Keeping Up With the Audiences:
Journalistic Role Expectations in Singapore

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Scholarly work on journalistic role conceptions is growing, but the assumption that what journalists conceive of as their roles depends in part on what they believe audiences expect from them remains underexplored. Through a nationally representative survey (N = 1,200), this study sought to understand journalistic role expectations in Singapore, a country with a unique media system that brings together a highly developed information and communication infrastructure with media regulation. The study found that Singaporeans expect their journalists to serve the public, the nation, and the government—and in that order.

Keywords: Asian values, journalistic role conceptions, journalists, role theory, Singapore, survey

Scholars have long been interested in studying journalistic role conceptions, or what journalists conceive of as their roles (Janowitz, 1975; Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1972; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986). This interest has been in part due to the assumption that what journalists conceive of as their roles influences how they do their work (Donsbach, 2008; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Subsequent studies noted a gap between roles that journalists conceive of and their actual practice (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2013), noting that other factors, such as organizational and social influences, affect role performance (Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015). One potential explanation for this gap is how conception is an individual-level process, whereas performance, in the context of journalism, is a collective output (Tandoc, Hellmueller, & Vos, 2012). But another way to further tease out this gap is to unpack journalistic role conceptions. An unexplored assumption is that journalists' role conceptions are based on what they think the public expects from them (Donsbach, 2008; Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007). The question, however, is whether what journalists think the public expects from them is consistent with the *actual* expectations of the public (see Figure 1).

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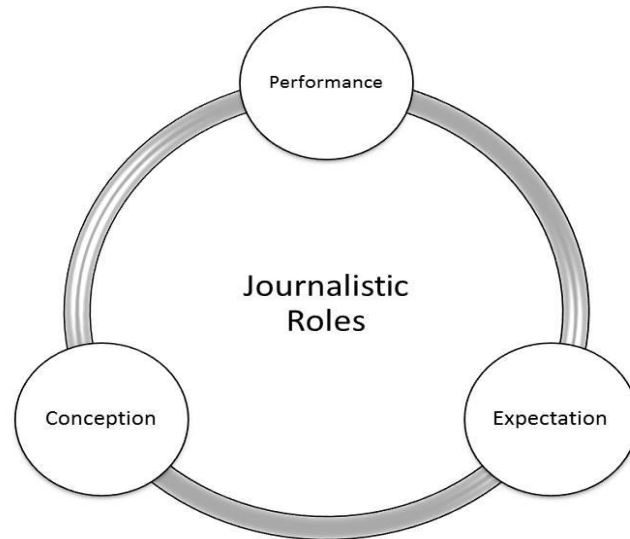Date submitted: 2015–08–18

Figure 1. The figure represents three areas of research on the professional roles of journalists. Studies have looked at the link between conception and performance, and between journalistic performance and audience expectations. The current study focuses on the link between audience expectations and journalists' role conceptions.

Scholarly work on the professional roles of journalists is growing, finding a new lease of academic life as the industry undergoes its greatest crisis in a century (Brill, 2001; Cassidy, 2005; Mellado, 2014; Tandoc & Takahashi, 2013; Weaver et al., 2007). But although it is agreed upon that role conceptions are journalists' conceptions of what is expected of them, the source of these expectations remains underexplored (Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, 2005; Nah & Chung, 2012). As readers are increasingly reluctant to pay for a paradigm of journalism that has gone to great lengths to validate and justify itself, but are more willing to contribute to it themselves, their expectations deserve much greater scrutiny. What roles do audiences expect from their journalists, and are journalists keeping up with those expectations?

Scholars studying journalistic roles have developed three streams of research: focusing on journalistic role conceptions, assessing journalists' role performance, and exploring the gap between conception and performance. This current study is part of an emerging fourth stream of journalistic role research focusing on *journalistic role expectations*, or the roles that audiences expect from journalists (Heider et al., 2005; Nah & Chung, 2012). This is especially important considering the changing nature of interaction between journalists and their audiences, facilitated by new information technologies such as social media (Hermida, 2011; Napoli, 2011). The "people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen, 2006, para. 2) are becoming more and more influential in the journalistic process, and understanding what they expect from their media, and how these expectations match those of journalists, is therefore essential.

Understanding different media contexts is equally essential because role expectations operate within particular occupational, social, and cultural contexts. For example, a wide-ranging study of the ethical values of non-Western journalists found a deemphasizing of truth-telling in favor of respect and community-building (Rao & Lee, 2005). In Asia, media systems in different countries are developing in their own ways, guided by Asian values rather than the values of their former colonial masters (Massey & Chang, 2002). In recognition of the limitations of Western-centric typologies that have marked early work in the study of journalistic roles, cross-country studies have also been conducted (Hanitzsch, 2011; Weaver & Wilnat, 2012). Such attempts, however, remain constrained by Western conceptions of journalism, and the dominant measures of roles remain to be Western-centric. Comparative research approaches are usually based on the spread of ideologies, practices, and assumptions of Western journalism practice (Mwesige, 2004). However, an implication of this approach is what Golding (1977) had previously observed—journalists in developing nations are seen as needing to catch up with those in more advanced countries.

