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Arts, Culture, and Entertainment Coverage

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Arts, culture, and entertainment coverage is a specialized type of journalism that engages with “the cultural public sphere” or “the cultural field.” Scholars and journalists around the world use very different terms for this type of news coverage. Some terms designate specialized topical areas, for example, music journalism, fashion journalism, or film criticism while others are more inclusive, for example, arts journalism or cultural journalism. “Cultural journalism” is used here for two reasons. First, it has become an increasingly common term in recent scholarship. Second, it denotes a broader journalistic interpretation of the cultural field than “arts journalism” by reflecting the eclectic approach to culture in many newsrooms today. News media cover everything from the arts to popular culture and the entertainment industries and from celebrity culture to more sociocultural and politicized topics such as value and identity politics. Journalists who report on and debate these topics, either as permanent members of staff or as freelancers, are referred to as “cultural journalists.” This term covers more traditional (all-round) reporters working with cultural news and critics and reviewers with a specialized expertise on particular cultural subfields.

The lack of consensus with regard to terminology makes it difficult for practitioners and scholars to arrive at a clear definition and a shared understanding of the boundaries of cultural journalism. At the same time, this lack of consensus points to arts, culture, and entertainment coverage being a multifaceted type of journalism of great academic and newsroom potential.

Intellectual context: Cultural journalism as emerging research field

Research on the coverage of arts, culture, and entertainment is not a novel phenomenon. Aesthetic disciplines have a long tradition of studying different types of critical discourses about cultural subfields, for example, literary criticism or film criticism, including critical discourses in the press (e.g., McDonald, 2007). Media and press histories have included culture as one of many other topics in broader accounts of the historical transformations of, for example, newspapers (e.g., Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). Cultural sociologists have used the increasingly diverse and internationalized (Americanized, some would argue) line of cultural topics covered and debated in the news media as an example of cultural globalization and its increased transnational exchange and coproduction of cultural goods (e.g., Janssen, Kuipers, & Verboord, 2008). They have also pointed to cultural journalism reflecting the closely connected processes of dissolving hierarchies between high art/popular culture and the emergence of cultural omnivores with broad cultural tastes and a predilection for both highbrow and lowbrow culture (e.g., Purhonen, Heikkilä, & Hazir, 2017). Cultural journalism has, however, only more recently been studied as a *distinct* type of *journalism* and a particular journalistic practice. This can be seen as a consequence of journalism studies more broadly becoming an increasingly institutionalized research field with a growing interest in the professional boundary work of journalists, different types of journalism, and the influence of institutional and technological changes on journalism as a profession. Within this explosively expanding research field, increasing attention has also been devoted to more specialized and softer journalistic subareas such as arts, culture, and

entertainment. Particular emphasis has been on how media institutional and technological changes have influenced the production, form, and content of cultural journalism as well as the professional role conceptions and practices of cultural journalists.

Social context: Commercialization and digitalization

Arts, culture, and entertainment coverage, like other types of journalism, have been heavily influenced by broader media institutional and technological changes, such as commercialization and digitalization, especially during the second half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century.

Commercialization is said to be very influential in cultural journalism, because topics related to art, culture, and entertainment provide numerous commercial opportunities for news media, for example, advertisements, publicity, and advertorials. These commercial influences potentially push the boundaries between the market and journalistic content. Verboord and Janssen (2015) have shown that European and U.S. newspapers have increased their cultural advertising and increasingly adjusted their coverage of arts and culture to accommodate newspaper readers. This is more evident in American than European newspapers, however. One example is the growing provision of compelling stories about celebrities from the cultural and entertainment industries, also in elite news media. This links to the aforementioned changing cultural hierarchies and patterns of cultural consumption, which have influenced the types of culture that news media find important to cover, in order to cater to audiences and advertisers. In addition, the cultural and entertainment industries have acquired the art of tailoring publicity materials and information subsidies to the needs of the news media by means of press kits, screenings, star-driven press junkets, and opening events. This is because arts, culture, and entertainment coverage may serve the additional function as a marketing or publicity tool for new cultural offerings, but it also functions as a platform for public visibility and cultural legitimacy for artists, cultural producers, and goods (e.g., Kristensen, 2017). One-liners and ratings from cultural critics' reviews of plays, books, or movies have, for example, become an integrated part of cultural marketing. These close intertwinements of the cultural industries and cultural journalism, and the sheer expansion of topics such as popular culture, celebrity, and entertainment in the news media, have been viewed as a result of not only dissolving cultural distinctions in cultural production and consumption but also of the commercialization of (cultural) journalism.

