal beliefs and preferences tilt their coverage (Schudson, 2001). Following the same pattern, the advocacy model views the purposive neutrality of the objective journalist as a disservice to the public interest, or at least to the interests of society's disenfranchised sectors (Janowitz, 1975). Finally, public journalism's criticism of the prevailing modes of journalistic practice focuses on the gap between the public-interest perceptions of professional journalists and those of the public itself (Rosen, 1991). The only remedy to this discrepancy, according to the public journalism critique, would evolve from direct public involvement in the process of determining how journalism could best promote communal interests.

Positioning the service of public interests as a core professional journalistic value raises the question of the correspondence between what journalists and the public perceive as good and bad journalism. A public-interest orientation might imply that professional journalists and audiences should agree on the essence of the journalistic mission. That is, according to this logic, the public and its journalistic emissaries – or even representatives – should concur on what this mission entails, or at least agree that journalists and the public should be aware of each side's beliefs and expectations. And so, the journalistic rhetoric of mission and service – according to this reading – assumes that in an ideal situation, when we ask journalists and audiences about the central goals, values and practices of journalism, we would receive similar, if not identical, answers.

At the same time, an alternative interpretation of what professional journalism entails might view differences in perception not as a professional failure, but rather as an almost given. According to this logic, the unique knowledge, experience and professional commitment of journalists might lead them to make decisions that do not necessarily reflect what the public wants, but rather what (journalists perceive as what) the public needs. Thus, for instance, professional journalistic discourse views highly popular 'infotainment' shows as a threat to the integrity of the profession (Downie and Kaiser, 2002).

The following study offers a concretization of this debate. It provides evidence concerning the similarities and differences between the ways in which journalists and the public perceive the core tenets of the journalistic

profession. Thus, it informs the discussion over the meaning of journalism's public mission with empirical survey data.

In the research reported, a sample of Israeli journalists and a sample of the Israeli public were asked a series of questions about the core values and practices of journalism. While such a comparative survey strategy seems warranted, relatively little research has thus far employed it. There are several comparisons of journalists' and publics' responses to opinion surveys, but these relate to perceptions of pressures on journalists (Voakes, 1997) and to perceptions of bias in reporting (Martin et al., 1972) and newsworthiness (Jones, 1993). To date, no research has compared the responses of journalists and the public to questions regarding core journalistic values, goals and practices, such as objectivity, neutrality and fact verification. Therefore, our research questions were devised to address three central issues:

RQ1: Do Israeli journalists differ from the Israeli public in the answers they give to survey questions regarding core journalistic goals, values, and practices?

RQ2: Do Israeli journalists differ from the Israeli public in their evaluation of the performance of Israeli media?

RQ3: Do Israeli journalists differ from the Israeli public in the criteria they use when forming their evaluation of Israeli media?

Our findings show that reactions to the identically worded questions in both samples were significantly different. That is, the journalists and the public diverged in their responses regarding central aspects of the journalistic profession and the criteria by which they define high-quality journalistic work. This discrepancy in the answers may help explain growing public dissatisfaction with the media and the mistrust towards journalists that is expressed in public opinion surveys, in Israel and elsewhere (Moy and Pfau, 2001).

This research also advances the study of journalistic communal identity, through the comparison between journalists and the public at large. Previous studies have suggested that journalists belong to communities that are constituted through shared training and common professional values and practices (Katz, 1997), as well as common narratives that shape communal interpretations of social reality (Berkowitz, 2000; Zelizer, 1993). Thus, the professional *and* the interpretive conceptualizations point to the ways by which journalists learn what it means to be a good journalist who serves assumed public interests. The following study concretizes the notion of collective journalistic sense making, within the context of the relations between journalists and their audiences.

The study results highlight the relatively uniform perceptions of mainstream journalists regarding what constitutes worthy journalism. The Israeli context is particularly interesting for the study of core journalistic agreements

due to the relative lack of formal training: undergraduate degrees in communication and journalism were first awarded 10 years ago.¹ Additionally, as can be seen in the findings reported in this article, only 20 percent of the surveyed Israeli journalists studied journalism or communication, whereas in comparison, 49.2 percent of surveyed American journalists hold degrees in journalism or communication (Weaver et al., 2003). Mass academic training of Israeli journalists could not therefore account for the high agreement rates found among the journalists surveyed in the study.

