



Country Report

Journalists in Iceland

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Backgrounds of Journalists

Journalism in Iceland is still mostly a male profession; 35.0 percent of the respondents in the study were women, but it should be noted that the actual percentage of women working in newsrooms was closer to 30.0 percent. The average age was 39.58 years ($s=11.44$), and half of the journalists were 36 years old or younger. However, male journalists tended to be six years older than their female colleagues. The average age for women was 35.69 years, while it was 41.64 years for men.

Nearly seven out of every ten journalists had a college degree (68.4%) and almost a quarter (24.9%) had specialized in journalism and/or communication. 47.4 percent had a Bachelor's degree and 21.1 percent had a Master's degree. But once again, there are gender differences. Women were more educated than the men, as they were twice as likely to have completed Master's studies; 31.2 percent of females had a Master's degree, but 15.8 percent of the males. The same applied to specialization in journalism and/or communication. Almost twice as many women (43.8%) had specialized in journalism and/or other communication-related field than men (22.5%).

Journalists in the Newsroom

On average, the journalists had 11.99 years of professional experience ($s=9.52$), and half of them had worked in journalism for nine years or less. Consistent with the six-year difference in age between male and female journalists, women had worked in journalism for 8.12 years and men for 13.87 years. Nine out of ten journalists worked full-time (89.8%) and had a permanent position (90.9%), while 4.8 percent worked part-time and 5.3 percent freelanced.

The journalists normally worked on general assignments (70.4%) for only one newsroom (1.33, $s=.64$), but 23.2 percent received a salary for other jobs. Most of the journalists were members of a professional association (82.7%).

Although there are hardly any gender differences in the form of employment, 29.9 percent of the men had other jobs on the side, while much fewer women did so (13.1%).

More than a third of the journalists (37.8%) worked for daily newspapers, 28.1 percent for television, 13.5 percent for an online news site that was a part of off-line media, 9.7 percent for weekly papers, 4.3 percent for radio, 3.2 percent for magazines, and another 3.2 percent for a stand-alone online news site.

Journalistic Roles

There appeared to be an overall agreement among Icelandic journalists that their main objective should be to report things as they are, to provide analysis of current affairs, to educate the audience, and to be detached observers; they should not be politically active by conveying a positive image of political leadership, supporting government policy or setting the political agenda (Table 1). They also believed that their role was not to influence public opinion or to be an adversary of the government. There was a slightly more disagreement among them on the issue of being a watchdog, i.e. whether they should scrutinize political leaders and businesses, and whether they should provide people with information to make political decisions. Thus, it may be posited that Icelandic journalists perceived their role first and foremost to be that of objective observers who communicated current events to their audience without any agenda.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	184	97.3	4.76	.59
Provide analysis of current affairs	183	88.5	4.47	.84
Educate the audience	183	83.1	4.31	.94
Be a detached observer	176	76.7	4.09	.98
Let people express their views	177	65.0	3.80	1.14
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	168	50.0	3.48	1.16
Monitor and scrutinize business	182	48.4	3.24	1.35
Provide information people need to make political decisions	175	44.6	3.12	1.45
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	183	42.6	3.20	1.25
Provide entertainment and relaxation	184	38.0	3.22	1.11
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	181	34.8	3.17	1.10
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	172	24.4	2.65	1.20
Support national development	157	22.9	2.43	1.34
Motivate people to participate in political activity	168	12.5	1.99	1.20
Advocate for social change	166	12.0	2.13	1.16
Influence public opinion	175	5.7	1.69	.92
Be an adversary of the government	165	5.5	1.78	1.02
Set the political agenda	172	2.9	1.39	.78
Support government policy	178	.6	1.08	.33
Convey a positive image of political leadership	178	.0	1.12	.38

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

It seemed to be the general belief of Icelandic journalists that they should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (Table 2). Interestingly, a quarter of them also thought that moral standards could be set aside if required by circumstances, and that what was considered ethical could depend on the situation and/or personal judgment. There was, however, a bit less of a consensus among them whether it was all right to set aside moral standards or whether moral standards were personal and situational.

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	180	88.3	4.35	.83
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	174	24.7	2.49	1.16
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	178	24.7	2.42	1.17
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	179	24.6	2.42	1.26

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.

The vast majority of the journalists thought that it was always justified or justified on occasion to use confidential business or government documents without authorization and to use hidden microphones or cameras (Table 3). In the eyes of almost half of the respondents, exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story was acceptable, either always or on occasion. Although most of the journalists felt that controversial reporting practices were not always justified, it is evident that in many cases they felt that those same methods could be justified on occasion. This was especially true, for example, for claiming to be somebody else. No one felt that using that particular method was always justified, but more than a third said it could be justified on occasion.

Accepting money from sources, and altering quotes and photographs were the three controversial reporting methods that the journalists found the least acceptable, by far.

