Australian journalism students' professional views and news consumption: results from a representative study

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Abstract

Journalism education's role in shaping students' professional views has been a topic of interest among scholars for the past decade in particular. Increasing numbers of studies are concerned with examining students' backgrounds and views in order to identify what role exposure to the tertiary environment may play in socialising them into the industry. This study reports on the results of the largest survey of Australian journalism students undertaken to date, with a sample size of 1884 students. The study finds that time spent studying journalism appears to be related to changes in role perceptions and news consumption. Final-year students are significantly more likely to support journalism's watchdog role and to reject consumer-oriented and "loyal" roles. They also consume more news than first-year students. On the other hand, journalism education appears to have little impact on views of controversial practices, with only marginal differences between final- and first-year students.

Introduction

Research into journalism students' views has gained currency among scholars in recent years, with an increasing number of studies conducted across various national contexts, and even comparative studies increasingly appearing. These studies have been aimed at filling a gap in our knowledge about journalism education, which has existed for some time. Until recently, most discussions in the field were based on educators' perspectives, with relatively little reflection about

how journalism education was actually impacting on students. Not that this has kept commentators in the news media – in particular journalists from the national newspaper *The Australian* – from arguing that journalism education is not preparing students sufficiently for their future jobs (Markson, 2014; Stewart, 2012). This has never been a uniquely Australian issue, of course, with numerous countries experiencing similar debates between journalism practitioners and educators (Deuze, 2006; Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011; Turner, 2000).

Yet the discussions in Australia and elsewhere show that arguments are often based on anecdotes on both sides, with so-called debates tending to be polemic rather than evidence-based. For example, journalists and editors – and some journalism educators themselves – have argued that journalism programs are accepting too many students, even though there are only limited new positions every year in what is considered a shrinking industry (Christensen, 2012; Stewart, 2012). Recent evidence, however, demonstrates that far from all journalism students actually aspire to careers in journalism, with only four in five students wanting to work as journalists; of those, less than half want to work in news journalism (Hanusch, 2012). Further, industry assertions about job openings are almost always based on mainstream traditional news media, which does not account for the increasing number of non-mainstream media organisations which have begun employing journalists (Cokley et al., 2011). In addition, research is beginning to demonstrate that over the course of their degrees, students are actually beginning to be "moulded" in the image of the industry, becoming more similar to working journalists in their role perceptions (Hanusch, 2013a; Spyridou & Veglis, 2008). At the same time, many of these studies have been based on relatively small sample sizes, which were not necessarily representative. This makes it difficult to extrapolate from their results.

This paper contributes to the emerging body of evidence about journalism students' backgrounds and (pre-) professional views, and the role that university education plays in shaping these. It reports the results from an in-depth study of Australian journalism students, conducted at 10 strategically selected universities. A total of 1884 undergraduate and postgraduate students were surveyed about a variety of aspects, making it the largest survey of its kind so far. The research builds upon an earlier pilot study conducted in 2011.

Background

A tertiary education in journalism has become a key prerequisite for becoming a journalist in Australia. According to a recent representative survey of Australian journalists, four out of five have a university degree; only one in five of those did not specialise in journalism or communication at university (Hanusch, 2013a). This trend can be observed elsewhere around the globe, albeit to differing degrees (Weaver & Willnat, 2012). It is therefore crucially important to examine what happens in journalism programs if we want to better understand the way future journalists are prepared for their work. This is not to say, however, that universities are the only institutions that might shape future journalists' views: a number of studies have found the university experience to be one of many influences (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Weaver, 1998; Zhu et al., 1997). Yet, considering the many current pathways into journalism available for practitioners to pursue, we maintain that it is at least important to pay more attention to how universities may be shaping professional views.

