Country Report

Journalists in Israel

Zvi Reich, Aviv Barnoy and Lishai Hertzog, *Ben Gurion University of the Negev*

1 December, 2016

Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Israel is male in his mid-forties, holding a Bachelor's degree. Of the 341 interviewed journalists, one third were female (32.6%) and two thirds male (67.2%). On average, Israeli journalists were 42.88 years old (*s*=12.86); half of the journalists were younger than 40. Journalists tend to be well educated: 20.1 percent of the respondents held a Master's degree or equivalent, 51.8 percent held a Bachelor's degree and another 1.5 percent had obtained a PhD. 5.9 percent had undertaken some university studies but did not complete any degree, 17.5 percent completed high school but have no higher education and 3.3 percent did not complete high school. Of those respondents who held a university degree, a little over half (51.5%) had not specialized in communication or journalism. One third of the respondents had specialized in journalism (33.7%), while only 7.6 percent had studied another communication field, and 7.2 percent had specialized in both journalism and another communication field.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Israel held a full-time position (68.3%), whereas 11.5 percent indicated having only part-time positions, and 12.4 percent worked as freelance journalists. 3 percent of the respondents were either owners of news organizations or shareholders, and 1.49 percent worked regularly as volunteers. The vast majority of the journalists that hold a full-time position are permanent employees (93%) with only 7 percent defined as temporary ones. And yet, more than one third (36.6%) of the journalists reported having other paid jobs outside the field of journalism.

The Israeli journalists are somewhat experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 15.47 years (s=11.10), and about half of them had less than 12 years of professional experience. Most journalists worked on a specific news beat (65%), such as politics, local news, or sports. The remaining 35 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on various topics and subjects. On the whole, the Israeli journalists worked for 1.4 newsrooms on average (s=1.01), with 80.5 percent working for only one newsroom. Half of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (50.5%).

The majority of Israeli journalists in the sample worked for print media: 25.8 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 21.4 percent to weekly newspapers, and 2.6 percent to magazines. Another 11.1 percent of the journalists worked for private or public service television, and 18.5 for private or public radio. 16.7 percent of journalists in the sample reported they worked for an independent online outlet and only 4.4 percent reported working for an online outlet of a different offline news organization such as TV, a newspaper or a radio station.

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, Israeli journalists found it most important to report things as they are. This "objective" orientation is followed by more activist roles – to advocate for social change and influence public opinion (see Table 1). It seems there are no major disagreements regarding these roles as indicated by the moderate levels of standard deviation. Likewise, there seems to be somewhat of a consensus among the respondents over the lack of importance of supporting government policy and conveying a positive image of political leadership.

More than two thirds of the journalists in our sample found it important to provide analysis of current affairs, promote tolerance and cultural diversity, and let people express their views. The majority of journalists also found the following roles to be important: to provide information people need to make political decisions, monitor and scrutinize political leaders, provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life, monitor and scrutinize business, provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, tell stories about the world, support national development, be a detached observer and set the political agenda.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	339	92.9	4.64	.74
Advocate for social change	338	80.2	4.27	1.11
Influence public opinion	335	79.7	4.24	1.04
Provide analysis of current affairs	332	77.4	4.16	1.11
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	336	71.1	4.03	1.13
Let people express their views	334	69.5	3.90	1.26
Provide information people need to make political decisions	332	64.5	3.73	1.39
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	329	62.9	3.66	1.44
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	336	61.0	3.63	1.29
Monitor and scrutinize business	335	57.3	3.47	1.45
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	336	56.8	3.57	1.35
Tell stories about the world	334	56.3	3.43	1.40
Support national development	335	54.9	3.50	1.46
Be a detached observer	332	50.9	3.36	1.42
Set the political agenda	336	50.9	3.34	1.49
Educate the audience	338	44.1	3.12	1.43
Be an adversary of the government	326	42.9	3.22	1.41
Motivate people to participate in political activity	332	34.3	2.74	1.48
Provide entertainment and relaxation	338	32.5	2.83	1.44
Convey a positive image of political leadership	333	7.2	1.70	1.07
Support government policy	327	6.4	1.62	1.03

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

Though Israeli journalists demonstrated a commitment to professional standards of ethics, with a vast majority agreeing that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2), more than half of the respondents also agreed that what is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation, leaving room for interpretation. Furthermore, almost half of the reporters agreed it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it. Finally, less than a third think that what is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment.

