

Mediating orientation and self-expression in the world of consumption: Australian and German lifestyle journalists' professional views

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Abstract

Despite having experienced rapid popularity over the past two decades, lifestyle journalism is still somewhat neglected by academic researchers. So far mostly explored as either part of wider lifestyle programming, particularly on television, or in terms of individual sub-fields, such as travel, fashion or food journalism, lifestyle journalism is in need of scholarly analysis particularly in the area of production, based on the increasing importance which the field has in influencing audiences' ways of life. This study explores the professional views of 89 Australian and German lifestyle journalists through in-depth interviews in order to explore the ways in which they engage in processes of influencing audiences' self-expression, identities and consumption behaviors. The article argues that through its work, lifestyle journalism is a significant shaper of identities in today's consumer societies.

Keywords

consumer, identity, lifestyle journalism, professional views, self-expression, service journalism, soft news

Motivated by the rapid development of lifestyle journalism in the past two decades, journalism and communication scholars have begun to pay increased attention to what

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appears to be becoming a global phenomenon. The rise of a consumption culture is regularly seen as the trigger for the phenomenal growth of lifestyle media in western societies since the 1980s (Bell and Hollows, 2005). Yet, its history can be traced back much further, first to the arrival of magazines which began to cater to rising consumerism and the emerging concept of lifestyle during the 1800s (Bell and Hollows, 2006). Much later, a second growth period began in the 1950s and 1960s, when technological innovations enabled newspapers to increase in size, allowing for more advertising as well as content, in particular soft forms of journalism, to be published (Cole, 2005: 33).

One of the most significant transformations of the media industries has been a remarkable shift from a media focus on public affairs to a focus on the private domain. Championing the values of consumerism, the media increasingly focus on everyday-life issues and individual needs (Brunsdon et al., 2001; Taylor, 2002). Audiences are addressed less in their role as public citizens concerned with the social and political issues of the day but rather in their role as clients and consumers whose personal fears, aspirations, attitudes, and emotional experiences become the center of attention (Campbell, 2004). The media increasingly provide help, advice, guidance, and information about the management of self and everyday life through consumer news and 'news-you-can-use' items (Eide and Knight, 1999; Underwood, 2001).

Entire television channels are now focusing on lifestyle content in a number of countries. In the US, the Discovery Channel airs a variety of programs and networks on health, cooking, and travel. On Australian pay-TV, audiences can also view the Lifestyle Channel in four incarnations: Lifestyle, Lifestyle Home, Lifestyle Food and Lifestyle You. In the UK, the BBC introduced lifestyle programming as early as the 1990s (Brunsdon, 2003), and similar trends towards specialized, consumer-oriented lifestyle programming can be observed throughout Asia (Lewis et al., 2012; Xu, 2007). Lifestyle content is also ubiquitous in the print media, with most newspapers running regular sections on issues such as travel, music, motoring, food, and health. Even the news agency Reuters has established a wire service devoted to lifestyle content (Brook, 2006).

Yet, the rapid growth in lifestyle journalism has thus far not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in academic enquiry into its practices. While the field has been a site of analysis for cultural studies scholars concerned with broader lifestyle television (Bell and Hollows, 2005; Brunsdon, 2003; Lewis, 2008; Lewis and Martin, 2010; Lewis et al., 2012), production aspects of specifically lifestyle *journalism* have remained under-explored (Hanusch, 2012a). This article therefore examines lifestyle journalists' views of their profession through in-depth interviews with 89 lifestyle journalists in Australia and Germany. Using the interviews, we investigate the ways in which lifestyle journalists define their field, how they perceive of their roles and how they view themselves in contrast to mainstream news journalists.

Modernization, need for orientation, and the rise of lifestyles

Defining lifestyle journalism can be a challenging task. 'Lifestyle' itself remains a rather contested term as it is applied to a variety of contexts. Common sense tends to associate 'lifestyle' with a number of practices that signify a rather glamorous way of life. For this

reason, marketing research has a specific interest in lifestyles, here defined as the ‘patterns in which people live and spend their time and money’ (Gunter and Furnham, 1992: 70). Indeed, in a highly commercialized world, lifestyles are inextricably tied to consumption, and individuals’ ways of life ultimately depend on their access to economic resources (Vyncke, 2002).

