

Country Report

Journalists in Colombia

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Colombia is male, in his mid-thirties, and holds a university degree in a field different from journalism or social communication. Of the 552 journalists interviewed, 219 were women and 333 were male, which makes 39.7 and 69.3 percent respectively. On average, the Colombian journalists interviewed were 35.21 years old ($s=12.06$), although half of the journalists were younger than 32 years. Colombian journalists tend to hold a university degree: 77.6 percent of the interviewed held a degree from a graduate program; 77.6 percent of the interviewed held a Bachelor's degree; 11.6 percent of the interviewed held a degree from a graduate program and 10.6 and percent had finished high school.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Colombia held a full-time position (83.2%), whereas 11.2 percent of the respondents indicated that they held part-time employments, and 5.6 percent worked as freelance journalists. Of those with full or part-time employment, 46.8 percent said they held permanent positions, and 53.2 percent worked on a temporary contract.

Regarding professional experience, Colombian journalists, on average, had worked in the field 11.17 years ($s=9.69$), and about half of them had more than six years of professional experience. Most journalists worked covering different subjects and topics (52.1%), and 47.9 percent worked on a specific desk, such as politics, local news, crime, economy, or sports and entertainment.

Overall, Colombian journalists worked for 1.20 newsrooms ($s=.49$). 16.3 percent said they worked for various media. 27.4 percent of these journalists had secured additional jobs outside the field of journalism. A minority of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (27.8%).

Across the whole sample, the majority of surveyed journalists worked for print media: 28.8 percent worked in newspapers, 8.9 percent in weekly newspapers and 2.1 percent in magazines. Another significant group of journalists worked for public and private radio (31.8%) and television (20.9%). Few journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies (2.0%) or for stand-alone online news sites (5.5%).

Journalistic Roles

With regards to how Colombian journalists reportedly viewed their professional purpose/role, they found it was most important to report news accurately, to provide analysis of current affairs, to promote tolerance and cultural diversity, to promote social change, and lastly, to educate the audience (Table 1). The standard deviations for each of these roles revealed that there was indisputable consensus on the perception of the relevance that these functions have within journalistic work.

Still, it was found that most journalists in Colombia valued letting people express their opinions, telling stories about the world, monitoring political leaders, and supporting national development. Furthermore, they valued influencing public opinion, providing people the information they need to make political decisions, and monitoring the business world. Lastly, journalists advocated for providing entertainment and news that capture a wider audience, setting the political agenda, motivating people to participate in political activities, and providing advice for daily life.

It also was found that the classic roles of impartial observers and government adversaries or watchdogs currently hold little importance for Colombian journalists. The same goes for the traditional roles of loyalists or functionalists related to promoting government policies and conveying a positive image of political leaders. The standard deviations showed divided opinions on the relevance of these roles in journalism. For some journalists, these classic and loyalist roles are not important in their work, while there are others who believe that these roles are crucial for their reporting.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	547	92.5	4.66	.74
Provide analysis of current affairs	543	91.0	4.56	.77
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	544	87.9	4.49	.86
Advocate for social change	543	84.7	4.40	.94
Educate the audience	546	84.6	4.39	.94
Let people express their views	544	81.4	4.26	1.03
Tell stories about the world	544	79.0	4.22	1.00
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	540	78.9	4.19	1.06
Support national development	539	76.3	4.14	1.10
Influence public opinion	540	75.0	4.08	1.05
Provide information people need to make political decisions	542	74.9	4.05	1.15
Monitor and scrutinize business	538	67.8	3.86	1.23
Provide entertainment and relaxation	540	66.3	3.91	1.08
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	544	65.4	3.86	1.19
Set the political agenda	536	65.3	3.82	1.20
Motivate people to participate in political activity	541	59.5	3.66	1.29
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	544	57.0	3.59	1.29
Be a detached observer	538	43.1	3.19	1.33
Support government policy	537	32.2	3.03	1.27
Be an adversary of the government	540	19.8	2.47	1.29
Convey a positive image of political leadership	541	18.7	2.40	1.32

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

The great majority of Colombian journalists reported they had a strong commitment to professional ethical standards. The majority of respondents agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of the situation or context (see Table 2). However, less than half of the interviewees subscribed to the idea that journalists' ethical decisions depended on the specific situation. Similarly, less than half of the respondents agreed with the view that their ethical decisions are a matter of personal judgment. Less than one out of five journalists considered that sometimes it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it.

