

New Zealand print freelancers: who they are, what they earn, where and what they publish

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Abstract

This paper provides a statistical picture of print freelancers, the largest freelance sector. Compared with journalists employed in the print industry, freelancers had generally the same ethnic profile and distribution throughout the country, but were more likely to be older and female. In our content analysis, 20 per cent of daily newspapers' copy, a third of weekly newspapers' copy, and about 60 per cent of magazine copy came from freelancers. The analysis suggests the newspapers found freelancers particularly useful in providing specialist copy and comment. Although some freelancers were relatively well paid for their efforts, print freelancers' average income was markedly less than that of their employed counterparts. This was because many freelancers work relatively few hours. Further, female freelancers' average income was about two-thirds of that earned by male freelancers. Many of those who embark on a freelancing journalism career should therefore be prepared to work relatively few hours and receive little financial reward.

Introduction

Freelancers – defined here as self-employed journalists who sell their work to clients in the journalism industry – are enjoying a rising profile in New Zealand. The second annual freelancers' conference was held in Auckland in 2007, attracting about 200 delegates and corporate sponsorship. *Freelance Market*, an online resource for freelancers (www.freelancemarket.co.nz), began publishing two regular newsletters in February 2006, which now have about 850 subscribers. Further, a freelance representative now sits on the council of the New Zealand Journalists' Training Organisation. These developments build on the presence of the New Zealand Freelance Writers' Association, an organisation that has existed for more than 25 years to support all freelance writers (www.nzfreelancewriters.org.nz).

Freelancers are lobbying the industry for higher rates of reimbursement, arguing that freelancers are undervalued (Griggs, 2007). Certainly, were it not for freelancers, the print-journalism industry in New Zealand would struggle to provide readers with the range of copy currently provided. In particular, the magazine industry relies heavily on freelancers. As Sarah Sandley, chair of the Magazine Publishers' Association, recently said: "We all of us are dependent to a greater or lesser extent on freelancers" (quoted in Griggs, 2007, para. 25).

But despite this higher profile little is known about the freelance market. Who are the freelancers? What do they earn? Where does their work appear? What do they produce? This paper seeks to answer these questions for freelancers whose work appears in the New Zealand print media, the largest section of the freelance industry.

Background to the research

Although numerous books on freelancing in New Zealand have been published, the focus of the literature is on providing readers with practical guides on being a freelancer. Much time is spent explaining how to find stories and conduct interviews, for instance, but there is virtually nothing analysing the freelance market itself.

Morris (1994) stated that two types of people typically become freelancers. The first are ex-journalists who “later decided to give freelancing a try”; the second are those who “entered our industry via other fields” such as ex-sportspeople and politicians (p. 128). Remuneration is not entirely overlooked in the literature, with most writers briefly summarising the standard rates. McCrone (1996) said rates ranged from \$100 to \$280 for 1000 words. The lower fee was for newspapers with circulations of about 10,000 copies; the higher fee for quality periodicals and large-circulation newspapers. The Engineering, Printing & Manufacturing Union, the journalists’ union in New Zealand, emphasised the difficulty in generating a high income as a freelancer. Whereas a staff feature writer can produce on average between 2000 and 2500 well-researched, well-written words a week, for a freelancer to “earn the equivalent of a senior feature writer’s salary of \$60,000, you need to write and be paid for 5300 words a week” (Engineering, Printing & Manufacturing Union, 2005, para. 3).

A recent survey of freelancers (Griggs, 2007) reported that, on average, newspapers pay an estimated 17-39 cents a word for freelance material, whereas magazines pay about 37-50 cents a word. Griggs noted that to earn the equivalent of \$42,000, including holiday and other entitlements, a freelancer earning 40 cents a word would need to produce a major 3800-word article every week, an almost impossible task. In light of this, Griggs advised freelancers to try to sell their material several times over to various clients.

The current study confines itself to publication in New Zealand, but it should be noted that as long ago as the mid-1980s New Zealand freelancers were advised to think globally, as they could earn more money by selling their work overseas (Mackrell, 1984). Similarly, Griggs and Stevenson (2006) suggested the only way to make a relatively high income as a freelancer was to write for publications in countries with currencies stronger than the New Zealand dollar.

Profiling the freelancers

Government agency Statistics New Zealand conducts the New Zealand census every five years, with the most recent census conducted on March 7, 2006 (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). The author made a special request to Statistics New Zealand for data from the 2006 census, which was then used to present the following profile of freelancers in New Zealand.

