

## Journalists' Perceptions of the Future of Journalistic Work

Robert G. Picard

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This study is part of the Reuters Institute's ongoing project on the future of journalistic work.

This survey was conducted in cooperation with the Society of Professional Journalists. The Society of Professional Journalists and its 7,500 members are dedicated to encouraging the free practice of journalism, promoting free flow of information, and stimulating high standards of ethical behaviour.



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## **Executive Summary**

This RISJ Report presents the results of a survey, conducted with the help of the Society of Professional Journalists, of 509 journalists across the Western world focusing on how they see the future of journalistic work – what will it be like, what will it demand, what will the rewards be, and what are the implications?

Fundamentally, the journalists who responded to the survey feel that journalism will be a harder job with less institutional support in the future. They do not necessarily, however, see it as less satisfying or less independent. There are concerns that journalists will have to work harder and have to think more about personal branding and entrepreneurship, and that they cannot count on stable employment, full-time jobs, or indeed life-long journalistic careers. But in spite of these prospects, the respondents generally see journalism as a relatively stable collection of fundamental practices and techniques that is not dependent on medium or existentially threatened.

The results are striking for three reasons. First, journalists are clearly not in denial about the direct impact fundamental changes in the media will have for journalism as a form of work. Second, while our respondents recognise that these changes are likely to make journalism more stressful, individualistic, and less stable, they are not particularly pessimistic about the future of journalism as a professional practice. Third, these results are generally consistent across gender, age, and how long people have worked as journalists. The results suggest, in other words, that many journalists are very clear eyed about how their profession is changing, and not stuck in the past as some commentators assume.

The challenge for news media, individual journalists, and journalistic professional associations, then, is to make sure that the often radical changes involved in journalism moving from 20th-century organisations to 21st-century ones are accompanied by the development of strong forms of 21st-century journalistic professionalism and the means to support them.

## Introduction

How the business and structures of journalism are changing became a significant source of concern in the past decade, but its implications for the future work of journalists and the contexts in which they carry out journalistic labour have received far less attention. These issues are crucial to those who will work in the field because it influences the conditions under which they will work, the nature of employment, how they plan their careers, how they provide for their families, and how they prepare for their retirements.

The changes have led journalists and industry observers to express uncertainty and existential angst about what the changes are doing to the quality of journalism, career opportunities, and skills needed for the future. But little attention has been paid to how journalists will work in the future, the structures in which journalistic labour will take place, and how the changes will affect the profession of journalism itself, let alone what journalists themselves expect of the future (Witschge and Nygren, 2009).

The changes taking place are not isolated to news provision, but are part of broader social transformations in which the service economy has become dominant and manufacturing has declined and moved to other parts of the world, many established large companies face intense competition from new entrants and smaller more agile firms, and where there is an increasing move towards more specialised work and less permanent forms of labour.

***“ I think full-time employment, in general, is undergoing a sea change and journalism and other creative endeavours - music and book publishing - are the canaries in the coal mine. ”***

Female, mid-career news agency journalist

These changes are characteristic of many parts of the labour market in post-industrial high income economies, not only the media (Neff, 2012). They are often accompanied by changes in government policies requiring individuals to take more independent responsibility for their pensions, medical care, and other social protection. Work is increasingly being outsourced, even moving abroad because of the breakdown of national markets. There is a growth in high-skill and low-skill jobs, but middle-income, routine jobs are disappearing as computers increasingly take on functions previously carried out by humans and many organisations rationalise work processes and contract out parts of their operations.

It is clear that journalists' and news organisations' dominance in terms of information provision and breaking news has been challenged by the rise of the internet and social media, that news organisations are operating across more platforms, and that journalists are being required to engage with audiences in more ways than the past (Gade and Raviola, 2009). These developments alter the conditions of the legacy journalism profession (Russo, 1998; Aldridge and Evetts,

2003; Deuze, 2005) and raise many questions. These include assessing the positive potential of new developments for journalism and news, but also concerns over the work pressures and emotional demands on journalists and work–life balance, whether healthy workplaces can be maintained that provide professional growth and development, recognition, social interaction, and supportive management, the viability of long-term employment, job satisfaction, the extent to which journalists are forced or willingly enter journalistic entrepreneurship, who will provide compensation and benefits required in the future, who is a journalist, and whether one can maintain a profession when such change and uncertainty exists (Rottwilm, 2014).

