



Country Report

Journalists in Germany

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Germany is male, in his mid-forties and holds a university degree in a field different from journalism or communication. Of the 775 interviewed journalists, 310 were women, making for a proportion of 40.1 percent of the overall sample. On average, German journalists were 45.58 years old ($s=10.50$); half of the journalists were younger than 46 years. Journalists tend to be well educated: 64.4 percent of the respondents held a degree from a graduate program and 7.0 percent held a Bachelor's degree. Another 3.9 percent of the journalists had obtained a doctoral degree, and 8.2 percent had undertaken some university studies but did not complete their studies. Of those respondents who held a university degree, a slight majority (56.2%) had not specialized in communication or journalism. Across the whole sample of German journalists, 16.4 percent had specialized in journalism, 12.6 percent had studied in another communication field, and 6.1 percent had specialized in both journalism and another communication field.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Germany held a full-time position (74.5%), whereas 7.9 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 17.7 percent worked as freelance journalist. Of those with full or part-time employment, 92.7 percent said they held permanent positions, and 7.3 percent worked on a temporary contract.

German journalists are fairly experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 19.52 years ($s=10.33$), and about half of them had more than 20 years of professional experience. Most journalists worked on a specific desk (59.9%), such as politics, local news, or sports. The remaining 40.1 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on various topics and subjects. On the whole, German journalists worked for 1.70 newsrooms ($s=1.45$); 17.2 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. A slight majority of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (53.4%).

Across the whole sample, 25.3 percent of the interviewees were true multimedia journalists, as they indicated to work for various media types simultaneously. The majority of German journalists in the sample worked for print media: 26.1 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 6.6 percent to weekly newspapers, and 14.3 percent to magazines. Another 7.2 percent of the journalists worked for private or public service television, and 11.0 for private or public radio. Few journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies (3.5%), for online newsrooms of traditional media (4.3%), and for stand-alone online news sites (1.8%).

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, German journalists found it most important to report things as they are, to provide analysis of current affairs, to be a detached observer, and provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience (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 supporting government policy and conveying a positive image of political leadership.

Still, a majority of journalists in Germany found it important to promote tolerance and cultural diversity, to provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life, to educate the audience, to tell stories about the world, to provide information people need to make political decisions, and to provide entertainment and relaxation. Politically more assertive roles, on the other hand, were supported by only a minority of respondents. Following traits belong to these roles: setting the political agenda, supporting national development, acting as adversary of the government, influencing public opinion, and advocating for social change.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	765	90.7	4.59	.73
Provide analysis of current affairs	768	83.5	4.31	.96
Be a detached observer	771	82.5	4.27	.95
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	766	73.5	4.00	.95
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	765	66.7	3.80	1.21
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	767	66.1	3.82	1.06
Educate the audience	762	57.4	3.60	1.10
Tell stories about the world	759	57.3	3.56	1.18
Provide information people need to make political decisions	760	56.2	3.36	1.45
Provide entertainment and relaxation	768	51.4	3.51	1.09
Motivate people to participate in political activity	761	44.9	3.10	1.42
Let people express their views	764	46.9	3.27	1.24
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	746	36.3	2.79	1.46
Monitor and scrutinize business	748	34.2	2.80	1.39
Advocate for social change	745	29.5	2.77	1.21
Influence public opinion	752	22.7	2.68	1.13
Be an adversary of the government	739	19.9	2.27	1.30
Support national development	738	13.3	2.14	1.15
Set the political agenda	744	9.8	2.10	1.06
Convey a positive image of political leadership	741	.6	1.25	.57
Support government policy	741	.4	1.27	.79

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

German journalists generally demonstrated a strong commitment to professional standards of ethics. The respondents almost unanimously agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Furthermore, nine 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, slightly less than half of the interviewees subscribed to the idea that journalists’ ethical decisions depend on the specific situation.

The picture was mixed with regards to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques. A large majority of journalists in Germany found the use of confidential business or government documents without authorization 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 re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, to pay people for confidential information, and to use hidden microphones or cameras. Only a minority of journalists found it permissible to make use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without permission and to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story. The practice of “brown envelope journalism” – that is, journalists taking money from sources, presumably in return for positive coverage – was almost unanimously condemned by German 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	767	93.9	4.60	.64
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	759	46.4	3.15	1.32
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	759	10.8	2.08	1.05
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	757	10.4	2.03	1.04

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	732	22.1	55.5
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	747	13.4	60.4
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	701	18.5	47.5
Paying people for confidential information	740	6.1	50.0
Using hidden microphones or cameras	747	6.2	48.7
Claiming to be somebody else	753	6.2	43.7
Publishing stories with unverified content	752	3.7	33.8
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	749	.7	18.3
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	753	.5	16.2
Accepting money from sources	759	.3	3.8

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 Germany reported a fairly high degree of professional autonomy. Three out of four respondents (74.0%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 81.9 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 majority of journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often” (53.7%).

