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**Reuters Institute**  
for the Study of Journalism

# JOURNALISTS IN THE UK

**Neil Thurman, Alessio Cornia, and Jessica Kunert**







**Reuters Institute**  
for the Study of Journalism

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**NEIL THURMAN, ALESSIO CORNIA, AND JESSICA KUNERT**

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# FOREWORD

## Ian Hargreaves

*Professor of Digital Economy, Cardiff University*

*Former Editor, the Independent; Deputy Editor, the Financial Times;*

*Editor, The New Statesman; and Director BBC News and Current Affairs*

Journalism plays a pivotal role in keeping us informed and critically aware. But in a period when digital communications technologies are violently disrupting news industry business models there is confusion and debate as to whether the result is less journalism, worse journalism or more and better journalism delivered through a more diverse array of media, including social media.

Given the importance of journalism and the current fluidity of the industry's commercial circumstances, it is very good to have an up-to-date insight into what journalists themselves have to say about some of these matters.

Building upon the work of a previous UK survey in 2012 and in collaboration with the global Worlds of Journalism project designed to produce comparative data on journalists' opinions and attitudes, this Reuters Institute report illuminates essential ground. It is based upon a survey of 700 of the UK's almost 64,000 professional journalists.

Some of its conclusions are familiar but still stark: the chronic failure to achieve even reasonable levels of ethnic diversity in journalism; and the very strong flow of women into the profession – they form a majority among young journalists but are still very much a minority in the senior ranks.

Particularly fascinating are the journalists' answers on ethical issues, which emerge as mostly in line with official codes of practice. Journalists say that their behaviour is affected more than anything else by ethical guidelines and professional codes of practice. This suggests that the Leveson era may have made more impact than is generally acknowledged. Since a majority of journalists also believe that their profession has lost credibility over time, it might even indicate the start of a fight-back.

Pleasing also, to me at least, is the historically rooted hierarchy of values which emerges from the journalists questioned. At the very summit, they place first the provision of reliable information and, second, holding power to account. In third place comes entertainment, which I also interpret positively: dull reporting, pedestrian writing and predictable analysis undermine the first two values.

Journalists, the data show, continue to be better and better educated, but for most of them pay remains relatively modest. The best paid jobs are still in television, where disruptive forces bearing on news are weaker.

The proportion of journalists working in newspapers has fallen sharply, but disagreement about definitions makes it unsettled whether overall in the digital age we have more or less journalism and more or fewer journalists. The authors estimate that there are now 30,000 journalists working wholly or partly online, but many bloggers are excluded from this count, along with others whose journalistic identity is complex.

Digital influences also mean that journalists have more data about audience responses to their work; it remains unclear to what extent they feel bullied by this into the clickbait game, rather than feeling that they can use the data to make better, independent decisions about how to provide a service the audience values.

For me, the overall impression delivered by the survey is positive. In spite of the most turbulent period of change in the news industry for a century, there is a read-out here of core purpose and conviction among British journalists. As business models start to settle down in the third decade of the internet and new types of proprietor establish themselves, this persuades me that the outlook is more promising than is often suggested.



# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Proposals for collaboration on further publications based on this survey data should be directed to Dr Neil Thurman <neil.thurman@ifkw.lmu.de>.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on a survey conducted in December 2015 with a representative sample of 700 UK journalists. Our analysis of the survey data and of over a hundred other relevant sources of information has produced numerous findings.

On UK journalists' personal characteristics and diversity:

- Although women make up a relatively high proportion of the profession, they are less well remunerated than men and are under-represented in senior positions.
- Journalism is now fully 'academised'. Of those journalists who began their careers in 2013, 2014, and 2015, 98% have a bachelor's degree and 36% a master's. While this trend is helping to correct historical gender imbalances, it may have other, undesirable, consequences for the socio-economic diversity of the profession.
- Journalists are less religious than the general population and a smaller proportion claim membership of the Muslim, Hindu, and Christian faiths.
- UK journalism has a significant diversity problem in terms of ethnicity, with black Britons, for example, under-represented by a factor of more than ten.
- About half of journalists take a left-of-centre political stance, with the remaining half split between the centre and the right-wing. Right-of-centre political beliefs increase with rank.

On UK journalists' employment conditions:

- 20% of journalists have gross yearly earnings of less than £19,200, likely to be at or below the 'living wage' for many.
- 83% of journalists in their mid to late twenties earn less than £29,000, an income that makes getting on the property ladder a significant challenge.
- 27% of journalists engage in other paid work.
- Most journalists (54%) work in a single medium (TV, radio, print, or online) and working across multiple media provides no clear financial benefit.
- A third of journalists working for UK 'national' newspapers now consider their outlet's reach to be transnational.

On UK journalists' working routines:

- Since 2012 the proportion of journalists in the UK working in newspapers has fallen from 56% to 44%, while the proportion working online has risen from 26% to 52%.
- We estimate there are now 30,000 journalists in the UK who work wholly or partly online. However, those working exclusively online are less well paid than journalists who work only in newspapers.
- 53% of journalists are specialists, with the most populous beats being business, culture, sport, and entertainment. There are few politics, science, or religious specialists.
- UK journalists typically produce or process ten news items a week, although that number doubles for journalists who work exclusively online.

On UK journalists' role in society:

- Journalists most commonly believe that their role is to provide accurate information, to hold power to account, and to entertain. However, few see importance in roles that are more directly connected with politics, like being an adversary of the government.
- Radio journalists, rather than journalists working online, feel most strongly that their role should include letting people express their views.
- 45% of UK journalists see it as very or extremely important to provide news that attracts the largest audience, a higher proportion than was found in a US survey in 2008–9.

On journalism and change:

- Twice as many UK journalists believe that their freedom to make editorial decisions has decreased over time as believe it has increased. We argue this could be a result of the increasing influence of audience research and pressure to 'keep up with the competition', with negative consequences for the diversity of news output.
- A large majority believe time for researching stories has decreased and the influence of profit-making pressures, PR activity, and advertising considerations has strengthened.



- Most UK journalists believe their profession has lost credibility over time.
- UK journalists overwhelmingly believe that the importance of technical skills and the influence of social media platforms have increased over time.

#### On influences on journalists' work:

- UK journalists believe that ethics, media laws and regulation, editorial policy, their editorial supervisors, and practical limitations exercise the greatest influence over their work.
- Although UK journalists ascribe little influence to state officials, politicians, pressure groups, business people, and PR, a large majority acknowledge the influence of news sources; and the most frequently cited sources in news stories are representatives of these very groups.
- Most journalists think that owners, advertising considerations, and profit expectations have little influence over their work, although these sources of influence are rarely experienced directly but rather through organisational constraints.

#### On UK journalists' trust in institutions:

- Contrary to stereotype, UK journalists appear to be more trusting in general terms, and no less trusting of politicians and government, than the general population.
- UK journalists show more trust in the judiciary and the courts than they do in their own profession, the news media.
- Journalists have less trust in religious leaders and trade unions than they do in Parliament, the police, and the military, in part, we argue, because of their reliance on these latter institutions as sources of information.

#### On ethics and standards:

- There is close correspondence between UK journalists' views on ethics and their professional codes of practice. However, they are more likely to find justification for ethically contentious practices, such as paying sources, than journalists in the United States.
- Rank and file journalists in the UK push ethical boundaries more than their managers, and 25% of all journalists believe it is justified, on occasion, to publish unverified information.

# PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND DIVERSITY

NEIL THURMAN

Our survey gathered a range of information on UK journalists' personal characteristics. Basic data on the age spread and gender balance of our sample is reported in Section 9. Here in Section 1 we focus in detail on the differences between male and female journalists in employment status, income, rank, and editorial freedom; and how the proportions of men and women entering the profession are changing. This section also reports on journalists'

- education;
- religious affiliation and depth of belief;
- ethnicity; and
- political affiliation.

In addition, our survey asked journalists about the length of time they had spent working in the profession. We have used this data in various ways in this study, for example to find out from those who have been in the profession for at least five years how they feel journalism has changed over time (see Section 5). For the record, the journalists who completed our survey had between one and 54 years of work experience, with an average of 18.5 years. About a quarter had less than ten years' work experience.

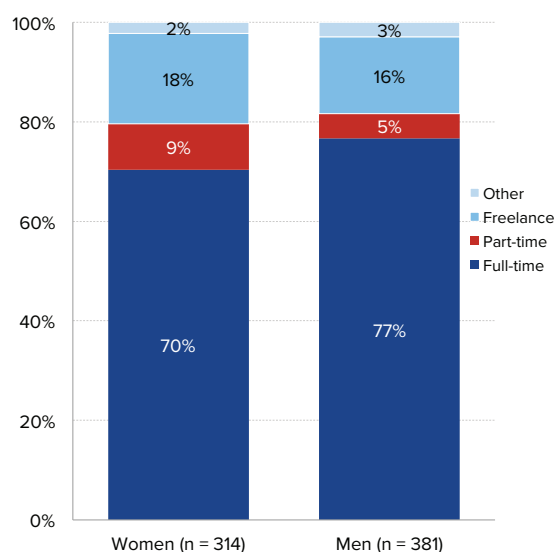
## 1.1 GENDER

Our results show that 45% of UK journalists are women, a similar figure to that found in other surveys (see Section 9.5). This figure is relatively high compared with some other professions. For example, only 31% of practising barristers (Bar Standards Board, 2014) and 33% of medical consultants (GMC, 2015) are female. It does not, however, tell the whole story. We also need to look at the levels of influence and recognition that women in journalism have.

Starting with employment status, we see that according to our survey women are slightly more likely to be employed on part-time or freelance contracts than men. However, women and men who are regular employees rather than freelancers

are almost exactly as likely as each other to be on a permanent rather than a temporary contract: 96% of men against 98% of women (see Figure 1.1a).

**FIGURE 1.1a: EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF MALE AND FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN THE UK, DECEMBER 2015.**

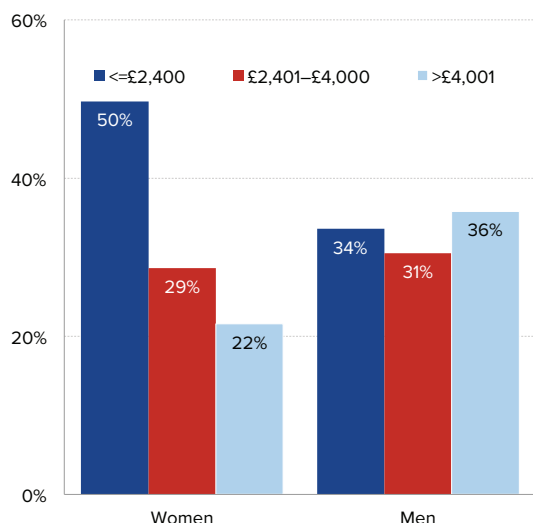


To compare income across the sexes we focused on full-time employees only, and excluded journalists who also worked in other paid activities at the same time. The results show that a significantly higher proportion of women journalists earn less than £2,401/month. About half of women are in this salary band compared with a third of men. Although the same proportion of male and female journalists earn between £2,401 and £4,000/month, men are considerably more likely to have a salary of over £4,000/month (see Figure 1.1b overleaf). We can clearly see then that the salaries of full-time female journalists are weighted towards the bottom of the salary scale, whereas men's salaries are more evenly spread across the full spectrum of earnings.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the female journalists in our sample were, on average, five years younger than their male colleagues which is likely to explain some, but not all, of this income disparity.

This finding chimed with one young, female journalist working at a national news publication who completed our survey. She told us that ‘there are a few men who do the same job as me and are paid considerably more despite having less experience’. In her view one of the barriers to equal pay was a lack of transparency: ‘you don’t know how big the gap is because there’s huge secrecy around how much everyone is paid’ (personal communication, 23 February 2016).

**FIGURE 1.1b: GROSS MONTHLY SALARIES OF FULL-TIME MALE AND FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN THE UK, DECEMBER 2015 (n = 411).**



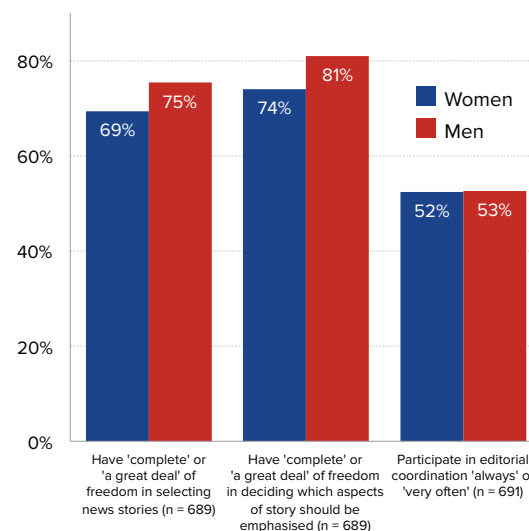
Notes: Journalists who said they also worked in other paid activities outside journalism were excluded. The average age of female journalists in our survey was 40 against 45 for men. This age difference is likely to explain some, but not all, of the income disparity between the sexes.

On the question of seniority, our survey shows that although similar proportions of men and women work as rank and file journalists, women appear to get stuck in junior management roles, whereas men are more likely to progress into senior management (see Figure 1.1c). The female journalist we spoke to felt that part of the explanation was the way existing

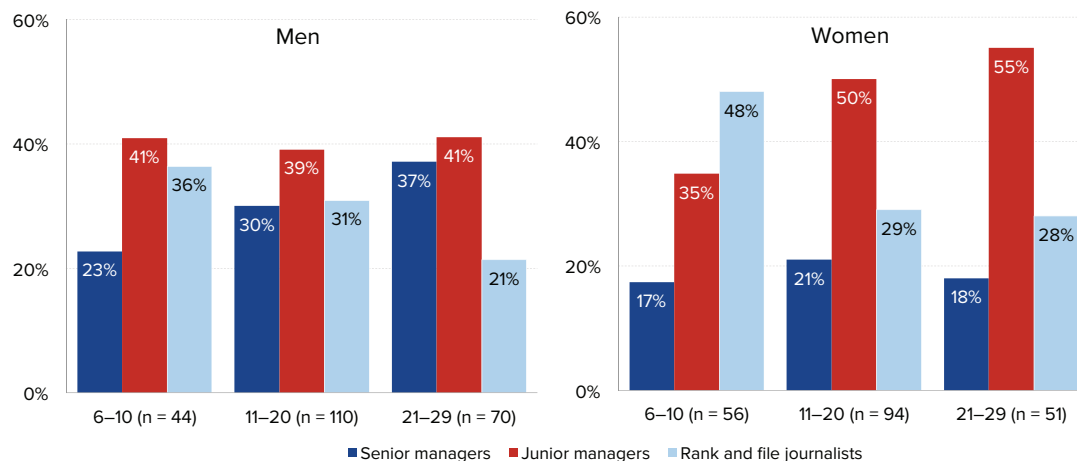
structures were inclined to replicate themselves: ‘there is a tendency for senior management to be predominantly male and for them to promote men as well’ (personal communication, 23 February 2016).

In addition to rank, our survey provided us with other ways of measuring differences in the relative levels of influence wielded by the sexes. We asked journalists how much freedom they had in selecting news stories, in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasised, and how often they participated in editorial meetings and newsroom coordination. There was no difference in the frequency with which men and women felt that they participated in editorial coordination, for example attending editorial meetings or assigning reporters. However, men said that they had a little more freedom both in selecting news stories and in deciding which aspects of a story to emphasise (see Figure 1.1d).

**FIGURE 1.1d: COMPARATIVE FREEDOM OF MALE AND FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN THE UK IN EDITORIAL DECISION-MAKING, DECEMBER 2015.**



**FIGURE 1.1c: RANK OF MALE AND FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN THE UK BY YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE, DECEMBER 2015.**

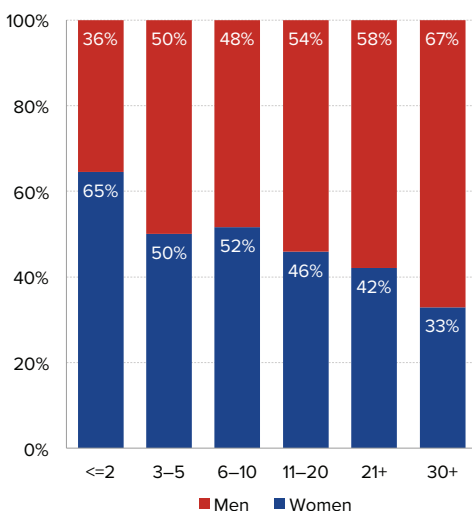


Note: Journalists at the start and end of their careers are not shown because those with less than 6 years professional experience are unlikely to have had significant opportunities for promotion and those with more than 29 years are more likely to be working part-time and in a freelance capacity (see section 2.5).

Our survey provides very limited data about any differences between the sexes in terms of the 'beats' or subject areas they cover. This is because only about half of our respondents say they specialise in a particular beat. If we look at the specialisms of those who do, all we can say with any certainty is that a lot more men cover sport than women: by a factor of about ten. Analysing the relative proportions of men and women at outlets with different geographic markets shows that gender diversity is worse at news organisations that are 'local' and 'transnational' in reach but better at those targeted at 'regional' and 'national' audiences.

So far our survey has painted a mixed picture of equality in influence and recognition for female journalists in the UK. Whilst men and women are approaching equality in security of employment and in their autonomy at work, women are paid less and are less likely to progress to senior levels of management. What then of the future? Are there any indications in our data that women will be better represented in senior positions in times to come? While it does not follow that having at least as many women as men entering the profession will result, eventually, in more equality in senior roles, it is a start. If we look at the profile of journalists entering the profession in recent years we can see that two-thirds of those starting their careers very recently – in the last two years – are women, almost exactly the reverse of the gender balance of journalists who have been working for more than 30 years (see Figure 1.1e). We can only hope that the high numbers of women among the recent entrants to the profession will receive fair remuneration and rise to positions of influence more easily than did the generations that preceded them.

**FIGURE 1.1e: PROPORTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN THE UK BY YEARS OF WORKING EXPERIENCE IN THE PROFESSION, DECEMBER 2015 (n = 682).**



Note: Data only include journalists who were working in the profession in December 2015.

## 1.2 EDUCATION

Traditionally, journalism has been a profession that has accommodated entrants without specialist training and, indeed, without any university-level education. In 2012 Jonathan Baker, the then Head of the BBC College of Journalism, wrote that to get into the BBC as a journalist 'a university degree is not required', adding that 'many of the BBC's top journalists did not have a university education' (Baker, 2012). While saying a degree was 'not required', Baker did concede that the qualification gave applicants 'a definite advantage'. This view is in line with the trend, observed globally (see e.g. Hanusch, 2013), towards the 'academisation' of journalism, as fewer and fewer journalists enter the profession without both a tertiary education and also some specialist education in journalism.

This trend is clearly evident in the UK. Indeed, Jonathan Baker is himself now running a journalism degree programme at the University of Essex (University of Essex, 2014). Our survey shows that 86% of UK journalists now have at least a bachelor's degree. This academisation becomes even more pronounced if we look at those who have entered the profession in recent years. Of those with three or fewer years of employment, 98% have at least a bachelor's degree with 36% having a master's. We can conclude then that journalism has become fully academised. Given the increasing costs of university education in the UK, especially when that education may include a master's degree, and given the competitiveness of university entry, questions need to be asked about the socio-economic diversity of future generations of UK journalists. For example, the university entry rate for 'men receiving free school meals in the White ethnic group' is just 9% (UCAS, 2015: 14) compared with 31% for all 18-year-olds in England (UCAS, 2015: 11).<sup>2</sup>

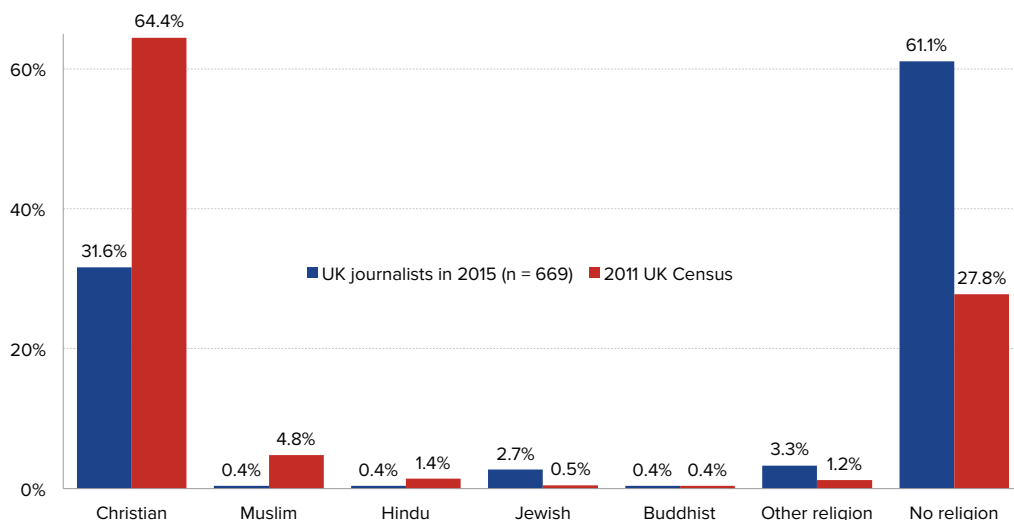
## 1.3 RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND BELIEF

To what extent do UK journalists consider themselves affiliated with any particular religion? Comparing our data with the 2011 Census shows that all religious groups are under-represented in the population of UK journalists with the exception of Buddhists and Jews. Muslims are most under-represented, followed by Hindus and Christians (see Figure 1.3a overleaf).

Of course surveys show that people can identify with a particular religious group, perhaps for social or cultural reasons, without practising regularly. A 2014 YouGov poll (Jordan, 2014) found that, irrespective of any affiliation with a formal faith, 76% of those surveyed said that they were 'not at all' or 'not very' religious. A similar number of UK journalists feel religion is of little or no importance (74%); however, their rejection is more profound, with 52% saying religion or religious belief is 'unimportant' against 37% of the general population who say that they are 'not at all' religious (see Figure 1.3b overleaf).

<sup>2</sup> The entry rate for disadvantaged 18-year-olds in England is 18.5% (UCAS, 2015: 13) and 16.4% for those who have received free school meals (ibid. 14).

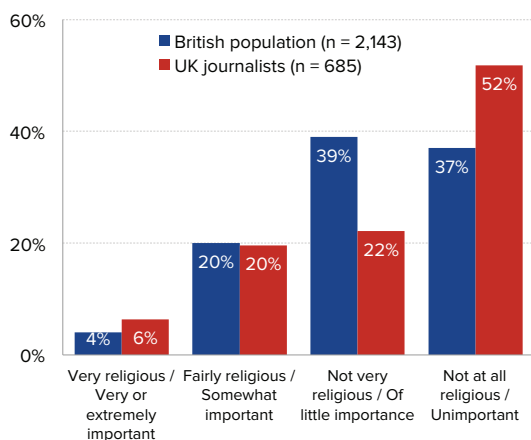
**FIGURE 1.3a: PERCENTAGE OF UK JOURNALISTS AFFILIATED WITH A RELIGION (OR NONE) COMPARED WITH THE 2011 CENSUS.**



UK journalists, then, are less likely to be religious or spiritual in general terms and much less likely to affiliate with a particular religious group than the wider community. Surprisingly, perhaps, this finding was welcomed by some religious representatives we talked to. A spokesperson from the Hindu Council UK said:

*It is heartening to note that a majority of UK journalists say that religion or religious belief is of little importance in their lives. Religious pluralism, including equal respect for atheists, is key to the future peace and success of this planet. Doing the right things (e.g. reporting accurately and reflecting the true picture without power and prejudice) are the key important factors. (Personal communication, 20 February, 2016)*

**FIGURE 1.3b: DEGREE OF RELIGIOSITY/ IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF TO UK JOURNALISTS VS THE BRITISH POPULATION.**



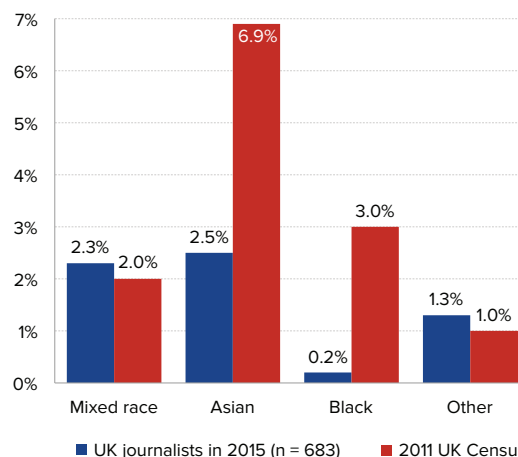
Note: Data about the British population are from a YouGov poll (Jordan, 2014) in which respondents were asked 'How religious, if at all, would you say you are?' UK journalists in our survey were asked 'How important is religion or religious belief to you?'

While the Hindu Council UK recognised the need to encourage minority groups, especially from deprived areas of the UK, to join the journalism profession, their response emphasised bridging the gap between spiritual and secular worldviews and encouraging religious pluralism, two areas that they felt would benefit from 'disinterested' journalists.

## 1.4 ETHNICITY

Comparing the results of our survey with data from the 2011 UK Census shows that those of Asian and Black ethnicity are under-represented in the population of UK journalists. The most under-represented group are Black Britons, who make up approximately 3% of the British population but just 0.2% of our sample. Asian Britons represent approximately 7% of the UK population but just 2.5% of our sample (see Figure 1.4).

**FIGURE 1.4: ETHNICITY OF NON-WHITE UK JOURNALISTS IN 2015 COMPARED WITH THE 2011 CENSUS.**



Note: White journalists made up 94% of our sample, while the 2011 Census revealed that 87% of the UK population was white.

Journalists from ethnic minority backgrounds who completed the survey had mixed opinions on discrimination in the industry. One, a young Asian financial journalist who worked in the trade press, said discrimination 'is not something I've ever experienced. I'm on my third journalism job and every office I've ever worked in, bar one which was very small, was quite diverse.' However, he did think that the situation might be different 'on some of the nationals and definitely on some of the regional newspapers' (personal communication, 23 February 2016).

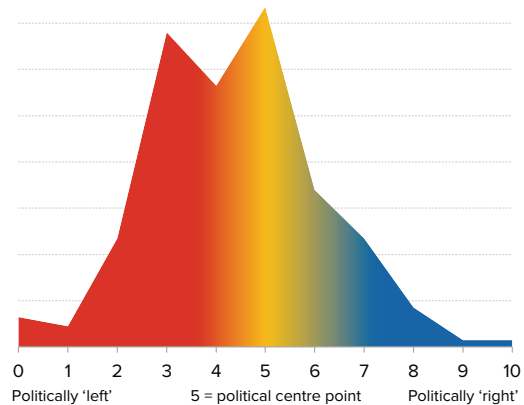
Another journalist, a Muslim magazine editor, felt his ethnicity had been a hindrance when applying for jobs. So much so that he once 'applied for the same job using an "English" sounding name and got an interview after being rejected the first time' (personal communication, 23 February 2016). Both journalists felt that cultural expectations and social connections were part of what prevented more Asians going into journalism. Traditional familial ambitions for children to go into 'respected professions' like 'medicine, engineering, and dentistry' make journalism a second-tier career; and because getting into journalism is highly competitive it requires 'either a lot of luck or someone you know', and 'Asian parents often don't know anyone in the media' (personal communication, 23 February 2016).

## 1.5 POLITICAL STANCE

Although it is more common for media institutions to be accused of political bias – the 'right-wing press' or 'the liberal media'<sup>3</sup> – individual journalists too can find themselves labelled as being of the right or of the left, often as a way of seeking to explain behaviour that is outside journalistic norms. Examples include the 'extreme' rhetoric used by 'right-wing journalist' Richard Littlejohn (O. Jones, 2012) or the 'controversial columns defending . . . Palestinian freedom fighters' written by 'left-wing' journalist Seumas Milne (Blanchard, 2015).

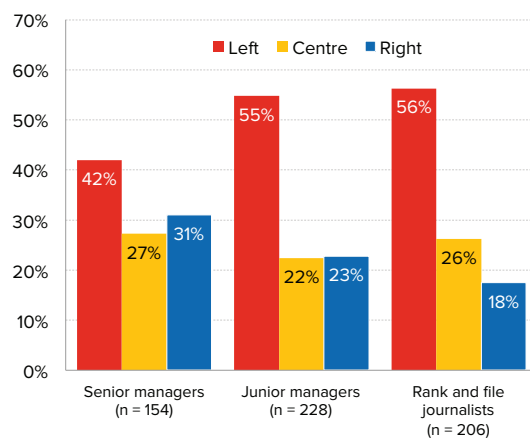
A search of the Nexis database of UK newspaper stories dating back to 1982 reveals that the term 'left-wing journalist' has been used 538 times, about twice as frequently as the term 'right-wing journalist'. But where are UK journalists on the political spectrum? We asked journalists to choose a point on a scale from 0 to 10 (where 0 was left, 10 was right, and 5 was centre) that was closest to their own political stance. Our results show that the single most chosen point on the scale was the centrist 5, with 24% of journalists choosing that position. A little over half (53%) chose a position to the left of centre and 23% to the right of centre (see Figure 1.5a).

**FIGURE 1.5a: POLITICAL AFFILIATION OF UK JOURNALISTS, DECEMBER 2015 (n = 603).**



This pattern differs somewhat between journalists of different ranks and levels of responsibility. Our survey shows that, while the proportion of journalists with a centrist political view stays fairly steady across the ranks, there is a clear increase in right-of-centre journalists in more senior roles, and a corresponding decrease in left-of-centre journalists, particularly above the rank of junior manager (see Figure 1.5b).

