



Country Report

Journalists in Italy

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The profile of the typical Italian journalist is almost in line with the Italian white collar composition; the group of journalists includes also a similar percentage of women (42.4%) in comparison to other professions (such as doctors or lawyers). The other characteristics are an age of 42.98 years (median=43 and $s=10.54$) and generally are well educated (72.9% of the sample got at least a college degree; 24.5% got a University degree). Just half of the them (50.1%) hold a degree in journalism or communication.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of the Italian journalists interviewed held a full-time position (62.9%), whereas 4.8 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 32.3 percent worked as freelance journalists. Italian journalists held in average a professional experience of 16.84 years ($s=9.79$ and median=15); the sample includes also the 67.7 percent of journalists who worked on various topics. The selected sample includes just professional journalists that are included within the so-called “Ordine dei Giornalisti” (100%), the journalists’ association in which journalists have to be included by law in order to legitimately practice the profession.

More than half of the Italian journalists (56.8%, $s=0.8$) worked just for one newsroom and 27.5 percent held other jobs outside the area of journalism.

Across the whole sample, 36.6 percent worked for daily print media, 5.6 percent for weekly newspapers, and 7.3 percent for magazines. Another 17.7 percent of the journalists worked for television (private or public ownership), and 14.9 percent for private or public radio. 6.1 percent of the journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies, for online newsrooms of traditional media (6.6%), and for stand-alone online news sites (5.3%).

Journalistic Roles

About professional role orientations, Italian journalists found it most important to report things as they are (mean=4.60 and $s=0.71$), to be a detached observer (mean=4.47 and $s=0.81$), to provide analysis of current affairs (mean=4.13 and $s=0.89$), and to let people express their views (mean=3.82 and $s=1.17$) (see Table 1). The relevance of roles like the first two (“to report things as they are” and “to be a detached observer”) are common in Western journalism, nevertheless they are in contrast with the typical representations of Italian journalism. Conversely, it is less common within Western journalism that “let people express their view” covered a massive support as in the Italian case. The two items that carry the lowest level of support are “Support national development” (mean=1.32 and $s=0.67$) and “Support government policy” (mean=1.32 and $s=0.65$).

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	394	90.4	4.60	.71
Be a detached observer	396	86.6	4.47	.81
Provide analysis of current affairs	394	77.4	4.13	.89
Let people express their views	389	64.5	3.82	1.17
Advocate for social change	392	46.9	3.28	1.30
Provide information people need to make political decisions	389	44.7	3.15	1.33
Monitor and scrutinize business	389	44.2	3.29	1.20
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	391	44.0	3.28	1.23
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	392	38.5	3.09	1.26
Motivate people to participate in political activity	387	30.5	2.72	1.33
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	392	28.8	2.73	1.25
Influence public opinion	386	23.6	2.52	1.23
Provide entertainment and relaxation	389	22.9	2.65	1.20
Set the political agenda	381	22.3	2.54	1.20
Be an adversary of the government	384	4.2	1.52	.88
Convey a positive image of political leadership	386	2.3	1.37	.77
Support national development	385	1.6	1.32	.67
Support government policy	386	1.0	1.32	.65

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

Italian journalists demonstrated a strong but contradictory commitment to professional standards of ethics. While the respondents almost unanimously agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, almost half of them declared that what is ethical depends on the situation (see Table 2) and almost three out of ten affirmed that sometimes it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it.

Regarding a selected number of controversial reporting techniques, the results are less predictable. A large majority of journalists in Italy found the use of confidential business or government documents without authorization, exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story, as well as using hidden microphones or cameras acceptable (see Table 3). Overall, within the proposed practices there are none regarded as unacceptable. Even making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission or paying people for confidential information are regarded as justified by almost four out of ten 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	396	93.7	4.62	.74
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	396	39.1	2.57	1.48
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	394	27.2	2.31	1.38
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	396	17.9	1.86	1.22

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	391	16.9	59.6
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	388	15.2	53.4
Using hidden microphones or cameras	389	10.8	65.8
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	366	7.9	59.8
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	379	5.3	46.4
Claiming to be somebody else	392	4.1	56.1
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	391	2.0	39.6
Paying people for confidential information	385	1.0	37.7
Publishing stories with unverified content	396	.5	7.1
Accepting money from sources	395	.5	1.8

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

The picture about Italian journalists' autonomy and perceived influences is clear as well as surprising. First, overall Italian journalists do not hold a high level of autonomy. Just half of them (49.5%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. Just 59.6 percent declared instead to have a complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story and just four out of ten reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) "always" or "very often" (40.4%).