Despite the emergence of tertiary journalism in many places dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, scholarly studies of journalism students have been only slowly forthcoming. Early studies in the US (Bowers, 1974; Boyd-Barrett, 1970) were followed up in the early 1990s by a global study conducted in 22 countries (Splichal & Sparks, 1994). While a seminal study for the field, its overall sample size of around 1800 students was relatively small considering the number of countries studied. Further, the study examined only first-year students, and was thus

not able to explore how students' views might evolve throughout their degrees. In addition, it did not ask students about role perceptions or ethical views, making it difficult to examine whether students were similar or different in their conceptualisation of journalism to working journalists.

In line with an explosion of research on journalists' role perceptions around the world – best exemplified by major international comparative studies such as the Worlds of Journalism Study and the Global Journalist surveys (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Weaver, 1998; Weaver & Willnat, 2012) – the past decade has also seen a quickly growing body of evidence drawn from journalism student bodies in a number of different countries (Bjørnsen et al., 2007; Frith & Meech, 2007; Hanna & Sanders, 2007; Plaisance, 2007; Sanders et al., 2008; Spyridou & Veglis, 2008; Wu & Weaver, 1998). Increasingly, these studies have also been conducted across countries, in an attempt to examine further the universalities and particularities of national journalism education contexts (Hovden et al., 2009; Mellado et al., 2013; Nygren et al., 2010). A number of these studies have found significant relationships between journalism education and students' views (Becker et al., 1987; Plaisance, 2007; Wu & Weaver, 1998); however, others did not find strong evidence to support such relationships (Bjørnsen et al., 2007; Hanna & Sanders, 2007).

In the Australian context, there is limited research on journalism students' views, despite considerable debate about student outcomes and employment destinations (for an overview, see O'Donnell, 2014). The country was part of Splichal and Sparks' (1994) global study, but the sample included only 24 students from the University of Technology, Sydney. This makes the extrapolation of findings to assumptions at the national level highly problematic. The first larger survey was conducted at Deakin University by Alysen and Oakham (1996), and was followed up with the same students two years later by Alysen (1998). It found that news consumption habits increased over the course of the students' degrees, but also pointed out some persisting misconceptions about journalism. This finding may indicate a relatively small influence of journalism education on students' views. Most recently, Hanusch (2013a) conducted a pilot study of 320 undergraduate students at six universities, to explore how their role perceptions and ethical views compared with those of working journalists. The study found that students' and journalists' professional views are ranked in quite similar ways and that, particularly towards the end of their degree, students' views were becoming more and more like those of journalists. In particular, students in their final year were much more oriented towards the watchdog role, and more strongly rejected a consumer-orientation as well as the "loyal" role of being a partner of government. At the same time, the study had important limitations in that it examined a very small proportion of students, and suffered from a relatively low response rate of around 20 per cent.

Given these gaps in our knowledge about journalism education's role in shaping journalists' professional views, it is therefore crucial to undertake a more in-depth study of a larger and more representative cohort of Australian journalism students. On the basis of the literature reviewed here, we developed the following four research questions:

RQ1: What are Australian journalism students' role perceptions?

RQ2: What are Australian journalism students' ethical views?

RQ3: What are Australian journalism students' news consumption habits?

RQ4: What role does journalism education play in affecting role perceptions, ethical views and news consumption habits?

Methodology

To answer the research questions, we conducted surveys with journalism students at 10 Australian universities, representing a sample of the 42 universities and colleges around Australia at

which journalism is taught (Dunn, 2012): Edith Cowan University, Perth; La Trobe University, Melbourne; Monash University, Melbourne; Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane; University of Newcastle; University of South Australia, Adelaide; University of the Sunshine Coast; University of Technology, Sydney; University of Sydney; and University of Tasmania, Hobart. Universities were selected in order to best represent a cross-section of journalism education institutions in the country, based on: geography (regional/metropolitan, as well as diversity of states); size of journalism program (small to large); focus of the journalism program (mostly vocational, mixture, mostly theoretical); and membership in a university network (Australian Technology Network, Group of Eight, Innovative Research Universities and Regional Universities Network). The selection was also guided by the presence of willing researchers who had the resources to administer the surveys. The study was part of the "Journalism Students Across the Globe" study, which aims to compare journalism students in 30 countries (http://www.jstudentsproject.org).

