

Country Report

Journalists in Russia

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Russia is female, in her mid-thirties and holds a university degree in journalism or communication. Of the 390 interviewed journalists, 252 were women, making for a proportion of 64.6 percent of the overall sample. On average, Russian journalists were 32.11 years old ($s=11.70$); half of the journalists were younger than 28 years. Journalists tend to be well educated: 57.2 percent of the respondents held a degree from a graduate program and 15.9 percent held a Bachelor's degree. Another 9.2 percent of the journalists had obtained a doctoral degree, and 15.9 percent had undertaken some university studies but did not complete their studies. Across the whole sample of Russian journalists, 78.7 percent had specialized in journalism and/or communication.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Russia held a full-time position (77.2%), whereas 14.9 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 7.9 percent worked as freelance journalists. Of those with full or part-time employment, 83.0 percent said they held permanent positions, and 17.0 percent worked on a temporary contract.

Russian journalists are not very experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 11.38 years ($s=9.82$), and about half of them had more than eight years of professional experience. Most journalists worked on various topics and subjects (56.9%). The remaining 43.1 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on a specific desk such as politics, local news, or sports. On the whole, Russian journalists worked for 1.61 newsrooms ($s=2.45$); 34.4 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. Only a minority of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (20.1%).

Across the whole sample, 14.7 percent of the interviewees were true multimedia journalists, as they indicated to work for various media types simultaneously. The majority of Russian journalists in the sample worked for print media: 19.8 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 12.3 percent to weekly newspapers, and 13.4 percent to magazines. Another 26.2 percent of the journalists worked for television stations, and 10.5 for radio channels. A significant number of journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies (12.3%), for online newsrooms of traditional media (11.6%), and for stand-alone online news sites (13.4%).

Journalistic Roles

With regard to professional role orientations, Russian journalists found it most important to report things as they are and to educate the audience (see Table 1). The relevance of these 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 supporting government policy and conveying a positive image of political leadership.

Still, a majority of journalists in Russia found it important to provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life, to advocate for social change, to provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, to provide analysis of current affairs, to tell stories about the world, to be a detached observer, to let people express their views, to promote tolerance and cultural diversity, and to support national development. Politically more assertive roles, on the other hand, were supported by only a minority of respondents. Following traits belong to these roles: influencing public opinion, setting the political agenda, and acting as adversary of the government.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	390	78.7	4.22	.82
Educate the audience	390	75.4	4.11	.92
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	390	66.4	3.84	1.16
Advocate for social change	390	66.2	3.87	1.05
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	390	66.2	3.94	1.05
Provide analysis of current affairs	390	63.3	3.83	1.01
Tell stories about the world	390	61.8	3.83	1.04
Be a detached observer	390	61.3	3.81	.94
Let people express their views	390	59.2	3.73	1.13
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	390	58.2	3.76	1.08
Support national development	389	51.9	3.59	1.21
Influence public opinion	390	45.4	3.42	1.11
Provide information people need to make political decisions	390	42.3	3.18	1.27
Motivate people to participate in political activity	390	39.2	3.10	1.16
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	390	28.5	2.96	1.09
Provide entertainment and relaxation	390	24.9	2.74	1.20
Monitor and scrutinize business	390	23.8	2.83	1.11
Set the political agenda	390	18.2	2.43	1.14
Be an adversary of the government	390	17.2	2.34	1.19
Support government policy	390	11.3	2.03	1.06
Convey a positive image of political leadership	390	10.3	2.01	1.05

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

Russian 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, seven out of ten journalists disagreed with the view 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, more than half of the 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 Russia found it justifiable at least on occasion to get employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information, to use hidden microphones or cameras, to claim to be somebody else, to pay people for confidential information, and to use confidential business or government documents without authorization (see Table 3). Still, journalists thought it was acceptable to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story, to accept money

from sources, to use re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, to publish stories with unverified content, and to make use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without permission. Only a minority of journalists found it permissible to alter or fabricate quotes from sources 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	390	72.3	3.95	1.10
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	390	57.2	3.49	1.39
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	390	33.6	2.72	1.43
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	390	30.5	2.67	1.35

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"
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	390	21.0	56.2
Using hidden microphones or cameras	390	16.4	70.0
Claiming to be somebody else	390	14.6	52.6
Paying people for confidential information	390	13.6	55.1
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	390	11.8	53.6
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	390	11.3	33.8
Accepting money from sources	390	10.3	16.4
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	390	10.0	23.1
Publishing stories with unverified content	390	10.0	17.7
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	390	9.7	8.7
Altering photographs	390	9.5	11.8
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	390	7.4	38.5

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 Russia reported some degree of professional autonomy. Three out of five respondents (62.1%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 67.2 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, less than half of the journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) "always" or "very often" (41.3%).