The *digitalization* of the production and distribution of news and journalism has also influenced arts, culture, and entertainment coverage. Especially the role and authority of institutionalized news media's cultural journalism in the cultural information circuit have been challenged. The few existing national studies on arts, culture, and entertainment coverage from a cross-media perspective have argued that institutionalized news media's digital versions have not yet revitalized cultural reporting. However, digital media technologies and participatory practices have influenced the forms of critical debates about arts, culture, and entertainment in the broader public realm. These technologies have enabled citizens or "amateurs" to engage in experience-based cultural reviewing on multiple media platforms and in noninstitutionalized contexts, for example, on user-driven cultural blogs (e.g., Verboord, 2014). This has challenged the role of especially newspapers as cultural citizens' common forum for accessing information and critical debates about arts and culture. It has also contested the authority and legitimacy of cultural journalists and critics (McDonald, 2007). However, the changed media landscape has not (yet) fundamentally marginalized established news media in the cultural information circuit. Audiences with a broad cultural taste still seek information about arts, culture, and entertainment from a variety of media sources and critical voices, including those of institutionalized news media. Nor has it completely circumvented audiences' attribution of authority to cultural critics, although the rise of bottom-up cultural critique does contribute to changing established ways of evaluating cultural goods in the direction of a more popular aesthetic discourse (Verboord, 2014).

Changes over time in arts, culture, and entertainment coverage—crisis or triumph?

These broader media institutional and technological changes have led to a discourse of decline or crisis in some parts of the scholarly debates about the development of cultural journalism over time. Comparative studies and single-country studies conducted in recent years have pointed to certain national differences and thus to media systemic contexts being important to arts, culture, and entertainment coverage but they do not generally paint a picture of a crisis in cultural journalism.

The *space and place* of culture in the news coverage, that is, whether the coverage of arts, culture, and entertainment has decreased or increased, constitutes a primary research focus. Comparative studies have reported a growth in European and U.S. newspapers, especially since the mid-twentieth century, both in terms of number and length of cultural articles (e.g., Heikkilä, Lauronen, & Purhonen, 2017; Janssen et al., 2008; Verboord & Janssen, 2015). Studies from the Nordic countries have shown the same patterns (Kristensen & Riegert, 2017). This is linked to the emergence of, and increase in, newspaper supplements, which focus either on culture more broadly or on particular cultural subfields and address a gradually more segmented and omnivorous

(cultural) audience for both publicist and commercial reasons. *Which* cultural subfields are being covered represents a closely related second research focus. Various studies have identified a number of common findings: literature, a classical cultural subfield, has played and continues to play a significant role in cultural journalism; music has been and continues to be a topic of main priority, but there has been a shift from classical to popular genres; new cultural forms have gained access to the cultural news agenda—especially important among these newcomers are film, television, and other media types; and theater is a classical, cultural subarea that has experienced a true marginalization (see, for example, Janssen et al., 2008; Purhonen et al., 2017). A third focus area has been the types of *genres* and critical discourses deployed to cover arts, culture, and entertainment. The review is considered a key genre of cultural journalism and distinct to this type of journalism, so much of the focus has been on the place of reviews in cultural journalism over time. Existing research has suggested that genres known from other types of reporting, such as interviews and analyses, have become more prominent in cultural reporting. While this has challenged the position of the cultural review, it has not led to a dramatic decrease in the number of reviews nor a radical weakening of critical discourses, although they have changed in a more popular direction (e.g., Verboord, 2014). On the contrary, research has shown that critical intellectual discourses in reviews have played a significant role in legitimizing new cultural subareas such as film, popular music, or TV-series as “good culture”; that is, they have played a role in transforming them from entertainment to art (e.g., Kersten & Janssen, 2017; Purhonen et al., 2017).

Research has thus shown that the coverage of arts, culture, and entertainment has increased. It has also revealed that the topical focus has become more diversified and reflects dissolving cultural hierarchies because some established cultural forms remain strong while significant shifts have occurred simultaneously in cultural foci from arts to popular culture. Finally, there is evidence that genre use is also more diversified today, but that the review remains key. These changes exemplify that cultural journalism is itself a cultural product, competing for audiences’ increasingly scattered attention in the globalized, commercialized, and digitalized cultural environment. The changes also exemplify the ways in which cultural journalism mirrors and amplifies the broader sociocultural and media institutional transformations of which it is a part.

