

Country Report

Journalists in Cyprus

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21 January, 2017

Backgrounds of Journalists

A typical journalist in Cyprus¹ is likely to be male, in his mid-thirties with a university degree in journalism or communication. Of the 204 interviewed journalists, 86 were women, making for a proportion of 42.2 percent of the overall sample. On average, Cypriot journalists were 37.51 years old ($s=9.09$); half of the interviewed journalists were younger than 36 years. Their level of education is very high: 99.0 percent of the respondents held a university or college degree. Of them, 52.9 percent held a Bachelor's degree, 44.1 percent held an MA degree, and 2.0 percent had obtained a doctoral degree. Of those respondents who held a university degree, the overwhelming majority (81.6%) had specialized in communication or journalism. Specifically, 59.2 percent had specialized in journalism, 7.5 percent in another communication field, and 14.9 percent had specialized in both journalism and another communication field.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The overwhelming majority of journalists interviewed in Cyprus held a full-time position (92.2%), whereas 5.9 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 2.0 percent worked as freelance journalists. Of those full- or part-time employed, 91.9 percent said they held permanent positions, and 8.1 percent worked on a temporary contract.

On average, Cypriot journalists had worked as journalists for 11.85 years ($s=8.47$), and half of them had more than eleven years of professional experience. Most journalists worked on various topics and subjects (57.8%), while 42.2 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on a specific beat. On the whole, Cypriot journalists worked for 1.13 newsrooms ($s=.38$); 11.8 percent of them had additional jobs outside journalism. Slightly more than half of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (52.7%).

The majority of Cypriot journalists in the sample reported working for online newsrooms of traditional media (73.0%). Another 33.8 percent worked for television and 27.0 percent for radio. Regarding print media, 32.4 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 10.3 percent to weekly newspapers, and 1.5 percent to magazines. Few respondents reported working for news agencies (8.8%) and for stand-alone online news sites (5.9%).

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, Cypriot journalists found it most important to report things as they are, to provide analysis of current affairs, and, to a lesser extent, to be a detached observer (see Table 1). The relevance of these

¹ This report covers only the Greek-Cypriot community in Cyprus (areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus, not the Turkish-Cypriot community).

“classic” roles was fairly undisputed among the interviewed journalists as the relatively low standard deviations indicate. Of high importance to them was also supporting national development, which is possibly related to Cyprus’ turbulent political past and still ‘unsettled’ present. The least important roles were supporting government policy, conveying a positive image of political leadership, and providing entertainment and relaxation.

A majority of journalists in Cyprus found some politically assertive roles significant, i.e. to advocate for social change, to monitor and scrutinize political leaders, and to promote tolerance and cultural diversity as well as to let people express their views. Roles related to a ‘watchdog’ mindset, i.e. being an adversary of the government and motivating people to participate in political activity, were supported by only a minority of the respondents.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

| | N | Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important” | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|-----|--|------|-----------------------|
| Report things as they are | 204 | 97.1 | 4.84 | .44 |
| Provide analysis of current affairs | 204 | 94.6 | 4.68 | .57 |
| Support national development | 203 | 75.9 | 4.26 | 1.05 |
| Be a detached observer | 194 | 72.7 | 4.21 | .99 |
| Advocate for social change | 204 | 70.6 | 4.14 | .91 |
| Monitor and scrutinize political leaders | 203 | 64.0 | 3.67 | 1.36 |
| Promote tolerance and cultural diversity | 203 | 60.6 | 3.96 | .98 |
| Let people express their views | 204 | 52.5 | 3.88 | .98 |
| Monitor and scrutinize business | 201 | 48.3 | 3.43 | 1.32 |
| Influence public opinion | 197 | 42.6 | 3.29 | 1.24 |
| Provide information people need to make political decisions | 203 | 37.4 | 3.11 | 1.47 |
| Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience | 204 | 32.8 | 2.71 | 1.26 |
| Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life | 204 | 32.8 | 2.63 | 1.59 |
| Set the political agenda | 183 | 29.5 | 2.76 | 1.33 |
| Be an adversary of the government | 195 | 23.6 | 2.65 | 1.40 |
| Motivate people to participate in political activity | 204 | 19.6 | 2.69 | 1.15 |
| Convey a positive image of political leadership | 192 | 18.2 | 2.17 | 1.45 |
| Provide entertainment and relaxation | 203 | 14.3 | 2.19 | 1.25 |
| Support government policy | 192 | 7.3 | 1.94 | 1.11 |

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

Cypriot journalists demonstrated a strong commitment to professional standards of ethics. The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Furthermore, less than one-third of the respondents believed that it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it, and even fewer that ethical decisions in journalism are a matter of personal judgment. However, four out of ten journalists subscribed to the idea that what is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation.