Moreover, the high rates of agreement are noteworthy within the historical context of the development of Israeli journalism. When the State of Israel was established in 1948, 10 of the 17 daily newspapers published in the country were affiliated with political parties, labour organizations or the government (Limor, 1999), and about two thirds of Israeli journalists were employed by such politically-identified newspapers (Peri, 1999). Thus, throughout Israel's first two decades its press continued to embrace, to a large degree, pre-state patterns of journalistic practice and self-definition: Israeli journalists of that era tended to frame and value journalistic work through ideological criteria and viewed their profession as an integral component of the Zionist endeavour (Meyers, 2005).

Throughout the following decades, with the proliferation of electronic and commercial media, the ongoing influence of American news formats and the gradual decline of party-affiliated press, journalists shifted towards a more professional orientation (Caspi and Limor, 1999; Doron, 1998). This new ethos entails a shift in the perception of how journalists could best serve the public interest. While during the state's formative era the majority of journalists openly identified the concept of public interest with Zionism or the goals of specific political parties, current Israeli journalists tend to identify the public interest according to journalistic professional standards, thus often positioning it in direct opposition to official interests and policies. This is evident by the fact that over the last three decades Israeli journalists have positioned the uncovering of corporate and governmental misdeeds as professional achievements that epitomize the press' contribution to the public interest (Meyers, 2003: 209–34).

Data

To investigate the three research questions, we compared results from two different surveys: a survey of journalists (see Tsfati, 2004), and a survey of a representative sample of the Israeli adult population (see Tsfati and Peri, 2004).

While the two surveys were initiated by two research institutions and conducted for different purposes, an effort was made to keep question wordings identical, and this was indeed the case in all but a few necessary exceptions.

Public opinion data

The data for the 'audience' sample were collected using telephone surveys conducted in December 2002 by Tel Aviv University's Public Opinion Institute. The sample consisted of 1119 individuals. In terms of nationality, 13 percent were Arabs and the rest Jews. In terms of religiosity, 5.5 percent were self-described Ultra-Orthodox Jews, 8.2 percent were self-described religious, 23 percent described themselves as traditional Jews, and about 50 percent were self-described secular Jews. Additional sample demographics (reported by Tsfaty and Peri, 2004) compared well with population parameters.

Journalists' sample

The survey of Israeli journalists was conducted between September and December 2002. As in previous survey research, a journalist was defined as a person who makes decisions directly affecting hard news content (Donsbach and Klett, 1993). This category includes reporters and editors, but excludes camerapersons, graphic editors, copy editors and the like. Also excluded, following Donsbach and Klett (1993), were journalists who concentrate on soft news such as sports, entertainment, travel and fashion.

Stratified sampling was used to build a diverse sample of reporters and editors. Journalists were sampled from every Hebrew language national news outlet (including print, television and radio news outlets), and from a sample of local newspapers. Each outlet was further stratified by respondents' seniority to ensure that the sample included senior reporters and editors,² on the one hand, and more junior reporters, on the other. A separate stratum was created for journalists from non-mainstream media targeting specific populations (including news outlets in Arabic, English and Russian, as well as religious groups). The strata structure is further detailed in Appendix 1. Random sampling was used within each stratum.³

The overall response rate was 53.7 percent. This response rate is comparable to those achieved by other scholars using questionnaires to investigate journalists worldwide (Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Weaver, 1998). The resulting journalists' sample included 201 Jews and 8 Arabs (about 4%). Additional sample demographics were reported by Tsfaty (2004). The sample somewhat over-represented male journalists, who comprised 71 percent of the sample, and senior journalists, who comprised 48 percent of the sample.

Measures

Perceptions of professional norms

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a series of professional journalistic norms. The items were adapted from a battery of questions used by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.⁴ The question for journalists was worded, 'Please indicate whether you think each of the following is an important principle of journalism'. The wording for the general public was, 'How important should each of the following be for journalists, when they cover the news?'.⁵ Response categories for both samples ranged from 'not at all important' (coded '1') to 'very important' (coded '4'). The items included 'always remaining neutral', 'verifying the facts', 'not publishing rumors', 'getting both sides of the story', 'providing the audience with interpretation to the news', and 'taking into account what interests the public'.

General evaluation of the Israeli media

Both journalists and the general public were asked to evaluate the performance of the Israeli media. In both surveys, the item was worded, 'In general, what grade would you give the Israeli news media for their performance?'. Response categories ranged between '0', indicating a very low grade, to '10', indicating a very high grade.