There seems to be no consensus regarding any of the selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques Israeli journalists were asked about. More than two thirds found it justifiable, at least on occasion, to use hidden microphones or cameras, use re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story and use confidential business or government documents without authorization.

Two practices were strongly rejected by most journalists, altering photographs and altering or fabricating quotes from sources, in accordance with their high commitment to reporting things as they are. Accepting money from sources, though rejected by most journalists, was deemed justified at least in some cases by more than a few, possibly reflecting trends of embedded advertising that characterizes not only small news organizations in Israel but also major ones.

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	333	83.8	4.29	1.22
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	334	53.6	3.09	1.70
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	332	43.1	2.75	1.65
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	330	30.6	2.31	1.58

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 hidden microphones or cameras	339	56.6	28.0
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	318	52.2	23.0
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	336	43.8	29.2
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	338	36.1	29.0
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	334	35.0	30.5
Claiming to be somebody else	338	29.0	29.3
Paying people for confidential information	334	19.8	36.2
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	336	16.1	26.2
Publishing stories with unverified content	337	11.3	11.9
Accepting money from sources	337	10.4	3.9
Altering photographs	336	9.8	3.0
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	335	9.6	5.7

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

Journalists in Israel reported a high degree of professional autonomy. More than 80 percent of the respondents (81.8%) said that they had complete, or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. Even greater numbers reported that they had freedom in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story (87.6%). However,

less than half of journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) always or very often (46.6%).

When it comes to influences on their job, Israeli journalist express commitment to professional ethics: 87.6 percent found journalistic ethics the most influencing factor on their work, with high levels of agreement as indicated by the relatively low level of standard deviation (see Table 4). News production is influenced by a variety of other factors as well. A majority of journalists found their work substantively influenced by their personal values and beliefs, and constrained by information access (or lack thereof), time limits and the availability (or non-availability) of news-gathering resources. Also, more than half of the respondents admitted their work was influenced by the editorial supervisors, higher editors and censorship.

Censorship was followed by media law and regulation, with almost half the journalists deeming it as very or extremely influential as well. These two factors though were fairly disputed as indicated by the standard deviation.

Only one in every ten journalists reported the influence of political government officials as being high. Politicians, business people and pressure groups were deemed as least influential by the journalists. Another relatively disputed factor was religious consideration as indicated by the relatively high standard deviation, possibly reflecting the diverse backgrounds and religious orientations among the sampled journalists, who included, among others, Muslim and ultra-orthodox Jewish journalists.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	331	87.6	4.43	.85
Your personal values and beliefs	336	75.3	4.11	1.00
Information access	334	62.0	3.70	1.13
Time limits	333	61.0	3.67	1.19
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	306	54.2	3.42	1.20
Availability of news-gathering resources	319	53.0	3.43	1.18
Censorship	332	50.9	3.20	1.57
Media laws and regulation	329	48.0	3.19	1.40
Relationships with news sources	337	46.6	3.28	1.21
Editorial policy	289	46.0	3.17	1.33
Managers of the news organization	254	39.0	2.86	1.40
Feedback from the audience	338	37.9	3.06	1.18
Your peers on the staff	317	36.9	3.02	1.16
Audience research and data	321	34.3	2.81	1.26
Owners of the news organization	195	29.7	2.41	1.48
Competing news organizations	338	27.2	2.71	1.17
Advertising considerations	317	25.6	2.40	1.37
Religious considerations	328	21.3	2.13	1.51
Military, police and state security	337	20.8	2.27	1.35
Colleagues in other media	339	17.7	2.34	1.11
Public relations	339	16.8	2.27	1.13
Profit expectations	300	14.0	1.88	1.25
Friends, acquaintances and family	339	13.6	2.14	1.17
Government officials	334	10.5	1.81	1.11
Politicians	336	7.7	1.72	1.03
Business people	336	6.0	1.59	.93
Pressure groups	336	5.1	1.70	.97