Surveys were administered in lectures and tutorials to undergraduate and postgraduate journalism students at each of the universities between April and August 2014. One difficulty the study encountered was identifying who qualified as a journalism student. While in many cases this was easy, such as when students were enrolled in a Bachelor of Journalism degree or were completing a degree major in Journalism, the task was more difficult when students did not have to officially declare the focus of their qualification until later in their degree. Further, some universities did not offer a major or stand-alone degree in journalism, but rather incorporated journalism into their broader media or communication majors. Hence, clear instructions were given to students, asking only those who were primarily studying journalism as part of their degree to complete the survey. Science students, for example, who were attending only one journalism class as an elective, were thus excluded from the study.

In total, 1884 valid surveys were received from across the 10 universities, making this the largest study of Australian journalism students to date. The response rate, based on the best possible approximation of the total number of journalism students at the participating institutions, was 63.5 per cent (see Table 1). At individual universities, response rates ranged from 50.7 per cent to 82.5 per cent.

Table 1: Response rates

	Valid responses	Total students	Response rate
Queensland University of Technology	137	251	54.6%
University of the Sunshine Coast	99	142	69.7%
University of Newcastle	86	165	52.1%
University of Sydney	354	429	82.5%
University of Technology, Sydney	302	463	65.2%
University of Tasmania	107	135	79.3%
La Trobe University	159	245	64.9%
Monash University	355	700	50.7%
University of South Australia	170	264	64.4%
Edith Cowan University	115	173	66.5%
Total	**1884**	**2967**	**63.5%**

In line with past studies in Australia and elsewhere (Alysen & Oakham, 1996; Densem, 2006; Grenby et al., 2009; Hanusch, 2013a; Splichal & Sparks, 1994), roughly two-thirds of the respondents in our sample were women (Table 2).

Table 2: Overview of demographics

Gender (Female)		68.9%
Age (Mean)		21.42 (SD=4.64)
Domestic student		88.6%
Undergraduate student		84.8%
Year of study	First	41.6%
	Second	29.9%
	Third and higher	28.6%
First in family to study		32.7%
Economic background of family	Below average	9.6%
	Average	38.1%
	Above average	52.3%
Interest in politics	Little or not interested	31.1%
	Somewhat interested	31.3%
	Very or extremely interested	37.5%
Political beliefs	Left of centre	53.6%
	Middle-of-the-road	31.1%
	Right of centre	15.5%

This confirms that journalism education is dominated by female students, which may have resulted in an increase in women in the journalistic workforce, despite a persistent power imbalance (Bacon, Price & Posetti, 2013; Hanusch, 2013b; North, 2014). Cokley, Patching and Scott (2006) state that women in Australian journalism courses comprise between 60 and 80 per cent of the cohort. They argue most Australian journalism courses are "skewed towards females and graduates tend to be females" (Cokley et al., 2006, p. 129).

The average age of the respondents was 21.42 years, while the median age was 20. The median, which takes the mid-point of the sample in terms of years of age, is likely a more accurate representation here, as the average age figure is skewed by the relatively small number of students older than 23. Roughly nine out of 10 students were domestic students, and a similar proportion were undergraduate students. Just over 40 per cent were in their first year of study, while just under 30 per cent were in their second. Around 30 per cent were in their third, fourth or fifth year of study. This, we believe, represents the overall level of attrition that university courses experience generally. While it was predominantly a working-class occupation in colonial Australia and even into the 20th century (Cryle, 1997; Vine, 2009), in more recent times journalism has come to be seen as more of a middle-class occupation. This may be reflected in students' family backgrounds, with more than half reporting that they grew up experiencing better than average economic conditions. Still, many students came from families with no prior exposure to tertiary education, with around one third saying that neither their father nor their mother had a university degree. A significant number – just over 30 per cent – of students have little or no interest in politics, despite the fact journalism is very often closely linked to the political field. At the same time, a slightly larger number profess to be very or extremely interested in politics. In terms of their political orientation, students are not very different from working journalists. Just over half – 53.6 per cent – of students said they were left of centre, compared with 51 per cent of journalists describing themselves in that way (Hanusch, 2013b). On the other hand, 15.5

