



Country Report

Journalists in Australia

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18 October 2016

Backgrounds of Journalists

Journalists in Australia are slightly more likely to be female than male, are highly educated, typically hold a university qualification with a specialization in journalism or communication, and are on average in their early forties. Of the 605 interviewed journalists, just over half (55.5%) were female. The average age was 37.74 years ($s=11.267$), with a median of 35 years indicating that half of Australian journalists were under the age of 35. As a group, these journalists are highly educated, with more than four in five (82.1%) holding a university degree. Of those, a further 81.2 percent have specialized in journalism or communication. In the context of the overall sample, this means that two out of three Australian journalists have a university degree specializing in journalism or communication. Most of those who have studied journalism or communication have focused on journalism (66.2%), while 8.5 percent focused on communication, and 6.5 percent specialized in both journalism and communication.

Journalists in the Newsroom

Of the 605 interviewed journalists, the vast majority (88.1%) were in full-time employment, while 7.9 percent were employed part-time. Only 3.0 percent of journalists worked as freelancers. Full- and part-time positions were typically permanent contracts, with 97.4 percent of those journalists saying they were employed permanently. Half of Australian journalists have been working as journalists for less than 12 years, with an average work experience of 14.45 years ($s=10.99$).

Typically, journalists in Australia are generalists, working across various beats (67.1%). The remainder work on specialized beats such as politics, sport or lifestyle. On average, Australian journalists worked for 1.31 newsrooms ($s=1.12$), with almost nine out of ten (88.6%) working for only one newsroom. The vast majority work exclusively in journalism, with only 18.7 percent saying they had other paid jobs outside journalism. Just under half (47.8%) were members of a professional association.

The dominant media type in Australia was print, with 38.3 percent working for a daily newspaper, 15.0 percent for a weekly newspaper, and 11.4 percent for a magazine. Broadcast was another important sector, with 16.4 percent working for radio and 14.5 percent in television. News agencies constituted a small minority, with only 1.2 percent working for this sector. A further 3.1 percent worked for stand-alone online news sites. It must be pointed out that Australian journalists could only nominate one main media type for which they worked, and the percentage of multimedia journalists working across platforms was therefore not assessed.

Journalistic Roles

Australian journalists' most important role orientations are to report things as they are, to educate the audience, tell stories about the world, be detached observers and to let people express their views. As the reasonably low standard deviations indicate, there is little disagreement among journalists as to the importance of these roles. In addition to these most important roles supported by more than three-quarters of journalists, a majority also indicated that it was important to provide information people need to make political decisions, provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, monitor and scrutinize political leaders and business, promote tolerance and cultural diversity, provide analysis of current affairs and provide entertainment and relaxation.

On the other hand, journalists were not as supportive of interventionist role orientations such as advocating for social change, providing advice, orientation and direction for daily life, supporting national development, influencing public opinion, motivating people to participate in political activity, setting the political agenda and being an adversary of the government. The least support was given to the roles of conveying a positive image of political leadership and supporting government policy. The low standard deviations point to strong agreement in journalists' rejection of these particular roles.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	600	94.7%	4.62	.65
Educate the audience	603	87.1%	4.29	.78
Tell stories about the world	604	77.6%	4.08	1.06
Be a detached observer	602	76.9%	4.07	.99
Let people express their views	602	75.7%	3.94	1.02
Provide information people need to make political decisions	600	64.8%	3.59	1.26
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	604	61.4%	3.70	1.12
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	604	60.4%	3.56	1.38
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	605	60.2%	3.69	1.13
Provide analysis of current affairs	601	56.6%	3.47	1.26
Monitor and scrutinize business	602	54.0%	3.43	1.22
Provide entertainment and relaxation	604	52.5%	3.52	1.18
Advocate for social change	600	37.8%	3.03	1.23
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	605	34.5%	3.02	1.17
Support national development	596	26.5%	2.62	1.27
Influence public opinion	601	22.1%	2.63	1.15
Motivate people to participate in political activity	605	19.5%	2.45	1.20
Set the political agenda	602	18.9%	2.31	1.20
Be an adversary of the government	600	11.7%	1.96	1.11
Convey a positive image of political leadership	599	3.8%	1.59	.87
Support government policy	601	1.3%	1.55	.77

Question: Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work. 5 means you find them extremely important, 4 means very important, 3 means somewhat important, 2 means little importance, and 1 means unimportant.