Understanding how journalists make sense of the changes and its implications for their careers is crucial. To develop that understanding the Reuters Institute teamed with the Society of Professional Journalists to conduct a survey of journalists' perceptions of work (the activity), labour (the nature of employment relations), and identity (what is journalism, who is a journalist). The study is part of the Reuters Institute's ongoing project on the future of journalistic work and builds on a previous report reviewing what we know from existing research about overall developments in journalistic work (Rottwilm, 2014). It focuses specifically on journalists' perception of the *future* of their work (rather than the past or present).

## *Methods*

The data were gathered through a survey of journalists. Members of the Society of Professional Journalists were asked to complete the survey using the organisations' email newsletters and website announcements. Other journalists in North America and Europe were sought via journalists' sites and their social media groups. The survey was taken between October and December 2014, generating 509 total responses.

Journalists were directed to a survey site where they were asked to respond to five questions about themselves and their work experience and then 20 questions about their perceptions of journalistic work, labour, and professional identity. The perceptions were obtained through respondents scoring of statements using a five-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. At the end of the survey respondents were given the opportunity to express in their own words what they see is happening to the occupation.

The respondents were 53.2% female and 46.8% male and had an average (mean) of 18.5 years of journalism work experience.<sup>1</sup> The majority of respondents (329; 64%) were born during the personal computer age (1980+) and thus can be considered native digital users.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The median score was 14 and the standard deviation was 15.4.

<sup>2</sup> The personal computer age here is defined as beginning in 1980, when home computers became readily available to

<sup>2</sup> The personal computer age here is defined as beginning in 1980, when home computers became readily available to consumers.

The majority of respondents, 79% (n=401), were from the United States. 3% (n=14) were Canadian, 9% (n=46) European, and 9% (n=45) from other nations. Because the survey did not employ structured international sampling, it is not possible to reliably break the results out by country.

Because the respondents have been recruited through professional journalistic associations, via websites catering to journalists, and via journalistic social media, they are self-selecting. The sample is thus neither random nor fully representative and results should be primarily viewed as indicative of how journalists generally perceive the future of work in their profession.

## Findings and Implications

Fundamentally, the journalists who responded to the survey feel that journalism will be a harder profession with less institutional support in the future. They do not necessarily, however, see it as less satisfying or less independent. There are concerns that journalists will have to produce more stories, that they will never be truly off work, and that working with news will be significantly more stressful than other kinds of white collar work (raising concerns over work–life balance). The respondents also generally think that journalists will have to think more about personal branding via, for example, social media, and be more entrepreneurial, as the ability to count on stable employment, full-time journalism work, and life-long careers in journalism are seen as threatened. Despite these perceived threats to some of the basic features of journalistic *work* and *labour* as we have known it in the post-war period – strongly associated with jobs in large mass media organisations, with full-time employment with middle class salaries (and better for some), and with working one’s way up a career ladder within a company or across an industry over the years – the respondents generally see journalism as an activity, the labour of making news, as a relatively stable collection of fundamental practices and techniques that is not dependent on medium or is existentially threatened. The results are striking for three reasons. First, journalists are clearly not in denial about the direct impact fundamental changes in the media will have for journalism as a form of work. Second, while our respondents recognise that these changes are likely to make journalism more stressful, individualistic, and less stable, they are not particularly pessimistic about the future of journalism as a professional practice. Third, these results are generally consistent across gender, age, and how long people have worked as journalists. The results suggest, in other words, that many journalists are very clear-eyed about how their profession is changing, and not stuck in the past as some commentators assume.

The findings indicate that journalists believe more change is coming to the structures of journalism and context and forms in which it takes place will be different from that of the 20th century. In the environment the journalists envision, news organisations and journalists will need to create new employment and contractual arrangements that recognise the increasing importance of non-employee journalists working as freelancers, stringers, correspondents, and journalism co-operatives. For such arrangements to be effective over time they will require improved access to and management of these journalists by news organisations and support organisations providing medical insurance, life insurance, pension, and other benefits for them. Journalistic professional associations and unions in particular will have to think about how they serve changing forms of journalism.

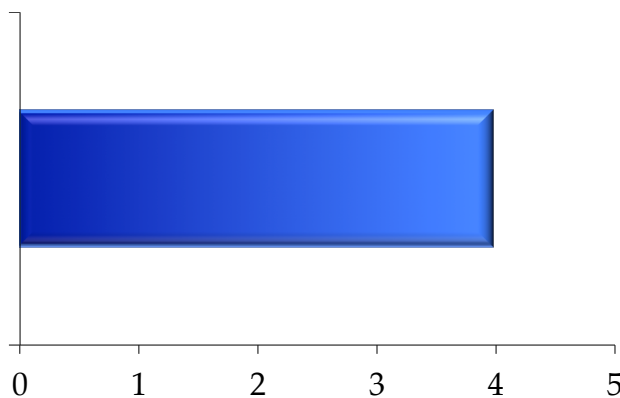
## Responses to Individual Questions

### A. Perceptions of Journalistic Work

Respondents were asked six questions about how they perceive the work of journalists will change in the coming years. These focused on issues of what work will require of journalists in terms of activities and workloads and pressures, and how they believe it will affect work satisfaction and work–life balance.