The picture was mixed with regards to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques. For instance, less than 19.0 percent of journalists surveyed considered it acceptable to occasionally use some of the controversial journalistic practices presented in Table 3. These controversial practices were occasionally justified by this small group of journalists with relatively ethical ideologies: the use of microphones and hidden cameras (18.9%), the use of re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors (18.8%), the exertion of pressure on unwilling informants to get a story (12.2%), the use of confidential business or government documents without authorization (11.6%), claiming to be somebody else (11.5%), the practice of getting hired by a firm or organization to gain inside information (11.1%), and paying people for confidential information (9.5%).

Also, less than 8.0 percent of journalists agreed to justify the use of unauthorized personal documents (such as letters and photographs), publishing stories without verifying their contents, accepting money from sources, altering or inventing 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	554	89.0	4.52	.99
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	554	38.8	2.75	1.64
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	551	35.0	2.60	1.56
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	553	17.0	2.02	1.33

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 re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	547	17.9	18.8
Using hidden microphones or cameras	550	15.5	18.9
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	550	11.1	11.6
Claiming to be somebody else	549	8.7	11.5
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	548	8.0	12.2
Paying people for confidential information	550	5.3	9.5
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	550	4.4	11.1
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	550	2.9	7.5
Publishing stories with unverified content	549	2.9	3.6
Accepting money from sources	549	2.2	1.6
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	547	2.2	2.9
Altering photographs	547	2.2	2.9

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

Colombian journalists perceived they had a high level of professional autonomy in their jobs. The vast majority of respondents said they had complete or a great deal of freedom with their selection of stories (80.4%) and deciding what perspectives should be emphasized in the news (80.5%). Likewise, more than half of the journalists stated they had participated in activities concerning editorial coordination, such as meetings to address drafting or news management, “always” or “very often” (56.6%).

News production in Colombia can be influenced by a variety of factors. The journalists that participated in this survey perceived journalism ethics (76.6%) as the main source of influence on their career (see Table 4). However, the majority of surveyed journalists also perceived strong limitations at an organizational and procedural level in relation to editorial supervisors (67.0%), editorial policy (67.0%), access to information (66.5%), influence of line managers or editors (60.3%), owners of the news organization (60.3%), media laws (59.8%), and time limits (59.2%). In the same way, more than half of the journalists perceived the relationship with news sources (58.7%), feedback from the audience (56.5%), and personal values and beliefs (55.8%) as highly influencing factors in their jobs.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	543	76.6	4.19	1.11
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	542	67.0	3.78	1.19
Editorial policy	545	67.0	3.80	1.23
Information access	543	66.5	3.81	1.23
Managers of the news organization	541	60.3	3.61	1.35
Owners of the news organization	541	60.3	3.61	1.35
Media laws and regulation	540	59.8	3.64	1.20
Time limits	542	59.2	3.63	1.21
Relationships with news sources	542	58.7	3.57	1.28
Feedback from the audience	543	56.5	3.54	1.21
Your personal values and beliefs	547	55.8	3.45	1.39
Audience research and data	545	47.7	3.25	1.35
Advertising considerations	545	42.9	3.08	1.45
Public relations	543	40.5	3.09	1.34
Competing news organizations	539	40.1	3.09	1.24
Profit expectations	542	38.7	2.95	1.43
Your peers on the staff	548	35.2	2.97	1.28
Availability of news-gathering resources	543	33.7	2.66	1.45
Censorship	540	32.0	2.74	1.38
Religious considerations	542	28.6	2.68	1.38
Pressure groups	534	28.5	2.58	1.40
Business people	543	28.0	2.66	1.34
Government officials	541	25.3	2.52	1.34
Politicians	542	24.2	2.48	1.33
Colleagues in other media	542	23.6	2.52	1.29
Friends, acquaintances and family	541	18.7	2.32	1.27

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.