The census asked respondents aged at least 15 years to report the job they spent the most hours engaged in during the past week (part-time or full-time). The data quoted here used the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (known as ANZSCO V1.0), as this taxonomy used the term “journalist” to classify journalists. This was preferred to the older New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, as that classification did not classify journalists as such, but rather used the classifications Reporter, Editor and Sub-editor. ANZSCO used four occupational categories for journalists – print, radio, television, and other (such as employers). ANZSCO has a separate classification for Editor, but that was excluded here, as this study confined itself to considering only those who gather and produce the copy. Data were collected to compare employed journalists (that is, those employed in the industry) with self-employed journalists (freelancers). To help ensure respondent privacy, Statistics New Zealand randomly rounds census figures, which is why the figures across the following tables do not always match exactly.

The census revealed that most journalists worked in print (table 1, all tables are located at the end of the paper): Eighty-six per cent of all journalists worked in print, five per cent in television and three per cent in radio. Most journalists were employed (table 2): Eighty-one per cent of journalists were employed, virtually all the rest were self-employed.

Not surprisingly, then, most freelancers were print journalists - of the 420 freelancers in the census, 85 per cent worked in print (table 3). Given that employed and freelance journalists accounted for virtually all the workforce, and that freelancers predominated in print journalism, the rest of this analysis is confined to a comparison of employed and freelance print journalists.

Compared to employed print journalists, proportionately more print freelancers were female (table 4). Whereas 49 per cent of employed print journalists were female, 55 per cent of print freelancers were female. They also tended to be older (table 5). Whereas 38 per cent of employed print journalists were aged under 35, only 10 per cent of freelancers were in that age group. At the other end of the scale, whereas only 16 per cent of employed print journalists were aged 55 and over, for freelancers the figure was 37 per cent.

Freelancers had generally the same ethnic characteristics as employed print journalists (table 6). Eighty-three per cent of employed print journalists and the same percentage of freelancers were of European ethnicity; three per cent of employed print journalists were Asian, compared to two per cent of freelancers; and two per cent of employed print journalists were Pacific, compared with one per cent of freelancers. The only notable difference was with Māori. Whereas five per cent of employed print journalists were Māori, with freelancers the figure was only two per cent.

The distribution of freelancers across the country closely matched the distribution of employed print journalists (table 7). Of course, journalists were concentrated in the main centres – about a third in the Auckland region, 19 per cent in the Wellington region, and 12 per cent in the Christchurch region – but there were marked similarities in distribution across the rest of the country as well.

Income and hours worked

It is clear that many print freelancers work part-time (table 8). Whereas only 10 per cent of employed print journalists worked fewer than 30 hours a week, 46 per cent of freelancers worked these hours. Similarly, whereas 41 per cent of employed print journalists worked 40 hours a week, only 11 per cent of freelancers did likewise. But at the top end of the scale almost a quarter of freelancers (24 per cent) worked 45 hours or more a week. This is less than the figure for employed journalists (36 per cent), to be sure, but is a relatively high percentage nonetheless.

The annual income freelancers earned was in line with the hours worked (table 9). Although only about 20 per cent of employed print journalists earned \$30,000 or less, 40 per cent of freelancers earned in that range (just over a quarter earned no more than \$20,000). At the other end of the scale, nearly half the employed print journalists (47 per cent) earned more than \$50,000, whereas only a third of freelancers earned likewise. So although some freelancers earn a reasonable living from freelancing, many earn meagre incomes.

Table 10 reveals that, within the various hours-worked bands, freelancers often earned higher average incomes than their employed counterparts. For instance, among females working 20-29 hours, freelancers earned an average \$34,000 against the employed journalists' \$28,500. Similarly, among males working 40 hours a week, freelancers earned \$57,600, against employed journalists' \$54,900. A possible reason for this is differences in working conditions. Whereas employed journalists' working conditions include such entitlements as holiday pay and sick leave, freelancers do not receive those benefits. Freelancers must therefore earn relatively more income for the same number of hours worked to compensate for this. It is also possible that the freelancers had a different age profile or experience from employed journalists working the same hours, and it is this that explains the differences in pay.

Despite earning higher average incomes in many of the hours-worked bands, print freelancers' overall average income was lower than that for employed journalists. The average annual income of print freelancers was

\$42,900, against the employed journalists' \$50,900. This difference was due to the relatively high proportion of employed journalists working relatively long hours and earning relatively high incomes.

Table 10 also demonstrates that females made up the bulk of the lower-income, lower-hours proportion of the freelance workforce. A third of all freelancers were women working 29 hours or less a week, men working the same hours comprised 13 per cent of the total freelance workforce. If we include freelancers working 39 hours or less, women made up 40 per cent of the total freelance workforce, whereas men comprised about half that amount. And within these hours-worked bands female freelancers earned less than their male counterparts. In the 30-39 hours-worked band, for instance, female freelancers earned an average income of \$40,500 against the males' \$58,000. At the other end of the scale, male freelancers working 45 hours a week or more comprised 17 per cent of the freelance workforce, whereas female freelancers comprised only seven per cent. At least here the average incomes were about equal: the women's average income of \$64,700 was slightly more than the men's \$64,600.

