

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND MASS MEDIA - AUDIENCES' PERCEPTIONS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP STORIES IN MASS MEDIA

Kim Klyver: Swinburne University, Hawthorn, Australia

Kevin Hindle: Australian Graduate School Of Entrepreneurship, Hawthorn, Australia

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Contact: Kim Klyver, Swinburne University, Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship, 3122 Hawthorn, Australia, Email: KKlyver@swin.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Using a set of variables measured in the Danish population survey related to the international Global Entrepreneurship Monitor project (GEM), this study explored what influences how people perceive stories about entrepreneurship in mass media. It was found that demographics influence how people perceived entrepreneurship stories, whereas social stratifications had no influence. Further on, the findings revealed a reinforcing effect from entrepreneurship stories in mass media. People already engaged in entrepreneurship perceived media stories differently from people not engaged, and people's existing values were also reinforced. Together, these findings provide some crucial implications for policy initiatives trying to promote entrepreneurship. First, such initiatives need to consider who the actual targets are as different people decode and perceive the same messages differently. Second, such initiatives have to be longitudinal and long termed in order to function through more influential agencies like family, peer group, school, occupational group and so forth, and not only through the mass media as secondary socialisation.

USING MASS MEDIA IN PROMOTION ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Based on survey data from the Danish Global Entrepreneurship Monitor project, this study investigated how mass media communication about entrepreneurship is perceived by different people among the audience in a society. Many national governments use mass media as a source to promote entrepreneurship (Lundstrom and Stevensen 2005) although knowledge about if and how mass media have an influential effect on entrepreneurship is still lacking. Without any knowledge on how different audiences perceive mass media stories on entrepreneurship, using mass media as a source of promoting entrepreneurship is vague. This study is a beginning of fulfilling the huge gap in knowledge on mass media and entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship has received enormous attention, both politically and scientifically, during the last couple of decades. After the Oil Crises in the 1970s, it was acknowledged that large businesses no longer could be seen as the sole driver of economic development. A stronger focus was devoted to entrepreneurship, new business formation and the role of small business growth (Bolton Report 1971, Storey 1994; Birch 1979). Politically, many resources are devoted in order to promote entrepreneurship. Dreisler et al. (2003) divided different political initiatives, based on a historical study of political entrepreneurship initiatives in Denmark, into four categories: 1) creating entrepreneurs of unemployed and social clients, 2) creating entrepreneurs by legitimising enterprising, 3) creating entrepreneurs by improving the entrepreneurial culture, and 4) sustaining entrepreneurship for those who have already started. A common characteristic of many Danish initiatives, besides their purpose of improving entrepreneurial capacity, is that they intend to function through secondary socialisation. They try to change, reinforce or shape the values of the Danish population in order to promote the commitment and desire to become an entrepreneur. Many of these initiatives work through mass media – either directly or indirectly – and are, thus, based on the assumption that mass media might be able to influence Danish people's vocational decisions.

Intuitively, assuming that mass media influence people's decisions through secondary socialisation is reasonable. However, theory on mass media states that a simple linear relationship between mass media and its audiences' decisions is questionable. There might be a relationship, but it is not simple and linear. Mass media is important for people in order to define the world in which they live and in order to define themselves. However, it is not reasonable to think that we understand the role of media, if we imagine a simple linear effect from mass media on audiences. The relationship is much more complicated.

Prior knowledge about mass media and entrepreneurship is more or less non-existent – only very few studies have dealt with this issue. From a research point of view and especially from a political point of view this is critical. Throughout the world and especially in the Western world, federal and local governments spend a lot of money promoting entrepreneurship based on the idea of secondary socialisation through mass media, without really understanding if and how mass media influence entrepreneurship. In a study of 13 countries around the world, Lundstrom and Stevenson (2005) found that over half of the countries used mass media to promote entrepreneurship.

Clearly, more knowledge on mass media and entrepreneurship is needed in order to guide all those governments who use mass media in their entrepreneurship promoting strategies. Today, it is unknown whether mass media initiatives are working, and if, how they work.