In sociology and cultural studies, lifestyle as an analytical concept is commonly related to a number of values and practices in the context of culture that is more holistically understood in Raymond Williams’ (1958: 18) and Edward T. Hall’s (1959: 31) terms as ‘way of life’ – what German sociologists would identify as *Lebensstil*. In this understanding, lifestyles are ‘patterns of action that differentiate people’ (Chaney, 1996: 4), no matter how glamorous or unsophisticated they are. In this reading, lifestyles have what we suggest calling a formative, reflexive and articulative dimension:

- The formative dimension refers to the idea that lifestyles provide orientation for the management of self and everyday life, hence they guide people’s behavior across various domains of life. As such, lifestyles also generate a sense of identification (with similar people) and distinction (from ‘others’).
- The reflexive dimension speaks to the performative aspects of lifestyles that engender a great deal of consistency in individuals’ behaviors. Taylor (2002: 481) argues that lifestyles are ‘performed improvisations in which authenticity is an entity which one can manufacture’.
- The articulative dimension finally relates to the expressive component of lifestyles. In this context, lifestyles can be seen as a form through which identity is articulated. Our lifestyle therefore is an expression and articulation of ‘who we are’.

The growing importance of lifestyle, as well as its corresponding media content, is closely related to ongoing processes of social change. Modernization creates a growing need for orientation in increasingly multi-optional societies. The current rise of lifestyle can be related to at least three interrelated major social developments: individualization, value change, as well as mediatization of everyday life.

Individualization marks one of the most fundamental transformations of modern society. Beck (1992: 128) relates processes of modernization to three dimensions of individualization: disembedding, or a ‘removal from historically prescribed social forms and commitments’; disenchantment, or the ‘loss of traditional security with respect to practical knowledge, faith and guiding norms’; and reintegration, or a ‘new type of social commitment’ that supersedes traditional social forms. Traditional social institutions continue to lose grip on people’s lives and cease to provide collective normative orientation. As a result, the individual needs to be selective in managing the self and everyday life. People are not only confronted with an increased plurality of options, they also have more flexibility in choosing between them. In this context, individualization has important consequences for the articulation of identity. Individuals are no longer ‘born into’ their identities, as Bauman (2000: 31–2) argues. Identity is transformed ‘from a “given” into a *task* and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences’ (emphasis added). Identity work in modern societies is not necessarily predetermined by social origin and social background, but is increasingly an individual exercise.

Social value change is the second major process that contributes to the rise of lifestyle coverage in the news. Several studies point to a remarkable shift in general social orientations from survival values to self-expression values (Inglehart, 1997). Inglehart and Welzel (2005) also postulate an ongoing emancipative value change that goes along with an emphasis on freedom of choice and equality of opportunities, priorities for lifestyle liberty, gender equality, and personal autonomy. These developments characterize post-industrial societies in which economic resources for survival are generally secured. Not surprisingly, self-expression values are more pronounced in wealthier societies (Inglehart, 2000). Furthermore, an increase in wealth and prosperity usually leads to more options and flexibility to shape one's lifestyle. Since lifestyles carry an expressive component, they can therefore be understood as the expression – or even exhibition – of one's self along with one's individual 'way of life'. In this regard, lifestyles are almost inextricably related to consumption, as the visible attributes that signify a specific lifestyle are usually purchasable products (clothing, gadgets, cars, accessories, etc.) and patterns of leisure-time activities (Chaney, 2001; Taylor, 2002).

Mediatization is the third major factor contributing to the growing importance of lifestyle. As a phenomenon it is understood as the increasingly pervasive relevance of the media and media logic for social processes of any kind (Krotz, 2008). Hjarvard (2008b: 113) defines mediatization as 'the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic'. A similar conceptualization is advanced in political communication scholarship (e.g. Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). There was a time, argues Hjarvard (2008a: 13), when social institutions like family, school and church were the most important providers of information, tradition and moral orientation for individuals:

Today, these institutions have lost some of their former authority, and the media have to some extent taken over their role as providers of information and moral orientation, at the same time as the media have become society's most important storyteller about society itself.

As the power of traditional authorities is progressively colonized by the media logic, the media can no longer be thought of as separate from other social institutions, or even from personal experience and everyday life. People do not live, any longer, *with* the media – but increasingly *in* the media (Deuze, 2012). In mediatized societies, identity work and the expression of lifestyles are therefore almost unthinkable without the media. Not only do the media shape people's lifestyles through news coverage, advertising and other kinds of content, they also provide a platform to express one's personal lifestyle through means of social media.

Defining lifestyle journalism

As these societal shifts have taken place, journalism has also undergone a remarkable shift in content – from a focus on public affairs to an emphasis on lifestyles and the private domain. The news media increasingly expand into lifestyle and service, and journalists are more than ever expected to provide help, advice, guidance, and information about the management of self and everyday life through consumer news and

'news-you-can-use' items (Eide and Knight, 1999; Underwood, 2001). As these fields of coverage gained ground in newsrooms across virtually all kinds of media, lifestyle news has emancipated itself from the doghouse of journalism into an audience-generating, professionally viable, and economically profitable practice.