Evaluation of the Israeli media in specific domains

Respondents in both samples were asked about the degree of their agreement with a series of survey items relating to the functioning of the Israeli media.⁶ Response categories varied between 'strongly agree' (coded '4') and 'do not at all agree' (coded '1'). The items were worded, 'The Israeli media are successful in uncovering corruption, abuse of power, and misconduct', 'News reports in Israeli media are full of factual errors and negligence', 'The Israeli media are patriotic to a degree that compromises their professionalism', 'The media do not sufficiently cover positive developments', and 'Journalists are motivated too much by competition and too little by ethical considerations'. Another item tapped the perception that the media had a liberal bias, or as it is commonly used in Israel – that it is too left wing. But given the different motivations behind the two surveys, the wording of the question was somewhat different. The item was worded, 'The media are too left-wing' for the general public, while for the journalists it was worded 'The media are a leftist mafia', a term often used in Israeli discourse to describe liberal bias in media (Lapid, 1986).

Setting standards for journalism

What do journalists and audiences perceive as good journalism? We began answering this question by analysing journalists' perceptions and public perceptions of ideal norms and practices of journalism. Table 1 presents responses to the survey items regarding perceptions of journalistic norms and practices and tests of the statistical significance of the difference between the samples. Only in one of the five survey items – 'getting both sides of the story' – was the difference between journalists and the general public not statistically significant. For the four remaining statements, the differences between journalists and the general public were highly significant ($p < .001$), and in an additional case ('not publishing rumors'), the difference was borderline significant ($p = .08$).

The journalists and the public both graded the professional norm of 'verifying the facts' as the most important among all items presented. But the two groups differed in the extent to which they concurred with this statement: 79.2 percent of the public thought that verifying facts is very important. In comparison, almost all the journalists (97.1%) rated the norm of 'verifying the facts' as very important. This data could be read as supporting evidence for the existence of core agreements among mainstream Israeli journalists with regard to the fundamentals of their profession. The relative uniformity of journalists' professional perceptions is also evident in the smaller dispersion of journalists' responses to the other survey questions, as indicated by the smaller standard deviations in the journalists' sample, in five of the six items (in four of which the differences were statistically significant).⁷ This is an especially interesting finding in view of the aforementioned fact that communication departments and journalism schools are a relatively new phenomenon in Israeli academia. This suggests that on-the-job training and diffusion of professional norms and values through common discourse manage to constitute shared professional beliefs among Israeli journalists, even in the relative absence of shared formal schooling.

While 75.2 percent of respondents in the public sample answered that 'always remaining neutral' is a 'very important' professional principle, only 43.4 percent of the journalists' sample responded in this way. While 13.2 percent of the journalists ranked neutrality as 'not so important' or 'not at all important', only 5.9 percent of the public sample did so. This significant difference seems to point at the varying perceptions of ideal-type journalism held by Israeli journalists and Israeli media consumers. While the general public perceives neutrality as a desirable goal, the journalists are far more sceptical. Following the same pattern, 53.4 percent of the journalists answered that 'providing the audience with interpretation to news' is very important, in

Table 1 Journalists' and public perceptions of the importance of journalistic professional norms

Item		Very important	Somewhat important	No so important	Not at all important	χ^2 (d.f.)	SD	Levene's test
Always remaining neutral	J	43.4%	43.4%	9.8%	3.4%	70.4 (3)***	.77	17.2***
	P	75.2%	18.9%	3.9%	2.0%		.65	
Verifying the facts	J	97.1%	2.9%			37.1 (3)***	.16	165.5***
	P	79.2%	16.1%	3.4%	1.4%		.59	
Not publishing rumors	J	78.8%	17.3%	3.8%		6.69 (3)#	.51	22.5***
	P	72.4%	19.1%	6.9%	1.5%		.68	
Getting both sides of the story	J	74.9%	21.3%	3.4%	0.5%	1.20 (3)	.55	2.4
	P	73.5%	21.2%	3.9%	1.4%		.62	
Providing the audience with interpretation to news	J	53.4%	38.9%	6.7%	1.0%	24.8 (3)***	.67	6.6*
	P	39.2%	38.7%	17.1%	4.9%		.86	
Taking into account what interests the public	J	25.6%	58.9%	13.5%	1.9%	57.7 (3)***	.68	52.1***
	P	49.1%	30.4%	14.5%	6.0%		.90	

Notes: J indicates journalists and P indicates the general public. *** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$, # $p < .10$

comparison with only 39.2 percent of the public. Thus, the journalists and the public differ in what they view as worthy reporting: while the public prefers neutrality to interpretation, the journalists believe that the opposite mix of neutrality and interpretation best serves the public.