This study explored how mass media communication about entrepreneurship is perceived by its audience – or more precisely: *how mass media communication about entrepreneurship is perceived by different people in society?* Based on prior knowledge on mass media in general and specifically on the relationship between mass media and entrepreneurship, ten hypotheses were developed. These ten hypotheses were empirically tested on Danish survey data related to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor data collection 2005. Here, about 2000 Danes were telephone-interviewed and among other questions asked about how they perceived stories about entrepreneurship in the media.

The paper is structured with a section on prior knowledge about mass media and entrepreneurship, followed by a section in which the ten hypotheses are outlined. Afterwards the methodology and the empirical results are presented before an interpretation of the results. Finally, the paper ends with a conclusion stressing on future research directions.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MASS MEDIA AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Mass Media Theory And Its History

Research on if and how mass media influence its audience has a long history. Gripsrud (2002) has divided the research history on mass media influence into three periods, each containing specific characteristics. The first period refers approximately to the time before 1940 – a period Gripsrud (2002) term 'Almighty media'. In this period, researchers thought of mass media as 'injectors' of new values, attitudes, ways of thinking and behaviour. Clearly, it was a cause-effect way of thinking, and the research was inspired by a mechanical stimulus-response model. The second period approximately refers to the period from 1940 to 1970, and here the general thinking was that mass media was not capable of influencing people's values and attitudes unless they were in harmony with what people already thought. In this period, Lazersfeld et al. (1944) develop the '*Two Step Flow of Communication Hypothesis*' arguing that it was especially difficult to influence people's values not already kept unless the media function through local opinion leaders. Another characteristic about the research completed in this period was the research known as '*The Uses and Gratification Research*' (Blumler and Katz 1974). Here, the main question was not what media did to its audience, but on the other hand what audience did to mass media. This period Gripsrud refers to as 'Powerless media'. The third period is a synthesis of the two previous periods and starts in the beginning of the 1970s. Gripsrud (2002) terms this period 'Mighty media'. Here, it was assumed that mass media did not determine *what* people were thinking – however mass media influence – to a certain degree – what people think *about* (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Lippman 1922). These ideas are also known as the '*Agenda-Setting Function Model*' and emerges from the Birmingham School emerged. One of the main contributions from the Birmingham School was Stuart Hall's (1973) study, where he argued that programmes in television are *encoded and decoded* based on certain social and cultural perceptions. That implies that producer and audience not necessarily share the same understanding of the same program, and further that audiences with different social and cultural backgrounds also perceive same programmes differently. Thus, it is

argued that people perceived mass media communication differently as a result of their social and cultural backgrounds.

As shown, the interest in mass media goes back to the early 1900s. As a reflection on the historical development Gripsrud (2002) wrote: “There are those who maintain that the fundamental reason for conducting media research is that media in some way influence us. As we shall see, this is a debatable view, not least because ‘influence’ may mean many things. But it is true enough that many of the opinions and much of the research about the media, particularly in the last 100 years, have been about the media’s influence on their audiences” (Gripsrud 2002: 31). However, completely different reasons to study mass media in addition to the interest in mass media influence exist. Researchers might want to gain new knowledge upon the world they are part of. They might want to establish new knowledge about death, love, religious or entrepreneurship. Studying how certain issues are encoded by producers and how audience decode the messages might create new knowledge. Gripsrud (2002) argued that the “... questions about *what the media tell us*, and *how*, are still perfectly legitimate points of departure for media research, and only indirectly involve concepts such as influence, impact or effects” (Gripsrud 2002: 32). He continued: “However, the point is that their influence on each of us, on groups and society as a whole, is determined by social and cultural conditions that to a large extent are outside the realm of the media and outside the immediate reception of the media texts, sounds, and pictures” (Gripsrud 2002: 36).

Thus, social stratification – “systematic differences in terms of economic and social resources and power between different groups” (Gripsrud 2002: 62) – seems to affect how individuals perceive themselves, how they react, what they prefer and what they like and what they dislike. Accordingly, social stratification is expected to affect how audience perceive and decode mass media communication. Apart from differences in social stratification, also other factors seem to influence how audience decode mass media such as gender, religion, geographical background and residence.

This was a very short introduction to the prior knowledge on mass media in general. In the next section, the scarce prior knowledge upon the relation between mass media and entrepreneurship will be reviewed.

