

Country Report

Journalists in the Netherlands

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in the Netherlands is male, in his mid-forties and holds an (applied) university degree in the field of journalism or communication. Of the 522 interviewed journalists, 205 were women, making for a proportion of 39.3 percent of the overall sample. On average, Dutch journalists were 46.76 years old ($s=11.06$); half of the journalists were younger than 48 years. Journalists tend to be well educated: 47.1 percent of the respondents held a Bachelor's degree and 33.5 percent held a Master's degree. Only a few of the journalists had obtained a doctoral degree (1.1%), and 6.9 percent had undertaken some university studies but did not complete their study. Of those respondents who held a university degree (Master's degree), a slight majority had specialized (51.4%) in journalism or communication. For the journalists who held an applied university degree (Bachelor) this was much higher: 76 percent. Across the whole sample of Dutch journalists, 43.5 percent had specialized in journalism, 8.2 percent had a degree in another communication field, and 13.4 percent had a specialized study in both journalism and another communication field, the others (35%) did not follow a specialized education.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The small minority of journalists interviewed in the Netherlands held a full-time position (41.7%), whereas 16.9 percent of the respondents indicated that they had a part-time employment. In the Netherlands there was quite a large group, 36.9 percent, who worked as a freelance journalist. Of those with full or part-time employment, 91.1 percent said they held a permanent position, and 8.9 percent worked on a temporary contract.

Dutch journalists are fairly experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 18.73 years ($s=10.46$), and about half of them had more than 18 years of professional experience. Most journalists worked on a specific desk (60.9%), such as economy, local news, or lifestyle. The remaining 39.1 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on various topics and subjects. Dutch journalists working as freelancers worked on average for 3.5 newsrooms ($s=2.35$). For the whole sample, 32.7 percent of the journalists had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. Only one third of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (34.5%).

The majority of Dutch journalists in the sample worked for print media: 24.3 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 13.4 percent to weekly newspapers, and 45.2 percent to magazines. Another 7.3 percent of the journalists worked for private or public service television, and 6.3 percent for private or public radio. Almost half of the journalists (47.5%) worked for an online outlet: 29.3 percent of the journalists worked for stand-alone online news sites and 18.2 percent for the online newsroom of a traditional media.

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, in their work Dutch journalists perceived as the most important role “to report things as they are” by far. Other more ‘classic’ roles in the highest ranking are: “provide analysis of current affairs” and “being a detached observer” (see Table 1). Besides the more ‘classic’ roles, a large majority of the journalists also indicated that roles such as “tell stories about the world” are important in their work. Dutch journalists found it also important to involve citizens in their work, as 72.1 percent indicated it is important to “provide advice orientation and direction for daily live”; almost 60 percent indicated that “letting people express their views” is important, and 40.0 percent find it important to “educate the audience”. Economic pressure seems also high in journalists’ work showed by the more commercial role that came up quite high, 45.9 percent perceived it important in their current work to “provide entertainment and relaxation”. Politically more assertive roles showed mixed results, as on the one hand almost half of the respondents indicated that “being an adversary of the government” is important in their work, on the other hand there was a relative strong consensus among the respondents that “supporting government policy” and “conveying a positive image of political leadership” is not important at all. In between, around one fifth of the respondents thought it is important to “monitor and scrutinize political leaders”, “to facilitate the audience to participate in politics”, “to be an advocate for social change” and “to set the political agenda”. Table 1 shows that beside the top and bottom ranking of the roles the relevance of the roles was not undisputed as the relative high standard deviations indicate.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	518	92.9	4.52	.68
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	516	72.1	3.91	.95
Tell stories about the world	519	69.4	3.88	1.05
Be a detached observer	513	64.9	3.76	.98
Provide analysis of current affairs	517	64.8	3.81	1.05
Let people express their views	518	59.8	3.63	1.03
Be an adversary of the government	513	46.2	3.26	1.25
Provide entertainment and relaxation	516	45.9	3.34	1.12
Educate the audience	512	40.0	3.21	1.08
Provide information people need to make political decisions	508	33.7	2.82	1.22
Monitor and scrutinize business	513	30.0	2.86	1.24
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	516	29.3	2.85	1.15
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	508	28.1	2.72	1.32
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	495	27.7	2.77	1.14
Influence public opinion	505	23.4	2.70	1.09
Advocate for social change	494	23.1	2.66	1.08
Motivate people to participate in political activity	509	22.0	2.61	1.09
Set the political agenda	504	16.9	2.41	1.10
Support national development	499	10.6	2.16	1.01
Support government policy	502	2.0	1.62	.72
Convey a positive image of political leadership	497	1.0	1.54	.64