This study tests current typologies of journalistic role conceptions based on a nationally representative survey of Singaporeans, mindful of these typologies' Western-centric origins and development. This study not only seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of journalistic roles by studying role expectations but it also extends the study of audience perception of journalistic roles in a unique media context.

Literature Review

Numerous typologies of journalism's social functions have been proposed. For example, referring to the mass media in general, Dimmick (2011) listed the following social functions: surveillance, interpretation, linkage, transmission of values, and diversion. Habermas (1999) referred to journalism's role in shaping public opinion by facilitating deliberation in the public sphere. Others, focusing on news, referred to its function as an amplifier, conferring legitimacy to particular concerns and perspectives (Green, 1992). Still, others argued that journalism's primary purpose is related to its audience: "to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 17). The classic—and much critiqued—normative four theories of the press (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1963) proposed a typology of authoritarian, libertarian, communist, and social responsibility models of the press. What are clearly embedded in these models are expectations of how the press ought to function in society, not only in relation to the state but also in relation to the public that the press is normatively supposed to serve.

These social functions become meaningful and manifest themselves ideally in practice when they are internalized by individual journalists. Scholars have contributed to a large body of work focusing on journalists' role conceptions (e.g., Cassidy, 2005; Chung & Nah, 2013; Hanitzsch, 2011; Mellado & Van Dalen, 2013; Tandoc et al., 2012; Weaver et al., 2007; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986). Because roles are journalists' internalizations of how they "ought to do their work" (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2013, p. 861), they are conceived of in relation to a set of expectations, some of which must come from the public that journalists serve. Earlier studies of role conceptions were mostly from the perspective of journalists, and rightfully so; and yet the results of these studies clearly point to a link between what journalists believe

their roles are and what they believe their audiences expect from them (Weaver et al., 2007). A way to expand understanding of journalistic roles, therefore, is to also take into account what these role expectations are.

The Study of Roles

The concept of roles has been studied in numerous contexts. For example, scholars have studied the roles of teachers (e.g., Uibu & Kikas, 2008), nurses (e.g., Carryer, Gardner, Dunn, & Gardner, 2007), and athletes (e.g., Benson, Surya, & Eys, 2014), among others. The concept of roles in sociology started as a theatrical metaphor, for although stage actors perform roles based on *scripts* written for them, individuals also behave in relation to scripts *prescribed* for them. Thus, role theory includes three main concepts—"patterned and characteristic social behaviors, parts or identities that are assumed by social participants, and scripts or expectations for behavior that are understood by all and adhered to by performers" (Biddle, 1986, p. 68).

Studies in social psychology also consider roles as part of an individual's social identity. Thus, the formation of roles depends, in part, on an individual's reference group (Collier, 2001), or what others have termed as the social structure (Thoits, 1991). Charng, Piliavin, and Callero (1988) defined a role identity as "a set of characteristics or expectations that simultaneously is defined by a social position in the community and becomes a dimension of an actor's self" (p. 304). Such definition highlights the importance of social expectations in the formation of role conceptions. But although the concept of roles is a widely researched area in sociology and social psychology, different perspectives also abound, leading to a lack of uniform definition of what constitutes a role.

Role theory "presumes a thoughtful, socially aware human actor" confronted with expectations that generate roles (Biddle, 1986, p. 69). A review of role theory research identified five perspectives: functional, structural, organizational, cognitive, and symbolic interactionist (Biddle, 1986). The organizational perspective, used in most empirical studies (Jackson & Schuler, 1985), assumes that roles are "to be associated with identified social positions and to be generated by normative expectations" (Biddle, 1986, p. 73). These normative expectations are set both officially within an organization and by informal groups. For example, a study of how athletes conceived of their roles found two sources of expectations: formally from their coach and informally from their peers through group interactions (Benson et al., 2014).

The organizational perspective is appropriate in understanding role conceptions of journalists, particularly because they work in an organizational context defined not only by a hierarchy of editors and reporters but also by external factors that influence their work, such as advertisers, government officials, and audiences (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). This perspective is also consistent with one point of agreement in the sociology of roles—that roles are negotiations between perceptions of individual and social expectations (Biddle, 1986; Charng et al., 1988; Thoits, 1991). Earlier development in the study of roles referred to a need to differentiate between "public and personal role definitions" (Motz, 1952, p. 466). So although roles are individual internalizations, they are based on beliefs of social expectations.

Role Conceptions

In the journalism context, a role has been defined as "a composite of occupational tasks and purposes that is widely recognizable and has a stable and enduring form" (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009, p. 119). Journalistic role conceptions have also been referred to as "journalists' own formulation of how they ought to do their work" (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2013, p. 861) as well as "generalized expectations which journalists believe exist in society and among different stakeholders, which they see as normatively acceptable, and which influence their behavior on the job" (Donsbach, 2008, p. 2605).