Prior Research Into Mass Media And Entrepreneurship

Although, the association between mass media and social behaviour has been investigated in a range of areas, as for instances in relation to violence, crime, drinking, drunken driving, loneliness, trends, language, seemingly disappointing knowledge exist about the interface between mass media and entrepreneurship. Few researchers have declared their interest in the meaning of and influence from mass media on entrepreneurship. However, Henderson and Robertson (1999) argued in their article on young adults’ attitudes to entrepreneurship as a career that a “... disappointingly poor knowledge is shown of actual entrepreneurs, conditioned largely by media which often portray business people in an unflattering light” (Henderson and Robertson 1999: 244). And further, Duggan (1996) wrote in his paper about promoting innovation in the UK that the media “... plays a key role in forming an understanding of the necessity of change” (Duggan 1996: 511). In a recent book on entrepreneurship policy, Lundstrom and Stevenson (2005) put strong emphasis on the need to use mass media as a source for federal and local governments to promote entrepreneurship. They report that over 50 % of the 13 countries they investigated currently use mass media in their entrepreneurship policy. Henderson and Robertson (1999), Duggan’s (1996) and Lundstrom and Stevenson (2005) all assume that mass media influence people’s perception of entrepreneurship and motivation to become an entrepreneur. However, their assumption is not empirical based, but rises from more general reflections.

However, empirical studies with attention to mass media and entrepreneurship have been completed. A small stream of literature is concerned with how the discourse of (female) entrepreneurs are reproduced in different media (e.g. Ahl 2002; Ahl 2004; Lämsä and Tiensuu 2002; Neergaard 2004). In another vein, van Gelderen and Verduyn (2003) have evaluated a set of films in which entrepreneurship plays a lead role, studying their usefulness and learning effect in the class rooms. An explicit focus on the relationship between mass media and entrepreneurship participation can be found in Hindle and Klyver (forthcoming). Here it was found – based on Global Entrepreneurship Monitor data for more than 30 countries through four years - that stories about successful entrepreneurs, conveyed in mass media, were not significantly associated with the rate of nascent (opportunity searching) or the rate of actual (business activities commenced up to three months old) *start-up* activity, but there was a significant

positive association between the volume of entrepreneurship media stories and a nation's volume of people running a *young* business (a business aged greater than three but less than 42 month's old). More particularly, such stories had strong positive association with *opportunity oriented* operators of young businesses. Together, these findings were compatible with what in the mass media theory literature may be called the '*Reinforcement Model*' (Klapper 1960). This argues that mass media are only capable of reinforcing their audience's existing values and choice propensities but are not capable of shaping or changing those values and choices.

Thus, few research projects have investigated various aspects of the association between mass media and entrepreneurship, and we are still more or less left with an empty, clichéd assertion that mass media and entrepreneurship participation interact. This study examined *how mass media communication about entrepreneurship is perceived by different people in society?* According to Gripsrud (2002) this kind of exploratory research question, trying to investigate what mass media tells us, is still a legitimacy question.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

In order to answer the research question, 10 hypotheses were developed based on mass media theory and research into mass media and entrepreneurship. The first five hypotheses concern the Birmingham-school argument that mass media's influence is dependent on social and cultural circumstances outside the area of mass media (Gripsrud 2002). The Birmingham-school argued that people perceive the same message differently (e.g. Hall 1973; Hall 1975; Fiske 1996). People are not passive audiences in which mass media injects its opinions and values. In stead, people are active and critical audiences that interpret messages based on prior knowledge and background. In this sense, it can be argued that social differences play a role in the way mass media communications are perceived. Further it might be expected that traditional demographic facts, such as gender and age, also influence how mass media stories are perceived. Some will interpret the communication in line with the *dominating* 'reading', whereas others will perceive the communication in a more *negotiated* (critical) or *oppositional* way (Hall 1973).

Hypothesis 1A: Gender influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media.

Hypothesis 1B: Age influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media.

Hypothesis 1C: Education level influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media.

Hypothesis 1D: Employment status influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media.

Hypothesis 1E: Household income influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media.

Whereas the first five hypotheses were mostly derived from the more widespread literature initiated by Hall (1973) on encoding and decoding of messages, the following two are derived from scarce literature on mass media and entrepreneurship (Hindle and Klyver forthcoming). Specifically, these two hypotheses follow the argument that mass media have a reinforcement effect (Klapper 1960) on entrepreneurship as suggested by Hindle and Klyver (forthcoming).