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

Dutch journalists in general demonstrated a rather mixed pattern in relation to the commitment to professional standards of ethics. Although a very large majority of the respondents agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of

professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Results showed also that journalists indicated this is not unconditionally. Quite a large majority agreed to the idea that journalists' ethical decisions depend on the specific situation. And slightly half of the respondents agreed that in extraordinary circumstances it is acceptable to set moral standards aside, and 45.8 percent agreed that what is ethical is a matter of personal judgment. The ideas about ethical principles, especially for the latter three items, were not undisputed as the high standard deviations indicate (Table 2).

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	512	88.7	4.30	.91
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	515	68.5	3.61	1.30
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	503	49.7	3.14	1.33
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	515	45.8	2.99	1.32

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	506	14.2	73.7
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	507	12.0	72.4
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	495	7.9	49.1
Using hidden microphones or cameras	508	4.5	79.7
Paying people for confidential information	492	2.6	40.2
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	495	2.0	44.2
Claiming to be somebody else	504	1.6	52.4
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	485	1.4	39.4
Altering photographs	510	1.4	26.9
Publishing stories with unverified content	506	.4	17.0
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	509	.4	11.4
Accepting money from sources	511	.4	4.3

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?

The mixed pattern was also shown with regards to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques (see Table 3). A large majority of the journalists in the Netherlands thought that using undercover research to gain inside information, using confidential business or government documents without authorization, as well as using hidden microphones or cameras, is justifiable at least on occasion (see Table 3). Furthermore, a majority of the respondents thought it was acceptable to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story, and almost half of them think that paying people for confidential information, making use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without permission, claiming to be somebody, and using re-creations or dramatizations of news by

actors, are justified on occasion. Only around one fifth of journalists found it permissible to manipulate content such as alter photographs, fabricating quotes from sources, or publishing stories with unverified content. The situation in which journalists take money from sources was almost unanimously condemned by Dutch journalists.

Professional Autonomy and Influences

Journalists in the Netherlands reported a high degree of professional autonomy, with a total of 90.8 percent saying that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories and a total of 91.6 percent who had complete or a great deal of freedom to decide over what aspects to emphasize in a news story. Still, a majority of journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) very often or always (64.6%).

News production is influenced by a variety of factors. Among the potential sources of influences mentioned, “time limits” fared on top of the list among Dutch respondents (see Table 4). About one out of five respondents found their work substantively influenced by information access (or lack thereof), by time limits, and by the availability (or non-availability) of news-gathering resources. Furthermore, almost half of the journalists thought their work was influenced by journalism ethics and also they indicated their work was influenced by their personal values and beliefs. The audience seems to have relative less influence on the work of the journalists, only about a quarter to a fifth of the journalists thought feedback of the audience as well as audience research was extremely or very influential.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Time limits	507	54.2	3.53	.93
Journalism ethics	498	49.6	3.31	1.06
Availability of news-gathering resources	489	48.7	3.40	.94
Editorial policy	479	45.1	3.31	.95
Your personal values and beliefs	509	42.6	3.38	.95
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	446	37.7	3.19	.95
Feedback from the audience	517	26.9	3.03	.87
Relationships with news sources	517	25.7	2.78	1.10
Your peers on the staff	467	24.8	2.97	.85
Audience research and data	444	20.7	2.71	1.04
Information access	504	19.4	2.69	1.03
Profit expectations	447	15.7	2.23	1.17
Managers of the news organization	414	15.2	2.46	1.03
Advertising considerations	490	13.9	2.31	1.14
Public relations	514	12.8	2.39	1.04
Media laws and regulation	500	11.4	2.40	.98
Owners of the news organization	424	10.8	2.17	1.07
Competing news organizations	508	10.4	2.49	.94
Business people	508	7.5	1.98	1.03
Colleagues in other media	516	7.0	2.39	.90
Religious considerations	466	6.7	1.70	1.03
Friends, acquaintances and family	516	4.8	2.21	.93
Government officials	505	4.6	1.74	.94
Politicians	506	4.3	1.78	.95
Pressure groups	510	4.1	2.04	.94
Censorship	506	4.0	1.59	.89
Military, police and state security	503	1.4	1.48	.77