STATEMENT: *Pressure to produce more stories will increase in the future*

Respondents perceived demands for article output will increase, with 77% agreeing or strongly agreeing that pressure to produce more stories will increase in the future.

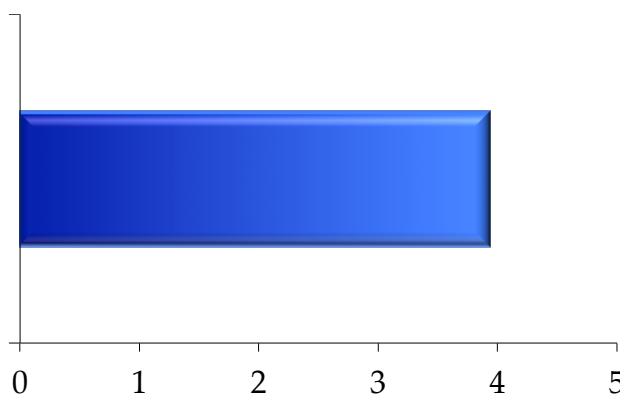


The overall score for the question was 3.96 out of a potential of 5

(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

STATEMENT: *In the future journalists will never be 'off work', constantly working on stories, promotional work on social media, and other things required by professional life*

Concern over work/life balance was evident, with 78% agreeing or strongly agreeing that journalists in the future will never be 'off work', constantly working on stories, promotional work on social media, and other things required by professional life.



The overall score for the question was 3.92 out of a potential of 5

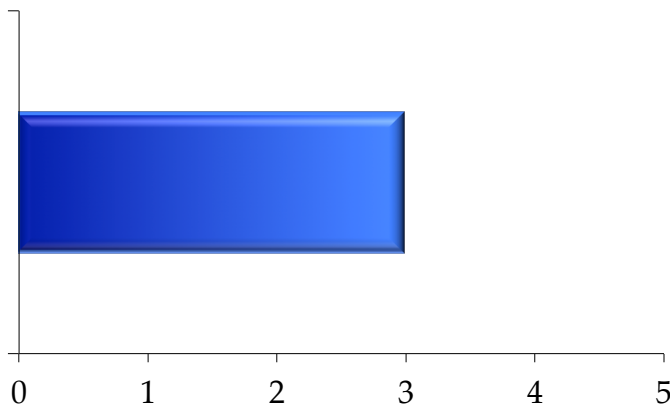
(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

**“ The increased pressure on some journalists to produce more content and to meet certain traffic numbers is adversely affecting the quality of reporting. Organisations should put emphasis on quality, not quantity - yet few actually do that. ”**

Female, early-career, web journalist

STATEMENT: *Journalism will be professionally more satisfying and rewarding for me in the future*

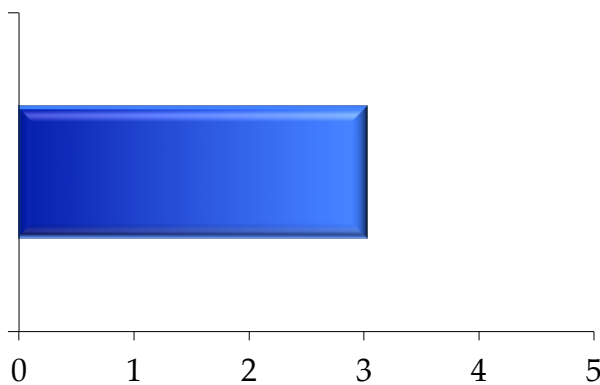
Respondents were split on how satisfying and rewarding journalism will be in the future, with the largest group of respondents (42%) answering ‘neither disagree nor agree’. Only 28% agree or strongly agree that journalism will be professionally more satisfying and rewarding for them in the future.