In regard to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques (see Table 3), a large majority of journalists in Cyprus thought it was justified, at least on occasion, to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story and to use confidential business or government documents without authorization. Also, more than half found it permissible, on occasion, to claim to be somebody else and to do undercover research to gain inside information. Less than half of the respondents justified practices such as making use of personal documents (such as letters and

pictures) without permission, using hidden microphones or cameras, and paying people for confidential information. Clearly renounced by the overwhelming majority was accepting money from sources, altering or fabricating quotes from sources, and altering photographs.

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 | 204 | 89.7 | 4.54 | .70 |
| What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation | 202 | 40.6 | 2.75 | 1.42 |
| It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it | 203 | 27.1 | 2.69 | 1.33 |
| What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment | 201 | 20.4 | 2.05 | 1.30 |

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” |
|--|-----|--------------------------------------|---|
| Accepting money from sources | 204 | 5.4 | .0 |
| Altering or fabricating quotes from sources | 204 | 5.4 | .0 |
| Altering photographs | 204 | 5.4 | .0 |
| Publishing stories with unverified content | 204 | 4.9 | 2.5 |
| Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors | 203 | 3.9 | 3.4 |
| Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information | 204 | 2.9 | 54.4 |
| Claiming to be somebody else | 204 | 2.5 | 57.8 |
| Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story | 204 | 2.5 | 72.1 |
| Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission | 203 | 2.5 | 43.8 |
| Using hidden microphones or cameras | 204 | 2.5 | 46.1 |
| Paying people for confidential information | 204 | 2.0 | 33.8 |
| Using confidential business or government documents without authorization | 202 | 2.0 | 70.8 |

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 Cyprus reported a particularly high degree of professional autonomy. Eight out of ten respondents (82.8%) reported having complete or a great deal of freedom in selecting their stories. With respect to the ‘angle’ of news stories, almost all respondents (91.2%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story. Fewer respondents, but still a large majority of respondents, reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often” (77.0%).

Regarding sources of influence on journalistic work (see Table 4), a large majority of the Cypriot respondents felt constraint by economic factors, reporting managers and owners of news organization as highly influential for their work. Overall, most respondents felt influenced mostly by internal factors, such as editorial supervisors and higher editors, editorial policy as well as procedural factors, such as time limits, and access to information. Journalism ethics and personal values and beliefs were also identified as significant sources of influences by most respondents.

External constraints were generally not significant for Cypriot journalists. Less than one in ten journalists reported being influenced to a significant extent by religion, pressure groups, business people, politicians, government officials, and public relations. Similarly, friends, acquaintances, and family, as well as colleagues in other media were identified as only minor sources of influence.