**FIGURE 1.5b: POLITICAL AFFILIATION OF UK JOURNALISTS BY RANK, DECEMBER 2015.**



Such self-reported political beliefs do not, of course, necessarily correspond to 'objective' assessments of political identity. For example, one study reported that 'participants showed a significant bias toward perceiving themselves as more conservative than they actually were, and this effect was more pronounced among independents and conservatives than liberals' (Zell and Bernstein, 2014).

Whatever the self-perceived or 'objective' political stance of journalists, their individual beliefs are not directly and uniformly reflected in the output of the media. First, not all journalists exercise the same degree of influence on the news agenda. Secondly, journalists' personal beliefs are moderated by other influences on their work, such as editorial policy and journalism ethics. The influences that journalists feel affect their work are

<sup>3</sup> A search of the Nexis database of UK newspaper stories dating back to 1982 found more than 3,000 mentions of the phrase 'liberal media', and more than 2,000 mentions of the 'right-wing press'.



more fully discussed in Section 6. However, we will mention here that our survey shows journalists think ‘Editorial Policy’ and ‘Journalism Ethics’ are more influential on their work than their personal values and beliefs.

Ethical codes of practice that apply to UK journalists mention the need to distinguish between ‘fact’ and ‘opinion’ or ‘comment’ (NUJ, 2011; IPSO, 2016), obligations that most journalists claim to take seriously: 66% of the journalists in our survey ‘strongly agree’ that ‘journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics’, with another 28% agreeing ‘somewhat’. Beyond strict codes of practice, UK journalists work within a professional culture where there is an expectation that they will be ‘detached’ and ‘report things as they are’. We discuss the professional roles that journalists consider important in full in Section 4. In the context of this discussion about the extent of the influence of journalists’ political beliefs, we will simply report how our survey revealed that more than three-quarters felt that being a ‘detached observer’ was ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ important and that even more (93%) felt the same about ‘reporting things as they are’.

In this section we have reported journalists’ perceptions of their political stance, noted how that pattern changes with seniority, and pointed to other moderating influences on journalists’ work. There is no space to enter into a full debate on how journalists’ personal political beliefs weigh up against other factors in influencing the selection of news stories and their framing. However, we will say that there are those who believe that influences such as ownership, commercial considerations, sourcing practices, and media management by vested interests carry much more weight than the beliefs of individual journalists (see e.g. Herman and Chomsky, 1994).

## 1.6 CONCLUSIONS

Although women make up a relatively high proportion of the journalism profession in the UK and are on a par with their male colleagues in terms of the editorial freedom they wield and their contractual conditions, they are less well remunerated and less likely to progress to senior positions. The normalisation of the graduate entry route into the profession is helping correct historical gender imbalances,<sup>4</sup> although this academisation of journalism may have other, undesirable, consequences, particularly for its socio-economic diversity.

UK journalists reflect the general population’s religious diversity far less well than its male/female ratio, although some religious representatives do not think this is necessarily a bad thing, as long as journalists report accurately and without bias. UK journalism has a significant diversity problem in terms of ethnicity, with Black Britons, for example, under-represented by a factor of ten. Some of our survey’s respondents had witnessed discrimination based on their ethnic characteristics first-hand. Commenting on this survey’s findings, Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary of the National Union of Journalists, said ‘employers must now be compelled to do an equality audit of their own organisations and then address clear disparities’ (personal communication via Oscar Williams, 26 February 2016).

About half of journalists in the UK say they take a left-of-centre political stance, with the remaining half split between the centre and the right-wing. Although certain political beliefs (those to the right-of-centre) increase with levels of responsibility, journalists claim to adhere strongly to the professional paradigm of neutrality. They also maintain that their personal beliefs, political and otherwise, are less important than other influences on their work. While this may be so, those other influences, such as public relations activity, are not politically neutral and, as we will show later, their effects are strong and growing.

<sup>4</sup> Women outnumbered men on UK journalism degrees in every year between 2007 to 2014 except 2008 (Reid, 2015).

# EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

NEIL THURMAN

In this section we present data on the employment conditions of journalists in the UK, including the nature of their contracts; the number of newsrooms and outlets they work for; the proportion who take other paid work; and their job roles, rank, and income. We also consider the geographical reach of the primary news outlets journalists work for, to try to gauge, at a time of instant international communication, the growth in the importance of audiences who are geographically removed from the journalists who serve them.

## 2.1 NATURE OF CONTRACT

**TABLE 2.1: PROPORTIONS OF UK JOURNALISTS WORKING FREELANCE OR AS A PERMANENT OR TEMPORARY EMPLOYEE.**

	This survey (2015)	NCTJ (2012)	LFS (2015)	Whole labour force <sup>a</sup>
<b>Permanent</b>	74%	66%	61%	79%
<b>Temporary</b>	7%	5%	1%	5%
<b>Freelance<sup>b</sup></b>	17%	21%	37%	15%
<b>Other</b>	3%	8%	1%	0.5%

a. June–September 2015. Source: ONS, 2015b.

b. The ONS *LFS* used the term 'self-employed' rather than 'freelance'. The NCTJ's survey also asked journalists whether they were 'self-employed' (either freelance or working for their own company).

Our survey shows that 81% of journalists in the UK are regular employees, with 17% working on a freelance basis, and another 3% having some 'other' arrangement (see Table 2.1). This proportion of freelance journalists is slightly lower than that found in the NCTJ's *Journalists at Work* survey (NCTJ, 2012), and significantly lower than that found in the Office for National Statistics' *Labour Force Survey* (*LFS*). In 2012, the NCTJ found that 21% of journalists worked in a 'self-employed' capacity – 12% freelance and 9% for their own company (NCTJ, 2012). For the third quarter of 2015, the *LFS* shows 37% of journalists as being self-employed (ONS, 2015b), although the small sample size (96) means we should interpret their data with caution. The higher proportion of freelancers found by the *LFS* may be due

to the fact that journalists looking for work are included (8% of the sample), some of whom may identify as freelancers. The sampling strategy we used in our survey targeted journalists who were actively working – excluding those who earned less than 50% of their income from journalism.

At 17%, the proportion of journalists we found to be working freelance is slightly above the average for the UK labour force, although about the same as in the wider 'Information and Communications' sector: in the third quarter of 2015, 15% of the UK labour force were self-employed as were 16% of those working in 'Information and Communications' (ONS, 2015b).

There have been regular reports of journalists in permanent employment being made redundant and replaced by freelance (and 'citizen') journalists. For example, in October 2015, the *Brighton Argus*, part of the Newsquest group, announced it intended to 'reduce the pictures department from three full-time photographers to one full-time picture editor as part of its policy to use readers' pictures and freelance contributions'. Similar changes have happened in other newspaper groups including Johnston Press (NUJ, 2016).

Has there been, then, an increase in the proportion of freelance journalists in recent years? Is the restructuring of the sort mentioned above creating more opportunities for freelance journalists – as proprietors' press releases may lead us to believe – or is it, on the other hand, putting out of work skilled professionals who are unlikely to continue working in journalism due to the limited opportunities available to freelancers?

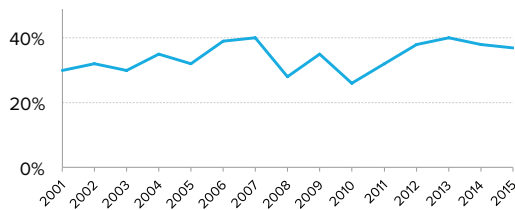
If we look at the *LFS* data on 'Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors' from 2001 to 2015, we see that there is not a clear pattern of increased freelance working. For example, the proportion of freelance journalists in 2011 (32%) was no higher than it was in 2002, 2004, or 2005 (see Figure 2.1 overleaf). We would conclude, then, that opportunities for freelance work within journalism do not appear to be increasing. Instead, it may be the case that many of those being made redundant are being lost to the profession along with the skills they embody.

Mike Pearce, for 20 years an editor of local newspapers in Kent, suggests that the gaps left, especially at the local level,

are being filled by low-quality content from ‘citizen journalists’. This trend, he believes, is hastening the demise of newspapers, with readers reluctant to buy titles that are increasingly poorly illustrated and written:

*The arrival of so-called ‘citizen journalists’ means proprietors are near their holy grail of producing news without the expense of reporters. Training schools have closed, on-the-job training is minimal. Background stories are rarely tackled, courts go unreported, raw copy appears, unsubbed. (Personal communication, 19 February 2016)*

**FIGURE 2.1: PROPORTION OF UK JOURNALISTS IDENTIFYING AS SELF-EMPLOYED, 2001–2015.**



Note: Data are for June–September each year. Source: ONS, 2015b.

## 2.2 FULL- AND PART-TIME WORKING

Our questionnaire only asked journalists who were permanent or temporary employees – not freelancers – whether they worked full- or part-time. The results show there is a strong connection between the type of employment contract and full-time working. A higher proportion (90%) of journalists who are permanently employed work full-time than those on a temporary contract, for which the figure is 50%. Our figures show the same general trend as the NCTJ’s 2012 survey. That survey, unlike ours, did report data on freelancers, showing that only about half work full-time (see Table 2.2).

**TABLE 2.2: PROPORTIONS OF UK JOURNALISTS WORKING FULL-TIME.**

	This survey (2015)	NCTJ (2012)
Permanent	90%	89%
Temporary	50%	72%
Freelance		51%

## 2.3 RANGE OF NEWSROOMS AND NEWS OUTLETS

A typical journalist in the UK works in a single newsroom for two outlets, for example, a print and an online edition. To be more precise, our survey found that the average number of newsrooms worked in is 1.48, and the average number of news outlets 2.2.

Freelancers are more likely to work for multiple newsrooms. Whereas over 80% of journalists in regular employment work for one newsroom, only 33% of freelancers do, with 14% working for three, 9% working for four, and 6% working for five. Freelancers are also more likely to work for multiple news outlets. While over 60% of regular employees work for a single news outlet, only 20% of freelancers do, with 24% working for two, 15% working for three, 12% working for four, and 7% working for five.

Although newsrooms do produce separate news outlets in the same medium, for example, *BBC News at Ten* and *BBC News at Six*, many have outlets in more than one medium. Section 3.1 describes the cross-media working patterns of journalists in the UK, showing, for example, that 54% work in one medium while 42% work across at least two media.

## 2.4 JOB ROLE AND RANK

We asked journalists to choose a job category that best described their current position. ‘Reporter’ was the most common, followed by ‘Editor-in-chief’ and ‘Senior editor’. ‘Managing editors’ came next, followed by ‘Desk’ and ‘Department’ heads (see Table 2.4a).

**TABLE 2.4a: UK JOURNALISTS’ JOB ROLES, DECEMBER 2015 (n = 698).**

Position in newsroom	
Reporter	23%
‘Other’	23%
Editor-in-chief	15%
Senior editor	15%
Managing editor	7%
Desk head or assignment editor	6%
Department head	6%
Producer	3%
News writer	1%
Trainee	0.4%

Note: Due to rounding, percentages do not add up to 100%.

Nearly a quarter of our respondents felt that their role did not fit into one of our nine predefined categories, including some freelancers unsure, perhaps, of how to respond to a question which asked for their role ‘in the newsroom’ (some made the point that, as freelancers, they did not work in

a newsroom). Also in the 'Other' category were senior or specialist journalists who felt that their role was not adequately described by our predefined terms 'reporter' or 'news writer'. Production roles, such as sub-editor or production editor, also featured. We present a summary of the other roles journalists defined for themselves in Table 2.4b. In it we have grouped over 100 different job titles into 13 broad categories covering proprietorial, production, supervisory, and writing and presenting roles. For the purpose of further analysis we also recategorised the roles of all the journalists in our survey into three even broader groups:

- senior/executive managers with strategic authority;
- junior managers with operational authority;
- rank and file journalists with limited authority.

**TABLE 2.4b: OTHER JOB ROLES SPECIFIED BY UK JOURNALISTS, DECEMBER 2015 (n = 698).**

Position in newsroom	
Freelance	4%
Deputy/section editor	4%
Feature writer/columnist/leader writer	2%
Writer/senior/chief writer	2%
Editor	2%
Specialist correspondent	1%
Presenter	1%
Sub-editor/senior sub-editor	1%
Other	1%
Broadcast journalist	1%
Online/social media editor	1%
Production editor	1%
Publisher/founder/MD	1%

Our recategorisation is relatively simple. By comparison, the NCTJ's *Journalists at Work* report assigned journalists to seven groups. The simplicity of our approach has allowed us to conduct relatively robust cross-tabulations, for example, looking at the editorial independence of rank and file journalists against their junior and senior managerial colleagues (see Section 3.3) and how pay differs by rank.

Overall we found that 25% of our sample were in senior managerial roles, 38% were in junior managerial roles, and 36% were rank and file journalists. Although lacking in operational or strategic authority, rank and file journalists – for example, those who call themselves 'senior writers', 'special correspondents', and 'presenters' – can have salaries in the higher salary bands. Four rank and file journalists told us they took home more than £115,000 per year.

## 2.5 INCOME

Our survey shows that UK journalists' salaries range widely,<sup>5</sup> with around 20% earning less than £19,500/year (gross), and about 5% earning more than £76,800. The median salary band was £28,812–£38,400. Our survey only included journalists who were earning at least 50% of their income from journalism, which may explain why the median salary earned is higher than that found by the NCTJ's *Journalists at Work* survey. In that survey more of the sample worked part-time. The median salary band for journalists surveyed by the NCTJ in 2012 was £25,000–£29,999, which, when adjusted for inflation, equates to £26,629–£31,953 in 2015. However, because of the different sampling strategies and salary bands used by the two surveys, it is difficult to make comparisons. We are reluctant, therefore, to reach any conclusions about the growth of journalists' average salary since 2012. What we can do, however, is compare incomes across other dimensions: employment contract, rank, age, gender, education, and type of news outlet – both in terms of geographical reach and medium.

### BY GENDER

In Section 1, which addresses UK journalists' personal characteristics and diversity, we describe the pay difference between men and women, showing how women working full-time in journalism earn less than their male counterparts.

### BY AGE

As expected, journalists' salaries rise in their twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties, only dropping off at age 60 and over when a greater proportion start to work part-time and in a freelance capacity.<sup>6</sup> Almost all (88%) of the journalists in our survey aged 24 or less earned between £0 and £19,200. Given that many will not be earning at the top of that band, this figure is likely to be at, or even below, the living wage<sup>7</sup> for many. Of those in their mid to late twenties, a time when many people would like to buy a property, the vast majority (83%) are earning less than £29,000 a year (see Figure 2.5a overleaf), about the same as the median graduate starting salary in 2014–15 (BBC News, 2015). Given that it has been estimated that, across the UK, a first-time buyer needs a minimum income of £41,000 – and £77,000 in London – (Kollewe, 2015), affordable housing is a critical issue for many journalists unless they have other sources of income.

### BY MEDIUM WORKED IN

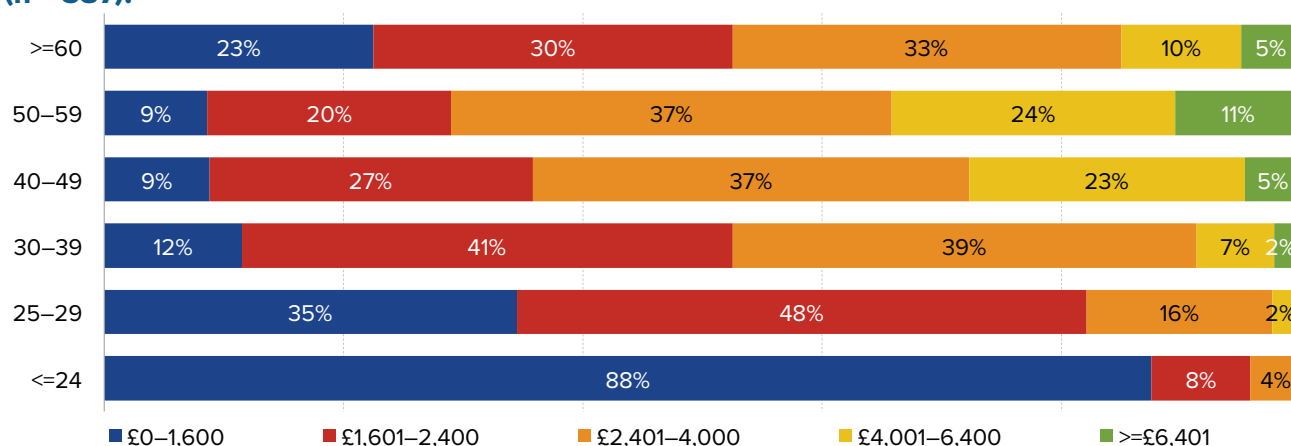
The NCTJ's 2012 survey found that journalists working mainly in television earned the highest salaries, with radio and online coming next, followed by magazines and then newspapers. Our survey did not ask respondents to indicate their main medium of employment but rather all the media they worked in (about 42% told us they worked across more than one medium). Using those data we are able to give an impression of the links

<sup>5</sup> Although, as we discuss in Section 7.5, income diversity among journalists is not as wide as that of the general population.

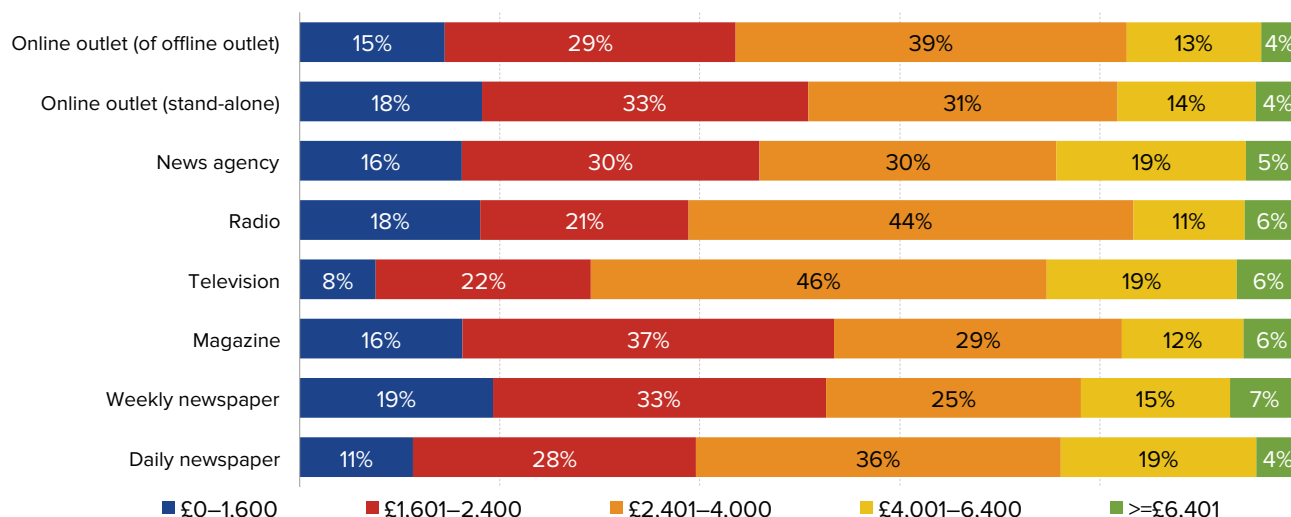
<sup>6</sup> Of journalists in their fifties, 8% work part-time compared with 12% of those in their sixties. 21% of those in their fifties work freelance compared with 32% of those in their sixties.

<sup>7</sup> £16,302 for those working outside London and £18,570 for those in the capital (Vero, 2014).

**FIGURE 2.5a: GROSS MONTHLY SALARIES OF UK JOURNALISTS BY AGE, DECEMBER 2015 (n = 587).**

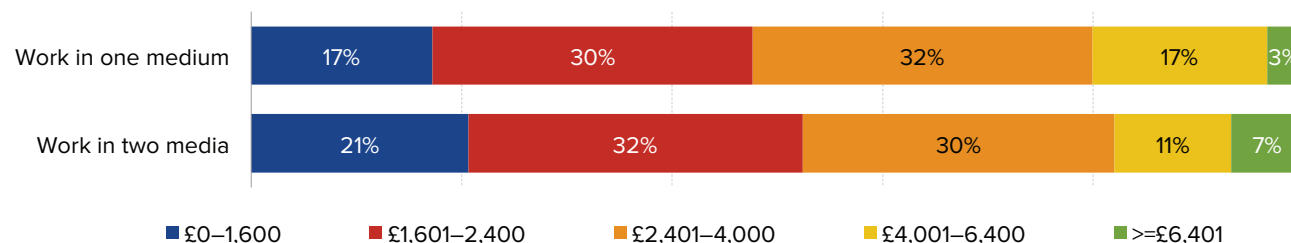


**FIGURE 2.5b: GROSS MONTHLY SALARIES OF UK JOURNALISTS BY MEDIUM WORKED IN, DECEMBER 2015 (n = 618).**



Note: Because respondents could indicate that they worked in multiple media (and 42% do, see section 3.1) these figures do not represent the salaries paid by the separate media industries, but rather the salaries of journalists who work wholly or partly in each media industry.

**FIGURE 2.5c: GROSS MONTHLY SALARIES OF UK JOURNALISTS WORKING IN ONE MEDIUM OR TWO MEDIA, DECEMBER 2015 (n = 508).**



between medium worked in and salary. Our results show, as the NCTJ's survey did in 2012, that journalists working wholly or partly in television are most highly remunerated, with 25% receiving a gross monthly salary of more than £4,001. At the other end of the spectrum, those working wholly or partly in magazines and weekly newspapers appear to be the least well remunerated (see Figure 2.5b).

We also looked at differences in salary between journalists who practised in more than one medium and those who did not. The results show that there is no clear financial benefit to working in more than one medium. For example, while 47% of those working in one medium earn less than £2,400/month, 53% of those working in two media do (see Figure 2.5c).<sup>8</sup>

Why, then, are the skills required to work across multiple media apparently not being rewarded? Spyridou and Veglis (2016) believe the convergence projects that provide opportunities for journalists to work across multiple media 'are primarily driven by the market logic that aims to reduce costs, while increasing productivity and maximising profit', part of a historical process whereby 'technology has been used by owners and managers to . . . make journalistic labor cheaper'. So, although much of the discussion around multiskilling is framed in positive terms, what Spyridou and Veglis call the 'super journalist paradigm', some believe that under convergence there is a tendency for journalists' skills to be spread thinly over multiple formats, exploiting 'the technological and social opportunities offered by

convergence in order to enhance monetization opportunities' (ibid.).

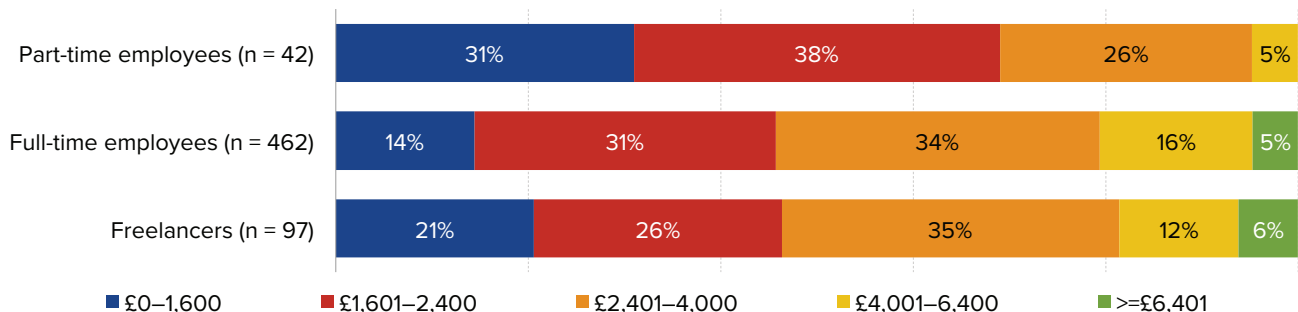
In a study of production convergence in UK newsrooms, Saltzis and Dickinson (2008: 222) predicted a two-tier workforce with 'the "single skilled" specialists, valued for their high journalistic standards; and "the multiskilled [journalist]", valued for their versatility and adaptability'. Our survey indicates that versatility and adaptability across multiple media may not command a premium over high journalistic standards in a single medium.

## BY NATURE OF CONTRACT

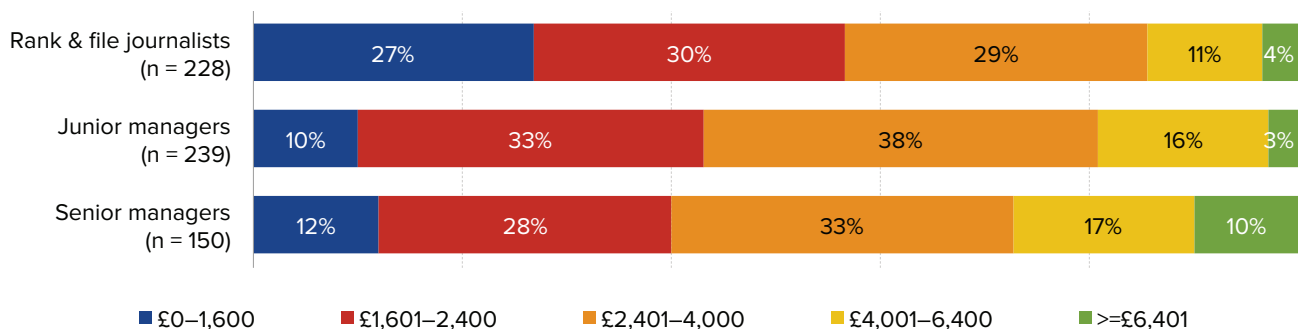
The median salary band for freelance and full-time journalists who completed our survey was the same. Looking at the spread of earnings we can see that, although a greater proportion of freelance journalists are in the lowest salary band, a higher proportion are in the highest salary band (see Figure 2.5d).

Overall our survey does not show a huge financial disadvantage to working on a freelance basis, at least in terms of annual income. However, other issues face freelance journalists. A comprehensive survey by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ, 2004) showed 'serious, and worrying, flaws in the way that staff editors and commissioning editors treat freelancers' and the effect of the isolation that can come with working from home.

**FIGURE 2.5d: GROSS MONTHLY SALARIES OF UK JOURNALISTS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS, DECEMBER 2015.**



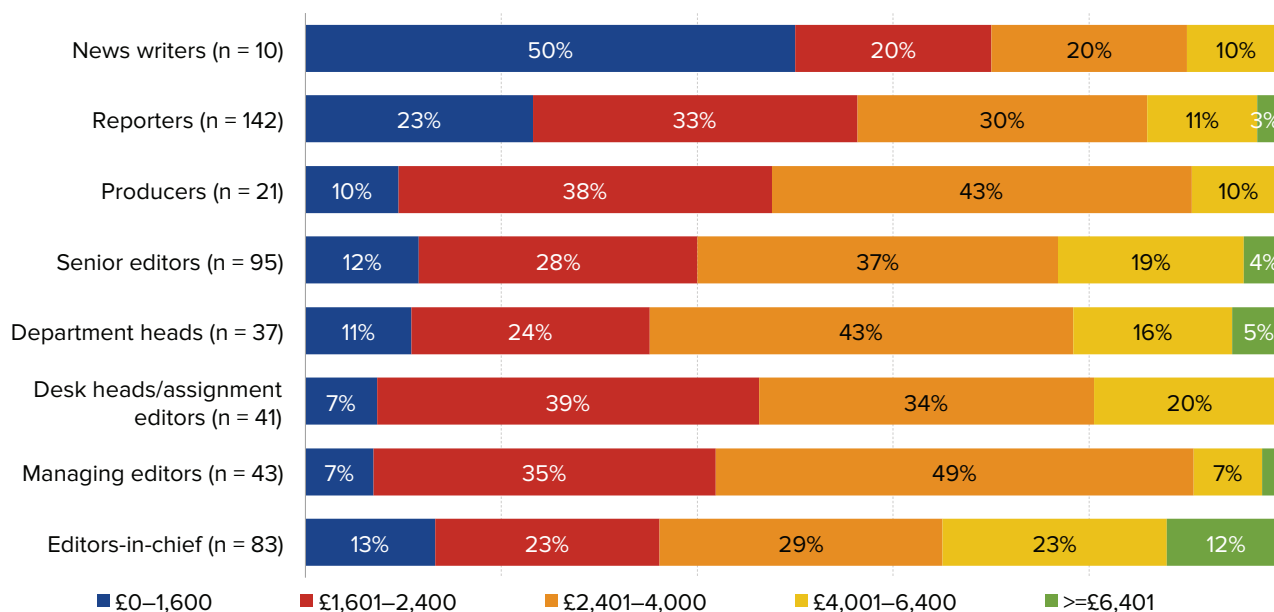
**FIGURE 2.5e: GROSS MONTHLY SALARIES OF UK JOURNALISTS BY RANK, DECEMBER 2015.**



<sup>8</sup> Some may seek to explain this result by suggesting that younger, less well-paid journalists are more likely to work across multiple media having, perhaps, received multi-media training at university. In fact, journalists who have entered the profession in the last five years do not work across more media than their more experienced colleagues (see Section 3.1).



**FIGURE 2.5f: GROSS MONTHLY SALARIES OF UK JOURNALISTS BY JOB ROLE, DECEMBER 2015.**



## BY ROLE AND RANK

As is to be expected, journalists' salary rises with rank. However, our survey found that around 15% of rank and file journalists, those we classified as having limited strategic or operational authority, were earning salaries above £48,000. Furthermore, holding a position of responsibility did not necessarily come with a high salary. Over 40% of journalists who were classified as senior/executive managers with strategic authority were earning less than £29,000 (see Figure 2.5e on previous page).

