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Journalists Are and Who They Should Be

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1. Introduction

In the Western context, journalism is thought to take the place of an unofficial Fourth Estate representing the people, grounded in the idea of the separate branches of power that check and balance each other (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). This notion relies on the assumption that journalists can act independently of the other Estates (Nerone, 2013), making journalism essential to the creation and maintenance of participatory democracy (Gans, 1998). Carey (1999) ties journalism's very existence to democracy and vice versa: "Without journalism there is no democracy, but without democracy there is no journalism either" (p. 91). As a result, journalism is intrinsically connected to the public through its democratic function (Banjac et al., 2024). Audiences are therefore a fundamental part of journalism (Loosen & Schmidt, 2016), giving it meaning and significance via their relationship (Loosen et al., 2020).

Whilst this journalist-audience relationship has long been a well-established research subject within journalism studies (Larsson, 2013), it has often taken a production-centric perspective (Swart et al., 2022), based on the assumption that the dynamic is skewed asymmetrically in favour of journalists (Loosen & Schmidt, 2016). However, studying audiences without directly engaging with them and relying on user metrics instead introduces a bias in which assumptions about audiences' standards may not align with what they actually want (Meijer & Kormelink, 2016).

Traditionally, audiences have been imagined as passive receivers (De Keyser & Raeymaeckers, 2012) reliant on journalists to deliver important information to them – especially in times of crisis (McIntyre, Dahmen & Abdenour, 2018). However, as digitalization radically transforms the relationship and the possibilities for interaction, audiences (re)emerge as a topic of interest (Loosen & Schmidt, 2016). With increased visibility of both journalists and audience members, as well as the use of technologies that allow for direct and instantaneous interaction, audiences can, for example, give feedback through various means whilst journalists can respond and integrate their audiences more strongly into news production processes (Wilhem et al., 2021).

In addition, what "people bring to the news" has been found to be of as much importance as the news production itself in shaping audiences' approach to news (Nelson & Lewis, 2023, p. 1522). As the importance of emotion and identity becomes more prominent within research, and findings suggest that the way audiences approach news is not just determined by rational evaluations of past performances, Panievsky et al. (2024) argue for the importance of exploring

imaginative dimensions of the journalist-audience relationship, integrating research on trust, hate, credibility, stereotypes, loyalty, and bias as part of one imaginative construct in the minds of audience members.

The future of journalism remains uncertain as digital technologies and economic pressures bring substantial changes to society (Lowrey & Gade, 2011). Simultaneously, journalists face challenges of declining credibility and low levels of public trust (e.g. Willnat, Weaver & Wilhoit, 2019). One reason why audiences have been found to lose trust in news and engage in avoidance behaviours is the disconnect between what audiences expect of journalists and what they are actually offered (Tsafiti et al., 2006; Coleman, 2012). Successfully adapting to change depends on journalists' ability to meet the expectations of their diverse stakeholders, among them their audiences (Banjac et al., 2024).

This thesis aims to contribute to our understanding of the relationship between audiences and news-makers by applying both role theory (Biddle, 1979) and the framework of the imagined journalist (Panievsky et al., 2024) to explore how Austrian audience members imagine journalists, and how those constructions may or may not diverge from their conceptions of ideal journalists. As the imagined journalist framework has not yet been explored extensively, and heeding the calls of Panievsky et al. (2024), additional focus will be placed on whether or not distinctions within imagined journalists emerge. By adopting the audience's perspective, this thesis seeks to uncover the nuanced ways in which individuals imagine journalists and perceive their roles and responsibilities—perceptions that may shape how they engage with news media. Through qualitative inquiry and in-depth analysis, this master's thesis aims to contribute to a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of the journalist–audience relationship.

While previous research has explored how audiences are imagined by journalists and how that affects their behaviours and shapes their content (e.g., Coddington et al., 2021), the reverse perspective has received comparatively little attention.

In the current media environment – which is highly competitive, commercialized and marked by declining trust (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020; Lowrey & Gade, 2013) – journalists are balancing “professional autonomy, social responsibility, and public demands” as well as profits (van der Wurff & Schönbach, 2014, p. 433; Conboy, 2014). Understanding the expectations of audiences and how they imagine journalists becomes significant (Panievsky et al., 2024; Banjac et al., 2024).

To do so in a comprehensive manner, the thesis is structured accordingly. Following this introductory chapter, the next section lays out the theoretical foundation of this thesis – imagined journalists and the expectations framework of Banjac et al. (2024). Both approaches are situated within the journalist-audience relationship. While this relationship is understood as role-based, its imaginative dimensions are highlighted through the imagined journalists concept (Panievsky et al., 2024) – which is explored in Chapter 2.1. Subchapter 2.1.1 examines related research, particularly using imagined audiences, which it has been designed to mirror.

As stated above, this thesis combines the imagined journalists approach with audience expectations. Thus, Chapter 2.2 provides an introduction to audience expectations, exploring the significance of expectations within that relationship and placing it into the broader theoretical context of role theory. Additional subchapters are dedicated to expectation modes and expectancy violation theory (EVT), and discusses implications and effects of behaviours violating – or meeting – expectations.

Chapter 2.3 explores previous research into audience perceptions of journalists, and Chapter 2.4 is dedicated to providing a brief overview of the Austrian media environment. Finally, Chapter 2.5 presents the research questions of this thesis.

The third section details the methodology. After presenting the two-sided video ethnography (3.1), the data sample (3.2) is explained, as well as contextualized. To conclude this segment, the data collection process (3.3) is described. Chapter 4 is structured in two subchapters focusing on data analysis: transcription (4.1) and qualitative content analysis (4.2).

The fifth chapter presents and discusses the results, with a subchapter each dedicated to addressing the first research question (5.1) and the second (5.2). Within these chapters, results are presented across personal and positional dimensions. Subchapter 5.3 summarizes and discusses key findings. The thesis concludes in its final Chapter 6, presenting its limitations and identifying further research potential.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter outlines the theoretical framework guiding this thesis. Drawing on recent work in audience research and role theory, it explores how audiences perceive and imagine journalists. As journalism is increasingly understood through relational, affective, and imaginative dimensions, understanding audience perceptions of journalists becomes crucial. The framework is structured in two main parts: Section 2.1 introduces the concept of *imagined journalists* and examines how imagination, stereotypes, and emotions such as trust or hostility inform how audiences imagine and engage with journalists. Section 2.2 focuses on *audience expectations*, situated in the broader context of role theory, and expectancy violation theory to explore how audiences articulate mental conceptualisations of journalists.

Contemporary news combines elements of mass and interpersonal communication; this blend can also be referred to as "masspersonal communication" (Lee, 2015). Within this context, the relationship between newsmakers and their audiences is viewed as a series of recurring interactions (Scholl et al., 2014). In response, scholars are now applying approaches from interpersonal communication research to the study of journalism (Wilhem, Stele & Detel, 2021).

With increased visibility of both parties, accompanied by technologies allowing for direct and instantaneous interaction, audiences can give feedback through various means whilst journalists can respond and integrate their audience more strongly into news production processes (Wilhem et al., 2021). However, these developments can also be viewed negatively, as researchers emphasize a darker side to engagement following populist developments such as hate comments and misinformation campaigns (Quandt, 2018). Journalists are also becoming targets of identity-based online abuse based on their gender, race or religion, with some affected more than others (Chen et al., 2020; Levi, 2022). There are also indications that journalists who are more visible to the public are disproportionately affected by harassment (Lewis et al., 2020). In addition, a disconnect has been identified between audiences and journalists (Karlsson & Clerwall, 2019). In that regard, research often highlights declining trust and audiences moving to alternative news sources (e.g., Riedl & Eberl, 2020).

These developments, among others, underscore the need to better understand how audiences conceptualize journalists themselves, beyond roles or institutions, which is where the imagined journalists framework proposed by Panievsky et al. (2024) offers valuable insight.

2.1 Imaginaries in Journalism

2.1.1 Imagined Journalists

The imagined journalists concept was proposed by Panievsky et al. (2024), who define it as “the entirety of ideas, connotations, stereotypes, sentiments, criticisms, priorities, and, increasingly, conspiracy theories” (p.2) that audiences attribute to journalists. By taking an associative approach to explore imagined journalists, the different themes and terms that emerge show where audiences’ focus lies – on news content, practices or more personal aspects of journalists, such as their character, intentions or interests – instead of centring trust, for instance (Panievsky et al., 2024). This framework consolidates various strings of audience research – trust, role perceptions, news consumption and willingness to pay to access journalistic work – and emphasizes “the imaginative and affective dimensions of people’s attitudes toward media” (Panievsky et al., 2024, p. 7).

Just as journalists’ imaginations about their audience may influence their own perceived journalistic roles, as well as their actual practices and content (Coddington et al., 2021), the way audiences imagine journalists may shape their role expectations and practices – making it useful to examine as a central part of the audience-journalist relationship (Panievsky et al., 2024). By considering news as communication messages and shifting the focus to the relational character of journalism (Atad & Cohen, 2023), it becomes meaningful to apply approaches from interpersonal communication research to the study of journalism (Wilhem, Stele & Detel, 2021) and explore not only the imaginations of communicators but also those of audience members.

The framework builds on folk theories which are ideas or judgements that are formed without sufficient evidence regarding their truth or usefulness, and help people make sense of their surroundings and serve as a base for actions (Mont’Alverne et al., 2023). Their accuracy or usefulness does not matter, as folk theories influence behaviours and decisions nonetheless (Toff & Nielsen, 2018). This is true for both analytical (describing how journalists are– or are believed to be) and normative elements– evaluations of how journalists ought to be (Mont’Alverne et al., 2023). The framework of folk theories of journalism encompasses two key aspects: the descriptive perception of what journalism is like and the normative ideals of how it ought to be (Knudsen et al., 2022). In the case of journalism, this involves “popular beliefs about what journalism is, what it does, and what it ought to do that people use to make sense of news in their everyday life” (Nielsen, 2016, p. 846). Folk theories do not have to be

logical, extensive, or verifiable ways through which audiences envision and assess journalists and their institutions and they may or may not be tied to actual performance (Mont’Alverne et al., 2023).

Audiences have to rely on cognitive constructions just as much as journalists do, seeing as many (if not all) journalists are just as personally unknown to the audience as vice versa – even with some journalists being highly visible. As audiences approach news, they are not only holding perceptions of the news environment but also of themselves – perceptions that influence how they approach news (Nelson & Lewis, 2023). Sociology considers imaginaries as a tool that both causes and addresses uncertainty and links them to expectations and narratives – which the imagined journalists concept already includes by building on folk theories – as key dimensions informing future actions (Bazzani, 2023).

Moreover, how audiences interact with journalists and the media is not just influenced by prior news consumption experiences, but also by their understanding (and that of those around them) of how news is produced (Waisbord, 2006). As the importance of emotion and identity becomes more prominent within research (e.g., Lecheler, 2020), it seems that how audiences approach news is not just determined by rational evaluations of past performances. Panievsky et al. (2024) therefore argue for exploring imaginative dimensions of the journalist-audience relationship, integrating research from many different subfields – such as research on trust, hate, credibility, stereotypes, loyalty, and bias – into one imaginative construct in the minds of audience members.

As the imagined journalist framework is fairly new, there have not yet been further studies utilising it. This thesis is the first to utilise their approach in a qualitative study and a different cultural context which may provide further insight. Their original study used an open-ended quantitative online survey (and a thematic analysis) to explore the imagined journalists of Israeli audiences in a highly polarized setting. Their work finds audiences to voice beyond professional criticisms (for instance, extending to journalists’ character) and resentment (Panievsky et al., 2024). In addition, few participants mention democracy, but many echo right-wing antipress messaging and populist catchphrases (Panievsky et al., 2024). While their methodological approach provides insight by relying on audiences to mention concepts themselves, it is limited in depth by asking only one question: “In your opinion, what are the prominent traits of journalists in Israel?” (Panievsky et al., 2024, p. 48). Not only may some audience members be less inclined to type longer messages, but it also does not allow for more

nuanced images by 1) explicitly centring imagined traits, thus providing a preexisting lens for audiences' imaginaries, and 2) focusing on dominant traits, which may limit nuance and distinctions, and 3) not allowing for different types of imagined journalists to emerge as audiences only give one answer for the broad range of journalists which they may encounter.

Research into how audiences imagine news organizations has identified seven dimensions: “*usefulness, credibility, empathy, personality, usability, news selection bias, and social responsibility*” (Shin, 2022, p.80). Shin (2022) employs qualitative focus groups, asking audiences along pre-defined areas on the basis of literature while remaining open to additional input by audiences; they argue audiences' image of news media to consist of both (affective) perception and cognitive assessment, contrasting (imagined) performance against normative expectations. Interestingly, they found empathy of organizations/journalists towards interview subjects to be highly relevant in shaping audiences' news image (Shin, 2022). While Shin (2022) focuses on the organizational level, the work also highlights the relation between personality specific practices and audiences emotions, with negatively evaluated practices being related to feelings rather than cognitive assessments such as credibility.

2.1.2 Imagined Audiences

In light of the limited literature on audiences' perceptions and expectations of journalism being available at the time of their study, van der Wurff and Schönbach (2014) drew on the more extensive research into journalists' self-perceptions and professional role conceptions to inform their study. This chapter engages with related literature, namely imagined audiences, in a similar manner – as insights from adjacent research may offer valuable perspectives for applying and extending the imagined journalists framework. This is especially true because the imagined journalists framework has been conceptualised to mirror imagined audiences.

First, Marwick and boyd (2010) argue that, “[e]very participant in a communicative act has an imagined audience” (p. 115). In the context of communication, it constitutes a core principle; communicators imagine their audience and form a “mental conceptualization of people with whom we are communicating” (Litt, 2012, p. 330). By understanding audiences as the other half of this communicative act, it is reasonable to assume that they make similar mental conceptualizations (see, Panievsky et al., 2024). With journalism transformed and no longer a one-way street of communication (Livingstone, 2004), it may be worth exploring which mental conceptualizations audiences construct of journalists. This argument is supported by Lecheler (2020), who argues that concepts closely tied to the journalist-audience

relationship need to be explored through not just journalistic lenses but also audience-centred approaches. Following this thought, similar to how imagined audiences shape journalists' news practices, the way audiences imagine journalists may shape how they perceive and interact with news as a whole (Panievsky et al., 2024).

Moreover, studies into imagined audiences especially highlight mediation: Communicators become more reliant on their imagination the less their actual audience is observable or known (Litt, 2012). With digital media allowing for potentially limitless audiences, communicators construct imaginations of their audience, according to which they may adjust their communication (Marwick & boyd, 2010). If journalists, for example, imagine their audience to be more interested in sensationalism, such images may influence journalists' own role perception and practices in order to align with their imagined audience (Coddington et al., 2021). Journalists create their news products with a broad, dispersed, and ambiguous audience in mind (Coddington et al., 2021). Since they are unable to personally interact with and get to know each of their recipients, they create and maintain a mental image of their audience instead (Coddington et al., 2021). In engaged journalism, audiences are often imagined as either enemies or allies, Nelson (2024) argues that research (and journalism) should also acknowledge the "agnostic majority" (p.183).

Professional communicators are not the only ones constructing images of their audience: it also applies, for example, when posting on social media (Marwick & boyd, 2010) or commenting on journalists' work online (Kim, Lewis & Watson, 2018). In their study, Marwick and boyd (2010) found variations in imagined audiences in relation users' media use intentions – for example using a blog as news or entertainment. In the blogging context, Brake (2012) identifies distinct relationships with the imagined audience depending on the type of interaction, for example one-sided, reciprocal or interpersonal.

Further, imagined audiences have been found to not necessarily be identical to actual audiences (Marwick & boyd, 2010) but still influence behaviour (Litt, 2012). Researchers have explored how journalists use new technological means such as metrics that give them additional cues on what their audience is like (Coddington et al. 2021; Nelson 2021). Before such technologies, journalists imagined their audience on the basis of "gut feelings" (Lewis & Westlund, 2015, p. 26) By instead using audience data to identify their readers, listeners, viewers and/or followers, news professionals want to better meet the varied expectations and needs of their audiences in a variety of contexts and times (Schaetz, 2023). However, metrics

bear the risks of maldistribution as well as potentially misrecognising, or misrepresenting the audience, whilst also frequently opposing journalistic aims, standards or values (Schaetz, 2023). These means also allow audiences to give feedback through many different ways, which affects how journalists perceive their audiences (Coddington et al., 2021) and may change their practices (Banjac, et al. 2024). Coddington et al. (2021) further argue that it is likely that differing imagined audience perceptions affect communication outcomes, making them relevant to communication research as well as journalistic practice.

Despite many principles of imagined audiences applying not just to communicators but also receivers in communicative acts, the framework was not applied to include audiences for over a decade. This imbalance reflects a broader tendency within the field to focus on the production-side of journalism (Swart et al., 2022). However, as digital platforms have made audiences more visible, vocal, and participatory, calls for more reciprocal, audience-centred approaches have grown louder (Lecheler, 2020; Loosen & Schmidt, 2016). The imagined journalists framework by Panievsky et al. (2024) addresses these calls and further contributes to the understanding of the relationship between audiences and news – placing focus on whether or not different types of imagined journalists emerge within audience narrations.

With that in mind, Litt and Hargittai (2016) found in their research of the imagined audience concept that people's imagined audiences fluctuated and could be sorted into two primary categories: 1) abstract imagined audiences (vague imaginations of a general audience) and 2) target imagined audiences, which they describe as a lot more specific and – as the name suggests – targeted. For the latter, more distinctions emerged (Litt & Hargittai, 2016). Panievsky et al. (2024) explored imagined journalists by asking audiences how they generally imagined journalists in Israel and what traits they associated with them. Based on the assumption that the framework mirrors the concept of imagined audiences (Panievsky et al., 2024), additional distinctions of imagined journalists may emerge by investigating non-abstract, specific or targeted journalists (Litt & Hargittai, 2016).

In order to deepen this understanding, it is essential to examine not only how audiences imagine journalists, but also what they expect from them (Banjac et al., 2024) – as Charles Taylor (2002) argues in his conceptualisation of the social imaginary not as a set of ideas, but rather its shared result, meaning the sense-making process of social reality. The term social imaginary links imaginaries and expectations and encompasses

the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations (Taylor, 2002, p. 106).

2.2 Audience Expectations

Building on this connection between imaginaries and expectations, Hautala and Ahlqvist (2024) emphasize expectations as a structuring part of human cognition, which “are interpreted by reflecting the imaginaries” (p. 2103).

Audience expectations – the relational norms, beliefs, and preferences people hold about journalists (Biddle, 1979) – have gained increasing scholarly attention in recent years (Truyens & Picone, 2021; Wilhelm & Detel, 2024). Research explores audience expectations as a factor shaping the relationship between journalists and audiences (Uth et al., 2025), and in the context of problematisations such as decreasing trust, increasing news avoidance (e.g. Newman et al., 2020) and audience fragmentation (Katz, 1996).

These issues again reflect the changing dynamics of the journalist-audience relationship in light of the development, implementation, and normalisation of new technologies and practices within newsrooms (Loosen & Schmidt, 2012). Although the public has always scrutinized the role performance of journalism, digital technologies have increased journalists’ visibility and made assessments easier (Banjac et al., 2024).

With advertisement revenues subsiding, news media find themselves more than ever dependent on audiences’ low remaining willingness to pay for news (Groot Kormelink, 2023). Yet, these developments do not affect all markets equally – some more, like the USA and UK, others less, like Germany and Finland (Luengo, 2014). With these “drastic techno-economic changes facing the profession”, literature centring around the “crisis of journalism” raises concerns about its implications for democracy, as markets intrude on institutional independence (Luengo, 2014, p. 576). Nerone (2009) takes on a hopeful view of the future, drawing parallels to historical transformations leading to collapses in some areas and reinventions in others, and argues that “journalism will find its future when it finds its audience” (p.355).

To truly find its audience, as Nerone (2009) suggests, it may be useful to consider the expectations audiences hold about journalists and their work. One way to approach this is

through role theory (Biddle, 1979), which offers a framework for examining expectations tied to journalistic roles (Banjac et al., 2024).

2.2.1 Role Theory

Role theory examines how individuals are expected to behave based on their social positions, with the term "role" referring to these characteristic behaviours (Biddle, 1979). However, some role theorists include attitudes in their conceptualisation of the term role (e.g. Turner, 1990, Lynch, 2007). Roles are performed much like actors perform on a theatre stage (Goffman, 1959), emphasizing aspects of appearance to an audience as well as practices (Mellado, 2020). Within this thesis, the term role performance refers to practices.

Roles are not static, nor do they exist separately from one another (Christians et al., 2009). Each person occupies multiple roles across different social contexts, and every role carries a distinct set of expectations—both from the individual themselves (their role conception) and from others (Banjac, 2022).

Expectations are thought to be derived from experience by most role theorists (Biddle, 1986). These expectations construct roles and affect not only the individual's behaviour but also societal reactions to it (Banjac et al. 2024). To comprehend journalism and its place in society, it is imperative to look at the roles of journalists, or the way “journalists define their relationship with society” (p.115) which assigns meaning to journalism (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Mellado (2020) argues that not just the broader social context influences how journalists perform their roles, but also their news organisation.

Role theory has a long tradition within social sciences as “its concepts are easily studied” (Biddle, 1986, p. 76). Central among those concepts are the ideas of consensus, conformity, role conflict, and role taking (Biddle, 1986). *Consensus* refers to whether or not expectations are agreed upon by different people – with researchers looking into the degree to which people actually share consensus, variables which influence such agreements, and whether shared norms are responsible for founding social order (Biddle, 1986). *Conformity* means complying with behavioural patterns, for example by copying others' behaviours – role theory then examines how expectations relate to behaviours (Biddle, 1986). For example, observing the behaviours of others can confirm existing expectations or generate new ones which foster conformity, following the prevalent idea that expectations produce behaviour (Biddle, 1986).