Despite its presence and growing importance in public consciousness, lifestyle journalism is still difficult to define, and for some even a contradiction in terms. Hanusch (2012a) notes the term is applied in a variety of contexts but often taken for granted and not elaborated on in detail. He identifies two main aspects of lifestyle journalism: a strong market orientation, and a dominance of 'news-you-can use', or service items. He defines lifestyle journalism as 'a distinct journalistic field that primarily addresses its audiences as consumers, providing them with factual information and advice, often in entertaining ways, about goods and services they can use in their daily lives' (Hanusch, 2012a: 2). In a similar way, Fürsich (2012) finds three dimensions as constituting the field: providing advice, a review function, and commercialization. Such definitions tend to rely at least in part on Eide and Knight's (1999) understanding of service journalism as providing information, advice, and help to audiences.

We argue that any definition of lifestyle journalism should have at least three basic ingredients: self-expression, the signification of identity, as well as consumption and everyday life. For the purpose of this article, lifestyle journalism therefore refers to *the journalistic coverage of the expressive values and practices that help create and signify a specific identity within the realm of consumption and everyday life*. Lifestyle journalism primarily addresses individual members of the audience in their capacities as consumers, instead of citizens. It focuses mainly on the private domain and less on the public sphere, and its content deals with subjects usually classified as 'soft news', including fashion and beauty; living, gardening and decorating; cookery, food and cuisine; travel and leisure; health, fitness and wellness; music, arts and entertainment; children, parenting and partnership; career; as well as human interest in general (Brunsdon et al., 2001).

Studying lifestyle journalism

As noted previously, a number of cultural studies scholars have analyzed the increasing amount and relevance of lifestyle content and its role in affecting issues of identity and taste in post-industrial consumer cultures (see, for example, Bell and Hollows, 2005; Brunsdon, 2003; Lewis, 2008; Lewis et al., 2012). However, the focus has been mainly on 'factual entertainment' (Brunsdon et al., 2001) genres, rather than specifically journalistic products, even if the boundaries are sometimes difficult to draw. Typical objects of analysis for studies of factual entertainment have been home and personal make-over programs, such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, celebrity cooking shows, and others. The extant work in this field has been highly useful in outlining the role these lifestyle formats play in shaping identities, promoting certain lifestyles, and giving consumer advice, much of which, as we will see, can be applied to lifestyle journalism as well. However, journalistic formats which produce lifestyle content have been analyzed comparatively less often, and even more rarely from a journalism studies perspective (Hanusch, 2012a). Kristensen and From's (2012) study of Danish newspapers demonstrates that cultural, consumer and lifestyle journalism are becoming increasingly

inseparable, and they see mediatization responsible as responsible for this process. But most studies have not engaged with the broader phenomenon of lifestyle journalism and instead focused on individual areas of the field, with travel, fashion and food particularly prominent.

Travel journalism has received attention, especially since the beginning of the millennium, with Fürsich and Kavoori's (2001) work responsible for spawning a number of studies. The commercial imperatives in a consumer culture are apparent in this field, with travel journalism being 'more about reporting on travel for entertainment and information purposes ... it rarely includes investigative aspects' (Hanusch, 2010: 71). Many studies have found that travel journalism often stereotypes destinations (Cocking, 2009; Santos, 2004) and tends to focus on the presenter rather than the host culture (Dunn, 2005; Hanefors and Mossberg, 2002). More recently, a study of travel journalists found that consumer-driven roles were considered the most important, although there was also some support for being mediators between cultures, and, to a smaller extent, taking a critical view of travel (Hanusch, 2012b). McGaurr's (2010, 2012) studies of international travel journalists who reported on the Australian island state of Tasmania similarly found that they can indeed take a critical stance in their reporting.

Fashion journalism is another area operating with a clear focus on consumption. Rocamora (2012) points to two main strands of academic inquiry into fashion journalists. The first strand has been concerned with fashion writing and images, while a second strand deals with fashion journalism as a genre. Production studies have been relatively rare, with a few exceptions (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006; McRobbie, 1998). In food journalism, James (1997) notes how early cookery columns in British newspapers were overtaken by a more serious style in the 1960s and 1970s, which has evolved into specialist programs in the modern day. Brown (2004) found that, increasingly, top journalists are assigned to the food beats at US newspapers. Work in this field has also been concerned with issues of identity. Johnston and Baumann (2007) examined food writing's role in social status formation, while James (1997) and Appadurai (1998) were interested in its influence on identity formation. Most recently, Duffy and Yang's (2012) examination of food writing in Singapore has shown how it is used to help shape that country's identity.