Initial work on journalistic role conceptions discussed a dichotomy of roles. Janowitz (1975) talked about the *gatekeeper* role, which emphasized objectivity by separating facts from opinions, and the *advocate* role, which required journalists to speak up for the powerless. These are similar to Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman's (1972) dichotomy of a *neutral* or a *participant* journalist. Subsequent work proposed an initial typology of three roles: the disseminator, adversarial, and interpretive roles (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986). The mobilizer role was added later as public journalism emerged in the United States (Weaver et al., 2007; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). The *disseminator* role is similar to the neutral journalist; the *interpretive* role refers to a journalist's function of providing analysis and interpretation; the *adversarial* role refers to being skeptical adversaries to government and business news sources; and the *mobilizer* role values the opinions of ordinary citizens (Weaver et al., 2007).

Based on surveys over the years, the interpretive role remains the most popular among American journalists (Weaver et al., 2007), whereas items measuring the disseminator role have displayed low internal consistency in recent years, demonstrating how journalistic roles are evolving (Cassidy, 2005; Holton, Lewis, & Coddington, 2016; Nah & Chung, 2012; Tandoc et al., 2012). A survey of 137 citizen journalists found that they rated the mobilizer role as most important (Chung & Nah, 2013). But the study of roles has expanded to also include journalists from other media systems. Interviews with health journalists in Australia found that they conceive of their main roles as educators (Forsyth et al., 2012). Hanitzsch (2011) identified four professional milieus of journalists based on media functions: the populist disseminator, detached watchdog, critical change agent, and the opportunist facilitator. Based on a survey of journalists from 18 countries, with widely differing political and cultural assumptions, ranging from Germany to Brazil to Egypt to China, Hanitzsch (2011) found that the detached watchdog role "materializes in practical terms mainly in Western countries that share a long history of democracy" (p. 491). So although the watchdog role is dominant among journalists in the United States and in Germany, it is almost completely absent among journalists surveyed in China, Uganda, and Egypt (Hanitzsch, 2011).

Role Performance

Studies on journalistic role conceptions rest on the assumption that such role conceptions affect practice (Donsbach, 2008; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). But although numerous studies have assessed journalistic performance in a variety of ways, studies that focused on assessing performance through the prism of journalistic roles remain scarce. This is partly due to the methodological challenge of examining

role performance, or how professional roles manifest in news content (Mellado, 2014). Such examinations are important, considering the assumed impact of conceptions on practice.

Whereas role conception refers to "what journalists think is important to do," role performance refers to "what they actually do" (Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015, p. 5). Thus, other scholars have started comparing role conceptions and role performance, finding that individual role conceptions do not always lead to role performance as measured by journalistic outputs (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2013; Tandoc et al., 2012). An explanation is how journalism is a collective process (Tandoc et al., 2012). News articles are organizational outputs. They originate from individual journalists, but they also undergo layers of editing. Thus, "journalists do not actually enact a role, but they perform a role as a collective outcome" (Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015, p. 6).

Another plausible explanation to this gap is yet another potential mismatch between perceived and actual role expectations, or between what journalists conceive of as their roles and the actual role expectations audiences have of their journalists. In short, the gap that scholars have found between journalistic role conception and performance might also be present between journalistic role conception and role expectations. This makes it important to study not only journalists' role conceptions but also what is expected of them by their audiences. This study is therefore focused on understanding what roles audiences in Singapore expect from their journalists.

Role Expectations

If role conceptions are what journalists think they should do, such normative beliefs of their roles must have been shaped by several factors. This assumption is consistent with the role concept being explicated as the product of what journalists think society expects from them, and what society *actually* expects (Biddle, 1986; Thoits, 1991). Thus, role expectations refer to the actual expectation that shapes how journalists conceive of their roles: the scripts prescribed for actors (Biddle, 1986). But although an important part of journalistic role conceptions is what journalists think their audiences expect of them, research on audiences' role expectations remains scarce, especially outside the United States.

A survey of 600 American adults found four roles that the public expected from journalists: being a good neighbor, serving as a watchdog, being unbiased and accurate, and reporting fast (Heider et al., 2005). Although journalists rated being a watchdog as their most important role, audiences expected journalists to be good neighbors, more than anything else (Heider et al., 2005). Being a good neighbor includes attributes associated with public journalism, such as caring about one's community (Heider et al., 2005). However, the survey is only based on a representative sample of adults in a southwestern metropolitan area. A survey of 238 online news users in the United States found that online news users rated the disseminator role the highest, followed by the civic role, operationalized as including citizens in decision-making (Nah & Chung, 2012). The study, which also found that perceived media credibility was a significant predictor of expecting journalists to be mobilizers and interpreters, used the typology developed by Weaver and colleagues (2007) in the United States.