Some people are engaged in entrepreneurship, whereas others are not. Those engaged involve in this study people in different stages of the lifecycle: 1) people with intention to start a business, 2) people in the process of starting a business, 3) people running a young business (between 3 and 42 months old) and 4) people running an established business (older than 42 months). Following the reinforcement theory, people engaged in entrepreneurship will perceive mass media stories on entrepreneurship differently than people not engaged in entrepreneurship. When people search for reinforcement of their identity and values, entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs will notice and emphasise different issues in the same stories. And most likely, they also watch completely different programs on television, read different newspapers, visit different web pages, etc. Thus, they will not have the same perception of entrepreneurship stories brought in the media in general.

Hypothesis 2A: Engagement in entrepreneurship influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media.

Apart from that idea that engagement in entrepreneurship influences the perception of media stories, it may further be expected that differences exist among people engaged in entrepreneurship. Some people are more committed in their engagement than others. People in the early stages of the entrepreneurial process are expected to be less committed than people in the later stages. They have not yet put taken any financial risks and they have not yet finally decided to start which means that they have not yet personally committed themselves 100 %. Many of the people in the early stages still have their normal fulltime job. However, as they move forward in the entrepreneurial process and become more committed to entrepreneurship their identity as an entrepreneurs and the values associated with being an entrepreneur become increasingly important to them. Therefore, it is expected that people in different stages of the entrepreneurial process will perceive stories in the media differently.

Hypothesis 2B: The stage of the entrepreneurial process in which people are engaged influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media.

The last three hypotheses carry on the investigation of the reinforcement effect of mass media on entrepreneurship suggested by Hindle and Klyver (forthcoming). The earlier hypotheses concerned whether engagement of entrepreneurship influences perception of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media. However, from a reinforcement theory perspective, it may also be expected that people's existing values and attitudes towards entrepreneurship might influence how stories are decoded. People will seek to integrate the signals they receive from mass media into what they already think and believe. Thus, they will make notice of the stories that reinforce their existing beliefs and values regarding entrepreneurship; otherwise disregard them or interpret them in a way that reinforcement their own values.

Hypothesis 3A: People who perceive entrepreneurship as a good career choice have different perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media than people who do not perceive entrepreneurship as a good career choice.

Hypothesis 3B: People who associate entrepreneurship with high status and respect have different perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media than people who do not associate entrepreneurship with high status and respect.

Hypothesis 3C: People, for whom fear failure would prevent them from a starting a business, have different perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media than people for whom failure would not prevent them from starting.

METHODOLOGY

The ten hypotheses were tested on survey data collected in to the Danish Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. Because present knowledge upon the interaction between mass media and entrepreneurship is scarce, research has to search for general and more or less simple relationships. It is then up to future research to continue this research and investigate more sophisticated relationships. In this specific investigation a random sample of Danish adults (between 15 and 64 years old) has completed a structured telephone interview in relation to the Danish participation in the international Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) project. An extra question was added to the ordinary questions asked in the GEM survey: "When mass media bring stories on entrepreneurship which main impression do you get? 1) it is an interesting career choice, 2) it is a career requiring hard work, or 3) it is a risky career choice". This question is used as the dependent variable in all ten hypotheses which were statistical tested with use of chi square test. According to Bohrnstedt and Knoke (1994) chi-square test is "... a test of statistical significance based on a comparison of the observed cell frequencies of a joint contingency table with frequencies that would be expected under the null hypothesis of no relationship" (Bohrnstedt and Knoke 1994: 158). The chi-square test determines the likelihood that a dependent and an independent variable are unrelated in a population.

The independent variables selected for this study were all variables already available in the GEM dataset. They might not be the most appreciate variables in order to test whether demographics (hypotheses 1A, 1B and 1C), social stratifications (hypotheses 1D and 1E), entrepreneurship

engagement (hypotheses 2A and 2B) and existing values (hypotheses 3A, 3B and 3C) influence how media stories on entrepreneurship are perceived. However, the early stages of research into mass media and entrepreneurship consent this exploratory approach.

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS

In general, about 17 per cents of Danish adults get the impression from entrepreneurship stories in mass media that being an entrepreneur is an interesting career; around 72 % get the impression that it is hard work; whereas 11 % get the impression that being an entrepreneur is a risky career.

