



Country Report

Journalists in Chile

Claudia Mellado, Pontificia *Universidad Católica de Valparaíso*,
Lydia Frost & Thomas Hanitzsch, *LMU Munich*

12 February, 2017

Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Chile is male, in his mid-thirties and holds a university degree in journalism or communication. Of the 491 interviewed journalists, 212 were women, making for a proportion of 43.2 percent of the overall sample. On average, Chilean journalists were 32.99 years old ($s=8.48$), and half of the journalists were younger than 30 years. Journalists tend to be well educated: 74.9 percent held a Bachelor's degree and 21.1 percent held a Master's degree. Another 0.4 percent of the journalists had obtained a doctoral degree, and 2.9 percent had undertaken some university studies but did not complete their studies. Across the whole sample of Chilean journalists, 86.5 percent had specialized in journalism and/or communication.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Chile held a full-time position (80.4%), whereas 10.0 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 9.6 percent worked as freelance journalists.

Chilean journalists are not very experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 8.46 years ($s=7.53$), and about half of them had less than five years of professional experience. Most journalists worked on various topics and subjects (59.4%). The remaining 40.6 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on a specific desk, such as politics, local news, or sports. On the whole, Chilean journalists worked for 1.38 newsrooms ($s=.95$); 28.5 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. A minority of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (23.7%).

About half of Chilean journalists in the sample worked for print media: 35.2 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 0.4 percent to weekly newspapers, and 13.8 percent to magazines. Another 25.9 percent of the journalists worked for private or public service television, and 14.5 for private or public radio. Few journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies (2.2%), for online newsrooms of traditional media (1.8%), and for stand-alone online news sites (6.1%).

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, Chilean journalists found it most important to report things as they are 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. Likewise, there was a strong consensus among the respondents over the little importance of acting as an adversary of the government and conveying a positive image of political leadership.

Still, a majority of journalists in Chile found it important to educate the audience, to promote tolerance and cultural diversity, to let people express their views, to influence public opinion, to monitor and scrutinize political leaders, to tell stories about the world, to provide information people need to make political decisions, to monitor and scrutinize business, and to advocate for social change.

Only a minority of respondents supported roles like providing entertainment and relaxation, motivating people to participate in political activity, supporting government policy, being an adversary of the government, 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	476	88.2	4.51	.90
Provide analysis of current affairs	472	85.0	4.40	.97
Educate the audience	461	71.8	4.04	1.18
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	452	71.7	4.01	1.24
Let people express their views	455	70.1	3.96	1.26
Influence public opinion	466	69.1	3.93	1.17
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	446	66.4	3.87	1.27
Tell stories about the world	456	65.6	3.83	1.31
Provide information people need to make political decisions	447	62.4	3.68	1.40
Monitor and scrutinize business	452	61.1	3.72	1.30
Advocate for social change	458	61.1	3.80	1.27
Support national development	455	60.0	3.70	1.28
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	466	57.7	3.59	1.35
Be a detached observer	458	54.4	3.52	1.32
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	456	52.2	3.44	1.31
Set the political agenda	440	50.5	3.36	1.43
Provide entertainment and relaxation	459	48.1	3.30	1.39
Motivate people to participate in political activity	436	36.2	2.92	1.40
Support government policy	446	24.7	2.57	1.33
Be an adversary of the government	436	13.5	2.05	1.22
Convey a positive image of political leadership	440	12.3	2.01	1.17

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

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

The picture was mixed with regard to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques. A large majority of journalists in Chile found the use of confidential business or government documents without authorization as well as the use of hidden microphones or cameras justifiable at least on occasion (see Table 3). Still, most journalists thought it was acceptable to claim to be somebody else, to get employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information, to use re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get to a story, to make use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures)

without permission, and to pay people for confidential information. Only a minority of journalists found it permissible to publish stories with unverified content, to alter or fabricate quotes from sources, and to alter photographs. The practice of “brown envelope journalism” – that is, journalists taking money from sources, presumably in return for positive coverage – was also supported by only a minority of Chilean journalists.

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	480	86.5	4.49	.94
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	477	37.1	2.73	1.52
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	471	25.3	2.41	1.44
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	476	21.2	2.34	1.34

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 confidential business or government documents without authorization	471	14.0	57.1
Using hidden microphones or cameras	470	11.1	53.6
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	469	11.1	35.0
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	468	9.8	35.9
Publishing stories with unverified content	474	9.1	3.8
Accepting money from sources	473	8.9	1.3
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	474	8.9	5.9
Altering photographs	473	8.9	3.2
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	468	8.8	34.2
Claiming to be somebody else	469	7.5	41.2
Paying people for confidential information	465	6.0	29.9
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	468	4.3	32.3

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 Chile reported a relatively high degree of professional autonomy. More than three out of five (63.6%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 66.2 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 even higher. Still, a slight majority of journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often” (50.8%).