From the review of the literature, it is apparent that the producers of lifestyle journalism have been under-researched. This is particularly so when we want to examine the field at large, rather than sub-fields such as travel or fashion. Thus, there is a clear need for studies to examine lifestyle journalists as a group, their understanding and views of their profession, as well as the way in which they differentiate themselves from other journalists. Based on this literature review, we frame our research question as follows: how do lifestyle journalists conceive of their role, and how does this role distinguish them from mainstream news journalism?

Methodology

We conducted in-depth interviews with 89 lifestyle journalists, of which 25 were conducted with Australian, and 64 with German respondents. Australia and Germany were chosen because both are similar in that they represent western consumer societies but

also contain somewhat different journalistic cultures, with Australia following an Anglo-American model, while Germany has had a differing journalistic tradition (Esser, 1998). German journalists tend to embrace the professional roles of the detached observer, watchdog of government, and provider of political information more strongly, while Australian journalists pay more attention to analysis in the news, and are more relativist in terms of their ethical values (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). Furthermore, there are minor differences between the German and Australian media systems, with a notably higher concentration of media ownership in Australia, along with Sunday newspapers and community broadcasting having a stronger presence in the country's mediascape. Germany, on the other hand, is slightly more characterized by the greater relevance of national broadsheets and public service broadcasting to public discourse.

That being said, the three processes that contribute to the rise of lifestyles and lifestyle journalism – individualization, value change and mediatization – play out in quite similar ways in the two countries. At the same time, as Lewis and Martin (2010: 333) have pointed out, ‘the “lifestyle” element in lifestyle media and culture needs not only to be understood in relation to global shifts in identity around consumer culture and late modernity but also to be articulated to specific geocultural contexts’.

We chose interviewees for this study from the following fields: Travel; Fashion/Beauty; Health/Wellness/Fitness; Food/Cuisine/Cooking; Living/Gardening; Parenting/Family; People/Celebrity; and Personal Technology. Semi-structured interviews were conducted either over the phone or in person by extensively trained research assistants between March and September 2011. Based on an overview of the field in each country, we identified the leading media organizations where lifestyle journalism was conducted in each country, representing major newspapers, magazines, radio programs, TV channels, and internet sites. In doing so, we paid particular attention to national contexts. In Australia, much lifestyle journalism occurs in newspaper supplements and magazines, while in Germany it is concentrated to a larger degree in magazines, with television also slightly more visible as a site of production. As a result, the Australian sample included 13 journalists who worked mainly for magazines, 7 working for newspapers, 3 for online, 1 for radio and 1 for television. The German sample component consisted of 46 respondents from magazines, 7 from newspapers, 3 from television, 1 from radio and 7 from internet sites. It should be noted, however, that a number of the interviewed journalists, particularly those working for newspapers but also magazines, as well as freelancers, often worked across platforms, producing some of their material for their publications' websites.

The majority of respondents were in full-time employment, but to take account of the relatively large component of freelancers in lifestyle journalism (Hanusch, 2012a), we deliberately selected a number of freelancers (five in Australia and nine in Germany). Full-time respondents included a variety of positions in the editorial hierarchy, such as magazine editors, deputy editors, section editors, reporters, columnists and trainee journalists. In terms of gender, we aimed to have a reasonably even representation, as evidence from the field of travel journalism suggests women are in a slight majority. Hence, 16 of the 25 Australian respondents and 34 of the 64 German respondents were female, which equates to women making up 56.2 per cent of the total sample. The average age of the participants in each country was around 40 years. The

youngest interviewed journalist came from Australia and was a 22-year-old editor at a magazine, while the oldest – a 77-year-old freelancer – also came from Australia. The majority of respondents were in their 30s or 40s, however, with two-thirds falling into these age brackets. Of Australian respondents, 17 of 25 had completed a university degree, two of those at Masters level and one who held a PhD. Among German respondents, 53 had completed university, two at PhD level. Only around half of university-educated respondents in each country had actually studied journalism or a communication-related degree. This is in line with evidence from studies of journalists in general (Weaver and Willnat, 2012).

Results

Journalistic backgrounds

The most common pathway into lifestyle journalism is through a completed university degree, not necessarily in journalism, and a subsequent cadetship in a mainstream news organization. Following some time as generalist journalists, quite often working in typical hard news beats such as politics, business, local news, but also in sport, respondents in both Australia and Germany often ‘fell into’ lifestyle journalism, rather than pursuing work in the field early on. For example, an Australian beauty journalist working at a magazine said she had not thought of getting into this field until she did an internship at a fashion magazine while at university. Similarly, a German newspaper travel editor said she originally wanted to write stories for a newspaper’s page three – a page which typically consists of in-depth news features – before she did an internship for the travel pages. ‘I originally wanted to get into real journalism, and got into travel journalism by accident. There I realized that you can write stories that are just as great as on page three – but they are less bloody.’ Such statements from lifestyle journalists are in line with evidence as regards Australian travel journalists (Hanusch, 2012b).

