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Crossing Boundaries: Professional Role Perceptions and Freedoms Among Diasporic Iranian Journalists

Abstract

We rely on data from an online survey of 69 Iranian journalists living and working outside Iran to (1) examine their professional role perceptions, focusing on impartiality versus interventionism, and (2) assess their operating environment when it comes to reported freedoms, perceived fears for their personal safety and the safety of their families, as well as reported experience being victims of cyber-attacks attributed to Iranian authorities. We test whether factors such as their target audience, the issues they cover, the year they left Iran, as well as the professional role perceptions relate to reported freedoms and fears. We find that Iranian journalists abroad do not see themselves in an activist role, but strongly identify themselves with objective journalism. Also, while respondents see some editorial freedoms to pursue investigative reporting and question the Iranian government, the majority of respondents fear personal or familial repercussions, and many have been the target of cyber-attacks. Third, we find that contextual factors such as the topics covered or the target audience are only weakly related with professional role perceptions and reported freedoms and fears. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings in the contemporary Iranian context.