These results could be contextualized in several ways. First, mainstream Israeli journalists, who are members of a professional community sharing common experiences, may be more aware of the unattainable nature of 'neutrality', even when it is perceived as a worthy professional norm (Carey, 1986; Roeh and Ashley, 1986). Second, this difference may point at long-term developments within the professional discourse of Israeli journalists. This claim cannot be sustained by the data of the two surveys, which are first of their kind and capture only one present moment in time. Yet, a probe of various historical data seems to suggest that Israeli journalists, like many of their colleagues around the world, are increasingly questioning the value of neutrality.

This, in turn, might point at a significant historical pattern of development: while journalists of Israel's formative era, namely the 1950s and early 1960s, wholeheartedly adopted the notion that journalists should be first and foremost loyal to ideological ideals of the Zionist endeavour or specific political movements (Goren, 1976; Naor, 1998), later perceptions, embraced through the 1970s and 1980s, shifted towards an adoption of the objective-neutral model (Peri, 2004: 73–93). The findings of the surveys, therefore, could be read as supporting evidence regarding a third phase in this process, during which a significant number of mainstream Israeli journalists question their ability to mirror reality 'as it is', in a neutral manner. Such journalists believe that their public mission would be best advanced if they were to operate as involved interpreters of reality, rather than as distant observers. Or, as Nahum Barnea, a leading political writer put it:

Anyone living in this profession knows there's no such creature, an objective journalist, devoid of emotion, devoid of opinion, devoid of this or other predisposition, and if someone professes to be such a journalist, he is nothing but a fake (Barnea, 2002: 5).

The Israeli public wants journalists to take into account its tastes and interests, more than journalists think they should. Almost half of the public (49.1%), compared with only about a quarter of journalists (25.6%), responded that 'taking into account what interests the public' should be a 'very important' professional journalistic norm. Like other professionals (e.g. physicians or social workers), Israeli journalists seem to share the perception that in many cases they know better than their clients what is best for them. Hence, the limited importance assigned to 'the interests of the public' by journalists. For journalists, taking into account what interests the public might be perceived as an unprofessional policy targeted at the lowest common denominator, or as

surrendering to financial considerations. In turn, audiences want their tastes satisfied, and their areas of interest covered, and hence, so many of them think that taking the audience into account is highly important (though support of this norm was rather low in the public sample as well, compared with the other items).

Thus far, we have demonstrated the gaps between journalists and the public in their perceptions of the importance of professional journalistic norms, and argued that part of the explanation for these gaps lies in a common journalistic belief in norms and values as part of their shared professional ethos. Following this logic, it is worthwhile to examine which journalists are closer to the audience in their perceptions of what constitutes worthy journalism, and which are more distant. This is done in Table 2, which presents the percentage of journalists viewing each of the values in the survey items as 'very important', according to four professional variables: professional status, media outlet type (local vs national), formal training in journalism or communication, and age. Findings show that by and large, younger journalists, junior journalists, and journalists working in local media tend to be closer to the audience in their perceptions of what constitutes worthy journalism, whereas older journalists, senior journalists, and those who work in the national media are more likely to depart from the general public in those perceptions. Formal training had little impact on journalists' perceptions, and in the only case in which there was a significant difference (the case of the item concerning neutrality), those with formal training were closer to the audience than those who did not hold degrees in journalism or communication. This pattern of findings supports our interpretation that the gaps in the perception of the importance of professional values stem mainly from on-the-job training and socialization, and perhaps from shared work experience, rather than formal education.

Valuing Israeli journalism in practice

The abovementioned analysis relates only to questions regarding 'ideal type' journalistic practices. That is, such questions are aimed at what *should* be done, rather than the evaluation of actual journalistic practice. A complementary strategy for learning how journalists and audiences define 'good journalism' is to look at how they rate the work of Israeli journalists in practice. This is done in Table 3, which presents average responses to items relating to the work of the Israeli media. Higher numbers represent stronger agreement with the statement, on average. There was no statistically significant difference in the way journalists and the public responded to the sentence, 'The Israeli media are successful in

Table 2 Percentage of respondents viewing professional values as 'very important'