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

Journalism is currently in a state of change. According to Israeli journalists who had five years or more of professional experience (the group of journalists who were asked to respond to the question on changes over time), the importance of journalists' skills, specifically the use of search engines and other technical skills, had most profoundly increased over the last five years (see Table 5). The composite of their replies indicates that journalists are expected to do more with fewer resources. Most journalists agreed that their average working hours have increased, as well as their need to interact with audiences, yet the time available for researching stories had decreased, according to most respondents, alongside the deterioration in the credibility of journalism.

While most responders agreed that the influence of ethical standards and journalism education had decreased during the past five years, for all other factors mentioned in Table 6, most journalists agreed the influence had increased. The two factors whose influence has increased the most, according to our respondents, are technology related: social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) and user-generated content (such as user comments and blogs), yet the next factors increasing their influence are more market-related: profit making pressure, competition, public relations and advertising considerations.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	263	96.2	.0
Technical skills	265	95.5	.8
Average working hours of journalists	249	75.9	7.6
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	261	69.7	13.8
The relevance of journalism for society	259	39.4	32.8
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	257	25.7	40.1
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	244	21.7	38.5
Having a university degree	251	21.5	41.4
The credibility of journalism	257	13.2	64.6
Time available for researching stories	257	5.4	81.3

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Israel. 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 Facebook and Twitter	261	96.9	1.1
User-generated contents, such as blogs	258	91.9	3.5
Profit making pressures	247	86.2	2.0
Competition	264	83.0	9.1
Public relations	258	79.8	5.0
Advertising considerations	257	79.4	5.8
Audience involvement in news production	247	77.3	6.9
Audience feedback	253	75.9	6.3
Pressure toward sensational news	255	71.4	3.5
Audience research	238	60.9	8.8
Western ways of practicing journalism	193	52.8	14.0
Journalism education	248	22.6	55.2
Ethical standards	259	10.4	72.6

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in Israel. 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

Regarding trust in public institutions, Israeli journalists turned out to have little faith in most of them. Only two institutions enjoyed a great deal of, or complete trust among more than half the journalists; the judiciary and the courts, and the army (while public trust in armies tends to be among the highest in Western countries, in the Israeli context it is often explained by the compulsory military service, whereby many of the Israelis or their family members are soldiers, and by the central role of the army in Israeli society). Only about one in every four journalists had high levels of trust in the news media. The most untrustworthy, according to journalists, were the elected public representatives: the government, political parties and politicians in general. Overall, there was a fairly high agreement among the respondents over the question of institutional trust, as low standard deviation values indicate. Disagreement was most pronounced for religious leaders and the army, again possibly reflecting the diversity of religious and political orientations among the studied reporters, who included minorities of Arab journalists as well as ultra-orthodox Jewish ones.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The judiciary/the courts	325	59.4	3.48	1.06
The military	327	54.4	3.40	1.15
The news media	327	26.9	2.95	.91
The police	328	20.7	2.66	.99
Trade unions	320	18.8	2.61	.98
The parliament	328	16.5	2.58	1.01
Religious leaders	318	13.8	2.13	1.18
The government	328	11.9	2.27	1.00
Political parties	326	4.6	2.01	.89
Politicians in general	322	3.1	1.90	.85

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

Size of the population:	3,000 working journalists (estimated)
Sampling method:	stratified proportionally systematic sampling for newsrooms and sampling based on quota for journalists within newsrooms
Sample size:	341 working journalists
Interview methods:	telephone
Response rate:	37%
Period of field research:	01/2014-10/2015