Role conflict addresses multiple incompatible and nonconsensual expectations of one's behaviour, often resulting in stress and possibly causing disruptions within social systems (Biddle, 1986). However, there are several related concepts which may affect a person's role performance and are sometimes confused with role conflict, for example, incomplete or insufficient expectations resulting in *role ambiguity*, or too many expectations being placed on someone resulting in a phenomenon called *role overload* (Biddle, 1986). Finally, *role taking* refers to attributing expectations to others in social interaction, with scholars either examining how accurate people are at assuming another's expectations or the sophistication of that process – with successful role takers presuming that other people hold their own expectations of other people's thinking and behaviours (Biddle, 1986).

2.2.1.1 Approaches to Role Theory

According to Biddle (1986), there are five different research perspectives affecting the study of roles: the functional, interactionist, structural, organizational, and cognitive approach. Among these five, Mellado (2020) identifies the structural-functionalist and symbolic perspective, as well as dynamic interactionism as the most dominant theoretical paradigms within role theory research.

The *functional* approach understands roles as shared, normative behaviours within stable social systems, which explain and inform characteristic behaviours of people in social positions (Biddle, 1986). Research on journalistic values and norms tends to stem from this school of thought, highlighting normative expectations, social consensus, and the idea that roles are shaped by behaviour (Mellado, 2020). Its limitations include its underlying assumptions about social stability, ignoring roles that exist aside from social positions and the existence and consequences of norms which are not shared (Biddle, 1986). The *structural approach* examines roles as shared and relational patterns of behaviours within social structures, understood as stable organizations of people (Biddle, 1986). It relies on mathematical expressions to explain abstract systems and relationships clearly, neglecting expectations, and limiting its ability to explain individual experiences, changes, and suboptimal systems (Biddle, 1986).

The *symbolic interactionism* approach focuses on how social interaction transforms roles and the processes through which individuals interpret and make sense of others actions (Biddle, 1986). Whilst insightful, it is limited by a lack of clarity regarding definitions and the relation of expectations and roles (Biddle, 1986). *Dynamic interactionism* expands on symbolic

interactionism, recognizing that people actively shape the situations they encounter, while these situations, in turn, influence them (Ashforth, 2012).

The *organizational approach* focuses on how roles are shaped by organizational goals and structures, assuming that roles are tied to social positions and shaped by normative expectations stemming from formal rules and informal group dynamics (Biddle, 1986). It centres potential conflicts (and their resolution) resulting from the two, but does not address evolving roles and assumes organizations are rational and stable (Biddle, 1986).

Finally, the *cognitive approach* originates from social psychology and focuses on the relational character between expectations and behaviour (Biddle, 1986). It looks into the origins of expectations, how to measure them, how people perceive others' expectations, and how such perceptions affect a person's behaviour (Biddle, 1986). However, cognitive role theory tends to overlook changes in human interaction; in addition, it originates from a US-centric perspective and does not account for the resulting contextual limitations as a result (Biddle, 1986). By focusing mainly on individuals, it pays less attention to phenomena connected to social positions or those of broader structural or temporal character (Biddle, 1986).

Journalistic roles have been researched extensively, starting around the mid-20th century (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Early works distinguished between neutral and participant roles (Cohen, 1963), as well as gatekeepers and advocates (Janowitz, 1975). The studies by Weaver and Wilhoit in the 1980s to 2010s (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986; Weaver, 1998; Weaver & Willnat, 2012) strongly impacted research in this area, further gaining interest as disagreements across societies over the importance of roles were found, hinting against 'a' journalism with shared professional norms across the world (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Later cross-national studies (Donsbach, 1981; Köcher, 1986) contested the idea of a universal journalism understanding even within the relatively homogeneous Western societies (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) note that studies investigating journalistic roles have a tendency to be descriptive.

2.2.1.2 Advantages and Limitations

There are a number of advantages to role theory: Due to its ability to address behaviour patterns, social identities and expectations it is able to address many aspects of social life, allowing it to be widely used across multiple research disciplines as well as in practice (Biddle,

1986). These factors have resulted in a rich empirical base, providing a valuable perspective to examine journalism and the journalists-audiences relationship particularly, to which this thesis seeks to contribute.

However, role theory has also struggled with several issues from “conceptual and definitional confusions” (p. 86) to fragmentation and limited coherence in theory caused by scholars with varying perspectives using the same terms (Biddle, 1986). For example, some scholars avoid using the concept of expectations as a whole or use vastly different conceptions of “role” – tying them to functions, actors or behaviours to legitimize one’s position or to project an image to others (Biddle, 1986). In addition, research has been focused on the practical application of role concepts leaving the theory underdeveloped in some aspects and assumptions highly context-dependent (Biddle, 1986). Further, scholars disagree on the focus of role theory: should it understand its research subject (the person) as an individual or a “representative of a social position” (Biddle, 1986, p.86)? Expectation modes allow researchers to consider both (Banjac et al., 2024).

2.2.2 Expectation Modes

As mentioned earlier, role theory examines the expectations tied to social positions. Unlike journalistic role conceptions, audiences’ perceptions of roles have received little attention until recent years (Uth et al., 2025). Expectations are usually studied on an individual level, for instance journalists, but also apply to organisations and institutions, such as specific outlets or journalism as a whole (Bazzani, 2023). This thesis follows the thought of Biddle (1979) who integrates various elements of cognitive role theory and further distinguishes between three distinct types of expectations that individuals can hold simultaneously. In contrast, other role theorists usually focus on one of the three following modes: 1) norms, 2) beliefs and 3) preferences (Biddle, 1986).

Biddle (1986) considers the different expectation modes to be learned from experience. According to Hanitzsch and Vos (2017), audiences' expectations of journalists are influenced by their consumption of journalistic products and their observation of journalists' discursive construction of their social roles. As a result, journalism researchers looking into audience expectations frequently find similarities, if not reflections of journalists’ role conceptions (Loosen et al., 2020; Vos et al., 2019). However, researchers have also found diverging expectations between audiences and journalists (Tsafiti et al., 2006; Willnat et al., 2019; Loosen et al., 2020).

While expectations may be shared, they are not required to be (Biddle, 1986). Further, each mode has the potential to affect behaviour and the generation of roles (Biddle, 1986). Actors also form expectations about others' expectations, which further inform their own expectations (Bazzani, 2023). People are able to express prescriptions, observations as well as affective evaluations in *covert*, unexpressed or *overt*, manifested ways (Biddle, 1979). Expectations are manifested through articulation and thus materialize as *expectation performance* (Banjac, 2022) in the shape of “demands, assertions, and assessments” (Banjac, et al. 2024, p.63). However, expectations are often complex – meaning people express multiple modes at the same time (Biddle, 1979). Banjac et al. (2024) provide an example for such occurrences within audience narrations: “Journalists are overly concerned with market pressures (descriptive/predictive), which makes me feel disappointed (cathectic), so they should focus on being critical watchdogs (prescriptive)” (p.63). They argue that linguistic markers within audiences' narrations enable researchers to distinguish the different modes within expectations, preventing the usual focus on normative expectations (Banjac et al., 2024).

Banjac et al. (2024) highlight 1) the relational nature of expectations as shaping perceptions and behaviour, if violated or confirmed; 2) the complexity and interplay of the three modes; 3) their personal or positional character – whether they refer to role-specific or person-specific expectations; 4) whether they are shared or not; and 5) the imagined power dynamics and potential of adapting behaviour.

2.2.2.1 Norms

First, norms, or *prescriptive expectations* demand, encourage or prohibit characteristic behaviour (Biddle, 1979) – e.g. “journalists should be watchdogs” (Banjac, 2022, p. 76).

Within journalism research, many studies have been dedicated to theorizing journalistic norms. The influential “Four Theories of the Press” is guided by the assumption that a country's journalism is determined by its political system, implying different normative and political perspectives of “what the press should be and do” (Siebert et al., 1956). Press systems are then assessed according to the degree to which they meet “the liberal ideal of a neutral “watchdog” press free from state interference” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 13). Journalism's normative principles are historically linked to and shaped by the fundamental idea of press freedom and autonomy, proclaiming itself as a representative of the public in the face of power (Nerone, 2013). As such, norms are foundational to the profession's identity (Christians et al., 2009) and ideology (Mellado, 2020).

Such normative perspectives are useful when it comes to tuning legal media policies or guidelines to meet societal expectations (Mellado, 2020). It should also be noted that journalistic ideals are not consistent globally; for example, objectivity as a norm may be highly regarded in US journalism (Schudson, 2001), however, in many South American countries, advocacy is considered a much more important norm (Waisbord, 2008).

In comparison with other expectation modes, audience-held normative expectations of journalists have received considerable scholarly attention (e.g., Truyens & Picone, 2021). Research has traditionally centred ideals and expectations in connection to journalism as a foundation for political engagement (Banjac & Hanusch, 2022).

2.2.2.2 Beliefs

Secondly, beliefs, or descriptive expectations, are informed by observations and express statements or assumptions about characteristic behaviour (Biddle, 1979) which are sometimes also understood as “likely conduct” (Biddle, 1986, p.75), e.g. “journalists are watchdogs” (Banjac, 2022, p. 76).

They may also be referred to as predictive expectations (Banjac et al., 2024) and reflect a “regularity with which a behavioural pattern occurs” (Burgoon & Hubbard, 2005, p. 151). As they are not normative demands, journalists may more easily dismiss expressions of descriptive expectations (Raemy & Vos, 2020) or take corrective actions (Banjac et al., 2024).

Beliefs about others behaviours may impact behaviour as much as prescriptive expectations are able to do (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). For example, audiences expressing the belief of journalists being market-driven may cause adaptations in journalists’ behaviour as they seek to disprove the statement (Banjac, Juarez Miro & Hanusch, 2024). Discrediting news organizations and journalists through for example labelling them as ‘fake news’ also may lead to self-censorship, possibly influencing how the public perceives news and decreasing media trust (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019).

Moreover, audiences are becoming less interested in and trusting of news, frequently ignoring it altogether because they believe it to be overly negative, biased, and insignificant (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2020). Repeatedly expressed beliefs may become stereotypes, whether accurate or not (Bank et al., 1977). Beliefs prevalent in public discourse have the potential to damage “journalism’s societal legitimacy and economic survival” (Banjac, Juarez Miro & Hanusch, 2024, p. 63).

2.2.2.3 Preferences

Thirdly, preferences, or cathectic expectations, are emotional reactions to characteristic behaviour (Biddle, 1979), e.g. “I like or do not like journalists being watchdogs” (Banjac, 2022, p. 76). Embedded feeling, such as desire or aversion, is central to this mode (Banjac et al., 2024) and express which characteristic behaviours “would or would not please the subject” (Biddle, 1979, p. 128).

In the context of changes in the journalist-audience relationship, journalists now seek to meet their audiences’ preferences in order to remain competitive and viable (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2019). Willnat et al. (2019) found the entertainment role to be evaluated by both journalists and audiences as unimportant despite being a core feature of journalism which many audiences express preference for; they suggest this may reflect the normative foundation of journalistic roles. In a recent US study, Farrish et al. (2024) identify two perspectives on expectations which are related to journalistic role preference: the traditional ideal of neutral journalists and those who express opinions.

2.2.3 Expectancy Violation Theory

Expectancy violations theory (EVT) originates from the field of interpersonal communication and views human interaction as guided by expectations which can be violated or confirmed by others (Burgoon, 2015). EVT considers expectations to be “enduring cognitions about the behaviour anticipated of others” (p. 3), produced by social norms and other unique information about one’s fellow communicator(s) (Burgoon, 2015). While actual communication is more influential, expectations have been found to have effects even when violated (Burgoon & Le Poire, 1993).

Expectancy violation refers to unmet expectations; the more behaviours deviate from expected patterns, the more significant the impact (Burgoon, 2015). Gauging audience expectations correctly can be difficult for practitioners despite increasing feedback possibilities (Banjac & Hanusch, 2022).

However, not all violations are necessarily negative in nature (Burgoon, 2015). One isolated violation results in uncertainty and may be dismissed, further violations reduce uncertainty and may be perceived as occurring within a pattern of negative behaviours (Afifi & Burgoon, 2000). Mediated communication, too, may hold various expectations depending on its modality (Burgoon, 2015).

In addition, how violations are evaluated (as desirable or undesirable) depends on the violator's rewardingness – for example whether a friend (high reward value) or an ex-partner (low reward value) violates expectations may affect whether or not something qualifies as either a positive or negative violation (Burgoon, 2015). High reward value communicators (who are regarded favourably) are more likely to achieve positive violations and with it, favourable interpretations of their actions (Burgoon, 2015). Persons which have high social status (through expertise, financial means or attractiveness), are similar to their interaction partner or offer positive feedback are regarded with more positive interpretations of their (nonverbal) behaviours (Burgoon, 2015). This suggests potential implications for journalists. For instance, audiences who consider journalists to be people of high social status – by ascribing them expertise or significance, for instance – may evaluate them differently in case of violated expectations than those who do not conceptualize them as such.

Additionally, they evoke more involved but also pleasant communication from communication partners and are evaluated more highly in areas such as credibility, persuasiveness and attractiveness (Burgoon, 2015) – also areas which may be relevant to journalists in their relationship to audiences. However, violations without interpretative leeway are not affected by the reward valence of the violator (Burgoon, 2015). According to EVT, positive violations lead to more favourable outcomes compared to positive confirmations, while negative violations result in worse outcomes than negative confirmations (Burgoon, 2015).

EVT understands prescriptive expectations to convey which behaviours are considered appropriate, desirable or preferred (Burgoon & Hubbard, 2005), combining role theory's normative (prescriptive) and cathectic modes, expressing feelings – a distinction which can be valuable (Banjac et al., 2024). Imaginaries also contain a sense of expectations and what would violate them (Taylor, 2002).

Using an expectations concept informed by combinations of EVT and role theory allows for complex explorations of the different needs and wants of journalistic stakeholders (such as audiences) because it takes into consideration the relational nature of expectations and how they impact perceptions or behaviours (Banjac, et al., 2024). They cause adjustments when violated or confirmed in order to bridge gaps between ideal and actual behaviour (Banjac, et al., 2024). Drawing on Biddle (1979), their framework includes not just normative expectations, but also descriptive (or belief-based) expectations, as well as cathectic (or

affective) expectations behaviours (Banjac et al., 2024). As stated earlier, expectations can also be assessed for their personal or positional character, meaning whether or not they are rooted in personal, individual choice or derived from positional, collective group standards (Banjac, et al., 2024). Related to this notion, expectations may be carried by individual people or agreed upon by one or multiple communities – widely shared expectations are more impactful on behaviours (Banjac, et al., 2024). Finally, one’s willingness or ability to change behaviours are informed by power dynamics between stakeholders (Banjac, et al., 2024).

2.3 Audience Perceptions of Journalists

Normative expectations are a central focus of many studies investigating audience perceptions of journalists (e.g., van der Wurff & Schönbach, 2014). Research has examined divergences between journalists role conceptions and audience expectations, as well as their potential effects – on trust, for instance (e.g., Tsafiti et al., 2006). Studies have also explored the relationship between various audience demographics and expectations (e.g., Banjac, 2021). While several studies have examined the effects of journalists’ personality traits and emotions on their journalistic practices (e.g., Bakvalova, 2022; Flammia, 2024), in audience perception research, personalities are considered in less detail (however, e.g., Shin, 2022).

Normative ideals are often based on the liberal model, which has spread from the US across the world (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Conceptions that fall outside of its framework are overlooked, even in the US (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Van der Wurff and Schönbach (2014) investigate the expectations of the public in the Netherlands, focusing on expectations of news media and journalists regarding journalistic roles and norms. They find audiences to simultaneously hold both civic and citizen demands; while civic demands strongly resemble journalists’ self-perceptions of the importance of the role in society, citizen demands represent audiences’ individual need (van der Wurff & Schönbach, 2014).

Journalism is central to everyday life (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2008), constructs shared realities (Carey, 1989) and provides people with “a basic map of the social world” (Nerone, 2015, p. 323). With this in mind, some scholars push for a journalism concept which places focus beyond the usual focus on the public-politics domain (e.g., Hess & Gutsche, 2018). This becomes especially relevant as journalism research has also often neglected other forms of journalism in favour of political journalism (Hanusch, 2019).

Yet, other forms have other expectations tied to them; Conboy (2014), for instance, argues that normative expectations of journalism cannot be easily applied to tabloid media which follow different, entertainment-focused traditions over bourgeois values of public debates. Similarly, Banjac and Hanusch (2022) found audiences to expect inspiration and aspiration from lifestyle journalism; they argue normative demands to approximate hard and soft journalistic forms through dichotomies of public and private, rationality and emotionality, and detachment and involvement. However, overall little research has examined audience expectations of other journalistic forms.

Moreover, research has found journalists to prioritize different roles compared to audiences and correlations to lower trust in news (Tsfati et al., 2006). Beyond traditional professional values like objectivity, audiences highlight the importance of an affective dimension in journalism including emotional and interpersonal connection, expecting empathy and communication skills (Mellado & Gajardo, 2024). As media repertoires diversify and audiences and their needs become more fragmented, audiences have been found to expect more connection and engagement with journalists (Banjac & Hanusch, 2022).

In a study of Chilean audience perceptions, journalists are believed to be mere employees subject to decisions by superiors, limiting their perceived autonomy and affecting their work's quality and impartiality (Gajardo & Mellado, 2024). Other researchers found audiences to construct journalists as stable and predictable along normative ideals, describing them as “selfless, autonomous and detached, fact- and research-driven, educated professionals providing in-depth analysis, text-heavy content” (Banjac & Hanusch, 2022, p. 716).

When exploring normative expectations, research has examined how demands compare to evaluations of actual performance – discrepancies between these two have been observed, along with decreased media trust (Fawzi & Mothes, 2020). However, demands have not been compared to imaginative dimensions. A study into how AI bots are experienced has explored users' imaginaries, involving myths, hopeful and fearful narratives as well as their expectations which were projected onto their chat bot communication partner (Depounti et al., 2022).

Moreover, studies have found audiences to hold normative expectations of autonomy, reliability and watchdog practices – but also discrepancies between audiences' expectations and journalists' role conceptions (Tsafiti et al., 2006; Willnat et al., 2019; Loosen et al., 2020). As an example, in their survey on role conceptions of audiences and journalists in the US, Willnat et al. (2019) find journalists to prioritize investigating government claims and

analysing political issues whereas citizens centre dissemination practices related to speed, accuracy and reaching a wide audience. Truyens and Picone (2021) highlight the lack of consensus on the form of these differences. In any case, such a disconnect suggests a violation of expectations, which can lead to discontent (Burgoon & Hubbard, 2005).

Research has also found variations of expectations depending on audience traits, for instance, audiences' news use: audiences who use news often hold journalists to higher standards (van der Wurff & Schönbach, 2014; Willnat et al., 2019). Truyens and Picone (2021) point out the limitations of considering news consumption a singular variable; they instead identify five differing news repertoires (incidental, traditional, online, avoiders and omnivores), which relate to audiences' views of journalistic norms.

Studies into audience expectations are often focused on specific cases, ignoring various characteristics of the audience which may inform their views (Truyens & Picone, 2021). However, there is no homogenous audience; every audience member possesses a combination of sociodemographic characteristics which predict differences in expectations (Truyens & Picone, 2021; Willnat et al., 2019; Loosen et al., 2020).

One early study by Brand and Pearson (2001) compares journalists' and audiences' views on various norms (quality, credibility, independence) as well as adequacy of local coverage and attitudes to contemporary social issues – finding not only the demographic makeup of the two to differ, but also their assessment of news and attitudes on issues.

Willnat et al. (2019) also found differences in audiences' evaluation of journalistic roles depending on various sociodemographic traits – for instance, higher educated audiences rated journalistic roles as less important, whereas racial and ethnic minorities evaluated them as more important and religious citizens highlighted mobilization and dissemination roles. However, this study uses a quantitative survey and cannot provide information on why various groups of audiences hold different expectations (Willnat et al., 2019). On the other hand, Loosen et al. (2020) found that higher education is associated with higher expectations of political roles in Germany.

Age is also a significant category: Older audiences have been found to more strongly expect journalists to check on power (Heider et al., 2005). Fisher et al. (2024) find stronger support for journalists expressing opinions (instead of strict impartiality) among younger, educated, left-wing and paying audiences. Politically progressive audiences have been found to prioritise expectations of journalists advocating, checking on power, and mobilising (Vos et

al., 2019). Using an intersectional approach, Banjac (2021) found expectations to differ along the categories of race, class and gender, reflecting the audiences lived experiences.

Whereas Willnat et al. (2019) found women to evaluate journalists being adversarial as less important, Heider et al. (2005) found them to demand solution-oriented practices. Female sports journalists reporting on female athletes in stereotypically female sports have been found to be perceived more credible and likeable than male journalists in the same field (Pratt et al., 2018). When reporting on ‘feminine’ issues such as culture or health, female journalists were evaluated as less credible and competent, than when covering ‘male’ issues such as politics or sports (Santia et al., 2024). This may also reflect on wider, gendered connotations of the genres.

2.4 The Austrian Media Environment

This thesis’ examination of journalism through the lens of audience expectations is by no means a representation of a “global standard”; it should rather be understood as exploring a unique journalism culture (Mutsvario et al., 2021, p. 997).

Austria is a small, mostly German-language country in the center of Europe (Grünangerl, Trappel & Tomaz, 2021) It can be broadly categorized as part of the "Western journalism culture," alongside countries such as Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Australia, and the USA (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). Present within this culture cluster are ideal-typical values of journalism, consisting of “non-involvement, detachment, monitoring the government, as well as providing political and interesting information to motivate the people to participate in civic activity” (Hanitzsch et al., 2011, p. 281).