News production is influenced by a variety of factors. Among the potential sources of influences mentioned in the interview, “journalism ethics” fared on top of the list among Chilean respondents (see Table 4). A majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by time limits, by editorial supervisors and higher editors,

by information access (or lack thereof), and by editorial policy. Also, more than half of the respondents admitted their work was influenced by their personal values and beliefs.

Overall, internal factors were found to be more influential than external constraints. Chilean journalists felt little influenced by sources from within the political and civic realm: the government, politicians, censorship, religion, the military, police and state security, pressure groups, business people, and public relations. They also reported only minor influence from friends, acquaintances and family as well as from colleagues in other media. Likewise, economic influences – stemming from owners and managers, market competition and profit expectations as well as advertising – seem to have little relevance in Chilean newsrooms.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	451	83.1	4.33	.92
Time limits	451	64.5	3.79	1.11
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	455	63.7	3.79	1.03
Information access	455	63.7	3.72	1.23
Editorial policy	451	60.8	3.72	1.10
Your personal values and beliefs	453	55.8	3.58	1.27
Availability of news-gathering resources	442	48.6	3.36	1.28
Feedback from the audience	455	47.7	3.36	1.20
Managers of the news organization	451	45.9	3.37	1.26
Relationships with news sources	445	44.7	3.19	1.36
Owners of the news organization	445	40.9	3.16	1.35
Competing news organizations	454	40.1	3.08	1.22
Media laws and regulation	447	34.2	2.90	1.24
Audience research and data	443	34.1	2.89	1.33
Your peers on the staff	454	33.0	2.97	1.18
Profit expectations	445	30.1	2.66	1.37
Advertising considerations	445	27.4	2.58	1.34
Censorship	450	26.9	2.56	1.35
Public relations	439	25.7	2.60	1.32
Business people	443	18.5	2.26	1.25
Colleagues in other media	455	17.6	2.35	1.14
Pressure groups	445	17.1	2.17	1.26
Government officials	448	15.8	2.14	1.20
Friends, acquaintances and family	453	15.7	2.19	1.18
Politicians	444	15.3	2.12	1.19
Religious considerations	448	12.9	2.04	1.19
Military, police and state security	443	9.7	1.92	1.07

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 a state of change. According to Chilean journalists, the use of search engines and the importance of technical skills 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.

Influences on journalism and news production have changed as well. With the exception of ethical standards, advertising considerations, and journalism education, influences on journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6. Here, it was especially the influence of social media, audience feedback, audience involvement in news production, user-generated contents (such as blogs), and competition that had strengthened the most during the past five years. A majority of Chilean journalists reported an increase for market-related influences – such as profit making pressures, audience research, and a pressure toward sensational news. Journalism education was 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	215	89.3	2.3
Average working hours of journalists	214	65.4	9.8
Technical skills	213	61.5	15.5
Having a university degree	212	54.2	16.5
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	216	50.9	24.1
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	212	50.5	21.2
The relevance of journalism for society	213	43.7	25.8
The credibility of journalism	214	34.1	33.2
Journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions	212	27.4	30.7
Time available for researching stories	214	13.1	60.3

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Chile. 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	208	79.8	4.8
Audience feedback	209	67.9	8.1
Audience involvement in news production	206	62.6	13.1
User-generated contents, such as blogs	209	61.7	14.4
Competition	206	53.9	17.0
Audience research	207	44.0	26.1
Profit making pressures	204	39.2	31.9
Pressure toward sensational news	205	38.0	37.6
Public relations	207	37.2	30.9
Western ways of practicing journalism	187	36.9	17.6
Ethical standards	210	33.8	38.1
Advertising considerations	207	32.4	33.8
Journalism education	207	29.0	43.5

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in Chile. 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 comes to trust in public institutions, Chilean journalists turned out to have reasonable faith in the news media, and the police (see Table 7). Still, institutions like trade unions, the military, the judiciary/the courts, and the government were still found trustworthy by Chilean journalists, although respondents did not hold them in particularly high esteem. Remarkably, Chilean journalists seem to have more trust in the military than in politicians, political parties and religious leaders. The interviewed journalists had relatively little confidence in these three institutions. Overall, there was a fairly high agreement among the respondents over the question of institutional trust, as low standard deviation values indicate. Disagreement was most pronounced for the military.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The news media	458	45.0	3.24	1.00
The police	457	27.8	2.91	1.03
Trade unions	453	19.9	2.73	1.01
The military	456	17.5	2.48	1.10
The judiciary/the courts	455	16.5	2.57	.99
The government	457	14.0	2.54	.97
The parliament	457	9.0	2.31	.94
Religious leaders	453	7.5	1.99	.98
Political parties	456	3.1	1.89	.87
Politicians in general	457	3.1	1.96	.86

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>	5,000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	stratified proportionally random sampling for newsrooms and stratified sampling for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	491 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face, telephone and online
<i>Response rate:</i>	45.05%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	05/2014-01/2015