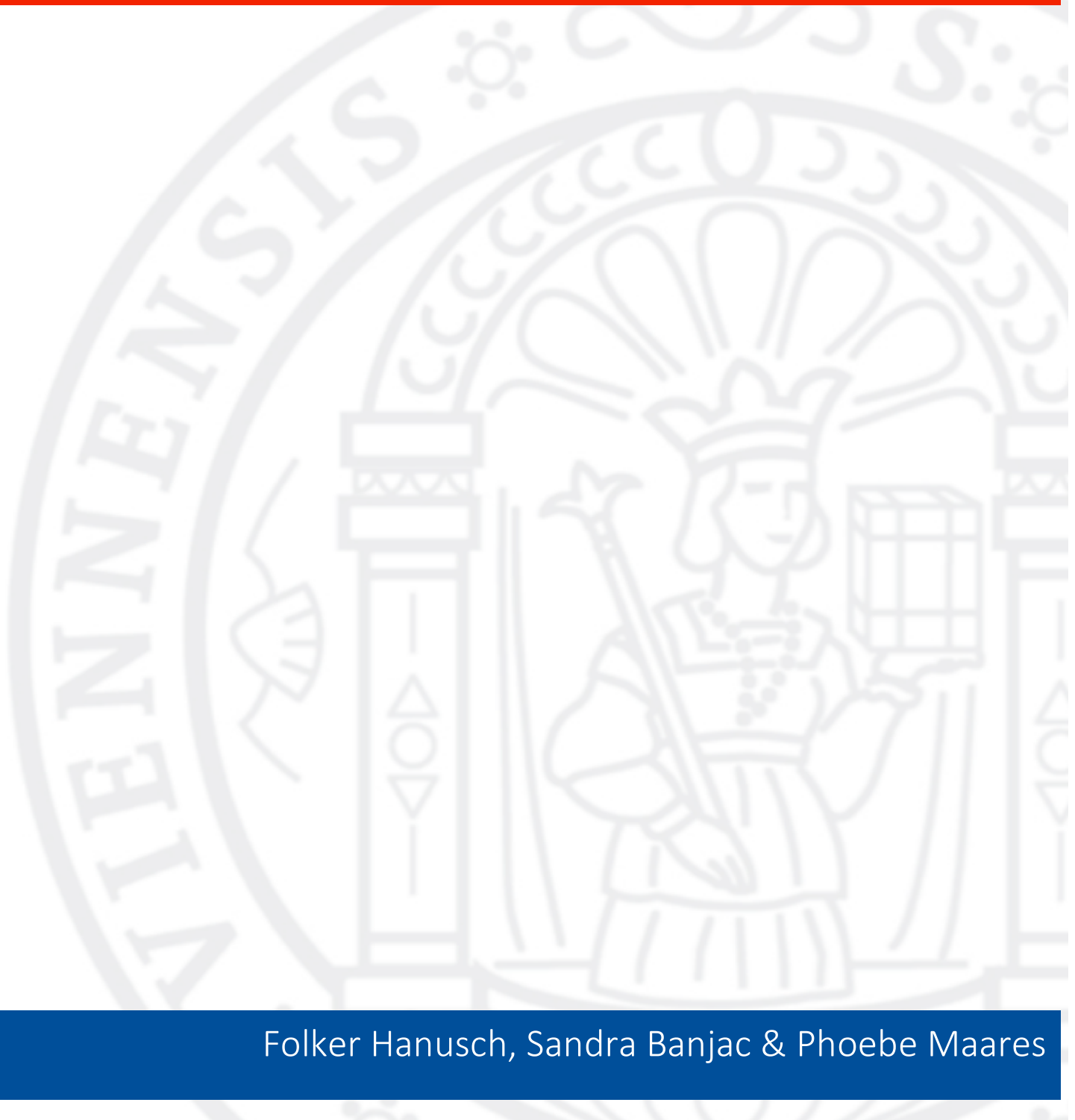




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# LIFESTYLE JOURNALISTS IN AUSTRALIA

ROLES, INFLUENCES AND TRANSFORMATIONS



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**1. Lifestyle journalists love their work.** 82% of all surveyed journalists are satisfied with their job, and 15% are dissatisfied. Just over half (55%) say they will likely or definitely still work in lifestyle journalism in the next five years, while 28% are unsure of their future in this field.

**2. Lifestyle journalists often work in atypical employment.** The majority of lifestyle journalists have regular employment, with 50% working full-time and 10% holding part-time positions. Just under a third work as freelancers or bloggers.

**3. Lifestyle journalism is not well-paid.** Just over 50% earn less than \$1,749 per fortnight, after taxes. Based on figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics this is lower than the 'all employees average weekly total earnings', which works out at \$1,844 per fortnight.

**4. Lifestyle journalists come from mainstream journalism.** The average lifestyle journalist has been working in mainstream journalism for five years before pursuing a career in the lifestyle field. The most common beats are travel, food, fashion, and health.

**5. Lifestyle journalists in Australia are highly educated.** Almost 80% have completed tertiary education, two-thirds specialised in either journalism or another communication field, and 23% pursued a specialised education in a lifestyle field (e.g. travel, fashion etc.).

**6. Lifestyle journalism should be about providing fun, entertaining and inspirational stories.** Most journalists think these are the most important roles of lifestyle journalists, closely followed by wanting to offer a service or advice to audiences, regarding trends and news-you-can-use. In contrast, the majority feel it is less important to promote the lifestyle industries, and to monitor and scrutinize businesses involved in lifestyle industries.

**7. Lifestyle journalists feel they have a substantial amount of freedom, while acknowledging commercial influences.** Although most lifestyle journalists report having great to absolute freedom in story choice, most also consider publishers' and managers' interests when producing journalistic content. When considering the trustworthiness of stories based on free products or services, 40% say that kind of content would lose its credibility.

**8. Lifestyle journalists increasingly have to incorporate social media and audience feedback into their work.** Journalists say over the past five years the time available to research stories, employment opportunities, and salary have decreased. At the same time, 90% recognise an increased importance in the need to be active on social media, with almost 80% feeling the pressure to market their own work online, and 68% acknowledge the heightened need to take into account audience research and data.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results from the first comprehensive study of Australian lifestyle journalists and one of the first such studies worldwide. While there have been numerous studies of journalists worldwide, including a number of notable efforts in Australia, most studies have focussed either on the general population of journalists or specific rounds such as political journalism. Other fields, such as lifestyle journalism have received less attention.

Yet, **lifestyle journalism has been a strongly growing area of the news media** over recent decades, as particularly Western societies are becoming increasingly individualised, and focussed on individual well-being and self-expression as part of the emergence of consumption cultures (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2013). As lifestyle journalism proves popular with audiences, it is becoming an important field for academic inquiry also.

The enormous growth of lifestyle journalism over recent decades has been a remarkable development given the broader 'crisis' in traditional journalism. While traditional formats, such as political and foreign news appear to be shrinking, softer forms of news have experienced growing popularity, with lifestyle content – particularly in Western countries, but also increasingly in other societies – becoming ubiquitous, with specially devoted newspaper sections and supplements, an exquisite variety of magazines, dedicated television channels, and a endless assortment of websites.

At the same time, **lifestyle journalism is often derided** by the journalistic profession and an array of scholars, many of whom are critical of the field's proximity to commercial interests and accuse it of 'dumbing down' journalism. From a normative standpoint that privileges citizen- over market-oriented news, processes like tabloidization are seen with much scepticism.

Yet, others argue that instead of "dumbing down", the diversification of journalistic content is actually engendering a process of "braining up" (McNair, 2009, p. 70). Such approaches generally critique the 'dumbing down' thesis as being grounded in elitist and unrealistic views of the public sphere, and argue that less elite-driven news agendas can actually offer wider opportunities for political engagement across all sections of society (Temple, 2006).