Austria belongs to the Democratic Corporatist Model that is characterized “by a historical coexistence of commercial media and media tied to organized social and political groups, and by a relatively active but legally limited role of the state” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 11). Neighbouring countries who share the language compete on its media market (Grünangerl, Trappel & Tomaz, 2021). The Austrian Media Landscape is small, concentrated, and dominated by ORF (in TV and radio markets) and the tabloid Kronen Zeitung; print remains a key format, but newspaper ownership is especially concentrated (Grünangerl, Trappel & Tomaz, 2021). Media outlets rely heavily on public advertising, and subsidies are distributed according to circulation numbers (Grünangerl, Trappel & Tomaz, 2021). As in other countries, news trust is decreasing (Newman et al, 2020).

Austrian journalists disapprove of beliefs and convictions impacting news and, like other western journalists, tend to avoid taking sides in disputes even if one side has a better position; instead placing emphasis on impartiality (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). High esteem is “given to objective, factual and credible reporting” (Hanitzsch et al., 2011, p. 283). Like in other German-speaking countries, Austrian journalists are averse to publishing unverifiable material; in addition, they are inclined to follow ethical rules and are reluctant to use questionable methods in their reporting (Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

In Austrian newsrooms, the typical journalist “is more likely to still be a man, quite a bit older, 44.5 years, has no academic degree, albeit with ever decreasing probability, still tends to work full-time” (Kaltenbrunner & Lugschitz, 2024, p. 343). Kaltenbrunner and Lugschitz (2024) highlight shrinking and aging newsrooms as well as gender differences regarding income, managerial positions, but also gendered domains such as lifestyle and sports being female and male domains, respectively. In addition, Austrian journalists with migration background are disproportionately underrepresented compared to the total population. (Kaltenbrunner & Lugschitz, 2024).

Riedl and Eberl (2020) find agreement between audiences and journalists in Austria on dissemination and entertainment (although less important) as core functions of journalism. However, the study also finds strong demands for contrasting expectations among Austrian audiences (Riedl & Eberl, 2020).

2.5 Summary and Research Questions

As outlined throughout earlier sections, imaginative and affective dimensions of the audience-journalist relationship are increasingly receiving attention in recent journalism studies (Uth et al., 2025). The imagined journalists framework highlights the role of non-rational evaluations and imaginative dimensions in shaping audiences’ approach to news (Panievsky et al., 2024).

Theory on imaginaries suggests a link between imaginaries and expectations. For instance, scholars outside of journalism research have connected expectations and imaginaries, highlighting the structuring nature of expectations (e.g. Hautala & Ahlqvist, 2024). Taylor’s (2002) understanding of imaginaries also explicitly links them to expectations and violations. Thus, this thesis structures audiences’ imagined journalists using expectations. Both frameworks have roots in the work of Goffman (1959) and aim to understand how audiences

approach news by highlighting the interplay of diverse modes, including descriptive and affective aspects.

While Panievsky et al. (2024) criticize the focus of role perception research on practices and the quantitative, close-ended approaches many studies take, this thesis addresses this by combining their approach with the explicitly open expectations approach of Banjac et al. (2024) which accounts not only for positional expectations, but also personal ones. Building on the work of Panievsky et al. (2024), this thesis aims to further explore how audiences imagine journalists in a different cultural context. Due to the newness of their concept, additional focus will be placed on exploring possible distinctions between imagined journalists. In their study, Panievsky et al. (2024) ask audiences specifically for predominant traits among Israeli journalists, limiting the openness of their work. To address this and allow audiences to place their focus freely, the first, overarching research question is:

RQ1: How do audiences imagine journalists?

Whereas Panievsky et al. (2024) explore how imagined journalists differ from discourses in academic literature, this work contrasts the concept of imagined journalists—which highlights “how people think and feel about journalists” (p. 46), equating to descriptive and cathectic expectations—with audiences’ normative expectations of how journalists should be. Studying potential gaps or overlaps in this way may provide valuable insight into the complex relationship between journalists and audiences and allow for new strategies to improve the relationship by addressing various demands (Panievsky et al., 2024).

As the success of performances relies on the ability to recognize the norms or anticipations within a particular context and adhere to them accordingly, failing to do so comes with stigmatization (Goffman, 1959; as cited in Burgoon & Hubbard, 2005). Therefore, it may be useful to explore whether audiences’ expectations of ideal journalists are, in their mind, met or unmet – or in other words, how much and in which aspects their conceptualizations of imagined and ideal journalists overlap or diverge.

As studies (e.g., Loosen et al., 2020) have found differing normative expectations within audiences based on respondents’ gender, education or age, such demographic markers will be kept in mind when analysing potential differentiations between audience groups.

Thus, the second research question is:

RQ2: How do audiences imagine ideal journalists?

Defining who is or is not considered a ‘journalist’ can prove difficult as it is highly contested within research (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). The question is explored in depth in boundary work (e.g. Carlson, 2015) and would go beyond the scope of this work. However, it touches upon distinctions such as location, knowledge and authority (Carlson, 2015). In order to consistently operationalize the definition throughout this work – and for the sake of practicality and clarity – this thesis understands journalists as professionals who “contribute journalistic content to news outlets” (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p.9f).

To explore these questions, this thesis adopts a qualitative, interview-based research design, which is particularly suited to contribute new and nuanced insights to the mixed methods approach of the initial imagined journalists study that relied on a quantitative thematic analysis of a singular question with no possibilities for follow-up questions (Panievsky et al., 2024). The next chapter details the chosen method.

3. Method

This chapter provides information on the method used within the thesis. Initially, typical approaches to audience research are laid out, before explaining which is best suited for the goals of this work. The chosen method is reviewed extensively regarding its application possibilities, advantages and limitations as well as potential ethical concerns. Later sections deal with the sampling process and the sample itself and finally, data collection.

3.1 The Two-Sided Video Ethnography

When researching audiences, many studies are based around two main methodological approaches: quantitative surveys (e.g. Knudsen et al., 2023) and qualitative interviews (e.g. Mont'Alverne et al., 2023; Nelson & Lewis, 2023). Since quantitative approaches are meant to measure, explain and depict the manifestations of variables and their correlations on a large scale in a standardized way in order to test hypotheses (Misoch, 2015) they were not suitable to answer the research questions of this thesis. Instead, a qualitative approach is employed in order to gain detailed and complete understanding of how audiences imagine journalists by exploring their expectations (Misoch, 2015). This exploratory nature is another reason to choose a qualitative approach (Misoch, 2015).

An interview-based method was deemed best suited to answer the research questions as it allows to understand what complex constructs actually mean to people (Toff & Nielsen, 2018). The interview itself centres around audiences' news consumption and the expectations and imaginations of journalists they hold. Thus, a guideline is utilized in order to explore audiences' subjective perspectives, experiences, feelings, imaginaries and conflicts (Mey & Mruck, 2011). Using a guideline is especially beneficial for interviews with longer durations, as it helps interviewers remember critical questions and allows for greater comparability between multiple interviews (Mey & Mruck, 2011). In order to achieve data comparability, all topics in the guideline must be addressed (Misoch, 2015). In addition, although less flexible than other interview types due to the pre-formulated questions, interview-situations are made easier on the researcher (Mey & Mruck, 2011). The interview guideline was created within the scope of a larger research project and is attached in the appendix; it was not designed by the author of this thesis.

Semi-structured interviews give participants the freedom to elaborate on issues, providing as much context and unprompted associations as they want to and defining concepts completely

in their own words (Knudsen et al., 2023) which Panievsky et al. (2024) highlight as important. In addition, researchers are enabled to adjust their line of questioning or pose follow-up questions as needed to clarify, resulting in more accurate data (Alamri, 2019).

However, with qualitative approaches gaining popularity in recent years, Groot Kormelink (2020) argues that “news audience researchers [have] to go ‘beyond simply championing or justifying qualitative methods’ [...] and be more reflective and critical” (p. 863) of the qualitative interview’s limitations and possibilities. As such, attention must be given to several challenges: Among other factors, the quality of data depends on the interviewer, their skill and expertise (Mey & Mruck, 2011). Whilst qualitative interviews are flexible, they may be exposed to subconscious biases and are much more small-scale (Brown, 2001). After all, interviews are a time-consuming method; it takes time to schedule, conduct, transcribe and analyse them (Alamri, 2019). Time may also pose a challenge in scheduling regarding which participants can be reached during conventional work hours in the first place (Alamri, 2019).

Establishing trust between researcher and participant is fundamental to qualitative interviews (Freese, Rauf & Voelkel, 2022). The basis for this is being respectful and non-judgmental towards research subjects, no matter how extreme their opinions (Misoch, 2015). Developing a relationship is significant to the success of qualitative interviews (Alamri, 2019). Whilst informing participants about the topics and goals of the study is necessary, participants may feel inclined to give socially desirable answers (Misoch 2015). As a result, the interviewer's presence may result in “participants provid[ing] more biased and less reliable data” (Alamri, 2019, p. 67). By being transparent but vague, this effect may be mitigated (Misoch, 2015) which is why participants were informed of the overall goals of the study but not its specifics.

Moreover, Pitts (2005) identifies “apologetic self-analysis” (p. 259) as one potential drawback of qualitative interviews examining audiences and their experiences – a phenomenon that appears to be related to social desirability. Furthermore, self-presentation may occur; this refers to the interpretations of participants’ own attitudes and experiences which emerge to varying degrees within their responses (Pitts, 2005). This reflects people drawing on already existing narratives to construct their own – creating folk theories of journalism (Nielsen, 2016). As these interpretations are tied to understanding audiences’ layered expectations and relation to journalism (Groot Kormelink, 2020) and even built on in the case of the ‘imagined journalist’ framework (Panievsky et al., 2024), self-presentation effects are not an issue in this work.

However, they are still something to be aware of. As a whole, these points tie in with the argument that interviews are performed constructions rather than authentic (Edwards & Holland, 2020). This means, interview data as a product of verbal communication does not directly capture aspects of reality (Honer, 2011), only reproductions.

Even without considering such potential effects, it can be difficult for participants to access and verbalize their internal state (Groot Kormelink, 2020). Not only are considerable self-reflection skills needed but also the vocabulary and narrative skills to express one's experience in a potentially stressful interview situation (Groot Kormelink, 2020). In addition, recalling details may be challenging, raising questions about the extent to which individuals can retain and recount the news they consume, their experiences with it, and the journalists who produce it (Groot Kormelink, 2020).

The two-sided video ethnography addresses some of these problems (Groot Kormelink, 2020). It combines in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews with observational aspects of ethnography (Groot Kormelink, 2020). Ethnography is mostly used as a qualitative inquiry which studies “*at first hand* what people do and say in particular contexts” (Hammersley, 2006, p. 4). It may contain observations, open-ended interviews as well as document analysis (Hammersley, 2006). Ethnographers aim to understand the perspectives of participants in order to explain their behaviours whilst also gaining an analytic understanding which may differ or conflict with participants' views (Hammersley, 2006). Typically, ethnography has placed emphasis on researcher's physical presence (Hammersley, 2006.). However, some scholars argue it would be negligent to exclude digital communication from ethnography, not only because of the amount of online interactions but also because online experiences structure offline interactions (Murphy, 2021).

Building on these foundations, how are ethnographical perspectives applied within the two-sided video ethnography? Applying the *think-aloud protocol* (Groot Kormelink, 2020) participants are asked to perform a task— consume media as they normally would— whilst narrating it (e.g., Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2018). Coupled with elements of the *watch and discuss* method which seeks to capture participants' reactions to people's thoughts and reactions in real time, effects of social desirability can be reduced by encouraging audience members to voice their expectations and imaginations of journalists as they encounter journalistic content (Groot Kormelink, 2020). For example, in order to access people's expectations of more targeted (imagined) journalists, they can initially be asked to demonstrate

their news consumption practices. By *re-enacting* their usual news consumption, and actively encountering journalistic content, normative responses can be minimized compared to regular interviews (Groot Kormelink, 2020). Video re-enactments of everyday practices allow researchers to gain valuable insights into embodied – and, when conducted in participants' own homes, emplaced – knowledge that would not be accessible through other means (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2014). This inductive, qualitative approach allows for in-depth understanding and exploration of audiences' expectations of journalists through rich and detailed data. Kumpel and Anter (2024) highlight it as a valuable tool in times of algorithmic curation.

Out of practical concerns, the method was modified. First, the rewatch protocol was removed, because the duration of the interviews (averaging at roughly 1,5 to 2 hours) would have made it unfeasible. This also made it necessary to interrupt the think aloud protocol more often for questions which may otherwise have been asked during the rewatch session.

Initially, the presence of a visible camera may be intrusive for participants (Murphy, 2021); however, they have been observed to grow used to it (e.g. Desmond, 2017). Participants simply being aware of cameras is not enough to significantly change their behaviour (Jones & Raymond, 2012). In addition, Turkle (2011) argues that the omnipresence of smartphones has shifted expectations surrounding privacy. By enabling researchers to concentrate on the intangible, interpersonal aspects of ethnographic research, technology has been proposed to improve rather than interfere in most settings (Murphy, 2021). However, Murphy (2021) raises the question whether participants' homes are not too intimate too record. Due to such ethical concerns, participants were offered the choice of either inviting the researcher(s) to their home or coming to the university. They were also told that their choice would not negatively impact them or others.

In general, certain ethical guidelines must be followed when conducting research with human beings in order to protect them from any potential harm resulting from their participation (Misoch, 2015). This is especially true in qualitative research (Nii Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023). Ethical questions should find consideration in all steps of the research process: in the interview process this entails determining whether sensitive, private, or maybe stressful subjects are being covered which would make interviewees more vulnerable (Misoch, 2015). However, even when covering less sensitive research subjects, stressful or private topics may still come up (Misoch, 2015). Potential participants should be informed about content and goal of the study, be anonymized and informed about potential consequences they may experience

because of their participation (Misoch, 2015). The interview itself is a potentially stressful social interaction and may lead participants to question things which were taken for granted – an exercise that can be enriching but also unsettling (Misoch, 2015).

3.2 Data Sample

This section offers an extensive overview of the recruitment process, outlining the particular strategies and decisions made in the search for participants. It provides valuable information on the sampling process, describing each step taken to reach possible candidates, but also guidelines, criteria and limitations which influenced the selection of participants. In addition, this section also outlines and discusses the demographic composition of the final sample regarding potential implications for the results and impact of the study.

Sampling was conducted in several steps in order to achieve a diverse, targeted sample in order to account for diverse expectations. To ensure this, flyers were distributed widely across various public and semi-public locations in all municipal districts, spanning grocery stores, sports centres, libraries, churches, cafes, and universities. Online advertisements and social media postings complemented these efforts. Participants which were recruited directly in this first step consented after completing an initial survey which sought to find participants with a representative distribution of certain traits. Among these traits were variables such as age, gender, education attained, employment status, income, country of origin, party identity and religion. Participants were chosen according to the demographic within a nation-wide representative survey, results from the most recent general election in 2019 (Statistik Austria, 2020).

After the first interviews were completed, snowball sampling techniques were attempted further in order to expand participant outreach. Some participants were also recruited through a market research company in order to reach underrepresented groups. Despite these efforts, participants with lower education levels and those who identified as right-wing remained underrepresented. This may be because right-wing individuals are more reluctant to participate in research (Blee, 2007). After all recruitment possibilities were exhausted, the research team's personal networks were utilized to find fitting participants with which the interviewer did not have pre-existing relationships.

Most recruiting efforts primarily targeted the Austrian capital Vienna, where audience members from many different backgrounds can be accessed easily. Another reason for this was

of the practical sort, as Vienna is the interviewer's place of residence and travelling to distant places would have taken additional time and reduced the likelihood of being able to schedule multiple interviews a day. Requiring participants to travel to Vienna for an interview would also not have been feasible, as it would have raised the time and money investment on participants' end. Online interviews would not have allowed for the same ethnographic approach or recordings of physical media.

With all this in mind, the sample consists of 20 audience members of all genders and ages (excluding minors) who consume diverse news media. Participants reside in Austria at the time of data collection and were purposively sampled to ensure they consume a wide range of news media, both online and offline. This is to ensure the exploration of the full potential of expectations through widely and broadly differing news producers. Because this thesis aims to reach people of many different backgrounds, sampling decisions have been based around mirroring the distribution of demographic markers in the total Austrian population as closely as possible. The considered variables include sex, age, education attainment, religion, employment status, income, migration background, party identity, and political ideology. A precise overview of the distribution of traits is attached in the appendix.

Of the total sample ($N = 20$), ten identify as female, nine as male, and one as nonbinary. Ages are ranging from 17 to 79 years, averaging at 42,85 years. The median income of participant ranged 1.201€ to 1.800€ after taxes. Right-wing identifying participants are significantly underrepresented (5), compared to left-wing participants (13). In addition, audience members who have at least a bachelor's degree are overrepresented (13). Of the six participants who do not have a degree, two are university students.

It should also be noted that the study required participants to commit for longer periods of time which may have deterred people with lower resources available. The larger study, for which the data was collected, aimed to recruit participants who were willing to return for a second phase. This made the recruitment process more complicated as the first phase already contained not just the two-sided video ethnographies but also a letter-writing exercise. Upon completing the latter, participants were compensated with a voucher worth 30€, redeemable at Thalia, MediaMarkt, Spar, or Amazon.

3.3 Data Collection

This section describes the data collection process. As mentioned earlier, the data of this thesis was collected within the scope of a larger, FWF funded research project into audience expectations and alongside senior scientists. As a result, the interview guideline was not developed by the author.

All interviews were conducted between March and September of 2023, either in participants' homes or a room at the university depending on their preferences. In sum, nine participants opted to invite the researcher(s) to their homes, whereas the remaining 26 interviews were conducted at the Department of Communication in Vienna. Four interviews were conducted in Upper Austria, through the interviewer's personal network. These participants were recruited in the final stage of the data collecting process in order to reach saturation and incorporate rural voices.

In the days prior to the interview, participants were asked to bring their personal devices or other physical media they regularly used if possible to demonstrate their typical media usage. Challenges occurred for example with magazines or newspapers which participants usually read in café's and were provided at the specific locations, but also devices which were too heavy or relied on set times such as TVs or PC setups.

Before the interview began, participants were informed about the content and goal of the study, data management practices, their rights as participants and how they would be compensated for their time. Depending on how they were recruited, some participants had already been informed about and agreed to this in writing after completing an initial survey. Otherwise, participants were asked to sign a consent form in person. Nonetheless, some important points were emphasized, such as the recording of data, compensation and participants being able to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences to anyone (Nii Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023).

The interviews were conducted by the author, mostly with a second researcher present. This was advantageous as the interviewer could focus on conducting the interviews without having to keep an eye on the technological set-up, allowing for a smoother flow.

Audio and video tracks were recorded using a separate audio recorder, ensuring the fixation of data (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). In addition, the software OBS Studio was used to screen record the interviewer's laptop which hosted a Zoom meeting in which the interviewee

took part. The laptop's built-in camera was positioned so that it could capture the participants' facial expression and gestures. Whenever the participant demonstrated their media use, they were asked to share the screen of their personal device, making it visible in the final recording. Occasionally, devices would disconnect, batteries would run low, or other technical issues would arise. This was accounted for in the total time slot allocated for the interview, with a maximum duration of three hours, further increasing the time commitment required from participants.

The interview itself was initiated by telling participants about the research subject, asking how they get information about what is happening in the world through different ways. Participants were told to bring up anything that was relevant to them. In order to advance the audience turn in accordance with Swart et al. (2022), terms adjacent to 'news' or 'journalism' were initially being avoided by the interviewer until the interviewee mentioned. However, as the terms were attached to other recruiting materials and contained in the name of the study, some priming effects may have occurred nonetheless.

At the beginning, participants were asked to imagine the start of a regular day for them: "Imagine it is morning, the alarm rings, what is the first thing you do?". They were then prompted to walk the researcher through their day, focusing on the media they interact with throughout it. As participants mentioned using media or devices they had brought with them, they were asked to demonstrate how they usually went about informing themselves. During this demonstration, the researcher asked them to narrate what they were doing and why, how they felt as they did and to bring up media or actors which were relevant to them as they encountered them. Whenever participants mentioned such media or actors through which they informed themselves in their narration, the researcher took notes in order to ask follow-up questions later if necessary to avoid interrupting the narrative flow. This process was time-intensive, with individual interviews often lasting around 1.5 to two hours. Some outliers took even longer (up to almost three hours).

4. Analysis

With the foundations of the method laid out, the following section is dedicated to the analysis and its necessary steps. With the collection of the interview data complete, transcriptions need to be made. Guided by literature, this chapter discusses this process. In a second step, the approach taken to conducting the qualitative content analysis is described.

4.1 Transcription

In order to analyse interviews, transcriptions need to be made: This process centres around reproducing spoken words from recordings into writing (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006) and constitutes part of the data analysis process (Wellard & McKenna, 2001). In order to assure quality criteria are being met during this process, transcription is documented and follows the rules established in this section (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

In this step, researchers make a number of choices, for example whether to include non-verbal data (e.g. facial expressions, tone, body language, emotions), or whether to stick to verbatim transcriptions or not (McLellan, MacQueen & Neidig, 2003). Even pauses and silences can hold important contextual information (Poland & Pederson, 1998). As textual data alone can never capture all nuances of an interview, and additional variables such as cost, time or expertise factor into this decision, some trade-offs have to be made (McLellan, MacQueen & Neidig, 2003). With this in mind, it may be a fair assessment to call transcripts ‘constructivist’ objects (Ashmore & Reed, 2000) and transcription an “interpretative activity” (p.292) challenging assumptions of accuracy (Poland, 1995).

