Country Report

Journalists in Oman

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Oman is a mid-thirties male who holds a university degree in journalism or communication. Of the 257 interviewed journalists, only 102 were female, making for a proportion of 39.7 percent of the overall sample. On average, journalists in Oman are 37.88 years old (s=8.65); half of the journalists are younger than 37 years. Mostly, Omani journalists are well educated: 78.7 percent of the respondents held a college degree. Moreover, 61.4 percent of working journalists held a degree in journalism and/or communication.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed held a full-time position (55.3%), whilst 25.7 percent of the respondents were part-time employees, and 17.1 percent were freelancers. All of those with full or part-time employment held permanent positions (100.0%). Journalists in Oman are somewhat experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 12.60 years (s=7.68), and about half of them had more than 11 years of professional experience.

Across the whole sample, more than half the Omani journalists in this study tended to be generalists (52.2%), working on or supervising various subjects, rather than specialists (47.8%). On the whole, 54.9 percent of the Omani journalists worked for a single newsroom exclusively; the remaining journalists worked for two newsrooms simultaneously. In addition, 40.9 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. Three out of five journalists (59.1%) held memberships of specialized journalists' associations, mainly the Omani Journalists Association.

The sample of journalists was distributed as follows (several journalists work for different types of media): daily and weekly newspapers (Arabic and English; 67.8%), magazines (12.3%) and news agencies (7.1%), Omani national TV (19.8%), as well as for radio stations (state-run and private; 29.8%).

Journalistic Roles

Regarding professional role orientations, journalists in Oman found it most important to be detached observers, to advocate for social change, to support national development, to provide analysis of current affairs, to provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, to influence public opinion, to provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life, to report things as they are, and to let people express their views (see Table 1).

About half of the respondents found it is important for journalists to monitor and scrutinize business, to provide entertainment and relaxation, and to provide information people need to make political decisions. On the other hand, less than half of the journalists asserted that journalists should support government policy, set the political agenda, motivate people to participate in political activity, convey a positive

image of political leadership, monitor and scrutinize political leaders, and finally, be adversaries of the government.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Be a detached observer	257	89.5	4.23	.83
Advocate for social change	257	76.7	4.03	1.01
Support national development	257	76.7	4.04	1.14
Provide analysis of current affairs	257	71.6	3.90	1.04
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	257	69.3	3.93	1.11
Influence public opinion	257	66.1	3.75	1.09
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	257	63.8	3.76	.95
Report things as they are	257	63.4	3.75	1.22
Let people express their views	257	63.4	3.67	1.11
Monitor and scrutinize business	257	54.5	3.43	1.17
Provide entertainment and relaxation	257	54.1	3.58	1.02
Provide information people need to make political decisions	257	53.7	3.59	.93
Support government policy	257	47.9	3.32	1.23
Set the political agenda	257	44.4	3.19	1.08
Motivate people to participate in political activity	257	40.5	3.16	1.20
Convey a positive image of political leadership	257	40.1	3.35	.96
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	257	33.5	3.30	.88
Be an adversary of the government	257	20.2	2.54	1.23

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

Omani journalists generally demonstrated a strong commitment to professional standards of ethics. There was a high consensus among the respondents that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Moreover, more than half of the sample emphasized the idea that what is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment and depends on the specific situation. Though, less than half of the sample found it acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it.

Regarding the justification of controversial reporting methods, Omani journalists admitted that they might reside to unorthodox methods in some critical coverage and reporting cases (see Table 3). They found it justifiable, at least on occasion, to publish stories with unverified content or to use re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors. From a minority's viewpoint, it was justified to claim to be somebody else or to alter or fabricate quotes from sources. An even smaller number of respondents, accounting for a quarter of the sample, found it justified to accept money from sources, to make use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without permission, to use confidential business or government documents without authorization, to use hidden microphones or cameras, to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story, and to alter photographs.

Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information and paying people for confidential information were found justifiable by less than 20 percent of the sample. The results in general reflect a strong adherence to ethical standards.

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	257	81.3	4.19	1.13
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	257	61.1	3.72	1.09
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	257	59.9	3.61	1.11
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	257	43.2	3.24	1.25

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"
Publishing stories with unverified content	257	43.2	23.0
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	257	37.7	27.2
Claiming to be somebody else	257	30.0	30.4
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	257	28.0	7.4
Accepting money from sources	257	27.6	6.2
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	257	25.7	37.7
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	257	25.3	31.9
Using hidden microphones or cameras	257	24.5	23.7
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	257	24.1	38.1
Altering photographs	257	21.4	30.0
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	257	18.7	34.6
Paying people for confidential information	257	17.1	34.6

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 Oman reported an average degree of professional autonomy. 44.7 percent of the journalists expressed having complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story. 40.2 percent of the sample, though, referred to having complete or a great deal of freedom in selecting their stories. Nevertheless, a smaller number of journalists (34.2%) emphasized their participation in editorial coordination activities.

News production in Oman is influenced by a variety of factors. Media laws and regulations topped the list of the 26 influencing factors, indicating the necessity of abiding by formal rules of the Omani media scene (see Table 4). Likewise, journalists found their work dramatically affected by the availability of news-gathering resources, information access, editorial policy, owners of the news organization, journalism ethics, government officials, relationship with news sources, censorship, personal values and beliefs, feedback from the audience, and editorial supervisors and higher editors.