McNair believes the **growth of lifestyle journalism can be regarded as a positive move** away from male-dominated news agendas to a more feminised and humanist kind of journalism, which is "less pompous,

less pedagogic, less male; more human, more vivacious, more demotic" (2009, p. 74). Despite this growing recognition of, and appreciation for non-news journalistic fields, lifestyle journalism has for a long time been starved of scholarly attention, perhaps partly because it is still suffering from entrenched beliefs that it cannot be considered "real" journalism.

One problematic aspect includes varying definitions over what actually constitutes lifestyle journalism (Brunsdon et al., 2001; Hanusch, 2012; Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2013; Usher, 2012). For the purposes of this study, we adopted the definition of **lifestyle journalism as "the journalistic coverage of the expressive values and practices that help create and signify a specific identity within the realm of consumption and everyday life"** (Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2013, p. 947).

Our study set out to strategically capture lifestyle journalists as a group. The **original survey was developed and conducted at Queensland University of Technology (QUT)**, where the first author was employed as a Vice-Chancellor's Research Fellow between 2014-2016. He has since taken up a role as Professor of Journalism at the University of Vienna.

The survey was carried out between April and June 2016, using an online survey tool. Respondents were drawn from a publicly available database (AAP MediaNet), using search criteria specific to lifestyle journalism areas. Results included journalists employed with established media organizations as well as those outside organizations, such as freelancers and bloggers.

A personalized invitation email was sent to each of the 5314 identified accounts on 19 April 2016. A total of 458 emails were undeliverable, with respondents either no longer working at the address or out of the office during the research timeframe. Four reminder emails were sent, with the final date for data collection on 30 June 2016, yielding 751 responses, of which 616 were completed sufficiently to warrant inclusion in the study. This resulted in a response rate of 12.7%, an acceptable response rate comparable with previous online survey studies involving journalists.

We are grateful to the journalists who took the time to provide information for our survey and would like to also thank for their very insightful additional information provided at the end of the survey. The following report aims to provide a first snapshot of their backgrounds, professional and ethical views, as well as their perceptions of economic influences and changes in the field of lifestyle journalism.

## 2. DEMOGRAPHICS

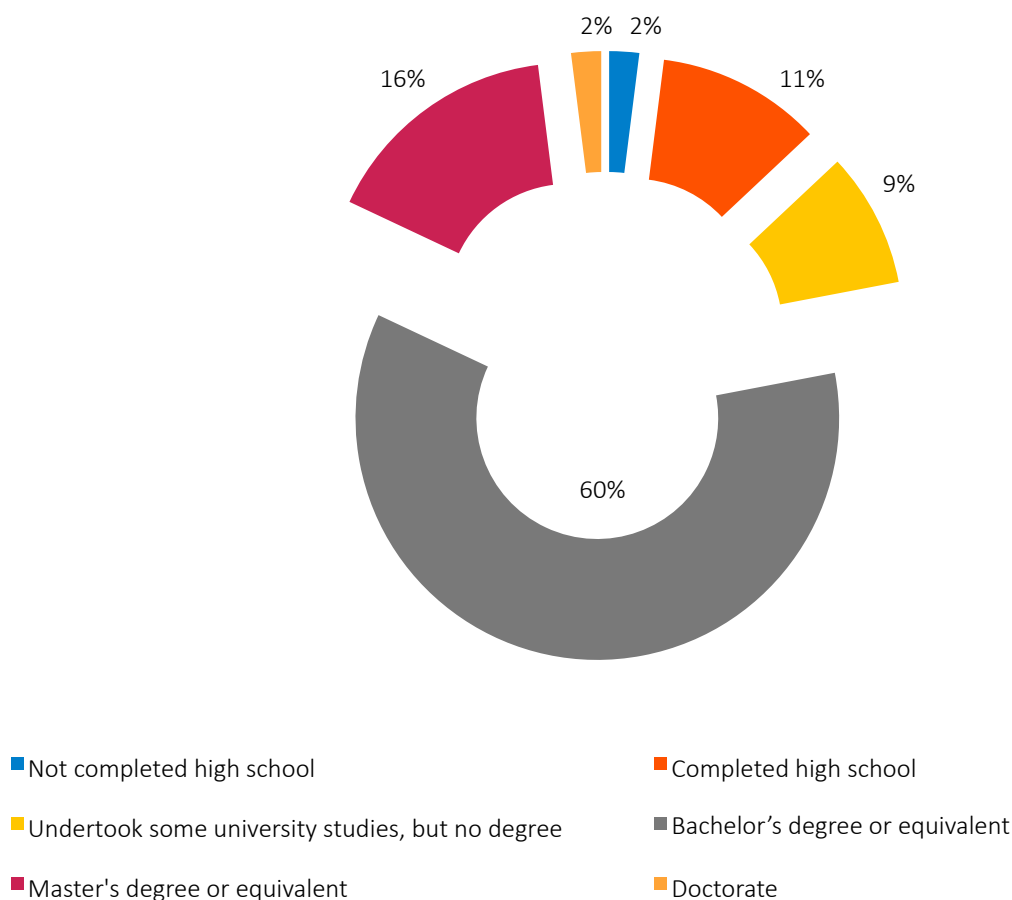
The average Australian lifestyle journalist is predominantly female, highly educated and on average in their early forties. They are typically employed full-time, work for one to two media outlets, and largely in the online and magazine journalism sector. In their studies, they did not specialise in a specific lifestyle field, and in their journalistic work they do not specialise in one particular topic, but work on a variety of beats within the lifestyle field. Two-thirds (66%) of Australian lifestyle journalists are female and in their early forties, which is slightly higher than the 55% of women found working in Australian mainstream journalism (Hanusch 2016). The average age of journalists working in the lifestyle field is 42 years, with ages ranging from 22 to 72 years, in contrast to Australian mainstream journalists who average at 38 years of age (Hanusch 2016).

### 2.1 EDUCATION

Lifestyle journalists in Australia are highly educated. Almost 80% have completed tertiary education, and another 9% undertook some form of university education but did not complete their studies (Fig. 1). Among Australian mainstream journalists, of those who completed a university degree in journalism and communication (81%), 66% focussed on journalism (Hanusch 2016).

### 2.2 SPECIALIZATION

Although only a quarter (23%) pursued a specialised education in a lifestyle field (e.g. fashion, travel etc.), their expertise and work experience is diverse. Two-thirds specialised in either journalism or another communication field, or both (Fig. 2, p.4).



## 2.3 SALARY

Compared to average earnings in Australia, lifestyle journalism is not well-paid. Just over 50% earn less than \$1,749 per fortnight (after taxes). Based on figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics<sup>1</sup> this is lower than the 'all employees average weekly total earnings', which works out at \$1,844 per fortnight (after taxes).<sup>2</sup> Only 13% of lifestyle journalists earn more than \$2,800 per fortnight.

Asked whether they engaged in any other paid activities, 41% of lifestyle journalists confirmed they do, which is more likely if they work as a freelancer or blogger. A total of 60% of journalists in each of these employment categories work in areas other than journalism, compared to half of all part-timers and just one quarter of all full-time journalists.