Table 4: Perceived influences

| | N | Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential” | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|--|-----|--|------|-----------------------|
| Managers of the news organization | 203 | 71.4 | 4.01 | 1.02 |
| Owners of the news organization | 202 | 70.3 | 3.93 | 1.19 |
| Time limits | 204 | 68.6 | 4.05 | .92 |
| Editorial supervisors and higher editors | 201 | 66.7 | 3.92 | .98 |
| Journalism ethics | 200 | 66.0 | 4.07 | 1.10 |
| Information access | 203 | 66.0 | 4.02 | .94 |
| Your personal values and beliefs | 204 | 59.3 | 3.89 | 1.14 |
| Editorial policy | 201 | 55.2 | 3.74 | 1.02 |
| Availability of news-gathering resources | 199 | 44.2 | 3.54 | 1.20 |
| Relationships with news sources | 203 | 42.4 | 3.33 | 1.10 |
| Media laws and regulation | 202 | 36.1 | 3.41 | 1.27 |
| Censorship | 200 | 34.5 | 3.07 | 1.35 |
| Advertising considerations | 204 | 32.8 | 2.73 | 1.43 |
| Profit expectations | 204 | 30.9 | 2.75 | 1.53 |
| Competing news organizations | 204 | 23.5 | 2.54 | 1.24 |
| Your peers on the staff | 204 | 18.6 | 2.50 | 1.20 |
| Feedback from the audience | 203 | 14.3 | 2.62 | .99 |
| Audience research and data | 203 | 10.3 | 2.24 | 1.18 |
| Public relations | 203 | 8.4 | 2.14 | 1.01 |
| Government officials | 204 | 4.4 | 1.75 | .87 |
| Colleagues in other media | 204 | 3.9 | 1.84 | .97 |
| Politicians | 204 | 3.4 | 1.81 | .92 |
| Business people | 203 | 3.4 | 1.63 | .86 |
| Friends, acquaintances and family | 203 | 2.5 | 1.38 | .83 |
| Pressure groups | 203 | 2.5 | 1.68 | .81 |
| Religious considerations | 202 | 1.0 | 1.24 | .61 |

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 flux. According to Cypriot journalists, the use of search engines and the interactions of journalists with their audiences had most profoundly changed over the last five years (see Table 5). Also, a large majority of respondents reported an increase in their average working hours. However, the changes are not all negative, according to Cypriot journalists. Most respondents felt that the credibility of journalism had increased, as had the relevance of journalism for society and journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions. The importance of technical skills and university education (in journalism or other field) also increased, according to more than half of the respondents. What has dropped was time available for researching stories.

Influences on journalism and news production have changed as well. With the exception of ethical standards, influences on journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6. Especially the influence of social media, audience feedback, advertising considerations, and competition had strengthened the most during the past five years, according to Cypriot journalists. Most respondents reported an increase of market-related influences – such as profit making pressures, audience research, public relations, and pressure toward sensational

news – as well as influences from audiences (user-generated content, and audience involvement in news production). Ethical standards were the only source of influence that had substantively weakened over the years.

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 | 154 | 93.5 | .0 |
| Interactions of journalists with their audiences | 153 | 89.5 | .7 |
| Average working hours of journalists | 154 | 72.1 | 2.6 |
| The credibility of journalism | 153 | 69.3 | 12.4 |
| The relevance of journalism for society | 150 | 66.7 | 1.3 |
| Technical skills | 153 | 54.2 | .0 |
| Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions | 152 | 53.3 | 7.2 |
| Having a degree in journalism or a related field | 153 | 52.9 | 8.5 |
| Having a university degree | 153 | 51.6 | 6.5 |
| Time available for researching stories | 153 | 15.7 | 56.9 |

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Cyprus. 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 | 154 | 99.4 | .0 |
| Audience feedback | 154 | 95.5 | .0 |
| Advertising considerations | 153 | 95.4 | .0 |
| Competition | 154 | 93.5 | .0 |
| Audience research | 153 | 86.9 | .0 |
| User-generated contents, such as blogs | 153 | 85.6 | .7 |
| Audience involvement in news production | 154 | 81.8 | .0 |
| Profit making pressures | 153 | 73.9 | .0 |
| Public relations | 152 | 71.1 | .0 |
| Journalism education | 148 | 70.3 | 19.6 |
| Pressure toward sensational news | 152 | 53.3 | 1.3 |
| Western ways of practicing journalism | 140 | 32.9 | .0 |
| Ethical standards | 153 | 9.2 | 74.5 |

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in Cyprus. 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> | 431 working journalists (estimated) |
| <i>Sampling method:</i> | stratified proportionally systematic sampling for newsrooms and stratified proportionally random & convenience sample for journalists within newsrooms |
| <i>Sample size:</i> | 204 working journalists |
| <i>Interview methods:</i> | face-to-face, telephone and mail/e-mail |
| <i>Response rate:</i> | 92% |
| <i>Period of field research:</i> | 12/2013-01/2014 and 03/2014-09/2014 |