



Country Report

Journalists in Hungary

Róka Jolán, *Budapest Metropolitan University*, Lydia Frost & Thomas Hanitzsch, *LMU Munich*

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Hungary is male, in his mid-thirties and holds a university degree in journalism or communication. Of the 389 interviewed journalists, 185 were women, making for a proportion of 47.5 percent of the overall sample. On average, Hungarian journalists were 33.17 years old ($s=11.03$); half of the journalists were younger than 30 years. Journalists tend to be well educated: 52.8 percent of the respondents held a Bachelor's degree and 19.5 percent held a Master's degree. Another 2.3 percent of the journalists had obtained a doctoral degree, and 7.0 percent had undertaken some university studies but did not complete their studies. Across the whole sample of Hungarian journalists, 68.3 percent had specialized in journalism and/or communication.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Hungary held a full-time position (61.4%), whereas 26.1 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 9.6 percent worked as freelance journalist. Of those with full or part-time employment, 66.7 percent said they held permanent positions, and 33.3 percent worked on a temporary contract.

Hungarian journalists are not very experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 8.88 years ($s=8.09$), and about half of them had more than six years of professional experience. Most journalists worked on various topics and subjects (64.2%). The remaining 35.8 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on a specific desk, such as politics, local news, or sports. On the whole, Hungarian journalists worked for 1.22 newsrooms ($s=.61$); 39.3 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. About one-fifth of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (23.5%).

Most Hungarian journalists in the sample worked for print media: 15.2 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 10.5 percent to weekly newspapers, and 8.7 percent to magazines. Another 36.7 percent of the journalists worked for private or public service television, and 6.7 for private or public radio. Few journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies (.2%), for online newsrooms of traditional media (4.7%), and for stand-alone online news sites (17.2%).

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, Hungarian journalists found it most important to report things as they are, to be a detached observer, and to provide analysis of current affairs (see Table 1). The relevance of these “classic” roles was fairly undisputed among the interviewed journalists as the relatively low standard deviations indicate.

Still, a majority of journalists in Hungary found it important to promote tolerance and cultural diversity, to tell stories about the world, to educate the audience, to provide entertainment and relaxation, to provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, to provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life, to let people express their views, and to support national development. Political roles, on the other hand, were supported by only a minority of respondents. Following traits belong to these roles: motivating people to participate in political activity, setting the political agenda, acting as adversary of the government, supporting government policy, and conveying a positive image of political leadership.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	387	91.0	4.50	.75
Be a detached observer	385	86.5	4.38	.74
Provide analysis of current affairs	385	76.9	4.10	.99
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	355	74.4	4.05	1.01
Tell stories about the world	355	74.1	3.95	1.05
Educate the audience	353	67.1	3.80	1.07
Provide entertainment and relaxation	383	62.1	3.79	1.18
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	383	61.9	3.74	1.18
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	383	54.8	3.58	1.14
Let people express their views	376	54.3	3.59	1.15
Support national development	374	52.9	3.49	1.25
Advocate for social change	374	50.0	3.45	1.15
Influence public opinion	368	48.6	3.35	1.24
Provide information people need to make political decisions	374	48.1	3.24	1.45
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	373	43.7	3.12	1.45
Monitor and scrutinize business	375	38.9	3.03	1.35
Motivate people to participate in political activity	369	34.1	2.85	1.42
Set the political agenda	366	25.1	2.61	1.29
Be an adversary of the government	361	23.5	2.42	1.35
Support government policy	350	18.3	2.20	1.31
Convey a positive image of political leadership	354	16.4	2.08	1.27

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

Hungarian journalists generally demonstrated a strong commitment to professional standards of ethics. The majority of the respondents agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Furthermore, more than half of the journalists agreed with the view that journalists' ethical decisions depend on the specific situation. Two out of five journalists subscribed to the idea that sometimes it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it, and slightly less than a quarter thought their ethical decisions are a matter of personal judgment.

The picture was mixed with regard to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques. The majority of journalists in Hungary found the use of hidden microphones or cameras as well as undercover research to gain inside information justifiable at least on occasion (see Table 3). Still, most journalists thought it was acceptable to use confidential business or government documents without authorization and to claim to be somebody else. Only a minority of journalists found it permissible to make use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without permission, to publish stories with unverified content, to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story, and to alter 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	381	83.2	4.30	.85
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	380	55.3	3.29	1.31
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	378	40.5	2.91	1.32
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	378	24.9	2.48	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.

Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists

	N	Percentage saying "always justified"	Percentage saying "justified on occasion"
Using hidden microphones or cameras	363	15.7	56.2
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	361	12.5	48.8
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	347	11.0	30.5
Accepting money from sources	363	11.0	16.8
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	350	10.6	46.3
Claiming to be somebody else	363	10.5	46.3
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	345	10.4	13.9
Paying people for confidential information	351	10.0	39.6
Altering photographs	343	9.3	14.6
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	338	9.2	34.0
Publishing stories with unverified content	362	8.8	37.0
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	368	8.4	38.9

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

Journalists in Hungary reported a fairly high degree of professional autonomy. The majority of the respondents (65.2%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 62.8 percent, the number of respondents who had complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story was slightly lower. Still around half of the journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often” (47.9%).

