

## Entrepreneurship and mass media - audiences' perceptions of entrepreneurship stories in mass media

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### Principal Topic

Entrepreneurship has received increasingly attention, both politically and scientifically, during the last couple of decades. After the Oil Crises in the 1970s, it was acknowledge that large businesses could no longer 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. Since then, politically, many resources have been devoted to promote entrepreneurship.

A common characteristic of many Danish political 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 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 peoples' vocational choices.

Intuitively, assuming that mass media influence peoples' decisions through secondary socialisation is reasonable. However, theory on mass media states that this 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 every person in order to define the world in which they live and in order to define themselves, but it is not reasonable to think that we understand the role of media, if we imagine a simple linear effect from mass media on its audiences.

Previous research on mass media and entrepreneurship is more or less non-existent - only very few studies have dealt with this issue. From a scientific point of view and especially from a political point of view this is critical.

Therefore, there seems to be a need to explore the mechanism(s) between mass media stories about entrepreneurship and the nature of entrepreneurship taken place in a country.

In this study, we explore 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?

### Methodology/Key Propositions

Based on prior knowledge on mass media in general and specifically on the relationship between mass media and entrepreneurship, four hypotheses were developed: 1. People with different demographic characteristics perceive stories about entrepreneurship in mass media differently 2. Different social stratifications perceive stories about entrepreneurship in mass media differently. 3. Perception of entrepreneurship stories in the media is related to individuals' existing entrepreneurial commitment. 4. Perception of entrepreneurship stories in mass media is related to values already hold by individuals.

Through the Danish Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), these hypotheses were statistically tested using a randomly selected sample of Danish adults.

### Results and Implications

Our population survey revealed that peoples' age and gender influence how entrepreneurship stories in the media are perceived. No influence from social stratifications was found. People engaged in entrepreneurship had different perceptions of media stories than their counterpart not engaged in entrepreneurship. More specifically, a reinforcement effect was detected. It was also to a certain extent revealed that existing values towards entrepreneurship seem to be reinforced by mass media stories.

Accordingly, the study substantiated that mass media stories not are capable of shaping and changing its audiences' existing values and norms. However, mass media are capable of reinforcing values and norms that are already hold by the audience. Much more influential agencies (than mass media) like family and peer groups have the value shaping and value changing function.

The knowledge gained from this study has fundamental implications for design of political initiatives associated with promoting entrepreneurship. First, future political initiatives need to differentiate their messages according to the specific demographic strata in mind. Second, considering that mass media only have a reinforcement effect, the fundamental philosophy behind political initiatives needs to be reconsidered. Otherwise, the only effect of political initiatives will be keeping entrepreneurs in business, whereas no promotion of entrepreneurship to the rest of the population will take place. In order to encourage more people towards entrepreneurship, future initiatives have to function through more influential agencies like family, peer group, school as an institution, occupational group and so forth. In general, it requires that entrepreneurship policy become more longitudinal and long termed.

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