A survey of 364 journalism undergraduate students in the United States found that they rated the interpreter role as most important (Tandoc, 2014). The students' role conceptions were found to be correlated with their news consumption patterns. Students who got their news from social media expected their journalists not only to interpret the news but also to quickly disseminate it (Tandoc, 2014). Another survey of journalism students across seven countries used a different set of statements to measure role conceptions and found that students from these countries conceptualized journalistic roles through four dimensions: citizen oriented, loyal, watchdog, and consumer oriented (Mellado et al., 2012). Students from Australia, Switzerland, and the United States prioritized consumer-oriented and watchdog roles, whereas those from Mexico and Spain supported the citizen-oriented role (Mellado et al., 2012). Journalism students can be conceptualized as future journalists, but their responses can also be conceptualized as expectations from a segment of the journalistic audience.

A survey of 503 adults in Hong Kong found three factors of audience expectations: comprehensive coverage, objective coverage, and positive coverage (Guo, 2000). The study was done in the context of a national election campaign. It found a "strong connection between audience expectations and attention to media public affairs content" (Guo, 2000, p. 148). For example, those who pay attention to election news through newspapers tend to expect comprehensive and objective coverage (Guo, 2000). The study conceptualized role expectations as "perceptions of what the news media *ought to do*" (Guo, 2000, p. 134). Our study also adopts the same definition, focusing on *roles* that audiences perceive journalists ought to play.

Study Context: Singapore

Role expectations do not spring fully formed in the minds of the audience; they are socialized by and within a culture. Socialization is a process by which people are inducted into a culture, learning knowledge, values, and attitudes that support a system. The media are a source of socialization, and socialization also affects what the media do. Thus, media consumers are socialized into their conceptions of the roles that journalists should play by journalists themselves (Tandoc, 2014). But the media are just one of several socializing agents. Other agents, such as family, school, peer groups, professional and organizational affiliations, are also involved in the socialization process (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002; Moeller & de Vreese, 2013). Thus, to understand how journalism roles are perceived, it is helpful to understand the political and cultural system within which they exist: in this study, Singapore.

Small, economically vibrant, globally connected, multiracial, politically idiosyncratic, and at the heart of a rising Asia, Singapore cannot be said to be typical of any other country. Initially part of one of the Malay sultanates, later colonized by the British, then independent by 1965, the modern nation had a difficult start. The early 1950s and 1960s were marked by riots, based on religious and racial fault lines running through society, and fanned by the media (Duffy, 2010). Today, rioting is almost unheard of and racial tensions are scrupulously managed. The population is as multiracial as it was then, with the majority ethnic Chinese (74.2%) living alongside Malays (13.3%), Indians (9.2%), and others (3.3%) (Singapore Tourism Board, 2013). It is cosmopolitan, with around four million Singaporeans making up 71% of the population, sharing the island with 1.6 million non-natives of diverse nationalities (Singapore Tourism Board, 2013). Singapore continues to be well-ordered, and the national media play a part in this.

A defining moment for the Singaporean press came when the late Lee Kuan Yew, the then prime minister and a founding father of the modern nation, said: "Freedom of the press, freedom of the news media, must be subordinated to the overriding needs of Singapore, and to the primacy and purpose of an elected government" (L. H. Chua, 1998, p. 151). The media goal was to reinforce cultural values and social attitudes to raise the country to developed-nation status. Yet the press has been criticized as controlled, and Singapore came 150th out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders (2014) press freedom report.

The press is regulated in several ways. First, it is dominated by a single company, Singapore Press Holdings, a publicly listed company but with strong links to the government. A result of this is firm control on the flow of information: What reporters are able to hear is arguably more of an issue than what they are able to say. Second, newspapers need a state-issued print license, renewable every year, which means a high barrier to entry. The government avows a light hand on the Internet, but since 2013, news websites with more than 50,000 monthly visitors must be licensed, put up a bond of $50,000, and comply with government requests to take down content (M. Chua, 2013). Third, defamation laws, the Sedition Act and the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, among others, give scope to prosecute people who are deemed to have undermined social harmony. These have all shaped a press that is instinctively cautious—favors harmony over debate, government over opposition, and an Asian consensus in media over the Western watchdog model (Duffy, 2010).

Journalists are expected to conform to government-approved values. The Media Development Authority (2015), which oversees the press, offers guidelines on the role of the media so they do not undermine prevailing social norms, promote alternative lifestyles, foment racial tensions, or subvert national security. Journalists are socialized into agreed norms of nation-building. This is visible elsewhere in the country, too. In schools, for example, the National Education program's (Ministry of Education, 1997) three levels aim to inculcate three levels of engagement: to love the country (primary students), to know the country (secondary students), and to lead the country (pre-university students). The role of the media coincides with these social values embedded in the educational system.

