



Country Report

Journalists in Singapore

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20 December, 2016

Backgrounds of Journalists

Among the 95 journalists and editors surveyed in Singapore, 56 of them (58.9%) were female; they had a mean age of 37.70 ($s=11.34$, Median=34); the majority were educated to degree level or above (93.7%) so that 67 (70.5%) held a bachelors' degree and 22 (23.2%) had a masters' or above. Yet their degrees were not always in media, journalism or communication studies (41.6%); of those who held a degree, 20 (22.5%) specialized in journalism, twelve (13.5%) in another field of communication and five (5.6%) in both.

Journalists in the Newsroom

Singapore favors journalists working in the newsroom rather than freelancers (1.1%), so almost all of those interviewed and surveyed worked in newsrooms full-time (98.9%), with a wide range of experience (median=7 years, mean 11.42 years, $s=9.58$). They tended to be loyal and had worked for a mean of 1.14 newsrooms ($s=0.55$). Only three had another job at the same time (3.2%). Just over half considered themselves generalists (55.8%). 34.0 percent were members of professional bodies or associations (although not unions). Most worked in daily newspapers (66% or 69.5%), reflecting the predominance of newsprint as a well-staffed medium and the accessibility of newspaper reporters for this study based on the list of 250 names given to researchers by the leading news organization; eight (8.4%) worked in TV news, six (6.3%) in news agencies or for weekly newspapers each, four (4.2%) for online divisions of offline news outlets, and three (3.2%) for online-only publications.

Journalistic Roles

Respondents believed that their primary role was to monitor and scrutinize political leaders, followed closely by reporting facts as they are (Table 1). Yet only half found either of these to be 'extremely' or 'very important'. They were also keen that everyday people should be allowed to express their views through the national media, and that the media should broaden the readers' horizons. To promote tolerance and cultural diversity was an important journalistic role as well, concomitant with Singapore's conscious and consistent effort to foster harmony among the diverse races and religions that constitute the population. At the bottom end of the table, respondents did not see that providing advice for daily life, entertainment and relaxation was a significant journalistic role. These are, perhaps, values more associated with lifestyle magazines, and this may reflect a division of labor in the minds of the newswriters.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	89	50.6	3.30	1.29
Report things as they are	95	49.5	3.21	1.66
Let people express their views	93	49.5	3.35	1.24
Tell stories about the world	94	47.9	3.12	1.44
Educate the audience	94	46.8	3.17	1.44
Provide information people need to make political decisions	90	46.7	3.20	1.26
Provide analysis of current affairs	94	45.7	3.14	1.32
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	92	44.6	3.15	1.41
Set the political agenda	87	44.8	3.09	1.42
Be a detached observer	94	42.6	3.16	1.34
Advocate for social change	93	41.9	3.17	1.20
Support national development	94	41.5	3.20	1.11
Convey a positive image of political leadership	87	40.2	3.08	1.38
Be an adversary of the government	87	39.1	2.92	1.53
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	95	38.9	3.16	1.23
Motivate people to participate in political activity	89	38.2	3.06	1.26
Influence public opinion	92	38.0	3.13	1.07
Support government policy	90	36.7	3.14	1.16
Monitor and scrutinize business	93	35.5	3.13	1.19
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	94	34.0	3.05	1.10
Provide entertainment and relaxation	93	33.3	3.06	.99

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

Journalistic ethics in Singapore appear to be quite flexible, with only just over half of respondents saying that journalists should always adhere to ethical codes. This was matched by a similar percentage saying that ethical decision-making should be context-specific rather than a matter of principle (Table 2). Nevertheless, respondents did not think of ethical decision-making as being a particularly personal or individual act, which hints at some support for a generalized, community-wide ethical understanding.

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	95	51.6	3.06	1.69
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	94	46.8	3.14	1.32
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	93	40.9	3.03	1.35
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	94	27.7	2.71	1.20

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.

Over half of the respondents were comfortable using technological means to benefit a story, either using hidden cameras or microphones or by dramatizing the news for broadcast by using actors (Table 3); this latter fits with a popular television program recreating crimes and asking for witnesses to step forward. Equally, slightly under half were comfortable using government or business documents, and even fewer would use personal documents. A very small minority would consider altering or fabricating quotes or photographs, and only one single reporter said they were happy to accept money from a source.

Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists

	N	Percentage saying "always justified"	Percentage saying "justified on occasion"
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	93	4.3	50.5
Using hidden microphones or cameras	92	3.3	52.2
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	92	2.2	41.3
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	91	1.1	35.2
Publishing stories with unverified content	93	1.1	14.0
Altering photographs	94	1.1	4.3
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	92	.0	46.7
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	93	.0	33.3
Claiming to be somebody else	94	.0	33.0
Paying people for confidential information	93	.0	21.5
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	93	.0	7.5
Accepting money from sources	94	.0	1.1

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 felt they had some autonomy in selecting stories, with 61.7 percent of 94 respondents saying they had complete freedom or a great deal of freedom to do so. They showed a similar degree of freedom in selecting which aspects of those stories should be emphasized (55.8%). This did not correspond with attending news meetings or taking part in broader co-ordination of the editorial of their publication, with only 43.2 percent saying that they attended always or very often.