Item	Public	Journalists							
		Professional status		Media type		Formal training		Age	
		Senior	Junior	Local	National	No	Yes	Younger	Older
Always remaining neutral	75.2%	33.3%	52.8%***	58.7%	39.0%*	38.4%	60.5%#	44.8%	42.0%*
Verifying the facts	79.2%	100%	94.4*	97.8%	96.9%	96.9%	97.7%	95.3%	99.0%#
Not publishing rumors	72.4%	85.1%	72.9%#	82.6%	77.8%	78.8%	79.5%	73.3%	84.5%#
Getting both sides of the story	73.5%	82.2%	67.9%*	71.1%	75.9%	73.8%	77.3%	65.4%	84.5%**
Providing the audience with interpretation to news	39.2%	67.3%	40.2%***	41.3%	56.8%*	54.7%	47.7%	42.5%	64.7%**
Taking into account what interests the public	49.1%	21.8%	29.2%	22.2%	26.5%	23.1%	31.8%	22.6%	28.7%
<i>N</i>	602	101	108	46	163	162	44	106	103

Notes: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, # $p \leq .10$

Table 3 Average agreements with statements relating to the Israeli media, by sample (1 – not at all agree; 4 – strongly agree)

	Journalists M (SD)	Public M (SD)	t (d.f.)	Levene's test
Successful in uncovering corruption, abuse of power, and misconduct	2.93 (.71)	2.98 (.82)	.82 (409.86)	8.63**
Full of factual errors and negligence	2.63 (.89)	2.51 (.89)	1.67# (801)	.14
Patriotic to a degree that compromises their professionalism	2.61 (.97)	2.30 (.99)	3.87*** (784)	.02
Do not sufficiently cover positive developments	2.50 (.91)	2.90 (1.07)	5.10*** (406.10)	7.16**
Too much competition and too little ethical considerations	2.89 (.81)	3.21 (.91)	4.62*** (399.79)	8.86**
General evaluation of the Israeli media (0–10 scale)	5.85 (1.85)	6.34 (2.23)	3.37** (311.31)	6.95**

Notes: Table entries are means. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. # $p < .10$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

uncovering corruption, abuse of power, and misconduct.' In both samples, agreement with this positive statement was rather high (around 3 on average, on a scale of 1–4), in comparison with the other, more negative items.

Journalists tended more than the public to agree that news reports in the Israeli media are full of factual errors and negligence (the difference in this case was borderline significant). Journalists also significantly tended to agree that the Israeli media are 'too patriotic, in a way that compromises their professionalism'. Respondents in the public survey tended more than journalists to agree that coverage of positive news in the Israeli media is insufficient. Respondents in the public survey also tended more than journalists to agree that Israeli journalists care too much about competition and too little about ethical considerations. All in all, although the average grades were not too different, with journalists giving the media an average grade of 5.85, and the public giving them an average grade of 6.34 (both on a scale of 0–10), it is important to stress that the general evaluation by journalists of the Israeli media was significantly *lower* than that given by the audience.

This could be explained in several ways: since the journalists are far more familiar with the inner workings of Israeli media than the audience, they are probably also more aware of the 'dark continents' of Israeli journalism. Similarly, due to their common professional worldview, the journalists might be more critical and sceptical than the general public in their assessments of all

major social institutions, including the media. Finally, an alternative explanation might be that the journalists are more committed to the tenets of journalistic professionalism and thus they are harsher judges of the activities of their own community, in comparison with the audience.

Again, as in the previous analysis, examining which journalists are closer to the general public in their evaluation of the performance of the Israeli media can be illuminating. However, in this case, the variables of professional status, media type (local vs national), formal training, and age were in most cases not significantly related to the items tapping respondents' evaluations of the Israeli media. The exceptions were that junior journalists were on average closer to the public than senior journalists in their responses to the items about the media not covering positive developments ($M_{junior} = 2.64$; $M_{senior} = 2.35$; $p < .05$), and journalists being too competitive vs. ethical ($M_{junior} = 3.11$; $M_{senior} = 2.66$; $p < .001$). Younger journalists were also closer to the public than their older counterparts in their evaluation of the media as being too patriotic ($M_{younger\ journalists} = 2.48$; $M_{older\ journalists} = 2.75$; $p < .05$). Journalists working for the local media were on average closer to the public than their counterparts working for the national media in their responses to the item about factual errors in the Israeli media ($M_{local} = 2.30$; $M_{national} = 2.72$; $p < .05$).

As in the case of core principles and values of journalism, journalists' answers regarding the evaluation of the Israeli media in practice were less dispersed in five of the six items, out of which in four cases, the differences in dispersion between journalists and the public were statistically significant.