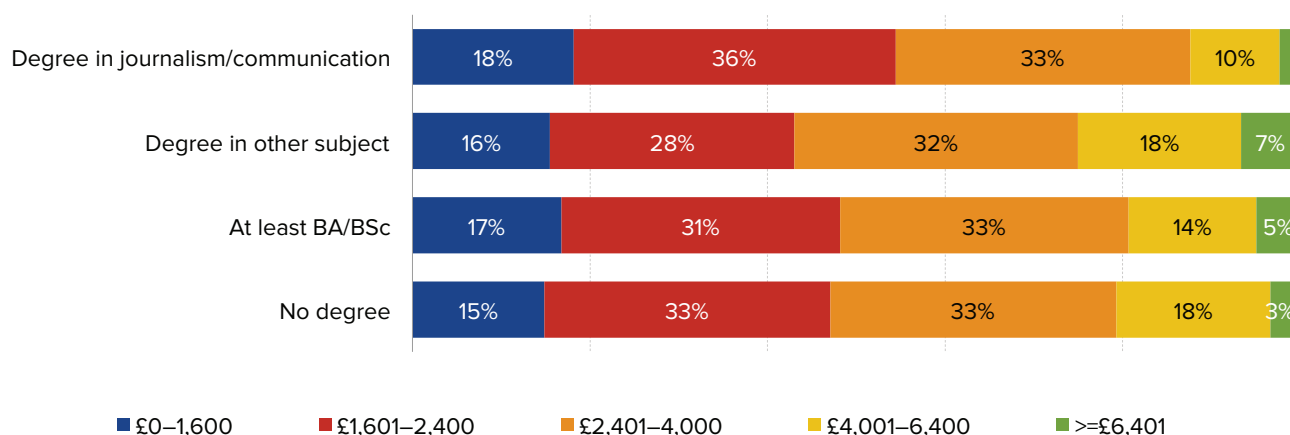
Looking at income by job role in more detail we can see that 'News writers' were the least well paid (other than trainees), with 50% earning less than £19,200/year, followed by 'Reporters'. 'Editors-in-chief' were the most highly rewarded, with 35% earning more than £48,000 (see Figure 2.5f).

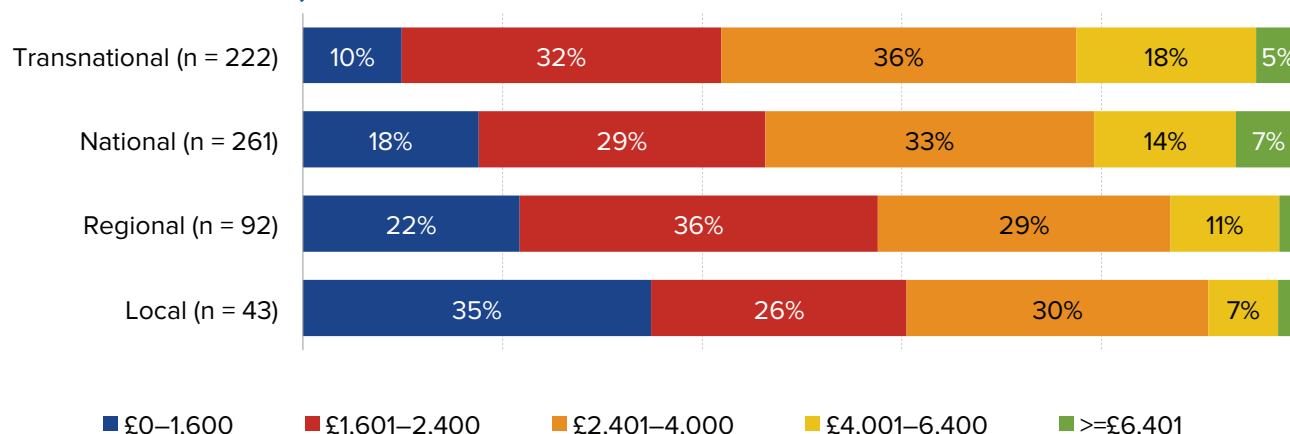
## BY EDUCATION LEVEL AND SPECIALISM

There are negligible differences in salary between those with at least a bachelor's degree and those without. In fact those without a BA or equivalent are actually more likely to be earning a salary in the upper three of our five salary bands than those who have one (see Figure 2.5g). This does not, of course, mean that a degree is without value. As we show in Section 1, on journalists' personal characteristics and diversity, a degree is now almost essential as a way into journalism. Instead, these results are more indicative of how, in the past, entry into, and progress through, the profession did not depend on formal qualifications.

There is an inverse relationship between whether journalists have specialised (at university) in journalism and communication and the salary they earn, with those who have specialised earning less than their colleagues whose university

**FIGURE 2.5g: GROSS MONTHLY SALARIES OF UK JOURNALISTS BY LEVEL AND TYPE OF EDUCATION, DECEMBER 2015 (n = 575).**



**FIGURE 2.5h: GROSS MONTHLY SALARIES OF UK JOURNALISTS BY GEOGRAPHICAL REACH OF PRIMARY OUTLET, DECEMBER 2015.**

studies were not related to journalism or communication. However, this difference is likely to be related to age rather than to a specialist education in journalism being an impediment to promotion, because a higher proportion of new entrants to the profession have a degree in journalism than their older, higher-earning colleagues (see Section 5.1).

### BY REACH OF PRIMARY OUTLET

Our survey asked journalists to state the reach (local, regional, national, or transnational) of the news medium for which they do most of their work. Although reach is a difficult concept in an era of global digital communication, the results show that higher salaries are linked to working for an outlet with wider geographical market reach. For example, about 35% of local journalists earn less than £19,200<sup>9</sup> compared with fewer than 10% of those working for a publication with an international reach. At the other end of the scale, those working in publications with a transnational reach are about twice as likely to earn more than £48,000 as those working in local publications (see Figure 2.5h).

## 2.6 OTHER OCCUPATIONS

Perhaps because of their low levels of pay, a relatively high proportion of journalists have a secondary occupation. Our survey found that 27% of journalists engaged in other paid activities. This figure is slightly lower than found by the NCTJ in 2012, again probably due to the higher number of freelance journalists surveyed by the NCTJ. The NCTJ found that the extent to which journalists worked in other jobs varied less than expected according to rank. Our results were slightly different, with only a fifth of junior managers engaging in other paid work compared with 35% of senior managers and 28% of rank and file journalists (see Table 2.6).

The *LFS* for the third quarter of 2015 shows that only 3.7% of the entire UK labour force did 'other paid work . . . in addition to' a main job. Given the similarity of the questions asked in our survey and by the *LFS*, we are reasonably confident to

conclude that journalists are more than seven times more likely to have a secondary paid occupation than the average worker in the UK.

**TABLE 2.6: PROPORTION OF UK JOURNALISTS WHO HAVE OTHER PAID OCCUPATIONS, 2012 AND 2015.**

	Our survey (2015) (n = 692)	NCTJ (2012) (n = 1064)
<b>All journalists</b>	27%	34%
<b>Senior managers</b>	35%	
<b>Junior managers</b>	20%	
<b>Rank and file journalists</b>	28%	
<b>Editorial management</b>		27%
<b>Section heads</b>		30%
<b>Non-editorial management/section heads</b>		49%

## 2.7 GEOGRAPHICAL REACH OF NEWS OUTLET

In an era of instant worldwide communication, when the fourth most popular online newspaper in the US is the British MailOnline (Alexa, 2016), the nature of the audiences that news outlets serve has changed. Our survey asked journalists to indicate the geographical reach of the news outlet for which they did most of their work. We present the data here and have used them elsewhere in this study to analyse, for example, the differences in salary or in editorial freedom between journalists working at news outlets with a local, regional, national, or transnational reach. The NCTJ's 2012 survey gathered data on the proportions of journalists working in provincial and national newspapers, radio, and television. Our data, although not as specific at the provincial and national level, goes further than the NCTJ's survey by asking journalists whether they feel their primary news outlet addresses a transnational audience.

<sup>9</sup> This figure is almost identical to that found by a *Press Gazette* survey in 2015 (Turvill, 2015b).

Over a third of UK journalists feel that their main news outlet has a transnational reach (see Table 2.7a). Such outlets include specialist publications aimed, for example, at financial professionals or sports fans; and emerging internet-only news sites that have global branding and operations in several different countries. Such sites, including Vice News, the Huffington Post, Politico, and BuzzFeed, have gained significantly in popularity in recent years and are now amongst the most visited news destinations in the UK. For example, the Huffington Post is the third most popular online news source in the UK and BuzzFeed attracts more online visitors than ITV News, Times online, and Independent online (Newman, 2015: 24).

**TABLE 2.7a: UK JOURNALISTS’ UNDERSTANDING OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL REACH OF THE NEWS MEDIUM THEY DO MOST OF THEIR WORK FOR, DECEMBER 2015.**

Reach	All journalists (n = 700)	Journalists working for UK national newspapers (n = 125)
Local	7%	0%
Regional	14%	2%
National	42%	69%
Transnational	36%	30%

Some journalists working for what have, traditionally, been national and regional newspapers in the UK also believe that the reach of their primary news outlet is now international. Indeed, we found that a third of journalists working for UK ‘national’ newspapers, such as the *Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *The Times*, and the *Daily Telegraph*, now consider their outlet’s reach to be transnational. Although many UK national newspapers have had an overseas audience for their print editions for many years, such international distribution is expensive, meaning it has been limited in extent. For example, 96% of the *Daily Mail*’s average daily print circulation is within England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and only 4%, a total of 56,680 copies, in foreign markets (ABC, 2016).

The overseas market for UK news publications has been changed by online publication, making the product available outside the traditional limitations of print distribution and increasing the exposure of UK news brands on the international stage. It has been estimated that online has increased UK newspapers’ daily overseas audience by between seven and 16 times (Thurman, 2014). MailOnline, for example, now gets 70% of its online visitors from outside the UK (ABC, 2016).

However, overseas visitors are not as engaged as those from news outlets’ home markets. The extent of this relative lack of engagement seems to have remained consistent over the years. For example, in 2005 overseas readers of UK online newspapers read ‘3–4 times fewer pages than their domestic counterparts’ (Thurman, 2007), identical to the pattern in January 2016 for MailOnline (see Table 2.7b).

**TABLE 2.7b: PROPORTIONS OF UNIQUE BROWSERS AND PAGE IMPRESSIONS FROM THE UK AND OVERSEAS REGISTERED BY MAILONLINE, JANUARY 2016.**

	Unique browsers	Page impressions	Monthly page impressions per unique browser
UK	30%	63%	54
Rest of the World	70%	37%	13

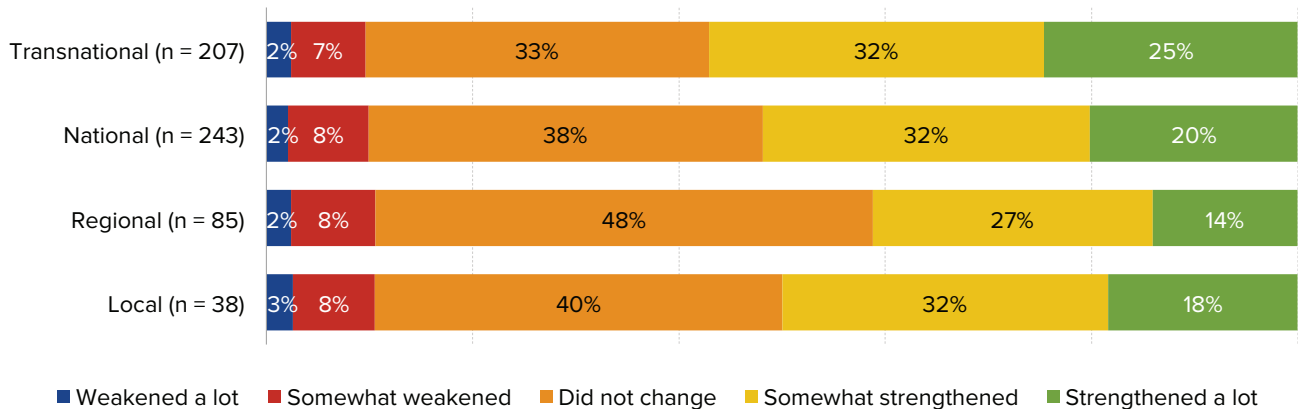
Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations.

Nevertheless, in spite of this relative lack of engagement, the presence of overseas readers does seem to have shifted journalists’ perceptions of their audience. Today a significant minority of those who would, in earlier times, have been focused on a national audience believe they are addressing an international market. We do not have space to do more than briefly consider the potential consequences of this change. One hypothesis is that, to serve a globally dispersed audience, news publications will increase the proportion of material that is independent of locality. Such content could include, for example, coverage of globally known individuals, including celebrities; soft news on health, animals, and technology; and sensationalist coverage of crime.

Our survey gives some support to this hypothesis, with a higher proportion of journalists working at publications with a transnational reach feeling that the pressure towards sensational news increased ‘somewhat’ or ‘a lot’ between 2010 and 2015 (see Figure 2.7). Our survey also found 9.4% of specialist reporters working for transnational publishers (*n* = 149) were on the entertainment beat compared with 4.1% at national publications (*n* = 170).

Other brands, however, are aiming for transnational reach with different kinds of content. With editorial offices in Australia and the US, the *Guardian* has had ambitions to be the ‘world’s leading liberal voice’ (*Guardian*, 2010) and FT.com has five international editions covering Asia, Europe, India, the Middle East, and the US, as well as a Chinese-language edition.

**FIGURE 2.7: PROPORTIONS OF UK JOURNALISTS WORKING ON LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL, OR TRANSNATIONAL PUBLICATIONS WHO BELIEVE PRESSURE TOWARDS SENSATIONAL NEWS CHANGED BETWEEN 2010 AND 2015. DECEMBER 2015.**



## 2.8 CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis indicates that the proportion of journalists working freelance, while probably somewhat higher than that of the whole labour force, has stayed fairly steady over time, mirroring trends among other workers. It may be, then, that employers' rhetoric about redundancies creating more freelance opportunities is over-optimistic, with the resulting gaps more likely to be filled with content from non-professional sources, to the detriment of the quality of news output.

Our data on those freelancers still in the profession show, as we expected, that they work for a greater number of newsrooms and outlets but also, perhaps surprisingly, that they earn almost as much as their contracted colleagues. More widely, low rates of pay are a problem in journalism, particularly for those in their twenties, and there are pay disparities between men and women and between those working in different media formats. It may be that low pay is contributing to the relatively high proportion of journalists, across all ranks, who take on other paid work outside journalism.

Our survey found that more than 30% of all journalists – and 30% of those working for UK 'national' newspapers – believe their main outlet addresses an international market. Such a change in journalists' conceptions of their audience has consequences for news production, as content is internationalised and localised.

The convergence that has made instant, international news distribution possible has also changed news formats and working routines, increasing cross-media working. Our survey raises some doubts, however, about the consequences of such changes for journalists, suggesting that those who work across multiple media are not paid a premium for their versatility and adaptability.

# WORKING ROUTINES

NEIL THURMAN

This section focuses on some of the working routines of journalists in the United Kingdom. Specifically: the type of medium or media they work in; what subject areas, if any, they specialise in; the freedom they have to make editorial decisions; and how many news items they produce or process each week. Other aspects of journalists' routines, such as their adherence to codes of conduct, changes in their use of social media, and the extent to which they are influenced by PR activities, are covered in other sections of this report.

## 3.1 CROSS-MEDIA WORKING

There has been much debate, both in academic and professional circles, about the extent to which journalists are working, or should be prepared to work, in a cross- or multi-media capacity, telling separate stories in different media formats or using multiple media to tell a single story. While news organisations' accounts of moves in this direction often carry an air of ease and inevitability – for example, Trinity Mirror's aim to 'produce compelling multimedia content which will increase audience and revenue in every marketplace' (Trinity Mirror, 2006) – the reality on the ground often looks rather different. In their analysis of Trinity Mirror's 2006 Multimedia Strategy, Andy Williams and Bob Franklin found journalists believed that multi-media working had 'adversely affected the quality of the news they [were] able to produce' (2007: 79) because, the journalists thought, the minimal training and lack of resources available did not allow them to produce news video of high quality.

Doubts about the need for what Marc Webber<sup>10</sup> disparagingly called the 'robo-journo . . . with a pen in one hand and a camera in the other' (Thurman and Lupton, 2008) are still voiced in the profession. In a study by the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, journalism professionals rated the importance of technical or multi-media production skills less highly than did journalism educators or students (Finberg and Klinger, 2014: 23). For example, while 76% of educators thought the ability to shoot

and edit video was important or very important, only 46% of professionals did.

Our survey provides some evidence to inform debates on cross-media working, showing that, in 2015, a majority of UK journalists (54%) work in a single medium (either TV, radio, print, or online), with about a third working across two media. Just 5% practise in three media and only 1% in all four (see Table 3.1a).<sup>11</sup> Narrowing the focus to those journalists who have entered the profession in the last five years ( $n = 120$ ), we see that the figures stay broadly the same, with very slightly fewer of these less experienced journalists working across three media and none working across four.

**TABLE 3.1a: PROPORTIONS OF UK JOURNALISTS WORKING IN ONE OR ACROSS MULTIPLE MEDIA TYPES (PRINT, TV, RADIO, ONLINE), DECEMBER 2015.**

Number of media types worked in	Proportion of UK journalists ( $n = 700$ )
1	54%
2	36%
3	5%
4	1%

Note: 3% of journalists reported that they worked in a news agency, which is why the percentage figures do not add up to 100.

Our survey asked journalists to indicate whether they worked 'in TV' rather than asking whether they worked 'with video' and whether they worked 'in radio' rather than 'with audio'. As a consequence, our results probably underestimate the extent of cross- or multi-media working. This is because, although we were able to capture whether print journalists also worked in TV or radio, and vice versa, and whether print, TV, and radio journalists worked online, we gathered no data about the extent to which journalists working online use multi-media skills. Online journalists can, of course, make and publish video, audio, photographs, and interactive graphics as well as writing text. Although our survey showed that over 40% of journalists who

<sup>10</sup> At the time Assistant Editor, News, The Sun Online.

<sup>11</sup> The remaining 3% work for news agencies, and therefore the types of media they work in are unknown.

work online think the importance of technical skills has increased ‘a lot’, we are obliged to point our readers elsewhere for data on the multi-media working patterns and output of online journalists (e.g. Spyridou and Veglis, 2016; Karlsson and Clerwall, 2011).

Despite this limitation, our data do suggest that the predictions of some – for example, that reporters would be taught to ‘think visually for every story they produce and to abandon words when graphics or video or stills work better’ (Stevens, 2001: 106) – have not, yet, come to pass. Both economic factors and human limitations are probably playing a part. In their 2014 State of the News Media report, the Pew Research Center said that ‘digital news video does not necessarily have a clear or simple path to becoming a major form of news in the future. Producing high-quality video – or even streaming it live – can be costly, and the payoff is not clear’ (Olmstead et al., 2014). Furthermore, being an exemplary journalist in multiple media is difficult. The words of Neil McIntosh,<sup>12</sup> spoken in 2007, still carry some weight: ‘I don’t think we’ll ever produce journalists who are brilliant print journalists and also brilliant in multimedia. I don’t think they’re necessarily a complementary set of skills’ (personal communication, July 2007).

So far we have talked about the extent to which individual journalists in the UK are working across different media types, but how many journalists – in total – now work wholly or partly in each media type? Comparing our results with those of the NCTJ’s *Journalists at Work* survey (NCTJ, 2012), we see that, since 2012, while the proportions of journalists whose work involves radio, television, and magazines have remained fairly constant, there has been a significant decrease (from 56% to 44%) in the proportion working in newspapers, and a very significant increase (from 26% to 52%) in the proportion working online (see Table 3.1b).<sup>13</sup>

While the decline in newspaper employment is well known – with an estimated 5,000 editorial redundancies in the UK’s local and regional press, and the closure of more than 150 newspapers since March 2011 (Sharman, 2016) – what is less well known is the extent of the growth in employment in online journalism and the nature of that work. We estimate that there may now be over 30,000 journalists in the UK who work wholly or partly online.<sup>14</sup> However, the online work that is replacing work at newspapers for some is, according to our survey, less well paid, with journalists working exclusively online ( $n = 91$ ) reporting median pay of £19,212–£28,800 (gross/year) against £28,812–£38,400 for journalists working exclusively in newspapers ( $n = 106$ ).<sup>15</sup>

**TABLE 3.1b: A COMPARISON OF THE PROPORTIONS OF UK JOURNALISTS WORKING WHOLLY OR PARTLY IN DIFFERENT MEDIA TYPES IN 2012 AND 2015.**

Type of medium	This survey (2015)	NCTJ (2012)
Online <sup>a</sup>	52%	26%
Magazine	44%	43%
Newspapers	44%	56%
Television	14%	17%
Radio	12%	13%

a. The NCTJ’s survey asked if journalists worked online. Our survey asked whether they worked in a stand-alone online outlet and/or in an online outlet with an offline parent. For the purposes of comparison this table just reports the proportion of journalists in our survey who said they worked wholly or partly at either or both types of online outlet. For the record 29% of the journalists in our sample said they worked wholly or partly at a stand-alone online outlet and 29% said they worked wholly or partly an online outlet with an offline parent. We also asked journalists if they worked in a news or picture agency – 6% said they did.

Note: journalists can work across several media types, which is why the percentages do not add up to 100%

## 3.2 SPECIALIST REPORTING

If Marshall McLuhan will indulge us for a moment, we would like to move from the medium to the message, from the container to the content. Our survey asked journalists whether they specialised in a subject area and if so which one. We found that a small majority (53%) of UK journalists claimed to cover a specific beat, with the rest working on various topics. About half of the specialist reporters were happy to choose one of ten specialisms<sup>16</sup> we named in our survey, with the other half preferring to answer in their own words. Of the named specialisms, ‘Sports’ was the most common, followed by ‘Economy’ and ‘Entertainment’. There were very few ‘Politics’ specialists, especially those focusing on ‘Foreign politics’ (see Table 3.2 overleaf).

Of the journalists who felt their specialism did not fit into one of our ten predefined categories the largest number (48) worked in the broad category of ‘Business/finance’. They covered areas such as ‘banking’, ‘personal finance’, and ‘investment’, specialist beats that did not fit into our predefined ‘Economy’ category, a term which many would have thought referred to reporting on broad economic trends and macroeconomic policy (see Table 3.2 overleaf).

‘Lifestyle’ was the next most populous ‘other’ specialism

<sup>12</sup> The then Head of Editorial Development, Guardian Unlimited.

<sup>13</sup> Because of the differing methodologies employed by the two surveys the figures are not perfectly comparable. E.g. the NCTJ’s sampling strategy, unlike ours, included a targeted email to members of the National Union of Journalists, an organisation that has acknowledged that those working online are under-represented in its membership (Rudin and Ibbotson, 2013: 2).

<sup>14</sup> Based on the official Office for National Statistics estimate of the number of journalists in the UK (63,139) and our own survey data.

<sup>15</sup> This pattern also applies to journalists with more than ten years’ work experience, so is not simply a function of age.

<sup>16</sup> Crime & law, Culture, Domestic politics, Economy, Entertainment, Foreign politics, Health, News/current affairs, Politics, and Sports. We appreciate that having a specialism called ‘news/current affairs’ is something of an oxymoron and that journalists may have found it difficult to choose between ‘politics’ and ‘domestic politics’. These categories were chosen by committee as part of the Worlds of Journalism Study, which provided the methodological framework for this study.



**TABLE 3.2: PROPORTION OF UK JOURNALISTS WORKING ACROSS 15 SPECIALIST BEATS (OR NONE), DECEMBER 2015 (n = 699).**

Specialism (or none)	Journalists selected predefined category	Beat self-defined by journalist	Total
<b>Not a specialist reporter</b>			47%
<b>Business</b>			11%
Economy	4%		
Business/Finance		7%	
<b>Culture</b>			9%
Culture	3%		
Lifestyle		5%	
Culture and Media		1%	
<b>Sports</b>	6.6%	0.1%	6.7%
<b>Entertainment</b>	3.9%	0.1%	4%
<b>Technology and Science</b>		3%	3%
<b>News/Current Affairs</b>	3%		3%
<b>Transport</b>		3%	3%
<b>Social Affairs</b>		2%	2%
<b>Politics</b>			2.1%
Politics	1.6%		
Domestic Politics	0.3%		
Foreign Politics	0.1%	0.1%	
<b>Other</b>		2%	2%
<b>Crime and law</b>	1.6%	0.4%	2%
<b>Environment</b>		2%	2%
<b>Health</b>	1.4%	0.1%	1.5%
<b>Defense and security</b>		1%	1%
<b>Local issues</b>		0.4%	0.4%
<b>Refused to answer</b>	0.1%		0.1%

and included journalists working in the areas of ‘travel’, ‘food and drink’, and ‘fashion’. Next, with 24 reporters, was ‘Technology and Science’, although the emphasis was heavily on technology. Only four journalists gave science as a specialism (0.6% of our total sample). Given the challenges of covering such a fast-moving and complex topic, and the importance of science in society – from climate change to cloning – it is something of an indictment of journalism in the UK that there are not more science journalists. However, says Connie St Louis, Director of the Science Journalism MA at City University London, the scientific community too deserves criticism.

*Its strategy has been to systematically hire an ever-increasing number of science public relations experts, many of them former science journalists, who are now paid to propagate and translate its findings and produce large amounts of material to highlight novel findings and discoveries, which leaves little space for the few science journalists to call science to account thereby fulfilling its [journalism’s] key ‘critical friend’ role. (Personal communication, 13 February 2016)*

‘Transport’ follows, with 19 specialists, split between those who covered business topics, such as ‘shipping’, and those with more of a consumer focus, for example on ‘classic cars’. ‘Social affairs’ comes next on the list, with 16 journalists, covering topics such as ‘education’, ‘youth affairs’, and ‘religion’. Only three journalists (0.4% of our sample) identified themselves as being specialists in religious affairs. The importance of religion

in both UK society and in international relations requires, perhaps, a greater proportion of experts in the field. As we show in Section 1.3, on journalists’ personal characteristics and diversity, UK journalists are less religious (both in the general sense and in terms of their affiliation with established religions) than the general population by some margin, which may be a partial explanation for why so few go on to develop into specialists in this field.

‘Environment’ had 13 specialists covering topics such as ‘farming’, ‘renewable energy’, and ‘animals’. The eight remaining ‘other’ categories contained relatively small numbers of specialists, including five working on ‘Defence and security’ issues, four on ‘Culture and media’ topics, and three on ‘Local issues’. We have retained an ‘Other’ category for topics such as ‘Fire’ and ‘Investigations’ that could not easily be grouped into larger categories.

Our survey shows some differences in the distribution of specialist journalists across the different media formats. For example, sports journalists are relatively common at daily newspapers, reflecting the fact that most sports output, being result-orientated, has a very short shelf life and is not as well suited to, for example, monthly magazines. As a medium, online enjoys many of the advantages of the media that preceded it. Like daily newspapers it has an ability to respond quickly to events. Like TV and radio it can carry audio and moving images. Like magazines it has the capacity to display high-resolution photographs. As a result it can, in theory, be a channel for content of all kinds. We see, however, in the distribution of

specialist reporters who work online, a relatively strong focus on technology, sports, and entertainment. This observation echoes other research which has found a preponderance of sports and entertainment (and also crime) content in online newspapers. Boczkowski (2010: 153) suggests that the increasing consumption of news at work favours such topics because they provide 'better fodder for conversations with co-workers than the often more contentious and sensitive topics presented in public affairs news'. The unequal distribution of content specialists across the different media types is, perhaps, further evidence to support McLuhan's (1994) conviction that 'in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message'.

### 3.3 EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

Our survey asked journalists about the freedom they felt they had in selecting news stories to work on and in the framing of those stories. It also asked about their participation in editorial and newsroom coordination, for example, attending editorial meetings or assigning reporters. We have used some of the data from the answers to these questions elsewhere in this report, for example, to look at whether there are any differences in the perceived editorial independence of male and female journalists (see Section 1.1).

Our survey also asked, in more general terms, how journalists feel their freedom to make editorial decisions has changed over time. The results of this question are reported in Section 5.3 where we also analyse why it might be that about twice as many journalists think it has decreased as think it has increased.

With regard to the present, our survey shows that nearly three-quarters of journalists believe that they have 'a great deal' of or 'complete' freedom in selecting the stories they work on, and an even greater proportion tell us that they have 'a great deal' of or 'complete' freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasised (see Figure 3.3a).

These results are, perhaps, surprising, given that, as we show in Section 5, journalists believe the level of influence from advertisers, public relations, and audience research has grown over time. Furthermore, high proportions (up to two-thirds)

tell us that they feel 'extremely' or 'very' influenced by factors including:

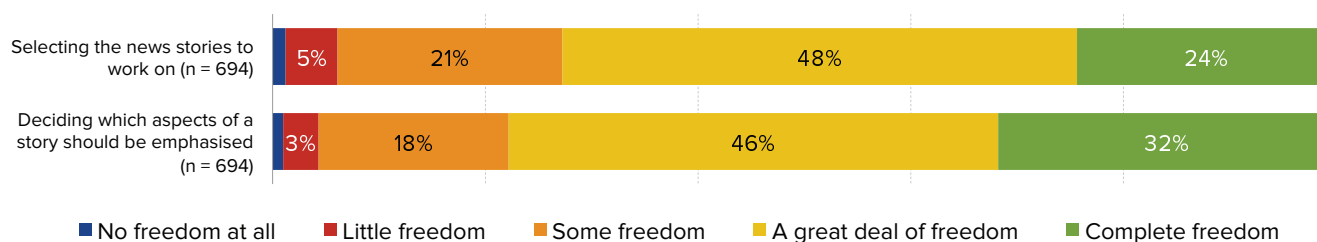
- their supervisors (47%) and editorial policy (64%),
- time limits (64%),
- audience research and data (41%),
- access to information (66%) and relationships with news sources (43%).<sup>17</sup>

A partial explanation for this apparent contradiction is that, although journalists tell us that the influence from advertisers, PR, and audience research is growing, they believe that some growth is happening from a relatively low base. For example, 44% of journalists think that PR is of 'little' or 'no' influence on their work.