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	170	17.6	66.5
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	165	4.2	43.0
Using hidden microphones or cameras	172	2.9	75.0
Paying people for confidential information	168	2.4	32.7
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	168	1.2	38.1
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	161	1.2	37.3
Altering photographs	174	1.1	10.3
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	177	1.1	5.1
Publishing stories with unverified content	171	.6	36.8
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	159	.6	27.7
Accepting money from sources	179	.6	.6
Claiming to be somebody else	173	.0	36.4

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

Icelandic journalists reported a high degree of autonomy at work, as 85.9 percent ($s=.76$) said that they had either complete freedom or a great deal of freedom in selecting stories. Also, 88.2 percent ($s=.73$) said that they had either complete freedom or a great deal of freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized. However, much fewer journalists (40.8%, $s=1.44$) reported participating always or very often in editorial co-ordination, and there was more variation in whether they did so or not.

According to journalists in Iceland, structural factors like information access, time limits, and availability of news-gathering resources had the strongest influence on their work. Also, more than half of the journalists said that journalism ethics and their personal values and beliefs were extremely or very influential in their work. The journalists fairly unanimously agreed that pressure groups, politicians, government officials, and censorship were not extremely influential, or very influential, in their work.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Information access	180	82.2	4.15	.84
Time limits	183	72.7	3.95	.93
Availability of news-gathering resources	172	68.6	3.88	.98
Journalism ethics	177	65.5	3.82	1.08
Your personal values and beliefs	181	53.6	3.55	.99
Relationships with news sources	175	48.0	3.35	1.20
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	176	47.2	3.25	1.06
Editorial policy	170	45.3	3.32	1.10
Your peers on the staff	178	41.0	3.24	.97
Media laws and regulation	171	39.2	3.03	1.19
Competing news organizations	180	33.3	3.05	1.08
Feedback from the audience	181	25.4	2.96	.90
Friends, acquaintances and family	180	22.2	2.64	1.04
Audience research and data	171	11.1	2.07	1.07
Profit expectations	175	7.4	1.75	1.03
Managers of the news organization	176	7.4	1.74	.95
Colleagues in other media	181	7.2	2.07	.93
Owners of the news organization	174	6.3	1.54	.91
Business people	179	4.5	1.62	.86
Public relations	179	3.9	1.81	.87
Advertising considerations	178	3.4	1.47	.81
Censorship	174	2.9	1.63	.86
Government officials	180	2.8	1.61	.84
Politicians	180	2.8	1.60	.85
Pressure groups	179	1.7	1.62	.77

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

It's clear from the responses of journalists in Iceland that the technological changes that have taken place during the past five to ten years have greatly impacted their work and increased the importance of the use of search engines and technical skills in general (Table 5). At the same time, the majority said that the time available for researching stories had decreased. The importance of education, either having a university degree or having a degree in journalism or in a related field, was something that most of the journalists felt had definitely increased.

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	123	97.6	.0
Technical skills	120	90.0	.8
Having a university degree	118	68.6	.8
Average working hours of journalists	117	58.1	11.1
The relevance of journalism for society	119	56.3	7.6
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	114	53.5	2.6
Interactions of journalists with their audience	112	52.7	17.0
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	112	46.4	10.7
The credibility of journalism	121	30.6	30.6
Time available for researching stories	122	10.7	62.3

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Iceland. 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.

Congruent with the increased importance of technical skills, an overwhelming majority of the Icelandic journalists felt that the effect of social media and user-generated content had strengthened over the past five years (Table 6). The influence of journalism education and competition were also reported as having become stronger. Only a quarter of the journalists felt that pressure towards sensational news had strengthened.

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter	118	95.8	.8
User-generated content, such as blogs	114	84.2	3.5
Journalism education	111	71.2	2.7
Competition	117	68.4	6.8
Audience feedback	114	57.0	3.5
Profit-making pressures	108	52.8	.9
Audience research	114	50.9	5.3
Ethical standards	113	49.6	6.2
Public relations	109	46.8	3.7
Advertising considerations	111	41.4	2.7
Audience involvement in news production	101	40.6	2.0
Pressure toward sensational news	111	26.1	5.4

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

When it came to the journalists' trust in the various institutions, there was very little disagreement between them. Most of them had complete or a great deal of trust in the police, and slightly less than half had complete or a great deal of trust in the news media and the judiciary/the courts. The journalists had little trust in politicians in general, the government, and religious leaders.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The police	177	68.4	3.79	.84
The news media	175	48.6	3.42	.64
The judiciary/the courts	173	46.8	3.31	.88
Trade unions	169	22.5	2.86	.82
The parliament Alþingi	172	9.3	2.43	.80
The government	170	8.8	2.45	.86
Religious leaders	171	5.8	2.05	.89
Politicians in general	169	1.8	2.33	.62
Political parties	172	1.2	2.17	.65

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>	350 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	-
<i>Sample size:</i>	187 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face and online
<i>Response rate:</i>	53.43%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	03/2012-06/2012