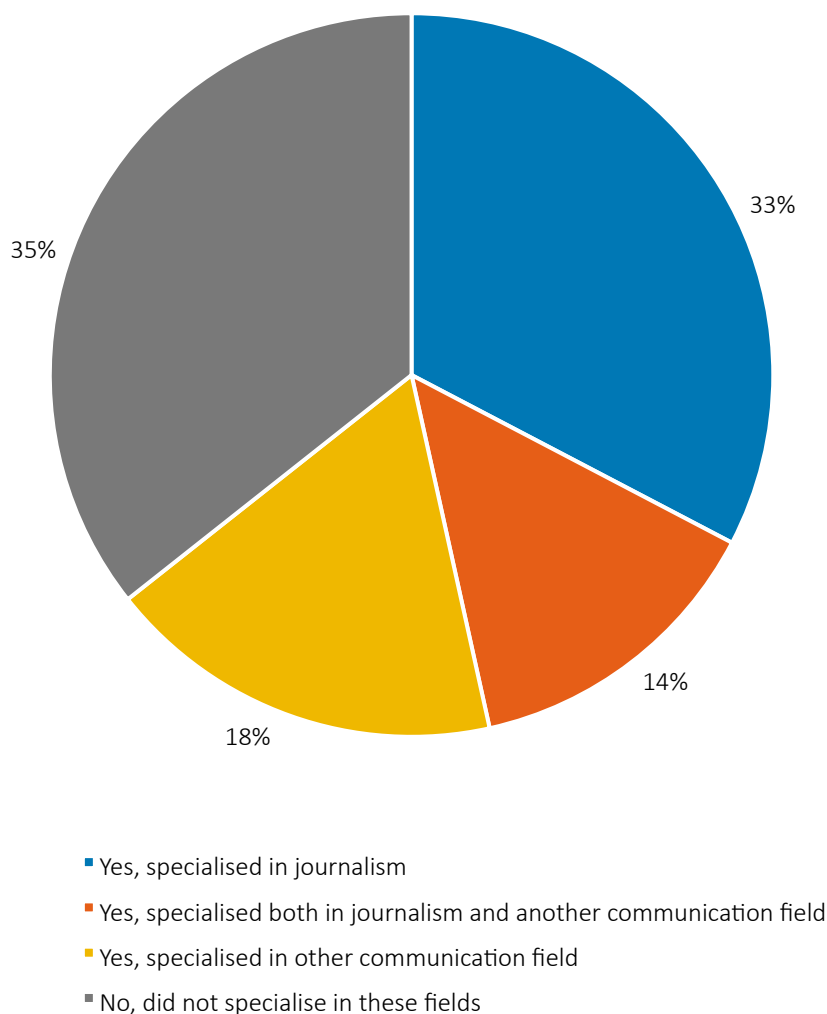


Fig. 2: Specialisation in Journalism Studies or Communication. N=426

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistic, available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6302.0>

<sup>2</sup> 'All employees average weekly total earnings' for May 2016, before tax was AUS\$1,160.20, working out to AUS\$922 per week after tax, calculated at <http://www.paycalculator.com.au>

## 2.4 WORK EXPERIENCE

The average lifestyle journalist has been working in journalism for 16 years, of which 11 years have been in lifestyle journalism; in other words, they worked for five years in journalism before moving into lifestyle beats. The average freelancer or blogger has been working for roughly 10 years. Interestingly, almost two thirds (60%) started working in lifestyle journalism in the last ten years.

About 30% have never worked outside of lifestyle journalism within the journalistic field, whereas 40% are currently working in mainstream journalism (Fig. 3). However, most journalistic work is done for lifestyle beats; only a fifth of all respondents work less than 50% of their time in lifestyle journalism.

There appears to be some commonality among lifestyle journalists when it comes to current or past employment with corporate publishing outlets and the lifestyle industry. While almost 60% of journalists have never worked in either of these fields, roughly 30% have also worked for corporate publishing outlets and the lifestyle industry in the past, and 10% are currently working in it. Advertising seems to be the field that the majority of lifestyle journalists have never worked in, with only 17% having worked in the field in the past, and 5% still now.

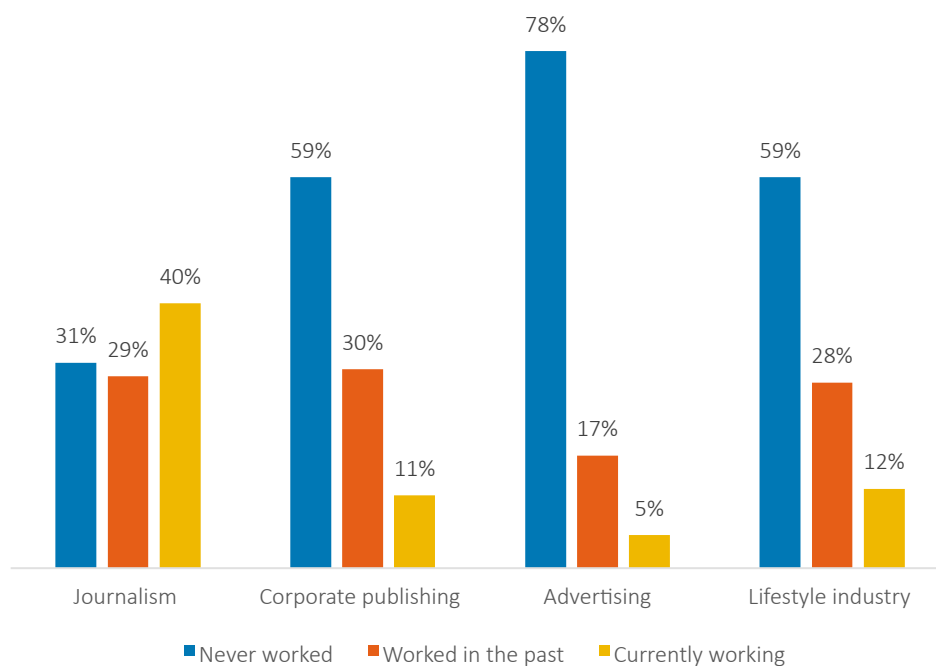


Fig. 3: Have you ever worked, or do you work in one of the following areas? Multiple mentions possible. N=491-517

## 2.5 JOB SATISFACTION

Australian lifestyle journalists seem to like their work and see themselves continuing to work in lifestyle journalism. A vast majority (82%) of all surveyed journalists are satisfied with their job, and 15% are dissatisfied. Just over half (55%) say they will likely or definitely still work in lifestyle journalism in the next five years, while 28% are unsure of their future in this field (Fig. 4).

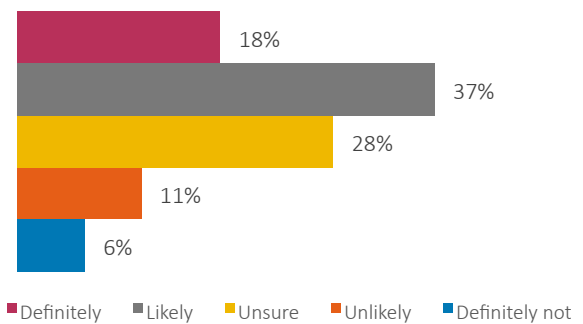


Fig. 4: Looking ahead, do you think you will still be working in travel journalism in five years' time? N=531

# 3. WORKING ENVIRONMENT

## 3.1 EMPLOYMENT CATEGORY

The majority (65%) of lifestyle journalists have regular employment, with five out of ten journalists working full-time and one in ten holding part-time positions. Just under one-third (29%) work as freelancers or bloggers (Fig. 5). Comparatively, of the 605 Australian mainstream journalists interviewed for the Worlds of Journalism study, 88% held full-time employment and 8% were in part-time positions (both with permanent contracts), with only 3% working as freelancers. In comparison to mainstream journalism, these figures show that lifestyle journalism is less likely to offer a guarantee of full-time employment and more likely to draw on the work of freelancers or bloggers.

Asked whether they belong to any organisations or association that are primarily for people in journalism or the communications field, 68% of lifestyle journalists said they do not belong to any such organisations. Of the Australian mainstream journalists interviewed, 48% reported being members of a professional association (Hanusch 2016).