Although there is not much support in empirical research for the claims about cultural journalism being in crisis, this research represents three challenges. First, most studies have mainly focused on (elite) newspapers rather than magazines, television, radio, or online news media. Second, the empirical data have often not covered the most recent years, that is, the 2010s, which is a period heavily influenced by the explosion in available information sources and changing patterns of media use. This has

repositioned the place of newspapers in media audiences' daily news mix. Third, all studies have applied particular but often dissimilar notions of the quite elusive concept of culture because the object of study had to be clearly defined. As a consequence, the increasingly blurred boundaries of the topics and types of culture treated under the umbrella term of cultural journalism are harder to capture.

Cultural journalism is a perfect example of how the boundaries between traditional distinctions such as hard news and soft news are dissolving. The very notion of “arts,

culture, and entertainment coverage” points to an extremely broad scale. In addition, cultural journalists address politically and socially engaged issues at the fringes of more traditional conceptions of “art,” “culture,” or “entertainment.” One example is the recent #MeToo and #TimesUp movements which started on social media. They initially focused on the Hollywood movie industry but soon gained broader cultural and political resonance, partly due to the intense coverage and debates in institutionalized cultural news media. Another example is the cartoon controversy from the mid-2000, prompted by the commissioning of cartoons of the prophet Muhammed by the cultural editor of a Danish national newspaper (Eide, Kunelius, & Phillips, 2008). The cartoons, published in the cultural section, stirred immense political controversy worldwide, a controversy that still occasionally resurfaces in international cultural and political debates. These examples illustrate the difficulties in conceptualizing and demarcating cultural journalism, but they also suggest the potentially broader societal significance and, at times, politicized nature of cultural journalism beyond the areas of cultural institutions, industries, and goods.

A different kind of journalism?

Arts, culture, and entertainment coverage is a type of journalism considered different from other types of journalism. Forde (2003) has labeled music journalists “journalists with a difference,” Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) have used the term “arts exceptionalism” about the professional culture among arts journalists, and Hellman and Jaakkola (2012) have argued that the cultural beat is characterized by following an “aesthetic paradigm.” These terms relate to several professional aspects: the training of cultural journalists and their work conditions, the particular journalistic practices of cultural journalists, and the role perceptions of and actual roles played by cultural journalists in society.

In terms of *training*, cultural journalists often have a higher academic degree in a particular cultural subfield rather than a more practical training within journalism. They have a certain cultural or aesthetic expertise that makes them qualified to write about particular topics such as literature, performance arts, or visual culture (e.g., Hovden & Knapskog, 2015). This training background emphasizes particular aesthetic norms and standards rather than traditional news values. Due to this association to the arts world and the humanities, intellectuals, academics, and artists, professionals at the periphery of journalism, have often contributed, and still do, to the coverage of and critical reflection on arts and culture in reviews, essays, and columns (e.g., Kristensen & Riebert, 2017). Relatedly, cultural journalism has a history of being populated by freelancers with non-permanent or part-time contracts, so cultural journalism represents a quite *precarious job market* within the news industry.

In terms of journalistic *practices*, three specific areas make cultural journalists distinctly different from other types of journalists: genre use, subjectivity in reporting, and interplay with sources. Cultural reporting is characterized by two main genres: previews and reviews, which are unique to cultural journalism. While previews provide information and guidance for the cultural consumer by preannouncing cultural

events and offerings, reviews facilitate critical reflection about arts, culture, and related sociocultural issues in public debate. Other types of critical and commentary genres, such as essays, features, and commentaries, are also common in cultural journalism. Such genres reflect the journalists' personal voice or signature and link cultural journalism to broader culture critical traditions beyond the

institutional framework of the news media. In this respect, cultural journalists adhere less stringently to traditional news genres and the norm of objectivity in journalism. This is related to subjectivity being a distinct feature in cultural journalists' professional work as cultural expertise, personal motivations, and subjective views or critical reflections influence which stories and phenomena are covered and how. As a result, cultural journalists and critics often have more freedom to choose which topics and issues to cover and debate compared to other types of journalists (Hovden & Knapskog, 2015; Hovden & Kristensen, 2018). Personal approaches also characterize cultural journalists' interplay with sources. Because cultural journalists often serve as mediators between cultural producers and cultural audiences, networking or mingling with sources from the arts world and the cultural industries is an important part of their work. Other journalists also engage in networking with sources, but cultural journalists often move in the same circles as their sources and share their passion for arts and culture. One example is that churnalism is particularly prominent in arts, culture, and entertainment coverage, partly because of the cultural industries' professionalized and institutionalized push for publicity, but also because cultural journalists are closely connected to, or are part of, the cultural elite (Kristensen, 2017).