On the other hand, a smaller yet still sizable group has pursued lifestyle journalism or specialized in one of its areas from the start. For example, an Australian gardening journalist had studied horticulture, and in Germany the increasing differentiation of journalistic education into specialized fields has had the effect that five German fashion or men’s magazine journalists have studied at the Academy of Fashion and Design, which offers a course in fashion journalism. One of these graduates, a German fashion journalist working for an internet site said she had ‘only had to do with fashion so far. I also only write for fashion, I’m not interested in anything else.’ We can see that the field is marked by a perhaps accelerating process of differentiation from mainstream news journalism through the establishment of specialized pathways into the occupation.

The interviewed lifestyle journalists from both countries exhibited high job satisfaction, perhaps higher than among generalist journalists, because the vast majority feel they have turned their hobby into a job. For example, an Australian gardening journalist said: ‘I tell everyone I’m the luckiest man alive. What I do for work, they’re doing for pleasure.’ In Germany, a television food journalist said he also regarded his job as a hobby. ‘That is the nice thing: the genre is of use in my private life as well. I enjoy cooking and eating, so my hobby is of use professionally as well as privately.’ Nevertheless,

for many the love of journalism or a desire to be a professional writer was the more important motive for entering the field. The editor of an Australian health magazine said:

Media has always been a career. The job I was in at the time was awful. This job came up, a better company to work for, a better magazine to work at, it just happened that my private interests helped me to get the job.

Typical journalistic skills are also extremely important for lifestyle journalists, who emphasize that journalistic ethics and basic skills of the craft are just as relevant in their field. The respondents do identify quite strongly with their role as journalists, an aspect that can also be traced back to the fact a large number of them have worked in other areas of journalism previously.

Professional views

Lifestyle journalists exhibit a number of professional views which can be regarded as constituting a specific lifestyle journalism culture, and which distinguish them from their colleagues in other fields. These relate to providing entertainment and relaxation; service, advice and news-you-can-use; orientation in daily life; inspiration and a positive attitude towards life; and exemplars of desired lifestyle. As the following discussion demonstrates, these views fit well into the theoretical discussion and dimensions of lifestyle journalism posited earlier, in that they relate to issues of self-expression, the signification of identity, and consumption behaviors.

The provision of *entertainment and relaxation* is clearly the most frequently cited role perception of lifestyle journalists in both countries. The vast majority of respondents believed it was crucial to provide their audiences with entertaining stories that let them relax. An Australian freelance travel journalist, for example, said:

Journalists are supposed to inform and entertain. Entertaining is the biggest thing for me, I try to write in a light and funny way, and hopefully make people laugh. Travel is a pretty relaxed, fun thing, so most of the stories should be that way too.

Similarly, a German parenting journalist said it was important to her ‘that my stories are easy to read. I like to write ironical comments, in order to create mutual laughter. This also provides relief for the readership, because you can laugh together about parents’ mistakes.’ A German travel journalist wanted to ‘primarily tell enthralling stories. Whether my readers end up traveling there doesn’t really concern me.’ And the editor of a health magazine asked:

Who wants to read dry, boring things? You can present information with a bit of humor, lightness, cheekiness, even, then it’s sweeter medicine, pardon the really bad pun. No one wants to be lectured at. It’s nice to take an entertaining tack without losing information, dumbing information down, or losing the message.

There are different types of entertainment, however, such as the ‘intelligent entertainment’ a German men’s magazine journalist described:

We often and in every issue provide feature stories that show real life. Be it a great feature on Iraq, where one of our reporters went to Iraq, or be it other difficult stories.... We afford ourselves that luxury and also believe that such stories are, in the greater mix, just as entertaining as the light or easy, bite-sized stories. I think a lifestyle magazine which bores people won't be bought a second time. Hence you cannot bore and therefore you should be entertaining automatically.

An Australian newspaper fashion editor agreed, saying it was important to provide 'light and shade that the media needs' and that 'people are quick to poo-poo celebrity stories but they are often the ones that are clicked on the most'.