With the press settled in its role, the Internet has opened a new arena for both debate and control. New websites directly question the government, including The Online Citizen and TR Emeritus (M. Chua, 2013). Bloggers air strong opinions on topics that the mainstream media treat with a lighter touch. This has led to repercussions: Two men were imprisoned under the Sedition Act in 2006 after making anti-Muslim comments online; a blogger was fined for contempt of court in 2015. Those who post online comments critical of the prime minister, or offensive to other races and religions, have found themselves pilloried in the press, flamed online, and fired by their employers (Sim, 2012; Tan, 2012). It is not only government, legislature, and media that are wedded to the Singapore press model. Many of the population, too, take actions that reiterate nation-building and contribute to the integrity of the country. In Singapore, criticism of the government coexists with a strong pro-government attitude.

Theoretical Synthesis

Two important but often taken-for-granted assumptions in studies of journalistic roles are that journalists' role conceptions depend, in part, on what they think their audiences expect from them; as such, role conceptions are also dependent on the social and cultural contexts in which journalists find themselves. Given the important role of audiences in mass communication in general, and their increasing influence on the news construction process in particular, it is important to understand what audiences expect from their journalists. This is consistent with the assumption that journalistic roles are based on external expectations and journalists' internalization of those expectations. But a focus on role expectations should also take into account the social and cultural contexts where such expectations occur, so as not to merely apply Western-centric standards in evaluating press systems and journalistic performance. For although these Western models have been helpful and enlightening, applied to other contexts, they have been found wanting.

This study seeks to understand *journalistic role expectations* in Singapore, a country with a unique social and cultural context. This study also seeks to build on earlier explorations of factors that affect role expectations of journalism students and audiences, such as media use and perceived media credibility (Nah & Chung, 2012; Tandoc, 2014), mindful that particular patterns in Western societies might not hold in Singapore. Based on this understanding, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1.   *What role expectations do Singaporeans have of their journalists?*

RQ2.   *How do Singaporeans prioritize these role expectations?*

RQ3.   *What factors influence these role expectations?*

Method

This study is based on an online survey of a nationally representative sample of Singaporeans (*N* = 1,200) conducted between June and July 2014. Sampling and data collection were conducted through the survey company Qualtrics through its partner polling companies in Singapore. The polling companies maintain panels of survey participants who get incentives in the form of gift cards and gas mileage in exchange for their participation. Invitations were sent to a randomly selected sample of 3,630 Singaporeans, ages 18 to 65 years, and 1,200 responses were completed for a response rate of 33%. The average age was 37.11 years (*SD* = 12.16), and 51% were female. Only Singaporean citizens and permanent residents were included in the sample. The online questionnaire included a battery of questions that spanned a few research topics. For this study, we are using the following variables:

News consumption. The respondents were asked how often they engaged in each of the following media uses using a 5-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*): read print copies of local newspapers (e.g., *Straits Times, Today*); read local newspaper websites (e.g., straitstimes.com); read print copies of news magazines; read online news magazines; read print copies of international

newspapers (e.g., *The New York Times*); read foreign newspaper websites (e.g., nytimes.com); watch local news on television (e.g., Channel 8); watch news on cable TV (e.g., CNN, BBC); read cable TV news websites (e.g., CNN.com); read foreign online-only news sites (e.g., *The Huffington Post*); listen to local radio; read blogs; read news on Facebook; read news on Twitter; and watch videos on YouTube. Watching YouTube videos was ranked the highest (M = 3.45, SD = 1.07), followed by reading print copies of local newspapers (M = 3.39, SD = 1.14) and watching local news on TV (M = 3.29, SD = 1.18).

   Credibility of journalists. Using a 5-point Likert scale, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each of the following descriptions of Singaporean journalists: fair, biased (reverse coded), accurate, tell the whole story, and can be trusted. These items were adapted from previous studies that have validated the items as measuring the concept of credibility (Meyer, 1988). The scale is reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .86.

   Role expectations. Using a 5-point scale, from 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*very important*), respondents were asked to rate the importance of each of the following media functions adapted from previous surveys of journalistic role conceptions (Hanitzsch, 2011; Mellado et al., 2012; Tandoc & Takahashi, 2013; Weaver et al., 2007): provide information people need to make political decisions; motivate people to participate in political activity; convey a positive image of political leadership; be an adversary of the government; support government policy; monitor and scrutinize political leaders; set the political agenda; promote tolerance and cultural diversity; advocate for social change; provide analysis of current affairs; influence public opinion; let people express their views; support national development; and provide advice, orientation, and direction for daily life (see Table 1). Guided by the literature, we decided to exclude items that traditionally measured a disseminator role, such as getting information to the public quickly and appealing to the widest possible audience, as these items have consistently shown low internal reliability over the years and across studies—in some cases, far below the acceptable reliability value—possibly pointing to how professional roles have evolved (Cassidy, 2005; Holton et al., 2016; Nah & Chung, 2012).