per cent of students said they were right of centre, slightly higher than journalists (12.9 per cent). The political leanings of journalists, then, are not drastically different from those of the students and, if anything, students appear slightly more polarised. One limitation in relation to the interpretation of results, however, is that the distinction between the political left and right tends to be somewhat subjective, and different respondents may have had slightly differing understandings of what these terms mean.

To answer our research questions, we asked students three sets of questions. The first question stated:

> The following list describes some functions that media may or may not have in society. Please indicate how important each of these things would be for you in your future journalistic work.

Students were asked to rate the importance of 23 items, on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (extremely important). Items were developed based on previous studies in this field as well as in journalist surveys (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Hanusch, 2013a; 2013b; Weaver & Willnat, 2012).

The second question was concerned with ethical views and stated:

> Given a news story that you or another journalist could cover, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?

Students were given a list of 11 controversial reporting practices, developed from studies such as those completed by Hanusch (2013b) and Weaver et al. (2007). Each item could be answered in one of three ways: (1) always justified; (2) justified on occasion; and (3) not approve under any circumstances.

The third question, concerned with news consumption habits, asked:

> Please tell us about your media consumption. How often do you read, watch or listen to news through the following media?

Students were given a list of seven types of media, including: newspapers (in print), news websites, radio news, magazines, television news, Twitter and Facebook. Answer options included: (1) never; (2) 1-2 days per week; (3) 3-4 days per week; (4) 5-6 days per week; (5) every day; and (6) several times a day.

Results and discussion

Role perceptions

The analysis of students' role perceptions shows they are reasonably in line with previous findings about journalism students' (Hanusch, 2012) and journalists' professional views (Hanusch, 2008; 2014; Josephi & Richards, 2012). The most strongly supported role in this study was "to tell stories about the world", with more than four out of every five respondents suggesting that doing so would be very or extremely important in their future role as journalists (Table 3).

Table 3: Journalism students' role perceptions (ordered by mean scores)

	N	M	SD	% very/ extremely important
Tell stories about the world	1838	4.28	0.842	84.1
Educate the audience	1833	4.27	0.84	83.0
Report things as they are	1835	4.26	0.9	81.9
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	1830	4.26	0.95	80.8
Let people express their views	1835	3.9	0.916	70.2
Provide analysis of current affairs	1834	3.86	1.009	68.1
Advocate for social change	1836	3.81	0.979	65.5
Provide information people need to make political decisions	1835	3.58	1.146	57.0
Provide entertainment and relaxation	1834	3.45	1.074	49.0
Be a detached observer	1737	3.4	1.016	47.9
Monitor and scrutinise political leaders	1817	3.37	1.279	50.0
Monitor and scrutinise civic society, for example, the church, NGOs	1800	3.28	1.229	45.1
Provide advice, orientation and direction of daily life	1830	3.25	1.07	41.8
Influence public opinion	1816	3.12	1.129	37.4
Motivate people to participate in political activity	1817	3.09	1.197	36.9
Monitor and scrutinise business	1797	3.07	1.167	36.3
Support national development	1780	3.02	1.101	32.6
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audiences	1810	2.67	1.219	25.8
Set the political agenda	1805	2.54	1.153	19.4
Convey a positive image of political leadership	1802	2.31	1.045	12.0
Cultivate patriotism	1759	2.23	1.099	12.0
Support government policy	1810	2.21	1.007	8.4
Be an adversary of the government	1750	2.21	1.086	11.0