The overall score for the question was 2.97 out of a potential of 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

STATEMENT: *Journalists in the future will have less independence and autonomy than they had in the past*

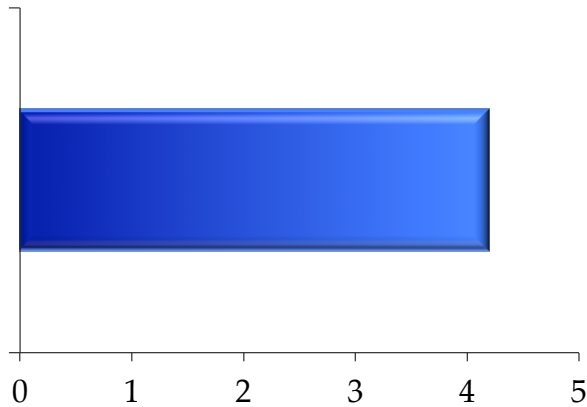
Respondents were split on how independence and autonomy will be affected, but the largest group (38%) agreed or strongly agreed that journalists in the future will have less independence and autonomy than they had in the past.



The overall score for the question was 3.01 out of a potential of 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

STATEMENT: *Journalists will have to engage in personal branding through social media, blogs, public appearances, etc. to succeed professionally in the future*

Respondents perceive that successful journalists will have to become self-promoters, actively concerned about their images. 86% agreed or strongly agreed journalists will have to engage in personal branding through social media, blogs, public appearances, etc. to succeed professionally in the future.



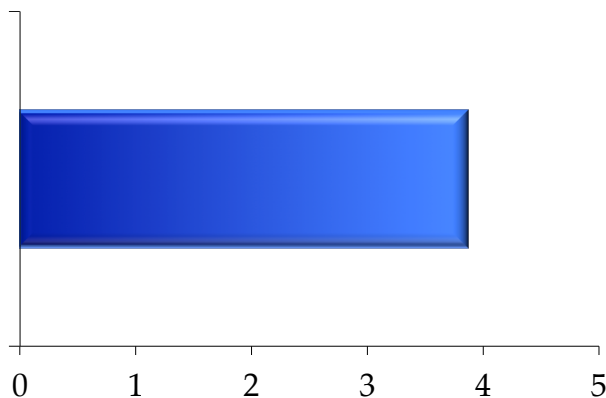
The overall score for the question was 4.18 out of a potential of 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

**“ I think journalists are developing their own brand that they market through their work over devoting themselves to one news organisation. ”**

Female, early-career television journalist

STATEMENT: *Journalism will be more stressful than other white collar professions in the future*

71% agree or strongly agree that journalism will be more stressful than other white collar professions in the future.



The overall score for the question was 3.85 out of a potential of 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ABOUT PERCEPTIONS OF JOURNALISTIC WORK

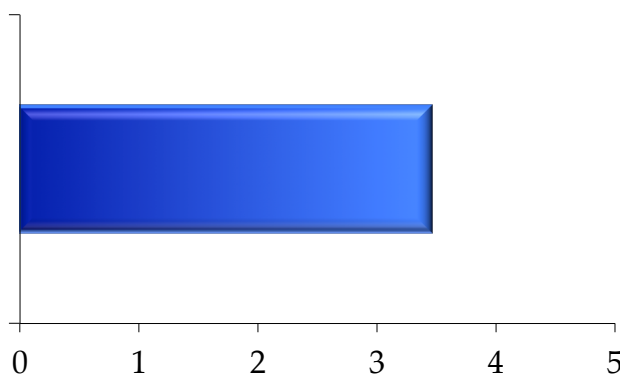
Overall, respondents said they believe journalism will face increased productivity pressures, and greater blurring of work and non-working time, and diminishing job satisfaction. They were uncertain about whether journalism will be as satisfying a job in the future and what will happen to journalistic autonomy and independence. Respondents strongly felt that future success would require journalists to engage in personal branding activities.

### *B. Perceptions of Journalistic Labour*

The survey asked six questions about how respondents perceive the organisational arrangements of journalism changing in the future. It focused on issues of whether journalists will be employed full-time or work in other arrangements, the extent to which employment will be stable and long-term, how salaries and benefits will be affected.

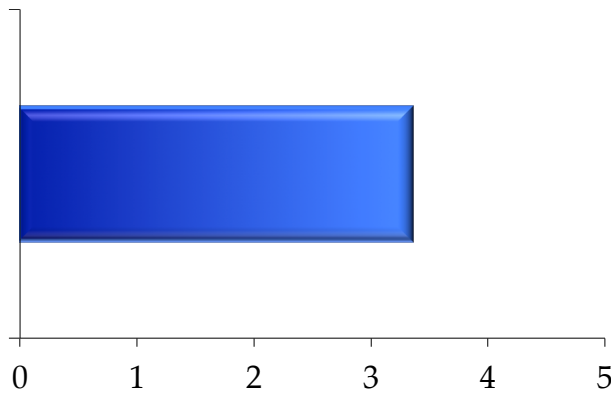
STATEMENT: *In the future journalists will increasingly become entrepreneurs and establish their own news companies*

55% agree or strongly agree that in the future journalists will increasingly become entrepreneurs and establish their own news companies.