An Australian living magazine editor also pointed out that entertainment did not necessarily mean just making people laugh, but the aim was to 'captivate audiences': 'If you're reading through a sticky date pudding recipe and following it through in the magazine, you're being entertained, interested in the mode of doing it, and how you actually get it sticky.' Yet again others attempt to create more of an idyllic world for their audiences where they can relax, with a German parenting magazine journalist saying they avoided talking about problems: 'Cancer, death, divorce, adoption – none of this exists here. We see the world through rose-colored glasses. Those who buy us want to see how great family is, how you come to grips with small problems.'

The second most common aspect of lifestyle journalists' professional views relates to their role as providing a *service*, *advice* and *news-you-can-use* for their audiences. While many journalists see it as equally important to provide entertainment, some believe that advice is their most important role. Said a German living and gardening television journalist: 'Eighty per cent of what we do is provide advice. People want to be taken by the hand.' He told of an incident when his program had aired a four-minute segment on cutting trees properly, an important issue for many gardeners that autumn. At the end of the segment, the program mentioned a self-published pamphlet on the topic, which the following day became a number one bestseller on Amazon. An Australian men's health magazine journalist said his magazine was 'basically a self-help magazine for men and it consists almost entirely of advice and tips, so informing is pretty much what we do.'

An Australian freelance technology journalist also subscribed to a role of adviser and especially the necessity to provide consumer advice when he said his job was helping people make informed decisions about technology:

There's nothing worse than buying a gadget that's a piece of junk because you just read the side of the box and believed what was on the box. The box will tell you what it can do, but it will never tell you what it can't do. That's kind of my job, to explain to people.

Similarly, a German personal technology journalist said lifestyle journalism cut short the search process for people. 'When they read one of my articles in which I have tested something, they don't have to test it any more.' This function is also important for some travel journalists, who focus on providing practical advice to their audiences.

In terms of the relative emphasis that is placed on providing advice, some platform-specific differences are apparent in this comment by an Australian health magazine journalist, who said there was a difference between the publication's print and online content:

Through the magazine, I would say the majority is about providing advice. Through the website and social media, it's less about advice, more about creating community and getting feedback. Magazine is definitely a one-way path, that's where the advice comes in. Websites are less advice, more communication.

Similarly, an Australian freelance travel journalist said it was now perhaps less important for lifestyle journalists to provide advice 'because there is more information out there that people can get themselves, with the internet'. The nature of the internet is thus also an influence on the work of lifestyle journalists, who constantly try to provide added value to their product.

Related to giving advice, the provision of a more general *orientation for daily life* is seen as another important component of lifestyle journalism. This also relates to the notion of self-expression discussed earlier, in that it provides basic ideas and content to allow audiences to use them as orientation for their own life. An Australian beauty editor at a magazine said she wanted to get the best product across to a reader, but also give them orientation in a general sense, such as by educating them on health and skin issues, Botox and surgery. A German youth magazine journalist said it was crucial to provide young readers with orientation without being patronizing.

Children obviously need more instruction than those in puberty. But, for example, with personal beauty tips, it's not enough to just present the products, otherwise the teenagers look like a box of water colors if they try it all out. Here it's important to provide orientation and explain where to get products and how much they cost.

At the same time, a German men's magazine journalist was at pains to point out that the advice and orientation his magazine offered did not extend to specific life counseling.

An additional role perception related to issues of self-expression is that lifestyle journalists aim to offer *inspiration* and *a positive attitude towards life*. Many also want to provide their audiences with new trends in the consumer culture. An Australian newspaper travel journalist simply said: 'You're writing a travel story to inspire people.' A colleague working for an Australian living and gardening magazine gave similarly high priority to this aspect, saying his job was to 'give people ideas and inspiration and information'. The goal is to provide something new for audiences, something which they may not have thought of previously. A German television travel journalist, for example, said he wanted to inspire viewers by providing them with novel ideas on how to spend their leisure time.

In doing so, lifestyle journalists want to communicate a positive attitude towards life in general. For example, the editor of an Australian fashion magazine said she provided a positive service. 'I'm helping them to get dressed in the morning and get inspired each season to buy a new wardrobe.' And the editor of a German living and gardening magazine said in a world full of bad news, people needed to have a place for dreams where they could feel happy.

I believe that no one can live well if he or she always deals with problems and difficulties. I think that now and then, one has to retreat and revel in harmony, however briefly, as real life is

calling us back fairly quickly. What we do here is a small facet; we simply offer a retreat from strain – just like going to the sauna.

