



Country Report

Journalists in Thailand

Yubol Benjarongkij, *Chulalongkorn University* and Smith Boonchutima, *Chulalongkorn University*

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Backgrounds of Journalists

In Thailand, the typical journalist is male, in their late thirties and holds a university degree in a field of journalism or communication. Among journalists that were interviewed, 161 were women, making for a proportion of 43.8 percent of the overall sample. The average age for a Thai journalist was 37.19 years ($s=11.33$), while three quarters of the sample were under the age of 30. Over 80 percent of journalists are holders of a Bachelor's or Master's degree; 70.9 percent of the respondents held a Bachelor's degree, and another 10.7 percent earned a Master's degree. There were no journalists who had completed a Doctoral degree in this study. Almost one in seven Thai journalists finished education at the high school level (14.7%) and 3.7 percent did not complete their studies. Among those respondents who held a university degree, one in seven (14.5%) had specialized in journalism, a third of them had studied in another communication field (33.4%), and 16.9 percent had specialized in both journalism and another communication field.

Journalists in the Newsroom

More than half of the journalists interviewed in Thailand held a full-time position (66.5%), whereas 13.7 percent of the respondents were employed on a part-time basis, with 18.2 percent working as freelance journalists. The Thai survey did not ask whether their positions were permanent or temporary.

In terms of professional experience, Thai journalists were somewhat inexperienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 7.51 years ($s=7.19$), and slightly fewer than half of the respondents had less than five years of professional experience (47.9%). Most journalists worked on a variety of topics and subjects (71.8%). Those who worked on a specific desk (28.2%) covered news related to current affairs, sports, entertainment, or economy. Journalists that reported focusing on politics, domestic or foreign affairs, or both, numbered ten out of the entire sample. Overall, Thai journalists worked for 1.71 newsrooms ($s=1.42$); many of them also had secondary employment in areas other than journalism (38.8%). Slightly less than a half were members of a professional association (45.3%).

The majority of Thai journalists in the sample either worked in radio (39.6%), mostly local, or television (25.4%), mostly national. 14.7 percent worked for a daily newspaper. A few journalists in the sample reported working for news agencies (6.7%), for online newsrooms of traditional media (1.6%) and for stand-alone online news sites (4.5%).

Journalistic Roles

A majority of Thai journalists viewed all roles listed in the questionnaire as very or extremely important. The roles that ranked highest included to report things as they are (88.7%), to provide analysis of current affairs (85.5%), and to be a detached observer (82.1%) (see Table 1). There was little dispute about the relevance of all listed roles among the interviewed journalists as the relatively low standard deviations indicate, except for acting as an adversary of the government ($s=1.01$). The roles of providing information people need to make political decision, motivating people to participating in political activity, and monitoring and scrutinizing business were rated as extremely or very important by a slight majority.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

| | N | Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important" | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|-----|--|------|-----------------------|
| Report things as they are | 371 | 88.7 | 4.37 | .69 |
| Provide analysis of current affairs | 372 | 85.5 | 4.23 | .71 |
| Be a detached observer | 369 | 82.1 | 4.26 | .84 |
| Support national development | 371 | 77.4 | 4.12 | .76 |
| Let people express their views | 372 | 76.3 | 4.25 | .83 |
| Advocate for social change | 367 | 75.2 | 4.02 | .76 |
| Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience | 374 | 73.8 | 4.02 | .78 |
| Monitor and scrutinize political leaders | 370 | 73.0 | 4.05 | .82 |
| Provide information people need to make political decisions | 370 | 70.5 | 3.96 | .84 |
| Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life | 372 | 68.5 | 3.92 | .77 |
| Monitor and scrutinize business | 370 | 67.8 | 3.90 | .78 |
| Motivate people to participate in political activity | 366 | 65.8 | 3.89 | .84 |
| Set the political agenda | 369 | 65.0 | 3.78 | .74 |
| Be an adversary of the government | 353 | 61.2 | 3.74 | 1.01 |
| Provide entertainment and relaxation | 374 | 60.4 | 3.76 | .92 |
| Influence public opinion | 365 | 60.0 | 3.74 | .77 |
| Support government policy | 366 | 57.1 | 3.63 | .84 |
| Convey a positive image of political leadership | 360 | 55.8 | 3.68 | .98 |

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

Thai journalists expressed mixed sentiments regarding professional standards of ethics. The respondents almost unanimously agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). At the same time, a strong majority agreed that what is ethical in Journalism depends on the situation or personal judgment, and that it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it.

A clearer picture emerges from responses about controversial reporting techniques, including publishing stories with unverified content, making use of personal documents without permission, claiming to be somebody else, accepting money from sources, and getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information, which were viewed as always justified among one out of six Thai journalists. Using hidden microphones or cameras and using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors were viewed by a large number of Thai journalists as reporting techniques that can be justified on occasion. The practice of taking money from sources was deemed justified on occasion or always justified by one in three Thai journalists (34.8%).

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 | 373 | 97.1 | 4.76 | .49 |
| What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation | 372 | 75.0 | 3.95 | 1.06 |
| What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment | 372 | 72.8 | 3.90 | 1.01 |
| It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it | 368 | 72.8 | 3.87 | .97 |

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” |
|--|-----|--------------------------------------|---|
| Publishing stories with unverified content | 367 | 15.8 | 25.6 |
| Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission | 371 | 15.6 | 24.8 |
| Claiming to be somebody else | 368 | 15.2 | 28.0 |
| Accepting money from sources | 362 | 15.2 | 19.6 |
| Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information | 360 | 15.0 | 28.9 |
| Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story | 359 | 12.5 | 34.0 |
| Using confidential business or government documents without authorization | 360 | 12.2 | 34.2 |
| Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors | 362 | 11.9 | 45.9 |
| Paying people for confidential information | 362 | 11.6 | 34.8 |
| Using hidden microphones or cameras | 368 | 8.4 | 53.5 |

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 Thailand report a fairly high degree of professional autonomy. More than a half (63.1%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. A slightly higher rate (64.2%) of the respondents said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story. About the same rate (63.1%) reported that they always or very often participated in coordinating editorial activities.