These professional practices suggest that cultural journalists *serve society* in different ways than their peers within, for example, political or news journalism. While most (Western) journalists monitor elites, set agendas, and inform citizens' political decision-making, cultural journalists perform a marketing and/or publicist role, whether intentionally or not, by promoting (selected) cultural offerings. However, research has also shown that, compared to other journalists, cultural journalists stress the importance of educating audiences, telling stories, and promoting tolerance (Hovden & Kristensen, 2018). This confirms the beat's broader societal significance and suggests that serving the public good is an important characteristic of this type of journalism. Thus, the cultural intermediary role of cultural journalists has both publicist and commercial dimensions.

While these are not novel features of cultural journalism, it is precisely these characteristics that distance cultural journalists from some of the key values of (Western) journalism, namely objectivity and autonomy. Cultural journalism has therefore often been viewed as a less legitimate kind of journalism and cultural journalists have frequently had to justify their practices to their peers (e.g., Harries & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007; Hovden & Knapskog, 2015). More recently, scholars have in fact argued that arts, culture, and entertainment reporting is undergoing a "newsification" or "journalistification" (Jaakkola, 2015). These terms suggest that cultural journalists are becoming more like other types of journalists. An increasing number of cultural journalists are being trained as all-round journalists, that is, trained to prioritize news genres and more objective reporting rather than aesthetic norms and values. Some would argue that cultural journalists therefore today have a hybrid professional nature.

Future directions in research on arts, culture, and entertainment coverage

Due to the various terms applied to the coverage of arts, culture, and entertainment in research and in newsrooms, a *primary* future focus of attention is the *use of terminology* and clear demarcations of cultural journalism as an area of research. Such terminological debates may of course be endless, especially due to the elusiveness of the concept of culture itself. In principle, any issue can become a cultural story or be viewed through "a cultural filter." Nonetheless such terminological debates are important, not least because of the often-blurred boundaries between cultural journalism and neighboring topics such as lifestyle, celebrity culture, or politicized issues. These wide-ranging and porous boundaries provide great research potential for cultural journalism scholars but also a risk of fragmentation, which necessitates some sort of common theoretical and conceptual grounds.

A *second* important future focus area is *comparative* cultural journalism research, both within and beyond the Western context. For now, most attention has been devoted to cultural journalism in particular national contexts, such as Brazil, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, the United States, South Africa, and Sweden. The few existing comparative studies (Janssen et al., 2008; Purhonen et al., 2017)

emphasize similarities and differences in arts, culture, and entertainment coverage across nations but indicate that special attention should be paid to national differences in future research. Culture is closely related to national identity, so cultural journalism may be prioritized differently depending on the funding models of the respective media systems for culture, news, and journalism (see also Kristensen & Riegert, 2017; Verboord & Janssen, 2015). Most studies have generally applied a Western perspective with the exception of a study focusing on the social and professional characteristics, perceived influences in daily work, and role perceptions of cultural journalists across 67 countries (Hovden & Kristensen, 2018). This study found that, despite national differences, cultural journalists around the globe share characteristics that make them distinctly different from other types of journalists. Further comparative research could shed more light on such distinctive features and their national variances.

A *third* future research perspective is a *cross-media perspective*. For now, most research has focused on cultural content in (mainly printed) newspapers, but studies of public service institutions' attention to arts, culture, and entertainment are slowly emerging (see, for example, Kristensen & Riegert, 2017). Cultural critique and reviewing on digital media platforms have also been examined to some extent (e.g., Verboord, 2014). Future studies should take the myriad of platforms characterizing the current media landscape into account, not only in single-platform studies but also in studies that compare the coverage of arts, culture, and entertainment across platforms.

SEE ALSO: Celebrity Coverage; Churnalism; Criticism and Reviews; Hard and Soft News; Journalism Studies; Lifestyle Coverage

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