Professional Ethics

Almost all Australian journalists displayed a notable commitment to professional frameworks by saying they either strongly or somewhat agreed that journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context. In perhaps a sign of the flexibility which Australian codes of ethics provide for individual decision-making, around one quarter of journalists still believe it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it. Around half were also situationalists, arguing that what is ethical in journalism

depends on the specific situation. The high standard deviations for this item indicate substantial diversity of views, however. A relatively small number of journalists also believes that what is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment.

When asked about a range of potentially controversial reporting methods, a large number of Australian journalists said it could be always or on occasion justified to use confidential business or government documents without authorization, as well as using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors. A majority of journalists also thought it was, at least on occasion, justifiable to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story. Nearly half thought it could be justified to make use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission, while slightly fewer thought the same about using hidden microphones or cameras. Around one-third also thought it could be justified on occasion to get employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information, pay people for confidential information, alter photographs and publish stories with unverified content. Most strongly rejected by Australian journalists were practices of claiming to be somebody else, altering or fabricating quotes from sources, and, most strongly of all, accepting money from sources.

Table 2: Ethical orientations of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "strongly" and "somewhat agree"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context	605	96.4%	4.67	.59
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	603	47.6%	2.98	1.46
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	596	25.8%	2.49	1.22
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	604	21.0%	2.23	1.23

Question: The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree. 5 means you strongly agree, 4 means somewhat agree, 3 means undecided, 2 means somewhat disagree, and 1 means strongly disagree.

Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists

	N	Percentage saying "always justified"	Percentage saying "justified on occasion"
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	601	20.3%	55.9%
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	590	10.0%	64.4%
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	603	2.7%	48.9%
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	602	2.2%	28.7%
Using hidden microphones or cameras	602	2.2%	40.2%
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	602	2.0%	46.3%
Paying people for confidential information	603	1.5%	26.9%
Altering photographs	587	1.4%	34.9%
Publishing stories with unverified content	603	1.3%	34.3%
Claiming to be somebody else	605	.7%	12.7%
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	605	.5%	17.5%
Accepting money from sources	605	.3%	1.0%

Question: Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?

Professional Autonomy and Influences

Australian journalists consider themselves as having significant amounts of freedom in their work. Exactly three-quarters (75.0%) said they have complete or a great deal of freedom in selecting news stories they work on. A similar number (80.9%) also report having complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized. Participation levels in editorial meetings and coordination are reasonably high, with more than half (56.1%) of interviewed journalists saying they were involved in activities such as attending meetings or assigning reporters.

When asked which aspects were the most influential in affecting their work, procedural limits were considered the most significant by Australian journalists. The vast majority of them said journalism ethics, media laws and regulation, time limits, information access and availability of news-gathering resources were extremely or very influential. Low standard deviations suggest relatively strong agreement as to the importance of these influences. Influential were also editorial policy and editorial supervisors and higher editors, as well as relationships with news sources. In contrast, economic and political factors, as well as reference groups were considered least influential. These included profit expectations, advertising considerations, colleagues in other media, owners of the news organization, government officials, politicians, religious considerations, business people, friends, acquaintances and family, as well as pressure groups.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	603	91.4%	4.34	.68
Media laws and regulation	602	80.6%	4.08	.95
Time limits	603	78.4%	4.03	.80
Information access	599	76.8%	3.94	.81
Availability of news-gathering resources	597	75.5%	3.96	.85
Editorial policy	597	70.2%	3.79	1.08
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	572	68.7%	3.73	.90
Relationships with news sources	599	58.3%	3.45	1.05
Feedback from the audience	604	49.2%	3.44	.93
Your personal values and beliefs	604	44.4%	3.35	1.08
Audience research and data	596	44.1%	3.19	1.17
Competing news organizations	603	38.5%	3.11	1.01
Your peers on the staff	603	29.0%	2.98	.97
Managers of the news organization	568	26.8%	2.64	1.24
Censorship	603	21.9%	2.48	1.26
Public relations	599	21.7%	2.58	1.08
Military, police and state security	598	19.7%	2.27	1.23
Profit expectations	533	17.3%	2.13	1.21
Advertising considerations	542	14.0%	2.10	1.12
Colleagues in other media	605	13.7%	2.37	1.06
Owners of the news organization	532	13.0%	2.04	1.17
Government officials	603	11.6%	2.30	1.04
Politicians	603	10.8%	2.27	1.04
Religious considerations	590	9.3%	1.97	1.06
Business people	602	9.3%	2.29	.97
Friends, acquaintances and family	605	7.4%	2.07	.98
Pressure groups	602	5.3%	2.12	.92