The overall score for the question was 3.45 out of a potential of 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

STATEMENT: *Journalists will increasingly work for non-profit enterprises in the future*  
48% agree or strongly agree that journalists will increasingly work for non-profit enterprises in the future.



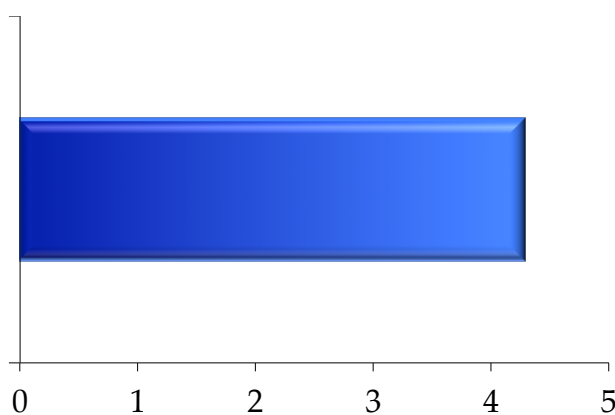
The overall score for the question was 3.34 out of a potential of 5  
(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

**“ *Journalists are asked to tell stories through multiple platforms for employers who have yet to monetise those platforms.* ”**

*Male senior newspaper journalist*

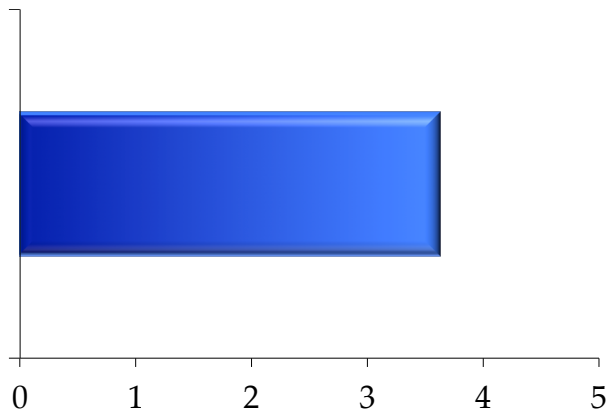
STATEMENT: *In the future journalists will not be able to plan on remaining employed by a single news enterprise for most of their career*

86% agree or strongly agree that in the future journalists will not be able to plan on remaining employed by a single news enterprise for most of their careers.



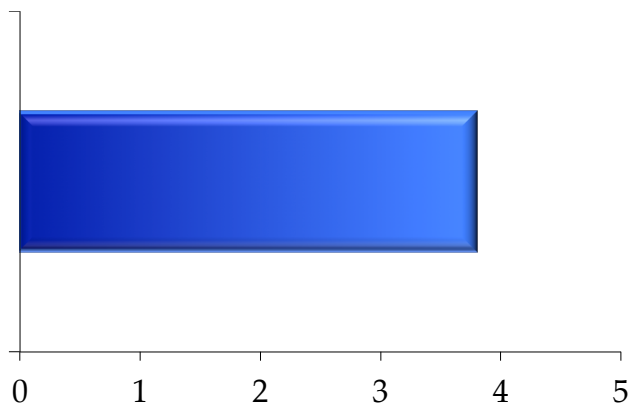
The overall score for the question was 4.27 out of a potential of 5  
(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

STATEMENT: *Salaries and benefits for most journalists will decline in the future*  
60% agree or strongly agree salaries and benefits for most journalists will decline in the future.



The overall score for the question was 3.61 out of a potential of 5  
(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

STATEMENT: *Journalistic employment will become increasingly precarious and uncertain in the future*  
71% agree or strongly agree that journalistic employment will become increasingly precarious and uncertain in the future.



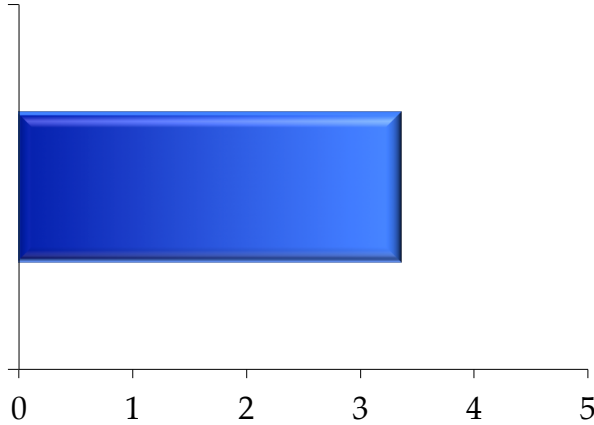
The overall score for the question was 3.78 out of a potential of 5  
(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

**“ Journalists can no longer assume they will have a full-time job in the future. They must always be thinking about their ability to bring in income outside of journalism. ”**

Female early-career freelance journalist

STATEMENT: *In the future journalism will be practised part-time by persons with income from other kinds of work*

48% agree or strongly agree that in the future journalism will be practised part-time by persons with income from other kinds of work.