Shaping the evaluation of Israeli journalism

Beyond the fact that the general public gave Israeli media a higher general grade than the journalists, it is necessary to explore the factors affecting journalists' general judgements and the public's general judgments. To examine the criteria used by respondents in both samples, in their general evaluation of Israeli media, we ran multiple regression models, with the general evaluation scores as the dependent variable, and the specific evaluation items as covariates. This allowed us to determine the strength of the contribution of the specific evaluations to the general judgments, controlling for each other. Results are presented in Table 4, as Models 1 and 2, for journalists and the public, respectively.

The beta coefficients reported in the models can be conceptualized as the weights assigned by the respondents for each of the specific criteria, when making the general evaluation judgments. Since these are standardized coefficients, they can be compared within and across models. The *t* test, on the

Table 4 OLS regression models predicting general evaluations of the Israeli media, by sample

	Model 1 Journalists	Model 2 Public	T	Model 3 Journalists	Model 4 Public
Successful in uncovering corruption, abuse of power, and misconduct	.45*** (.15)	.16*** (.11)	2.44*	.45*** (.16)	.15*** (.11)
Full of factual errors and negligence	-.14* (.13)	-.20*** (.11)	3.16**	-.14* (.13)	-.19** (.10)
Patriotic to a degree that compromises their professionalism	-.27*** (.11)	.02 (.09)	4.37***	-.27*** (.12)	.01 (.10)
Do not sufficiently cover positive developments	.05 (.11)	-.05 (.09)	2.25*	.05 (.12)	-.04 (.09)
Too much competition and too little ethical considerations	.01 (.11)	-.19*** (.10)	2.62**	.01 (.14)	-.16** (.11)
Leftist mafia (J)/too left-winged (P)				.00 (.15)	-.19*** (.11)
R-squared	.41	.13	.41	.16	
N	198	472	198	472	

Notes: Table entries are standardized regression coefficients, numbers in parentheses are standard errors. # $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

fourth column on the left, tests the hypothesis that the difference between the coefficients in Models 1 and 2 is statistically significant. As the table shows, the differences were indeed significant for all five items. This means that journalists and audiences assign different weights to different criteria when making a general evaluation of the Israeli media.

In the journalists' sample, the best predictor of the general evaluation scores was respondents' agreement with the statement 'The Israeli media are successful in uncovering corruption, abuse of power, and misconduct' ($\beta = .45$). The second best predictor was the sentence about the media being too patriotic (which negatively associated with the general evaluation scores; $\beta = -.27$), and third in line was agreement with the sentence about factual errors and negligence (again, a negative association; $\beta = -.14$). The statements about inadequate coverage of positive news and too much competition at the expense of ethics did not significantly predict general media evaluations in the journalists' sample.

In comparison, for the public, the strongest predictors of the general media evaluation scores were the item about factual errors and the item about too much competition at the expense of ethics (in both cases, the items negatively predicted the dependent variable; $\beta = -.20$ and $\beta = -.19$, respectively). The

public used the latter as a strong criterion, although it was not a significant predictor at all in the journalists' sample. Third in place was the item about the media being successful in uncovering corruption and abuse of power. This statement was much less powerful as a predictor in the public sample ($\beta = .16$, compared with $\beta = .45$ in the journalists' sample). The proposition about the Israeli media being too patriotic did not significantly predict general media evaluation in the public sample, compared with its relatively strong and negative role as a predictor in the journalists' sample. As with the journalists' sample, the item regarding insufficient attention to positive developments did not predict general media evaluations. However, the sign of the coefficient for this item was this time negative, compared with the positive sign in the journalists' sample.

Both surveys also included an item addressing allegations that the Israeli media have a liberal bias, i.e. are politically biased in favour of the dovish peace camp. Unfortunately, since the wording of the items was not identical, and especially given the use of the harsh expression 'leftist mafia' in the journalists' survey,⁸ it is impossible to compare responses to these items, and the weights assigned to these statements in predicting general media evaluations. However, it is still possible to run separate regressions and examine the role played by the identical theoretical construct of political bias in each of the models separately. Hence, the bias items were entered to the regression models, in addition to the other covariates. Results are presented in Table 4, as Models 3 and 4.

As Model 3 demonstrates, in the journalists' sample, adding the 'leftist mafia' item to the model did not substantially add to the variance explained by the model, as this item did not predict general media evaluations. In contrast, Model 4 demonstrates that adding the 'too left-wing' item into the model predicting the public's media evaluation significantly improved the explained variance in the model. The item about a left-wing bias emerged as one of the strongest (negative) predictors of media evaluation: respondents agreeing that the media leaned too much to the left were most likely to assign lower grades to the media.