Influence Of Demographics

Hypothesis 1A stated that gender influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media. This is tested in table 1.

Table 1: Perception of media stories and gender

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Primary perception of media stories on entrepreneurship	Interesting career	18.4 %	16.5 %	17.3 %
	Hard work	68.1 %	74.4 %	71.6 %
	Risky career	13.5 %	9.2 %	11.1 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %
	N			1790
Pearson Chi-Square				0.005

Source: Danish GEM population survey 2005

Table 1 reveals that gender influence how people perceive entrepreneurship stories in the mass media ($p=0.005$). Males, more than females, get an impression of entrepreneurship from mass media as something 1) interesting and 2) risky, whereas females, more than males, get an impression of career choice that require hard work. Hypothesis 1B stated that age influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media. This hypothesis test is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Perception of media stories and age

		Age			Total
		15-29	30-49	50-64	
Primary perception of media stories on entrepreneurship	Interesting career	21.8 %	15.3 %	18.5 %	17.4 %
	Hard work	67.5 %	74.6 %	69.0 %	71.6 %
	Risky career	10.7 %	10.1 %	12.5 %	11.0 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
	N				1777
Pearson Chi-Square					0.037

Source: Danish GEM population survey 2005

From table 2 it is revealed that age influences how entrepreneurship stories in the media is perceived ($p=0.037$). Young adults' decoding of entrepreneurship stories, more than older adults, produces a picture of entrepreneurship as an interesting career. Adults between 50-64 years old on the other hand, more than younger adults, get a more risky impression from the mass media about entrepreneurship. Finally, adults between 30 and 49 years old, more than their younger and older counterparts, get the feeling that being an entrepreneur is hard work. This is actually surprising as this mid-age actually is the most active in entrepreneurship. Schott (2005) shows that the age group between 35 and 44 year old is the most entrepreneurship active age group in Denmark.

Wrapping up, table 1 and table 2 revealed that both gender and age influence how people perceive entrepreneurship stories in mass media. Accordingly, hypotheses 1A and 1B can not be rejected.

Influence Of Social Stratifications

Hypothesis 1C stated that people's education level influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media. Second, hypothesis 1D stated that people's employment status influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media and finally did hypothesis 1E state that household income influences the perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media. These three hypotheses are tested in respectively table 3, table 4 and table 5.

Table 3: Perception of media stories and education

		Education			Total
		No education	Vocational education	Higher education	
Primary perception of media stories on entrepreneurship	Interesting career	16.3 %	18.8 %	17.3 %	17.4 %
	Hard work	69.6 %	69.6 %	72.6 %	71.5 %
	Risky career	14.1 %	11.6 %	10.1 %	11.0 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
N					1779
Pearson Chi-Square					0.320

Source: Danish GEM population survey 2005

Table 4: Perception of media stories and employment status

		Employment status			Total
		Employed	Un-employed	Other	
Primary perception of media stories on entrepreneurship	Interesting career	17.4 %	15.4 %	17.8 %	17.4 %
	Hard work	72.2 %	69.2 %	68.8 %	71.5 %
	Risky career	10.3 %	15.4 %	13.4 %	11.0 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
N					1784
Pearson Chi-Square					0.408

Source: Danish GEM population survey 2005

Table 5: Perception of media stories and household income

		Household income		Total
		<400	>400	
Primary perception of media stories on entrepreneurship	Interesting career	14.8 %	18.2 %	17.0 %
	Hard work	72.7 %	71.6 %	72.0 %
	Risky career	12.5 %	10.2 %	11.0 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %
N				1588
Pearson Chi-Square				0.123

Source: Danish GEM population survey 2005

All three statistical tests were insignificant and rejected the hypotheses. Neither education, employment status nor household income seem to influence how stories on entrepreneurship in mass media are decoded by audience. Thus, empirical results from this survey do not support the idea that social stratification has an impact on how entrepreneurship stories are perceived. Accordingly, it seems like the impression drawn from mass media stories on entrepreneurship is independent of economic and social resources and the power hold by people.

Influence Of Entrepreneurship Engagement

Hypothesis 2A and 2B followed the reinforcement model. Hypothesis 2A stated that people engaged in entrepreneurship have different perceptions of mass media stories on entrepreneurship than people not engaged. Hypothesis 2A is tested in table 6.