The overall score for the question was 3.34 out of a potential of 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

#### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ABOUT PERCEPTIONS OF THE JOURNALISTIC LABOUR

The results show significant concerns about the future of journalism as an occupation. Respondents perceive they will not be able to rely on traditional journalistic employment in the future and that they expect income and benefits to diminish. They expect that there will be more self-employment, express uncertainty about not-for-profit journalism and uncertainty about whether journalists can remain in full-time employment.

#### *C. Perceptions of Journalistic Identity*

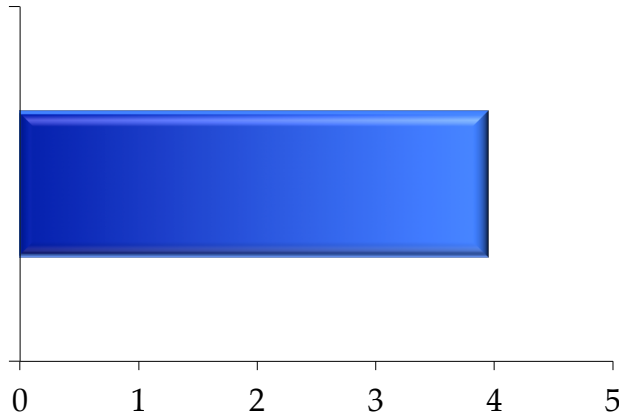
The survey asked eight questions about what journalism is, what journalists do, who are journalists, how one becomes a journalist and how professional standards and norms are established.

***“ The profession is losing its professionalism, but that’s no reason not to uphold traditional standards and principles. ”***

Male senior newspaper journalist

STATEMENT: *Journalism is a collection of fundamental practices and techniques that is not dependent upon medium*

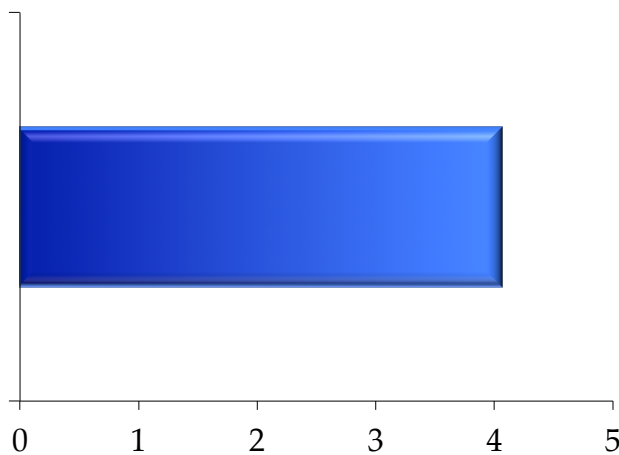
77% agree or strongly agree that journalism is a collection of fundamental practices and techniques that is not dependent upon medium.



The overall score for the question was 3.94 out of a potential of 5  
(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

STATEMENT: *Journalists need to work and regularly engage with other journalists to develop and maintain their professional practices and standards*

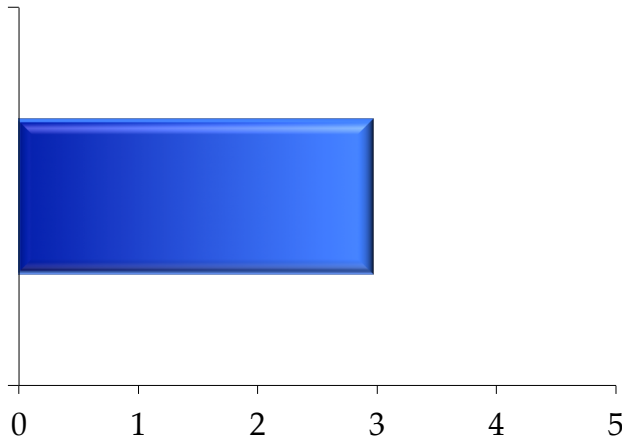
84% agree or strongly agree journalists need to work and regularly engage with other journalists to develop and maintain their professional practices and standards.



The overall score for the question was 4.05 out of a potential of 5  
(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

STATEMENT: *A journalist is someone associated with a professional organisation (association, union, etc.) that represents interests of journalists/journalism*

49% disagree or strongly disagree a journalist is someone associated with a professional organisation (association, union, etc.) that represents interests of journalists/journalism.