One last finding that is worth noting in Table 4 relates to the explained variance in the different models. Our survey items tapping specific evaluations of the Israeli media explained 41% in the variance in general media evaluations in the journalists' models, but only 16% at best for the public sample. The relatively low R-squared in the public sample could be indicative of additional factors operating to predict the dependent variable that were not entered into the models. It is thus probable to suggest that our survey items were crafted too much in respect to professional journalistic discourse, leaving aside possible additional criteria, which are meaningful for the audience. Such

factors could include items tapping audience enjoyment, on the one hand, and audience perceptions of journalists' expertise, on the other.

Conclusion

The results of the two reported surveys suggest four major findings. First, Israeli journalists have a relatively uniform perception of what constitutes worthy journalism, and especially in comparison with the Israeli public.⁹ Second, Israeli journalists and public differ in the degrees of significance they assign to various journalistic norms and practices. For instance, while journalists grade the interpretation of news as more important than neutral reporting, the audience prefers objectivity and neutrality to interpretation. Third, the Israeli public is slightly more positive in its overall assessment of the operation of media in comparison with the journalists. And finally, even though the two general assessments are fairly close in their numerical values (around 6 on a 0–10 scale), they are constituted by different or even opposing components. For instance, while the public's overall evaluation of the Israeli media is strongly connected to its assessment of how economic competition corrupts the ethics of journalists, the journalists themselves do not view this as a definitive factor in their overall assessment. At the same time, while the journalists strongly relate their overall evaluation of the Israeli media with the argument that it is too patriotic, the public does not view this factor as a significant component in its general evaluation.

While journalistic professional discourse is full of references to the audience as the *raison d'être* of the profession and while journalists often report that servicing the public is their reason for selecting journalism as a career, the results of this study highlight a discrepancy, rather than agreement, between public and journalistic responses regarding core professional journalistic values.

What is the significance of this discrepancy? What might be the social impact of such disagreements between journalists and the public on the ways in which journalism should be conducted and evaluated? We would argue that the possible answers to these questions are, to a large extent, derivatives of initial conceptualizations of the journalistic mission.

A view of journalism as a profession, similar to other more formally established professions such as medicine or law, would lead to an understanding of these findings as almost natural givens. Even if sociologically, the concept of a profession only partially applies to journalism, what matters within the context of this discussion is that many journalists perceive journalism as a profession. Hence, if journalists are qualified professionals, it is only

logical that just like doctors or lawyers they would know better than their clients what is better or safer for their clients.

This assumption has some support in the data: the surveys show that journalists with higher professional status (as indicated by their seniority, and by working for the more prestigious national media), and journalists who are older (presumably indicating more years in the profession, and hence more experience), tend to differ the most from the general public in terms of their professional perceptions. This stresses the point that indeed, journalists who could be viewed as *more* professional are the most distinct in their perceptions, in comparison with the public.

However, if our initial conceptualization of journalism views journalists as 'extensions' of the public, such as in the case of public journalism, then these findings would seem disturbing. According to this approach, the findings suggest that journalists, and especially the more senior ones, fall short of fulfilling their mission, which in turn could lead to the demise of the trust between journalists and the public.

Indeed, a more careful examination of the general public data demonstrates that the disparity between the public and the journalists is highest among Israeli Arabs and supporters of the Israeli right, groups that are among the least trusting of mainstream Israeli media in the Israeli political landscape (Chaim Herzog Institute for Media, Politics and Society, 2003). To test for a possible association between the disparity of particular members of the public from the average perceptions of journalists, on the one hand, and their trust in mainstream media, on the other, we calculated a disparity score from the average journalistic answers for each respondent.¹⁰ This measure was negatively and significantly associated with trust in the media as measured by the Gaziano and McGrath (1986) News Credibility Scale ($r = -.153$; $p < .001$). That is, the more an audience member diverged from journalists' perceptions of what constitutes worthy journalism, the lower his or her trust in the media was. This suggests that indeed the gap between audiences' perceptions and journalists' perceptions of the importance of professional journalistic norms is related to audience trust in the media, at least in the Israeli case.

The present study is not free of limitations. First, many of the concepts invoked in the survey module (e.g. 'facts', 'neutrality', and 'interpretation') might mean different things to journalists and audiences. This concern is amplified given the fact that Israeli journalists were by and large more educated than the general public. The only remedy for this problem is the statistical controls, and indeed most of the reported differences remained significant after controlling for demographic variables. But these controls tackle the effects of education and social class, not the effects of belonging to a different discourse – the professional culture of journalists on the one hand,

and the probably less sophisticated notions that even educated audiences have about neutrality and verification. Still, the fact that journalists and audiences differ in the way they respond to the same words is noteworthy, even though the words may carry different meanings for journalists and audiences.