However, the disparity between the amount of freedom journalists believe they have in selecting stories and the high level of influence they ascribe to factors such as their supervisors and audience data is striking. What is the nature of the freedom they believe they have? Is it, perhaps, freedom to choose and shape stories within the limits set by audience taste, by the time available, by the availability of sources, and by the editorial direction and policy set by their supervisors? Given the high degree of similarity between the news stories that appear across different news outlets<sup>18</sup> and the extent to which many stories contain material from PR, news agencies, or other media,<sup>19</sup> it seems unlikely that journalists' editorial freedom is as great as they believe it to be or present it as being.

There are two final observations we would like to make before we leave the topic of editorial freedom. First, freelance journalists believe that they have almost exactly the same amount of freedom in selecting stories as their full-time colleagues and a little less freedom in deciding how to frame stories, an indication that the limits on journalists' work are set and maintained in ways that do not depend on a permanent employment contract. Secondly, journalists working at a local level believe they have more editorial freedom, with 84% believing they had 'a great deal' of freedom or 'complete' freedom in selecting stories compared with an average of 71% for their colleagues working on publications with a regional, national, or transnational reach. This result may, in part, be

**FIGURE 3.3a: UK JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FREEDOM THEY HAVE IN STORY SELECTION AND EMPHASIS, DECEMBER 2015.**



<sup>17</sup> We report and analyse the full range of influences journalists feel affect their work in Section 6.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Boczkowski (2010: 92) found that there was a 47% content overlap between the hard news stories that appeared in two Argentinian newspapers, *Clarín* and *La Nación*.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis et al. (2008: 15) found that 60% of articles in UK quality newspapers and 34% of broadcast news stories were wholly or mainly derived from PR and news agencies/other media.

due to a higher number of local journalists in our sample being in senior management roles (35%) compared with their colleagues in the regional (14%) or national (20%) news media, but it may also be a result of the fact that our survey found that local journalists felt the influence of PR, business interests, the competition, and audience data less than their colleagues in regional, national, and transnational media.

We asked journalists how often they participated in editorial and newsroom coordination, for example attending editorial meetings or assigning reporters. Over half did so ‘always’ or ‘very often’ and another 20% ‘sometimes’. As Figure 3.3b shows, there are predictable increases in the participation in editorial coordination with rank (e.g. nearly half of non-managerial journalists ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ participate) and decreases in participation amongst freelance journalists, 65% of whom ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ participate. In addition to laying out the basic figures here, in Section 1 we look at whether there are any differences between the sexes.

### 3.4 PRODUCTIVITY

As we show in Section 5, on change in journalism, journalists believe that there have been very significant increases in their average working hours and decreases in the time available for researching stories. One might expect, then, to see an increase in journalists’ productivity, for example, in the number of news items they produce or process. Unfortunately, we do not have any directly comparable longitudinal data from the UK, but we do have data that allow some approximate international and longitudinal comparisons to be made.

Between 2007 and 2011 the Worlds of Journalism Study, which provided the methodological framework for this project, conducted a pilot study that measured the number of news items produced or processed per week by journalists in 21 countries. Although the UK was not part of that pilot study, the results provide a useful point of comparison because the question asked was identical to the question we asked in our survey, and the results of the pilot study show that, for most countries, the number of stories produced was within a relatively narrow range, between five and 14 per week, with the median number 12 (WoJ, 2013). These figures were based on an analysis of interviews with 2,100 journalists from 413 news organisations in 21 countries.

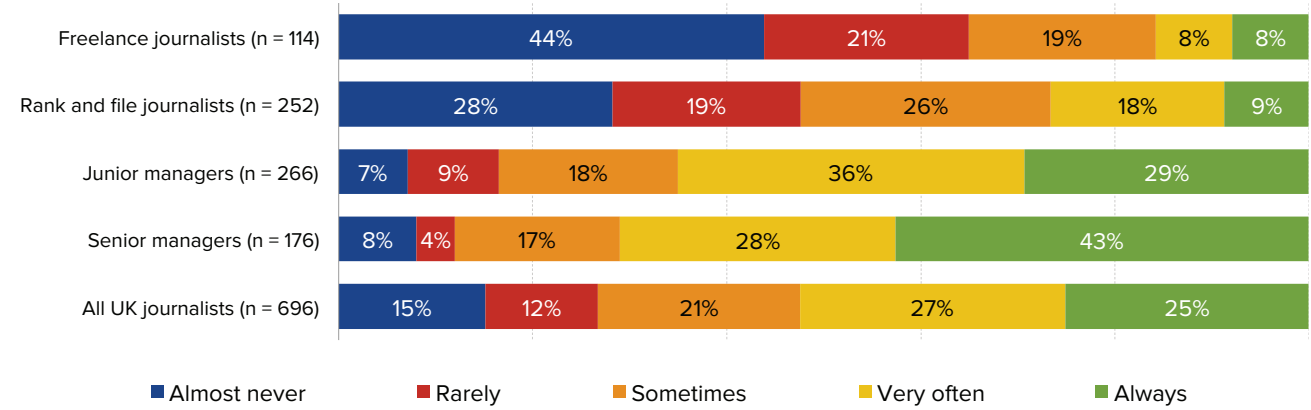
Looking at the UK data from 2015, we see the median number of news items produced per week is ten, not significantly different from the figure from 2007 to 2011 (see Table 3.4). The Worlds of Journalism pilot study found that the median number of items produced by ‘non-management’ journalists (e.g. reporters and news writers) was ten, close to the number that we found (8). We suggest, then, that journalists in the UK may be producing 20–25% fewer news items per week than their colleagues in some other countries, and that there may not have been a significant increase in the number of news items produced by journalists globally in the last four to eight years.

**TABLE 3.4: MEDIAN NUMBER OF NEWS ITEMS PRODUCED OR PROCESSED/EDITED PER WEEK BY ALL UK JOURNALISTS, BY RANK AND FILE REPORTERS, AND ACCORDING TO MEDIUM WORKED IN, DECEMBER 2015.**

Journalists who...	Stories/ week
Work only for online outlet with offline parent (n = 16)	37.5
Work only online (n = 87)	20
Work only for stand-alone online outlet (n = 69)	14
Work only for daily newspaper (n = 49)	12
Work either ‘only online’ or ‘online & in (an)other medium/media’ (n = 343)	12
All journalists (n = 634)	10
Rank and file journalists (n = 229)	8
Do not work online (n = 150)	7

The NCTJ’s *Journalists at Work* survey in 2012 found that the median number of stories worked on per day was three. If we assume a five-day working week, this translates to a median of 15 stories per week, higher than the median figure we found in 2015. Due to the difficulties of translating a daily to weekly figure, we should only take this as a rough comparison. Nevertheless, it provides some further evidence of minimal change in journalists’ productivity since 2012. These results are somewhat surprising given that journalists tell us there have been significant increases in their average working hours and decreases in the time available for researching stories. Could it be that changes to working practices, for example, an increase in the number of stories produced as a result of increasing

**FIGURE 3.3b: DEGREE OF PARTICIPATION IN EDITORIAL COORDINATION FOR ALL UK JOURNALISTS AND BY RANK AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS, DECEMBER 2015.**



online publication, had already happened by the time the Worlds of Journalism pilot study and the NCTJ survey were carried out? After all, many newspapers were fully online by the turn of the millennium.<sup>20</sup>

Our survey shows that there is a correlation between the medium that journalists work in and the number of stories they produce or process. Journalists who work online in some capacity produce 71% more stories than journalists who do not work online at all. This difference is even larger in the comparison between journalists who only work online and those who do not, where there is a 186% increase in the number of stories produced or processed.<sup>21</sup> Even when we compare those journalists working on a daily newspaper with those working in stand-alone online outlets, we see the online journalists producing 17% more news items per week (see Table 3.4).

Should, then, we be worried about how online journalism seems to have increased the volume of stories that journalists produce? Not necessarily. It does not follow that the higher volumes of stories produced online are of lower quality. First, the collaborative possibilities offered by online journalism mean that journalists are not solely reliant on their own efforts, but can harness material from their own readers, and from social media, and so forth, thus potentially reducing the time required to publish a story. Secondly, new formats for news output have emerged online, such as tweets, which are by their very nature limited in length and, as a result, fast to produce.

However, haste is an issue for concern. Thurman and Walters (2013) described the 'relatively loose culture of corroboration' they found in the practice of live blogging, an online news format which emphasises rapid updates. And with our data showing that some rank and file journalists are producing, processing, or editing 50, 60, or even 75 stories per week – a figure rising through the 100s, 200s, 300s, and even as high as 500 if we include junior and senior editors – there are genuine concerns about whether standards of verification, one of journalism's fundamental principles, can be maintained. Our survey showed no statistically significant difference between journalists who worked online and those who did not in terms of whether they believed it was 'always' or 'sometimes' acceptable to publish stories with unverified content. However, as a species, we adapt to new realities relatively easily, with the result that it may be difficult to recognise when standards have slipped. An online journalist at BBC World News quoted in Thurman and Schapals (2016) recognised this to be the case when he talked about the 'rivalry with other news outlets . . . about who could publish first, with "competitions" sometimes decided by "fractions of seconds"'. Under the influence of that rivalry, he said, there had been "less onus" to be "close to 100 percent sure" about the accuracy of statements' and 'the two-source rule [had] become "a bit more exploded"'. In that case, however, the dangers of such practices had been recognised and the journalist believed that 'the pendulum had started to swing back towards accuracy . . . [with] more acceptance that journalists can take an extra few minutes to "make sure this is factually right"'. Unfortunately, awareness of the consequences that can come with the ability to publish almost instantaneously may not be as high in every newsroom.

## 3.5 CONCLUSIONS

In this section we have shown how, even in an era of media convergence, only a minority of UK journalists cross the boundaries between print, broadcast, and online working. This is not, however, to deny the relevance of new skills. With over half of UK journalists working wholly or partly online, opportunities exist for journalists to practise multi-media storytelling – within commercial constraints and subject to their own personal abilities. The decrease in employment at newspapers and the increase in online outlets is giving more journalists the chance to take such opportunities. However, the financial compensation for such work is not, yet, at a level equivalent to that enjoyed by those who remain exclusively employed in newspaper journalism.

About half of UK journalists consider themselves to be subject specialists, and our survey shows that 'Business/economics/finance' is the most populous specialism, followed by 'Culture', then 'Sports' and 'Entertainment'. The distribution of these beat reporters across the different media types is broadly as might be expected, although we see a higher proportion of technology, entertainment, and sports specialists working online, which, perhaps, shows that the nature of online news consumption – interactive, from everywhere, and around the clock – favours the production of certain types of content.

Our survey reveals intriguing contradictions in journalists' perceptions of, on the one hand, their editorial independence and, on the other, the influence of external factors such as time and audience demands. This suggests, perhaps, that the freedom they say they have is either somewhat illusory and/or a construct used to help define a professional identity.

Finally, we considered productivity. By international standards UK journalists seem to have a little more time to work on each news story. However, they believe there has been a reduction in the time available to research stories, and our survey suggests an increase in online working may be the cause, with significant differences in the number of stories produced or processed by journalists working online and those who do not. Although this pattern has probably been established for some years, and does not appear to be changing significantly, the consequences, such as tendencies to adopt a 'looser culture of corroboration', must be kept under close scrutiny.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. the *Daily Telegraph* launched the Electronic Telegraph in 1994 (Richmond, 2009) and the *Financial Times's* FT.com started one year later in 1995 (FT.com, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Some of this is due to the fact that journalists working for the online outlet of an offline parent process a higher than average number of stories, perhaps because they are uploading stories from the offline outlet onto the web.

# JOURNALISTS' ROLE IN SOCIETY

JESSICA KUNERT AND NEIL THURMAN

In Britain, the role of journalists has been heavily scrutinised in recent years, most notably by the Leveson Inquiry (Leveson, 2012). Furthermore, journalism is in a period of technological, social, and economic upheaval that is having a profound influence on its practice. In this context, what do journalists in the UK consider their role in society to be? Do their views reflect some of the upheaval of recent years? And to what extent are those views coloured by longer established notions of what journalists should do or be? Our survey helps answer some of these questions.

## 4.1 IDEAL ROLES

We asked journalists to spell out the three roles they believed should be most important for journalists in the UK to perform. These roles were not predefined in our questionnaire, but respondents were invited to answer in their own words. Five roles were mentioned especially frequently (see Table 4.1). Highest-placed on the list, by some margin, was the role of information provider. This function, while not a big part of the 'journalist-as-hero' trope used in films such as *Welcome to Sarajevo* or *All the President's Men*, is performed by many journalists as they act as intermediaries between the public, business, government, the judiciary, and other actors in society, ensuring that each is informed about the other.

**TABLE 4.1: JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT ROLES FOR JOURNALISTS IN THE UK TO PERFORM, BY FREQUENCY OF MENTION, DECEMBER 2015.**

Role	No. of mentions
Providing information	303
Providing accuracy	161
Holding power to account	148
Providing entertainment	117
Truth telling	115

Note: Responses were aggregated using word frequency analysis.

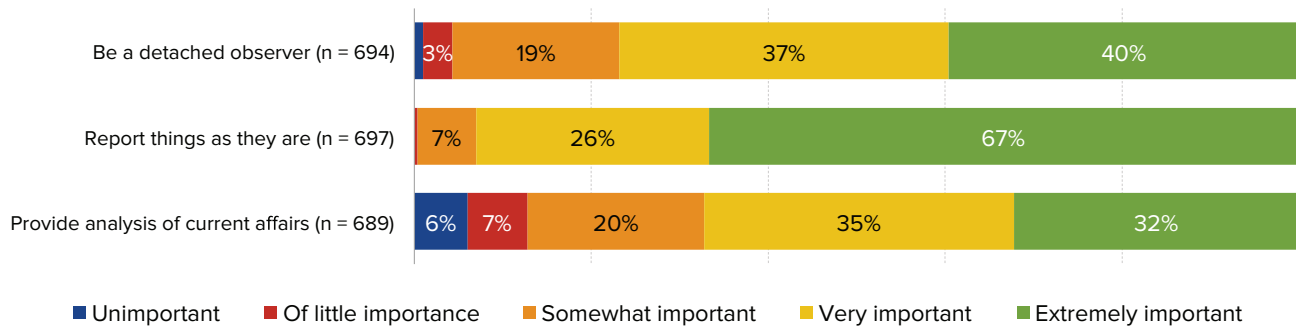
This role is vital to a well-functioning society, but is not, or should not be, a matter of simply passing on whatever information is received. Much of what is brought to journalists' attention has been issued to further some interest or other. Journalists should, therefore, act as checks and balances. At a basic level this means verifying information before it is published. It is no surprise, then, that providing accuracy is the second most frequently mentioned role UK journalists feel they should fulfil.

Although a journalistic ideal, accuracy is not always achieved in practice. Research shows a relatively high degree of inaccuracy in news stories. For example, Porlezza et al. (2012) found factual errors in '60 percent of Swiss newspaper stories . . . 48 percent of U.S. and 52 percent of Italian', although many such errors were relatively minor, such as the age of participants or the spelling of names. Such inaccuracies are somewhat understandable given the time constraints under which journalists operate. Our survey reveals that journalists believe those time constraints are becoming more severe, which, along with some of the technological, commercial, and social changes affecting journalism, raises questions about whether inaccuracies will increase (see Section 5).

For journalists to verify the information they issue is important but, on its own, insufficient as a means of keeping a check on society's actors and ensuring there is a balance in the representation of their interests. The reasons for this are twofold. First, institutions and individuals will, usually, only pass on to journalists information that they want published, meaning that much else of interest only sees the light of day as a result of leaks or through other processes of investigative journalism. Secondly, some in society are far better equipped to get their messages across, meaning that if journalists' output – however accurate – simply mirrors the material they receive, society will see a distorted picture of itself reflected in its media.

The need to provide these checks and balances is reflected in journalists' belief in their role as 'truth tellers', the fifth most mentioned role in our survey, and in their belief that they should be able to hold power to account, number three in our list (see Table 4.1). Our survey shows that UK journalists exhibit



**FIGURE 4.2: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DETACHMENT AND ANALYSIS, DECEMBER 2015.**

low levels of trust in many of society's actors (see Section 7), an important precondition, perhaps, of being able to act as a watchdog and expose the 'truth'.<sup>22</sup> More is required, however, for the watchdog function to be performed, and our survey shows that many of the other necessary conditions, such as time to research stories, independence from advertising considerations and PR influence, and freedom to make editorial decisions, are under pressure (see Section 5).

The fourth of the five most frequently mentioned roles was to entertain. With occasional exceptions, entertainment has been a part of the British press for hundreds of years. Kevin Williams writes of the 'newsbooks of the civil war period', which established many of the conventions of the modern newspaper, including the 'agony column' (2010: 21). And while entertainment was, perhaps, anathema to those like William Cobbett, behind the early radical press of the nineteenth century, the second wave of radical newspapers in the late 1820s and 1830s, such as the *Twopenny Dispatch*, mixed entertainment with activism, a tradition followed by the first Sunday newspapers, like the *News of the World*, which, according to Williams (2010: 39), 'represented attempts to project a radical ideology through entertainment as well as political instruction'. In the United Kingdom the role of the journalist as an entertainer – while, as our survey shows, being thoroughly modern – has a history that can be traced back hundreds of years.

As well as asking journalists to express what they believed to be their three most important roles, our survey asked respondents to grade the importance of 21 predefined roles covering six broad themes:

- detachment and analysis,
- scrutiny of politics and business,
- influencing politics, society, and public opinion,
- government support or opposition,
- meeting audience needs,
- promoting tolerance and diversity.

## 4.2 DETACHMENT AND ANALYSIS

Being a detached observer is 'extremely' or 'very' important for more than three-quarters of UK journalists, and 'reporting things as they are' is even more so (see Figure 4.2). This is in line with the answers given to our open-ended question, where information provision and accuracy were most frequently mentioned. It is important to acknowledge, however, that journalists do not see 'reporting things as they are' as a prohibition on commenting on news events. For example, our survey shows that 67% also see providing analysis of current affairs as 'very' or 'extremely' important (see Figure 4.2). The unprecedented availability of reports and commentary from news participants and sources, via social media and other communication channels, is giving journalists' analytical and curatorial skills particular relevance today, both for news consumers seeking guidance through the sea of information and as a vehicle for journalists to demonstrate their professional status in a changing information environment.

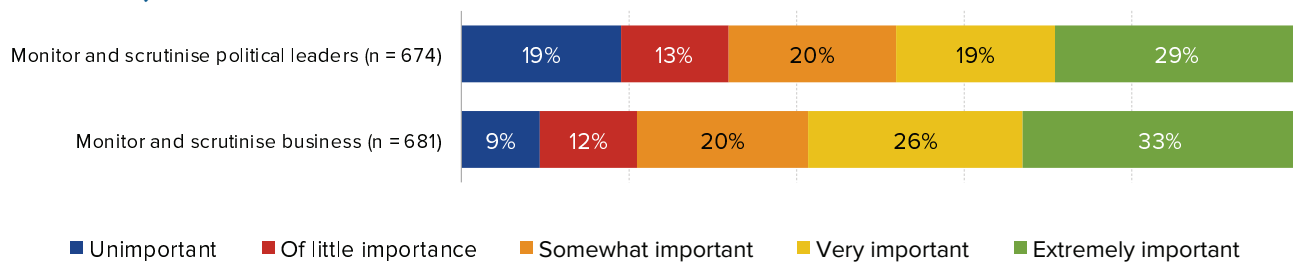
## 4.3 SCRUTINISING POLITICS AND BUSINESS

Holding power to account was the third most frequently mentioned 'ideal' role put forward by journalists in their own words. However, when we asked about the importance of scrutiny in the context of journalists' own work, a more nuanced picture emerged. For a third, the scrutiny of politics is not important in their work, and a fifth think the same about the scrutiny of business (see Figure 4.3 overleaf). There are, however, variations from this average with journalists who specialise in different subject areas, or 'beats'. As is to be expected, while monitoring political leaders is of great importance for politics and current affairs journalists, it is of no interest to their entertainment and culture colleagues. Interestingly, sports journalists' responses were spread across the scale. While a quarter

<sup>22</sup> A caveat should be issued here. As we discuss in Section 7, although journalists may have lower levels of trust than the public in some of society's actors, such as the police, their trust in other institutions, such as the government or the military, does not appear to be lower than that of the general population.



**FIGURE 4.3: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SCRUTINISING POLITICS AND BUSINESS, DECEMBER 2015.**



thought scrutiny of politics was not important, a third thought it was.

A similar pattern emerges when we look at views on the importance of the scrutiny of business (see Figure 4.3). While 59% of all journalists thought it 'very' or 'extremely' important, there were, again, variations according to beat. The role was considered most important by economic journalists and least important by those working in entertainment. For sports journalists, the answers were, again, across the scale, with over a third saying it was 'extremely important'. Recent scandals involving the IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federations), FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), and the UCI (Union Cycliste Internationale) have brought the close – and sometimes murky – links between sport, business, and politics to the fore. Perhaps as a result, some sports journalists are now keenly aware of the need for scrutiny of those areas.

## 4.4 INFLUENCING POLITICS, SOCIETY, AND PUBLIC OPINION

Setting the political agenda is considered by journalists in the UK to be rather unimportant in their work, as is influencing public opinion (see Figure 4.4). This is, perhaps, because such explicitly politicised roles go against their strongly

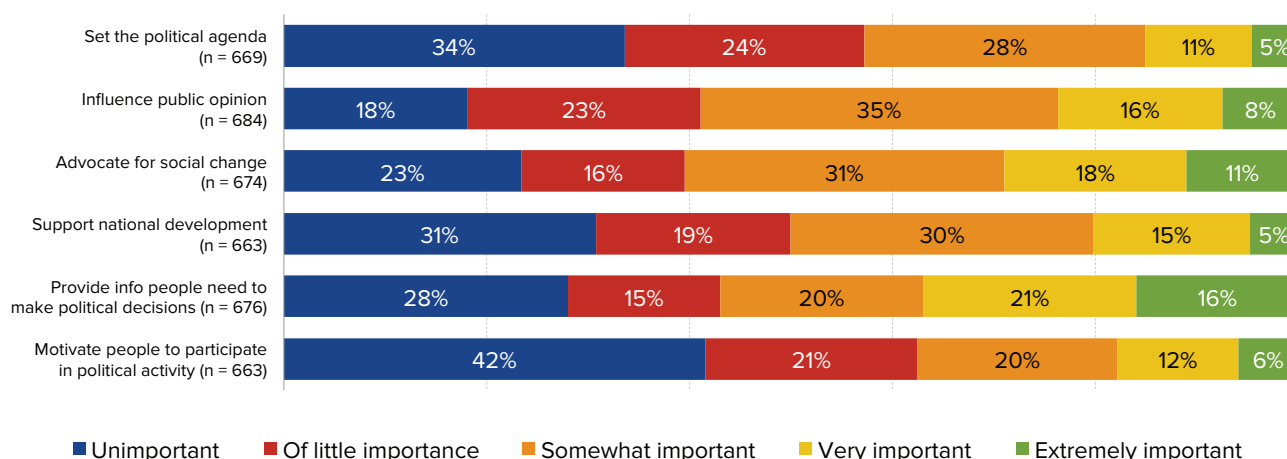
held professional paradigm of neutrality and information provision. However, in the softer, pseudo-political arena, we find different results, with 29% feeling it is 'very' or 'extremely' important to advocate for social change (see Figure 4.4).

Providing information for people to make political decisions is seen as of 'little' or no importance by 43% of journalists, and motivating people to participate in political activity is considered even less important (see Figure 4.4). These results sit in contrast to the fact that the provision of information is one of the primary roles journalists feel their profession should perform in society, and to journalists' belief in the importance of educating the audience (see Section 4.6 for further discussion).<sup>23</sup>

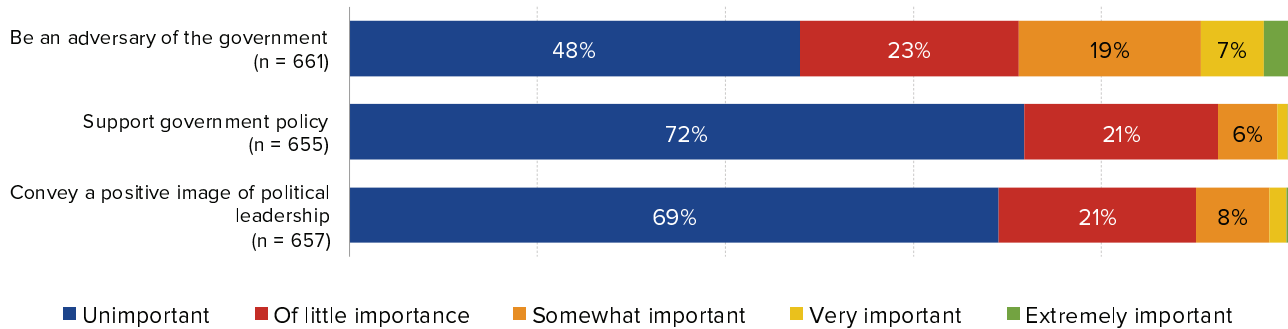
## 4.5 GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND OPPOSITION

Journalists' reluctance to adopt overtly political roles can also be seen in their answers about the importance of supporting or opposing government policy. Over 70% see it as of little or no importance to be an adversary of government, and even more, over 90%, think it is unimportant to support government policy or to convey a positive image of political leadership (see Figure 4.5). However, there are, again, some contradictions here with answers given elsewhere. For example, 48% of journalists

**FIGURE 4.4: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF INFLUENCING POLITICS, SOCIETY, AND PUBLIC OPINION, DECEMBER 2015.**



<sup>23</sup> We acknowledge that few journalists cover politics explicitly (see Section 3.2) and so opportunities for information provision/education in this area are limited.

**FIGURE 4.5: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON SUPPORTING AND OPPOSING GOVERNMENT, DECEMBER 2015.**

thought it was 'very' or 'extremely' important to scrutinise political leaders. If such critical inquiries detect actions that are problematic, then to reveal them is, we would suggest, acting in an oppositional manner.

## 4.6 MEETING AUDIENCE NEEDS

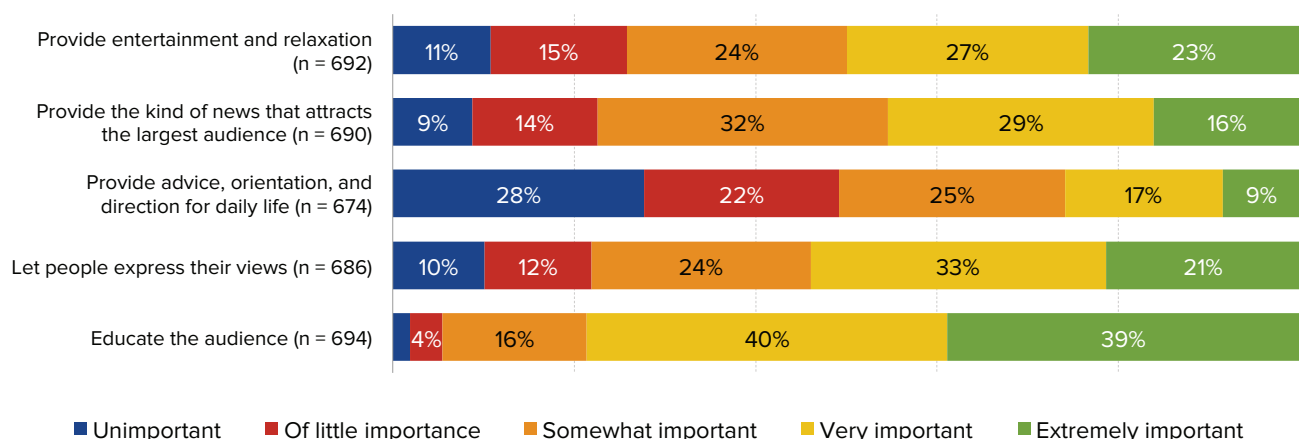
'Providing entertainment' is either 'extremely' or 'very' important for half of UK journalists, as is providing the 'kind of news that attracts the largest audience' (see Figure 4.6). The problems facing contemporary journalism are significant. According to Robert Picard (2014: 273), they include 'mature and saturated markets, loss of audiences not highly interested in news, the diminishing effectiveness of the mass media businesses model, the lingering effects of the economic crisis, [and] the impact of digital competitors'. As a result, attracting audiences is often seen as vital, especially when jobs, or the future of whole publications, are at stake. Strategies to do this can involve the use of audience research, which, as we show in Section 6.4, is believed by 41% of journalists to be 'very' or 'extremely' influential in their work. Some possible consequences of such popularism – including content homogenisation – are discussed in Section 5.4.

Providing 'advice, orientation, and direction' for daily life was seen as of little or no importance by about half of journalists, while the other half thought it had some importance (see

Figure 4.6). This span of viewpoints is probably due to the range of journalists our survey covered. While such advice is an important part of some publications, such as women's magazines and tabloids, its role is minor for many others.