Transcribers encounter additional challenges such as unclear speech (e.g. overlapping, omission of sounds, unending or incomplete, incomplete sentences), poor audio quality or background noises and may have to make decisions on interpunctuations which can affect intent or emphasize some passages over others (McLellan, MacQueen & Neidig, 2003).

Whilst some scholars argue it is important to be very precise in this step (Misoch, 2015), different transcription systems exist. Transcriptions can follow simple or complex transcription rules (Kuckartz, Dresing, Rädiker & Stefer, 2007). Although the language is smoothed and hesitation sounds (such as “uhm”), word breaks, repeats, and stutters are removed, simple transcription enhances readability (Kuckartz, 2009) while still remaining word-accurate (Kuckartz, Dresing, Rädiker & Stefer, 2007). Word accuracy is important as even minor deviations may lead to misinterpretations (Misoch, 2015).

In contrast, complex transcriptions take a verbatim approach, reproducing spoken data word for word in order to replicate the audio-recorded material as closely as possible (Poland, 1995). Even pauses and silences can hold important contextual information (Poland & Pederson, 1998) and are thus included in this approach. Moreover, meaning can be strongly tied to particular linguistic choices, whether that be grammar, syntax or word choice (Duneier 1999). Although this allows to analyse phonetic characteristics, transcription time is increased (Dresing & Pehl, 2015) at the cost of readability and easy comprehension (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). How detailed transcriptions need to be depends on the research aim and questions (Kuckartz, 2009). Further, choices made with regards to the transcription method should be congruent with the theoretical and overall methodological approach (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006).

Some older transcription rules, such as leaving blank space in between letters to indicate a word being stretched out, complicate computer assisted analysis (Kuckartz, 2009). To ensure compatibility with computer-assisted analysis, the following transcription rules devised by Kuckartz et al. (2007) have been applied:

First of all, the transcription is literal, meaning it captures speech as it is spoken without summarization or phonetic representations (Kuckartz et al., 2007). Language and punctuation are slightly smoothed to align with written German conventions (Kuckartz et al., 2007), dialects are adapted to standard German. Noticeable and longer pauses are indicated with ellipses (...) (Kuckartz et al., 2007). Emphasis is indicated through underlining (Kuckartz et al., 2007). The interviewer's affirmative noises are excluded whenever they do not interrupt the flow of speech (Kuckartz et al., 2007). Interjections are put in in parentheses, as well as sounds which clarify or support statements (e.g. laughter or sighing) (Kuckartz et al., 2007). At the beginning of the paragraph, "I:" indicates the interviewer's speech, whereas "B1:" indicates the interviewee's speech (Kuckartz et al., 2007). All information which could identify the participant is anonymized (Kuckartz et al., 2007). Finally, each speaker change is marked by inserting a blank line between turns to enhance readability ((Kuckartz et al., 2007). In addition, inaudible passages are marked as (unv.), external interruptions are highlighted and nonverbal activities such as a participant opening Instagram are noted (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2019).

Any personal data of participants within transcripts were anonymized in accordance to Kuckartz et al. (2007). Ten of the 20 transcripts analysed were done by a transcription agency, the remaining transcripts were verified and manually corrected after using an AI-based

automatic transcription service, AmberScript (see: Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). There are some variations of these transcription rules within a portion of the interviews as they were transcribed externally.

4.2 Qualitative Content Analysis according to Kuckartz

With the data collection and preparation process complete, the next step involves conducting a qualitative data analysis. After discussing different approaches to the qualitative content analysis, the chosen method is described step-by-step.

When it comes to analysing qualitative data, two main approaches have left their mark on research: first, the qualitative content analysis and second, the grounded theory approach which aims to generate theory (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Because this is not the aim of this thesis, the data will be analysed using qualitative content analysis. Generally, qualitative content analysis can be used to generate theory, but also to verify or describe phenomena and entails understanding and interpreting text (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

Qualitative content analysis is the systematic and methodically controlled scientific analysis of texts, images, films and other communication content (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Not only manifest but also latent content is analysed (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). At the centre of qualitative analysis are categories with which the entire material relevant to the research question(s) is coded (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Categories can be formed deductively, inductively or deductively-inductively (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). The analysis is primarily qualitative, but can also integrate quantitative-statistical analyses; it can be both category-oriented and case-oriented. (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022, p 39).

This thesis takes an inductive approach to category formation “to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data” (Thomas, 2003, p. 2).

There is a plethora of different approaches to qualitative content analysis, among them the two well-known approaches of Mayring (2010) and Kuckartz (2012), each utilizing varying techniques (Mayring, 2010; Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Both approaches use coding to analyse the data through key terms to systematize and interpret complex data (Bücker, 2020). Mayring’s (2010) approach is characterized by its systematic procedure, paraphrasing, gradual reductions, and the combining of quantitative and qualitative analysis processes with a focus on the latter. Whereas Mayring (2010) is guided by theory and highly structured, Kuckartz

(2012) takes a more open and flexible approach that is guided by the material which is better suited to address the research questions of this work.

Kuckartz (2012) describes three main methods of qualitative analysis: 1) content-structuring, 2) evaluative and 3) type-forming qualitative analysis. The content-structuring analysis is used to identify and analyse key themes in a systematic manner by structuring data through categories and subcategories, whereas the evaluative content analysis classifies and evaluates data along specific dimensions and the type-forming analysis focuses on grouping cases meaningfully (Kuckartz, 2018).

For this thesis, the content-structuring analysis method was chosen. It is well-suited for semi-structured interviews and focuses on breaking down the data into meaningful categories, making complex information manageable and interpretable (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

In recent years it has become standard practice to use so-called QDA software, such as MAXQDA, for qualitative data analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). MAXQDA, one of the most well-known and -used programs (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022; Mayring, 2010), allows the recontextualization of findings as coded sections can be viewed and compared within their original context at any time during coding and analysis (Fürst, Jecker & Schönhagen, 2016). After preparing the qualitative data by making and verifying transcripts as described in the previous section, it is imported into MAXQDA where it will be inductively analysed. Before beginning analysis, it is useful to reflect assumptions and knowledge on the research subject as well as the goals and context of the research (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). In this case, knowledge of the subject is informed by the theory and literature introduced in earlier sections, namely role theory and the imagined journalist framework.

Each and every interview is to be analysed in the same way which is disclosed in the following section of this chapter (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020). The analysis process is conducted in seven steps:

First, initiating text work; this entails reading the entirety of transcripts thoroughly to develop a holistic understanding for the data with the research questions in mind, marking important terms, phrasings and sections and analysing arguments in context (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). All thoughts, ideas and assumptions emerging at this stage are preserved using memos, to conclude brief case summaries are written which help with analytical differentiation and can inspire the generation of categories (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Memos and case summaries were written for each transcript within the same file and separated from each other

using lines (---) to indicate interpretative work and highlight potential ideas (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Case summaries included brief notes on participants, their media usage, any journalists they mentioned and preferences along with any distinctions or consolidations between media and journalists they made. For example, the memo for interview six recorded that the participant distinguished between serious and less serious sources and how this was defined within the context of the interview. Further, phrasings and quotes which stood out were noted (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

In the second step, main categories are developed; they can be derived from the research questions and interview guide, based in theory or completely inductive (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). In the previous step, dimensions which emerged were noted and compared across cases to develop into broader categories (e.g. work-life dimension, career level, personality, age, practices, relationship to audiences, relationship to other stakeholders) which built on the initial main categories. These initial main categories were derived from the research questions and focused broadly on 1) imagined journalists and 2) imagined ideal journalists through the lens of the three expectation modes. The main categories are tested in an initial coding run using approximately 25% of the data (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022), or for this study, nine interviews. This process provided many subcategories which were continuously refined and contained aspects of participants. It should be noted that “[c]ategory development [...] is an act of construction that is based on the prior knowledge, the basis of experience and not least the ‘world views’ of the analysers” (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022, p. 239).

In phase three, the entire material is coded from top to bottom, with sections assigned to one or more categories (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). All relevant units of meaning –comprising at least one full sentence and any additional context necessary for understanding –are coded, whereas irrelevant passages remain un-coded (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

In step four, subcategories are inductively developed to refine the initial, broader categories (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). This involves selecting a category to be differentiated, gathering all coded text segments associated with it, creating and organizing subcategories based on the material, and defining these subcategories with supporting examples from the text (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

In phase five, a second coding process is undertaken to assign the refined subcategories to text segments previously coded with the main categories, requiring another run through the material (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

The newly developed categories are then used to re-code previous material which has been coded with the main categories (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

Table 1

Refined Main Categories and Subcategories developed during Initial Coding

Main Categories & Subcategories			
Imagined / Ideal			
	Professional		
		Practices	standards, pressures, workflow
		Context-specific Characteristics	experience, occupation
		Relationship to Audience	interaction, influenceability...
	Personal		
		Demographic characteristics	age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomics, education
		Personality	traits, attitudes
		Physical appearance	

In this process, the categories above were collapsed: in the professional dimension, the relationship category was moved to practices, and in the personal dimension physical appearance was merged with characteristics. Another category for pressures was added. In addition, each of the categories was explored for distinctions between types of journalists.

Phase six entails analysis based on the themes and subthemes developed during coding, with the goal of preparing for the presentation of results (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Possibilities for analysis include category-based analysis, case and group comparisons, or visualizations (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). In this thesis, focus is placed on (main) category-based analysis to analyse what is (not) mentioned along the main categories as well as patterns,

differences and other notable observations within each subcategory; emerging connections between categories are also analysed (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). The analysis and presentation gain complexity, explanatory strength, and clarity by comparing, for example, groups which are differentiated by sociodemographic characteristics (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

Finally, step seven draws on insight and text fragments from previous stages and concludes the analysis process by putting findings into one final piece of writing, using quotes of typical examples to illustrate the findings (Roulston, 2013; Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). The structure of the results section is more or less fixed based on the differentiated categories and is completed by summarizing and discussing the results (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

To ensure the robustness of qualitative content analysis, quality criteria are essential (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Surrounding these criteria is a larger discussion regarding their meaning in qualitative research and whether or not they are to be distinguished from traditional standards – objectivity, reliability and validity – in quantitative research (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Researchers have argued for three major positions which assume quality criteria are either 1) universal, 2) specific to or 3) not applicable to qualitative research (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). This discussion is tied to criticisms of qualitative research for lacking representativeness in the statistical sense, however it seeks to achieve a different kind of representativity, namely conceptual representativeness (Misoch, 2015). Qualitative research prioritizes exploration, depth and contextualization (Fürst, Jecker, & Schönhagen, 2016).

This thesis follows the perspective of Kuckartz and Rädiker (2022) who argue for qualitative quality criteria between simple transferal and complete dismissal and differentiate between internal and external quality standards. They highlight internal quality standards as more significant and a prerequisite to external quality, whereas transferability and generalizability depend on study design and sample (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

Kuckartz and Rädiker (2022) propose a checklist of quality criteria specific to qualitative content analysis, aimed at evaluating the “reliability, credibility, dependability, rule-guidedness, intersubjective comprehensibility, auditability etc.” (p. 237, [translated by the author]) of a study’s internal quality, which often becomes apparent during the qualitative content analysis process. This checklist encompasses aspects of data acquisition, transcription, and the content analysis itself (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). For assessing the quality of qualitative content analysis, they highlight elements such as the appropriateness, justification,

and application of the chosen analysis method, as well as the consistency and precision of the category system, independent coding, and coder agreement (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Additionally, they emphasize the importance of thorough data analysis, consideration of exceptions and contradictions, transparency through memos, use of original quotes, drawing conclusions grounded in the data, and detailed documentation and archiving of the analysis process (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). By practicing transparency within qualitative research, the trustworthiness and implications of results can be more easily understood (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019).

In addition, validity can be assessed through frequent discussions with experts outside of the project, discussing findings with participants, extended stay or returning to the field and triangulation (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Triangulation – or the combination of different methods, approaches or perspectives – (Flick, 2020) was applied to increase credibility and validity (Alamri, 2019) but also credibility (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

Within the scope of this thesis, inter-coder agreement cannot be checked as it would require two researchers coding independently with the aim of reaching consensus in later discussions (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022)

5. Presentation of Results and Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to present and discuss the results of the analysis conducted. To protect participants' privacy, direct quotes from interviews are cited using an alias in combination with their age as well as interview number and quote position (Name, age; Interview Number, Position). Focus will be placed on identifying and contextualizing significant findings in order to answer the research questions in a comprehensive manner. To achieve this, the structure is segmented as follows: A subchapter is dedicated to both research questions, with additional subchapters dedicated to highlighting emerging themes. Brief summaries at the end serve to provide an overview of key results, before finally answering the research questions and discussing the results.

5.1 Imagining Journalists

This section seeks to lay out the key themes which emerged within audiences' narrations. Audiences imagine journalists across several major categories distinguishable along professional and personal dimensions. The professional dimension contains: 1) their working environment and pressures they are subject to, 2) journalistic standards, practices, workflows and 3) their affiliation (including the media and journalistic genre(s) or topic(s) they work for and their experience). At times, audiences touch on how they imagine the relationship between them and journalists. In contrast, the personal dimension focuses on 1) demographic and physical characteristics and 2) personality, including traits and attitudes.

This analysis considers the three modes of expectations – prescriptive or normative, descriptive or predictive and cathectic – expressed to identify how audiences imagine journalists. The expectations are reflected through the use of correlating language markers and at times made explicit.

5.1.1 Professional Dimension

This dimension contains all categories relevant to journalists within their role. As listed above, this includes environmental or outside pressures, aspects of the journalist-audience relationship and journalistic practices but also related anecdotes.

5.1.1.1 External Pressures

One key theme which frequently emerges considers journalists to be a part of a larger environment – whether that be society at large or their media organization. As such, they are described to experience pressures on an individual as well as an institutional level.

One participant describes the personal strain which journalists and others in the public eye face as a result of amplified public interest in them and their work as reasoning why his “expectations of journalists [...] are greater than those of normal people because they are exposed to a personal burden of public interest and they are only allowed to do this if they really can” (Andreas, 79; 9, Pos. 283). He adds that those who cannot do (the job) or lack key abilities “should not do it” (Andreas, 79; 9, Pos. 283). The participant’s belief is strengthened through a prescriptive expectation, making certain expected abilities indispensable and even a demandable requirement of people performing jobs of public interest.

In contrast, Dominik (20) emphasizes the reach of the media a journalist works for, “Of course, when you write for the highest-circulation newspaper in Austria, you have a certain responsibility that comes with the job” (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 331).

At the macro level, some participants believe journalists to be part of a “service society [...] [where] everything is always evaluated [...] [and] one has to bow to that” (Natascha, 41; 7, Pos. 268). In the context of the quote, ‘that’ refers to an external will of journalists’ readership which this particular participant often emphasizes. The linguistic marker in the quote points to a prescriptive expectation; however, this does not constitute an ideal to which the participant subscribes. Rather, this example illustrates how expectation modes intertwine, in this case forming beliefs about the working environment of journalists and the pressures they face. She does not consider herself a part of this mass of people and often voices discontent about journalists she likes having to bend to metrics or viewership surveys to better meet certain expectations. Natascha also believes that if journalists do not do what the audience wants – for instance, copy another journalist’s reporting style who has higher viewership numbers – they are at threat of losing their jobs.

Similarly to how Natascha imagines audience ratings to serve as performance indicators of a journalist’s work, others highlight economic motivations. The digital context is described as a working environment for journalists where click-based metrics dominate, forcing them to ensure their articles are widely read to sustain advertising revenue. Failure to be profitable on

an individual level is linked to journalists' jobs being threatened, "I believe they have to make sure that the articles are clicked on and read, otherwise they are gone" (Vincent, 47; 8, Pos. 150). This example shows a belief; however, the linguistic marker also points to a perceived norm or demand which journalists are exposed to by other stakeholders. Despite the importance often attributed to journalistic work, participants describe significant job insecurities journalists are faced with. The field is believed to be highly competitive with many journalists lining up, waiting for opportunities; this in turn, is believed to amplify the pressure on those who managed to get a reputable position.

In addition, journalists are believed by some to experience stress and time pressures due to tight deadlines and their responsibilities as illustrated by this response on how the participant imagines *Guardian* journalists to be like in their personal lives. "Um. Stressed? (laughs) Yeah. Because of all the, um, responsibilities. And, um, you know, if they do something bad, I believe a lot of people would be disappointed. So that would be stressful, at least for me" (Isabel, 23; 13, Pos. 183). In her response, descriptive and cathectic modes are combined as the participant describes how she believes journalists feel. This appears to be a pattern especially among participants who have made experiences in the journalistic field themselves or are students of communication science; they further express that they would not want to be a journalist themselves (anymore) due to this precarity. Isabel refers to her own experiences during a journalistic internship in her home country, "I saw how they work, and it was so chaotic and hectic. I was really, really scared" (Isabel, 23; 13, Pos. 543). While she does not know if the same is true in other countries, she imagines it to be. Simon (22) holds similar beliefs, describing journalists as often working too quickly and making mistakes as a result. He acknowledges that everyone makes mistakes but notes that journalists' mistakes are public.

Beyond audience scrutiny as well as economic and financial pressures, audiences also describe journalists as subject of broadly conceptualized but often vague 'Vorgaben' [translated by author as directives]. Journalists are imagined to be impacted by directives; for example, Elisa (60) says, "I am actually pretty sure that almost nobody can say what they really think and that they have to act according to directives" (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 351). These directives can be imagined as editorial policy, but also external or internal influences. Natascha (41) imagines that some articles and their political colouring are set by publisher and money givers. Additionally, they are often evaluated negatively or ambivalently. Elisa believes directives to have potential to be good by keeping journalists from making unqualified statements, however she sees potential for harm "if it goes too much in a political direction, [...] and then I [a

journalist] would always have to work in that direction, then I do not like it, because then neutrality is no longer there” (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 353).

While the concept of directives is connected to political partiality for many participants, to others it also includes journalistic ethics. For instance, Alice (17) believes, "That's probably given by the top people there. [...] I still think, that most things they have to do, that it is predetermined what they write, what they say" (Alice, 17; 12, Pos. 384). She evaluates this belief ambivalently, considering some directives to be good practice guidelines – such as not mentioning nationality in reports. She imagines that if directives (or the pressure to follow them) were gone, journalists would not change their practices because they are used to doing things a certain way already. She does express concern for good practice rules being neglected.

5.1.1.2 Practices and Workflows

Simon (22) describes his image of journalists to be consistent, unless he observes their work to be problematic; to violate an important normative expectation of his. Vincent (47) does not believe all journalists to have fun doing their job, but expects some (targeted) journalists to feel that way. Elisa (60) admires journalists’ versatility, “It must take an incredible amount of time, energy and research. I admire the fact that you can do it all at the same time and also the diplomacy to present it, I think that's great” (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 343).

Gathering Information

Journalists’ information gathering practices are often mentioned by audiences. Especially researching and conducting interviews are frequently described. As they are often normatively evaluated or specified depending on a journalist’s affiliation, details will be examined in later sections to avoid repetition.

Once information has been gathered, many participants describe journalists to analyse and evaluate it for its accuracy and truthfulness. Central practices also include the disseminating of the gathered information. In later processes, journalists are imagined as fulfilling their role as a “medium from one person to many others” (Ola, 23; 14, Pos. 569).

Being Neutral, Impartial and Factual

Some participants describe journalists – especially those working at public service media, more on that in the next chapter – to practice behaviours such as neutrality, not taking sides and not being influenced by political parties. Audiences include anecdotes as well as beliefs in

their narrations. Further, they also often acknowledge difficulties they imagine journalists to face. Participants also criticized unsatisfactory practices, however they are examined more thoroughly in chapter 6.2 along with audiences' normative expectations. However, as many participants conceive journalists as people and thus incapable of true neutrality, neutrality demands and observations are often considered through this lens.

Others believed it entirely impossible for journalists to be impartial, stating for example, “everything is a bit colored” (Natascha, 41; 7, Pos. 344). Others, like Elisa (60), who values objectivity as a norm, says she cannot judge whether the journalists whose work she likes are really objective or also politically coloured. Journalists can be described as practicing neutrality throughout various stages of the journalistic process, such as researching, analysing but also publishing or presenting their work. For instance, Erik (76) describes responsible journalists who he evaluates positively to consider who gets to speak on a topic – and receive a platform. He believes this platforming issue to be a difficult and unsolved problem which journalists are confronted with.

Journalists who were believed to work on and with well-founded information were often positively evaluated; Natascha (41) imagines them to only speak on things they have actually researched. She also includes a personal anecdote, having heard from someone that the journalists working at a specific outlet do good research.

Expectations of neutrality and the feelings which participants connect to it, are at times evaluated more importantly than their subjective enjoyment of journalistic work. Simon (22) describes it as hard for journalists to combine seriousness, neutrality and professionalism whilst being funny. He believes humour makes journalism less dry, more enjoyable and easier to consume, however, such work feels less serious and less trustworthy to him – unrelated to its actual quality.

Providing Opinion(s) and Context

“Well, that's one of the things that fundamentally bothers me about the classic approach to journalism, that there is often no own opinion, just a presentation of the facts and that the most important thing is to remain objective” (Simon, 22; 6, Pos. 364). Whilst Simon holds the belief that these behaviours are important, the quote shows a cathectic expectation, feeling bothered, in reaction to descriptive expectations. Arguably, underlying prescriptive expectations are identifiable in this example as well, although more implicitly; whereas Simon expresses desire

for the inclusion of opinions, he also demonstrates the belief that others (perhaps journalists themselves employing what he calls the classical approach to journalism) prioritize the objectivity norm.