Nonetheless, journalists perceived some other factors to be of less influence on news production, namely audience research and data, competing news organizations, peers on the staff, advertising considerations, time-limits, managers of the news organization, politicians, military, police and state security, public relations, profit

expectations, colleagues in other media, pressure groups, friends, acquaintances and family, and finally, business people. There was no apparent trend in the Omani journalism practice as to whether it was more influenced by internal than external factors or vice-versa. A number of internal and external influential factors topped the list, while others scored a lower rate, indicating a rather balanced trend.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Media laws and regulation	256	71.1	3.84	.94
Availability of news-gathering resources	255	71.0	3.98	1.00
Information access	256	65.2	3.75	.99
Editorial policy	254	65.0	3.76	.95
Owners of the news organization	250	60.0	3.72	1.06
Journalism ethics	257	57.2	3.54	1.21
Government officials	256	55.5	3.48	1.18
Relationships with news sources	256	54.7	3.55	1.02
Censorship	256	54.7	3.45	1.14
Personal values and beliefs	253	54.5	3.31	1.43
Feedback from the audience	256	53.1	3.49	1.08
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	255	52.2	3.44	1.16
Audience research and data	257	49.8	3.44	1.01
Competing news organizations	256	48.4	3.42	1.05
Peers on the staff	230	45.2	3.30	1.14
Advertising considerations	253	45.1	3.33	1.04
Time limits	256	44.1	2.96	1.45
Managers of the news organization	256	44.1	3.27	1.10
Politicians	256	40.2	3.12	1.22
Military, police and state security	250	40.0	3.04	1.35
Public relations	256	35.2	3.04	1.18
Profit expectations	257	31.5	3.00	1.09
Colleagues in other media	255	25.9	2.71	1.19
Pressure groups	256	25.8	2.84	1.06
Friends, acquaintances and family	255	25.5	2.67	1.21
Business people	256	23.4	2.70	1.19

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

Obviously, journalism is currently in a state of change. According to Omani journalists in this study, the credibility of the journalism profession had most profoundly increased over the last five years (see Table 5). This increase was pointed out to be related to the fundamental importance of journalism for the Omani society. Overall, all aspects of change scored higher percentages regarding to their perceived increase rather than perceived decrease. Journalists' responses mentioned a substantive increase in the requirements of occupying the journalism profession by having a university degree. What was most notable hereafter, was the ranking of technical skills and the utilization of search engines. Against expectations, the two aspects scored lower than some other aspects, especially utilizing search engines, which scored the lowest among all changing aspects. These results suggested the non-technological and high human quality of Omani journalism as being nascent as it is.

Influences on journalism and news production have changed as well. With no exceptions, influences on Omani journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6. Ethical standards scored the highest rate, suggesting the ethical orientation of Omani journalism. Omani journalism education seemed to be on the

right strength track over the past five years. Market related influences have strengthened as well, including competition, pressure toward sensational news, audience feedback, and advertising considerations. Social media and user generated content scored lower than expected among the list of strengthened influences over the past five years, suggesting the non-technological inclination of the profession as prior mentioned.

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 credibility of journalism	191	81.7	7.3
The relevance of journalism for society	191	76.4	4.2
Having a university degree	191	75.4	3.7
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	191	74.3	8.4
Technical skills	191	72.3	11.0
Average working hours of journalists	191	70.7	2.1
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	191	70.2	4.2
Time available for researching stories	191	67.5	7.9
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	191	64.9	13.1
The use of search engines	191	55.5	15.2

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Oman. 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"
Ethical standards	191	67.5	11.0
Journalism education	191	64.4	11.5
Competition	191	57.6	19.9
Pressure toward sensational news	191	54.5	13.6
Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter	191	53.9	14.7
Audience feedback	191	50.3	21.5
Advertising considerations	189	49.2	25.9
Audience involvement in news production	191	40.3	23.6
User- generated contents, such as blogs	190	39.5	25.8
Audience research	191	39.3	26.7
Public relations	190	38.4	28.9
Profit making pressures	189	36.0	30.2

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

Journalists generally have significant trust in three major institutions, namely the government, scoring the highest rate, followed by the parliament (Shura Council and State Council), then the military (see Table 7). Religious leaders followed with a trust rate of 40.0 percent, which was a surprising result considering Oman to be a religious Muslim country. The police, the news media, and politicians followed next, implying more trust in the military than in the police, and insinuating less trust in their own institution – the news media institution. The results, though, expose the judiciary/the courts to be the least trusted Omani institution, reflecting an unexpected distrust in the judicial system, contrary to a far stronger trust in the executive authority represented by a stable government and a transparent political environment.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The government	256	55.5	3.48	1.18
The parliament	256	55.1	3.46	1.13
The military	256	54.7	3.55	1.02
Religious leaders	250	40.0	3.04	1.34
The police	256	35.2	3.03	1.19
The news media	257	31.5	3.00	1.09
Politicians in general	256	25.8	2.84	1.06
The judiciary/the courts	256	23.4	2.69	1.19

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

Size of the population: 320 working journalists (estimated)

Sampling method: -

Sample size: 257 working journalists

Interview methods: face-to-face and mail/e-mail

Response rate: 86.0%

Period of field research: 04/2014 and 04/2015