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 German respondents (see Table 4). A majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by information access (or lack thereof), by time limits, and by the availability (or non-availability) of news-gathering resources. 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. German 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 German newsrooms.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	750	77.2	4.05	.91
Information access	745	62.9	3.75	.98
Time limits	759	61.0	3.68	.99
Your personal values and beliefs	752	60.3	3.72	.97
Availability of news-gathering resources	746	56.2	3.55	.97
Editorial policy	724	47.2	3.34	1.13
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	736	40.8	3.27	.97
Relationships with news sources	744	38.2	3.06	1.11
Media laws and regulation	730	34.1	2.96	1.20
Feedback from the audience	755	29.9	3.04	.92
Your peers on the staff	747	29.7	3.03	.94
Audience research and data	738	29.0	2.89	1.09
Profit expectations	709	21.4	2.43	1.27
Managers of the news organization	733	20.6	2.49	1.17
Advertising considerations	707	20.1	2.35	1.26
Competing news organizations	756	19.1	2.69	.98
Owners of the news organization	663	15.2	2.14	1.21
Public relations	755	12.5	2.29	1.04
Colleagues in other media	756	7.8	2.20	.94
Business people	752	6.0	1.78	.94
Pressure groups	751	5.7	1.86	.93
Friends, acquaintances and family	756	5.1	2.01	.92
Military, police and state security	743	4.7	1.58	.90
Religious considerations	709	4.4	1.52	.88
Censorship	744	2.8	1.38	.76
Politicians	745	1.4	1.41	.70
Government officials	744	1.1	1.24	.58

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 German journalists, the importance of technical skills and the use of search engine 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, most interviewed journalists felt that their professional freedom and

the time available for researching stories had dropped. Another major concern for German 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 and journalism education, influences on journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6. Here, it was especially the influence of social media, user-generated contents, and competition 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, audience research, and a pressure toward sensational news – as well as for 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.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has “increased”	Percentage saying has “decreased”
Technical skills	684	93.2	.7
The use of search engines	685	90.8	.0
Average working hours of journalists	676	74.0	1.9
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	674	64.7	10.5
Having a university degree	649	38.3	15.5
The relevance of journalism for society	675	29.8	36.6
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	636	21.4	23.2
Journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions	667	12.7	37.6
The credibility of journalism	673	9.5	64.3
Time available for researching stories	680	6.2	77.7

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Germany. 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, such as Facebook and Twitter	683	94.7	.5
Competition	683	90.3	1.9
User-generated contents, such as blogs	671	85.2	2.9
Profit making pressures	651	71.1	3.9
Advertising considerations	645	66.3	5.7
Audience feedback	675	63.7	5.4
Audience research	653	59.9	7.2
Pressure toward sensational news	668	59.6	5.8
Public relations	658	57.5	5.8
Audience involvement in news production	660	56.2	7.1
Journalism education	606	31.8	30.2
Ethical standards	658	14.5	47.1

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in [“Germany”]. 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, German journalists turned out to have reasonable faith in three institutions: the judicial system, the police, and their own institution – the news media (see Table 7). Still, major political institutions – such as the parliament, trade unions, and the government – were still found trustworthy by German journalists, although respondents did not hold them in

particularly high esteem. Remarkably, German journalists seem to have more trust in the the military than in politicians, political parties and religious leaders. The interviewed journalists had relatively little confidence in the former two 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 religious leaders and the military.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The judiciary/the courts	733	62.0	3.60	.81
The news media	742	58.7	3.57	.70
The police	735	56.9	3.54	.78
The parliament ["Bundestag"]	727	38.6	3.26	.84
Trade unions	735	31.0	3.06	.87
The government ["Bundesregierung"]	730	29.1	3.06	.84
The military	698	22.9	2.84	.93
Religious leaders	715	11.6	2.30	.99
Political parties	730	9.3	2.56	.78
Politicians in general	730	7.3	2.63	.73

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>	estimated: 41,250 working journalists
<i>Sampling method:</i>	stratified random sampling for newsrooms and systematic sampling for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	775 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	mixed mode: telephone interviews and online-survey
<i>Response rate:</i>	34.9% (combined)
<i>Period of field research:</i>	November 2014 – August 2015

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