This shows an awareness of journalism's storytelling tradition and global remit. In a similar vein, four out of five students want to promote tolerance and cultural diversity in their reporting. Journalism's traditional role of reporting only the facts is evidenced in the support expressed by a similar proportion of students for reporting "things as they are", rather than interpreting the news. Similarly, just under half feel it is important to be a detached observer. This is in contrast to the comparatively low approval of roles such as "influencing public opinion", which was supported by just over one third of respondents, and "setting the political agenda", which was supported by only one in five. At the same time, students still see a need to educate their audience (83 per cent believe this role is very or extremely important), and to provide analysis of current affairs (68.1 per cent). Journalism's watchdog function is also supported by students, but perhaps not quite to the extent that may have been anticipated. Monitoring and scrutinising political leaders was deemed important by half of the respondents, while applying similar scrutiny to civic society was supported by 45.1 per cent. However, similar to working journalists (Hanusch, 2008), a significantly smaller number (36 per cent) rated as important the role of being a watchdog of business. Clearly, students see their role more in terms of monitoring the political process rather than business. A consumer-oriented function was not very highly supported by the students we surveyed. While just under half thought it was important to provide entertainment and relaxation, only four in 10 wanted to provide advice, orientation and direction of daily life and even fewer – one in four – considered it important to provide news that would attract the largest audience.

Similar to working journalists (Hanusch, 2008; 2014; Josephi & Richards, 2012), the respondents clearly rejected approaches to journalism which could be considered "loyal". Only 12 per cent of respondents considered it important to convey a positive image of political leadership, and 8 per cent considered it important to support government policy. At the same time, only 11 per cent of respondents thought it was important to be an adversary of the government. At first glance, this may seem surprising given Australia's tradition of adversarial journalism, but it is very much in line with more recent evidence on Australian journalists' views (Hanusch, 2014). It appears that both journalists and students reject the notion that journalism should be adversarial for its own sake. Rather, they believe it is important to monitor those involved in politics, and – quite possibly – to not differentiate between those in government and those in opposition.

The stage of the degree reached by students appears to be related to a number of role perceptions. These go in two directions: on the one hand, students in their final year of study are more supportive of some roles, but less supportive of others, compared with first-year students. This would suggest that what students learn at university has at least some influence on how they view journalistic work. Most prominently, and supporting similar findings elsewhere (Hanusch et al., 2014), the more time students have spent at university, the more likely they are to support the watchdog role. T-tests reveal that final-year students were more supportive of all three items that relate to this role: monitoring and scrutinising business (final year: M=3.23, SD=1.182; first year: M=2.97, SD=1.159), t(1253)=3.937, p<.001; monitoring and scrutinising political leaders (final: M=3.50, SD=1.256; first: M=3.26, SD=1.269), t(1266)=3.29, p<.01; and monitoring and scrutinising civic society (final: M=3.37, SD=1.215; first: M=3.21, SD=1.231), t(1255)=2.27, p<.05. This result demonstrates quite clearly that journalism education appears to have an important impact in guiding journalism students towards performing the watchdog role when they later work as journalists. It also provides strong evidence in support of previous studies (Hanusch, 2013a), which found that final-year students were more likely to support the watchdog role. Other statistical differences exist in terms of final-year students being more likely to support key roles including: providing information that people need to make political decisions; telling stories about the world; motivating people to participate in political activity; and educating the audience. However, for all of these role perceptions, the differences were relatively minor, with effect sizes suggesting only a marginal influence of journalism education on them.

At the same time as journalism education appears to have what many would see as a positive impact in guiding students towards being more appreciative of journalism's watchdog role, we can also identify a trend suggesting that, over the course of their degree, students consider the consumer-oriented role to be less important. Again, this is in line with previous evidence (Hanusch, 2013a). Students in their final year (M=3.36, SD=1.037) were less likely than those in their first year (M=3.49, SD=1.079) to consider as important the role of providing entertainment and relaxation, t(1282)=2.176, p<.05, as well as the role of providing the kind of news that attracts the largest audience (final year: M=2.55, SD=1.159; first year: M=2.78, SD=1.243), t(1269)=3.449, p<.001.