Table 6: Perception of media stories and entrepreneurial status

		Entrepreneurship engagement		Total
		Entrepreneur	Not entrepreneur	
Primary perception of media stories on entrepreneurship	Interesting career	24.5%	16.1 %	17.4 %
	Hard work	61.2 %	73.5 %	71.6 %
	Risky career	14.4 %	10.4 %	11.1 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %
	N			1791
Pearson Chi-Square				0.0005

Source: Danish GEM population survey 2005

Table 6 shows a significant effect of entrepreneurship engagement on how entrepreneurship stories in mass media are perceived. People involved in entrepreneurship - including people considering starting a business within three years, people in the process of starting a business or people running a young or established business – more than people not engaged get an impression of entrepreneurship from mass media as something 1) interesting and 2) risky (p=0.0005). On the other hand, people not engaged in entrepreneurship get an impression of entrepreneurship as something involving a lot of hard work. Thus, hypothesis 2A can not be rejected and supports the reinforcement model. Hypothesis 2B is tested in table 7.

Table 7: Perception of media stories and degree of entrepreneurial status

		Potential	The entrepreneurial process			Total
			In the process of starting	Newly established a business	Running an established business	
Primary perception of media stories on entrepreneurship	Interesting career	17.7 %	26.5 %	23.3 %	30.8 %	24.6 %
	Hard work	66.7 %	55.9 %	60.5 %	57.9 %	61.1 %
	Risky career	15.6%	17.6 %	16.3 %	11.2 %	14.3 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
	N					280
Pearson Chi-Square						0.463

Source: Danish GEM population survey 2005

Where all previous hypotheses have concerned both people engaged in entrepreneurship and those not engaged, hypothesis 2B only involves those engaged in entrepreneurship. The number of respondents is therefore much lower. It was stated that the stage of the entrepreneurial in which entrepreneurs operate, through their hereby reflected commitment to entrepreneurship, influences how they perceive entrepreneurship stories in the media. However, table 7 shows no significant results suggesting a rejection of hypothesis 2B.

Influence Of Existing Values

Hypotheses 3A, 3B and 3C all concerned the reinforcement model. It was proposed that people's existing values towards entrepreneurship would affect how they perceive entrepreneurship stories in the media. Hypothesis 3A is tested in table 8.

Table 8: Perception of media stories and perception of entrepreneurship as a career choice.

		Good career choice		Total
		Yes	No	
Primary perception of media stories on entrepreneurship	Interesting career	19.6 %	15.7 %	17.5 %
	Hard work	69.8 %	73.4 %	71.8 %
	Risky career	10.6 %	10.8 %	10.7 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %
N				1632
Pearson Chi-Square (one-tailed)				0.063

Source: Danish GEM population survey 2005

Table 8 reveals that people who perceive entrepreneurship as a good career choice, more than other people, get an impression from mass media that entrepreneurship is a interesting career ($p=0.063$). Hypothesis 3A can therefore not be rejected. Thus, it seems like a positive perception of entrepreneurship (entrepreneurship is a good career choice) is reflected in a positive interpretation of stories in the media (entrepreneurship is an interesting career). Hypothesis 3B is tested in table 9.

Table 9: Perception of media stories and status/respect to entrepreneurs

		Status and respect to entrepreneurs		Total
		Yes	No	
Primary perception of media stories on entrepreneurship	Interesting career	17.5 %	18.4 %	17.7 %
	Hard work	72.9 %	66.6 %	71.3 %
	Risky career	9.6 %	15.1 %	11.0 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %
N				1682
Pearson Chi-Square (one-tailed)				0.003

Source: Danish GEM population survey 2005

Table 9 reveals a significant differences in perception of entrepreneurship media stories between those who associate entrepreneurship with high status and respect and those who do not ($p=0.003$). It seems like those who think that entrepreneurs receive high status and respect in the society also admire the hard work required to be an entrepreneur. Hypothesis 3C is tested in table 10.