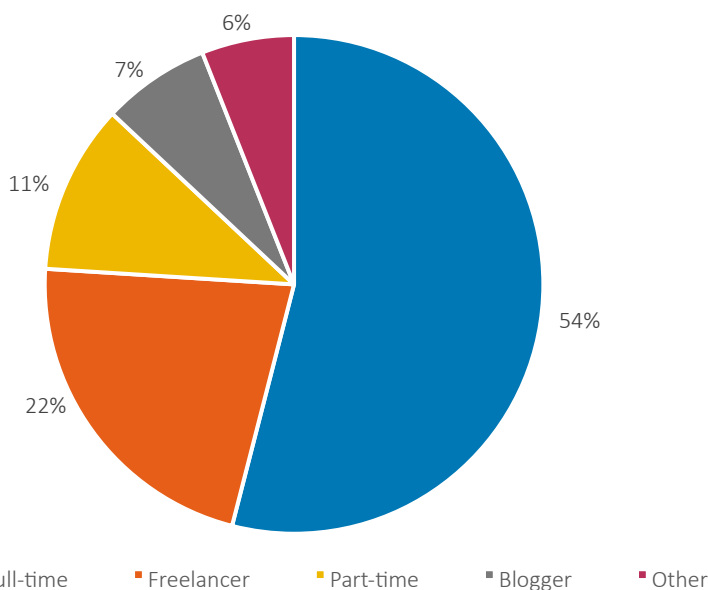


Fig. 5: Which of the following categories best describes your current employment? N=616

## 3.2 MEDIA OUTLETS

Within the last year (2015/2016), the majority of journalists (64%) worked for anywhere between one and three media outlets, with most working for one organisation (35% - Fig. 6). Only 22% reported for between four and nine outlets, and beyond that numbers decrease, with 14% reporting for 10 or more outlets, including one journalist saying they report for as many as 150 outlets.

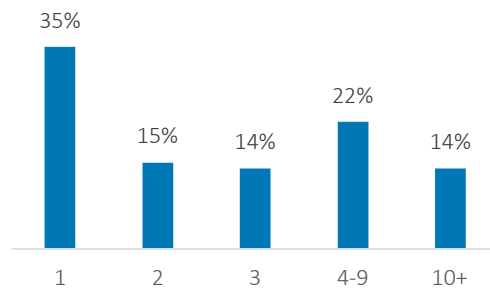


Fig. 6: Please list the number of outlets or media organizations you have produced lifestyle content for over the past year. N=610

Just over 45% of respondents work for publications with national reach, and just shy of another third (29%) work for publications with transnational reach. Lifestyle journalism content is mostly produced for commercial media organizations, with 88% of all respondents publishing with this type of media.



### 3.3 AREAS OF LIFESTYLE JOURNALISM

When asked whether journalists work on, or supervise specific lifestyle areas, or work on a range of areas, 60% of lifestyle journalists said they work on a variety of topics and subjects. The lifestyle journalists who work on one specific beat, predominantly work in travel (12%), food, cuisine and cooking (10%), and fashion, beauty, health and fitness (9%). These topics also dominate coverage by lifestyle journalists who cover more than one topic (Fig. 7). Those who work on various topics, also report on travel (41%), cooking, health (each 35%), as well as pop-culture and celebrity (26%). The area least reported on among journalists who work across multiple topics is personal finance.

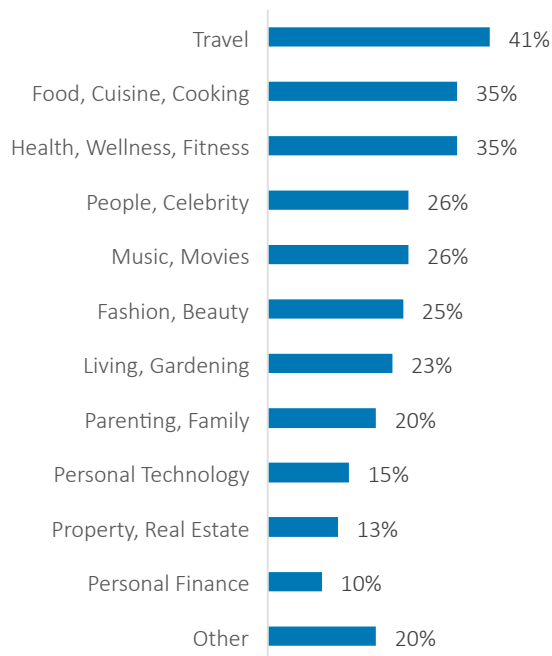


Fig. 7: Please choose all the areas of lifestyle journalism you normally work in. N=371

### 3.4 PLATFORMS PUBLISHED ON

Lifestyle journalists also publish across multiple platforms. Considering that most media outlets today have an online presence, it's not surprising that across all platforms, a large percentage of journalists publish online (37%). Similarly, it is not surprising that beyond online platforms, almost 20% of lifestyle journalists publish in specialist magazines, that focus on particular lifestyle areas, e.g. travel, food, health etc. (Fig. 8). It is however interesting to note that almost twice as many journalists publish in radio than on television, especially if we consider that lifestyle topics tend to be visually engaging and active in nature (e.g. travel, cooking etc.).

Comparatively, most Australian mainstream journalists work for print, with 38% working for a daily newspaper, followed by 15% reporting for a weekly newspaper, and 11% for a magazine. When it comes to broadcast, 16% work in radio, and 14% in television. Important to note here is that mainstream journalists by Hanusch (2016) were only able to nominate one main media type, whereas the lifestyle journalism survey allowed respondents to select all areas they normally work in.

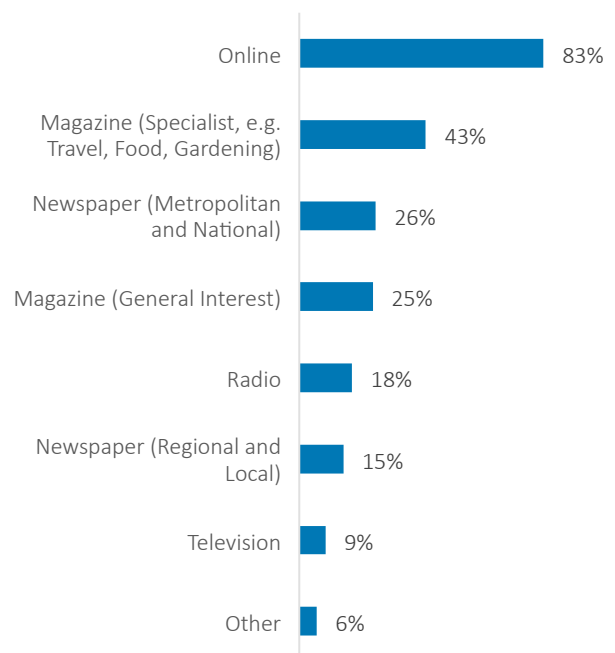


Fig. 8: Which platforms do you publish your content in? Multiple mentions possible. N=616

### 3.5 LOCATIONS OF WORK

Lifestyle journalists seem to work both from home and office, with an almost equal distribution. The average journalist spends roughly 90% of their workday either in an office and at home, and only 9% of work time is spent neither at home nor an office (Fig. 9). However, looking closer at the breakdown of individual journalists' answers, there seems to be a divide among them that is not as evident when looking at the averages. Just over one-third (37% spend at least 80% of their workday in an office while 32% work at most only 10% from home. At the same time, 37% never work in an office, and almost 28% work at least 90% from home. Interestingly, 36% of journalists spend up to 20% of their workday neither in the office nor at home, and are presumably travelling, while just over half of journalists never work in a location other than their office or home.

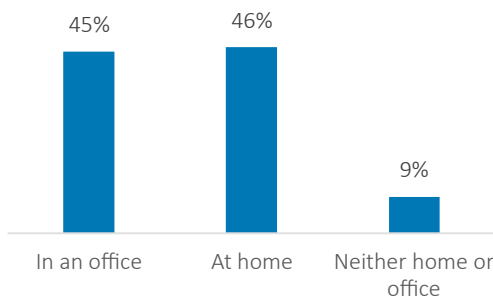


Fig. 9: Please tell us what percentage of your work is spent in the following locations. N=517

### 3.6 HOURS SPENT ON LIFESTYLE JOURNALISM

Just over one-third (37%) of lifestyle journalists spend between 21 and 40 hours working on topics related to lifestyle journalism, and almost the same percentage (36%) spend up to and less than 20 hours working on lifestyle journalism topics. One-quarter (26%) devote more than the regular 40 hours per week working on topics related to lifestyle journalism (Fig. 10).