Second, responses in the journalists and the general population surveys were both probably affected by social desirability. Journalists were probably saying what they thought journalists *should* say. Respondents in the general population survey were probably affected by their conceptions of enlightened and involved citizens in their response. However, the fact that the socially desirable answers in both samples were different from each other is in itself interesting and important. This study's focus was on principles and norms, not on behaviours, and so the different responses offered by journalists and audiences are indicative of such normative and cultural differences, regardless of social desirability.

The findings are of course also limited to the Israeli context. In particular, prior research has demonstrated a relationship between attitudes towards the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict and public attitudes towards freedom of speech and limitations on the press (Arian, 1995). This might suggest that the Israeli public's general perceptions and the journalists' general perceptions about the conflict shape their responses regarding media bias and patriotism, and perhaps media attitudes in general. Still, it is very likely that disparities in audiences' perceptions and journalists' perceptions of good and bad journalism will be found in other contexts as well. And so, future research could try to replicate these findings in such contexts. Future research could also use additional methods, and especially qualitative methods to attain further insights. In particular, qualitative interviews could help decipher the different meanings journalists and audiences assign to some of the concepts used in the current study.

Acknowledgements

The journalists' survey was funded by the Israel Democracy Institute. The general public survey was funded by the Chaim Herzog Institute for Media, Politics and Society. The authors thank Gabi Weimann for his comments and suggestions, and Oren Livio for his dedicated research assistance.

Notes

- 1 The Communication Institute of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem has awarded a relatively small number of graduate degrees in communication since the early 1970s.

- 2 Financial, political, military, and foreign affairs correspondents of Hebrew language national news outlets were classified as 'senior reporters'.
- 3 The list of the journalists that was used as a sampling base was obtained from the Ifat Media Information Center. This list was updated and completed using by-lines and credits, and in a few cases using lists of journalists obtained from editors of the various news media.
- 4 'Audience Problems and Financial Pressures Cited. Journalists Say Standards Slipping', *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press News Release*, 30 March 1999.
- 5 Only a random half of respondents in the general public sample ($n = 602$) were asked this battery of questions. This was in order to shorten the interview module in the survey. The number of respondents was high enough for the purpose of the current investigation, and the sample still constitutes a representative sample of the adult Israeli population.
- 6 Here, too, only a random half of respondents in the general public sample ($n = 617$) were asked this battery of questions.
- 7 The only exception from this pattern was in the case of the neutrality item. In this case, journalists' answers were less homogeneous than those of the public. The fact that when it comes to neutrality, audiences were more uniform in their answers, compared with journalists, highlights the relative disagreement within the Israeli journalistic community regarding neutrality as a professional value, discussed later in this article.
- 8 It has often been argued that Israeli journalists tend to be more dovish in their political beliefs than the general public (Goel, 1998; Lapid, 1986; Marmari, 1996). To date, there are no empirical data that support this assumption, but it does coincide with the fact that Israeli journalists generally belong to the social sectors (educated, secular, middle-class) that tend to be more dovish in their political leanings (Avraham, 2002; Tsfati, 2004).
- 9 Journalists were less dispersed in their answers about professional values even in comparison with a homogeneous sub-sample of the public that was similar in its demographics to the journalists' sample.
- 10 For each of the items tapping the perceived importance of journalistic norms, the difference between respondents' answers and the average journalistic answer was calculated for each respondent. The disparity score was the average of absolute values of these difference scores.

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Appendix Structure of the stratified sample

Stratum	Senior	Junior	Total
National			
Press			
<i>Yedioth Ahronoth</i>	12	8	20
<i>Maariv</i>	12	8	20
<i>Haaretz</i>	12	8	20
Radio			
Voice of Israel (IBA)	12	6	18
Galey Tzahal (Military Radio)	12	8	20
TV			
Channel One (IBA)	12	8	20
Channel Two	16	4	20
Channel Ten ^a	3	2	5
Other	10	11	21
Strata includes journalists from smaller, mainly niche-targeted outlets, news agencies, and online news services			
Local			
Press	A sample of local newspapers		39
TV	Strata includes journalists working for local TV stations in Tel-Aviv, Haifa, Bat Yam, Beer-Sheva, Jerusalem, and Northern Israel		6
Total	101	108	209

Notes: ^a Channel Ten News had just commenced operation and had only a limited number of journalists on their staff at the time this research was carried out.