A further aspect of lifestyle journalism identified earlier is the signification of identity, which has been explored at some depth in studies of lifestyle programming more broadly (Bell and Hollows, 2005; Brunson, 2003; Lewis, 2008). Lifestyle journalists in both Australia and Germany acknowledge that through their reporting they provide *exemplars of desired lifestyles* by showing people or consumer items which they believe their audiences aspire to. A German celebrity magazine journalist said when a woman bought the magazine she would feel entertained and perhaps realize that celebrities are just humans with their own problems. 'We offer examples, stars who can be worshipped. The voyeuristic streak is also served. Readers may even be nurtured.' An Australian beauty editor of a magazine agreed: 'It seems quite fluffy and glamorous on the surface, but when you get down to it, beauty is essentially image, and image plays an incredible part in society.' Studies of the effects on the identity formation processes in audiences have pointed out the significant influence such content can have, particularly on young people (May, 2009).

Some respondents, particularly those in the health area, also aim to help audiences change their lifestyle in a more basic way. An Australian health magazine journalist, for example, said his publication had written stories that helped readers who suffered from depression or who were overweight. This can also contain criticism of other consumer items, as an Australian health journalist working at a newspaper pointed out:

Given the way the whole obesity epidemic is going, I think it's really important for all journalists who are writing in this section to be quite practical in the advice they give because you are fighting against marketing companies that are selling foods that have got heaps of sugar and salt, but they are calling them low fat. People think they are doing the wrong thing when in fact they are not.

Having examined the respondents' views of their role, it is important to study their perceptions concerning their mainstream news counterparts in order to better understand the way they view their role within the journalistic field.

Perceptions vis-à-vis mainstream news journalists

Most lifestyle journalists differentiate themselves consciously and quite markedly from their mainstream news colleagues, acknowledging that they work in a distinctly different journalistic field. An Australian fashion editor at a newspaper, for example, pointed out that she could be on a 'completely different planet' to her news colleagues.

There's an interesting division between the news reporting side of the paper and the features side. I think the news reporting people think what we do is quite trivial and fluffy. In the features side we probably wouldn't be paid to go and do what they do. So [there are] two quite different camps. And they really don't understand fashion. There's a really specific skill-set that you need here, which is the same for any other section of the paper.

The latter part of this statement again supports the earlier argument that lifestyle journalism is increasingly becoming a field that requires a specific skill-set, and as a result an even more distinct journalistic field.

While the vast majority of respondents embraced and relished their work, a small minority also offered a more skeptical appraisal, preferring not to be seen as lifestyle journalists but rather as classical journalists who work in a lifestyle area. Some of this is because of the bad reputation lifestyle journalism has among mainstream news journalists, as a German travel journalist noted:

I still see travel journalism as just normal journalism, just with a specialized topic, like sport or business journalism. And whoever sees this differently, doesn't really do journalism anymore. Travel journalism that sees itself primarily as a kind of promotion for certain destinations is not journalism, but advertising.

The vast majority of respondents were quite adamant in identifying themselves as part of the journalistic field, rather than being captive to marketing efforts, a trend which is also in line with findings on Australian travel journalists (Hanusch, 2012b). Many lifestyle journalists interviewed for this study pointed out that at the heart of their work were still journalistic core skills and values, even if colleagues in other parts of the media often looked down on them. The food editor at an Australian newspaper said colleagues were often condescending. 'They just think we are down here having a good time and there's not much going on. They just think it's lots of long lunches and fun.' A German travel journalist agreed, saying some colleagues thought anyone could do her job, and that all she did was go on holidays. Music journalists said they had a reputation as 'yuppies' or 'professional teenagers', and personal technology journalists in both countries reported being regarded as nerds. An Australian freelance technology journalist said: 'I think mainstream media think we're just some nerdy, fringe freaks complaining about wanting faster internet access for watching porn. That's not what it's about.'

At the same time, a smaller number of respondents said they were respected and even admired by their colleagues in the news departments. For example, an Australian newspaper health journalist said he was considered the office's resident physiotherapist and consulted on colleagues' injuries or asked questions about personal training. An Australian newspaper food journalist said that, over the years, respect for his area had grown considerably, particularly as editors had found that food sections could generate reasonable amounts of advertising. Even envy was one of the reported reactions, especially by travel journalists. One Australian freelance travel journalist said, jokingly: 'There's a line of 150 people with knives out. When I'm going away I get all my stories done in advance, because once you give your gig away you never get it back.' While only a minority of journalists reported they were envied or admired by their mainstream news colleagues, there was a noticeable feeling among the respondents that lifestyle journalism was slowly gaining respect within the journalistic field. Considering that lifestyle journalism appears to be quite successful – a number of respondents said their sub-fields, such as personal technology and health were increasing their audiences and advertising revenue – at the same time as news journalism is struggling, there may well be financial reasons behind this trend.