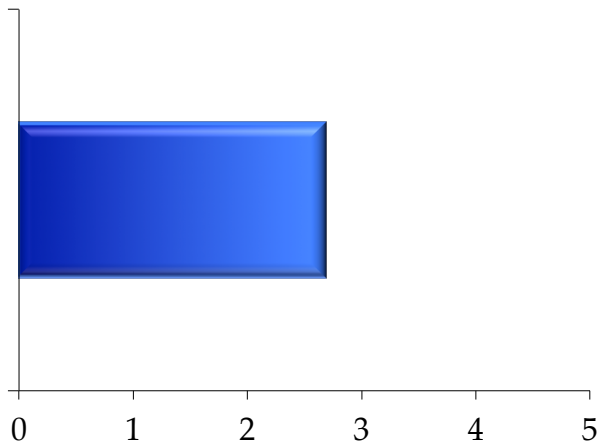
The overall score for the question was 2.95 out of a potential of 5  
 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

**“ Defining a journalist will become impossible. There are so many hybrids. ”**

Female mid-career magazine journalist

STATEMENT: *Members of the public who photograph/take videos of events or tell what is happening using social media and blogs act as journalists*

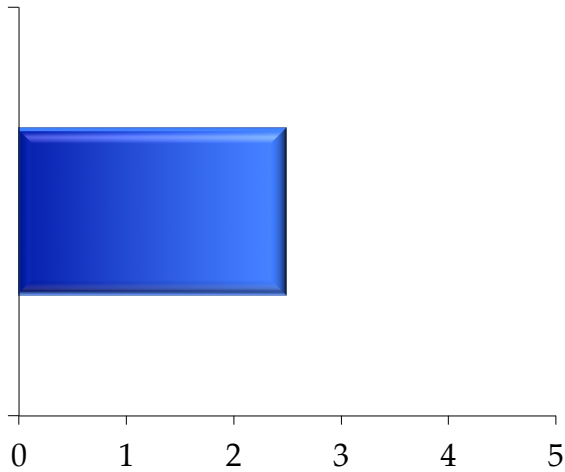
50% disagree or strongly disagree that members of the public who photograph/take videos of events or tell what is happening using social media and blogs act as journalists.



The overall score for the question was 2.67 out of a potential of 5  
 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

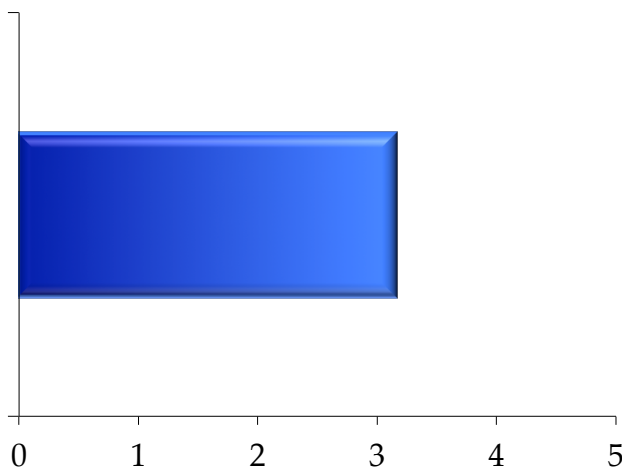
STATEMENT: *Only people who work for recognised news organisations are real journalists*

61% disagree or strongly disagree that only people who work for recognised news organisations are real journalists.



The overall score for the question was 2.49 out of a potential of 5  
 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

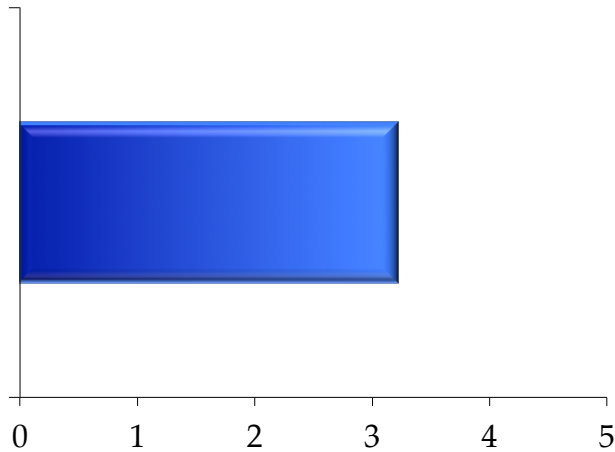
STATEMENT: *Anyone who employs the practices/techniques of journalism should be considered a journalist, irrespective of how they earn a living*  
 47% agree or strongly agree anyone who employs the practices/techniques of journalism should be considered a journalist, irrespective of how they earn a living.