Journalists believe they have a role in letting people express their views, with over 50% thinking it 'very' or 'extremely' important in their work (see Figure 4.6). Contrary to expectations perhaps, it is not online journalists but radio journalists who feel most strongly about this. A little less than a third of them believe it is 'extremely' important, whereas around 20% of online journalists do. While it is clear that there are now many more opportunities for people to express themselves in the media, we should examine journalists' views on the importance of facilitating such expression critically. The challenges – legal, cultural, and commercial – of doing so are considerable, especially at a time of polarised political opinion. Indeed, some news sites are now abandoning or heavily restricting comments sections (Pritchard, 2016). As we discuss in Section 5.2, there are indications that journalists' enthusiasm for audience expression is more about the potential for using the results as a source of news than about their desire to support self-articulation or enlarge online 'public spheres'.

An overwhelming proportion of journalists (79%) feel educating the audience is either 'very' or 'extremely' important (see Figure 4.6). Given that less than half that proportion (37%) feel the same about 'providing people with the information they need to make political decisions', does 'education', for journalists in the UK, not extend into political matters? For some, clearly

**FIGURE 4.6: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF MEETING THE NEEDS OF THEIR AUDIENCE, DECEMBER 2015.**

not, which is to be expected given that opportunities for political orientation are limited in many publications. These differing numbers may also be explained by the resonance that ‘educating the audience’ has for many in the profession. Lord Reith, the first Director General of the BBC, famously declared that the Corporation’s *raison d’être* was to inform, educate, and entertain. These words still appear in the organisation’s mission statement today (BBC, 2016), and have been widely adopted by public service broadcasters worldwide.

## 4.7 PROMOTING TOLERANCE AND DIVERSITY

UK journalists are split on the importance of promoting tolerance and cultural diversity in their work. While for almost half it is ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ important, there are 31% who believe it is of little or no importance (see Figure 4.7). Tolerance and diversity can, and should, be promoted in the workforce (25% of our sample are in senior managerial roles) and in the selection and framing of stories (nearly three-quarters of our sample believe that they have ‘a great deal’ of or ‘complete’ freedom in selecting the stories they work on). There are a number of initiatives to promote diversity in newsrooms and in news content. For example, the BBC has committed to reflecting ‘modern Britain accurately and authentically’ in its output (BBC, 2011), and the Press Association runs a bursary scheme to ‘enable more people from ethnically and socially diverse backgrounds to train as journalists’ (PA, 2016). However, as our survey indicates, there is still room for improvement. Tabloid coverage of migrants and refugees has been accused of being ‘racist’ (Lugo-Ocando, 2007) and evoking ‘cultural differences . . . as a criterion for exclusion’ (Fox, 2012), and, as we show in Section 1, UK journalists are less diverse than the population they serve by several different measures.

A related question in our survey concerned the importance of ‘telling stories about the world’, which was regarded as rather more important than promoting diversity (see Figure 4.7), perhaps because of how storytelling resonates with journalists. ‘Storytelling’, ‘communication’, and ‘engagement’ were all suggested several times when we asked journalists to name three roles they should perform in society.

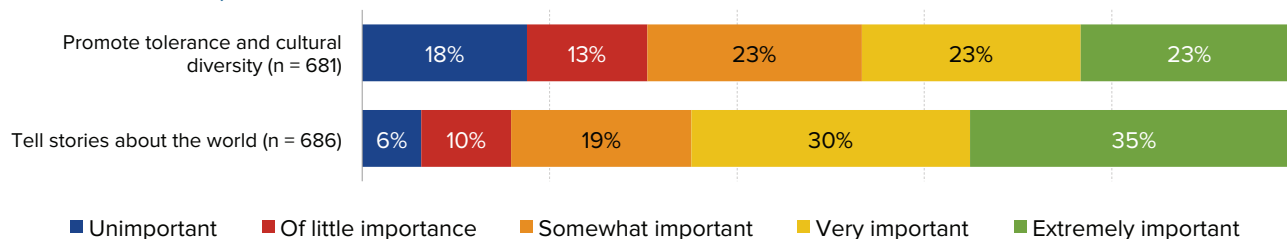
## 4.8 CONCLUSIONS

Our survey shows that journalists in the UK believe their roles in society to be multifaceted. They see themselves as providers of accurate information, analysis, entertainment, and education; as conduits of audience expression; as scrutinisers of those in power; and as promoters of diversity. There is, however, strong reluctance to be explicitly political. While some importance is given to campaigning on social issues, and while scrutiny of politics is important for most, the overwhelming majority say that opposing government, setting the political agenda, and even motivating people to participate in political activity are of little importance in their work.

In how they define their roles in society, UK journalists appear to be less detached than their colleagues in Austria and Germany, but also less likely to try to influence public opinion than journalists in Turkey, Egypt, or Indonesia.<sup>24</sup> In due course, using the data from the 2012–15 Worlds of Journalism study,<sup>25</sup> we hope to be able to make a detailed comparison of UK journalists’ role perceptions and those of journalists in scores of other countries.

There are hints in our data that journalists’ role perceptions may be changing in light of some of the disruption journalism has faced in recent years. For example, our survey shows that 45% of journalists in the UK think that ‘providing the kind of news that attracts the largest audience’ is ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ important (see Figure 4.6 on previous page). This is an even higher figure than was found among journalists in the United States in a survey<sup>26</sup> completed in 2008 and 2009, an indication, perhaps, of how economic pressures are inducing journalists to treat their audiences less as citizens and more as consumers. However, despite, or perhaps even because of, the upheavals of recent years, for journalists in the UK, detachment and neutrality are still central to their notions of what a journalist should be. Objectivity is, writes Lichtenberg (2000: 238), ‘a cornerstone of the professional ideology of journalists in liberal democracies’. With the profession of journalism being assailed on several fronts, it is, perhaps, unsurprising that its members continue to place importance in a concept that, Schudson and Anderson (2009: 99) argue, acts as a ‘solidarity enhancing and distinction-creating norm and as a group claim to possess a unique kind of professional knowledge’.

**FIGURE 4.7: UK JOURNALISTS’ VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING TOLERANCE AND DIVERSITY, DECEMBER 2015.**



<sup>24</sup> These comparisons were made using data from the Worlds of Journalism pilot study, which asked the same questions in these and other countries, although several years before our survey took place and with smaller sample sizes (WoJ, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> [www.worldsofjournalism.org](http://www.worldsofjournalism.org)

<sup>26</sup> In that survey, the US leg of the Worlds of Journalism pilot study (WoJ, 2013), the figure was 31%.

# JOURNALISM AND CHANGE

NEIL THURMAN

Our survey asked journalists their views on changes in journalism over time, with a particular focus on the last five years. To ensure answers were given with a degree of authority, only journalists with at least five years' work experience were polled. In fact most of those who answered these questions had chalked up significantly more time in the profession, an average of more than 20 years. The questions covered a range of topics, and the results have been grouped into the following themes:

- journalism education and skills;
- the influence of the audience and social media;
- editorial freedom, popularism, and competitive pressures;
- advertising, ethics, profit-making, and PR;
- journalism's relevance and credibility.

## 5.1 JOURNALISM EDUCATION AND SKILLS

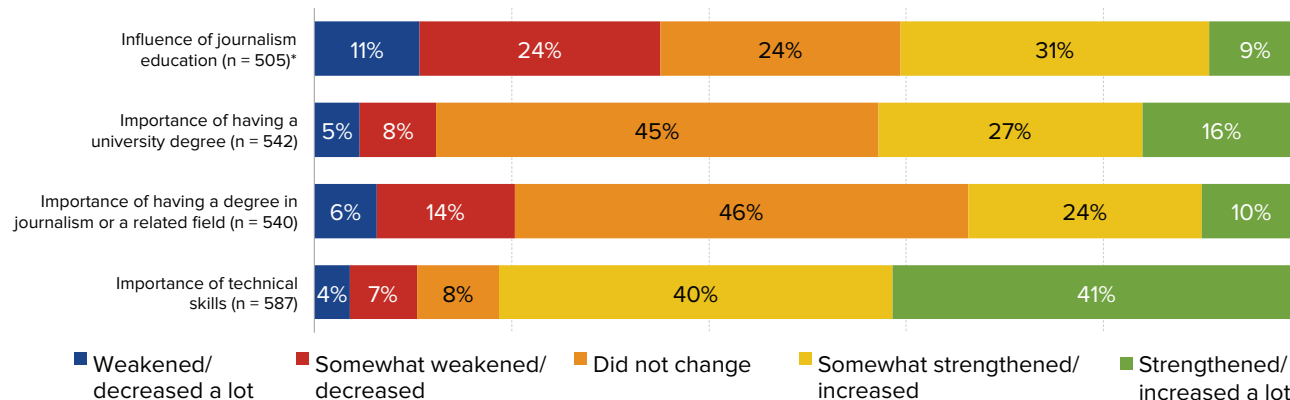
Our survey shows that a high and growing proportion of journalists are learning the trade at university. In the last half

decade 64% of those entering the profession had a bachelor's or master's degree (or some other university training) in journalism or a related field, compared with 51% in the previous five-year period, and 41% of all of those in the profession. It is perhaps surprising then that almost as many journalists believe the influence of journalism education has weakened over the last five years as believe its influence has strengthened (see Figure 5.1). This prompts questions about the nature of journalism education in the UK. For example, is it simply replicating traditional on-the-job training rather than, as many educators claim, producing a different sort of journalist, the so-called 'reflective practitioner' (see e.g. Falmouth University, n.d.)?

There may, however, be other explanations for journalists' uncertainty about the influence of journalism education; for example, a belief that there are more powerful influences at work, such as profit-making pressures and advertising considerations. We will consider whether these have become more or less powerful over time later in this section.<sup>27</sup>

Although UK journalists are not in agreement about whether an increase in the proportion of university-educated journalists

**FIGURE 5.1: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON CHANGES IN THE INFLUENCE OF JOURNALISM EDUCATION, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF TECHNICAL SKILLS AND OF HAVING A UNIVERSITY DEGREE AND/OR A DEGREE IN JOURNALISM OR A RELATED FIELD, DECEMBER 2015.**



\* Participants were asked about the strengthening/weakening of this influence 'during the past five years'.

<sup>27</sup> And in Section 6 we examine the current overall balance of influences on journalist's work.

in the profession has resulted in any strengthening of the influence of journalism education, more believe the importance of (1) having a degree, and (2) having a degree in journalism or a related field, has increased over time than believe it has decreased (see Figure 5.1 on previous page). This suggests that journalism education is viewed as useful as a means to 'get in the door', but is of less influence once the threshold to employment has been crossed. Such an assessment is in line with the views of many academics who study the sociology of journalism and talk about the relative invariability of newsroom culture, which helps explain 'uniformity and conformity among news workers' and provides those workers 'with defenses to withstand pressure for change' (Singer, 2004).

UK journalists overwhelmingly believe that the importance of technical skills has increased over time (see Figure 5.1 on previous page), which prompts questions about whether and where opportunities to learn such skills are being made available. Given the ambivalence about the influence of journalism education it may be that more providers of such education should make state-of-the-art technical training a part of their formal degree programmes. One example of where this has happened to good effect is at Goldsmiths College, University of London, whose MA/MSc in Digital Journalism includes technical training in advanced web, mobile, and visualisation technologies including JavaScript, Python, and PHP (Goldsmiths, n.d.).<sup>28</sup>

## 5.2 THE INFLUENCE OF THE AUDIENCE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Sub-questions in our survey related to changes in the influence of

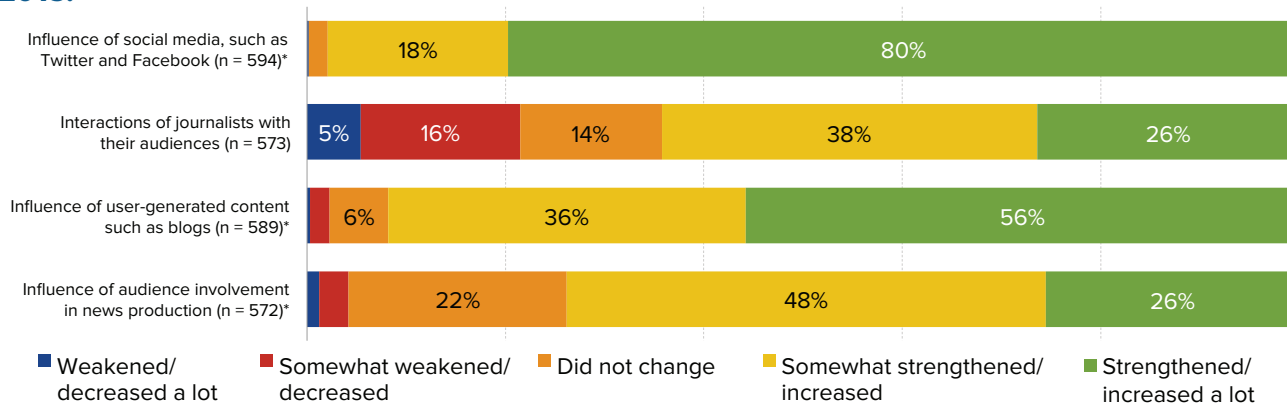
- content from 'users',
- social media,
- the audience involvement in news production,

and to changes in journalists' interactions with their audiences. Our results across all four areas show that most journalists believe the influence or importance of audiences and other users, and of their content, has strengthened or increased over time (see Figure 5.2). The strongest trend related to social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, which an overwhelming majority (80%) of journalists thought had strengthened in influence 'a lot' over the last five years. Indeed, out of all the 23 areas of possible change in journalism that we asked our respondents to comment on, the influence of social media was thought to have increased the most.

This confirms the findings of other research that has reported how journalists believe social media have become 'an incredibly important source' that is used 'constantly in all stories' (Thurman et al., 2016). Such comments sit in contrast to the apparent infrequency with which social media are quoted in news stories (see e.g. Broersma and Graham, 2013). This discrepancy between journalists' self-proclaimed dependence on social media sources and the sporadic appearance of those sources in news content may be explained by the fact that social media are 'often used as a tip-off mechanism, with journalists corroborating the information elsewhere' (Thurman et al., 2016). Social media are, of course, also distribution mechanisms for stories as well as sources of information for them. In the UK, 28% of regular online news consumers now come across news stories on social media in a typical week (Newman, 2015: 76), 19% follow a news organisation on social media, and 14% follow at least one journalist (ibid. 83). This disseminating function of social media is likely to be another reason why journalists so strongly believe that the influence of social media has grown in the last five years.

It is interesting to note that journalists believe their interactions with their audiences have not increased to the same extent as the importance of social media or of user-generated content (see Figure 5.2). This distinction is subtle but important, because it is an indication that online communication technologies, including social media platforms, are more important to journalists as a source of content than as a

**FIGURE 5.2: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON CHANGES IN THE INFLUENCE OR IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, AUDIENCE INTERACTION, AND USER-GENERATED CONTENT, DECEMBER 2015.**



\* Participants were asked about the strengthening/weakening of these influences 'during the past five years'.

<sup>28</sup> Disclosure: one of the authors of this report was the External Examiner of this degree programme from its launch until 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Some news sites, including Reuters, CNN, and the Chicago Sun-Times, 'have abandoned comments altogether or heavily restricted them' and, in Jan. 2016, the *Guardian* decided to limit or prohibit comments on stories about 'race, immigration and Islam' (Pritchard, 2016).

means by which they can build an ongoing dialogue with their audiences.<sup>29</sup> Such an observation is not new. Hermida and Thurman (2008) wrote of how the editors they interviewed in 2006 valued user-generated content ‘as a digital form of newsgathering, rather than as a way of allowing readers to express themselves’. In the ten years since then much has changed, not least the launch of Twitter and Facebook’s move from niche to mainstream network. However, we see continuity between then and now in journalists’ responses to their audiences and to non-professionally produced content.

## 5.3 EDITORIAL FREEDOM, POPULARISM, AND COMPETITIVE PRESSURES

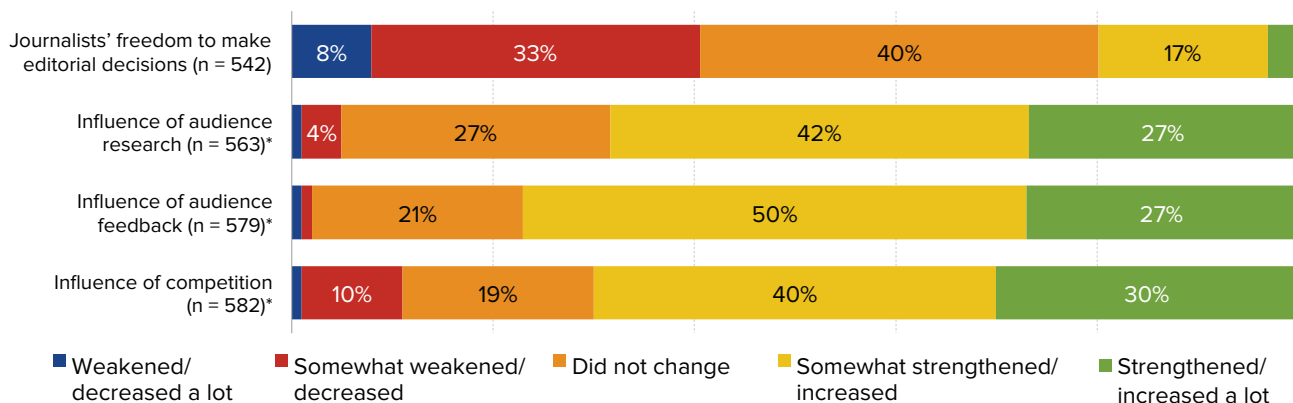
About twice as many journalists believe that their freedom to make editorial decisions has decreased over time as believe it has increased (see Figure 5.3). There are a number of clues in our survey data that might explain why this is so. First, journalists believe that the influence of audience research and audience feedback has strengthened over the last five years (see Figure 5.3).

Historically, decisions on news content were driven more by journalists’ intuition than by a deep understanding of how audiences consumed content. The audience was, writes Philip Napoli (2011), ‘a somewhat distant abstraction’. That era is now clearly over. The increasing number of online readers, combined with the availability of sophisticated means of monitoring their behaviour – such as Chartbeat,<sup>30</sup> NewsWhip,<sup>31</sup> and Parse.ly<sup>32</sup> – has given journalists and editors access to data of unprecedented breadth and depth, including details of which stories are being read on their own sites or shared on social media. Such information is increasingly being used in newsrooms to help decide which stories to produce, publish, and prioritise. For example:

- Edson Tandoc (2014) found that at large online newsrooms in the US, stories with ‘good’ levels of web traffic ‘would get updates and follow-ups’ and ‘topics that have done well in the past also tend to get assigned more’.
- Journalists at the UK regional news publisher Trinity Mirror have been told to ‘focus relentlessly on the content that we know gives us the most return for our effort . . . and [be] ruthless about content that doesn’t’, with regular performance assessments ‘taking into account audience traffic’ to their content (Ponsford, 2015).
- By contrast, other publishers who have also developed sophisticated approaches to audience data – like the BBC, the *Financial Times*, and the *Guardian* – insist that editorial judgement has to be central and that the point of analytics is to be data-informed, not data-driven (Cherubini and Nielsen, 2016).

The use of such data puts obvious limits on journalists’ own editorial decision-making, partially replacing their own news judgement with processes that attempt to match output to popular preferences. This change can bring to light important stories that, for various reasons, the mainstream media has ignored or been slow to cover. One recent example was the so-called Chapel Hill shootings, where three young Muslims, all members of the same family, were killed in North Carolina. Using computational tools that monitor social media activity, a student of one of the authors of this report observed how, initially, the ‘story appeared prominently on social media channels before there was any mention of it on US mainstream media websites or TV channels’ (personal communication, February 2015). Eventually the mainstream media responded, giving the story significant coverage. However, tailoring news to the tastes of readers may also lead to a greater preponderance of non-public-affairs stories. Research by Pablo Boczkowski (2010: 5) has shown that online news consumers’ preferences tend towards ‘sports, entertainment, and crime subjects’, while journalists consider ‘national, business, economic, and international topics’ more newsworthy.

**FIGURE 5.3: UK JOURNALISTS’ VIEWS ON CHANGES IN THEIR EDITORIAL FREEDOM AND ON THE INFLUENCE OF AUDIENCE RESEARCH, AUDIENCE FEEDBACK, AND THEIR COMPETITORS. DECEMBER 2015.**



\* Participants were asked about the strengthening/weakening of these influences ‘during the past five years’.

<sup>30</sup> <https://chartbeat.com>

<sup>31</sup> [www.newswhip.com](http://www.newswhip.com)

<sup>32</sup> [www.parse.ly](http://www.parse.ly)



Although Boczkowski's evidence came from a systematic content analysis that he made – several years ago – of online news, recent qualitative evidence supports his findings. A survey by the *Press Gazette* found that online journalists, including from the *International Business Times* and the *Daily Express*'s website, were worried about an 'emphasis on hits over quality', about 'traffic-related bonus structure[s]' creating 'the wrong incentives', and about the 'shift from proper journalism to . . . attention-seeking, fact-free, gossipy clickbait' (Turvill, 2016a).

Another potential explanation for journalists' belief that their editorial freedom has been curtailed is the influence of the competition, which respondents to our survey believe has strengthened over the last five years (see Figure 5.3 on previous page).

Although journalists, when not operating as a pack, have always tried to steal a march on each other, in the pre-digital era it was much more difficult. Knowing what the competition was up to in time to respond was, explains Mike Pearce, former editor of the *Thanet Times*, usually a matter of accident, for example 'an incautious drink-fuelled pub chat between rival journalists' or someone involved in the story leaking it to friends, family, and beyond,<sup>33</sup> perhaps 'buoyed by the excitement of knowing they were to appear in the papers' (personal communication, 2 February 2016).

With its breaking news feeds on Twitter, live blogs updated by the minute, and homepages edited around the clock, the contemporary news environment is very different. It has never been easier for journalists to monitor the competition. As with the influence of audience research, the rising influence of competition is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it allows journalists to easily stay up-to-date with breaking news stories and, via formats such as live blogs, give their readers more comprehensive coverage by aggregating content from a diverse set of sources, including their competitors.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, close monitoring of the competition may reduce diversity in overall news output. Returning to Pablo Boczkowski's 2010 study of online newspapers in Argentina and the US, we see how journalists were observed 'incessantly monitor[ing] coverage at competitors' sites' (2010: 3) and imitating their content. Over time Boczkowski observed an 'increase in the similarity of print newspapers' stories' that, he says, coincided 'with the timing of the growth in the volume and frequency of online news publishing'. Boczkowski also found 'a high level of homogenisation in the stories published by both print and online outlets in the contemporary setting' (2010: 4). Again, there is more recent qualitative evidence that supports these findings. For example, a senior employee of

the most-visited English-language newspaper website in the world, MailOnline, 'bemoans [the] pressure to produce endless copy [and a] culture of copying other people's journalism', and another online journalist dislikes having to 'collate crap from the internet instead of doing real research' (Turvill, 2016a).

## 5.4 ADVERTISING, ETHICS, PROFIT-MAKING, AND PR

Our survey shows that journalists believe the influence of the profit motive has strengthened over the last five years (see Figure 5.4a). This comes as no surprise given the well-documented falls in the circulation of newspapers, and the difficulties of monetising news online. In times of shrinking revenues, resources are often cut; and there have been plenty of examples in the context of the UK news media.

- On 25 January 2016, Guardian News and Media announced plans to cut £54 million from their annual budget to curb losses (Ponsford, 2016a).
- In February 2016, James Harding, the BBC's head of news, estimated that BBC News would face £80 million in cuts 'over the next four years' (Martinson, 2016).
- Johnston Press, the second-largest publisher of local newspapers in the UK, halved its editorial staff headcount between 2009 and 2015 (Turvill, 2016b).

The effects of such cuts can clearly be seen in our survey, with a large majority of journalists telling us that their hours have increased – more than a third say by 'a lot' – and an even larger majority saying that the time available for researching stories has decreased – again, more than a third say by a 'lot' (see Figure 5.4a).<sup>35</sup>

The effects of such resource limitations can manifest in various ways. For example:

- a greater reliance on public relations (PR) material,
- a closer relationship with advertisers, or
- trying to attract more readers with more sensational content.

Our survey indicates that, over the last five years, such effects may have been felt more strongly.

UK journalists believe that the influence of PR has increased over the past five years (see Figure 5.4b). This is a worrying

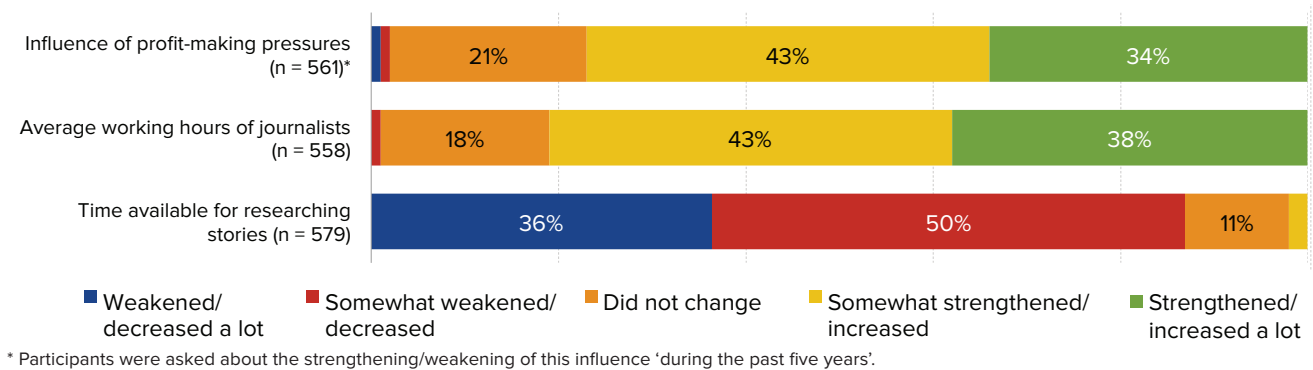
<sup>33</sup> Pearce recalls how: 'one editor, in a coastal town where immigration was a major concern, had worked for weeks to set up a front page exclusive, in which Tony Blair would defend his party's open-door policy. Days before it was to appear, the town's Labour MP was involved in a charity event with the editor of the rival local paper. The MP not only revealed to the editor that the opposition had a great story, but offered to send him a copy of what Blair would say! With an earlier publication time, he was able to turn his rival's hard-earned "exclusive" into a scoop of his own.'

<sup>34</sup> Thurman and Schapals (2016) found that live blogs added external links to sources they quoted 'an average of 22 times per live blog'. This compared with 'an average of just 0.46 links in "traditional" online articles covering the same story'. And even when 'the difference in word length is factored in, live blogs still linked out four times more frequently than traditional online articles'.

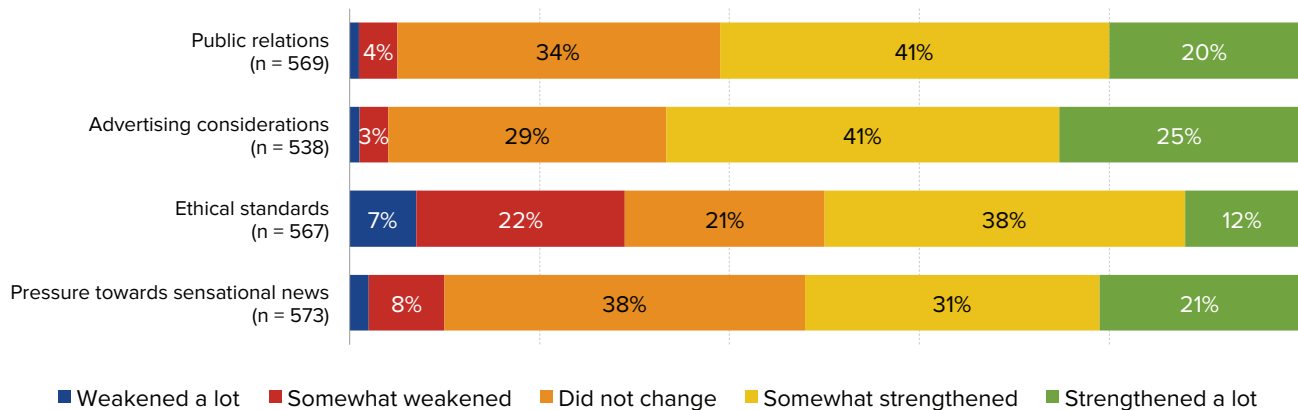
<sup>35</sup> Our survey gives a snapshot of journalists' willingness to publish stories with unverified content. We found that, on 'an important story', 1% thought it was 'always' justified and 24% that it was 'justified on occasion'. There is evidence that new formats for news, such as live blogs, encourage the publication of unverified content (see e.g. Thurman and Walters, 2013) and that resource pressures are making it more likely: a regional deputy editor told a *Press Gazette* survey that: 'I often feel rushed to complete stories, which has led to mistakes and several complaints' (Turvill, 2016a). Given that our survey shows journalists think being accurate, almost above all else, defines their role in society (see Section 4) they – and their employers – must be careful to adapt to technological changes and financial constraints in ways that are compatible with this guiding principle.