Other participants hold similar beliefs on this issue, particularly regarding practices where two opinions on a topic are treated as equal without contextualizing qualifications or considering the broader discussion,

where the journalist does not give much of their own opinion or does not color the picture a lot, they just try to describe what happened, and it is not that they only describe from one side, they try to give both sides an equal chance to explain their point, but they do not put it into context (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 303).

Esther believes that a news outlets' size relates to such practices, "The bigger they get, the more they try to be a crowd pleaser, the more they try to offer information to everyone, which makes sense because they try to make their information accessible to as many people as possible" (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 307). By positioning themselves, journalists are imagined to "[lose] the people who are outcasts" (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 307).

Interacting and Influencing

How journalists are expected to interact with their audience depends on how close or distant their relationship is imagined to be. For example, Rachel (65) contrast the relationship and interaction possibilities of a radio journalist who responds to birthday wishes from audience members, which the participant finds very nice, to the more distant one she (and others) feel to have with PBS journalists, particularly Armin Wolf.

How participants evaluate different forms of interaction between audience and journalists can also be related to how they generally understand the relationship. For example, to Vincent (47) who imagines the relationship itself as shaped by economic considerations, some interactivity offers – such as asking what readers think of a topic, which he describes as not providing value – are similarly thought to be financially motivated. "The motivation behind it is probably that people call up the thing and that advertising is placed, there's a financial incentive behind it, [...] they're not really interested in the opinion" (Vincent, 47; 8, Pos. 210). While he also considers feedback to be financially incentivized, as journalists are imagined to be dependent on their audience continuing to purchase their work, he believes it will be heard as long as it is not defamatory.

Andreas (79) on the other hand, does not believe journalists to change their behaviours when criticized. As an avid writer of letters-to-the-editor, he describes them as a tool “exclusively [for] my own displeasure dismantling” (Andreas, 79; 9, Pos. 177). He imagines editors-in-chief to not care about even a hundred of letters with the same concern, even if it means a hundred readers, viewers or listeners less. Ultimately, he imagines people enjoying their work as the goal of journalists who wish to move ahead in their career.

In the context of social media, Esther (23) imagines Klenk to intentionally formulate his tweets to provoke interaction, whether positive or not. Note: For clarity, this thesis refers to the platform as "Twitter" (and all connected terminology such as “tweeting”) despite its rebranding to "X." This choice has been made to keep the terminology consistent with participants’ usage at the time of data collection.

Another emerging aspect of the audience-journalist relationship concerns influenceability. Dominik (20) does not imagine he could influence a journalist’s work through (tweet) interactions because he considers himself not easily influenceable either.

I mean, you might be the perfect person and know everything better, but in most cases that's not the case, then you should accept what people say. And of course you shouldn't take every piece of rubbish to heart, but I think that you can make justified criticism of any journalistic persona (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 331).

Many participants believe the number of people or validity of criticisms to potentially cause journalists to reflect on their practices and potentially change something. Erik (76), a member of a service club, believes that “the quality of people in my club [...] holds weight” (Erik, 76; 2, Pos. 245) when it comes to journalists accepting feedback. He lists university professors, doctors, diplomats, CEOs and musicians as examples.

5.1.1.3 Distinctions by Affiliation

As stated earlier, journalists are believed by some to be under pressure to align their work with the brand identity of the media outlet they are employed by. Consequently, audiences appear to distinguish how they imagine journalists and which expectations they hold of them in relation to their affiliation to media outlet and journalistic genres.

Media affiliation also at times reflects varying expectations of journalistic practices. Some participants who dislike certain practices they describe journalists at specific media outlets to engage in, acknowledge that they would likely act similarly within the organizational

framework to ensure their articles were published. Depending on the participant, different distinctions and phrasings emerge, however, it appears that notions of quality are widely-spread. Associations of quality and significance can also be tied to genres. For example, Elisa (60) formulates the same expectations for “a politically engaged or ORF or news journalist” (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 330), clustering political journalists with public service to her definition of news.

5.1.1.3.1 Media Outlet

Public Service Media

The ORF’s public service mission is often described, along with their broad reach of diverse viewers. Vincent (47) describes ORF journalists themselves as broadly positioned who use down-to-earth-language which is not too simple in order to reach such a broad audience. Rachel (65) emphasizes expectations of ORF journalists being impartial, and describes it as difficult for journalists who have been associated with a party to distance themselves again. Similarly, Natascha (41) voices the belief that “[p]ublic broadcasters are not likely to be influenced by any party” (Natascha, 41; 7, Pos. 272).

Julia (21) expresses amazement at their professionalism. All of them are described as well-prepared and having mastered an ability to ask questions spontaneously (e.g. 7). Erik (76) imagines ORF journalists as very consistent and praises them for doing outstanding work. He also notes that ORF “attempts to make a balance appear” (Erik, 76; 2, Pos. 159), for instance, by giving people who are against vaccinations room. As mentioned in an earlier section, Erik considers this a difficult problem for journalists to face

Journalists working at the *Zeit im Bild* (ZIB), the ORF’s prime time TV news journal, are described to have the best run time and the highest viewer numbers. Natascha (41) positively notes the moderators being a well-rehearsed team with a dynamic which feels good. When it comes to workflows, Vincent (47) imagines ORF (video) journalists driving somewhere to interview people (imagined to be difficult) and record them. Julia (21) describes the workflow of ZIB journalists,

they're in the studio all day and they're researching this and then they sit down and get ready and speak this and I imagine it's really difficult. I also imagine it's really difficult to get to that position and that's why I just admire them (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 545).

Rachel (65) considers the employment situation of ORF journalists, “I only know that many at ORF are only on a work contract, i.e. they only have a contract for one year and then have to make a name for themselves to get their contract extended” (Rachel, 65; 11, Pos. 58). She believes that this causes competition amongst the journalists. Natascha (41) believes ZIB journalists, specifically those moderating the format, to potentially have better contracts and payment.

Some participants enjoy Armin Wolf’s journalistic style or call themselves fans of him (5, 7), whilst others express dislike of his practices (9, 11). Esther (23) follows him on twitter, because she describes him as influential on the Austrian media landscape and discourse. Armin Wolf is described as provocative in his questioning and to pressure interviewees to respond, for which Elisa (60) believes him to receive many criticisms. Rachel (65) calls his interview practices rude and hurtful at times. She lists an example of him asking long winded questions but not giving his interviewee a lot of time to respond. Andreas (79) describes Wolf to have brought a new style to ORF which the participant calls “Austrian calf biting” (Andreas, 79; 9, Pos. 86). Whilst Andreas felt that was okay at first, now he “can’t watch that, I don’t have to [...] that awakens in me an inner resistance” (Andreas, 79; 9, Pos. 82) and expresses feeling annoyance and discomfort when witnessing it. Elisa (60) believes Wolf reads the comments about him, but “nobody has that much time, but if there's something controversial or maybe he feels attacked, then he'll probably take a look at it” (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 256). Rachel (65) prefers the style of Martin Thür, “Precisely because he has empathy with those he interviews and because he has certain boundaries so that he doesn't unsettle people” (Rachel, 65; 11, Pos. 86).

Julia (21) describes the ZIB social media account as boring. She criticizes that they always have the same background on TikTok and only do shortened ZIB content, “I mean, I know that it's sort of from the law and one is not really allowed to do that much. [...] So they're basically just standing there. [...] I might as well watch ZIB” (Julia, 21; 4, pos. 288-294). However, she does not believe that to the fault of the social media journalists. In addition, she mentions content they did she liked, such as a behind-the-scenes newsroom tour, which she calls cool.

Quality Media

Participants refer to a broad range of quality media which is overwhelmingly print or a related web/social media appearance. With regard to practices, they are distinguished according to editorial line and publication frequency.

Across quality media, a few commonalities can be observed. The outlets themselves are often imagined to be serious, informative and trustworthy. Simon (22) imagines journalists at traditional ‘serious’ media to research a lot, tend to be relatively objective and cover new and interesting topics. He evaluates it as pleasant to encounter content by journalists working for quality media on social media. Ada (53) believes that journalists working for her preferred outlet would not publish articles written in a similar style to the free tabloid *Heute* because they have a higher intellectual level. Elisa (60) likes to read the *Standard* for the opinions of journalists she likes, whereas Ada describes and positively evaluates them delivering examples of positive developments, citing the diversity of journalists to support that practice.

Generally, workflows are not imagined to be overly divergent from other journalists. Rather, the quality and thoroughness of practices is emphasized. Natascha (41) imagines them to have editorial meetings, where everyone throws in ideas before they decide together or the editor-in-chief decides.

Andreas (79) pictures *Falter* journalists as very diverse cannot provide a unified image of a Falter journalist. However, he does see some shared practices; he describes them as not shying away from asking hierarchically higher positioned people in positions of power questions openly “without expecting a specific answer and without expecting a high regard for the intelligence of the question from the interlocutor“ (Andreas, 79; 9, Pos. 201). He also describes them as beginning an interview with casual questions and by building a comfortable discussion climate. Further, he says he “can tell just by the name of the journalist roughly what direction that [article] is going to go in because I’ve already formed a picture of them” (Andreas, 79; 9, Pos. 195).

Julia (21) does not enjoy *Kurier* so much. She describes them as “center right, so they’re a bit conservative, and when I know that, I’m already dismissive” (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 102). The *Wiener Zeitung* feels relatively neutral to Vincent (47), who appreciates reading articles from journalists across the political spectrum to gain new perspectives.

Journalists working for newspapers and magazines with a lower publication frequency such as *Die Furchen* or *Datum* (where new issues appear weekly or monthly) are imagined to have “enough time to do the work thoroughly [...] and also a certain education, to distinguish the wheat from the chaff” (Erik, 76; 2, Pos. 68). He describes the workflow of a *Datum* journalist, beginning with getting a topic assigned. The journalist is imagined to have “a lot of freedom, including money, to follow this up so that he is satisfied. So that he can justify – this

is cross checked, he is not alone, there is a team that checks it” (Erik, 76; 2, Pos. 173). Vincent imagines the workflow at *Datum* similarly; however, he describes them as freelance journalists who prepare “and then write an article about it. It's like preparing for a presentation at school” (Vincent, 47; 8, Pos. 170). Another participant expresses trust in their research skills, describing them to use proper sources and occasionally giving their readers insights into their work flows (9). Despite also being a daily newspaper, Vincent believes that journalists working for the *Wiener Zeitung* have more time to research, because they do not necessarily cover the news of the day.

Other participants highly regard some individual journalists for their achievements. For instance, *Profil* journalist Nanning is imagined by Andreas (79) as indispensable for Austria, having used his celebrity to thematize issues which nobody else cared about, at times using visual tools and stunts such as putting antlers on his head to convey a message. While Esther (23) considers *Falter* journalist Klenk important to Austrian discourse and positively notes his absorbing writing, she also thinks, “he spouts a lot of rubbish. I also think that a lot of what he gets upset about or writes about is extremely irrelevant” (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 46).

Tabloid

Within tabloid media, there are more and less prestigious media for which imagined journalists can work. Many describe tabloids such as *Kronen Zeitung* as influential and fuelling resentments in certain, other audience groups. While participants say they feel informed, some also express feeling “a bit disgusted by the writing style, by the headlines” (Ola, 23; 14, Pos. 697-698). At times, headlines were considered unobjective, making participants wish journalists would avoid dramatic reporting and “put it nicer. [...] just formulate it more objectively” (Ola, 23; 14, Pos. 699). By some, tabloid journalists are described as conducting “[o]ne-sided research and perhaps only moving in a certain political background” (Ada, 53; 3, Pos. 237). To Dominik (20), they spread misinformation, at times write nasty things about people and pursue political campaigns. For instance, the reporting of *ServusTV* is described to have heavily contributed to the division in Austria, by giving vaccine opponents so much room, to Erik (76) it is obvious that they do that because of viewer numbers.

However, journalists working for outlets which are described as sensationalist – compared to telenovelas (14) – are also described to write about a lot of unnecessary stories. Elisa (60) imagines journalists at *Heute* must have more time to follow such tiny stories. At the same time, Ola (23) describes journalists at *Heute* as skilful within the framework of their paper:

“Well, they get to the heart of things very well. They also have little space and few characters, so they can do that, write short stories, but it's all very, a bit exaggerated and very look-at-me, very striking” (Ola, 23; 14, Pos. 687).

Journalists writing for *Heute* are imagined to be starting out because they are only allowed to write a few lines at a time which is thought to be not fulfilling for a passionate journalist and, as Natascha (41) imagines, shorter articles which also pay less. Vincent (47) believes them to just want to quickly get information out. He describes BILD journalists as writing sensationally and not with the intention to transfer knowledge about a topic but to be populist, not producing very qualitative work. Erik (76) describes Fellner as “a background noise of nonsensical chatter” (Erik, 76; 2, Pos. 280) – which he believes can be funny in authentic non-journalists for which the participant does not have similar expectations. Tabloid columnist M. Jeannée is also critiqued – with cathectic expectations arising as a result of normative expectations being believed to be violated:

He must be aware when he's doing this work that he's taking advantage of people who are either academically illiterate or not smart or have no informal education or simply people who are not particularly reflected. And that is something that I find morally reprehensible (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 229).

Social Media

The social media journalists discussed by participants are often working for various media mentioned earlier; they may be responsible for a media's social media presence or just use social media for themselves such as *Falter* journalist Florian Klenk who is an active twitter user. Dominik (20) sees the journalist as a representative of the newspaper, on twitter at least. Not all participants apply the label social media journalist to the same group of people, Simon (22), for instance, imagines the person who wrote an article as a journalist and does not use that label for the person who posted it to the outlet's Instagram account. However, individual journalists who are visibly doing journalistic work on social media, especially those who do journalistic video formats, are consistently described as journalists by those who follow them.

Social media journalists working for media types discussed earlier often are attributed similar associations, with Dominik (20) for instance, describing the social media accounts of some quality media as “something small to complement the print” (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 303).

As this section focuses on practices specifically attributed to different social media journalists, platform specific practices are centred.

Julia (21) describes why she prefers the style of a Standard journalist doing TikTok compared to the PBS's channel:

I think that the Standard's target group [is] [...] people who are as old as me and who [...] consume news and stuff like that anyway, and I think that the people from Zeit im Bild talk a bit as if I don't know my stuff or as if they were doing it for children. I think Zeit im Bild is targeting their audience a little too young [...] and then it's clear that they're not talking at eye level, they're talking down. That's why it comes across as if they're trying to lecture me. Although I'm the same age as them, which makes no difference, but I don't feel like I'm on an equal footing (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 338).

ZIB's TikTok is described as too monotonous for 14-year-olds to enjoy, Julia also notes the newsroom 'vibes' of ZIB's account not fitting the more casual platform. She also positively notes the Standard Social Media journalists taking her phone into her hand to record "how normal people make TikToks" (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 348). Funk, a youth format on social media by a German PBS, is described as less serious and less to be taken seriously (6).

5.1.1.3.2 Genre

War Journalists

War journalists are described by one participant as a key representation of journalism as a whole. Reading a journalist's autobiography about his experiences with war is compared in excitement to a reading a crime novel. "That's how I imagine journalism, but of course that's extreme in the theater of war" (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 500).

Such journalists are often described as working in an active war zone which allows them to fully understand the situation, although some participants believe them to work within a tight frame of what they are allowed to report. Natascha (41) believes Austrian journalists reporting on war to primarily work with press statements and be no threat to other countries (for instance, Russia) through their reporting because of Austria's size but still expresses concerns. She describes one war journalist's working environment in a war zone as spartan, noting he does not have an office, and speculates whether he is completely alone there, before acknowledging that he probably has a camera guy with him. Many others do not go in detail about workflows.

One particular journalist that is frequently mentioned is Christian Wehrschütz, a highly visible journalist in Ukraine covering the war for the ZIB. Described by some as “our great man in Ukraine” (Erik, 76; 2, 151), many consider his work incredible, with arguably cathartic elements. He is believed to do a good job; to some, he is beyond criticism because of his work (e.g. 5). However, while Natascha acknowledges that it feels like he is really there, she also says it feels sensationalist to show pictures of destruction, “why does one do that, in a war zone, that I go right there? And that's where the bomb hits” (Natascha, 41; 7, Pos. 260).

Andreas (79) has a different perspective on Wehrschütz, expressing happiness when his segments are over; believing him to be a self-promoter who is on too frequently and always does the same reports. He imagines him paid per minute of screentime and thus considers it reasonable for the journalist to not deny correspondence requests. He prefers the work of Karim El Gawhary, another correspondent covering the Middle East, arguing that he provides new statements, researches more precisely and answers questions without repetitions or things irrelevant to the audience (9).

Investigative Journalists

Journalists are often positively evaluated for uncovering things and displaying investigative practices (7). Vincent (47) expresses fascination with how these journalists work, admiring their dedication, precision, and willingness to put themselves in danger, noting that they work passionately, investigate background information, and analyse the truthfulness of events; while they may not be deeply involved in current topics due to their intense focus on a single subject, they appear to enjoy their work, are highly engaged, compare their tasks to a science fiction thriller, and are seen as needing a sense of humour to endure the demands of the profession.

Lifestyle, Travel and Celebrity Journalists

The work of lifestyle journalists feels good to Elisa (60) as “these are nice things, unlike the newspaper. [...] At most, I'm not feeling so good in the sense that I think I can't afford it all. It's nice to look at, of course” (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 127-129). These journalists report “on everything else that interests me, such as international developments and travelling. That's a very positive feeling” (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 129). When asked how she imagines lifestyle journalists, she says,

It's someone I envy and whose work I would like to have myself. [...] I think to myself, he gets some topic or can decide on one of the given topics, then travels to the location, researches, does interviews, writes it up, submits. I would love to do that (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 131-133).

In contrast, Natascha (41) imagines the workflow of lifestyle journalists to be desolate. She describes them hearing about an event from the editorial office, going there to “wait five hours, then someone comes and says, I don't want to give an interview now, and then you pack up again and go home“ (Natascha, 41; 7, Pos. 475) without valuable input, dependent on celebrities for instance. Rachel (65) believes them to choose which topics to deal with on their own, “I imagine that he sits down and eats this [national dish] or he goes to the theatre and watches that play, but voluntarily, not dictated” (Rachel, 65; 11, Pos. 216).

Simon (22) describes *ELLE* as the typical life style and fashion magazine which does not target him, but women. Based on his first impression, he is sceptic of its quality, particularly wondering how thoroughly an article on psychology could have been researched. However, he expresses surprise to have been offered new knowledge and expresses respect for what he describes as an intellectual work. He describes the female journalist behind the article to have done her job well but not great. This is not imagined to be her fault, rather he imagines her limited by the media she works for. Further, he describes the interviewee to “[help] the interviewer a lot by talking a lot. That's why I don't know whether it's particularly clever of her to elicit answers like that, but I don't think it's bad work in any case.” (Simon, 22; 6, Pos. 112)

Journalists working for an event-focused lifestyle magazine are imagined as follows:

perhaps freelancers or students who are just exploring what's happening? I would like to do something like that. [...] They go around. Then that [event] gets categorized into evening, seasonal, culinary, and culture. [...] I think these are very freedom-loving and curious individuals who walk around, get involved, and upload that (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 210).

Travel journalists are similarly imagined as freedom-loving and praised for writing well-researched travel reports. Natascha (41) notes that their articles have a positive tone which do not mention downsides for locals, reasoning that the latter would not fit with the audience's desire for nice pictures. Natascha herself does not express preferences. She imagines *Gala* journalists – whose topics focus on celebrity as well as fashion and society – to be women who turn their hobby into their job. They are imagined to work an easy-to-get-in, part-time job where they write a couple of articles at home before returning to their kids. When imagining

the journalist of an article on English royalty, she pictures a woman with a child on her side, writing the article. Later, the participant adds that she also has to know how royals function as well as a global understanding and contextual knowledge.

With regard to celebrity journalism, Julia (21) says she watches *Exklusiv*, a TV format by RTL, sometimes but describes it as nonsense. “They report so badly. It's so tabloid. I'm interested in pop culture and I actually find out about it all on Twitter or TikTok and they report things that I already heard three weeks ago” (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 60).

5.1.2 Personal Dimension

To many participants, the personal dimension is central to how they imagine journalists. For instance, Dominik (20) poses “the question to what extent the person Florian Klenk can be separated from the person editor-in-chief of *Falter*” (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 132). Similarly, Andreas (79) praises a specific journalist for his work, believing it to be not just rooted in his age and experience but also his personality.

5.1.2.1 Demographic and Physical Characteristics

Journalists' demographic characteristics may or may not be observable by audiences depending on the journalistic format. Nonetheless, some participants articulated beliefs of the demographic (and sometimes also physical) characteristics they imagine various journalists to embody. However, such descriptive expectations need not necessarily be accurate to reality.

For instance, when reading a short and factual article on religion online, Simon (22) pictures the journalist behind it as a typical journalist. To him, this journalist is “an older person, middle-aged between 40 and 60 perhaps. For me also masculine and somehow from the look also educated, somehow intellectual” (Simon, 22; 6, Pos. 38) – however, the article in question shows a female name and picture.

Age

Age was often associated with a journalist's experience; older journalists are generally seen as more experienced and better qualified (4) and believed to work for more prestigious and established, traditional quality media (8). For instance, 76-year-old *Falter* journalist Turnherr sticks out to Andreas (79) because of his age, clarity and wisdom. Older journalists who have made career working for tabloids employing sensationalist or other contested practices were judged by some participants – who critiqued tabloids – as a misuse of their

power and audience. Within the scope of war journalism, Natascha (41) expresses disbelief, questioning why journalist Wehrschütz puts himself through correspondence in a war zone when he is close to retirement. While she believes he should leave that work to a younger journalist, she considers them to not have as much knowledge.