The overall score for the question was 3.15 out of a potential of 5  
 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

STATEMENT: *Journalism is a craft or trade that requires some training and experience, but not specialised education*

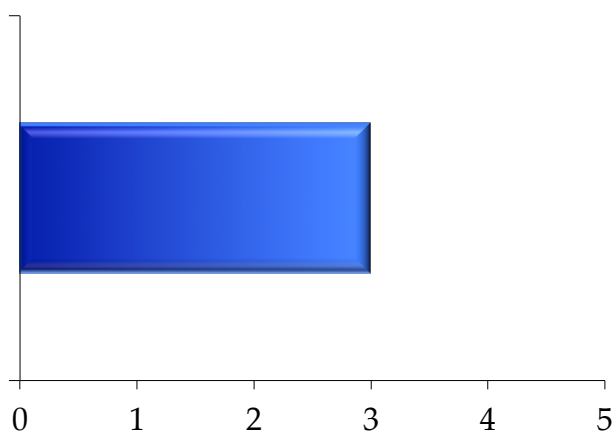
51% agree or strongly agree journalism is a craft or trade that requires some training and experience, but not specialised education.



The overall score for the question was 3.20 out of a potential of 5  
(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

STATEMENT: *Journalism is a profession based on a body of knowledge and norms of professional behaviour for which specialised university education is required*

Only 37% agree or strongly agree journalism is a profession based on a body of knowledge and norms of professional behaviour for which specialised university education is required.



The overall score for the question was 2.98 out of a potential of 5  
(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

#### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ABOUT JOURNALISTIC IDENTITY

Respondents agree that journalism involves professional practices and techniques and that regular contacts with those who undertake journalism is necessary to improve practices and maintain journalistic standards. The results reveal, however that there is some uncertainty about what make one a 'journalist'. Respondents

perceived that membership in professional organisations, working for recognised news organisations, and use of journalistic practices and techniques did not fully mark the boundaries of who should be considered a journalists. Respondents further did not strongly embrace the idea that specific types of training determined whether a person was a journalist.

### *Response Rankings*

The responses can be ranked by their average scores to reveal the overall level of agreement, uncertainty or disagreement on the 1-5 scale ((1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither disagree nor agree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

**Table 1. Ranking of answers related to journalistic work and labour**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Score</b>
Journalists will not be able to plan on remaining employed by a single news enterprise for most of their careers	4.27
Journalists will have to engage in personal branding through social media, blogs, public appearances, etc. to succeed professionally in the future	4.18
Pressure to produce more stories will increase in the future	3.96
Journalists in the future will never be 'off work'	3.92
Journalism will be more stressful than other white collar professions in the future	3.85
Journalistic employment will become increasingly precarious and uncertain in the future	3.78
Salaries and benefits for most journalists will decline in the future	3.61
Journalists will increasingly become entrepreneurs and establish their own news companies	3.45
Journalists will increasingly work for non-profit enterprises in the future	3.34
Journalists in the future will have less independence and autonomy than they had in the past	3.01
Journalism will be professionally more satisfying and rewarding for me in the future	2.97

**Table 2. Ranking of answers related to journalistic identity**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Score</b>
Journalists need to work and regularly engage with other journalists in order to develop and maintain and develop their professional practices and standards	4.05
Journalism is a collection of fundamental practices and techniques that is not dependent upon medium	3.93
Journalism is a craft or trade that requires some training and experience, but not specialised education	3.20
Anyone who employs the practices and techniques of journalism should be considered a journalist, irrespective of how they earn a living	3.15
Journalism is a profession based on a body of knowledge and norms of professional behaviour for which specialised university education is required	2.98
A journalist is someone associated with a professional organisation (association, union, etc.) that represents the interests of journalists and journalism	2.75
Members of the public who photograph/take videos of events or tell what is happening using social media and blogs are acting as journalists	2.65
Only people who work for recognised news organisations are real journalists	2.49

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## SELECTED RISJ PUBLICATIONS

Wendy N. Wyatt (ed.)

**The Ethics of Journalism: Individual, Institutional and Cultural Influences**

*(published jointly with I.B. Tauris)*

Raymond Kuhn and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (eds)

**Political Journalism in Transition: Western Europe in a Comparative Perspective**

*(published jointly with I.B. Tauris)*

Nigel Bowles, James T. Hamilton, David A. L. Levy (eds)

**Transparency in Politics and the Media: Accountability and Open Government**

*(published jointly with I.B. Tauris)*

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