**FIGURE 5.4a: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON CHANGES IN THE INFLUENCE OF PROFIT-MAKING PRESSURES AND TO THEIR AVERAGE WORKING HOURS AND TIME AVAILABLE FOR STORY RESEARCH, DECEMBER 2015.**



**FIGURE 5.4b: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON CHANGES IN THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS, ADVERTISING CONSIDERATIONS, ETHICAL STANDARDS, AND PRESSURE TOWARDS SENSATIONALISM, 2010–2015.**



finding given the extent to which the UK's quality newspapers and radio and television news programmes were already drawing heavily on PR material by the start of this period. In 2006 as many as 40% of their stories were wholly, mainly, or partially based on PR material (Lewis et al., 2008). The apparent rise in influence of PR in recent years – from an already high base – is prompting a backlash from journalists, and even from some in the PR industry. For example, the BBC's former Business and Economics Editor, Robert Peston (2014), lamented the fact that 'newspapers are filled with reports based on spurious PR-generated surveys and polls, simply to save time and money' and called the 'unhealthy deals' done between journalists and PRs 'hideous and degrading'. Even some PR practitioners are worried that they may be biting the hand that feeds them. Getting coverage in the media for their clients is only of benefit if readers believe in the credibility of journalism, a credibility that is threatened by excessive PR activity (Jackson and Moloney, 2015).

The increasing use of PR material as an information or editorial subsidy may be one response to resource constraints in the

newsroom. Another is to pay greater attention to the demands of advertisers in order to capture or retain the revenue they bring. Our survey shows UK journalists overwhelmingly believe that the influence of advertising considerations has strengthened over the last five years (see Figure 5.4b). Such considerations sometimes result in editorial choices being made, in effect, by advertisers.<sup>36</sup> For example, a business-to-business editor who responded to a survey by the *Press Gazette* said that the journalists in the company where he works 'have no say over what goes into the magazine – the content is dictated by the clients' (Turvill, 2015c). While this extreme level of commercial influence may be relatively rare – more common, according to the *Press Gazette*, in business-to-business journalism (ibid.) – evidence of the influence of advertisers is evident in all areas of journalism. For example, the so-called 'Chinese Wall' between advertising and editorial content has become harder to discern in the lengthening shadow of 'native advertising', where news outlets publish (and sometimes write) editorial-style stories whose selection and framing have been decided by sponsors.<sup>37</sup> Despite some of the outlets involved, like the *New York Times*, 'vigorously

<sup>36</sup> Kevin Williams writes that in the post-war era advertisers have had 'considerable influence over the British press' (2010: 207), although less through 'direct pressure brought to bear on the editorial content' than in determining the 'shape' of newspapers in order that, with their special features and sections, they can 'reach particular target groups' of interest to advertisers.

<sup>37</sup> Advertising-sponsored features are not new, Kevin Williams (2010: 208) notes their 'growth . . . in the quality press during the post-war period'.

refuting the notion that native advertising . . . compromise[s] the wall that exists between editorial and advertising’ (Levien, 2014), surveys have shown that 43% of Americans have felt disappointed or deceived when they found out content was sponsored by a brand or company (Newman, 2015: 104), and in January 2016, BuzzFeed UK was ‘censured by the Advertising Standards Authority for failing to clearly label paid-for content’ (Ponsford, 2016b).

In light of the increasing pressure from PR firms and from advertisers, what should we make of our survey’s finding that more UK journalists believe that ethical standards have strengthened over the last five years than believe they have weakened (see Figure 5.4b on previous page)? We would argue that such a strengthening is likely to relate to particular practices, such as respecting the privacy of individuals’ personal communications, that have come under scrutiny as a result of the revelations involving phone-hacking at the *News of the World* and other newspapers and the resulting Leveson Inquiry. Whether ethical standards in other areas, such as keeping editorial content free of commercial influence or properly acknowledging the sources of material used in stories, have also strengthened remains a question of debate.

## 5.5 JOURNALISM’S RELEVANCE AND CREDIBILITY

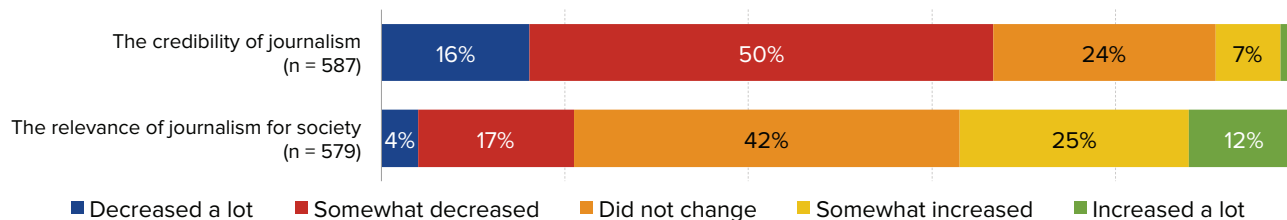
Given the unprecedented scrutiny of the ethics of UK journalism in recent years it is not surprising that an overwhelming proportion of journalists believe their profession has lost credibility over time (see Figure 5.5). Nevertheless, our survey does provide some reasons for optimism. More journalists believe that the relevance of journalism for society has increased over time than believe it has decreased (see Figure 5.5).

So, in spite of the challenges, there remains a belief in the fundamental value of journalism and in the role of journalists. As we discuss in Section 4, our survey reveals that UK journalists most commonly believe that their role in society is to hold those in power to account, to be accurate, and to provide information – all functions that play to a traditional concept of journalism as a powerful, responsible, and relevant force in society.

## 5.6 CONCLUSIONS

In this section we have reported UK journalists’ views on the extent of changes to their working conditions and audience interactions and to the importance of skills and education in the profession. We have also described journalists’ perceptions of the degree to which internal and external influences on their work have strengthened or weakened over the last five years. These influences include commercial pressures; technological and social developments; and ethics, rules, and standards. The results show a profession undergoing significant change and raise questions about journalism education, editorial independence and accuracy, and media content plurality. At the same time, however, we see some continuity in journalists’ views about how influential – or not – formal journalistic education is, the value of audience interaction, and the relevance of journalism for society. Our reliance on a survey of journalists’ perceptions of change does, of course, paint a rather one-dimensional picture, which is why we have tried to triangulate our results by making reference to other research on media content, news consumption patterns, and news production routines. Even so, our survey raises as many questions as it answers and highlights the necessity for more research, in particular on the use of social media by journalists; the effects of audience data, PR activities, and commercial pressures on news content; and the application of ethics, rules, and standards in a post-Leveson era.

**FIGURE 5.5: UK JOURNALISTS’ VIEWS ON CHANGES IN THE CREDIBILITY OF JOURNALISM AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR SOCIETY, DECEMBER 2015.**



# INFLUENCES ON JOURNALISTS' WORK

ALESSIO CORNIA AND NEIL THURMAN

Without professional autonomy, journalists cannot provide their audiences with accurate and impartial information. It follows that knowing about the social, economic, organisational, and political forces that limit journalists' autonomy – and, as a consequence, shape their work – is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of contemporary journalism. In Section 5 we discussed how some of the influences on journalists' work have changed over time. What follows here is complementary, a description and analysis of the situation in December 2015. This section examines the degrees of influence journalists in the UK believe the following forces have on their work:

- personal values, religious considerations, and ethics;
- professional and social relationships;
- editorial policy, media regulation, and censorship;
- economic factors and the audience;
- information access and time limits;
- political and economic actors.

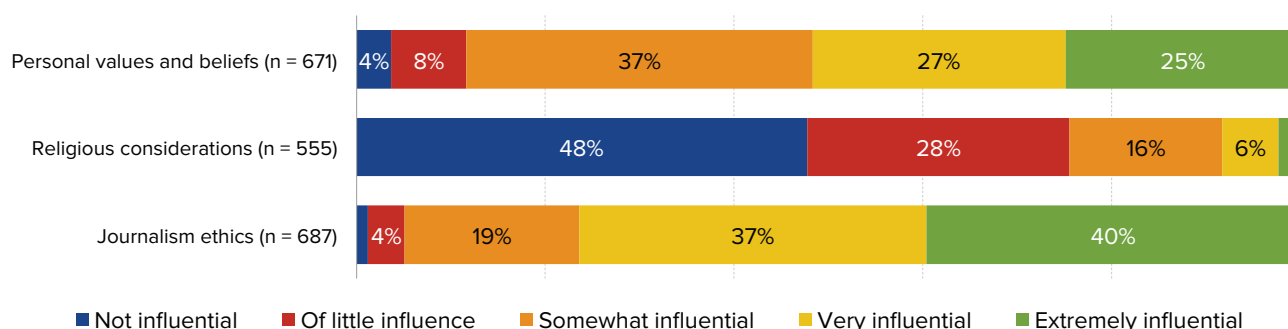
## 6.1 PERSONAL VALUES, RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS, AND ETHICS

Our survey shows that journalists consider their personal values and beliefs to have a strong influence on their work. More than half (52%) think their values and beliefs are 'extremely' or 'very' influential, whereas only 12% believe they have little or no influence (see Figure 6.1).

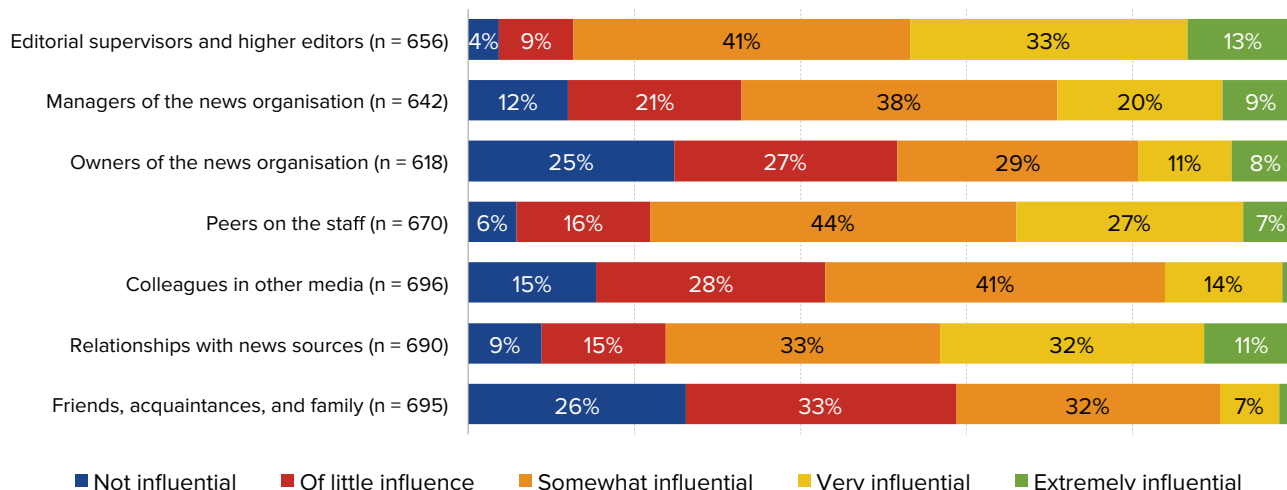
Despite religion often playing a central role in people's values and beliefs, our survey shows that religious considerations are not perceived as a strong source of influence. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of journalists (76%) think religion has little or no influence on their work, with only 8% considering it 'very' or 'extremely' influential (see Figure 6.1). This result is not unexpected given that journalists are less religious than the general population: 61% are not members of a formal faith and, irrespective of any religious affiliation, almost three-quarters consider religion unimportant (52%) or of little importance (22%) in their lives (see Section 1.3 for a fuller analysis).

Journalism ethics are perceived as playing a much more important role, actually the strongest role among all the sources

**FIGURE 6.1: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL VALUES, RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS, AND ETHICS ON THEIR WORK, DECEMBER 2015.**



**FIGURE 6.2: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE INFLUENCE OF PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS ON THEIR WORK, DECEMBER 2015.**



of influence considered by this study. More than three-quarters of journalists (77%) believe the influence of ethics on their work is 'extremely' or 'very' important (see Figure 6.1 on previous page). Our survey suggests that the perceived importance of ethics does not depend on the type of medium journalists practise in (print, broadcasting, or online), nor on the reach (local, national, or transnational) of the outlet they work for. The specific practices journalists consider to be ethical or not, and the circumstances when journalists believe deviations from established ethical standards can be justified, are described in Section 8.

## 6.2 PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Our survey asked journalists to evaluate the influence of professional and social relationships on their work. Not surprisingly, journalists believe their 'editorial supervisors and higher editors' exercise the greatest influence over their work: 46% consider them 'extremely' or 'very' influential, whereas only 13% believe their superiors have little or no influence (see Figure 6.2).

As Figure 6.2 shows, managers of news organisations are seen as less influential: almost as many journalists think managers have little or no influence (33%) as think they are 'very' or 'extremely' influential (29%). The least influential working relationship is perceived to be with the owners of the news outlet, who are described as having little or no influence by more than half (52%) of UK journalists (see Figure 6.2). Our data suggest that owners' influence is felt differently by journalists of different ranks. A greater proportion of those of higher rank think that owners are somewhat influential, and a lower proportion believe they have little or no influence.<sup>38</sup> This difference may be explained by the fact that those in higher ranks have more contact with proprietors. Owners can,

however, still exert influence on rank and file journalists via the supervisors and managers whom those rank and file journalists perceive as being very influential.

Previous studies on newsmaking have shown how journalists' working routines and interpretative patterns are usually deeply influenced by their daily relationships with colleagues (Crouse, 2003; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978). These relationships can be both with peers inside the newsroom and with journalists working for other media organisations. For example, reporters covering a specific news beat or on an overseas assignment may spend a large amount of time with journalists from other news organisations. They are likely to cover the same stories, experience the same kind of problems – with sources and supervisors, perhaps – and share ideas on how to solve them.

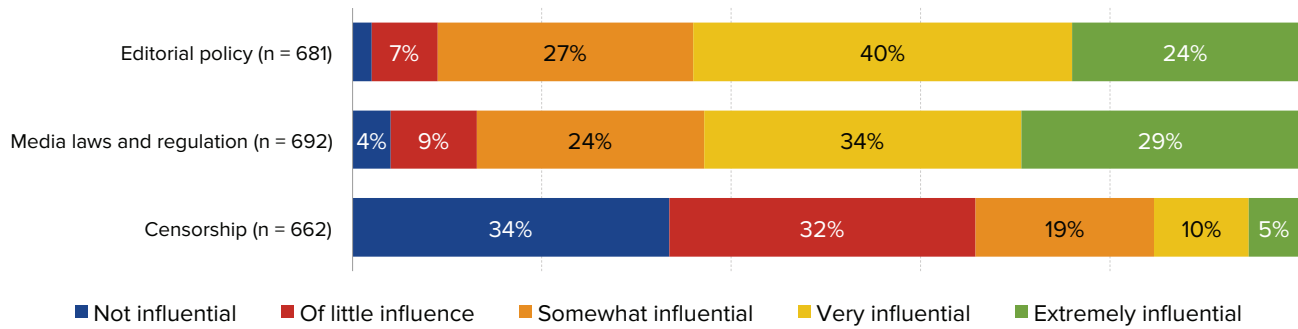
Our data show that interpersonal relationships with colleagues are perceived as quite an important source of influence over journalists' work: 34% believe that their peers on the staff are 'very' or 'extremely' influential, while only 22% take the opposite view (see Figure 6.2). However, the influence of journalists working for other media is considered much weaker: only 16% of journalists believe they are 'very' or 'extremely' influential, while 43% think they have little or no influence (see Figure 6.2). The stronger influence of peers on the staff may be explained by the fact that most journalists spend most of their working hours with colleagues in the newsroom, rather than at other locations where they can meet journalists from other media. This result provides a hint, perhaps, that journalistic work is now relatively desk-bound, as a consequence of resource limitations, the ease with which it is possible to experience events virtually, and changes in news formats.<sup>39</sup>

Journalists' relationships with news sources are perceived as having a strong influence: 43% evaluate them as 'very' or 'extremely' influential, while only 24% believe they exercise little or no influence over their work (see Figure 6.2). Early studies on

<sup>38</sup> 26% of rank and file journalists think owners are somewhat influential, while 38% of senior managers do. 57% of rank and file journalists think owners have little or no influence, while 40% of senior managers do.

<sup>39</sup> For example, Andrew Sparrow says that it can be easier to cover politics for the *Guardian's* 'Politics Live' live blog from his desk with 'a 24 inch Apple Mac . . . television . . . and reference books' than from a laptop in Westminster with an unreliable Wi-Fi connection (Thurman and Walters, 2013).

**FIGURE 6.3: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE INFLUENCE OF EDITORIAL POLICY, MEDIA REGULATION, AND CENSORSHIP ON THEIR WORK, DECEMBER 2015.**



newsmaking (Gans, 1979; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1981) as well as more recent research on UK journalists (Davis, 2009) have described the relationship between sources and reporters as a two-way exchange, a mutually beneficial relationship where sources seek out journalists to promote themselves and their activities, and journalists develop sources to gain off-the-record and behind-the-scenes material. Gans likens this symbiotic relationship to a dance: 'Although it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not sources do the leading' (1979: 116).

Our data show that such professional relationships are more influential on journalists' work than their social interactions are. Only 9% of journalists consider their friends, acquaintances, and families to be 'very' or 'extremely' influential, whereas more than a half (59%) believe they have little or no influence over their work (see Figure 6.2).

## 6.3 EDITORIAL POLICY, MEDIA REGULATION, AND CENSORSHIP

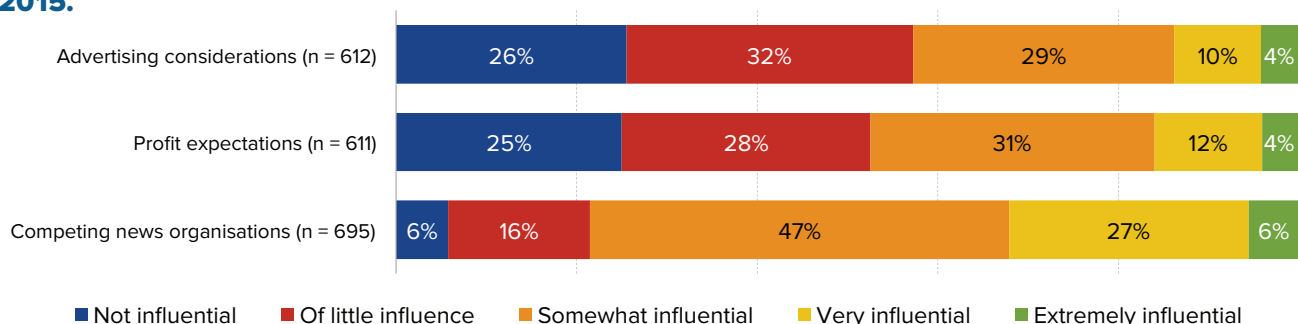
News organisations' editorial policy, and media law and regulation, are believed by journalists to be among the strongest sources of influence on their work. Editorial policy defines a news organisation's principles and standards, guiding editorial decision-making and content creation. It reflects the organisation's core values, the pertinent legislation, and the

relevant ethical codes of practice. It is not surprising that 64% of journalists consider the editorial policy of the organisation they work for to be 'very' or 'extremely' influential, while only 9% believe it is of little or no influence (see Figure 6.3). Respondents expressed similar views on the influence of media law and regulation: 63% believe the UK media's legal and regulatory framework is 'very' or 'extremely' influential (see Figure 6.3). The extent to which UK journalists' own ethical standards correspond with the professional codes of conduct they work under are analysed in Section 8. Finally, censorship is among the least influential sources of influence over UK journalists. Two-thirds consider it to have little or no influence (see Figure 6.3).

## 6.4 ECONOMIC FACTORS AND THE AUDIENCE

Advertising considerations and profit expectations are evaluated as weak sources of influence: only about 15% of UK journalists define them as 'very' or 'extremely' influential, whereas over half consider them to have little or no influence (see Figure 6.4a). How does this finding sit with the fact (as discussed in Section 5.4) that UK journalists believe the influence on journalism of advertising and, especially, of profit-making pressures has considerably strengthened in the last few years? We believe this difference may, in part, be to do with the separation between wider developments in the industry and journalists' day-to-day work.

**FIGURE 6.4a: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE INFLUENCE OF ADVERTISING CONSIDERATIONS, PROFIT EXPECTATIONS, AND COMPETITION ON THEIR WORK, DECEMBER 2015.**



These wider developments include news organisations' adoption of 'native advertising',<sup>40</sup> which is considered by many publishers to be one possible response to falls in advertising revenue and the rise of ad blocking.<sup>41</sup> The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Guardian* have, for example, all created new teams to produce native advertising (Newman, 2015). Although such developments are significant, most journalists in our survey consider themselves to still be relatively isolated from commercial pressures. This may be due to the fact that, even at news organisations that have adopted native advertising, for example, the *Wall Street Journal* and Huffington Post UK, there is still a clear separation between journalists and those creating branded content (Marshall, 2013).

Competition is considered a stronger source of influence than advertising and the profit motive, with a third of journalists believing it to be 'very' or 'extremely' influential and 22% taking the opposite view. As we discuss in Section 5.3, journalists believe the influence of the competition has strengthened considerably over recent years, though keeping an eye on competitors has always characterised journalists' work. Early studies described how reporters monitored the topics their colleagues were working on to avoid being rebuked by supervisors for having missed a story (Gans, 1979; Tunstall, 1971; Sigal, 1973). The digital news environment makes such monitoring even easier. Editors monitor competing news organisations' websites, and 24-hour TV news channels play in the background in many newsrooms. A recent study by Chadha and Wells (2016) concludes that editorial imperatives to match competitors have been vastly amplified by editors' access to Twitter. One reporter expressed frustration with the modern social-media-dominated working environment: 'every reporter has the experience of having a boss using Twitter to look over their shoulder', pushing him or her to cover the same stories their competitors are tweeting about (Chadha and Wells, 2016: 8). As discussed in Section 5.3, the increased influence of competing news organisations and pressure from editors not to miss anything may be leading to a culture of imitation where there is a greater degree of similarity between the content published by competing news organisations.

No significant differences between local, regional, national, and transnational media emerged from our analysis. However, differences were found between media types. Compared with broadcast and print journalists, those working online feel the

influence of the competition on their work to a greater extent.<sup>42</sup> This is likely to be due to the ease with which online journalists can monitor their competitors' digital platforms.

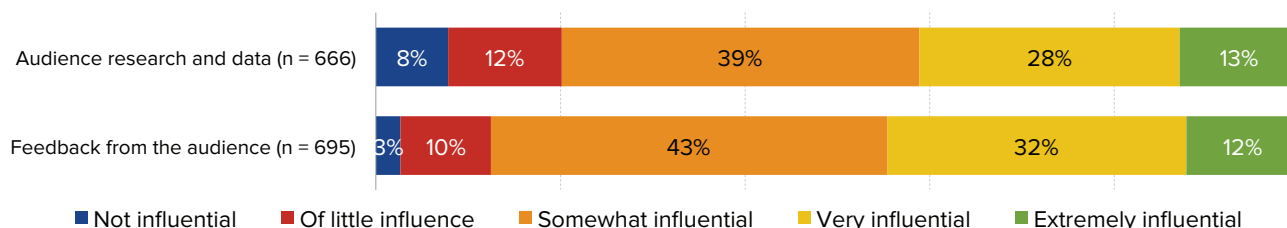
Our survey shows the strong influence of audience research and audience feedback on journalists' work. Over 40% of journalists consider audience research and their interactions with the public to be 'very' or 'extremely' influential, whereas only 20% or less think they are of little or no influence (see Figure 6.4b). As we discuss in Section 5.2, journalists also believe these sources of influence have strengthened considerably over the last few years.

Traditionally, decisions about which events would become news or which aspects of a story deserve emphasis were driven by journalists' own evaluations or by those of their supervisors. These judgements were often based on their subjective understanding of what would be interesting or important to their audience (Gans, 1979). In recent years, news organisations have increased their use of quantitative data on audience behaviour. A recent report on editorial analytics by Cherubini and Nielsen (2016) revealed how UK news organisations such as the *Guardian* and the BBC are developing audience teams within their newsrooms. New job roles like 'audience editor' and 'growth editor' have been created in an attempt to better inform editorial departments about their audiences' tastes. Despite news organisations being aware that quantitative analyses need to be supplemented by qualitative editorial judgement, it is undeniable that data-informed decision-making is strongly influencing journalists' work. In a similar way, the growing use of social media and other digital tools for self-expression has given journalists more opportunities to monitor and interact with their audiences. Our survey confirms the strong and growing influence of audience research and feedback on the daily work of UK journalists.

## 6.5 INFORMATION ACCESS AND TIME LIMITS

It is not surprising that the availability of newsgathering resources, access to information, and time limits are listed among the most important sources of influence on journalists' work (see Figure 6.5). The availability of newsgathering resources – such as news agency feeds, correspondents on

**FIGURE 6.4b: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE AUDIENCE ON THEIR WORK, DECEMBER 2015.**



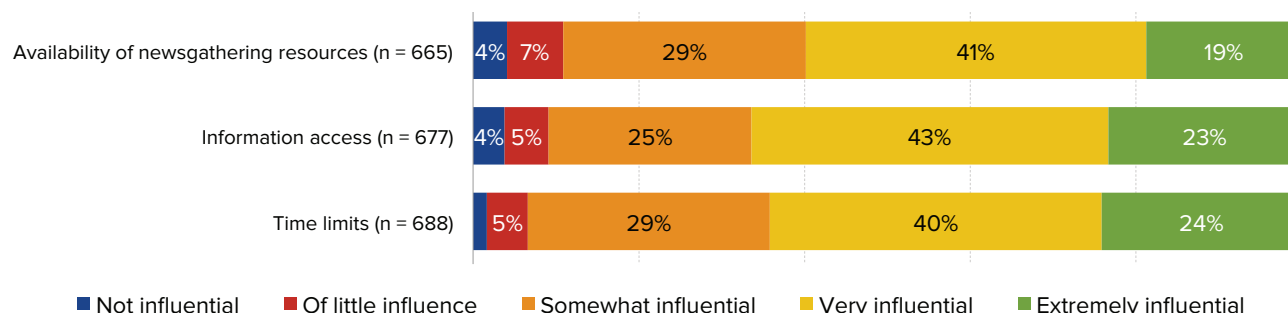
<sup>40</sup> Native advertising is branded content, sponsored by advertisers, that matches the editorial format of the platform where it appears.

<sup>41</sup> Ad-blocking software removes advertising content from web pages. 39% of regular online news users in the UK say they employ ad-blocking software to screen out ads (Newman, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> 45% of journalists working only for online media believe that competition is 'very' or 'extremely' influential, while only 13% take the opposite view (n = 89).



**FIGURE 6.5: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE AVAILABILITY OF NEWSGATHERING RESOURCES, INFORMATION ACCESS, AND TIME LIMITS ON THEIR WORK, DECEMBER 2015.**



location, or high-tech communication tools – is perceived as ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential by 60% of journalists. Respondents’ evaluations vary according to the type of media they work for and its reach, with journalists who work only for broadcasting organisations or for news outlets with a local or regional reach<sup>43</sup> feeling especially strongly about the importance of the availability of these resources. For broadcast journalists, this is likely to be due to the often limited availability of high-quality video and audio content for stories occurring in difficult-to-reach locations. For journalists addressing local and regional audiences, this may be due to resource pressures at what are usually small- and medium-sized news organisations.

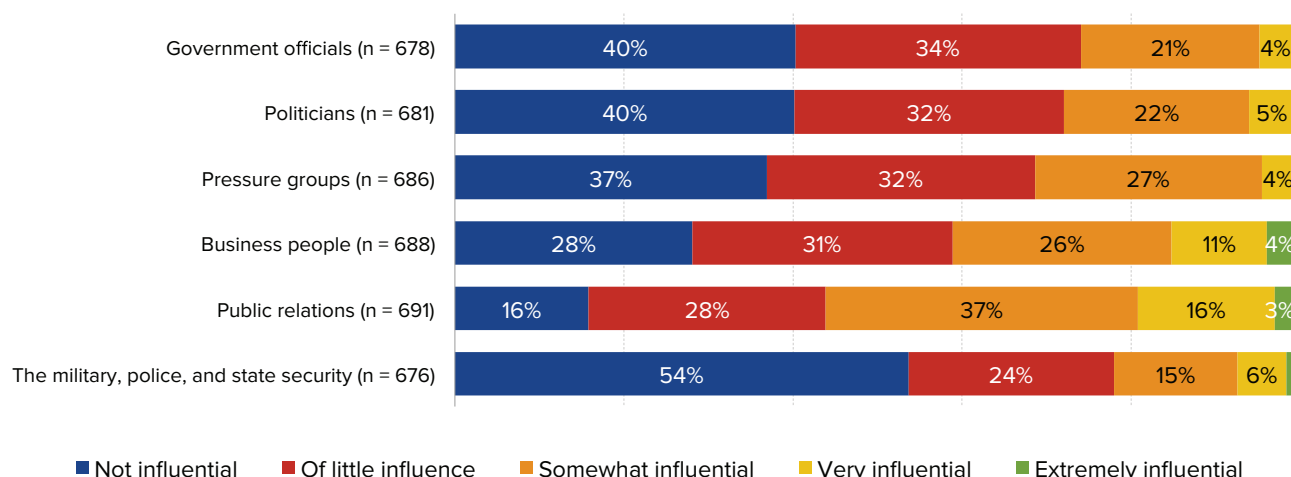
Our survey shows that UK journalists overwhelmingly believe that ‘information access’ has a strong influence over their work, with 66% thinking it ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential (see Figure 6.5). This proportion rises even higher among journalists who work only for broadcasting organisations (78%), and those working for local and regional news outlets (71%). Journalists face various challenges in accessing information. Data made available by national governments can, for example, be inaccurate or incomplete; sources can be reluctant to grant an interview or an on-the-record statement; and private companies

can deny access to specific information about their activities. Even when information is accessible and complete, the lack of time that journalists have at their disposal can be a major obstacle. Time limits are considered ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential by 64% of UK journalists (see Figure 6.5).