Further, by their final year, students are also less supportive of "loyal" roles, such as conveying a positive image of political leadership (final year: M=2.27, SD=1.043; first year: M=2.37, SD=1.031), t(1264)=2.316, p<.05, as well as less supportive of the role of influencing public opinion (final year: M=3.07, SD=1.174; first year: M=3.20, SD=1.127), t(1267)=2.024, p<.05. Effect sizes for both these differences were very minor, however.

Ethical views

When it comes to ethical views, our results show that the controversial actions receiving the least approval from students include accepting money from sources (rejected absolutely by four in five respondents), publishing stories with unverified content (77.9 per cent say they would not

approve of this under any circumstances), and failure to protect source confidentiality (rejected by 78.6 per cent) (Table 4).

Table 4: Journalism students' ethical views (ordered by mean scores)

	N	M	SD	% always justified	% justified on occasion	% not approve under any circumstances
Accepting money from sources	1836	2.79	0.439	1.5	17.6	80.9
Publishing stories with unverified content	1849	2.77	0.446	1	21.1	77.9
Not protecting source confidentiality	1837	2.77	0.446	1.2	20.3	78.6
Claiming to be someone else	1850	2.68	0.499	1.6	28.5	69.8
Making use of personal documents such as letters and photographs without permission	1849	2.6	0.526	1.8	36.1	62
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	1839	2.48	0.55	2.6	46.7	50.7
Paying people for confidential information	1844	2.41	0.541	2.5	53.6	43.9
Getting employed in a firm or organisation to gain inside information	1840	2.39	0.57	4.4	52.6	43
Using hidden microphones or cameras	1848	2.36	0.551	3.7	56.8	39.6
Using confidential government documents without authorisation	1848	2.34	0.575	5.4	55.6	39.1
Using re-creations or dramatisations of news by actors	1844	2.22	0.62	10.7	56.8	32.4

Actions that appear more permissible to students include re-creations or dramatisations of news by actors, with one in 10 saying it is always justified, and a further one in two saying it may be justified on occasion. Further, the use of hidden microphones or cameras can be or is always justified by around six in 10 students, a similar number to those approving of the use of confidential government documents without authorisation. On the other hand, personal documents such as letters and photographs are deemed more off-limits, with six in 10 saying they would not approve of their use under any circumstances. Compared with Australian journalists' ethical views (see Hanusch, 2013), some important differences can be observed. These show that journalists are less concerned about using re-creations or dramatisations (only 25.6 per cent would not approve under any circumstances, compared with 32.4 per cent of students) as well as using confidential government documents (23.8 per cent would not approve, compared with 39.1 per cent of students). At the same time, these are still the two most "permissible" actions as viewed by both journalists and students, demonstrating some similarity here. A large discrepancy exists in relation to the use of hidden microphones or cameras, with 57.6 per cent of journalists rejecting this practice compared with 39.6 per cent of students. In a similar vein, journalists are much more likely to reject the tactic of seeking employment in a firm or organisation in order to gain inside information (69.1 per cent as opposed to 43 per cent of students), as well as paying people for confidential information (71.6 per cent compared with 43.9 per cent). Journalists are much more risk-averse when it comes to claiming to be someone else (86.6 per cent reject this outright, compared with 69.8 per cent of students). Journalists are also more wary of accepting money from sources (98.7 per cent of journalists say they would never approve, as opposed to 80.9 per cent of students). On the other hand, journalists are less worried about using personal documents without permission (51.7 per cent would not approve, compared with 62 per cent of students), and about publishing stories with unverified content (64 per cent compared with 77.9 per cent of students).