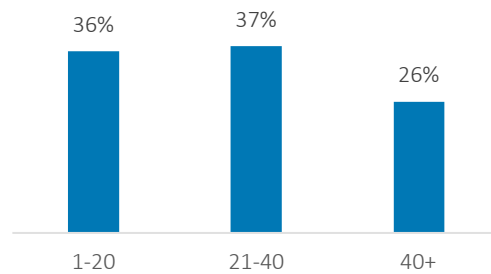


Fig. 10: How many hours per week do you spend working on topics related to lifestyle journalism? N=597

## 4. ROLE PERCEPTIONS

Lifestyle journalists are predominantly concerned with ensuring that the content they produce is fun, entertaining, and inspirational (top three foci – Fig. 11). Here, upward of 81% of journalists agreed these criteria were of strong importance. These role perceptions are closely followed by the wish to offer a service or advice to audiences, regarding trends and news-you-can-use. Even though recent research on lifestyle journalists shows that they are interested in focussing predominantly on positive stories, only just over half of all respondents (55%) strongly or somewhat agree to that role perception.

Where journalists appear to be equally divided is on statements about providing a forum for audiences to ask questions, and motivating people to change their lifestyle. Journalists feel it is unimportant or only a little important to promote the lifestyle industries, and to monitor and scrutinize businesses involved in lifestyle industries.

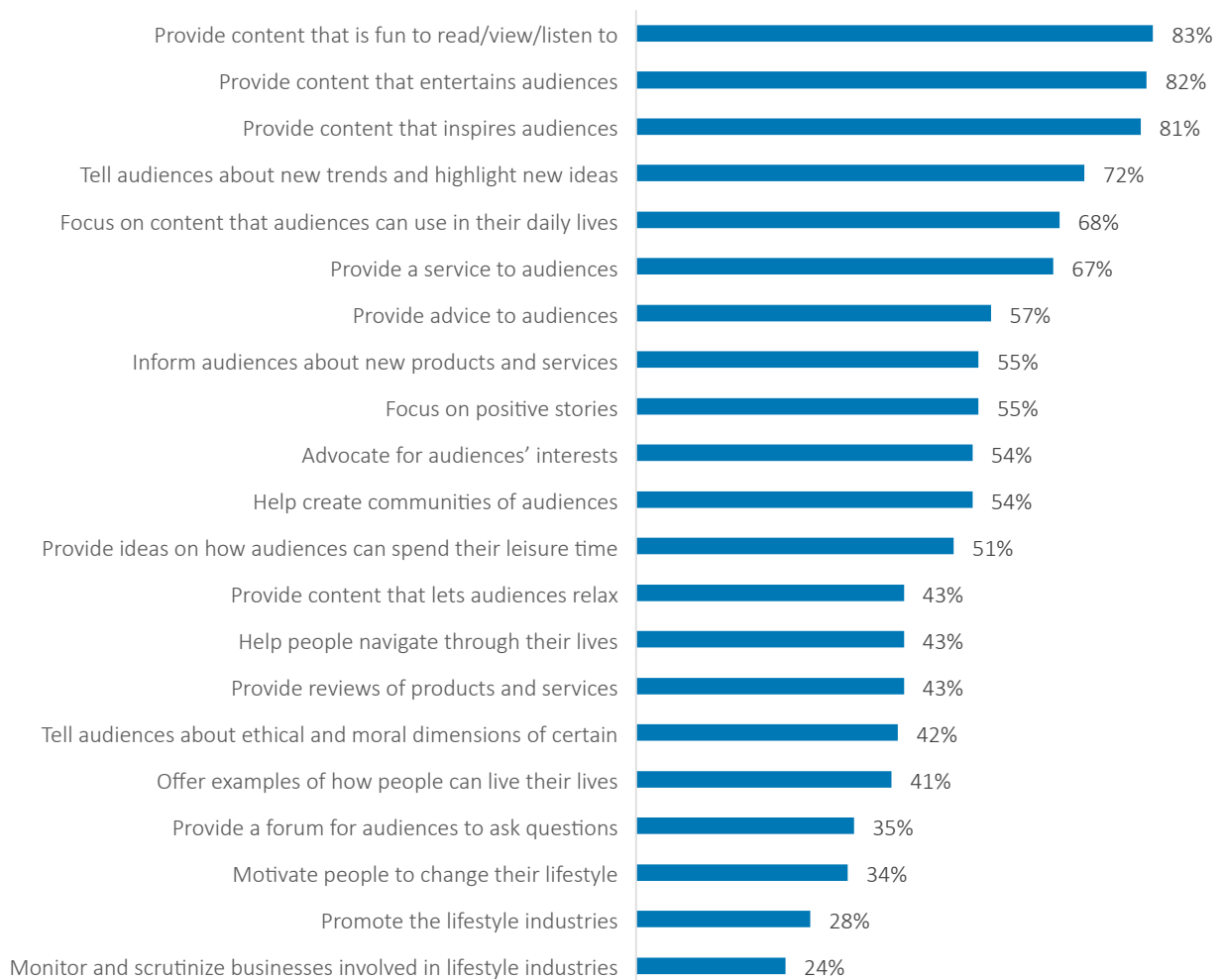


Fig. 11: Percentage of respondents saying very/extremely important to the question: "Please indicate how important each of the following things are in your work as a lifestyle journalist." N=602-612

## 5. COMMERCIAL INFLUENCES

### 5.1 AUTONOMY

Commercial influences can have a great impact on journalists' perception of autonomy in journalistic work, and presumably greater for those in lifestyle journalism which by nature demands more interaction with commercial products and services, and perhaps even pressures to work on certain types of stories or emphasise specific story angles. What is therefore interesting to find is that 82% of journalists feel they have a substantial deal of freedom or complete freedom in selecting the stories they want to work on, and when it comes to deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized 86% feel they have complete or a great deal of freedom to make these decisions.

Overall, journalists say they have quite a lot of freedom in both selecting stories and more so in deciding which aspects of those stories to emphasise, meaning, as soon as journalists manage to pitch their stories successfully they say they have a great deal of, or complete freedom to shape them (85%).

These figures are even higher than those reported by Australian mainstream journalists, where 75% reported having complete or great deal of freedom in selecting news stories they work on, and 81% felt they have complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasised (Hanusch 2016).

It is interesting to contrast journalists' perceptions of freedom to select and shape stories with their perceptions of the commercial influences affecting lifestyle journalism (Fig. 12). Although most lifestyle journalists report having great to absolute freedom, most also strongly or somewhat agree that they should consider publishers' and managers' interests when producing journalistic content (49%). In all other cases, journalists were more likely to strongly disagree with all of the above statements, in particular claims that advertising interests usually outweigh editorial interests (72%) and that they never mention a brand in the stories they produce (69%), meaning that journalists do in fact mention brands (Fig. 12).