However, some young participants like Esther (23) criticizes *Falter* journalist Klenk admitting to being initially apprehensive to ‘Klimakleber’ protests for showing his age. “He’s just the kind of boomer who doesn’t want to be one. [...] He’s just this, I swear I’m not old. Like that. But then he writes certain things again, where I think to myself, dude, please” (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 50).

In contrast, younger journalists are believed to be less experienced and often just starting out their career. As a result, some participants associate them with less prestigious and less satisfying jobs, such as tabloids (especially free newspapers) and local papers (5). “One could sort of say that it’s like [...] they don’t take just anyone who comes along, but I don’t think the threshold for getting in is not that high” (Ola, 23; 14, Pos. 689). However, there are also exceptions; for instance, Vincent (47), imagines *Standard* journalists to be younger (up to their mid-30s) and left leaning.

I believe that a lot of people, especially young journalists, have little choice because journalism is extremely poorly paid and very few interesting jobs are advertised. And then often the only adverts that are available are in tabloids. Then you just try to get in somewhere to say I already have journalistic experience (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 227).

Esther also imagines differences depending on the region in which young journalists live, believing Viennese students to go to tabloids and those in the country side to go to local news. Unlike their older counterparts, younger journalists working for tabloids are often viewed more ambiguously by some participants criticizing their employer media.

Younger journalists are also associated with social media. For example, Simon (22) describes the journalists behind the German PBS account *Funk* as approachable, young people – without having any visual indicator of their age. Younger participants also perceive journalists who produce content for social media (such as TikTok) without seeming to use the platform themselves as older (14).

The two ORF journalists Ambra Schuster and Idan Hanin working on ZIB’s TikTok account are visibly young. Whilst they are believed to be smart and competent, they are also

thought “lucky, that they work at such a large news station quasi at such a young age” (Alice, 17; 12, Pos. 180). Whilst they are admired for achieving perceived success at a prestigious news outlet, they also make 17-year-old Alice feel intimidated at the thought of interacting with them in real life. Julia (21) expresses feelings of jealousy of the two because of their age.

Gender

Some participants believe that gender informs a journalist’s style, articulating distinct gender-specific descriptions and beliefs. Some participants also make gendered associations of genres, for instance imagining lifestyle journalists to be women (e.g. 6). At times, male journalists are described as assertive or even aggressive, particularly in political reporting, whereas female journalists are associated with softer, empathetic, or lifestyle-oriented roles (7, 11).

I hope that there are always a lot of women in this profession, because they certainly, at least I believe that we scrutinize an issue more. Men are usually very straightforward and very job-related, i.e. very quick to put an argument on paper or present it. Women, I think, always ask themselves questions, so I think it's good when women are in this job (Rachel, 65; 11, pos. 58).

Based on a journalist’s choice of words in an article, Natascha (41) forms beliefs of their gender; describing the person as a man, imagining men to use more assured and certain wordings compared to women who would use softer language. As the article covers a political issue, she would have preferred a softer approach for the sake of neutrality.

In other cases, a journalist’s gender is not described to (at least, directly) relate to journalistic practices. For instance, Andreas (79) describes a journalist as “not the alpha male he would like to be” (Andreas, 79; 9, Pos. 327).

Natascha (41) believes other male ZIB journalists to be trying to copy Armin Wolf which she considers a shame. She imagines Wolf’s younger male coworker Martin Thür to have been told by advisors to behave a certain way to please the audience and fix his believed lower rating – this includes copying Wolf’s style but also being fake friendly. Similarly, Natascha believes Tobias Pötzelsberger to have been told to “come across as serious, masculine” (Natascha, 41; 7, Pos. 146). Whilst Andreas (79) also believes Pötzelsberger to have taken on some of Wolf’s style, similar gender-specific narrations are absent. Natascha reasons that gender roles in the heads of other audiences result in orders from higher-ups to develop a different profile in order

to please the audience. Notably, the participant does not imagine female journalists in the same position to be under similar pressures. To her, this is an issue young male journalists are more likely to face due to gendered expectations in audiences' heads.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity as a category is prominently absent from most participants' narrations. Alice (17), herself having a migration background, notes that A. Schuster and I. Hanin may have roots in another country due to their names. Esther, another young woman criticizes a (white, male) journalist "for whom it is not possible that he allows that there are other population groups that are somehow equal to white cis men" (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 318). She also expresses a belief about an *Al-Jazeera* journalist's religion based on the topic she is covering, "I assume that she is probably Muslim, since she writes about Indian Muslims and is Indian, that she deals with this" (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 217).

Education, Socioeconomics and Other Background(s)

Many audience members describe journalists as educated, often without providing detail whether that means a trade education or degree. Some participant imagine certain journalists (often quality media journalists) to be to be more educated than others (2, 11). Participants at times note other qualifications and career paths. Some believe journalists coming from other fields to be valuable or having experience with another job – for instance, being a soldier before becoming a war journalist (2). Andreas (79) imagines (and positively evaluates) Ö1 journalists to not just be journalists for a job but come from other fields and have different areas of knowledge as well as the skill to prepare and share that journalistically.

Some participants made assumptions or evaluations related to class and cultural background. Simon (22) describes a journalist behind a lifestyle article as a middle-class, cultured bourgeoisie woman writing for a similar female, middle-class audience. He further evaluated her as, "[n]ot especially a person I feel particularly connected to" (Simon, 22; 6, Pos. 66). Ada (53) reflects on how a journalist's social background affects language use and proximity to everyday life, noting that transitioning from a trade profession gave the journalist in question a "completely different social background" (Ada, 53; 3, Pos. 225) and a different way of speaking. She also expresses the belief that "a lot of people in professional journalism in particular [...] have perhaps lost their background to a lot of things, so I'll say, to daily life" (Ada, 53; 3, Pos. 374).

Appearance

The looks of some journalists who are visible to the public are also described and evaluated – either as attractive to them or others, likeable or unlikeable. When asked what a journalist does well, Julia (21) jokes, “He looks good” (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 320), believing him to be tall. Some participants linked journalists’ appearance to likeability, “I think she also comes across very likeable, also from her looks, like, I find her to be a beautiful woman (laughs)” (Alice, 17; 12, Pos. 326). The same participant found the appearance of two journalists relatable, “also their look- so, looks aren’t important, but like, they look- don’t know, like all of us. [...] they look sweet” (Alice, 17; 12, Pos. 178.). Julia also positively evaluated a journalist looking sweet and happy. Other journalists’ looks resulted in negative evaluations. For example, one interviewee examines the small profile picture of a journalist, “he just looks like he feels like at all and without any visual information of the journalist.

A female Al-Jazeera journalist not smiling in her profile picture feels interesting to Esther (23) and is described as a statement. Based on this, the participant imagines that she positions herself as a serious human and maybe is critical, which Esther deems appropriate for a journalist. At the same time, she associates the absence of a smile with pictures she has seen of women in middle eastern or developing countries doing housework which “always look very serious, they always have a very resolute, direct gaze” (Esther, 23; 10 pos.). She does not evaluate that negatively and acknowledges the association as prejudiced.

When journalists’ voices were mentioned, they were usually highlighted for being “pleasant” (12), nice to listen to or familiar. In the case of a radio journalist, Natascha (41) says, “When he speaks, then I hear that, I listen gladly. [...] Because the voice, I know immediately, [...] it’s very familiar to me” (Natascha, 41; 7, Pos. 76-78)

Some participants also mention (or guess) a journalist’s home federal state based on their voice and dialect (e.g. 9). However, other voices stood out in a negative manner; sounding, for example, arrogant (10). In another instance, a light-hearted format with a voice described as “[v]ery, like deep, like a robot” and monotonous felt “boring and very, very serious”, and believed not to match the topics it covered, making the participant say “it just didn’t fit” (Alice, 17; 12, Pos. 350).

5.1.2.2 Personality and Traits

There is a plethora of traits which journalists can be described with – from being likeable, funny, intelligent, fearless, kind, calm, approachable, authentic to serious, diplomatic, competent, trustworthy, confrontative, aggressive, attention-seeking, arrogant, hard-working and open-minded. This chapter also explores genre-specific distinctions.

Some participants express a correlation between personal likeability and their attitude to or engagement with the journalist's work. For example, Simon (22) says that feeling connected to the journalist behind an article would make him more motivated to read it and enjoy it more. Dominik (20) says likeability of journalists does not matter as much, "this personal level is very much lost on me when it comes to politicians and journalists; I usually limit myself to the concrete activity and the views [to judge them]" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 105). With regard to Florian Klenk, who he "appreciates professionally" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 307) and considers a positive example within the Austrian Media Landscape, he says,

fundamentally, I think as a person he would actually be really unlikeable. He has such a slightly - well, it comes across to me in interviews, for example, something slightly arrogant. But well, I can read an article by him and agree with him and can block that out, but I think, for example, I personally can't make friends with him on a personal level (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 138).

There are various reasons why participants describe some journalists as likeable or not; ranging from (dis)liking a journalist's appearance (e.g. sweet, friendly), personality (e.g. arrogant, full of energy) or performance (e.g. lecturing, humorous). Depending on the participant these traits may be evaluated positively or negatively. In addition, dissonance between how a participant believes a journalist is trying to come across as in comparison to how the participant feels it comes across. For example Andreas (79) believing someone to want to seem wise, whereas his performance feels bumpy and insecure to Andreas.

In the case of journalists using social media, Dominik says, "You really notice that the person is no longer just [...] a journalist, but that both dimensions, the private person and the professional person, come together. And I find that very interesting" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 309). Especially „with videos, this personal level, the likeability, comes out more than with print, so I watch it" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 297). Other traits often mentioned relate to skills and intelligence, for instance being thoughtful (9) and competent (4). "I think that journalists who

don't get too personal or aren't so easily tricked by their discussion partner [...] and always come back to a relatively neutral level, I believe that these people appear more competent or very capable" (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 405).

Further, participants describe some journalists, among other things, as versatile (5), engaging (1), human (11), snappy (11), provocative (10), bland (1), quiet (9), interesting and inspiring (13), rough and angry (9) as well as too inquisitive, aggressive (2) and cool (4). They also believe some to have fun talking to strangers (8), be good at improvising (4), talk too much (9), full of energy (1) or over the top (4).

At times, participants make connections between believed personality traits and practices apparent. For instance, because Dominik (20) imagines a specific journalist as bland, he believes he could not do the most interesting interviews. Similarly, Andreas (79) imagines *Standard* journalists to be more self-convinced than other journalists, resulting in him believing that they do not change their opinion as easily because of where they work.

5.1.2.2.1 Genre- and Media-specific Traits

At times, journalists demonstrating certain practices were associated with possessing correlating traits. For instance, in the case of journalists utilizing sensationalist practices: "If you manage to come up with such flashy things and write something like that, I believe you're also very loud and very colourful and probably very temperamental. That probably gets exhausting in the long run" (Ola, 23; 14, Pos. 707).

On the other hand, such journalists were thought to be creative, possessing a gift for turning tiny stories into big ones – which was expressively not appreciated. Instead of using more direct terms which may be negatively connotated, some participants were hesitant to ascribe traits which could be perceived as negative to journalists. In addition, they sought to phrase how they imagined even abstract journalists (especially on a more personal level) positively even if they expressed sentiments indicating otherwise. Despite finding the writing style of *Heute* journalists disgusting, Ola explains, "I don't know what they're really like and I think... maybe they're completely different. Maybe I'm doing them an injustice. Because it is after all their job, they earn money with it" (Ola, 23; 14., Pos. 715). Nevertheless, negative associations were present in participants who disapproved of tabloids and affected their attitudes, for example, whilst participants expressed understanding towards journalists working there, many could not see themselves befriending someone working for such media. For instance, Simon (22)

describes tabloid journalists to have decided consciously and to freely work there and support their company's world view – potentially having these morally reprehensive views themselves. However, he also imagines that “there are certain people who perhaps take a more opportunistic approach and simply think that I will get reliable work and I know that my articles will be clicked on a lot and they don't care about moral implications” (Simon, 22; 6, Pos. 200).

Public Service Journalists

Some audiences describe ORF journalists as a broadly diverse group and presumably balanced mix (7,8). “It seems to me that those who are at ORF have already somehow made it or are already where they want to be. And the others maybe not so” (Natascha, 41; 7, Pos. 50). Julia (21) describes them as “ambitious and determined”, hardworking, somewhat “know-it-all”, liking to win arguments and convince others with their knowledge (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 547).

Wolf in particular is believed by some to be strict, intimidating (4) or aggressive and confrontative (9). In contrast to Andreas [Note: number 9], Julia evaluates this positively, especially during interview situations, “He can really get on people's nerves, I think, and I think that's a good thing because he wants people to take responsibility for what they've said. And I think that just makes sense“ (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 553).

However, many participants also note a certain distance. Dominik (20) believes he could not “have a longer conversation that is really informal” (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 308) with them. When asked where those perceptions come from, he brings up aspects such as the “lecture-like” format – based on camera angles, the limited possibility to experience traditional journalist (ZIB) as a person apart from occasional bloopers. “There's never really any chance of really experiencing the person as a person, instead I really only experience the person as a transmitter of news” (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 309). Others believe them to be arrogant and disconnected. “They are very much their own people. They just feel like they're better, at least that's how I felt” (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 134).

Simon (22) holds similar expectations for quality journalists, describing Spiegel journalists as people who he would not interact with in life despite believing he would get along with them if he met them. However, he imagines these journalists to move in other circles from him and be more serious. While this participant imagines a distance between him and some journalists, he does not describe it as a fundamental and unbridgeable one – he simply is not at that same stage in life, yet.

Other Journalists

Alice (17) articulates expectations of a celebrity journalist, “I can also imagine that maybe in private life, just because she talks very much about celebs- she gossips a bit maybe, [...] simply because they are probably the first people to learn the latest things” (Alice, 17; 12, Pos. 329-330). In contrast, travel journalists were imagined as “Freedom-loving, little time for the family, intellectually versatile” (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 135), whereas Natascha (41) imagines lifestyle journalists to be fashion-conscious, emotional, superficial but potentially self-reflected and likeable. Natascha also associates economic journalists with being frugal and focused; Elisa describes war journalists as strong, fearless and unafraid.

5.2 Imagining Ideal Journalists

5.2.1 Professional Dimension

As Nils (31) asserts, a journalist “has to be professional, that’s clear” (Nils, 31; 22, Pos. 752) – but what exactly does that entail according to audiences?

5.2.1.1 Practices and Standards

Neutrality, Objectivity and Factuality Norm

Although the three appear similar, there are some distinctions. Neutrality focuses on being free of bias, opinion or preference. Participants frequently mention it as a key expectation (11), expressing demands for journalists to always stay neutral (12) and postulating: “Journalists should be the neutral information media for everyone” (Ada, 53; 3, Pos 337). In order to fulfil neutrality expectations, they should talk to people “on both sides [...] very civilly” (Ada, 53; 3, Pos. 209). With that standard in mind, impartiality is also very present in audiences’ narrations and often portrayed as a balance between two sides which ought to be upheld through presenting both. For instance, as Magdalene (46) states journalists should “always represent both opinions, [...] pro and contra” (Magdalene, 46; 21, Pos. 555). Erik (76) expects a diverse spectrum of opinion within a news organization to avoid bubbles and keep discussion between contrary opinions civil.

Neutrality is also tied to demands that journalists should not be influenced (13) or try to influence their audience (7, 21). Neither should they push their own opinion on audiences, or make them feel ashamed to have a different view (9). They should not lecture or moralize too

strongly, present opinions and facts without evaluating comments and let people think for themselves and come to their own conclusions (1, 3, 21). Nils (31) expects journalistic articles to possess spirit and personality – contrasting / balancing notions of neutral articles being dry – without being manipulative.

At times expectations surrounding journalists' neutrality are also extended to them not taking a (visible) political stance (7). In one media example Natascha (41) encounters the headline "Most are against Kickl as chancellor" and criticizes it as a violation of the neutrality norm. Based on the headline, she feels as if the outlet is positioned against the politician and may potentially influence the audience before the national election. However, not all participants agree; instead, they expect journalists to take a stance and evaluate events – more on that in a later section.

Objectivity refers to verifiable, observable and measurable statements. At times it is also contested whether or not it is possible for a person to be objective. Isabel (23) therefore expects that journalists should at least try to be objective.

Factuality is concerned with the provable trueness of statements. Some participants voice expectations that journalists should stay factual, which includes portraying facts as they are and being truthful about reality (3, 21). Journalists should be as accurate as possible (12). "[F]acts claimed in the article must be true and traceable" (Andreas, 79; 9, Pos. 137). It also means journalists „must make a clear distinction between the reported facts and their personal opinion" (Andreas, 79; 9, Pos. 137) and not let their opinions influence their way of working, for instance as their research practices. Esther (23) also considers the ability to distinguish one's own emotions from one's work a necessity even if she believes it to be difficult.

Research and Sourcing Norms

Journalists are expected to invest time, effort and care into research (13, 6). They should repeatedly research (8,1) to do justice to reality (1). Further, they should engage deeply with topics (8), going beyond the surface (13) and beyond press releases (1, 22) or mere information on the day's event (1). They are also expected not to seek out information to validate their preexisting opinion also seeking counter-opinions (9).

When researching, journalists should consult quality sources. This can mean reading specialist literature (6), talking with the right people – which can be experts (13, 4) or those

affected by a topic (9, 13). Isabel (23) adds that they should engage empathetically with sources and issues; by asking the right questions and showing empathy for affected people.

However, they should also be critical of sources and issues. For instance, Esther (23) expresses her belief of what makes a good journalist – combining descriptive and normative expectations: “I believe that a good journalist takes a very critical look at topics” (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 219). At its peak, being critical can be associated with investigative journalism which is an ideal to some like Simon (22), Andreas (79) and Dominik (20) who praises the magazine *Falter* for spearheading numerous famous cases of investigative journalism in Austria.

On a more immediate level, Vincent (47) expects journalists to question if something is true. This is related to factuality expectations mentioned earlier but focuses on being critical of the factuality of a source rather than journalists being factual in their journalistic outputs. Participants voice specific expectations of practices which they consider should be a matter of course, such as recheck-double check (9), knows that correlation is not causation (6), seeks out current knowledge instead of relying on outdated knowledge (13).

In interview situations being critical is more contested. For context, it is important to note that most participants reference video interviews with politicians. Many enjoy Armin Wolf’s confrontational interview style (14) and consider it legitimate and important that journalists challenge their interviewees. Especially in interviews with politicians who are believed to be well prepared, journalists should be persistent and not leave questions unanswered (14). They should ask precise questions and demand precise answers (5). Ola praises a journalist: “He doesn’t let up and he doesn’t really let himself be influenced by the whole thing. So he really wants to know and then remains firm and says you didn’t answer my question instead of just letting it slide” (Ola, 23; 14, Pos. 435).

Other audiences, such as Simon (22), emphasize that journalists should not provoke their interviewees. Notably, in a text based media example with an expert interviewee, Simon does express desire for more critical engagement with the interviewee in question. Generally, he expects journalists to engage in a critical discussion and make their interviewees argue the reasoning behind their beliefs. Similarly, participants who do think journalists should provoke politicians clarify that they disapprove of ‘below the belt’ practices and instead expect provocation through well-made arguments (7). Socially unpleasant and observable interactions should be avoided according to some participants. This can include demands that journalists and their interviewees do not interrupt each other and that journalists should not push through

violently or maliciously (9). Rachel (65) expands on this notion, asserting that journalists should not force others to respond to questions, instead accepting and respecting them as they are. She puts herself in the position of the interviewee – whether politician or expert - and expects journalists to make interviewees unveil things themselves by building an interpersonal connection with them much like the interview situation she experienced as a study participant.

Finally, journalists should be transparent in their practices (9). Facts they present should, as mentioned earlier, not just be true, but also traceable. For instance, journalists should support claims with proof and example (5).

They should also practice transparency, providing the audience with a glimpse behind the scenes. Julia (21) – a communication student with working experience in the journalistic field –articulates a demand for more transparency on how news media work, voicing the belief that many audience members do not know. At the same time she recognizes transparency efforts which she believes nobody looks at, instead arguing they should be implemented within the journalistic product itself. In contrast, to Ola (23) seeing behind the scenes is “interesting, but it is not that important” (Ola, 23; 14, Pos. 591).

Education, Information and Novelty Perspectives

Many participants expect journalists and their work to be informative (e.g., 1, 4, 13). Dominik (20) asserts journalists should cover a broader scope of global topics instead of always covering the same issues. This expectation resembles other audience members’ desire to be provided with new impulses and perspectives (6), providing value for them to take away from the journalistic work (1) – with less obvious perspectives expected to be offered to them in detail (10). Journalists should also inform people about difficult or uncomfortable topics (13, 2) and explain things in an easily understandable manner even for those who consume news less frequently in order to avoid knowledge gaps growing bigger (4). To some, all information should be clarified to make sure no further questions come up (12).

Orientation Norm

Journalists are often expected to provide their audiences with context and background information (1, 4, 10, 12). Esther (23) thinks journalists should write about the effects of an event. Although not mentioned by many, some participants also believe journalists should provide orientation through their own evaluations and opinions. Andreas (79) laments fewer people being interested in a journalist’s evaluation of events anymore; believing other

audiences to only want to know the hard facts of what happened. He (and Esther) however, expect journalists to write opinion pieces which they consider journalism's lifeblood (9, 10).

Beyond providing context or opinions, some also demand explanations – in a way they are able to understand it. For instance, Julia (21) expresses frustration about journalists using contextualizing comparisons relying on (unexplained) references to previous political developments for which she was not alive and thus "I don't know it, do I have to google all over again? And Google doesn't say what the vibe was like." (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 142).