Question: Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work. 5 means it is extremely influential, 4 means very influential, 3 means somewhat influential, 2 means little influential, and 1 means not influential.

Journalism in Transition

The transformation of journalism is also felt acutely in Australia. In terms of aspects of work, journalists stated that the most significant increase over the past five years had been in the use of search engines and technical skills. Very considerable increases were also experienced in the average working hours of journalists, as well as in interactions of journalists with their audiences. In contrast, a majority said the credibility of journalism had decreased, and that the time available for researching stories had also decreased.

When asked about changes in a variety of influences on journalistic work, almost all journalists said social media, such as Twitter or Facebook had strengthened, with a very large majority also saying the influence of user-generated content had become greater. Audience feedback, audience involvement in news production had also become more influential, as had economic factors such as profit-making pressures, audience research, competition, public relations and advertising considerations. In contrast, a significant number of journalists said the influence of ethical standards had decreased.

The questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five years or more of professional experience.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	466	96.4%	.0%
Technical skills	463	85.3%	2.8%
Average working hours of journalists	461	77.0%	2.0%
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	457	74.8%	11.2%
Having a university degree	460	50.0%	6.7%
The relevance of journalism for society	465	45.6%	18.1%
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	458	41.3%	11.8%
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	454	20.0%	20.7%
The credibility of journalism	463	8.2%	55.3%
Time available for researching stories	464	6.0%	78.9%

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Australia. 5 means they have increased a lot, 4 means they have somewhat increased, 3 means there has been no change, 2 means they have somewhat decreased, and 1 means they have decreased a lot.

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media, such as Twitter or Facebook	468	99.4%	.2%
User-generated contents, such as blogs	468	92.3%	1.7%
Audience feedback	466	84.8%	2.1%
Audience involvement in news production	461	81.6%	2.4%
Profit making pressures	462	80.3%	2.2%
Audience research	448	71.7%	3.1%
Competition	467	69.2%	13.9%
Public relations	465	63.0%	4.9%
Advertising considerations	459	59.5%	5.0%
Pressure toward sensational news	463	54.4%	5.0%
Journalism education	416	33.7%	28.1%
Ethical standards	464	17.5%	42.5%

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in Australia. 5 means they have strengthened a lot, 4 means they have somewhat strengthened, 3 means they did not change, 2 means they have somewhat weakened, and 1 means they have weakened a lot.

Journalistic Trust

The most trusted institution in society by Australian journalists is, by a very large margin, the judiciary. All other institutions are seen at least somewhat skeptically, with less than half of interviewed journalists saying they had complete or a great deal of trust in the police and military. Political institutions are the least trusted, which includes the federal government, politicians in general, and political parties. Trade unions are also typically not trusted.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The judiciary/the courts	602	72.6%	3.81	.63
The police	602	45.3%	3.39	.79
The military	575	39.0%	3.29	.82
The news media	599	25.0%	3.13	.64
The federal parliament	600	14.2%	2.87	.73
Religious leaders	594	9.6%	2.57	.84
The federal government	601	9.2%	2.71	.72
Trade unions	593	7.1%	2.64	.72
Politicians in general	603	3.6%	2.46	.71
Political parties	603	2.7%	2.33	.71

Question: Please tell me on a scale of 5 to 1 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions. 5 means you have complete trust, 4 means you have a great deal of trust, 3 means you have some trust, 2 means you have little trust, and 1 means you have no trust at all.

Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	11,000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	stratified proportionally random sampling for newsrooms and stratified proportionally random sampling for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	605 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	telephone
<i>Response rate:</i>	90%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	05/2012-03/2013