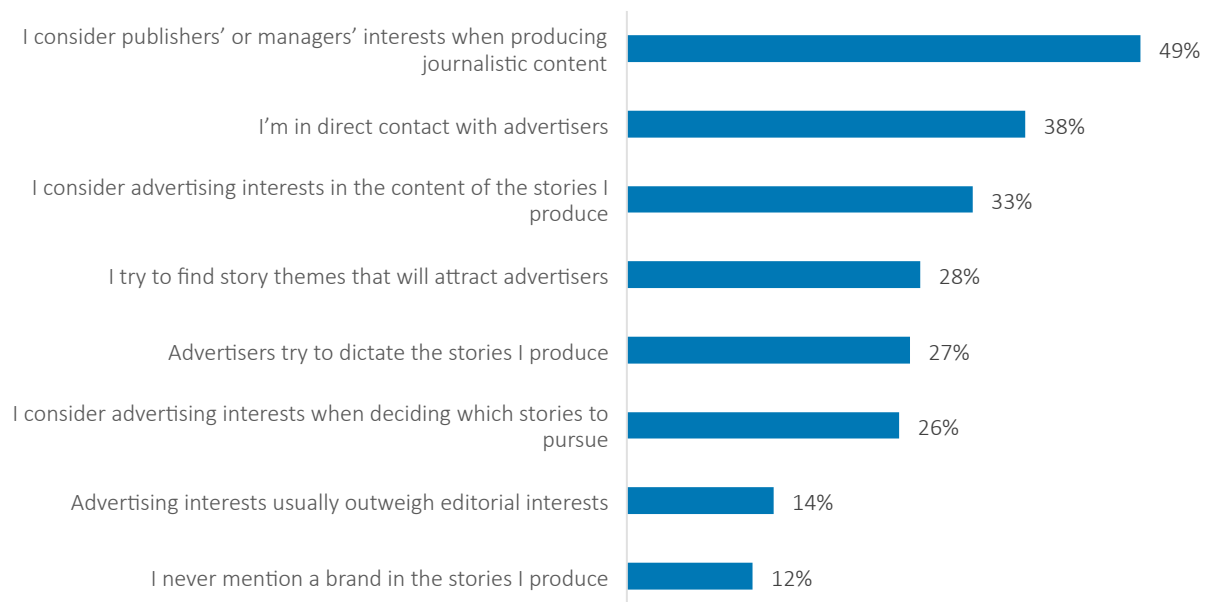


Fig. 12: Percentage of respondents who somewhat or strongly agree with the question: "Lifestyle journalism is affected by a range of commercial aspects. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements." N=602-607

## 5.2 PUBLIC RELATIONS MATERIAL

Questioned about the possible influence of public relations material, lifestyle journalists claim autonomy from the impact of PR on which stories they chose to cover and how they report on them. The vast majority claims that PR material has no impact on what topics they choose to cover (58% disagreement) or how they cover a specific topic (63% disagreement).

Despite the fact that most journalists report getting fewer than five phone calls and 20 emails per day (14-15, p. 12), the perception persists that there is too much PR material (48% - Fig. 13).

At the same time, PR material is seen as providing necessary information for journalists to do their job (54%) and almost half of all respondents claim to have a close relationship with PR professionals.

Where journalists almost equally agree and disagree is around the claim that it is easy for PR professionals to place content in journalistic publications. Interestingly, only a fifth of all respondents claim that editorial meetings are used as a space to discuss and define how PR material should be treated.

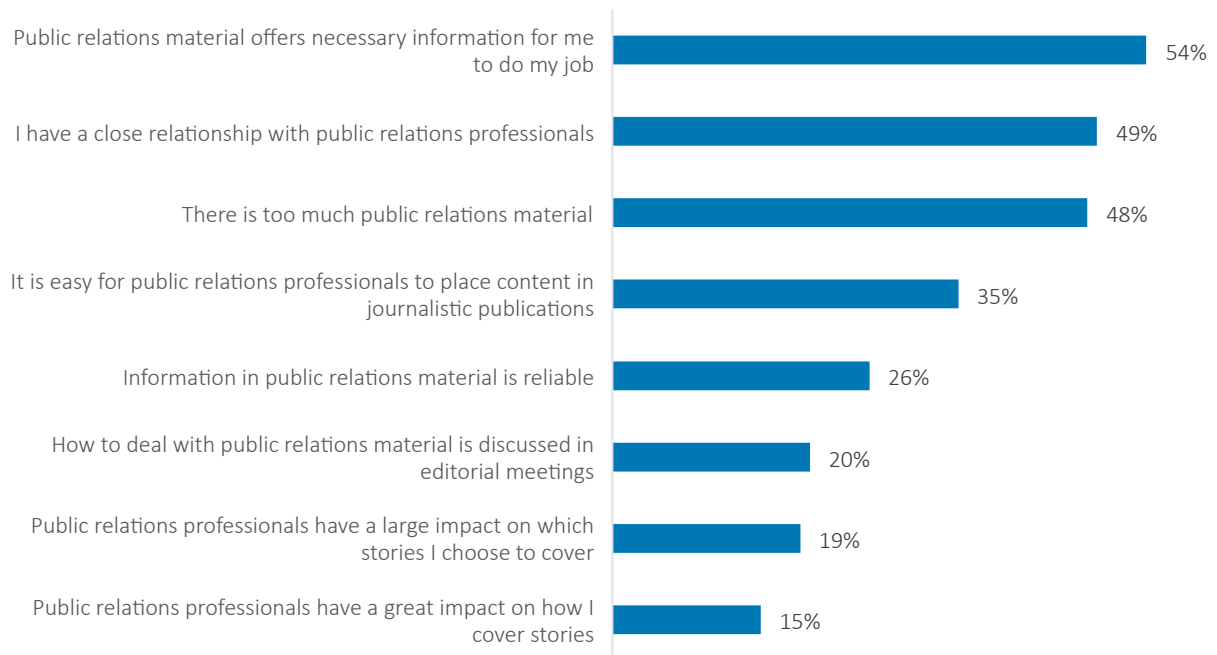


Fig. 13: Percentage of respondents who somewhat or strongly agree with the question: "Please indicate your agreement with the following statements in relation to public relations material." N=588-593

### 5.3 UNSOLICITED EMAILS AND PHONE CALLS

Contrary to the perception that journalists are flooded with PR material, findings show that 66% of lifestyle journalists receive up to 20 unsolicited PR emails a day, 14% receive between 21 and 40 emails, and only 5% receive more than 100 emails per day (Fig. 14).

The seemingly low number of unsolicited emails and phone calls journalists receive from PR professionals could be explained by the finding that 49% of journalists say they have a close relationship with public relations professionals (Fig. 13, p. 11), arguably reducing the need for unsolicited contact. Likewise, some communication between journalists and PR professionals could be taking place via social media platforms, which were not included in this question.

When it comes to unsolicited phone calls from PR professionals, Fig. 15 shows that under half (41%) of all journalists get no phone calls from PR professionals, and just over half (51%) receive anywhere between one and five calls a day.

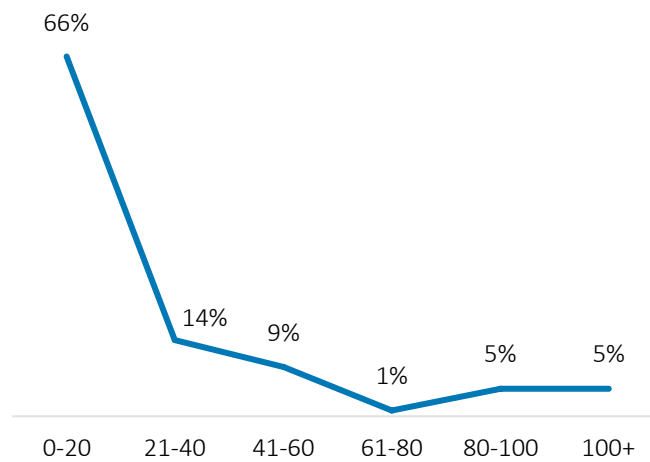


Fig. 14: How many unsolicited emails do you receive on average per day from PR professionals? N=592