Results

Role Expectations

   RQ1 asked what roles Singaporeans expected from their journalists. We ran an exploratory factor analysis (principal axis factoring) using oblique rotation (direct oblimin with Kaiser normalization) to see underlying factors among the 14 items included in the survey to measure role expectations. The sample was adequate for analysis, KMO = .88, Bartlett's test of sphericity, χ^2(91) = 5,794.10, p < .001. The analysis found three underlying factors that accounted for about 57% of the variance in journalistic role expectations among Singaporean citizens.

   The first factor consists of six statements: provide information people need to make political decisions; monitor and scrutinize political leaders; promote tolerance and cultural diversity; advocate for social change; provide analysis of current affairs; and let people express their views. It accounts for 37.11% of the variance. The scale is reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .80. We refer to this first factor as a

public-oriented role, given that these items refer to what journalists should do for the people and on behalf of them. The second factor consists of five statements: convey a positive image of political leadership; be an adversary of the government; support government policy; set the political agenda; and influence public opinion. It accounts for 12.16% of the variance. It is also a reliable scale, Cronbach's alpha = .80. We refer to this second factor as a *government-oriented role*, given that these items refer to what journalists should do in relation to the government. An unexpected finding, however, is how items that would be inconsistent in a Western context clustered around this factor. Specifically, we expected that conveying a positive image of political leadership will be perceived as contradictory to being an adversary of the government, and yet these items clustered together, further confirmed by a positive correlation between the two items, *r*(1,200) =.49, *p* < .001.

The third factor is based on one item: support national development, which accounted for 7.19% of the variance. We refer to this third factor as a *nation-oriented role*, where citizens expect their journalists to support nation building, but do not necessarily equate it to supporting the administration-party dominated government (see Table 1).

Table 1. Factor Analysis of Role Expectation Items.

	M	*SD*	Public oriented	Govt oriented	Nation oriented
Let people express their views.	3.95	.87	.642		
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity.	3.85	.92	.527		
Provide analysis of current affairs.	3.69	.88	.722		
Provide information people need to make political decisions.	3.53	.89	.652		
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders.	3.38	1.02	.540		
Advocate for social change.	3.32	.89	.481		
Support government policy.	3.20	.98		-.677	
Influence public opinion.	2.92	1.07		-.588	
Convey a positive image of political leadership.	2.89	1.03		-.624	
Be an adversary of the government.	2.80	1.02		-.637	
Set the political agenda.	2.77	1.05		-.698	
Support national development.	3.56	.85			-.726
Provide advice, orientation, and direction for daily life.	3.32	.93			
Motivate people to participate in political activity.	2.99	.94			
Eigenvalues			5.20	1.70	1.01
Variance Explained			37.11	12.16	7.19

Note. The sample was adequate for analysis, KMO = .88, Bartlett's test of sphericity, χ^2(91) = 5,794.10, *p* < .001. Three factors of role expectations emerged from the analysis: public oriented, government oriented, and nation oriented.

RQ2 asked about how Singaporeans prioritized these role expectations. Comparing the mean scores of the items tested (see Table 1), the respondents rated letting people express their views as most important (M = 3.95, SD = .87). This was followed by promoting tolerance and cultural diversity (M = 3.85, SD = .92) and providing analysis of current events (M = 3.69, SD = .88). Setting the political agenda was ranked the lowest (M = 2.77, SD = 1.05). In terms of the three clusters of roles, the public-oriented role was ranked the highest (M = 3.62, SD = .64), closely followed by the nation-oriented role (M = 3.56, SD = 1.05). The government-oriented role was ranked last (M = 2.88, SD = .76).

Factors Related to Role Expectations

RQ3 asked about factors related to Singaporeans' role expectations. Based on studies that explored journalistic role expectations in the United States, we tested the relationships between news consumption patterns (Tandoc, 2014) and perceptions of media credibility (Nah & Chung, 2012), and role expectations. We also explored the association with demographic variables, specifically age, gender, income, and education. We first ran an exploratory factor analysis (principal axis factoring) using oblique rotation (direct oblimin with Kaiser normalization) to determine underlying factors among the 15 items in the survey that measured news consumption. The sample was adequate for analysis, KMO = .85, Bartlett's test of sphericity, χ^2(105) = 5,631.35, p < .001. The analysis found three underlying factors that accounted for about 55% of the variance in the news consumption of Singaporean citizens (see Table 2).

The first factor includes six items, accounting for 30.75% of the variance. The items are: reading online news magazines; reading print copies of international newspapers (e.g., *The New York Times*); reading foreign newspaper websites (e.g., nytimes.com); watching news on cable TV (e.g., CNN, BBC); reading cable TV news websites (e.g., CNN.com); and reading foreign online-only news sites (e.g., *The Huffington Post*). This scale is reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .84. This factor clearly refers to news consumption from international sources. The second factor includes three items, accounting for 13.56% of the variance. The items are: reading print copies of local newspapers; reading print copies of news magazines; and watching local news on television. This scale is likewise reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .70. This factor refers to news consumption from local sources. Finally, the third factor includes four items, accounting for 10.43% of the variance, and clearly refers to news consumption from social media. The items are: reading blogs, reading news on Facebook, reading news on Twitter, and watching videos on YouTube. This scale is also reliable, Cronbach's alpha = .71.