One surprising result, given the changes in role perceptions observed through the course of students' progress through their degrees, is that there is little change overall to a student's ethical

position. We could only find significant differences between final- and first-year students in relation to three controversial practices. First-year students were more likely to disapprove of the use of personal documents (62.8 per cent, compared with 57.5 per cent of final-year students), while final-year students were less approving of using employment in an organisation to gain inside information (48.8 per cent compared with 41 per cent) and accepting money from sources (83.8 per cent compared with 78.2 per cent). While these differences were all statistically significant at p<.05, the fact that Cramer's V<.100 in all cases shows quite clearly that the stage of their degree has a minimal effect on ethical views. Further research needs to be conducted to examine the reasons for this finding, but a number of possibilities can be offered here. First, it is possible that students' ethical views are grounded so strongly in their moral worldviews as shaped through their upbringing, that university education has very little effect. Second, ethical views remain relatively abstract during journalism education, as most students would not be confronted with such decisions until they actually work in the industry. Finally, the extent of ethics-specific education in journalism varies widely between the sampled universities, and changes in ethical views may be more related to how much ethics are discussed as part of the curriculum. Plaisance (2007) found that students' ethical views changed following an ethics course at a US university, suggesting that ethics-specific education can have an impact. However, not all universities in our sample provide dedicated courses on ethics, instead integrating ethical issues into the curriculum. This may confound our results, as it is difficult to determine whether any specific ethics courses may actually have had an impact on some students' views.

News consumption

Anecdotal evidence suggesting that journalism students in general are not news junkies was a key consideration in our quest to find out more about their news consumption. The results show that students do access a lot of news, and their habits are in line with more recent trends in news consumption (Pew Research Center, 2012). Indeed, very few read printed newspapers, with almost one fifth never reading one, and just under half accessing print media on only one or two days per week. Only one in every 10 students read a printed newspaper each day (Table 5).

Table 5: Journalism students' news consumption habits (in per cent)

	N	Never	1-2 days per week	3-4 days per week	5-6 days per week	Every day	Several times a day
Newspapers (in print)	1844	19.8	46.9	16.3	7.2	8.4	1.5
News websites	1852	1.9	10.8	18.7	16.4	26.0	26.1
Radio news	1855	15.8	25.3	20.1	14.6	16.1	8.1
Magazines	1845	28.9	42.9	15.4	8.0	3.6	1.2
Television news	1853	5.0	17.8	23.3	18.8	24.3	10.7
Twitter	1849	36.4	13.8	8.8	6.8	13.5	20.7
Facebook	1845	6.3	5.0	7.4	8.0	24.4	48.9

On the other hand, news websites are the second most popular place for news, with more than half of students accessing one at least once a day. The most popular news source overall is Facebook. Roughly three in four students access the social networking site at least once a day, with almost half doing so several times a day. Meanwhile, Twitter – another popular social networking site of increasing relevance as a journalistic resource – is used on a daily basis by only one third of students. Usage patterns for Twitter are the most polarised as well, with an almost similar number never accessing the site. While print newspaper use was relatively low, magazines appear to be consumed even less often. Almost one in three students said they never read a magazine, and just over 40 per cent of magazine readers did so only on one or two days a week. Naturally,

the publication cycle of magazines, which tend to be published only weekly or monthly, affects some of these results, but the number of students who never read a magazine was still 10 per cent higher than for printed newspapers, and beaten only by Twitter. Television and radio news rank just behind Facebook and news websites, with television slightly more popular than radio. Just over one third watch TV news at least daily, while only a quarter listen to radio news daily.