She adds,

Sometimes I would just like it to be explained to me in such a way that I know what to make of it or give me a little more information so that I know how to categorize it. Give me an example that I understand now [...]. You shouldn't tell me my opinion either, but I would like to have an opinion with it. [...] If you don't know anything about it [a debate] you can't say what your opinion is because you can't assess it. [...] It would be best to say where the opinion comes from. Who is that and back and forth. How does he or she position themselves? (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 148).

Dominik (20) considers "it good, when a journalist has a stance, but one should not [...] moralize" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos 142). When such behaviors which violate normative expectations are observed, audiences may react "more instinctively than rationally" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos 146), employing "a defense mechanism, because you have the feeling that someone is trying to force an opinion on you" (1, Pos 146). Moreover, they may feel annoyed (cathectic) by what seems to Dominik to be a moral sermon which he does not expect from a newspaper. In addition, he says such a violation affects how he imagines the journalist in question: "I consider the journalist to be more or less also less competent than another journalist. So, then there is a bit of personal judgement of the whole journalistic work, which is now independent of the objective quality" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 146).

Independence, Empowerment and Accountability

This group entails expectations pertaining to journalism's claim as the fourth estate. It includes journalists being independent of other estates. For instance, Andreas (79) says journalists should play a leading role instead of "always panting after what is actually happening" (Andreas, 79; 9, Pos. 331). In this case, he is referring to the relationship between journalists and politicians; the participant criticizes journalists relying on simply reporting what

is happening in politics, instead of actively researching themselves and using one's prominence to bring underdiscussed topics to public attention (9).

Another participant highlights that journalists should be free of commercial interests and institutional pressures (1).

I think that journalists also [...] must show to their own newspaper business, their own publishing house that they can also write exactly what they want to, without having to pay attention to the whole media house, which of course also mostly has commercial interests (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 181).

He further considers it harmful to democracy to have a high concentration of media ownership, believing it to be the reason for day-to-day pragmatism outweighing the longer scale political visions which he desires (1). Ada's ideal journalist is "[n]ot afraid to bring uncomfortable things up, but also has to pass the people the ball and say: you are empowered to act" (Ada, 53; 3, Pos. 187). She expects journalists to work to create a better future.

Some audience members also voice expectations that journalists ought to listen (4), reflect on (6) and adapt to criticisms in order to improve (1). What is considered a mistake can vary. However, in the case of mistakes, journalists should take accountability (6,4) and position themselves instead of making excuses (4). However, some highlight that not all audience feedback requires adaption; audience feedback should be considered "[i]f it's a really big mass, then yes, so, if it's representative" (Ola, 23; 14, Pos 455). Whilst the number of audience members giving certain criticism is often mentioned, the validity of the criticisms (by other audience members) is also brought up. Among the specific criticisms raised by participants was that journalists should avoid mentioning nationality in crime reports (12).

Interactivity and Community-Building

News media are expected by some to create interactivity between reader and producers. For instance, they should provide space for hobbyists writers (the participant often mentions experts) in the newspaper which is considered as mutually beneficial, and comment sections with audiences potentially being able to gauge how articles are perceived by others (1). When it comes to interactivity, one participant expresses desire for journalists to let their audience interact and comment freely without fear of being banned instantly (21). However, others have different expectations. They express feeling upset because of hateful comments online and demand spaces moderated by journalists or others (4).

In a broader context, Ada (53) expects journalists to bring people of different opinions together. For example, she and Erik (76) believes they should host community events such as reader café's and have conversation rounds with normal people. Interestingly, she highlights the importance of in-person communication (3).

Accessibility Norm

Journalists should be able to make difficult topics accessible (6). This entails breaking down complex topics through simple and understandable but brief explanations. Dominik (20) points out: "it is an art, after all, if one breaks down highly complex things into an article with a few hundred words" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 181).

Further, audiences expect journalists to be able to utilize language effectively. Language is often considered a central aspect of making knowledge accessible. To many, this means keeping audiences in mind. Andreas (79) considers it a necessary skill for journalists to put information into language so that it can be understood in the context of the media (and audience) they write for. He draws on his own experience as an expert to emphasize the ability to present and to adjust one's language to the respective audience. For instance, not using higher level technical terms for an entry level audience. Instead, many prefer simple wordings, phrasings (3) and explanations (4). Ola (23) thinks of an ideal journalist who

can get things across well, can explain them well, can explain them simply and quickly, but give the most important details [...]. Also that you can express yourself relatively well, but you can express yourself clearly, so not so pompously high, because then half of humanity probably won't understand it, including me (Ola, 23; 14, Pos. 571).

To Julia (21), understanding is easier through summaries in her own words, prompting her to voice the expectation that journalists should speak more colloquially.

I often need it in youth language, because when there are technical terms and things like that, it's more difficult to remember. [...]. Of course, it's difficult for journalism if you do it in youth language, but I know that it's easier for me if it's spoken in my jargon (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 136).

Journalists should also use story telling and narrative devices (10), as well as language containing *Schmäh* (humor) to loosen things up and provide entertainment value as well instead of being "obertantenmäßig" (overly lecturing) which is not received and retained well by 3's imagined audience to which Ada (53) does not count themselves. This approach is considered

important to not give this audience “the impression one wants to overrun them” (Ada, 53; 3, Pos. 133) and not make them feel as if there is a hierarchy between journalists and them. In that case, audiences would “turn off” (Ada, 53; 3, 181). Ada puts it this way: „There look, I [the journalist] am the know-it-all and you [the audience] are the poor little sausage" (Ada, 53; 3, Pos. 133).

Positivity and Entertainment

A few participants expect that journalists should provide balance by reporting significant positive things rather than predominantly negative issues especially those that are considered less (personally) significant (5). Participants also express a demand that journalists should not stretch out an “unnecessary story” – such as a fluff-piece on a cat being saved taking up two pages in a free yellow news paper (7).

5.2.1.2 Distinctions by Affiliation

‘Hard’ Journalists: Politics, War and Economics

Some participants group politics journalists with those who cover ‘hard’ topics like economics, seeing little difference between their professional norms. At times, they are contrasted to journalists covering ‘soft’ issues, such as travel journalists (e.g. 5), who are not just imagined differently as demonstrated in earlier sections, but also held to different standards.

War journalists were not mentioned often overall. Participants who did mention them had clear normative expectations regarding their practices, and highlighted their expectations for quality work in this field. This entailed expectations of truthfulness, accuracy, factuality, neutrality, independence, diligence (in research) and completeness. Participants expressed a desire to be presented with the full picture and context of the war, enabling them to understand what is happening, why it is occurring, and how it is connected. As a result, war journalists were expected by some to draw on historical knowledge when writing about wars.

Audience members also centred journalists’ physical presence in war zone countries (7, 21). Natascha (41) makes the argument that journalists have to feel what it is like on site in order to gain insights which cannot be gathered elsewhere. War journalists spoke to her conception of journalists as people going and reporting from places she could or would not go. Magdalene (21) adds that journalists should report “what it’s really about” (Magdalene, 46; 21,

Pos. 365). However, Natascha (41) wished to be shown less pictures of destruction. Whilst Natascha acknowledged that war journalists probably use certain techniques, she emphasized an innate skill – a “nose, you have it or not, that you check, this is important now or the information or there I should go” (Natascha, 41; 7, Pos. 252) – a certain feeling.

For politics journalists, a core expectation of many participants surrounded the practice of neutrality (e.g. 5). Whilst neutrality is a norm applied to journalists on a broad scale, for politics journalists it receives additional focus, at times being articulated as a prerequisite. In this respect, participants also acknowledge external pressures potentially affecting their conceptions of ideal journalists. When asked about her evaluation of imagined prescriptions set in place by an institution, she sees the potential benefit of preserving certain quality standards at the risk of neutrality, “if it goes too much in a political direction, [...] say a station is black or red or blue” (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 353). She aims her expectations of neutrality not just towards the journalists themselves, but also the institution they work for – expecting that media outlets should not require their workers to follow certain party lines.

To her, journalists being

as neutral as possible, that’s a contradiction in terms, because he has to be careful in which political region [he is] and on the other hand he should be neutral. This tightrope act, that he is very skilful in this respect, is perhaps expected or admired in my case (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 330).

Further, participants voice expectations of trustworthiness and reliability.

Public Broadcast Journalists

Others equate journalists who cover “political” issues with those who work for the Austrian public broadcaster ORF. As Austria’s PBS, ORF was frequently discussed; certain PBS journalists such as Armin Wolf are highly visible public figures, their practices discussed and often upheld as an ideal or rarely as its antithesis.

Some participants articulate specific practice related expectations for journalists working for ORF. One central aspect echoes the practice of neutrality expected from politics journalists and (as in the case of Elisa) includes political impartiality. Mirroring Elisa’s expectations discussed above, Natascha also says that ORF journalists should not be influenced by any party. In addition, they should be “thinking outside the box. Always, like Armin Wolf, always on the edge, a little bit of what works, what doesn’t” (Natascha, 41; 7, Pos. 391). This again topicalizes

prescriptions resulting from the institutional framework, tying normative expectations to imagined external pressures.

However, not every participant agrees. Andreas (79) dislikes the impartiality norm applied to the public service broadcaster specifically, judging it a pretence misrepresenting the distribution and quality of opinions for the sake of appearing neutral. The participant criticized in an example discussion rounds held in which disputed scientific minority opinions were represented by one person in conversation with one other person. With regards to practices, he criticized the invitation politics, imagining ORF as too afraid to confront claims of partiality, whereas other PSB made the participant feel more comfortable. He held the normative expectation that ORF journalists should push back against the expected mainstream of public opinion through brave statements even if they may risk shit storms – which, in his mind, ORF avoids. Rachel (65) has further expectations regarding these political discussion formats, directed straight at the journalists who moderate them: They should be well-prepared, know their guests' characters to predict reactions and sit fighters apart from each other. In addition, Rachel thinks they should prepare their guests to ensure polite behaviour throughout the discussion.

‘Soft’ Journalists: Travel, Society and Fashion

The main practice expectation articulated with regards to travel journalists relates to presenting a country using pictures and descriptions (5). Audience members also expect more personal stories about journalists' experience in the country. Elisa (60) emphasizes the subjectivity she expects and explicitly states she does not have any expectations of accuracy – “a trip, that's his subjective impression, he can say what he wants and it's up to me whether I like that too. I don't expect that to be true” (Elisa, 60; 5, Pos. 330). To some, ideal travel journalists offer others to join and hold events so people with shared interests can meet. Elisa (60) draws this expectation from a specific travel journalist she already follows and whose work Elisa enjoys. Society journalists should provide also context and illustrate their background knowledge on political dynamics, for example, between royal houses (7).

Social Media Journalists

This distinction does not revolve around varying issues or media outlets but the platform it is presented on. Depending on the news outlets or journalists participants follow on each platform, their expectations may be further distinguishable. Some participants make additional

distinctions depending on the specific platform and how they use it – for example, Instagram and TikTok as image- and video-based platforms in comparison to Twitter which is described as more text-based.

Generally, normative expectations of social media journalists revolve around (institutional and financial) independence, strong and consistent online presence, casualness, appeal, brevity and simplicity, expressing opinions, the use of language including humour and irony, interactivity.

Isabel (23) considers the independence of (YouTube) journalists from media outlet a good thing. Because they aren't working for a specific media, they do not have to follow media agenda of outlet, making them more objective (13).

In contrast, Simon (22) thinks social media journalists should make post with a clear message and have a recognizable political orientation – he somewhat jokingly adds that it would be ideally one he agrees with. Alice (17) also expects journalists on social media platforms to represent their own opinion more, however they should also be careful not too take sides too much. Whilst she herself is interested in what (ORF) news speakers actually think, its unimaginable to her that that could become reality (12).

Esther (23) has a differing perspective. While she thinks it is important to take a stand, especially with a large reach, she also believes that some stances should not be worth mentioning everywhere – such as siding with attacked countries – without occasion. In her opinion, these stances which she sees as a given should only be reiterated in context. She also states it is not good for journalists to identify themselves with an opinion online, “The fact that you're already stating your political opinion in your name here, for example, reinforces your bubble all the more. [...] and anyone who doesn't agree with that won't read it anymore” (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 100). She believes this to be damaging to discourse.

ORF social media journalists on TikTok currently do practice a norm which is not shared by Isabel (23) – having to talk in an elevated manner in order to come across as serious. She expects them to talk less elevated, unlike their current practice in order to come across as serious which the participants ascribes to normative expectations placed on them by others (12). Esther voices expectations that journalists should use the same language on-and offline, mentioning examples of older generations switching their language for social media.

In addition, some believe social media journalists should employ humour and irony (4, 6). However, to Simon (22) there is a certain balance to be met in order to not sacrifice seriousness, especially with quality media. Relatedly, Dominik (20) thinks journalists should not participate in trends on social media, especially TikTok, as he believes that there is not much to be gained discussion however credibility is lost. In contrast, Julia (21) considers journalists participating in trends as desirable.

Dominik's ideal journalist uses social media not as a planned performance but as containing "the element of spontaneity" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 319) which isn't originating from the production but themselves and is thus inherently more personal (compared to the same journalist doing this in the frame of a TV format) even when communicating about political topics. The participant contrasts this ideal with how he actually imagines the current process: "where everything is precisely planned" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 303) and having specifications about formalities which resemble "an ORF report in a newspaper on the Internet. And if it went more to this - more free level, I think it would be more appealing" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 303).

In line with his desire for more casualness on social media, Dominik also expects journalists to be braver on social media. Whilst for certain topics such as international politics, thoughtful posting seems appropriate to him, other situations call for "freer" and more "confrontative" writing in line with "the nature of Twitter [being] geared towards being confrontational, so I think politicians and journalists should be more daring" (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 315). To him, this would be more appealing. Simon (22) also voices expectations of appeal and appealing work though he did not elaborate on specifics. Julia (21) considers short form social media appealing – and TikTok as an ideal platform especially – because it allows her to inform herself briefly. As a consequence, she expects short and simple explanations on social media.

Demands of social media journalists' practices were also concerned with audience feedback – from responding to messages, to dealing with criticisms and hate comments. One participant also expects interactivity in the form of "also joining in the conversation with people in the comments and make sure in the bio that it's safe space and stuff like that" (Julia, 21; 4, Pos 440). In her opinion, an ideal journalist should have multiple channels across platforms, as for instance Instagram provides better opportunities for interactivity (4).

Some consider journalists being responsive on social media to be desirable (1,4). Julia (21) feels that it makes them more approachable and argues that they should respond to topic-

related questions in comment sections. Dominik (20) acknowledges that journalists with large following responding may realistically not be possible, however for him this also poses questions of the authenticity of tweets on a journalist's profile. He considers it ideal for journalists to tweet themselves but acknowledges constraints. Further, he says that interactivity should not be forced but originate from a desire of wanting to include community more (1).

Outlets should moderate comments on social media, as some contain racist, homophobic, and other discriminatory content. As one participant noted, "I don't really want to be confronted with that" (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 164). Such comments are believed to likely already be illegal and should not be left unaddressed, as this may give the impression that such discourse is normal or acceptable. Esther (23) believes journalists should not share hate comments they get, rather they ought to delete them or speak to therapist about it instead of making negativity spread.

5.2.2 Personal Dimension

5.2.2.1 Demographic and Physical Characteristics

Education, Gender and Age

The education category constitutes an exception. Many participants articulate expectations surrounding the formal education of journalists. Although specific educations are rarely mentioned, journalists are expected to be "well-educated, also in digital media" (Erik, 76; 2, Pos 266) and possess extensive knowledge (e.g. 9). One participant distinguishes between two types of extensive-knowledge-havers:

I am an ideal journalist if I specialize in a topic, write about it and have an expertise in it. [...] I think that has an enormously good quality [to] [...] deal with the topic [...] where I have my expertise [...] where I know my way around. [...] On the other hand, I think it's just as good a quality if I'm broadly positioned, can get involved in a wide variety of topics, and can quickly make statements across topics. Even if they are brief (Vincent, 47; 8, Pos. 232).

Whereas some participants voice expectations of a well founded and broad education, Erik (76) also expects special knowledge regarding the gathering and connecting of information. Similarly, Viktor (62) focuses on trade skills rather than education: "Another basic requirement is certainly to master the craft of journalism" (Viktor, 62; 24, Pos. 127).

Most participants do not explicitly refer to gender (or other similar categories) in their normative expectations, although many do use male pronouns in the original language when talking about an ideal journalist.

One notable exception is Julia (21) who begins describing her ideal journalist as follows: “So it's a woman for once, because I kind of like that more, I feel in better hands there” (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 433). She expands on this by drawing on cathectic and descriptive expectations, explaining that she expects “when information is presented to me, [that] there is a female perspective somewhere, because I am also female and because I often have the feeling that men can't understand the female experience” (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 435). Julia's ideal journalist is also “older than me, so, not as old as me. 30 or something like that?” (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 440). She explains this prescription through a belief: “I believe that people who are older are always given more credibility or more competence. [...] Because I simply think that they have more background knowledge for things” (Julia, 21; 4, Pos. 443).

5.2.2.2 Personality and Traits

Some expectations of normative traits are closely related to the expected practices presented earlier. For example, a participant who expects their ideal journalist to ask critical questions, may also expect they need to be critical or curios (e.g. 5). According to some, journalists should enjoy certain central practices – for example, expecting them to like to do research and write (10) and be good at these skills (12). Beyond being a good writer for the practical purpose of allowing the audience to understand, Alice (17) also extends her normative expectations beyond role-specific contexts, for example by stating that journalists should be good people.

Participants also hold distinct normative expectations depending on the format their ideal journalist is imagined to conduct. In the case of a journalist holding major political interviews for the Austrian public service broadcaster during election campaigns, Dominik (20) expects in-depth knowledge of the material along with the skill to articulate this knowledge in conversation. Further, he expects that in interviews with top politicians

the journalist should not completely step back as a person; rather, they should perhaps have a strong character, bringing some dynamism into the conversation. As a journalist, they should also have a certain level of authority and not completely retreat behind the authority of the politician (Dominik, 20; 1, Pos. 327).

Intelligent, Knowledge-Seeking, Ways of Thinking, Honest, Trustworthy and Brave

Some audience members expect an inherent curiosity (5, 8). Similarly, participants voice the prescription that journalists should be open to the world and expand their own horizons (4). Magdalene expects journalists should be uncovering (21), others think they should be informed (8). In addition, journalists should be clever, intelligent, thoughtful and competent (11).

At times, participants voice normative expectations about journalists' way of thinking. Vincent (47) believes journalists should be structured thinkers who are good at placing information, filtering essences as well as understanding details and keeping an overview. Relatedly, Esther (23) thinks good journalists should be sensitive and punctilious without its connotations of being annoying or pedantic, rather she means "a special precision, an ability to distinguish exactly what is what and how you have to understand it." (Esther, 23; 10, Pos. 322). When asked about ideal journalists, some participants highlight specific ways of thinking—lenses through which they understand the world—which, in both cases, align with the participants' own ways of thinking. Andreas (79) believes journalists should possess not just political thinking and a skill to assess future development somewhat correctly but also a sense for beauty beyond pure functionality. Whereas some participants do say they prefer journalists who hold similar opinions, Julia's ideal journalist is an exception by including a specific stance – the journalist should be an intersectional feminist and include people of color as well as disabled and queer people.

Another expectation of how journalists ought to be revolves around them being truthful (21) and trustworthy (2). It is frequently articulated – and explicitly mentioned as a prerequisite by (9) – that journalists should be honest and faithful to facts (9). Magdalene's ideal journalist is non-influencing. Some also hold the expectation that journalists need to be brave (5, 22). Ada (53) conceptualizes a broad fearlessness necessary for journalists to perform their role adequately: "Because if you're afraid, can you really bring unpleasant truths to light? Because if I'm afraid I'll be sued-?" (Ada, 53; 3, Pos. 382).

However, what journalists ought to be brave for may differ. Elisa (60) places her expectation of journalists being brave in the context of interview situations where they ought to be insistent. Nils (31) who values objective and factual reporting, also thought journalists should not "hav[e] fear of perhaps letting your own opinion flow in a little because that's how you also see the personality [...] simply to describe objectively what happened without being afraid of being immediately judged for it" (Nils, 31; 22, Pos. 742). Nils acknowledges that this

expectation may be difficult for journalists to execute but considers it manageable for the sake of articles which are not too dry.

Communicative, Empathetic, Likeable, Approachable, Authentic and Passionate

Ideal journalists should be in exchange with others and not be ashamed of getting in touch with people (8). According to Andreas (79), journalists should not only enjoy communicating but also experience an intrinsic need to communicate—much like the participant himself – imagining their success as tied to being extroverts. Whilst journalists are often expected to be communicative, some participants highlight that they should be good listeners (2) who like listening to others rather than themselves (10).

Some participants voiced expectations that ideal journalists should be compassionate (5) and empathetic (13, 11). Rachel (65) places focus on journalists having empathy for interview partners, being polite with and appreciative of them, whereas Isabel (23) explicitly extends this expectation beyond the interview context to handling topics with care.

To many participants, an ideal journalist is likeable (6,11), though it is not necessarily a prerequisite to them. Esther (23) considers likeability an important trait for influencers to possess – whilst this may appear unrelated, she understands journalist Florian Klenk to be an influencer in the sense that he is influential both on Twitter and in the Austrian media landscape as a whole. However, what makes a journalist likeable to audiences differs. Julia (21) thinks of an ideal journalist who does not take herself too seriously. To Simon (22), journalists should be approachable and casual, to Isabel (23) they should be relatable to their audience. Esther (23) thinks they should not be too convinced of themselves. Ada (53) draws on her experience working in a news outlet and highlights the interpersonal relationship between journalists themselves, expressing that they should be easy-going with one another.