Discussion

Lifestyle journalism has increasing social relevance in a journalistic field faced with unprecedented technological and financial challenges. As audiences for mainstream news appear to be dwindling, lifestyle content has opened up new audiences, a development that some see as beneficial because it has the potential to popularize knowledge (Hartley, 2000). Yet, while lifestyle shows on television have been studied in some detail, there have been precious few analyses of specifically lifestyle journalism. In response to the dearth of studies into aspects of the production of lifestyle journalism, this study has conducted an in-depth analysis of how lifestyle journalists make sense of their work, specifically in terms of their professional views and the ways in which they differentiate themselves from mainstream news journalists.

Partly based on existing analyses of lifestyle programming more generally, we argued that lifestyle journalism can be defined – and in fact distinguished from mainstream news journalism – as the journalistic coverage of the expressive values and practices that help create and signify a specific identity within the realm of consumption and everyday life. In our in-depth interviews with 89 lifestyle journalists from Australia and Germany we found a variety of specific role perceptions, which include providing entertainment and relaxation; service, advice and news-you-can-use; orientation in daily life; inspiration and a positive attitude towards life; and exemplars of desired lifestyle. As our analysis shows, these can be traced back to ongoing transformations of modern society. Lifestyle journalists address their audiences as consumers, offering them practical and specific advice, as well as general orientation that is aimed at their lifestyles. In doing so, they offer exemplars of lifestyles. All areas of lifestyle journalism, by providing new ideas and inspiration about various consumer items that help in living a certain type of life, thus engage in affecting the formation of identities in their audiences.

The journalists' responses also indicate that the five dimensions of role perceptions that are specifically relevant to lifestyle journalists vary in their relative importance and are often interconnected or coexist in the German and Australian newsrooms we studied. Figure 1 illustrates the way the five role dimensions relate to, and overlap with, one another. Entertainment and service may thus be conceived as two primary and largely independent dimensions. The secondary role of providing inspiration and a positive attitude towards life overlaps with the two primary dimensions; orientation intersects with service, and the providing of a desired lifestyle overlaps with both entertainment and orientation.

While lifestyle journalists see themselves as providing a distinctly different product to their mainstream news counterparts, they also see themselves firmly as journalists, who are committed to some of the basic tenets of journalism. This is what distinguishes lifestyle journalism from broader lifestyle programming. Its practitioners are typically journalistically trained and have a background in news journalism, even though there appears to be a trend toward specialized training. Nevertheless, as their role perceptions show, while there is a similar core foundation which they have in common with news journalism, lifestyle journalists distinguish themselves through their focus on consumption, self-expression, and the signification of identity. Notably, the way lifestyle journalists feel recognized by their fellow colleagues – especially by those from the “serious” beats – often

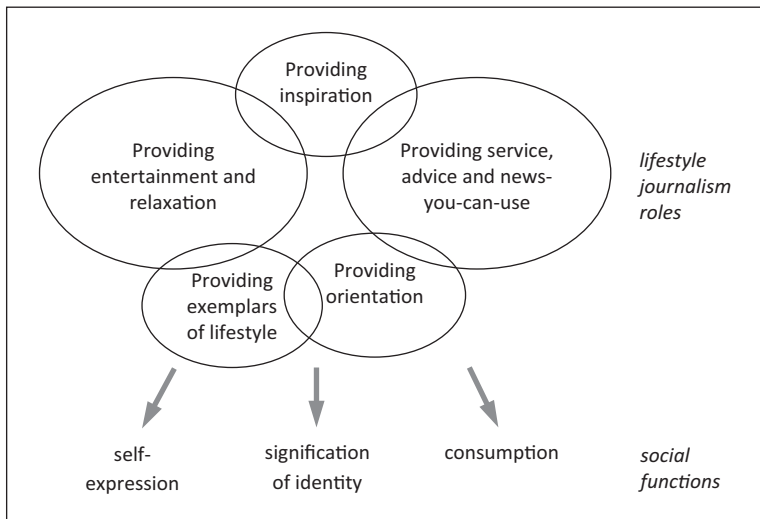


Figure 1. Relationship between the role dimensions of lifestyle journalism.

puts them in difficult terrain: between respect, admiration, and sometimes even envy on the one hand, and an attitude of condescension on the other.

Future analyses will need to examine the wider area of the production of lifestyle journalism, including analyses across a broader variety of countries, in order to discover the extent to which a global lifestyle journalism culture may or may not be developing. Our study found little evidence of cross-national differences, other than the main sites where lifestyle journalism is produced; however, the two countries selected were quite similar in terms of their economic development. Nevertheless, we believe this study can lay the ground for future projects to examine this increasingly relevant field of journalism.

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