The overall effect of this was that female freelancers' average income was \$35,400, whereas the male freelancers' average income was a considerably higher \$52,100. There was a similar marked difference in the average incomes of the employed journalists, with women earning \$43,700 to the men's \$58,000. It is outside the scope of the present study to discuss why such a gender difference exists, but this is clearly an area that merits further study.

Where print freelancers publish

To identify where New Zealand print freelancers publish their work domestically, the author and three research assistants conducted a content analysis of the major New Zealand newspapers and magazines in 2007. The raw data were obtained from Media Monitors, a private company that collects media output for its clients. These data were cross-referenced against a database maintained by another company, MediaPeople, which lists journalists employed at major publications. These data were augmented by lists prepared by the author and the three research assistants of employed journalists and freelancers, lists obtained by contacting those in the employed and freelance sectors.

To obtain a picture of freelancers' contribution to the major newspapers, the analysis covered the major daily newspapers: *Otago Daily Times*, *The Dominion Post*, *The NZ Herald*, *The Press* and *Waikato Times*. We also included the five national weekly newspapers: the two business weeklies, *The National Business Review* and *The Independent Financial Review*; and the three Sunday newspapers, *Herald on Sunday*, *Sunday News*, and *Sunday Star-Times*. The international pages were excluded from the analysis, as this copy is typically produced by overseas news agencies and newspapers, whereas the focus of this analysis was on the New Zealand freelance market. We analysed two weeks' worth of articles (September 3 to 16, 2007, inclusive) to generate a large population of articles.

To obtain a picture of freelancers' contribution to the major magazines, we surveyed all the magazines with an audited circulation of at least 30,000 contained in Media Monitors' database. The magazines surveyed (frequency of publication ranged from weekly to monthly) were: *The Australian Women's Weekly*, *Country-Wide Northern Cuisine*, *The Foodtown Magazine*, *The NZ Farmers Weekly*, *NZ House & Garden*, *NZ Listener*, *NZ Woman's Weekly*, *New Idea*, *Next*, *North & South*, *Straight Furrow*, *TV Guide* and *Woman's Day*. Where these magazines were international, we analysed the New Zealand edition. We analysed one month's worth of articles (August 20 to September 16, 2007, inclusive), again, to generate a large population of articles.

The purpose of this part of the study was to capture and measure the characteristics of the overall print freelance market, and the survey periods reflect this. As such, results for individual publications are not reported below. Given the survey periods captured only two issues of each weekly newspaper and one issue of each monthly magazine, such numbers were too small to produce reliable figures for individual publications.

We collected data on bylined articles, producing a total of 3212 articles. In the vast majority of cases, each article carried only one byline. However, in a handful of cases articles carried multiple bylines. To facilitate our analysis and to maximise the number of articles analysed, such articles were split, and the bylines and word counts assigned to each resulting new article on a *pro rata* basis. For instance, an article that carried two bylines was split into two articles, the first having the first byline and 50 per cent of the word count, the second having the second byline and the remaining 50 per cent of the word count. This increased the total number of articles to 3258, an increase of 1.4 per cent. In the following tables the sum of the figures may not match the total, due to rounding.

Table 11 shows the word count for the bylined articles. The data is split into copy produced by self-employed journalists, employed journalists, news agencies, and other (including where the byline was another newspaper, an overseas stringer or a pseudonym). These two latter categories reflect the fact it was impossible to obtain information on what proportions of such copy was produced by employed staff versus freelancers.

Employed journalists' copy predominated at both the weekly and daily newspapers, accounting for 60 and 62 per cent of the total copy respectively. News-agency copy accounted for another six per cent of copy at the dailies (no news-agency copy appeared in the weekly newspapers). But the contribution of freelancers was significant, amounting to nearly 20 per cent of the copy at the daily newspapers and over a third at the weeklies. Freelancers' contribution was more pronounced at the magazines, accounting for about 60 per cent of the total copy. Virtually all the remaining magazine copy came from employed journalists.

What print freelancers publish

Table 12 reports the nature of copy produced by freelancers versus the remainder (employed journalists, news agencies and other). Only figures for the newspapers are presented, as Media Monitors does not collect such data for the magazines. The subject areas were: general news, business (including business news, business features, information technology, and personal finance), lifestyle (including newspaper-magazine stories, arts and entertainment, and travel), opinion (columns and reviews), sport, and other (including farming, general features, education stories, property and careers).

At the daily newspapers, freelancers' largest contribution was in the supply of lifestyle copy, accounting for six per cent of the total lifestyle copy from all sources and about 30 per cent of total freelance copy. Freelancers supplied four percent of both the business and opinion copy at the dailies (22 and 18 per cent of total freelance copy respectively). Freelancers contributed little to the general news, sports or other pages - one to two per cent in each case.