Because literature on journalistic role expectations remains scarce, which hinders us from testing directional hypotheses using regression, we decided to run correlation analysis, consistent with what a previous study on role conceptions of journalism students had done (Tandoc, 2014). This allowed us to initially explore associations between the variables of interest, given the exploratory nature of the current study (Field, 2009). Our goal is to explore associations, rather than make specific predictions.

The correlation analysis included news consumption, media credibility, and the demographic variables to see associations with the three journalistic role expectations mapped out. Age was negatively, albeit weakly, correlated with the government-oriented role expectation, r(1, 195) = -.06, p = .06,

whereas educational level was positively and also weakly correlated, $r(1, 135) = .06$, $p = .06$. Income was weakly and positively correlated with public-oriented role expectation, $r(1, 123) = .06$, $p < .05$. However, the analysis showed no significant relationship between perceived media credibility and news consumption patterns, and what roles respondents expected from their journalists (see Table 3).

Table 2. Factor Analysis of News Consumption Items.

	M	*SD*	Foreign News	Local News	Social Media
Read online news magazines?	2.68	1.07	**.452**		
Read print copies of international newspapers?	1.87	.93	**.637**		
Read foreign newspaper websites?	2.11	1.07	**.834**		
Watch news on cable TV?	2.56	1.17	**.619**		
Read cable TV news websites?	2.39	1.08	**.781**		
Read foreign-only news sites?	2.05	1.08	**.623**		
Read print copies of local newspapers?	3.39	1.14		**.640**	
Read print copies of news magazines?	2.57	1.00		**.556**	
Watch local news on television?	3.29	1.18		**.615**	
Read blogs?	2.59	1.00			**.581**
Read news on Facebook?	3.25	1.25			**.626**
Read news on Twitter?	2.08	1.21			**.593**
Watch videos on YouTube?	3.45	1.07			**.602**
Read local newspaper websites?	3.07	1.23			
Listen to local radio?	3.32	.93			
Eigenvalues			4.61	2.03	1.56
Variance Explained			30.75	13.56	10.43

Note. The sample was adequate for analysis, KMO = .85, Bartlett's test of sphericity, $\chi^2(105) = 5,631.35$, $p < .001$. Three factors of news use patterns emerged: international news use, local news use, and social media news use.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study sought to understand journalistic role expectations in the Singaporean context. Through a nationally representative survey of residents, and based on the framework of the organizational perspective of role research that focuses on the influence of normative expectations (Biddle, 1986), the study found that Singaporeans, in general, expect their journalists to serve the public, the nation, and the government—and in that order. Specifically, they considered the function of letting people express their

views as most important. In contrast to studies conducted in the United States, perceptions of media credibility and news consumption patterns were not linked to any role expectations. Instead, age, education, and income were found to have significant, although weak, relationships with particular role expectations.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis Predicting Role Expectations.

	Public oriented	Government oriented	Nation oriented
Age	.01	-.06[a]	-.01
Gender	.01	.02	.05
Education	.00	.06[a]	-.01
Income	.06[b]	-.02	-.01
Local news use	-.01	-.01	-.01
International news use	.00	.03	-.01
Social media news use	-.03	-.01	.01
Credibility	.00	.00	.01

Note. The analysis showed no significant relationship between perceived media credibility and news consumption, and what roles respondents expected from their journalists.
[a]$p = .06$. [b]$p = .04$.

This study used role conception items from earlier studies of journalistic role conceptions, which have been mostly tested in Western contexts. Although the items analyzed have emerged from Western-centric studies, they can still be pressed into service for studies beyond the West. Their value in cross-cultural comparative studies lies in their continuity in different cultural contexts. But although the items themselves stay the same, the interpretation of them needs to avoid Western-centric bias. For instance, the item "letting people express their views" was the ranked highest in the survey. In the West, this is redolent of letting the citizenry speak out against the authorities, based on an individualistic culture. However, the same words in an Asian collectivist culture such as Singapore have connotations of a society sharing ideas to strengthen both society and its governance. Expressing views is collaborative rather than confrontational (Ng, 2001). Similarly, the government-oriented role was ranked lowest by Singaporeans. To anyone working from a Western assumption that the media are watchdogs on an unreliable, self-interested, and suspect body politic, this seems extraordinary. But to a Singaporean in a monolithic political system that prides itself in competence, consistency, transparency, lack of corruption, and placing nation above self, there is less impetus for the press to oversee government. In both cases, it is not the factors that carry a Western-centric bias but the assumptions that accompany their interpretation.