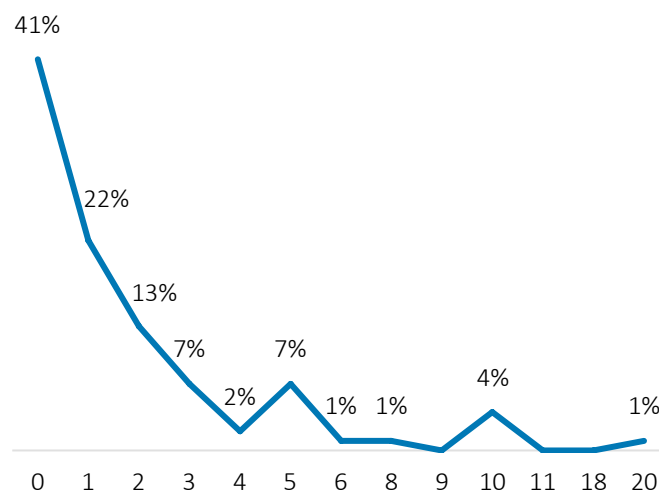


Fig. 15: How many unsolicited phone calls do you receive on average per day from PR professionals? N=589

## 5.4 FREE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Lifestyle journalists do not think that free products influence their reporting, with more than 50% disagreeing with that statement (Fig. 16). In contrast, they claim to favour an open approach, where, for instance, more than seven out of ten lifestyle journalists say they would tell their audiences if someone else sponsored a product or service (75%) and just over a half would report if a product did not live up to their expectations, even if it was sponsored.

When considering the trustworthiness of stories based on free products or services, four out of ten journalists say that kind of content would lose its credibility. Interestingly though, when it comes to the acceptance of gifts, almost a third of the respondents don't have a strong position on the matter; 30% neither agree nor disagree that accepting gifts of higher value is wrong, and another 32% are similarly ambivalent on the question of whether they would return free products, regardless of their value.

At the same time, most lifestyle journalists claim that at least 70% of the content they produce is free of public relations material, and nearly 2 out of ten respondents say it is almost entirely free of public relations material (90%).

Moreover, they credit PR with only a small amount of sway, with the majority (70%) of journalists saying that only up to 25% of the content they produce is influenced by public relations material. Another quarter of respondents say that up to 50% of their content is influenced. Nearly all respondents (97%) say their content never consists of any unrevised public relations material.

Journalists' perceptions of the level of competition and financial status of their employer was also crucial for this survey. Just over a half (53%) of questioned lifestyle journalists see their main employer as operating within a high or very high competitive environment, and only 14% say their main employer is situated within an environment of to low no competition.

Despite talk of a financial crisis of the media sector, 43% perceive the financial situation of their organisation as positive (30%) or very positive (13%), with 29% in the 'neutral' position, and 22% seeing the financial situation as negative (18%) or very negative (4%). At the same time, more than half (57%) of the lifestyle journalists perceive their organisation as somewhat or entirely dependent on advertising, and only 22% see it as entirely independent.

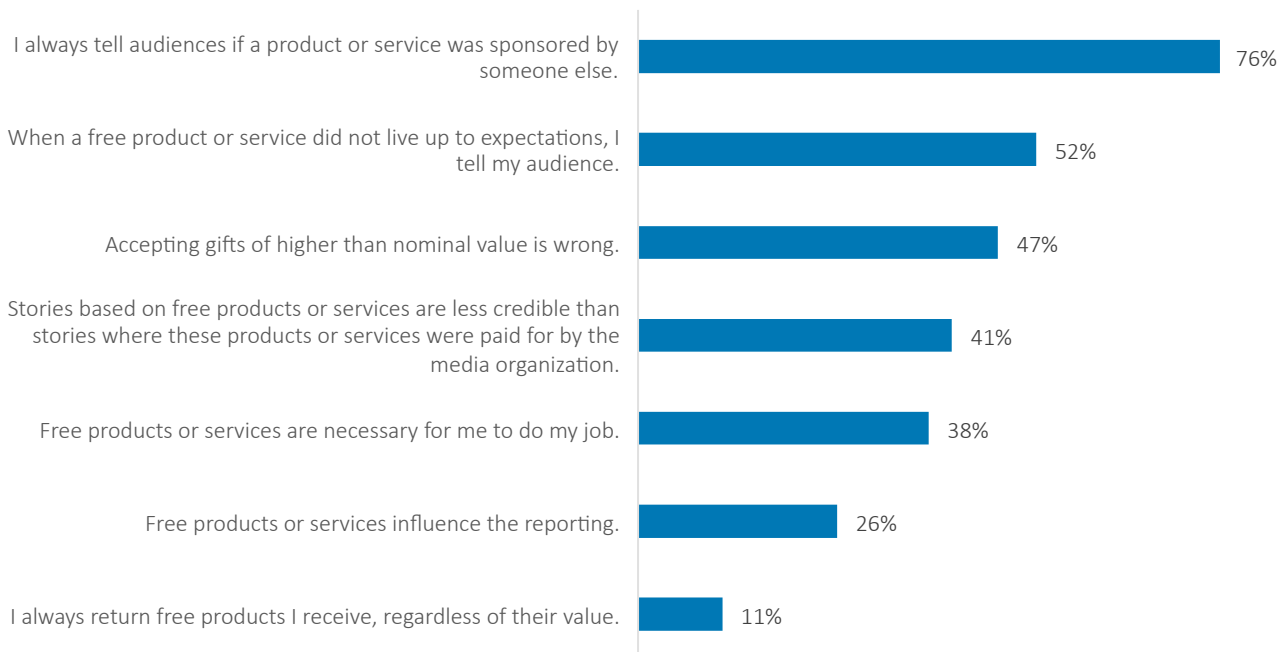


Figure 16: Percentage of respondents who somewhat or strongly agree with the question: "Please indicate your agreement with the following statements about free products and services." N=559-564

## 6. TRANSFORMATIONS

When asked to evaluate the extent to which various aspects of journalistic routines and the working environment have changed over the past five years, journalists say that the time available to research stories, employment opportunities and salary have decreased. A drop in the time available to research stories was also noted among Australian mainstream journalists (Hanusch 2016).

What appears not to have changed over the past five years among lifestyle journalists are influences from public relations and advertising, critical reviews of products, freedom to make editorial decisions, and positive perceptions of lifestyle journalism by other journalists.

Lifestyle journalists say that pressures on working conditions have increased. The vast majority (90% - Fig. 17) feels an increased importance in the need to be active on social media, with almost eight out of ten saying they recognise the need to market their own work online, and 68% acknowledge the heightened need to take into account audience research and data, e.g. web analytics.

Similar increases were detected among Australian mainstream journalists who noted an increase in the use of search engines and technical skills, average working hours, and interaction of journalists with their audiences. Likewise, mainstream journalists said that the influence of social media, user-generated content and audience feedback/involvement has strengthened (Hanusch 2016).



Fig. 17: Percentage of respondents who responded with 'somewhat increased' to 'increased a lot', to the question: "Lifestyle journalism has experienced a number of changes in recent times. Please tell us to what extent the following aspects have increased or decreased in your work over the past five years." N=515-525



### 6.1 USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Considering the noted increase in the importance of being active on social media, it's interesting to look into data on social media usage by lifestyle journalists (Fig. 18). They mainly use popular social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram on a regular

and frequent basis (at least once a day), presumably to engage with audiences and conduct research. Self-marketing platforms such as LinkedIn are used up to a few times a week, whereas personal blogging sites and YouTube are rarely used more than once a week.