Another interesting result emerges in the analysis of differences based on the stage of their degree students have reached. Here, we can see a clear trend toward increased news consumption across a range of platforms the longer students study. This is in line with Alysen's (1998) finding that students consumed more news in their final year than in their first year. The only platforms where we could not find any statistically significant differences were printed newspapers and television news. Even here, however, we could see a trend towards increased exposure, with 11.9 per cent of final-year students reading a newspaper daily, compared with 8.6 per cent of first-year students. Still, the percentage of students who never read a newspaper was stable at around 19 per cent for both first- and final-year students. In regard to television news, we found that 31.3 per cent of first-year students watched daily, compared with 37.5 per cent of final-year students, even though this difference was non-significant. The largest jump was for Twitter. Only 28.9 per cent of first-year students used Twitter daily and 45.1 per cent never used it; among final-year students, those who never used it were only 28.2 per cent, and those who used it daily 38.9 per cent. This was a statistically significant result, $\chi2=(5, N=1292)=44.458$, $p<.001$, with Cramer's $V=.186$ suggesting a small effect. Similarly, the use of news websites also increased dramatically, with 60.6 per cent of final-year students accessing such sites at least once a day, compared with only 45.9 per cent of first-year students, $\chi2=(5, N=1295)=44.120$, $p<.001$, $V=.185$. Radio news was also used on a daily basis by final-year students (29.3 per cent) more often than first years (20.2 per cent), $\chi2=(5, N=1297)=35.606$, $p<.001$, $V=.166$. Final-year students were more likely to read a magazine (76.4 per cent) compared with first-year students (66.9 per cent), $\chi2=(5, N=1291)=16.822$, $p<.01$, $V=.114$. Further, the use of Facebook increased, with 79.5 per cent of final-year students accessing the site daily compared with 67.6 per cent of first-year students, $\chi2=(5, N=1291)=31.971$, $p<.001$, $V=.157$.

Overall, it is worth pointing out that access to a news source may not always equal importance. Nielsen and Schrøder (2014) have shown there are important differences between how widely used some sources are, and how important they actually are. Their eight-country study found that television was by far the most widely used and important source of news, followed by news websites and printed newspapers, while social media were the least frequently used. Even among younger people aged 18-24, social media lagged behind TV and news websites, including in terms of how important they were as a source. Our study, however, did not ask respondents for their opinions about how important each of the sources was.

Conclusion

This study represents the largest survey of Australian journalism students undertaken to date. While it was conducted at only 10 out of more than 40 universities and colleges that offer some kind of journalism education, these institutions were chosen specifically to represent the demographic, geographic and curriculum variety of Australian journalism education at large. Coupled with a solid response rate overall of more than 60 per cent, we believe it presents reliable and representative evidence about Australian journalism students' views, and the impact their education may have on these views.

Our results confirm previous findings in Australia and elsewhere, affirming the important role that journalism education plays in the professional development of students' role perceptions.

Specifically, we found that students' role perceptions are – by and large – reasonably similar to those of working journalists. What is more, the longer students have been studying their degree, the more likely they are to think like journalists. This is particularly the case in relation to journalism's watchdog role, with final-year students considering this role as much more important than those in their first year. Final-year students also deem the "consumer orientation" and "loyal to government" tendencies of information provision as less important, and their opinions in these respects are again more aligned with those of working journalists. In so far as the students' views are largely in alignment with the views of industry professionals, they appear to have a solid foundation for future integration into the profession, very far from being ill-prepared for future working life. At the same time, we found relatively little influence of journalism education on students' ethical views; this was a surprising finding considering evidence gleaned from previous studies. We pointed to some potential explanations for this anomaly, all of which require further research. Finally, as many would hope, journalism education was observed to have a positive effect on news consumption. Final-year students consume most types of media more often than first-year students. At the same time, they are not accessing traditional platforms such as newspapers, radio or magazines, instead opting most frequently for online options such as Facebook and news websites. Twitter was identified as a special case, with polarised usage; one third of respondents access it daily, while another third never access the platform. With Twitter being a relatively new social media platform which is becoming increasingly important in the journalistic context, this tendency may change in the future.

Overall, then, our study finds evidence that journalism education has at least some effect on students' pre-professional views and habits, in particular in relation to role perceptions and news consumption. But the largely non-significant findings in relation to ethical views suggest that university education is but one among a larger number of influences. More research is necessary to untangle this complex web of influences to better understand how journalism students are socialised into the industry.

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