These results partially resonate the factors regarded as the most influent in news production. Except for "journalism ethics", that is the most influent factor, and "personal values and beliefs", the others are eminently practical factors such as time limits, information access, relationships with news sources or availability of news-gathering resources. Within those factors, editorial policy plays a role too.

The most significant as well as ambiguous result is that politicians and business people are regarded to be the least influent in the journalists work.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	393	77.6	4.19	.94
Time limits	393	55.0	3.63	1.08
Information access	392	52.6	3.61	.98
Your personal values and beliefs	394	51.3	3.60	1.13
Relationships with news sources	390	47.9	3.50	1.09
Availability of news-gathering resources	387	38.8	3.11	1.27
Editorial policy	388	37.9	3.20	1.10
Media laws and regulation	385	29.4	3.01	1.07
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	384	26.8	2.80	1.13
Feedback from the audience	394	26.1	2.92	1.06
Competing news organizations	392	25.3	2.79	1.07
Audience research and data	387	24.5	2.74	1.20
Public relations	389	22.6	2.58	1.22
Owners of the news organization	379	17.4	2.34	1.21
Managers of the news organization	379	14.8	2.25	1.18
Profit expectations	381	14.2	2.17	1.15
Censorship	383	13.8	2.08	1.12
Your peers on the staff	389	12.1	2.35	.98
Advertising considerations	380	12.1	2.08	1.14
Friends, acquaintances and family	393	8.4	2.03	1.00
Colleagues in other media	394	6.9	2.16	.91
Pressure groups	384	6.8	1.71	.98
Politicians	384	6.0	1.69	.95
Business people	383	4.7	1.61	.86
Government officials	378	4.0	1.51	.83

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

Assuming that journalism is in a state of flux is almost common sense, identifying what is changing is more difficult. According to Italian journalists, the importance of the use of search engines and technical skills had most profoundly changed over the last five years (see Table 5). The evaluation about the average working hours of journalists, the decreasing journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions and the time availability for researching stories indicate a deterioration of working conditions, the one about the increased interaction with audiences suggests what is perhaps the greatest challenge and change within the Italian journalism.

The perceived influences on journalism and news production have changed as well. With the exceptions of ethical standards and journalism education, influences on journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6. Furtherly showing that the interaction with audience is the greatest challenge and opportunity for journalists, the influence of social media, user-generated contents, and audience feedback had strengthened most during the past five 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	356	95.2	.8
Technical skills	354	73.4	19.5
Average working hours of journalists	345	69.9	10.7
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	350	59.1	27.1
Having a university degree	346	34.4	19.7
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	345	33.3	22.6
The relevance of journalism for society	351	14.2	65.2
The credibility of journalism	352	6.3	81.0
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	346	5.8	69.7
Time available for researching stories	352	2.8	84.1

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Italy. 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	355	96.6	1.4
User-generated contents, such as blogs	354	89.8	4.0
Audience research	346	71.7	3.5
Profit making pressures	344	71.2	3.2
Audience involvement in news production	345	70.7	7.0
Audience feedback	354	68.9	5.6
Pressure toward sensational news	346	68.2	2.3
Advertising considerations	341	64.5	5.9
Competition	356	64.0	9.3
Public relations	345	52.2	5.8
Journalism education	353	35.1	49.9
Ethical standards	354	18.4	65.8

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

Methodological Information

- Size of the population:* 15,850 working journalists (estimated)
- Sampling method:* simple random sampling, stratified proportionally systematic sampling & members of journalist union for newsrooms and journalists within newsrooms
- Sample size:* 396 working journalists
- Interview methods:* online
- Response rate:* 3.75%
- Period of field research:* 02/2015-07/2015