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 Russian respondents (see Table 4). A majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by managers of the news organization, by editorial supervisors and higher editors, by information access (or lack thereof), and by owners of the news organization.

Overall, internal factors were found to be more influential than external constraints. Russian 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.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Your personal values and beliefs	385	67.0	3.90	1.04
Managers of the news organization	373	61.1	3.69	1.03
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	374	56.1	3.59	1.06
Information access	390	55.6	3.64	1.00
Owners of the news organization	385	53.2	3.52	1.24
Editorial policy	388	47.4	3.31	1.26
Feedback from the audience	390	46.2	3.43	1.05
Media laws and regulation	390	42.1	3.36	1.09
Relationships with news sources	390	40.3	3.22	1.12
Journalism ethics	387	40.1	3.17	1.27
Audience research and data	377	37.9	3.07	1.17
Availability of news-gathering resources	384	37.0	2.99	1.30
Time limits	383	35.2	2.99	1.24
Competing news organizations	390	34.4	3.02	1.14
Your peers on the staff	384	32.6	2.93	1.17
Profit expectations	377	26.8	2.55	1.32
Friends, acquaintances and family	390	23.1	2.50	1.21
Advertising considerations	378	21.2	2.40	1.30
Public relations	390	20.3	2.58	1.10
Censorship	390	20.0	2.47	1.18
Government officials	390	18.2	2.34	1.17
Religious considerations	376	14.1	2.25	1.16
Politicians	390	13.3	2.24	1.16
Military, police and state security	390	13.3	2.12	1.13
Colleagues in other media	390	12.6	2.26	1.01
Business people	390	12.3	2.19	1.04
Pressure groups	390	10.5	2.22	1.00

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 Russian 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. Almost half of the respondents reported an increase in their average working hours. Furthermore, half of the interviewed journalists felt that their professional freedom and the time available for researching stories had dropped. Another major concern for Russian journalists was the decrease in journalism’s public credibility.

Influences on journalism and news production have changed as well. With the exception of ethical standards, western ways of practicing journalism and journalism education, influences on journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6. Here, it was especially the influence of social media and audience feedback that had strengthened the most during the past five years. A majority of Russian journalists reported an increase for market-related influences – such as advertising considerations, profit making pressures, competition, a pressure toward sensational

news, and public relations – as well as for audience involvement in news production, user-generated contents (such as blogs) and audience research. 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	285	90.2	2.1
Technical skills	285	81.4	4.2
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	285	58.9	14.7
Average working hours of journalists	285	47.7	12.6
The relevance of journalism for society	285	32.6	34.0
Having a university degree	285	17.2	48.1
The credibility of journalism	285	17.2	52.6
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	285	16.1	51.9
Journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions	285	13.3	47.4
Time available for researching stories	284	12.7	51.4

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Russia. 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	285	80.7	6.7
Audience feedback	285	73.3	7.4
Advertising considerations	285	71.9	5.6
Audience involvement in news production	285	71.6	7.7
User-generated contents, such as blogs	285	70.5	8.4
Profit making pressures	285	66.7	7.0
Competition	285	59.6	15.1
Pressure toward sensational news	285	58.6	10.2
Audience research	285	53.7	15.8
Public relations	285	52.6	15.8
Ethical standards	285	24.9	47.4
Western ways of practicing journalism	285	21.8	44.2
Journalism education	285	14.7	56.5

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in Russia. 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, Russian journalists turned out to have reasonable faith in their own institution – the news media (see Table 7). Still, institutions such as the military, the government, the judicial system, trade unions, religious leaders, and the police were found trustworthy by Russian journalists, although respondents did not hold them in particularly high esteem. Remarkably, Russian journalists seem to have more trust in the military than in politicians, the parliament and political parties. The interviewed journalists had relatively little confidence in those 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 government and religious leaders.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The news media	390	28.7	3.09	.80
The military	390	19.2	2.62	.99
The government	390	18.2	2.58	1.03
The judiciary/the courts	390	14.9	2.47	.97
Trade unions	390	12.8	2.41	.95
Religious leaders	390	12.8	2.22	1.03
The police	390	12.6	2.47	.91
Political parties	390	9.7	2.21	.97
The parliament	390	9.0	2.31	.95
Politicians in general	390	8.7	2.24	.91

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>	200,000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	purposive quota sampling & convenience sample for newsrooms and based on quota & convenience sample for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	390 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	telephone, face-to-face, mail/e-mail and online
<i>Response rate:</i>	41.0%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	02/2014-10/2015