Table 10: Perception of media stories and fear of failure

		Fear of failure		Total
		Yes	No	
Primary perception of media stories on entrepreneurship	Interesting career	15.7%	18.6 %	17.4 %
	Hard work	72.9 %	70.5 %	71.5 %
	Risky career	11.4 %	10.9 %	11.1 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %
N				1740
Pearson Chi-Square (one-tailed)				0.145

Source: Danish GEM population survey 2005

Hypothesis 3C stated that people, for whom fear failure would prevent them from starting a business, have different perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in the mass media than people for whom failure would not prevent them from starting. Table 10, however, rejects this hypothesis. People's fear of failure does not seem to influence how they perceive entrepreneurship stories in the media.

In general, the empirical results support the idea that existing values towards entrepreneurship influence how entrepreneurship stories in the mass media are perceived. There also seemed to be a meaningful association between the existing values and how entrepreneurship stories were perceived, supporting the reinforcement model. However, not all values have an influential impact on the decoding process. This might be because some values are of stronger personal importance than others, and that only that the most important values impact on the perception of mass media stories.

INTERPRETATION AND IMPLICATIONS

Mass Media Stories: What Regulate Our Perception?

In this study, what basically has been investigated is what regulate and influence how people perceive stories about entrepreneurship in the mass media.

Clearly, several mechanisms regulate and influence people's perception, and this study only dealt with few of them: demographics, social stratifications, entrepreneurship engagement and existing values. It was revealed that demographics influence how people decode and perceive entrepreneurship stories in mass media. On the other hand, no support was found for the idea that social stratifications influence perception of entrepreneurship stories. Perception of entrepreneurship stories seems to be independent of social and economic status hold by people. Entrepreneurship might be a phenomenon that all kind of people, regardless of economic and social status, relate to in the same manner.

In addition to influence from demographics, also a reinforcement mechanism seems to affect how entrepreneurship stories are perceived. The reinforcement model, developed back in 1960s by Klapper (1960), states that mass media are only capable of reinforcing their audience's existing values but are not capable of shaping or changing those values. The reinforcement theory argues that audiences are active, not mere passive and unquestioning recipients of whatever is served up to them. In reinforcement theory, the media are regarded as having very little power to alter or challenge beliefs, values and ideas already held by audiences. The media ordinarily act in ways that reinforce opinions, ideas and values which audience members already hold. Specifically, Klapper stated that: "Mass communication does not ordinarily serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions through a nexus of mediating factors" (Klapper 1960: 7). Klapper's empirical research showed that other 'socializing agencies' in modern societies are far more important and influential in helping shape audience opinions, behavior and attitudes. These more influential agencies include: family, peer group, religion, school as an institution, occupational group, legal institutions and political institutions. These are real life factors and situations with which individuals are in contact on a daily basis. They were much more real - and interactive - than any media experience.

In an earlier study upon entrepreneurship and mass media the idea of reinforcement effect was introduced (Hindle and Klyver, forthcoming). In addition to the earlier study completed by Hindle and Klyver (forthcoming), this study has improved our initial knowledge on the mass media's reinforcement effect by introducing light and shade into the original idea.

First, the empirical results revealed that people's entrepreneurship engagement matters. People involved in some kind of entrepreneurial activities perceive stories in mass media differently than people not involved in entrepreneurial activities. However, this reinforcing effect does not seem to vary throughout the entrepreneurial process. People involved in entrepreneurial activity in different stages of the entrepreneurial process do not perceive entrepreneurship stories differently. People in different stages in the same way reinforce their identity as entrepreneurs from mass media. Gripsrud (2002) argues that mass media's representation of specific groups of people sometimes provoke strong feelings – especially if the audience have their identity connected to this group. Thus, it might be that entrepreneurs differently than non-entrepreneurs perceive entrepreneurship stories in the media as they have a collective identity and therefore identify themselves with these stories about entrepreneurs. They feel connection to the group of people portrayed in the media.

Second, this study has improved our knowledge on mass media and entrepreneurship as the empirical results revealed how existing values influence how entrepreneurship stories were perceived. This study emphasised that mass media only are capable of reinforcing values already hold by people. The main shaping of values emerges from people's enrolment of more influential agencies like family, peer groups, occupational group and so forth. At the same time, it seems like it is more or less impossible for mass media to make people think and act against their deep-rooted norms and convictions.