Despite the low score on adherence to codes of professional ethics reported in Table 2, ethical considerations were still the main influence on news production given by respondents (Table 4). They also felt their newsgathering was influenced (limited) by the regulations that surround the profession, as well as the difficulties accessing information in the city-state. Religious considerations — that is, considerations for the racial and religious tensions in Singapore — were more significant than individual beliefs. State security also scored relatively highly, although this may reflect a concern with a desire to protect state security rather than feeling threatened by it. Businesses, advertisers and public relations practitioners were not considered to exert significant influence. Finally, the low score of influence from competing sources and organizations reflects the relative monopolies enjoyed by most news organizations in Singapore, where a small population subdivided among language groups has resulted in little competition for each company.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	93	53.8	3.39	1.39
Media laws and regulation	92	48.9	3.28	1.28
Information access	93	43.0	3.15	1.22
Religious considerations	89	42.7	3.11	1.28
Censorship	89	41.6	3.20	1.10
Time limits	92	41.3	3.14	1.30
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	93	40.9	3.05	1.23
The military, police and state security	86	39.5	3.08	1.18
Editorial policy	93	38.7	3.06	1.31
Pressure groups	87	35.6	2.97	1.14
Managers of your news organization	85	35.3	2.88	1.18
Availability of news-gathering resources	89	33.7	2.99	1.15
Government officials	89	33.7	2.99	1.09
Owners of your news organization	87	33.3	2.86	1.30
Relationships with news sources	91	33.0	3.08	.90
Audience research and data	88	33.0	3.16	.99
Personal values and beliefs	91	31.9	3.01	1.22
Politicians	88	31.8	2.93	1.13
Friends, acquaintances and family	93	31.2	2.81	1.17
Advertising considerations	89	30.3	2.83	1.12
Public relations	93	30.1	2.88	1.05
Feedback from the audience	93	29.0	3.11	.81
Competing news organizations	93	29.0	2.99	1.04
Colleagues in other media	93	28.0	2.86	1.10
Profit expectations	88	27.3	2.80	1.20
Peers on the staff	92	25.0	2.95	1.01
Business people	90	24.4	2.81	1.05

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

Singapore has a tech-savvy population, and this is reflected in the active uptake in technology in newsrooms and a strong perception among journalists that technical skills are increasing (Table 5). At the same time — although not necessarily connected — respondents believe that the profession has become more credible and more relevant for society. In each case, the number of those who believe these aspects are decreasing are around or less than half of those who believe it is increasing. The ‘academicizing’ of the profession received a more mixed response, as the ratio of those who believed it was increasing to those who believed it was decreasing was not extreme, perhaps reflecting a long-term focus on academic skills nationally, which has long seen a high proportion of journalists educated to degree level.

The impact of social media on journalism was unclear: the number of those who thought it had increased was almost the same as those who thought it had decreased, with around half of respondents taking either stand; and a similar pattern was recorded for UGC (Table 6). At the same time, however, and despite the increased opportunities for audiences to make their voices heard, respondents were more likely to think that audience feedback, research and involvement had all declined. Similarly, the influence of Western style of reporting, sensationalism and pressure from PR practitioners were all reckoned to have weakened.

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"
Credibility of journalism	58	60.3	20.7
Technical skills	57	56.1	36.8
Relevance of journalism for society	59	55.9	25.4
Use of search engines	59	52.5	44.1
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	59	49.2	39.0
Time available for researching stories	59	44.1	22.0
Average working hours of journalists	59	42.4	37.3
Having a university degree	57	40.4	28.1
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	57	28.1	21.1
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	56	25.0	26.8

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Singapore. 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	59	50.8	47.5
Competition	57	45.6	38.6
User-generated contents, such as blogs	58	41.4	46.6
Journalism education	54	40.7	31.5
Ethical standards	57	40.4	28.1
Audience involvement in news production	58	39.7	44.8
Audience feedback	58	39.7	46.6
Profit making pressures	59	39.0	39.0
Advertising considerations	56	37.5	33.9
Audience research	57	33.3	38.6
Public relations	57	29.8	33.3
Pressure toward sensational news	57	26.3	33.3
Western ways of practicing journalism	54	20.4	25.9

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

No institution was trusted by more than half of respondents. The judiciary and the law courts were considered most credible, followed by the police. The institutions of government were held in quite high regard, too. Nevertheless, politics was viewed less favorably, and respondents were quite consistent in their disdain for it. That negative sentiment extended to their own profession; the news media was not considered to be notably trustworthy, and was placed on a par with religious leaders (Table 7).

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The judiciary/the courts	92	47.8	3.22	1.27
The police	91	42.9	3.24	1.15
The parliament	90	41.1	3.16	1.16
The government	89	38.2	3.16	.98
The military	89	37.1	3.10	1.04
Trade unions	90	33.3	3.06	.94
Religious leaders	91	29.7	3.10	.93
The news media	93	29.0	3.05	.84
Political parties	88	27.3	3.15	.69
Politicians in general	89	24.7	3.06	.74

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>	1,000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	simple systematic sampling & other for newsrooms and purposively chosen based on quota for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	95 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	telephone and online
<i>Response rate:</i>	25%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	01/2014-06/2015