News production is influenced by a variety of factors. Among the potential sources of influences mentioned in the interview, “personal values and beliefs” fared on top of the list among Hungarian respondents (see Table 4). A majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by journalism ethics, by information access (or lack thereof), by time limits, by audience feedback, and by editorial supervisors and higher editors. Also, more than half of the respondents admitted their work was influenced by the availability (or non-availability) of news-gathering resources and editorial policy.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Your personal values and beliefs	381	77.4	4.09	.97
Journalism ethics	384	71.6	4.02	.97
Information access	383	68.9	3.84	.99
Time limits	382	67.0	3.82	.97
Feedback from the audience	384	62.8	3.64	.96
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	369	60.7	3.67	1.08
Availability of news-gathering resources	371	58.0	3.58	.98
Editorial policy	367	54.0	3.45	1.16
Managers of the news organization	364	51.6	3.40	1.19
Media laws and regulation	379	50.9	3.49	1.11
Relationships with news sources	375	49.3	3.34	1.18
Audience research and data	374	48.4	3.39	1.10
Your peers on the staff	383	43.3	3.30	.95
Owners of the news organization	369	43.1	3.20	1.26
Profit expectations	367	37.1	3.01	1.21
Public relations	376	36.4	2.97	1.14
Advertising considerations	370	33.2	2.94	1.13
Competing news organizations	382	31.4	2.98	1.09
Friends, acquaintances and family	384	30.5	2.84	1.17
Religious considerations	322	25.2	2.58	1.28
Censorship	378	24.9	2.63	1.23
Colleagues in other media	382	20.9	2.59	1.08
Politicians	358	12.8	2.04	1.16
Military, police and state security	320	12.8	1.95	1.19
Government officials	358	11.7	2.01	1.10
Pressure groups	357	10.4	1.90	1.09
Business people	360	10.0	1.95	1.06

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. Hungarian journalists felt little influenced by sources from within the political and civic realm: public relations, religion, censorship, politicians, the military, police and state security, the government, pressure groups, and business people. They also reported only minor influence from friends, acquaintances and family as well as from colleagues in other media. Economic influences – stemming from owners and managers, market competition and profit expectations as well as advertising – seem to have some relevance in Hungarian newsrooms.

Journalism in Transition

Journalism is currently in a state of change. According to Hungarian journalists, the importance of technical skills and the use of search engines had most profoundly changed over the last five years (see Table 5). Overall, the journalists’ responses point to a substantive deterioration of working conditions in the profession. A large majority of respondents reported an increase in their average working hours. Furthermore, the interviewed journalists felt that their professional freedom and the time available for researching stories had dropped. Another major concern for Hungarian journalists was the decrease in journalism’s public credibility.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has “increased”	Percentage saying has “decreased”
The use of search engines	151	86.8	2.6
Technical skills	150	82.7	4.0
Average working hours of journalists	144	81.3	4.2
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	145	53.8	16.6
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	138	38.4	23.9
Journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions	145	31.7	35.2
Having a university degree	142	31.0	26.8
The relevance of journalism for society	148	28.4	46.6
The credibility of journalism	149	22.1	54.4
Time available for researching stories	146	21.2	57.5

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Hungary. 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	148	93.2	1.4
User-generated contents, such as blogs	149	89.3	2.7
Profit making pressures	147	89.1	.7
Advertising considerations	143	83.9	4.2
Competition	147	82.3	7.5
Pressure toward sensational news	150	79.3	2.0
Audience involvement in news production	146	78.8	3.4
Audience feedback	150	73.3	6.0
Public relations	142	64.1	7.0
Audience research	140	63.6	8.6
Western ways of practicing journalism	124	53.2	14.5
Journalism education	134	41.0	32.1
Ethical standards	148	26.4	53.4

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

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. Here, it was especially the influence of social media and user-generated contents that had strengthened the most during the past five years. A majority of German journalists reported an increase for market-related influences – such as profit making pressures, advertising considerations, competition, and a pressure toward sensational news – as well as for audience involvement in news production and audience feedback. 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.

Journalistic Trust

When it comes to trust in public institutions, Hungarian journalists turned out to have most faith in the military, religious leaders, their own institution (the news media), and the judiciary (see Table 7). Still, major political institutions – such as the parliament, trade unions, and the government – were still found trustworthy by Hungarian journalists, although respondents did not hold them in particularly high esteem. The interviewed journalists had relatively little confidence in politicians in general and political parties. Overall, there wasn't total agreement among the respondents over the question of institutional trust, as relatively high standard deviation values indicate. Disagreement was most pronounced for religious leaders and the government.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The military	272	30.1	2.91	1.13
Religious leaders	267	24.0	2.60	1.20
The news media	274	23.7	2.80	.98
The judiciary/the courts	274	23.4	2.73	1.10
The police	275	21.5	2.68	1.08
Trade unions	264	18.6	2.52	1.09
The parliament	273	15.0	2.29	1.14
The government	266	13.2	2.07	1.16
Politicians in general	271	9.2	2.06	1.04
Political parties	270	7.0	2.04	1.03

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>	8,000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	simple random sampling, simple systematic sampling & convenience sample for newsrooms and convenience sample for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	389 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face, telephone, mail/e-mail and online
<i>Response rate:</i>	42.19%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	05/2014-05/2015