This revealed itself in how items on the survey clustered in ways different from what earlier typologies of role conceptions based on these factors had shown. There are two potential explanations for this. First, this study focused on what audiences expect from their journalists. The clusters of roles that

emerged from the factor analysis demonstrate a departure from traditional typologies of role conceptions. These findings point to a potential *mismatch* between journalistic role conceptions and the role expectations from audiences that supposedly partly shape these roles conceived of by journalists. Such a mismatch between journalists and their audiences have earlier been found in terms of their news preferences (Boczkowski, 2010; Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006), but it is also plausible that such disagreement exists in terms of conceptions and expectations of what roles journalists ought to play (Heider et al., 2005). The mobilizer, disseminator, interpreter, watchdog, change agent, and facilitator roles proposed by earlier studies (Hanitzsch, 2011; Weaver at al., 2007) are those of a field looking inward at itself, rather than outward to its audience. However, another plausible explanation is the peculiar characteristics of the Singaporean press, especially when compared with Western media systems. This offers a new direction for research, to directly compare role expectations among readers and journalists across different media and cultural contexts. The findings of the study also offer new challenges in this area of research, specifically in developing measurements for role conceptions and expectations that are grounded in different cultural and media contexts.

In the first factor of role items, which we termed public-oriented role, scrutinizing political leaders loaded in the same factor as providing analysis of current affairs and letting people express their views. For journalists' roles in the Western context, however, these items would be separate and variously belong to the adversarial, interpreter, and mobilizer roles that American journalists have conceptually distinguished (Weaver et al., 2007). In the second factor, conveying a positive image of political leadership loaded with being an adversary to the government, setting the political agenda, and influencing public opinion. This shows that Singaporeans do not see these as contradictory items. This might point to a peculiar expectation of journalism's role in Singapore. It is expected to be *both* critical and supportive of the government. This is not unlike Singaporeans' peculiar stance with their government: criticism of the government coexists with a strong pro-government attitude. Interestingly, younger Singaporeans and those with higher educational status tend to embrace such peculiar government-oriented expectation, seemingly shaped by their liberal thinking combined with awareness of Singapore's efficiency.

Finally, supporting national development was the third factor, related but conceptually distinct from serving the people and serving the government. This presents an interesting conceptual distinction between the relationship of the press to the public, to the government, and to the nation as a whole. Two items—motivating people to participate in political activity and providing advice, orientation, and direction for daily life—did not load on any of the clusters of role expectations, again demonstrating how audiences, particularly in Singapore, navigate through these measures of journalistic roles developed in the West differently. These items have been considered as forming part of the mobilizer role, particularly in surveys in the United States, where citizens freely participate in political activities. However, the extent and the ways in which Singaporeans engage in political activities are different from that in the United States, which might explain the results of this study.

Factors that were linked to role expectations in the United States—perceived media credibility and news consumption patterns—were *not* linked to Singaporeans' role expectations. This bolsters the argument that different patterns are to be expected in a different social and cultural context. It also points to the possibility of citizens being socialized into role expectations by socialization agents other than the

media (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002; Moeller & de Vreese, 2013). Instead, age, education, and income were linked to particular role expectations. Younger and more educated Singaporeans tend to expect a unique government-oriented role from their journalists, possibly out of their familiarity of the historical context that has shaped the country combined with their awareness of the larger, global media and political system. In contrast, wealthier Singaporeans tend to expect a public-oriented role that also includes the function of scrutinizing government officials and letting people express their views. These functions are not exactly consistent with the current press system. It appears that those who are more financially stable are more open to departures from strict government control of media discourse. Wealth may give an impression of protection from government, or a confidence that manifests itself in the expectation of having a voice that is heard and an assumption that success gives them the right to question.

Of course, a clear limitation of this study is the use of role conception items tested and validated in mostly Western media systems in understanding journalistic role expectations in Singapore. Roles, in general, occur within occupational, social, and cultural contexts. Therefore, the social, cultural, and political influences that have created the government–press–audience relationship in Singapore is unique to the country and cannot be guaranteed to show "cross-cultural equivalence" with other countries and other systems (Hui & Triandis, 1985, p. 133). And yet this is one point of this study, to test commonly used items in the study of role conceptions in a different cultural context and demonstrate the challenges in appropriating Western-centric models in other contexts. An important and interesting future study would be to explore role expectations in Singapore using a different strategy, such as using a grounded theory approach by interviewing news audiences in Singapore, where role expectations can emerge free from the constraints of Western-centric typologies.

This study also sought to demonstrate the importance of studying role expectations if we are to fully understand journalistic role conceptions and performance. In response to the changing nature of the relationship between journalists and their audiences, it becomes increasingly important to understand audience expectations of journalists. This will allow not only a better understanding of audiences but also a clearer picture of journalistic role conceptions, as they can be compared empirically with what audiences expect and how journalists perform. If journalistic role conceptions are based on what journalists believe the audiences expect of them, are journalists keeping up with the audiences?

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