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. Dutch 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, and business people. They also reported only minor influence from friends, acquaintances and family as well as from colleagues in other media. Influence of economic influences – stemming from owners and managers, market competition, public relation, and profit expectations as well as advertising – scored a bit higher but still seemed to have relative little relevance in Dutch newsrooms. The influence of the internal and external constraints was not undisputed shown by the relative high standard deviations (Table 4).

Journalism in Transition

Journalism is currently in a state of change. According to Dutch journalists, the importance of technical skills and the use of search engines had most profoundly changed over the last five years (see Table 5). Also, Dutch journalists experienced that the interaction with the audience has increased substantially. Overall, the journalists’ responses point to a substantive deterioration of working conditions in the profession. A majority of respondents reported an increase in their average working hours. Furthermore, most interviewed journalists felt that their professional freedom to make editorial decisions had dropped and a large majority thought the time available for researching stories decreased. Another important concern the majority of the Dutch journalists had, is the decrease of journalism’s credibility. This is remarkable because credibility is seen as one of the key concepts in journalism.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has “increased”	Percentage saying has “decreased”
The use of search engines	471	92.8	.2
Technical skills	460	84.6	5.7
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	456	70.8	11.2
Average working hours of journalists	437	66.4	10.5
Having a university degree	420	32.4	16.7
The relevance of journalism for society	458	25.5	26.2
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	427	20.1	27.4
Journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions	426	10.3	46.2
The credibility of journalism	453	7.9	55.6
Time available for researching stories	456	2.9	88.6

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

Influences on journalism and news production have changed as well. With the exception of ethical standards and journalism education which half of the respondent thought weakened, 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 Dutch journalists reported an increase for market-related influences – such as profit making pressures, advertising considerations, and a pressure toward sensational news. Also, the relation with the audience is changed, a majority of the journalists experienced that audience feedback, audience involvement in news production and audience research has increased the last five years.

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

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media, such as Facebook or Twitter	469	96.4	.9
User-generated contents, such as blogs	457	89.1	.9
Profit making pressures	442	77.6	.9
Competition	443	77.0	5.4
Audience feedback	452	76.1	3.3
Advertising considerations	443	75.6	2.5
Audience involvement in news production	448	74.6	2.7
Pressure toward sensational news	431	59.6	2.6
Public relations	427	59.0	3.3
Audience research	404	50.7	4.2
Journalism education	342	17.0	44.7
Ethical standards	412	16.5	49.8

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in the Netherlands. 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, it seems that journalists are not truly convinced to trust them. The majority of the Dutch journalist only have faith in one institution, the judicial system (see Table 7). The police and military were runner-up. It is striking that only about one third of the journalists found their own institution 'news media' trustworthy. This is comparable with the trustworthiness of major political institutions such as the parliament and the government. Remarkably, Dutch journalists seem to have more trust in these general political institutions than in politicians and political parties. The interviewed journalists had little confidence in the former two institutions, only about one of ten journalists think they can be trusted. This was also the case with religious leaders. Overall, there was a fairly high agreement among the respondents over the question of institutional trust, as the relative low standard deviations indicate. Disagreement was most pronounced for trust in religious leaders.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The judiciary/the courts	498	59.0	3.49	.84
The police	500	45.2	3.30	.81
The military	487	38.0	3.18	.83
The news media	497	35.4	3.23	.69
The parliament [Tweede kamer]	498	30.3	3.10	.75
The government [Regering]	500	29.6	3.04	.81
Trade unions	487	18.1	2.75	.87
Political parties	500	12.4	2.68	.77
Religious leaders	464	11.9	2.14	1.04
Politicians in general	500	11.8	2.71	.74

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>	15,000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	-
<i>Sample size:</i>	522 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	online
<i>Response rate:</i>	10%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	10/2014-11/2014