News production is influenced by all factors listed. Editorial policy, journalism ethics, information access, and owners of the news organization were reported by three quarters of the interviewed journalists as the most significant of extremely or very influential factors (see Table 4).

Overall, external constraints were viewed as less influential than internal factors. Thai journalists felt less influenced by competing news organizations, peers on the staff, pressure groups, and audience research and data. However, organizational components, like a news organization’s editorial policy and owners and managers are seen as more influential.

Table 4. Perceived influences

| | N | Percentage saying ‘extremely’ and ‘very influential’ | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|--|-----|--|------|-----------------------|
| Editorial policy | 370 | 77.3 | 4.04 | .74 |
| Journalism ethics | 372 | 76.9 | 4.15 | .79 |
| Information access | 370 | 75.7 | 4.01 | .72 |
| Owners of your news organization | 369 | 75.3 | 3.99 | .84 |
| Media laws and regulation | 369 | 72.4 | 3.99 | .76 |
| Managers of your news organization | 372 | 72.3 | 3.92 | .81 |
| Editorial supervisors and higher editors | 371 | 69.8 | 3.91 | .83 |
| Feedback from the audience | 373 | 68.9 | 3.90 | .77 |
| Censorship | 369 | 67.8 | 3.84 | .78 |
| Availability of news-gathering resources | 371 | 67.4 | 3.86 | .76 |
| Time limits | 372 | 64.5 | 3.80 | .72 |
| Profit expectations | 340 | 64.4 | 3.79 | .83 |
| Advertising considerations | 340 | 63.8 | 3.81 | .91 |
| Government officials | 364 | 63.7 | 3.75 | .90 |
| Friends, acquaintances and family | 366 | 63.7 | 3.82 | 1.02 |
| Relationships with news sources | 373 | 63.3 | 3.78 | .87 |
| Colleagues in other media | 372 | 62.6 | 3.79 | .95 |
| Politicians | 362 | 62.4 | 3.75 | 1.01 |
| Business people | 366 | 61.2 | 3.73 | 1.00 |
| Public relations | 369 | 60.2 | 3.70 | .96 |
| Competing news organizations | 361 | 60.1 | 3.76 | .87 |
| Pressure groups | 361 | 59.6 | 3.67 | .98 |
| Personal values and beliefs | 371 | 58.5 | 3.76 | .83 |
| Peers on the staff | 373 | 57.9 | 3.71 | .85 |
| Audience research and data | 363 | 57.3 | 3.70 | .80 |

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 in Thailand is currently undergoing major shifts. According to Thai journalists, the importance of the use of search engines and a journalist’s freedom to make editorial decisions had changed dramatically over the last five years (see Table 5). A majority of respondents also saw an increase in the use of search engines (95.6%), journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions (82.9%), and technical skills (78.3%). However, the decrease in the credibility of journalism and time availability for researching stories was reported by almost one out of ten respondents (10.1% and 8.9% respectively).

All listed influences on journalism and news production, especially technical skills and interactions of journalists with their audience, have changed as well owing to the rise of social media such as Facebook, twitter and mobile messaging applications, namely Line (96.2%). Competition, audience feedback, advertising considerations and profit making pressures have increased as well. 7.6 percent of the respondents viewed these changes as adversely affecting ethical standards in journalism.

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 | 159 | 95.6 | .0 |
| Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions | 158 | 82.9 | 3.2 |
| Technical skills | 157 | 78.3 | 3.8 |
| Interactions of journalists with their audiences | 158 | 77.2 | 2.5 |
| The relevance of journalism for society | 157 | 75.8 | 5.7 |
| Average working hours of journalists | 158 | 74.7 | 3.2 |
| Time available for researching stories | 158 | 70.9 | 8.9 |
| The credibility of journalism | 159 | 68.6 | 10.1 |
| Having a university degree | 158 | 57.6 | 1.3 |
| Having a degree in journalism or a related field | 159 | 52.8 | 3.8 |

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Thailand. 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, Twitter and Line | 159 | 96.2 | .6 |
| Competition | 158 | 92.4 | .6 |
| Audience feedback | 159 | 87.4 | .6 |
| Advertising considerations | 153 | 83.7 | .7 |
| Profit making pressures | 150 | 80.0 | .0 |
| Audience involvement in news production | 159 | 79.9 | .6 |
| Ethical standards | 158 | 79.7 | 7.6 |
| Pressure toward sensational news | 155 | 77.4 | .0 |
| User-generated contents, such as blogs | 156 | 74.4 | 1.3 |
| Public relations | 155 | 69.7 | 1.3 |
| Journalism education | 154 | 68.8 | 3.2 |
| Audience research | 159 | 68.6 | 3.8 |

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

Methodological Information

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| <i>Size of the population:</i> | 15,000 working journalists (estimated) |
| <i>Sampling method:</i> | members of journalist union & convenience for newsrooms and convenience sample for journalists within newsrooms |
| <i>Sample size:</i> | 374 working journalists |
| <i>Interview methods:</i> | face-to-face and mail/e-mail |
| <i>Response rate:</i> | 65% |
| <i>Period of field research:</i> | 01/2013-12/2014 and 08/2015-02/2016 |