## 6.6 POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ACTORS

Our survey shows that an overwhelming majority of UK journalists think that political institutions and actors do not affect their work. Nearly three-quarters believe that ‘government officials’ and ‘politicians’ are of little or no influence, and 69% feel the same about ‘pressure groups’ (see Figure 6.6). Together with the ‘military, police, and state security’, these are considered some of the least influential sources of pressure UK journalists have to deal with. The only significant variation concerns journalists working for local and regional media. These journalists are more likely than their colleagues in national or transnational media to consider ‘politicians’, ‘government officials’, and the ‘military, police, and

**FIGURE 6.6: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON THE INFLUENCE OF GOVERNMENT, POLITICIANS, PRESSURE GROUPS, BUSINESS PEOPLE, PR, AND THE SECURITY FORCES ON THEIR WORK, DECEMBER 2015.**



<sup>43</sup> 74% of journalists who work only for broadcast news outlets (n = 67) and 70% of those working for local/regional media (n = 149) believe that the availability of newsgathering resources is ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential, while 10% and 7% respectively take the opposite view.



state security' to be somewhat influential.<sup>44</sup> This is likely to be due to the more frequent and closer relationships that local journalists often have with local politicians, public officials, and police representatives. Compared with national journalists, local reporters work within a narrower arena, where newsgathering activities are based, to a greater extent, on interpersonal relationships.

The majority (59%) of UK journalists also think that business people are of little or no influence (see Figure 6.6 on previous page). However, public relations activities seem to affect UK journalists to a greater extent. Nearly a fifth of journalists consider public relations to be 'very' or 'extremely' influential, 37% think it is somewhat influential, and 44% believe it has little or no influence (see Figure 6.6 on previous page). As previously discussed, UK journalists think the influence of PR has increased significantly over the last few years (see Section 5.5).

## 6.7 CONCLUSIONS

In this section we have revealed UK journalists' views on the social, economic, organisational, and political forces influencing their work. The results show that journalists perceive the most important sources of influence to be journalism ethics, editorial policy, laws and regulations, information access, and the availability of newsgathering resources. Journalists' personal values and beliefs also have influence over their work.

By contrast, UK journalists believe that political forces and economic imperatives exercise minor influence. Given the amount of research that has identified the role political and economic forces have in shaping news content (see e.g. Benson and Hallin, 2007; Hallin and Mancini, 2004), these results are somewhat surprising. Other studies (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011) have found that journalists tend to underestimate the influence of political and economic forces because they are rarely experienced directly. Instead, they are filtered by news organisations and transmitted through the hierarchy, manifesting as organisational and procedural constraints or as a natural part of journalists' work. The modest influence that journalists ascribe to political and economic factors, and the strong influence they ascribe to their personal values and beliefs, indicate that journalists may be overestimating the extent of their professional autonomy.

<sup>44</sup> 58% of journalists working for local or regional media consider politicians to have little or no influence, 35% think they are 'somewhat' influential, and 7% 'very' or 'extremely' influential. The percentages for all journalists are, respectively, 72, 22, and 5. 62% of local/regional journalists consider government officials to have little or no influence, 35% think they are 'somewhat' influential, and 3% 'very' or 'extremely' influential. The percentages for all journalists are, respectively, 74, 21, and 5. 58% of local/regional journalists consider the 'military, police, and state security' to have little or no influence, 29% think they are 'somewhat' influential, and 13% 'very' or 'extremely' influential. The percentages for all journalists are, respectively, 78, 24, and 8.

# JOURNALISTS' TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

JESSICA KUNERT AND NEIL THURMAN

Trust is an important foundation of everyday life. We place trust in our family, our friends, and our neighbours. Trust is also extended to strangers on a regular basis. There are several advantages to be gained from trusting others. For example, Fukuyama (1995: 90) suggests that companies in high-trust societies are more successful as they benefit from reduced 'transaction' costs, such as the costs of carrying out business negotiations or resolving contract disputes. Coleman (1988: 102) extends the value of trust beyond the realm of companies to other contexts such as the family and politics. Trust, then, is a key component of building the social capital that marks successful communities.

In our survey we assess interpersonal trust (how much trust journalists have in other individuals in society) and institutional trust (how much trust journalists have in institutions).

Measures of interpersonal trust assess in general terms the extent to which society's members trust each other. An oft-used indicator is the 'Rosenberg question' (Rosenberg, 1956), which was part of our survey: 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?' This question has been used in many cross-national surveys and the results show large differences between countries. There are manifold explanations for these differences, such as the extent of corruption in a society.

Institutional or political trust, also called systemic trust, measures how people feel about political institutions and their members. As Morrone et al. (2009: 16) say, 'institutional trust is essential for the stability of societies and the functioning of democracy'. In our survey we assessed journalists' levels of trust in a wide range of institutions, including those that are part of the wider political system, such as trade unions and the police.

As with interpersonal trust, surveys show large differences in institutional trust across countries. There are, however, some common patterns. Parliament is generally trusted more than government, the judiciary is the most trusted of all institutions (Morrone et al. 2009: 16), and trust in government has declined

in almost all industrialised societies over the years (Dalton, 2005).

## 7.1 INTERPERSONAL TRUST

Interpersonal trust in the UK has been on the decline. The proportion of those who are 'trustful' fell from 56% to 44% between 1959 and 1990 (Kaase, 1999: 5), and in the 2005 *World Values Survey* only 30% of Britons felt that most people could be trusted.<sup>45</sup>

Levels of interpersonal trust vary not only over time but also by country and community. Alesina and La Ferrara (2000: 16) suggest that levels of interpersonal trust are determined by personal characteristics. Trust is lower amongst those with less income and education and those who are discriminated against, such as minorities and women. Communities that are racially diverse and have high levels of income inequality may also be less trustful.

Our survey indicates that journalists in the UK may have a higher level of trust than the general population, with 40% agreeing that 'most people can be trusted' (see Figure 7.1). This difference may be a result of UK journalists' personal characteristics, such as their relatively high levels of education and their ethnic homogeneity.

**FIGURE 7.1: UK JOURNALISTS' LEVEL OF INTERPERSONAL TRUST, DECEMBER 2015 (n = 652).**

**MOST PEOPLE CAN BE TRUSTED**

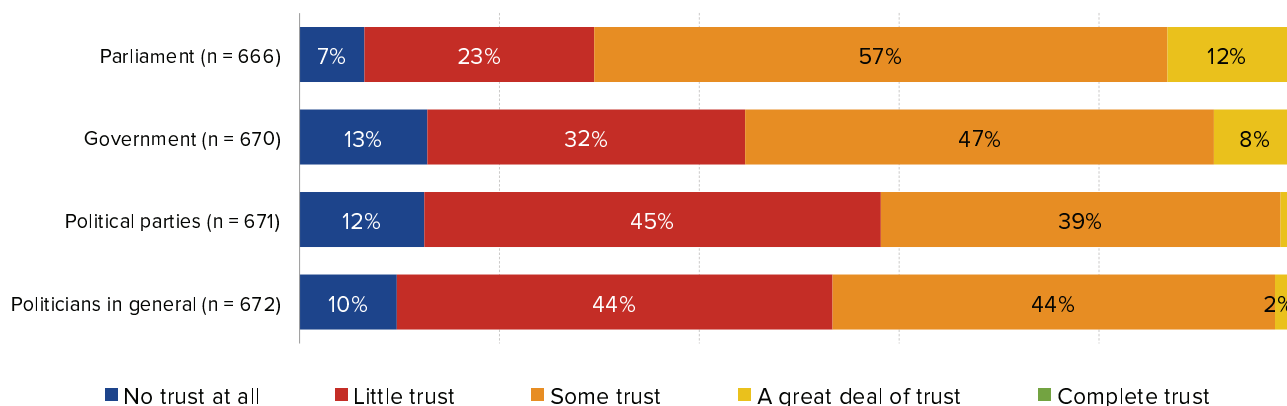
**40%**

**ONE CANNOT BE TOO CAREFUL**

**60%**

<sup>45</sup> See documentation for the UK in World Values Survey (2014).

**FIGURE 7.2a: UK JOURNALISTS' TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND ACTORS, DECEMBER 2015.**



We might expect journalists in the UK to extend some of their relatively high levels of interpersonal trust to institutions, because, as Morrone et al. (2009: 23) say, 'a high level of interpersonal trust is a prerequisite for a good level of institutional trust'. Our survey asked the degree to which political, state, and non-state institutions are trusted by journalists in the UK. We present the results in the next three subsections.

## 7.2 TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND ACTORS

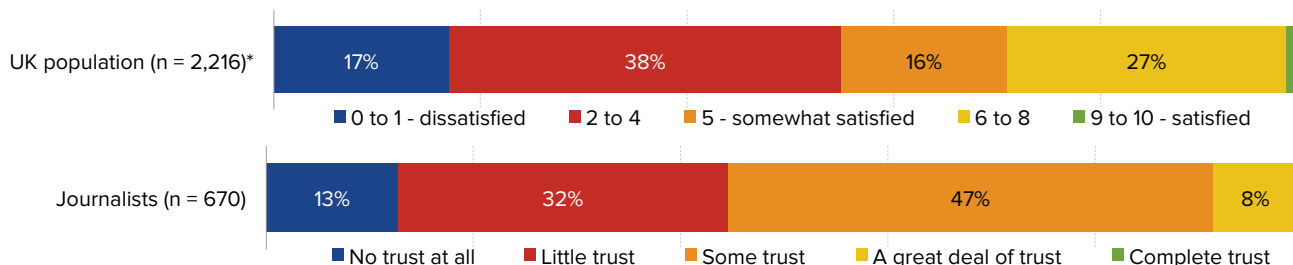
In this section we look at journalists' trust in explicitly political institutions and individuals: Parliament, government, political parties, and politicians. Only a small proportion of journalists say they have a 'great deal' of or 'complete' trust in political institutions or politicians (see Figure 7.2a). However, trust in political institutions is also low – perhaps even lower – amongst the general population, so journalists, despite saying that one of their profession's key roles is holding power to account,<sup>46</sup> are not exceptional in the level of distrust with which they view political institutions.

Looking at our results in more detail shows that journalists view Parliament<sup>47</sup> with slightly less suspicion than they do political parties, government, and politicians, with 30% having 'little' or 'no' trust in it, and 57% having some trust (see Figure 7.2a).

The government<sup>48</sup> fares worse than Parliament in our survey. Only 8% of journalists put 'complete' or 'a great deal' of trust in government, while almost half have 'little' or 'no' trust (see Figure 7.2a). However, studies in other countries show that it is common for governments to be trusted less than parliaments (see Díez Medrano, 2016). Furthermore, trust in government is not high among the wider population. As Figure 7.2b shows, a randomly selected sample of UK inhabitants were no more, and possibly less, trusting of government than our sample of journalists.<sup>49</sup>

'Political parties' and 'Politicians in general' are trusted even less than government and Parliament in our survey, rated lower by journalists than any other institution. Politicians fare slightly better than political parties but, even so, 54% of journalists have 'no' or 'little' trust in them (see Figure 7.2a). However, trust in politicians is low across the board, and the UK's general population may be at least as untrusting of politicians as its journalists are, and possibly more so (see Figure 7.2c).

**FIGURE 7.2b: A COMPARISON OF THE LEVELS OF TRUST/SATISFACTION IN GOVERNMENT AS EXPRESSED BY UK JOURNALISTS AND THE GENERAL POPULATION.**



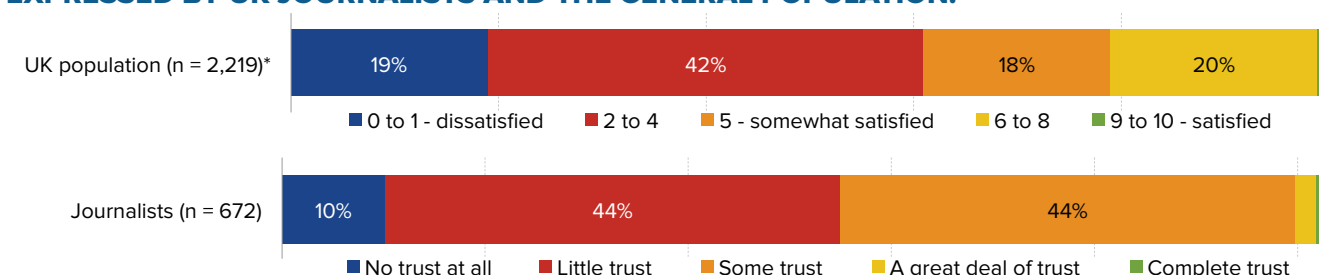
\* Source: European Social Survey (2012).

<sup>46</sup> In our survey, holding power to account was the third most frequently cited role journalists defined for themselves (see Section 4.1).

<sup>47</sup> Defined in our survey as 'The House of Commons/Scottish Parliament/Welsh Assembly/Northern Ireland Assembly'.

<sup>48</sup> Defined in our survey as 'the Prime or First Minister, the Cabinet, and other ministers'.

<sup>49</sup> The comparison with the European Social Survey (ESS) data is approximate because the question asked by the ESS was about 'satisfaction', whereas our survey asked about 'trust'. Because the ESS used an 11-point rating scale, we have aggregated their data into five bands (as indicated in Figures 7.2b and 7.2c) in order to allow rough comparison with our data.

**FIGURE 7.2c: A COMPARISON OF THE LEVELS OF TRUST/SATISFACTION IN POLITICIANS AS EXPRESSED BY UK JOURNALISTS AND THE GENERAL POPULATION.**

\* Source: European Social Survey (2012).

## 7.3 TRUST IN OTHER STATE INSTITUTIONS

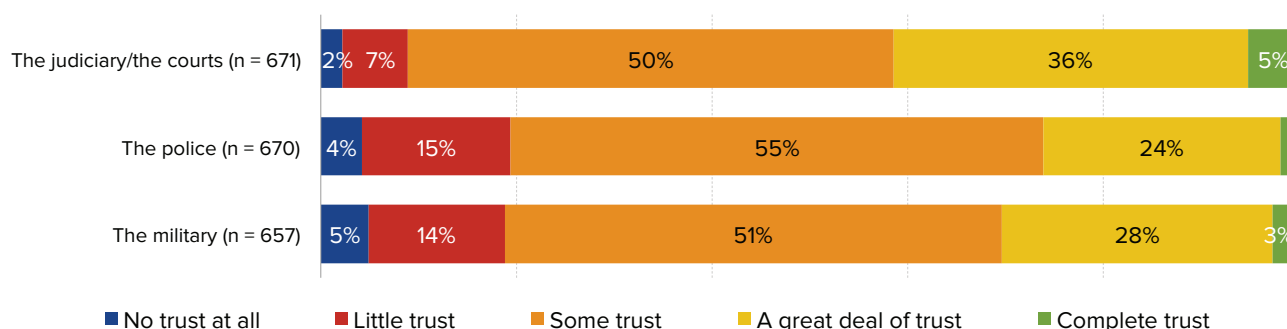
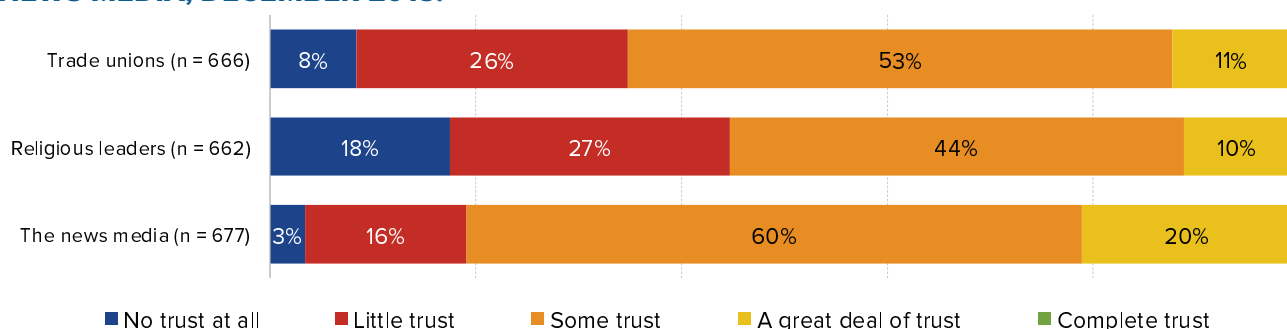
Journalists have a relatively high level of trust in the judiciary and the courts, the police, and the military, with less than a fifth having 'little' or 'no' trust. The judiciary and courts are trusted the most, followed by the military and the police (see Figure 7.3a).

Although journalists have relatively high levels of trust in these 'other' state institutions – we will suggest some reasons why later in this section – there is still some suspicion; for example, 19% of journalists have 'little' or 'no' trust in the police. There is no space to go into detail about what the sources of that suspicion might be. We will, however, mention that there have been a number of recent examples where such institutions, including the police, have attempted to mislead the media to protect their own interests (see e.g. Davies, 2009).

## 7.4 TRUST IN NON-STATE ACTORS

Finally, we look at journalists' trust in non-state actors, namely trade unions, religious leaders, and the news media itself. UK journalists have lower levels of trust in religious leaders than they do in Parliament, the police, the military, and the judiciary and courts. Nearly half (45%) say they have 'no' or 'little' faith in religious leaders (see Figure 7.4). Some of this distrust is likely to be a result of scandals involving abuse by members of the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church (Laville and Sherwood, 2015), and the Methodist Church (Methodist Church of the United Kingdom, 2015). However, there have also been significant scandals involving the UK Parliament, the police, and the military, also covered widely by the media, yet journalists' trust in these institutions is not as low. Why not?

First, as we report in Section 1.3, UK journalists are less religious, in general terms, than the UK population and

**FIGURE 7.3a: UK JOURNALISTS' TRUST IN OTHER STATE INSTITUTIONS, DECEMBER 2015.****FIGURE 7.4: UK JOURNALISTS' TRUST IN TRADE UNIONS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, AND THE NEWS MEDIA, DECEMBER 2015.**

less likely to be affiliated with a formal faith. Therefore, in addition to mistrust of religious leaders arising from abuses of power they may have committed, journalists have relatively low levels of trust in the views they espouse. Secondly, Parliament, the police, and the military are important sources of information for journalists. Our survey shows that nearly a quarter of journalists think that ‘the military, police, and state security’ are at least ‘somewhat influential’ to their work (see Section 6). This is unsurprising given the PR activities of these institutions and the extent of news coverage relating to police investigations and to the armed forces. For example, the Ministry of Defence has around 1,000 people working in media/communications roles, although this figure ‘excludes many military personnel involved in communications work’ (Rayment, 2007). UK police forces employ almost as many such staff – 775 across 38 of the 46 police forces for which information is available (Turvill, 2015a). With ‘law and order’ sources cited in 22% of UK news stories, and national government sources cited as frequently (Lewis et al., 2008), journalists have relationships with the police and the military that involve them trusting those institutions to provide information. That trust is evident in the results of our survey.

Trust in trade unions, while not as low as that in religious leaders, is still lower than that in the police, military, the judiciary and the courts, and Parliament. Over a third of journalists have ‘little’ or ‘no’ trust in unions (see Figure 7.4 on previous page). Part of the explanation could be that trade unions are perceived as having less legitimacy than they used to. Just as trust confers legitimacy, so legitimacy instils trust. Unions have suffered from falls in membership over the years, following their weakening under the Thatcher government and the retreat of highly unionised industries like coal and steel. In 2014, 6.4 million UK workers were members of a trade union, a far cry from the peak of 13 million in 1979 (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2015: 5). Journalists’ own union, the National Union of Journalists, has been subject to some of these dynamics, weakened by de-recognition in the 1980s.

Another explanation for journalists’ low levels of trust in trade unions revolves, again, around journalists’ relationship with their sources. Trade unionists are not an important source of information for journalists. A study found that just 1.5% of news stories in UK ‘quality’ newspapers and in radio and television news reports used trade unionists as a source, and ‘where trade union material was present’, say the authors, ‘it typically provided an oppositional voice’ (Lewis et al., 2008).

Journalists are conflicted in their attitudes towards their own profession, the news media. Nearly a fifth have ‘no’ or ‘little’ trust, 60% have some trust, and another fifth have ‘a great deal’ of or ‘complete’ trust (see Figure 7.4 on previous page). This span of opinion may reflect the range of journalism in the UK, some parts of which enjoy higher levels of trust than others. For example, a YouGov survey in 2013 showed that while 61% of people trusted BBC journalists to tell the truth ‘a great deal’ or ‘a fair amount’ that figure fell to 13% for journalists on tabloid newspapers (YouGov, 2013).

In Section 8 we analyse UK journalists’ ethics, and report on when they think it may be justified, for example, to pay people for confidential information. Given the phone-hacking scandal and subsequent Leveson Inquiry, it is perhaps unsurprising that journalists view the institutions they work for with some of the ambivalence they display towards other institutions.

## 7.5 CONCLUSIONS

Our survey indicates that journalists in the UK have higher levels of interpersonal trust than the general population. This finding works against the stereotype of the journalist as hard-boiled cynical hack. It is in line, however, with our findings on the personal characteristics and diversity of journalists in the UK (see Section 1). They show that journalists are, as a group, highly educated, socially homogeneous, and similarly paid,<sup>50</sup> characteristics that promote higher levels of interpersonal trust.

As was to be expected, UK journalists have very little trust in political institutions and actors, with politicians and political parties coming bottom of the list. Their trust in other state institutions, including the police, is, however, considerably higher. As with our results on interpersonal trust, the – albeit imperfect – comparisons we have been able to make show that journalists’ levels of institutional trust are no lower – and may, indeed, be higher – than those of the general population. Part of the reason for this may be their relatively privileged social status. Another explanation is suggested by our finding that journalists trust religious leaders and trade unions less than the police, the military, and Parliament. Although journalists consider holding power to account to be one of the three most important roles they perform, they depend on institutions of state power for information in a way they do not with religious leaders or trade unions. As we have said, that dependency requires a relationship, which, like any relationship, demands a certain level of trust.

<sup>50</sup> Compared to the income inequality in the general population as measured by the *Labour Force Survey* (ONS, 2015b).

# ETHICS AND STANDARDS

ALESSIO CORNIA AND NEIL THURMAN

The causes and effects of the Leveson Inquiry have moved ethical standards to the forefront of debates about British journalism. In Section 5.4 we showed that, in the UK, more journalists think ethical standards have strengthened than think they have weakened over the last five years. Our survey also asked further, general, questions on ethics, as well as questions about whether, on an important story, it is ever justified to push the boundaries of ethics and standards in these areas:

- sources: payments and pressure;
- using material without permission;
- misrepresentation and subterfuge;
- falsification and verification.

## 8.1 JOURNALISTS' GENERAL VIEWS ON ETHICS

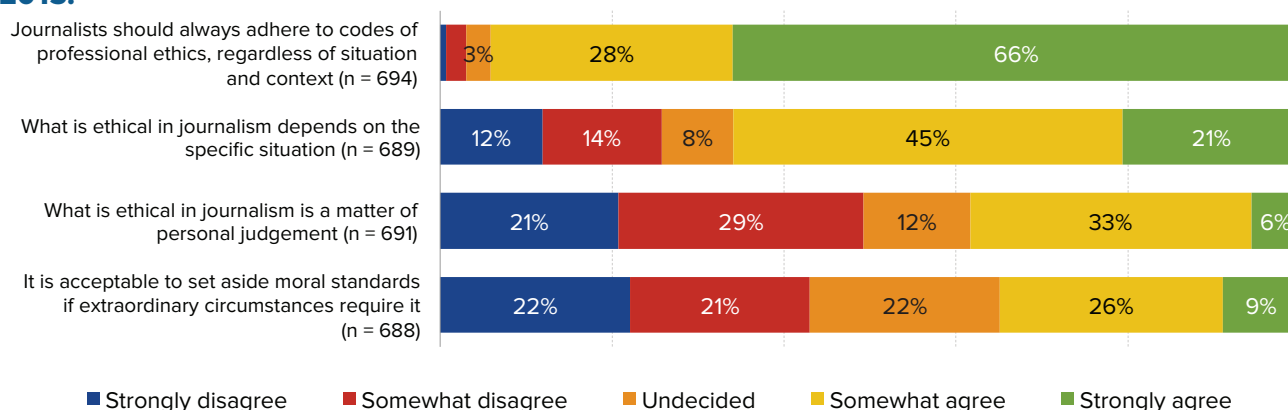
The overwhelming majority of journalists in the UK (94%) express agreement with the statement that they should 'always adhere to codes of professional ethics regardless of situation and context'. At the same time, however, two-thirds also agree

that 'what is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation' (see Figure 8.1). These two findings may appear contradictory but, in fact, they are not.

Acknowledging that the specific situation defines what is ethical or not does not mean that specific circumstances can justify an infringement of codes of professional ethics. The codes themselves recognise that specific circumstances define whether a given practice should be considered justified. For example, both the *IPSO Editors' Code of Practice* (IPSO, 2016), which defines professional standards for print and online journalists and editors, and the *Ofcom Broadcasting Code* (Ofcom, 2015), which regulates TV and radio services, allow standards to be set aside in the public interest. Stories in the public interest could include those that reveal criminal behaviour, protect public safety, or disclose misleading claims made by individuals or organisations. Most UK journalists, then, seem to be aware of the contextual flexibility in their professional codes of practice.

Journalists were also asked to indicate whether they agreed with the following statement: 'What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgement.' In this case, respondents expressed mixed views: 50% of them disagreed, 39% agreed, and 12% were undecided (see Figure 8.1). It is difficult to explain this result, but it may be related to the different ways

**FIGURE 8.1: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON GENERAL STATEMENTS ABOUT ETHICS, DECEMBER 2015.**



in which the question can be interpreted. On the one hand, the statement seems to suggest that journalists' *subjective* views define which practices are appropriate or not. This interpretation may have led respondents to disagree with the statement, especially in relation to the previous question about the importance of a more *objective* element – the specific circumstances. On the other hand, it is possible that some respondents interpreted the question in a way that acknowledged the innate subjectivity of every evaluation: the decision on whether specific circumstances can justify a given practice necessarily implies a subjective evaluation of the situation from the journalist's side, and therefore what is considered ethical or not depends on his or her personal judgement. This more philosophical interpretation could have led some respondents to agree with the statement.

Finally, journalists were asked to express whether they agreed with the following statement: 'It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it.' This question also addresses specific circumstances, although the wording is stronger, with the use of the term 'extraordinary'. Here the focus is not on the definition of what is ethical in journalism, but on the adherence to moral standards. While ethics in journalism are defined in professional codes of conduct, morality is more often associated with personal and social values. The more mixed views expressed by journalists, as well as the higher number of undecided respondents (22%), reflect the complexity and abstract nature of the statement (see Figure 8.1 on previous page).

## 8.2 SOURCES: PAYMENTS AND PRESSURE

The first set of ethically questionable practices we asked about in our survey related to sources. Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story is considered unacceptable by 65% of UK journalists, while 35% think it is justified on occasion (see Figure 8.2). Clause 3 of the *IPSO Editors' Code of Practice* requires journalists not to 'engage in intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit'. Specifically, they should avoid 'questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing individuals once asked to desist' (IPSO, 2016). A request to desist is not, however, the only criterion journalists should take into consideration when deciding whether to exert pressure on unwilling informants. *The Editors' Codebook* (Beales, 2014)

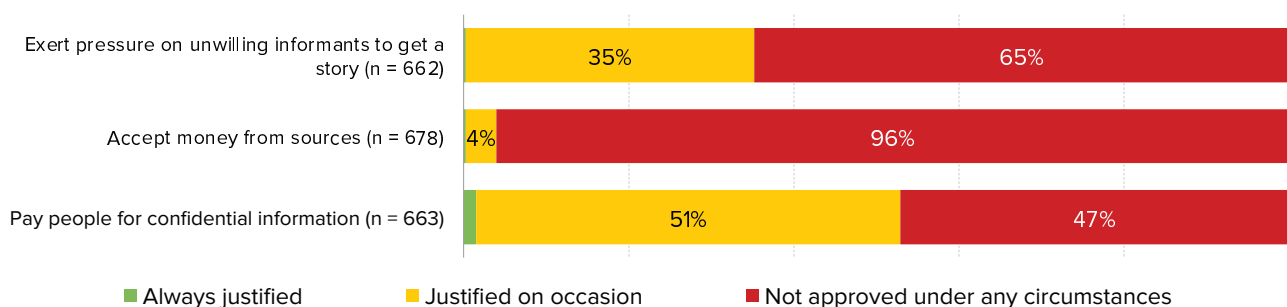
provides an example of a complaint that was upheld by IPSO's predecessor, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), where no formal desist request was made but where the journalist's actions were considered to go against the spirit of the Code and amount to 'harassment':

*A couple whose daughter, aged 16, committed suicide declined a weekly newspaper's offer to publish a tribute, saying they would be in touch if they changed their minds. But the reporter, with deadline pressing, called four times in a few days. The PCC said common sense should have dictated that repeated calls in a short time to recently-bereaved parents were inappropriate. The complaint was upheld. (Beales, 2014: 42)*

Our survey shows that a significant proportion (35%) of journalists consider that it is justified, given an important story, to exert pressure on unwilling informants. This is in line with the codes of practice, and the exception they grant for stories in the public interest (IPSO, 2016; Ofcom, 2015). A survey of US journalists showed similar results, with 38% agreeing that, on occasion, it can be justified to badger unwilling informants (Willnat and Weaver, 2014).