Implications: A More Longitudinal And Long Termed Entrepreneurship Policy

As written in the introduction, a common characteristic of many Danish entrepreneurship policy initiatives, besides their purpose of improving entrepreneurial capacity, is that they intend to function through secondary socialisation. They try to change, reinforce or shape the values of the Danish

population in order to promote the commitment and desire to become an entrepreneur. Many of these initiatives work through mass media – either directly or indirectly – and are, thus, based on the assumption that mass media might be able to influence Danish people's vocational decisions. This use of mass media as an important source to promote entrepreneurship is not an exception in Denmark. Lundstrom and Stevenson (2005) found in their study of 13 countries that over 50 per cent of governments used mass media in the promotion of entrepreneurship.

Without being too definitive or conclusive, the findings presented in the article are indicative of what influence how people perceive stories in mass media. It has been indicated that demographics influence how people perceive entrepreneurship stories. From this knowledge some implications for designing political initiatives emerge. Thus, in order to promote entrepreneurship through political initiatives – directly and indirectly through secondary socialisation – demographic variables have to be taken under consideration. For instance, our findings suggest that males and females perceived entrepreneurship stories differently. This might indicate that promotion of female entrepreneurship in contrast to male entrepreneurship calls for completely different entrepreneurship stories. Males' and females' identities as entrepreneurs might differ and the role models and values that might enhance their vocational choice as entrepreneurs differ accordingly.

It was further substantiated that mass media stories are not capable of shaping and changing its audiences' existing values and norms, but only capable of reinforcing values and norms that are already held by the audience. Much more influential agencies like family and peer groups have the value shaping and value changing function. This knowledge has fundamental implications for design of policy initiatives associated with promoting entrepreneurship.

First, the role of policy initiatives aimed at promoting entrepreneurship has to be reconsidered. The intuitively causality between positive mass media stories and increasing rate of entrepreneurial activities is much more muddled than earlier expected (Lundstrom and Stevenson 2005). The reinforcement effect might generate additional energy and motivation for people who already have made their vocational decisions to become entrepreneurs. However, mass media stories on entrepreneurship do not or only slightly influence the decision to become an entrepreneur. Following the empirical findings presented in this article it is a waste of money for governments to use mass media to change people's motivation to become entrepreneurs. However, initiatives using mass media as source have the potential of keeping existing entrepreneurs in business.

In order for future policy initiatives to be effective, they have to function through more influential agencies like family, peer group, religion, school as an institution, occupational group, legal institutions and political institutions. And in order to function through these completely different agencies, initiatives have to be much more long term. Initiatives have to run across different federal and local governments over several years without being disturbed by occasional political agendas and election strategies. If entrepreneurship policy gets a more longitudinal and long term role in politics, the chances that initiatives would more than reinforce existing entrepreneurs will increase.

CONCLUSION

In this study, what basically has been investigated is what regulates and influences how people perceive stories about entrepreneurship in the mass media. Knowledge upon that is essential as many federal and local governments spend many resources on promoting entrepreneurship through mass media (Lundstrom and Stevenson 2005).

The findings revealed that demographics influence how people perceive entrepreneurship stories, but on the other hand that social stratifications do not influence how media stories are perceived. Meanwhile, it was also revealed that entrepreneurship stories in the mass media are decoded by its audience in a way that reinforces existing values and identities. Entrepreneurs perceive entrepreneurship stories differently than non-entrepreneurs, but no differences were found between how entrepreneurs in different stages of the entrepreneurial process.

The empirical results have crucial implications for entrepreneurship policy formation. First, future political initiatives have to consider demographic variables – people with different demographical characteristics perceive entrepreneurship stories in mass media differently. Following, in order to promote entrepreneurship each initiative has to differentiate its message according to the specific

demographic strata in mind. For instances, promoting female entrepreneurship call for different entrepreneurship stories than promoting male entrepreneurship.

Second, considering the emerging evidence of mass media as only having a reinforcing effect on existing values, the fundamental philosophy behind policy initiatives promoting entrepreneurship has to change. Otherwise, entrepreneurship policy initiatives are not capable of enhancing people's motivation to become entrepreneurs. In order to encourage more people towards entrepreneurship, policy initiatives have to function through more influential agencies like family, peer group, school as an institution, occupational group and so forth. It requires that entrepreneurship policy become more longitudinal and long termed.

This explorative study into a nearly completely neglected area of research calls for more sophisticated and extensive investigations into the relationship between mass media coverage and entrepreneurship.

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