Overall, internal factors were found to be more influential than external constraints. Strikingly, journalists felt little influence from the political and citizenry sphere: public relations (40.5%), censorship (32.0%), religious considerations (28.6%), the government (25.3%), and politicians (24.2%). Similarly, all the surveyed journalists reported only minor influence from friends, acquaintances and family, as well as from

colleagues in other media. Likewise, economic influences – like advertising considerations, market competition, and profit expectations – seem to have little relevance in Colombian newsrooms.

Journalism in Transition

Colombian journalism has experienced significant changes on a technological and professional level. According to the surveyed journalists, the importance of technological skills (81.7%) and the use of search engines (88.8%) have increased the most during the last five years (see Table 5), and have been perceived as essential requirements to develop the field of journalism. Almost half of the respondents (49.9%) acknowledged that the relationship between journalists and the public has changed notably, as it is increasingly demanded that journalists have substantial interactions with their audiences.

On the other hand, the vast majority of Colombian journalists perceived an increasingly competitive social and professional environment that demanded improved training at the university level. Likewise, the majority of respondents believed that the need to have a degree in journalism has strengthened. Journalists in Colombia also felt an increasing relevance (69.3%) and credibility (60.7%) of journalism in society. This increase in relevance is particularly notable as the country is negotiating a peace agreement with the “Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia” (FARC) to end the conflict that has plagued the country for more than fifty years.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has “increased”	Percentage saying has “decreased”
The use of search engines	349	88.8	2.6
Technical skills	349	81.7	5.7
Having a university degree	351	75.5	9.1
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	352	71.3	14.2
The relevance of journalism for society	352	69.3	10.8
The credibility of journalism	349	60.7	19.8
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	345	49.9	22.0
Average working hours of journalists	350	45.1	27.4
Journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions	351	40.2	26.8
Time available for researching stories	351	29.1	45.6

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

Nevertheless, this technologically advanced social environment contrasts with the detriment in labor conditions for journalists in Colombia. 45.1 percent of journalists assured that the average number of working hours is constantly increasing, but the time available for story investigations is decreasing (45.6%). It must be said that even though 56.6 percent of journalists – as stated in the previous section – assured they participated in editorial coordination activities, only 40.2 percent of these journalists perceived an increase in their freedom to make editorial decisions. In other words, even though journalists perceived advances in editorial participation, the vast majority agreed that editorial decisions were still being centralized.

Table 6 presents the specific ways in which changes are perceived by journalists in this social and professional environment marked by technologies, relationships, and economic pressures centered on publicity.

Firstly, journalists considered that the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter has strengthened, as well as the tendency towards citizen journalism, in which public participation in the production of news and production of content demanded an increasingly horizontal and interactive communication in the process of news production.

Table 6 reveals that journalists felt that there had been an increase in the pressure to produce news with sensationalist content (58.8%), as well as pressure to practice journalism for profit (50.3%), and to take into account publicity considerations (53.6%) at the time of airing, so that content does not go against the interest of the advertisers.

These questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five or more years of professional experience.

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter	349	88.3	3.4
Audience involvement in news production	350	73.1	9.1
User-generated contents, such as blogs	349	72.8	11.2
Audience feedback	349	71.9	9.2
Public relations	348	63.8	13.2
Pressure toward sensational news	342	58.8	21.3
Audience research	350	58.6	16.3
Advertising considerations	345	53.6	18.8
Profit making pressures	346	50.3	24.6
Competition	347	48.7	19.6
Journalism education	351	42.7	32.2
Ethical standards	350	32.3	42.9

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

<i>Size of the population:</i>	10,000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	stratified proportionally systematic sampling & purposive quota sampling for newsrooms and purposively chosen based on quota for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	560 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face, telephone and mail/e-mail
<i>Response rate:</i>	63.0%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	03/2013-10/2014