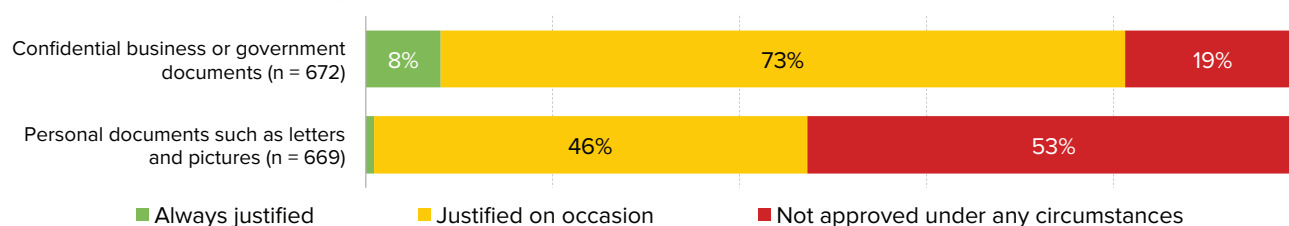
Journalists were then asked to express their views on payments within the context of newsgathering activities. Whereas accepting money from sources is considered inexcusable by almost all journalists in the UK (96%), paying people for confidential information is considered justified on occasion by 51% (see Figure 8.2). This result differs from standards in the US where only 5% of journalists believe it is justified on occasion (Willnat and Weaver, 2014). However, the UK professional codes clearly indicate that this is a legal practice. *The Editors' Codebook*, for example, says that 'payment for stories is legitimate in a free market and it would be impossible – if not actually illegal under human rights legislation – to disallow it' (Beales, 2014: 10). The Code prohibits payments only in specific circumstances; for example, to criminals or their families or associates, 'so that these people are not effectively glamorising, glorifying or profiting from crime'. However, there is, again, a public interest exception.

**FIGURE 8.2: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON PAYING/ACCEPTING MONEY FROM SOURCES AND EXERTING PRESSURE ON THEM, 'GIVEN AN IMPORTANT STORY', DECEMBER 2015.**





**FIGURE 8.3: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON USING MATERIAL WITHOUT PERMISSION, 'GIVEN AN IMPORTANT STORY', DECEMBER 2015.**



## 8.3 USING MATERIAL WITHOUT PERMISSION

Our survey asked two questions about using material without permission. Using confidential business or government documents without authorisation is largely considered acceptable: 73% of UK journalists believe it is justified 'on occasion' and 8% think that it is 'always justified' (see Figure 8.3). In this case UK journalists' views differ considerably from those of their colleagues in the US where only 58% thought the use of unauthorised business or government documents was justifiable (Willnat and Weaver, 2014). However, Willnat and Weaver's finding has to be seen in the context of the polarisation of opinion around national security issues in the US following the Edward Snowden and WikiLeaks cases. In 2002, the percentage of US journalists who found justification for the use of official documents without authorisation was 78%, very similar to our result.

While UK journalists consider it largely acceptable to use official material without authorisation, the use of personal documents, such as letters and pictures, without permission is a different matter. Only 47% thought it was ever justified (see Figure 8.3). This difference can, in part, be explained by the emphasis given to individuals' privacy in the professional codes. The *IPSO Editors' Code of Practice*, for example, says that 'everyone is entitled to respect for his or her private and family life, home, health and correspondence, including digital communications' (IPSO, 2016). This entitlement to respect applies to information and pictures published on social networking sites, whose republication is not 'inherently justifiable' even if unprotected by privacy settings (Beales, 2014: 31). However, again, exceptions can be justified in the public interest.

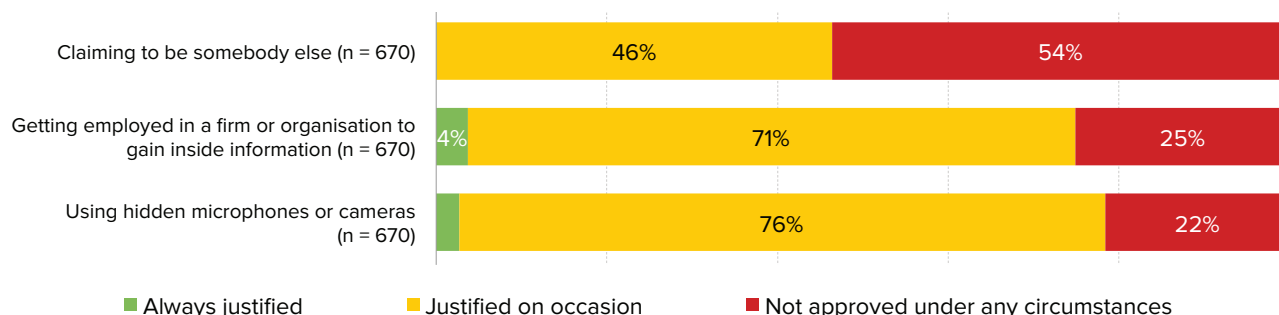
Although double the proportion of UK journalists say they would never use personal documents without permission as say they would never use official material in the same circumstances, their ethical stance is still relatively liberal in this area compared with some of their international colleagues. For example, only 25% of US journalists believe it is ever justifiable to use personal documents without permission (Willnat and Weaver, 2014).

## 8.4 MISREPRESENTATION AND SUBTERFUGE

Should a journalist pretend to be somebody else? Mazher Mahmood is probably the best-known exponent of misrepresentation in the context of UK journalism. His personas, including 'the fake sheikh', have entrapped celebrities, politicians, and members of the British royal family. The *News of the World*, for which Mahmood worked for several years, claimed his undercover investigations brought several criminals to justice. However, his methods have also been accused of breaking the law without any clear public interest justification (BBC News, 2006). Indeed, the relevant professional codes of practice say that misrepresentation and subterfuge 'can generally be justified only in the public interest and then only when the material cannot be obtained by other means' (IPSO, 2016).

UK journalists expressed mixed views about whether claiming to be somebody else is acceptable: 54% believe it is never justified and 46% think it is justified on occasion (see Figure 8.4). US journalists are, again, more disapproving, with only 7% agreeing that misrepresentation is justifiable on occasion (Willnat and Weaver, 2014).

**FIGURE 8.4: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON USING MISREPRESENTATION AND SUBTERFUGE, 'GIVEN AN IMPORTANT STORY', DECEMBER 2015.**



While UK journalists have mixed views on misrepresentation, other forms of subterfuge are accepted to a greater extent. Over 70% consider getting employed in a firm or organisation to gain inside information or using hidden microphones and cameras justified on occasion (see Figure 8.4 on previous page). US journalists are, again, more conservative, with only 25% believing that posing as a fake employee is ever acceptable and 47% believing the same about the use of hidden recording equipment (Willnat and Weaver, 2014).

## 8.5 FALSIFICATION AND VERIFICATION

Our survey also asked about the falsification of material and the acceptability of publishing unverified content. Three-quarters of UK journalists think that publishing stories with unverified content is not justifiable under any circumstances (see Figure 8.5). However, given that the *IPSO Editors' Code of Practice* gives no public interest exception to its guidance that 'the Press must take care not to publish inaccurate ... information', it is, perhaps, surprising that a quarter of UK journalists believe that publishing news with unverified content is justified on occasion. In Section 3.4 we explore how journalists working online have to produce or process a relatively high number of stories and how the normalisation of such increased workloads, as well as new online news formats such as live blogs, may be contributing to a lowering in standards of verification.

Almost all UK journalists (95%) disapprove of altering or fabricating quotes<sup>51</sup> and a very high proportion, 88%, believe the same about altering photographs (see Figure 8.5).<sup>52</sup> Our last question on ethics and standards was about the use of recreations or dramatisation of news by actors. This practice is largely approved of by UK journalists: 68% believe it is justifiable 'on occasion' and 6% 'always' (see Figure 8.5). Although this practice can blur the boundaries between fact

and fiction, it can also be an effective way to illustrate a story when original images are not available and is regularly used in current affairs and long-form documentary journalism.

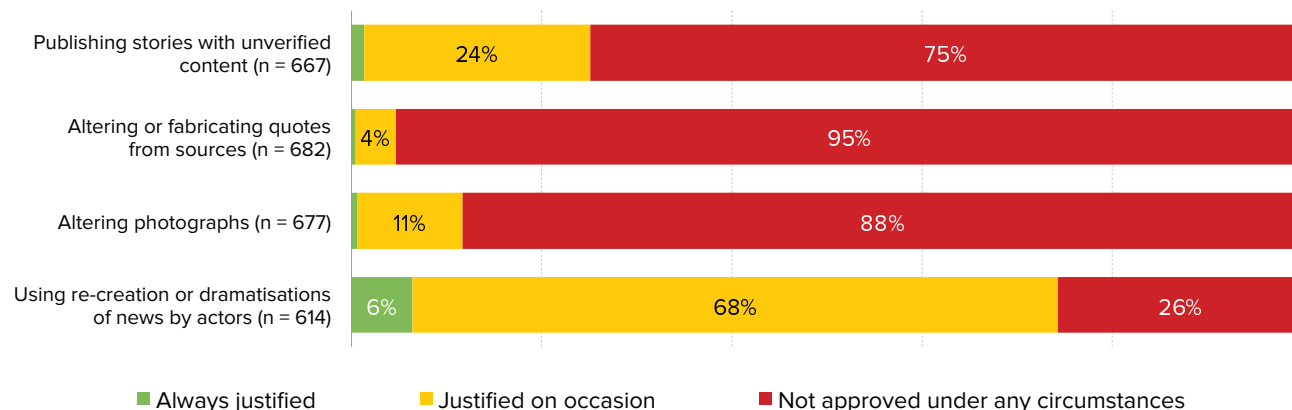
## 8.6 DIFFERENCES BY RANK AND MEDIUM

Our analysis shows some variation in views on ethics among journalists of different ranks and among journalists working in different media. Broadcast journalists exhibit wider acceptance of subterfuge, such as the use of hidden microphones/cameras, getting employed in an organisation to gain inside information, or claiming to be somebody else. They also consider it more acceptable to use material without permission. Print journalists are more likely to find justification for paying people for confidential information, publishing stories with unverified content, and exerting pressures on unwilling informants (see Figure 8.6a).

Seniority also influences views on ethical standards. Rank and file journalists show a greater level of acceptance of practices at the ethical boundaries than junior or senior managers (see Figure 8.6b).<sup>53</sup> This finding may reflect the pressure rank and file journalists feel to 'deliver the story'. For example, Graham Johnson, a former journalist at the *News of the World* – before its demise one of the biggest-selling English-language newspapers in the world – said:

*You can't get through the day on a tabloid newspaper if you don't lie, if you don't deceive, if you're not prepared to use forms of blackmail or extortion or lean on people, you know, make people's lives a misery. You just have to deliver the story on time and on budget, and if you didn't then you'd get told off. The News of the World culture was driven by fear. (C. Jones, 2012)*

**FIGURE 8.5: UK JOURNALISTS' VIEWS ON PUBLISHING UNVERIFIED MATERIAL, FABRICATION, MANIPULATION, AND DRAMATISATION, 'GIVEN AN IMPORTANT STORY', DECEMBER 2015.**

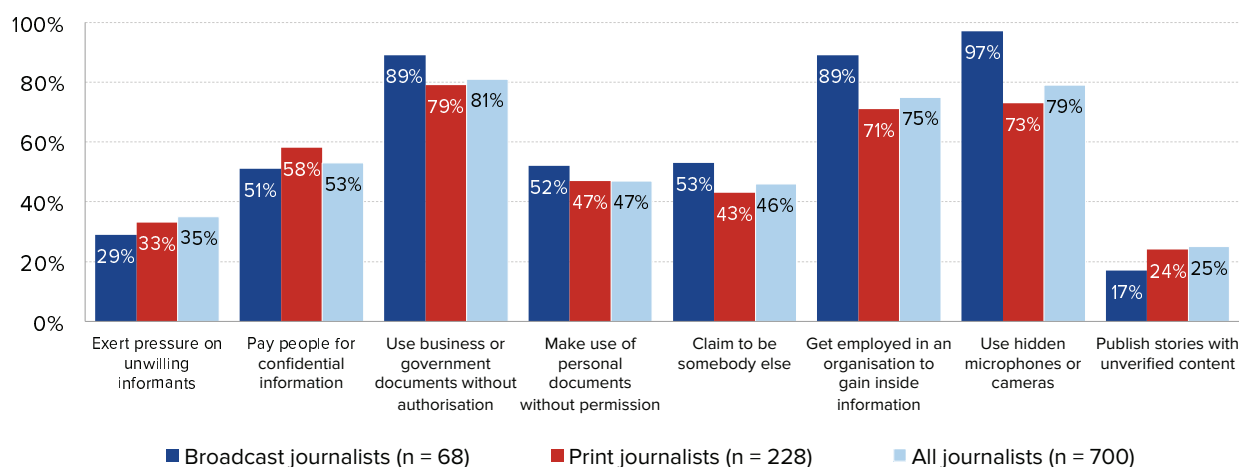


<sup>51</sup> It is, however, acceptable to edit some quotes, e.g. from interview transcripts, for readability.

<sup>52</sup> The *IPSO Editors' Code* (IPSO, 2016) says that an image can be digitally enhanced, but that notice should be given if it has been altered significantly.

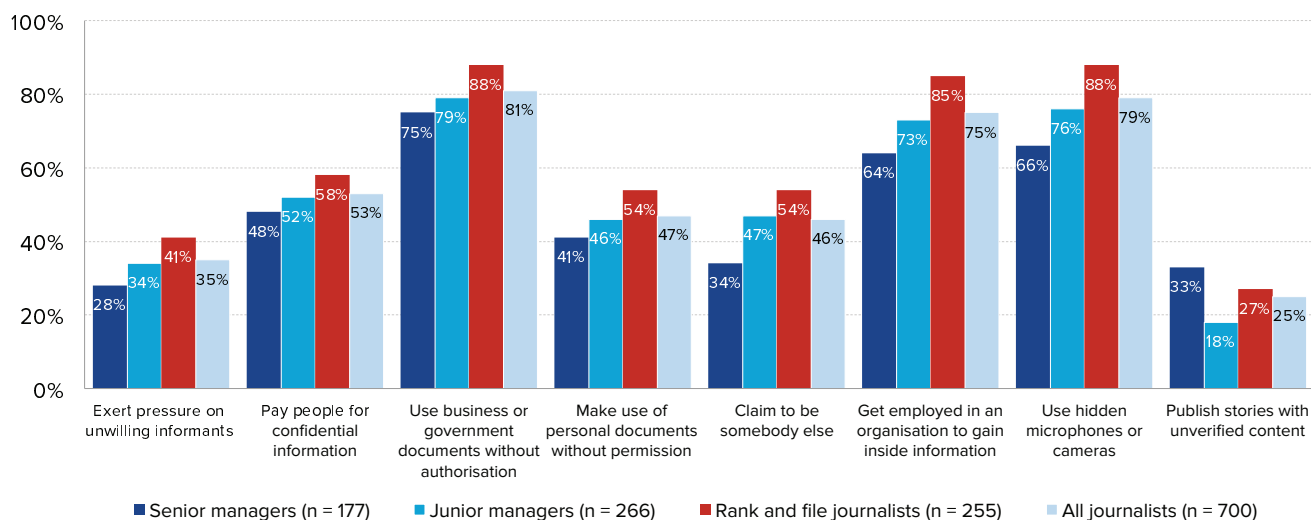
<sup>53</sup> The only exception to this pattern was in the publishing of stories with unverified content, where a higher proportion of senior managers than rank and file journalists found some justification.

**FIGURE 8.6a: A COMPARISON OF THE PROPORTIONS OF UK PRINT & BROADCAST JOURNALISTS WHO FEEL IT IS JUSTIFIED ('ALWAYS' OR 'ON OCCASION') TO PRESSURE OR PAY SOURCES, USE PRIVATE DOCUMENTS WITHOUT PERMISSION, PUBLISH UNVERIFIED CONTENT, OR ENGAGE IN FALSIFICATION AND SUBTERFUGE, DECEMBER 2015.**



Note: The figures for print and broadcast journalists only include those journalists who work exclusively in one or other of those media. Journalists working in print or broadcast journalism and one or more other media were excluded.

**FIGURE 8.6b: A COMPARISON OF THE PROPORTIONS OF UK JOURNALISTS OF DIFFERENT RANKS WHO FEEL IT IS JUSTIFIED ('ALWAYS' OR 'ON OCCASION') TO PRESSURE OR PAY SOURCES, USE PRIVATE DOCUMENTS WITHOUT PERMISSION, PUBLISH UNVERIFIED CONTENT, OR ENGAGE IN FALSIFICATION AND SUBTERFUGE, DECEMBER 2015.**



## 8.7 CONCLUSIONS

Our survey shows that UK journalists' views on ethics closely match the professional codes of conduct they work under. Of the practices only permitted in the public interest, journalists are most likely to find justification for the unauthorised publication of official documents, the use of hidden recording devices, and misrepresentation and recreations. Paying people for confidential information is also considered justified on

occasion by the majority of UK journalists. However, despite a close alignment between their views and those of their professional bodies, and the fact that they tell us ethical standards have strengthened in the last five years, and despite the fallout from the Leveson Inquiry, UK journalists remain, in comparison with some of their international colleagues, relatively willing to justify practices that, under normal circumstances, their professional codes of ethics would prohibit.

# METHODOLOGY

NEIL THURMAN

This report is based mainly on an online survey carried out in December 2015. The survey had 700 responses from a sample that is broadly representative of the total population of UK journalists. In this section we lay out the methodology in detail, describing the collaborative, international, and comparative survey project – the Worlds of Journalism Study – that is the source of this report’s questionnaire and overall approach, and assessing the representativeness of our results via comparisons with other surveys.

## 9.1 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire<sup>54</sup> used in this study was developed as part of an international project, the Worlds of Journalism Study,<sup>55</sup> that involves academics from around the world. Between 2012 and 2015, using the same core questions, researchers surveyed journalists in scores of countries, gathering data on journalists’ diversity, employment conditions, and working routines, as well as their opinions on:

- ethics and standards,
- the influences on their work,
- the trustworthiness of institutions such as the government and trade unions,
- their role in society, and
- changes in journalism over time.

The collective nature of such a project resulted, inevitably, in some compromises, including on which questions should be asked. For example, although a question was included on whether it is ever justified to pay people for confidential information, there was no question about whether it is acceptable to hack telephones – highly relevant in the UK context given the phone-hacking scandal and subsequent public inquiry (Leveson, 2012). However, the advantages of our

collective approach are significant, in particular the ability to make cross-country comparisons. The full set of data from the countries involved in the Worlds of Journalism Study was not available in time to be used in this publication, which focuses on the UK data. However, further publications are planned, which will include comparisons between journalists in the UK and their colleagues in up to 70 countries.<sup>56</sup>

## 9.2 SAMPLING STRATEGY

In order to build our sample we first obtained a list of journalists’ names, email addresses, and professional affiliations from the Gorkana Media Database,<sup>57</sup> which is the largest available database of UK journalists’ contact details (Gavin Smith, personal communication, 19 January 2016). In the Gorkana database, journalists are associated with particular ‘media types’, for example, ‘National newspapers’. A total of 35,010 contact details were downloaded for UK journalists working across all media types, with the exception of ‘Commercial blogs’, ‘Developing blogs’, and ‘Individual blogs’. Journalists working for ‘Mainstream blogs’ were included. However, because some journalists were associated with more than one media type, for example, ‘Radio’ and ‘Television’, or ‘National newspapers’ and ‘Regional newspapers’, a deduplication process was undertaken, which resulted in the removal of 5,684 duplicate entries. This left a final database of 29,326 journalists from which 30% were picked at random to receive an invitation to complete the survey, which was hosted on the Qualtrics online survey platform.<sup>58</sup>

Journalists received an email invitation to participate on 7 December 2015. Two further reminders were sent by email, the first on 13 December 2015 and the second on 26 December 2015. Participation in the survey was by invitation only and participants could not complete the survey more than once. The survey was closed at 10:55 (GMT) on 31 December 2015.

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<sup>54</sup> A copy of the questionnaire used in the survey is available here: <http://bit.ly/1nvaQxZ>

<sup>55</sup> [www.worldsofjournalism.org](http://www.worldsofjournalism.org)

<sup>56</sup> Proposals for collaboration should be directed to Neil Thurman <[neil.thurman@ifkw.lmu.de](mailto:neil.thurman@ifkw.lmu.de)>

<sup>57</sup> [www.gorkana.com](http://www.gorkana.com)

<sup>58</sup> [www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)

A total of 1,292 surveys were started, and 715 were fully completed. Only surveys that were fully completed were taken forward to be used in the final analysis.

## 9.3 EXCLUSIONS

All the fully completed surveys were examined and the data cleaned. For example, close attention was paid to the names of the news organisations the journalists did most of their work for, as well as their employment status. Respondents who worked for media organisations that were not considered to have their own news programme or news section were excluded, for example all-music radio stations. We also excluded journalists working for certain categories of publication, such as:

- consumer magazines produced by ‘contract’ publishers for corporate clients, e.g. in-flight magazines for airlines;
- websites whose primary purpose is to sell something (including information), but that carry some journalistic content; and
- magazines published by companies owning retail premises, e.g. department stores.

Although journalists working for such outlets often write stories of a type that can be found in newspapers, we felt that these publications were actually closer to public relations than to journalism. A total of seven respondents were excluded for these reasons. We also excluded two UK-based journalists who reported exclusively for foreign news outlets (for example, a continental European TV channel).

In order to be included in the study, journalists had to be involved in the production or editing of journalistic content or in editorial supervision or coordination. So, for example, it was decided to classify press photographers as journalists but not camera operators unless they independently made editorial decisions. Respondents whose professional role did not fit our nine predefined categories<sup>59</sup> were examined and those whose self-reported occupation did not meet our criteria were excluded. One respondent was excluded on the basis of their occupation, an Art Director.

It was decided to include only journalists who earned at least 50% of their income from journalism. Therefore respondents who said they worked in a voluntary capacity, were on maternity or paternity leave, who were retired, or were working unpaid for a start-up were excluded. In some cases – e.g. freelance journalists involved in running their own blog or small-scale publication – a judgement had to be made about whether the journalist was likely to be earning a majority of their income from journalism. We excluded some freelance blogging journalists where there was no evidence that their blog earned money, for example through advertising. A total of five respondents were excluded on the basis of their employment status.

## 9.4 SAMPLE SIZE

Official statistics on the number of journalists working in the UK can be obtained from the Office for National Statistics’ *Labour Force Survey (LFS)* which has an official occupational definition of ‘Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors’. Between April and June 2015, the *LFS* estimated that there were 63,618 journalists working in the UK (ONS, 2015a). If we take this figure as the total population of UK journalists, our survey’s sample size (700) can be considered to be very robust by the standards of social survey research, with a confidence interval of 3.68% at a confidence level of 95%.

## 9.5 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Not all of the 63,618 journalists estimated by the *LFS* to be working in the UK are listed in the database of journalists we used to build our sample. Our subset of the Gorkana database contained 29,326 journalists, of whom we picked 30% at random. Of those approximately 8% completed the survey. In order to assess the representativeness of our final sample we have compared it with those used by the *LFS* and by the *Journalists at Work* survey, published in 2012 by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ, 2012).

The size of the population of journalists in the UK – approximately 64,000 – and the fact that, as the NCTJ writes, there is ‘no central, all-inclusive list of journalists’ in the UK (2012: 12), makes it unfeasible to build a truly representative sample for any survey of UK journalists. The *LFS* is the largest household survey in the UK, with a total sample size of approximately 100,000 individuals per quarter. However, it samples the whole labour force, with the result that its sample of journalists (approximately 100 per quarter) is very small. Consequently, the data on UK journalists from the *LFS* has a high confidence interval (10) at a confidence level of 95%, meaning it is rather unreliable as a single source. The NCTJ’s sampling strategy favoured journalists who were members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), those registered with the NCTJ itself, members of the Society of Editors and the Professional Publishers Association, readers (not necessarily all journalists) of publications (like the *Press Gazette*) where links to the survey were posted, and those working for particular employers of journalists.

Our survey used a sample built from a database to which, one of its representatives told us, ‘all journalists’ are added, but which they are then allowed to ‘opt out’ of if they do not want to be listed and, potentially, receive press releases from Gorkana’s clients (Gavin Smith, personal communication, 13 January 2016). As a result, it is theoretically possible that our sample may under- or over-represent some types of journalist. For example: older journalists who have built up a substantial contacts list and do not want to receive unsolicited correspondence, or freelance journalists who do not have the access to sources or story leads that comes with regular employment in a newsroom and see registration with Gorkana as a useful alternative source

<sup>59</sup> The categories were: Editor-in-chief, Managing editor, Desk head or assignment editor, Department head, Senior editor, Producer, Reporter, News writer, and Trainee.

of information. Although some under- or over-representation is a possibility, our sample, as is discussed below, did not turn out to be biased against older journalists or to include more journalists who were working freelance or for their own companies.

In spite of the differing and imperfect sampling strategies of our survey and the NCTJ’s, our sample correlates well with that used in the NCTJ survey in terms of the ethnicity of respondents, their gender, and their employment status. It also correlates well with the ONS’s sample in terms of gender and education. Our sample is rather more educated than the NCTJ’s sample (see Table 9.5a). This difference is likely to be a result both of the two surveys’ different sampling strategies and of the fact that, in the three years following the NCTJ survey, new entrants into journalism were more likely to have a degree. Our survey shows that 98% of journalists who entered the profession between 2013 and 2015 have at least a bachelor’s degree. This compares with 85% of those who entered the profession before 2013. Our sample, like that used by the NCTJ, contains fewer freelance journalists than the *LFS*’s sample. The reasons for this are explored in Section 2.1.

**TABLE 9.5a: A COMPARISON OF THE ETHNICITY, GENDER, EDUCATION, AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF UK JOURNALISTS SAMPLED IN THIS SURVEY AND IN SURVEYS BY THE OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS (ONS, 2015b) AND THE NCTJ (2012).**

	ONS (2015)	NCTJ (2012)	This survey (2015)
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White	89%	94%	94%
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	55%	57%	55%
Female	44%	42%	45%
<b>Education</b>			
University degree	84%	73%	86%
<b>Employment status</b>			
Freelance or own company	37%	21%	17%

Our sample correlates well with that used in the *LFS* in terms of the proportion of respondents under 25 and over 40. However, the *LFS* sample had more respondents in their thirties and fewer aged between 25 and 29. Our sample correlates well with that used in the NCTJ’s survey in terms of age, with only a slight divergence visible in the upper age bands: our sample had fewer respondents aged 60+ but more in their fifties (see Table 9.5b).

**TABLE 9.5b: A COMPARISON OF THE AGE OF UK JOURNALISTS SAMPLED IN THIS SURVEY AND IN SURVEYS BY THE OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS (ONS, 2015b) AND THE NCTJ (2012).**

	ONS (2015)	NCTJ (2012)	This survey (2015)
<b>Under 25</b>	6%		4%
<b>25-29</b>	3%		14%
<b>30-39</b>	33%		23%
<b>40-49</b>	25%		25%
<b>50 and over</b>	32%		34%
<b>22-24</b>		3%	4%
<b>25-29</b>		12%	14%
<b>30-34</b>		14%	13%
<b>35-39</b>		12%	11%
<b>40-49</b>		27%	25%
<b>50-59</b>		20%	27%
<b>60+</b>		13%	8%

Note: Due to rounding, column totals may not add up to 100%.

Looking at the media in which respondents work, we see that our sample correlates well with that used by the NCTJ in the magazine, TV, and radio sectors. Our sample did, however, contain fewer newspaper journalists (44% worked in this sector, against 56% in the NCTJ sample), and more who worked online: 52% against 26% in the NCTJ sample (see Table 9.5c). This divergence is likely to be a result of the differing sampling strategies and the time lag between the surveys. The NCTJ’s sampling strategy included targeting members of the National Union of Journalists, an organisation that has acknowledged that those working online are under-represented in its membership and that those working in broadcasting are over-represented (Rudin and Ibbotson, 2013: 2). In the three years that separates the two surveys, there was an increase in the number of journalists working online.

**TABLE 9.5c: A COMPARISON OF THE MEDIA WORKED IN BY UK JOURNALISTS SAMPLED IN THIS SURVEY AND A SURVEY BY THE NCTJ (2012).**

	NCTJ (2012)	This survey (2015)
<b>Newspapers</b>	56%	44%
<b>Magazines</b>	43%	44%
<b>Radio</b>	13%	12%
<b>TV</b>	17%	14%
<b>Online</b>	26%	52%
<b>News agency</b>		6%

Note: In both surveys, respondents were able to choose multiple answers to the question about which media they worked in, which is why the percentages do not add up to 100.



Overall we are confident that our sampling strategy has resulted in a sample that is broadly representative of the general population of UK journalists. Compared with the *LFS*'s sample, ours is weighted in favour of those in their mid to late twenties, weighted against those in their thirties, and has fewer freelance journalists. However, we do not feel that this difference changes the results significantly. In many parts of our survey freelance journalists expressed similar views to journalists in regular employment, for example, in the amount of editorial freedom they felt they had (see Section 3.3). Furthermore, the small number of journalists surveyed by the *LFS* makes their data rather unreliable.

Although our sample differs a little from that used by the NCTJ's survey, in particular in terms of journalists' highest formal educational qualification and the relative proportion of journalists working in the online and newspaper sectors, we would argue that these differences are not an indication of any fundamental flaw in our sampling strategy but rather, as has been discussed, the result of changes in journalism that happened in the three years between the surveys and differences in the respective sampling strategies used.

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