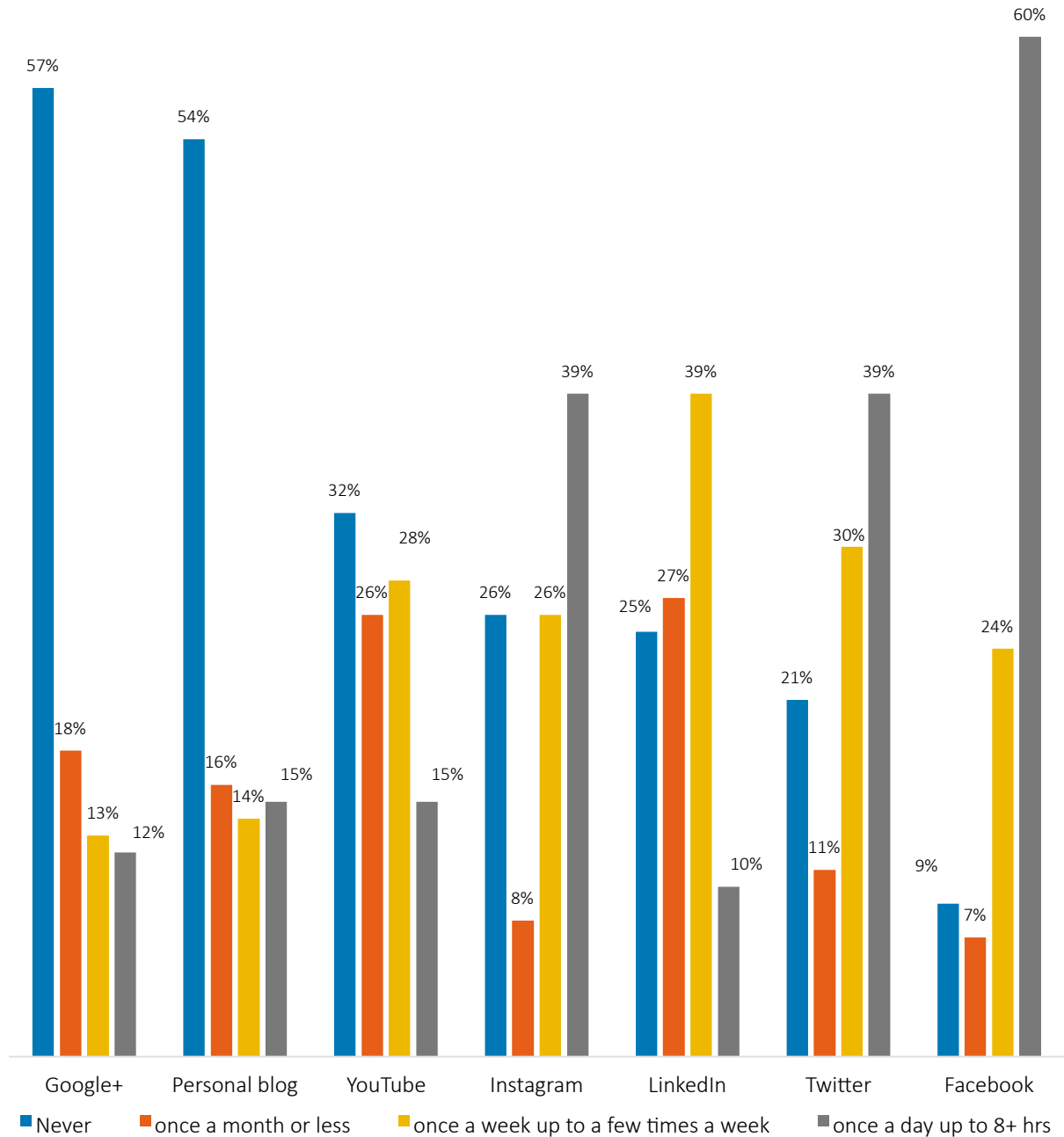


Fig. 18: How often do you use any of the following for work-related purposes? N=519-531

## 7. INFLUENCES

Corresponding with the perception that time available for research and production of stories has been decreasing, most lifestyle journalists say that deadlines are the biggest influence on their work (69% - Fig. 19) followed by their personal interests (67% agreement).

Apart from deadlines, feedback from audiences and social media are the most crucial influences on a lifestyle journalist's daily work, closely followed by ethical and editorial policies. Journalists claim that freebies, promotional material, and public relations professionals are least influential (agreement below 10%).

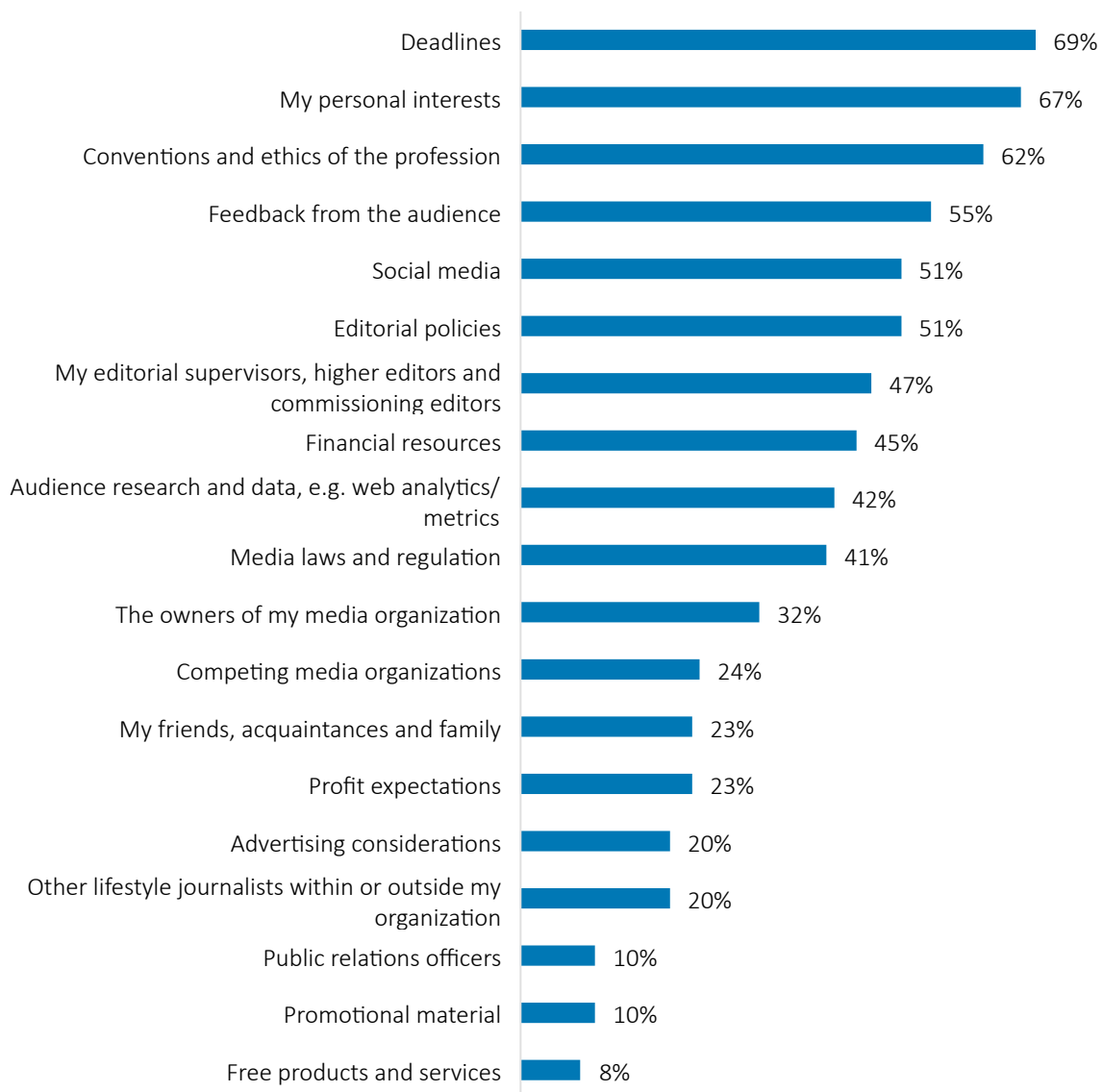


Fig. 19: Percentage of respondents who somewhat or strongly agree with the question: "Please tell us how much influence each of the following has on your work." N=508-518

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