Audiences also expect journalists to be authentic (2, 22). To Erik (76), this means a journalist should not just be authentic (and, in correlation, trustworthy) themselves, but also recognize (in)authenticity in others such as their interview partners. Similarly, journalists are expected by some to possess incorruptible judgement (9). Andreas (79) also considers it necessary for people working in the public eye to be stable and consistent.

Another frequent expectation mentioned revolves around journalists' feelings for their job and their work ethic. This can range from being hard-working (14), to really caring about their

topics and job (3). Some participants expect journalists to feel a passion for their line of work which can at times take on extreme extents (5).

5.2.2.3 Distinctions by Affiliation

Politics journalists generally should be knowledgeable, accurate, diplomatic, trustworthy and reliable (5). Those working for the participant's preferred quality media are ideally calm, composed, determined, intellectual and smart. They need to possess extensive background knowledge (due to their social role and potential impact) as well as respect and consideration for their fellow human beings (5). PBS journalists should be curious and critical, not too well-behaved but remain within legal frameworks (7). With regard to PBS journalists moderating discussion rounds, Rachel (65) expects them to be confident. Whereas travel journalists should be open, flexible, adventurous, willing to collect information and intellectual (5), society journalists need to be extroverted and chirpy (7).

5.3 Summary and Discussion

To reiterate, this thesis has explored how audiences imagine journalists and how they imagine ideal journalists. When imagining journalists, audiences touch upon a broad range of elements beyond the functionality of their social role. These images are described by participants as relatively stable, unless violated (Burgoon, 2015). They often imagine journalists to be situated within an environment which exerts social, financial and political pressures affecting their practices and inner world, at times hindering them from being a (more) ideal journalist.

Participants frequently refer to financial and political pressures as well as public scrutiny, imagining journalists as operating within frameworks that shape and sometimes limit their autonomy. As in recent studies, autonomy emerges as a central aspect of audiences' expectations (Gajardo & Mellado, 2024). Public scrutiny is described as rooted in journalistic responsibility and normative expectations that weigh on journalists. When violated, such expectations can be expressed through criticism and are often believed to gain validity by being repeated by large groups of people. These images may be tied to associations of an ideal rational, democratic (bourgeoisie) journalism, in which the audience assumes the citizen role (see van der Wurff & Schönbach, 2014). However, many participants do not imagine journalists to adapt to feedback or take accountability for mistakes, in spite of demands. This suggests tensions between ideals and beliefs.

Others consider journalists through the lens of a provider-costumer relationship in which journalists operate based on economic considerations. In such conceptualizations, the audience matters to journalists as a number related to reach and profit. In the case of violated expectations, participants who imagine journalists to be market-driven, ascribe the audience more indirect influence on journalists' practices. These two images do not exclude each other. Broader academic discussions of journalists' working conditions as shaped by commercial pressures and audience demands (Conboy, 2014; Lowrey & Gade, 2011; van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014) were mirrored in participants' imaginaries, often describing them as profit-driven and limited by directives.

Another finding relates to the specific practices that audiences believe journalists to perform and what they normatively expect, as well as affiliation-based distinctions they make – in accordance with news media image research by Shin (2022).

While ideal journalists were held to norms such as thorough research, factual accuracy, and neutrality, journalists were often imagined to only partially fulfil these expectations. The neutrality norm, in particular, was often demanded, but conflicted with other norms (at times within participants' narrations themselves) and seldom described as met. It is often normatively charged even when described.

In addition, participants expected journalists to enable interaction (even community-building and facilitating consensus), ensure accessibility through language, provide context, orientation, as well as new information and perspectives. Another interesting expectation concerned journalists showing and working with empathy. Empathy was especially appreciated in contexts involving vulnerable subjects or sensitive topics, where participants imagined ideal journalists as being respectful, empathetic, and human. This expectation was evaluated positively and contrasted with perceptions of aggressive or rude journalistic styles – again, mirroring the findings of Shin (2022). While this suggests that emotions in journalistic practices are an important marker of professionalism, some participants also highlight ideal journalists as “sensitive but competent” (Rachel, 65; 11, Pos. 389), implying a perceived tension or even incompatibility of the two concepts within audiences' imaginaries.

Described practice-related behaviours were often evaluated emotionally against normative expectations. These judgments were closely tied to affiliation: journalists working for public service broadcasters and quality outlets were more often imagined as meeting professional ideals, particularly in terms of preparation and quality. However, some participants

questioned aggressive interview styles and felt more distance. Tabloid journalists – especially those working for free newspapers – by contrast, were more often imagined as falling short of normative ideals — yet even here, participants occasionally acknowledged positive qualities such as accessibility or brevity.

Overall, journalists working in public service and legacy media are central to most audience narrations, reflecting the report of Kaltenbrunner and Lugschitz (2024) which finds print journalists to be prototypical in Austria, a country with very high, if declining, print usage. Public service journalists, especially ZIB journalists, are highly visible, which may contribute to them being imagined frequently and in detail. Journalists working for other genres, such as travel, are expected to perform more ‘personal’ practices and are not subject to normative expectations of neutrality. They are also not imagined as under economic pressures, rather they are described as having an enviable position to those who follow their work.

Affiliation-based distinctions appeared frequently in participants’ narratives, with expectations shaped by context clues and assumptions about the tone, style and content of journalists’ outlet, platform, and genre; these distinctions influenced how journalists were imagined in terms of credibility, traits and even ascribed intent (see Shin, 2022).

At the same time, many participants articulate expectations surrounding personal characteristics—such as age, gender, appearance, and personality— through which they understand and evaluate journalists. For instance, some participants associate age with experience and credibility, while others connect likeability or arrogance to journalistic professionalism. Participants also voiced stereotypes of male and female domains in journalism. Some categories like ethnicity or migration background are absent from most narrations, reflecting their underrepresentation in newsrooms (Kaltenbrunner & Lugschitz, 2024). Likeability was overall a relevant category to participants when imagining journalists and constituted an ideal to some. In light of the high and low rewardingness concept (Burgoon, 2015), likeable journalists may be more positively evaluated when expectations are violated. For instance, Natascha (41) describes a practice she does not like in a likeable journalist as imposed on him by superiors to meet audience demands. Overall, this suggests that audiences do not necessarily separate the person from the role, but rather form impressions of journalists as whole individuals embedded in professional environments. It could be concluded that trust and perceived competence emerge not only from observing journalistic practices but also from

how audiences imagine the journalist as a person. Also, it should be noted that how audiences imagine journalists does not necessarily reflect how they actually are or perform their role.

There are also numerous anecdotes which come up, often when exploring targeted journalists, for example, being a family member of a friend (2), sharing the same hairdresser with a journalist (9), encountering them on a train (3), believing someone to (not) live what they preach (3, 7), having heard about a journalist's divorce (11), potentially leading to increased feelings of closeness – or evaluating them more negatively. There are also notes on journalists' private lives including not wanting to be a journalist's friend (4) or wife due to them always being away (2).

Participants rarely voiced clear normative expectations surrounding the demographic and physical characteristics of journalists. Some evaluated certain characteristics positively or negatively depending on the context. One participant is an exception, imagining her ideal journalist explicitly as female (and an intersectional feminist) in order to make sure the female perspective was included and expressing feeling better represented. Some female participants also articulated other practice-related gendered expectations, imagining female journalists to utilize a different, softer style and possess an inherently distinct perspective which was positively evaluated. No male participants expressed such explicitly gendered expectations of practices. This may suggest not only a connection between gender and journalistic style, but—with the same female participants articulating emotionality as a norm—a potential reclamation of emotionality as a valued journalistic quality. Without visual or contextual cues, audiences tend to rely on stereotypes of typical journalists in their imagining, which often means middle-aged men.

Some individual participants struggled to produce more specific imagined journalists at first, particularly with personal aspects of abstract journalists and some targeted journalists that participants did not encounter often or care for. Usually, imagined practices could be described. However, they articulated more detailed images when asked about different targeted journalists they had more information on or whose work they did not feel indifferent about.

6. Limitations and Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore how Austrian audiences imagine journalists and ideal journalists, investigating the imagined journalist framework through expectation modes to better understand the imaginative and affective expectations and perceptions that shape the journalist–audience relationship.

The findings illustrate that audiences imagine journalists as complex, multifaceted and mostly stable figures – unless expectations are violated. They are imagined as subject to external pressures by various actors which are believed to influence not just their role performance but also their inner world. Journalists are not only seen as professionals fulfilling their roles, enacting journalistic practices in different institutional contexts, but also as individuals with characteristics, personality traits and attitudes.

Central descriptions of journalistic practices involve researching information, as well as processing and disseminating it. However, how audiences imagine them to exactly perform such tasks (and their evaluation of that) varies. This depends not only on the individual journalist, but also on the media outlet they are associated with and the participants' broader beliefs about them and journalism as a whole. The traits audiences attribute to journalists often align with qualities deemed necessary for their specific occupation, but they also go beyond professional competencies – for instance, kindness. Journalists are frequently assessed in terms of likeability and authenticity, with some participants drawing on appearance-based stereotypes in their evaluations.

How audiences imagine ideal journalists tends to focus on the professional dimensions, particularly journalistic practices. However, some participants struggle to imagine even ideal journalists as free from external pressures, which they consider to hinder their ability to fulfil normative expectations. Beyond expectations of thorough, high-quality research, most participants agree on the importance of communicating information in appropriate ways. Yet, what constitutes 'appropriate' varies—ranging from accessibility and highly discussed neutrality to opinion-sharing and displays of empathy. Some also imagine ideal journalists as possessing specific personal or demographic traits, reflecting a desire for representation.

This thesis contributes to the understanding of the imagined journalists concept by exploring it in-depth using qualitative methods in another cultural context from the original study of Panievsky et al. (2024). Furthermore, it connects the framework to expectation modes

and offers rich and complex insight on how audiences imagine and distinguish journalists. By employing a method in which audiences encounter journalists and their work, articulating imagined journalists becomes more accessible. Empirically, this thesis synthesizes and extends existing research on audiences, audience perceptions of journalists, and the relationship between the two. It highlights the relational, affective and imaginative factors that shape audience engagement with journalists and illustrates the broad – and at times conflicting – expectations audiences hold, which often go beyond purely professional dimensions. Greater awareness of these expectations may enable journalists to make more informed and responsive decisions.

However, the research is not without limitations. As the study focuses on investigating expectations about journalists that are important to audiences, some aspects of the framework may be underexplored or even biased. While many participants mentioned journalists working for outlets they themselves do not use regularly, these were typically discussed only when strong – often negative – emotions were involved. Similarly, all expectations regarding social media journalists were expressed by younger participants who regularly engaged with their work; other groups may imagine these journalists differently. As a result, the perspectives of more indifferent or disengaged audience members may be underrepresented. Additionally, the sample skews toward left-leaning, highly educated, and highly interested participants, which may lead to the underrepresentation of other viewpoints. The extensive scope of the study and the long-term time commitment required may have discouraged more casual audience members from participating, further contributing to this imbalance.

Future studies could address these limitations. There is also potential for cross-cultural research and in-depth explorations of how various audience groups imagine journalists, especially those that were underrepresented in this thesis. Building on this work, future research could also investigate why audiences imagine (ideal) journalists the way they do. In addition, while this study included some associative questions as suggested by Panievsky et al. (2024), future studies could benefit from incorporating a broader range of such techniques.

Given the uncertainty and shifting expectations journalists face, understanding how audiences imagine them remains essential. By centering audience perspectives, this thesis contributes to a more balanced view of the journalist–audience relationship, particularly the affective, imaginative dimensions and the normative expectations that shape it.

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Appendix

Abstract English

This thesis explores how Austrian audiences imagine journalists and ideal journalists, applying the emerging *imagined journalists* framework (Panievsky et al., 2024), in combination with theory and *expectation modes* (Biddle, 1979). It centres audience perspectives, taking an open-ended approach to explore how they understand and approach news through the lens of the journalist-audience relationship. Heeding calls, the work focuses on imaginative and affective dimensions which are examined through the prescriptive, descriptive and cathectic expectations audiences hold.

In the theoretical section, the imagined journalists concept is defined and contrasted to its counterpart, the more extensively researched imagined audiences. Further, the framework is situated in the context of journalistic roles and beliefs, norms and preferences of audiences – as well as the effects of met or unmet expectations. It also provides background on the Austrian media landscape in order to further contextualize results. The empirical section consists of a qualitative content analysis of 20 in-depth interviews with diverse Austrian audience members.

The results show that audiences imagine journalists as complex and multidimensional figures, articulating not just positional aspects – where they focus on practices, workflows and pressures – but also personal conceptualisations – ascribing personalities, traits, attitudes and demographic characteristics. In addition, audiences imagine journalists differently across media affiliations, depending on their evaluation of the media organization at large. Similarly, audiences construct distinct ideal journalists, with variations tied to their imagined function. While role specific practices are emphasized in conceptualisations of ideal journalists, the personal dimension remains a central aspect of audiences' imaginaries.

Abstract German

In der vorliegenden Masterarbeit wird untersucht, wie sich das österreichische Publikum Journalist*innen und ideale Journalist*innen vorstellt, wobei das neue Konzept der *imagined journalists* (Panievsky et al., 2024) in Kombination mit Rollentheorie und *Publikumserwartungen* (Biddle, 1979) angewendet wird. Im Mittelpunkt steht die Sichtweise des Publikums, wobei ein offener Ansatz gewählt wird, um durch die Beziehung zwischen Journalist*innen und Publikum zu erforschen, wie Nachrichten verstanden und angegangen werden. Die Arbeit konzentriert sich auf imaginative und affektive Dimensionen, die anhand der präskriptiven, deskriptiven und normativen Erwartungen des Publikums untersucht werden.

Im theoretischen Teil wird das Konzept der *imagined journalists* definiert und seinem Gegenstück, dem etablierterem *imagined audiences* Konzept, gegenübergestellt. Darüber hinaus werden Vorstellungen in den Kontext journalistischer Rollen und Erwartungsmodi sowie der Auswirkungen erfüllter oder unerfüllter Erwartungen gestellt. Außerdem wird Hintergrundwissen über die österreichische Medienlandschaft vermittelt, um die Ergebnisse weiter zu kontextualisieren. Der empirische Teil besteht aus einer qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse von 20 Tiefeninterviews mit verschiedenen österreichischen Publikumsmitgliedern, wobei besonderes Augenmerk auf auftretende Unterschiede gelegt wird.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass das Publikum sich Journalist*innen als komplexe und mehrdimensionale Personen vorstellt, wobei sie nicht nur positionsbezogene Aspekte - Praktiken, Arbeitsabläufe und Einflüsse - artikulieren sondern auch persönliche Merkmale zuschreiben, wie Persönlichkeiten, Charakterzüge, Einstellungen und demografische Merkmale. Darüber hinaus hat das Publikum unterschiedliche Vorstellungen von Journalist*innen je nach deren Medienzugehörigkeit, und abhängig davon wie es das Medienunternehmen als Ganzes bewertet. Ebenso konstruiert das Publikum unterschiedliche Idealvorstellungen von Journalist*innen, die sich je nach ihrer vorgestellten Funktion unterscheiden. Während rollenspezifische Praktiken in solchen Konzeptualisierungen hervorgehoben werden, bleibt die persönliche Dimension ein zentraler Aspekt in der Vorstellung idealer Journalist*innen.

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Sample Demographics

Nr.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Highest Education	Income	Political Orientation	Party Identification
1	Dominik	20	m	Matura	601€ – 1200€	Sehr links	Keine Angabe
2	Erik	76	m	Doktorat	3601€ – 4600€	Mitte rechts	NEOS – Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum
3	Ada	53	f	Matura	1801€ – 2400€	Ziemlich links	Die Grünen – Die Grüne Alternative
4	Julia	21	f	Bachelor, Ingenieurin oder Meisterin	601€ – 1200€	Ziemlich links	Die Grünen – Die Grüne Alternative
5	Elisa	60	f	Magister, Master oder Diplom	Keine Angabe	Keine Angabe	Keine Angabe
6	Simon	22	m	Matura	0 – 600€	Sehr links	Keine Angabe
7	Natascha	41	f	Magister, Master oder Diplom	1201€ – 1800€	Mitte links	Die Grünen – Die Grüne Alternative
8	Vincent	47	m	Bachelor, Ingenieurin oder Meisterin	1801€ – 2400€	Ziemlich links	Keine Angabe
9	Andreas	79	m	Magister, Master oder Diplom	3001€ – 3600€	Ziemlich links	Die Grünen – Die Grüne Alternative
10	Esther	23	f	Bachelor, Ingenieurin oder Meisterin	601€ – 1200€	Sehr links	Keine Angabe
11	Rachel	65	f	Bachelor, Ingenieurin oder Meisterin	1201€ – 1800€	Mitte	Die Grünen – Die Grüne Alternative
12	Alice	17	f	Matura	0 – 600€	Ziemlich links	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (SPÖ)
13	Isabel	23	f	Bachelor, Ingenieurin oder Meisterin	0 – 600€	Ziemlich links	Keine Angabe
14	Ola	23	nb	Bachelor, Ingenieurin oder Meisterin	0 – 600€	Ziemlich links	Die Grünen – Die Grüne Alternative
15	Melina	60	f	Bachelor, Ingenieurin oder Meisterin	1201€ – 1800€	Mitte links	Die Grünen – Die Grüne Alternative
21	Magdalene	46	f	Lehre oder berufsbildende mittlere Schule	0 – 600€	Ziemlich rechts	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)

22	Nils	31	m	Magister, Master oder Diplom	1201€ – 1800€	Ziemlich rechts	Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP)
24	Viktor	62	m	Allgemeinbildende Pflichtschule	601€ – 1200€	Mitte links	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (SPÖ)
26	Benedikt	47	m	Matura	1201€ – 1800€	Ziemlich rechts	Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP)
27	Roman	41	m	Bachelor, Ingenieurin oder Meisterin	3601€ – 4600€	Mitte rechts	Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP)

Interview Guideline

- Stellen Sie sich vor, es ist Morgen. Ihr Wecker läutet. Was machen Sie als Erstes?
 - Notiz: Weiter über Tagesverlauf anregen, bis sie die Interaktion mit irgendeiner Art von Medien erwähnen. In etwa: “Ich verwende mein Handy, Computer, Zeitung, etc.”
- Was machen Sie/ Was verwenden Sie, wenn Sie wissen möchten, was sich in der Welt tut?
- Für jede erwähnte Plattform/Organisation:
 - **Wem** folgen Sie (Influencer, Orgs., Journalisten)?
 - Anhand dieser Karte - könnten Sie mir ganz kurz erzählen, warum Sie jedem davon folgen, was haben Sie davon?
- Basierend auf Ihren Beobachtungen dieser Person und deren Arbeit, wie würden Sie diese beschreiben? (**beschreibend**)
 - Wie denken Sie, sieht die Gesellschaft im Allgemeinen sie?
 - Wer “sind” sie? Wie sehen oder erleben Sie sie?
 - Was denken Sie, machen sie tagtäglich?
 - Worauf stützen Sie diese Eindrücke? Woher wissen Sie das? Könnten Sie mir bitte Beispiele nennen, die Sie gesehen haben?
 - Optional: Wenn dieses Outlet eine Person wäre, wie würden Sie sie beschreiben? (wenn sie über das Outlet und nicht über den Akteur sprechen)
 - Wie denken Sie darüber? Warum empfinden Sie das so?
- Welche Emotionen oder Gefühle kommen bei Ihnen auf, wenn Sie an (AKTEUR) denken? (**Emotionen**)
 - Welche Emotionen oder Gefühle kommen bei Ihnen auf, wenn Sie an deren Arbeit denken? Warum?
 - Worauf stützen Sie diese Gefühle? Könnten Sie mir bitte Beispiele nennen, die Sie gesehen haben?

- Was machen Sie normalerweise, nachdem Sie Inhalte von dieser Person ("Akteur") konsumiert haben?
 - Warum ist das so? Wie fühlen Sie sich dabei?
- Was denken Sie, sollte (AKTEUR) im Rahmen seiner Arbeit machen? (**vorschreibend**)
 - Gibt es etwas, was sie nicht machen, wovon sie glauben, dass sie es sollten?
 - Gibt es etwas, was sie machen, wovon sie denken, dass sie es nicht machen sollten?
 - Wie würden Sie an deren Stelle ihre Arbeit machen? Denken Sie, dass (AKTEUR) das auch so machen sollte?
 - Wenn Sie (AKTEUR) einstellen wollen würden, wie würde die Jobbeschreibung aussehen?
- Wenn Sie den idealen (AKTEUR) erstellen könnten, welche Eigenschaften würde dieser haben?
- Was denken Sie über ihre Arbeit/ihre Inhalte?
- Was denken Sie über diese Menschen? Wie stellen Sie sie sich vor?
- Wären Sie gerne mit dieser Person befreundet?
- Könnten Sie etwas über Ihre Beziehung zu X sagen?
 - Kommunizieren Sie mit X auf irgendeine Art? (z.B., Kommentare, Twitter...)
 - Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass Sie deren Arbeit beeinflussen können / oder wie sie darüber denken? Prompt: inwiefern?...
- Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass Sie X wichtig sind?
- Was glauben Sie, denken die über Sie?
- Welche Wörter würden die verwenden um Sie als ihr Publikum zu beschreiben? Wie die sich Sie vorstellen? Sie könnten 3 Wörter verwenden..
- Wenn Sie ein Tier und eine Farbe wählen müssten um AKTEUR zu beschreiben, welches würden Sie nehmen? Und warum?

List of Abbreviations

EVT	Expectancy Violation Theory
PBS	Public Broadcast Service
ORF	Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (Österreichischer Rundfunk)
ZIB	Zeit im Bild, Television news broadcasts of ORF
FWF	Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung