CultureCase

Charting the decline in newspaper live arts coverage

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Summary

This research examined the changing levels of arts coverage in European quality newspapers over a 50 year period (from 1960 and 2010). The paper draws out the changing balance between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” articles, and how this relates to the format of the cultural product covered. The study discovered that over time levels of highbrow arts coverage remained ‘largely stable’, but non-highbrow arts coverage grew ‘exponentially’ between 1960 and 2010. In other words, the culture sections of those newspapers became increasingly dedicated to covering things like pop records or TV box sets.

The study draws from the arts and culture sections of *Le Pais* (Spain), *Dagens Nyheter* (Sweden), *Helsingin Sanomat* (Finland), *Le Monde* (France) and *The Guardian* (UK)

The articles from those sections were assigned one of 21 different cultural categories which were grouped as ‘highbrow’ or ‘non-highbrow’. ‘Highbrow arts’ comprised ‘architecture, ballet and modern dance, classical music (including opera), literary fiction (novels, poetry, plays) and other nonfiction’. All other primary cultural areas and subgenres were operationalised as ‘non-highbrow’. At the same time, each article was assigned to a ‘format’ which meant the researchers could separate live coverage (concert, plays, exhibitions) from articles on recordings (books, DVDs, etc).

The headlines disguise a mixed picture between art forms and formats

The fact that ‘the share of non-highbrow art coverage slowly increases at the cost of highbrow coverage’ turns out to be ‘linked to the decline of the live event’ and the ‘rise of the commercially distributed cultural product’. So highbrow arts which were live and without capture or sale through a product saw a relative decline of coverage in the papers. Coverage of literary fiction actually grew slightly, whereas theatre coverage underwent a ‘consistent decline’.

Keywords

european union **arts** **newspaper** **media**

Title	Live or Recorded? Reassessing the “decline of the highbrow arts” debate using European newspaper data, 1960–2010
Author(s)	Heikkilä, R., Hazır, I. K. & Purhonen, S.
Publication date	2020
Source	Cultural Trends, Vol. 29, Iss. 3, pp. 199-212
Link	**https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09548963.2020.1728190**
Open Access Link	**https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09548963.2020.1728190**
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