At the weeklies, freelancers contributed a significant amount of business copy. Given the weeklies included the two business newspapers, the table reports business copy separately for the Sundays and the business papers. This allows us to separately see the contribution freelance business journalists make to the business newspapers. Freelancers made a major contribution to those papers, contributing 11 per cent of the business copy produced by the weeklies. Freelancers at the Sundays produced four per cent of the business copy produced by the weeklies. Together, freelance business copy accounted for 41 per cent of all freelance copy published by the weeklies. Freelancers also made a significant contribution to the lifestyle pages, contributing eight per cent of the weeklies' total output (about 20 per cent of total freelance output). Freelancers contributed four per cent of the opinion and other copy in the weeklies. Freelancers contributed three per cent of the general news and sports copy, a slightly higher share than at the dailies but still modest.

The total number of freelancers captured in the survey was 447 (table 13). This was considerably higher than the total number of print freelancers in the census data reported in table 3. This was because the census data only included those whose primary work was freelancing, whereas the data in table 13 also included those who

freelanced to supplement their income from their other, primary occupation. The table reports the number of freelancers that produced selected percentages of the total amount of freelance copy.

The table reveals that a relatively small number of freelancers accounted for the lion's share of the total freelance output. Twenty-four freelancers (five per cent of all the freelancers) accounted for 25 per cent of the total freelance word count. Similarly, 77 freelancers (17 per cent) accounted for half the total freelance output, and 39 per cent of freelancers accounted for 75 per cent of the total freelance output.

Very few freelancers published in multiple publications during the survey period. Only 17 freelancers (four per cent) published in more than one publication, suggesting that freelancers mostly publish material sequentially, not simultaneously.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to provide a clear picture of the print freelance market in New Zealand, a significant part of the New Zealand journalism industry and whose profile is on the rise.

The census data discussed above revealed that, compared with journalists employed in the print industry, freelancers had generally the same ethnic profile (although there were proportionately fewer Māori among freelancers) and distribution throughout the country. However, compared to employed print journalists, freelancers were more likely to be older and female. Among those who report freelancing as their main job, many worked part-time, but about a quarter of the freelance workforce worked 45 hours or more. The distribution of income reflected this pattern, with many freelancers earning no more than \$30,000 a year, but about a third earning \$50,000 or more.

The census data discussed above also showed that print freelancers often earned higher average incomes than their employed counterparts for the same hours earned. However, print freelancers' average annual income was \$42,900, which was a lot less than the average \$50,900 earned by employed print journalists. This was because freelancers predominated in the low-paying low-hours part of the workforce. Many of the freelancers in this group were women, and even among freelancers women did relatively poorly. Female freelancers' average incomes were often less than male freelancers' income for the same hours worked, and female freelancers' overall average income was about two-thirds of that earned by male freelancers.

The content analysis revealed that freelancers contributed significant amounts of copy. About 20 per cent of daily newspapers' copy and a third of weekly newspapers' copy came from freelancers. About 60 per cent of magazine copy came from freelancers. At the newspapers, freelance copy was mostly found in the lifestyle, business and opinion pages. This suggests the newspapers found freelancers particularly useful in providing specialist copy and comment.

The higher profile freelancers enjoy today is deserved. Freelancers contribute a significant amount of copy to New Zealand newspapers and magazines, and some are relatively well paid for their efforts. However, many who embark on a freelancing journalism career should be prepared to work relatively few hours and receive little financial reward for their efforts. Further research could consider freelancers' views on this state of affairs and what strategies might raise freelancers' average income.

The author thanks Media Monitors, MediaPeople, the three research assistants (Matthew Calman, Jonathon Howe and Kimberley Villari), Pip Stevenson, Kim Griggs, and Jacqueline Cumming for their invaluable assistance with this project.

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Table 1: Number and percentage of journalists by industry, 2006		
Industry	Number	%
Print	2034	86
Television	108	5
Radio	72	3
Other	156	7
Total	2370	100

Source: Census, 2006

Table 2: Number and percentage of journalists by employment, 2006		
Employment	Number	%
Employed	1920	81
Self-employed	420	18
Other	30	1
Total	2370	100

Source: Census, 2006

Table 3: Number and percentage of self-employed journalists by industry, 2006		
Industry	Number	%
Print	357	85
Television	12	3
Radio	12	3
Other	39	9
Total	420	100

Source: Census, 2006

Table 4: Number and percentage of print journalists by gender & employment, 2006				
Gender	Employed	%	Self-employed	%
Male	837	51	162	45
Female	816	49	195	55
Total	1653	100	357	100

Source: Census, 2006

Table 5: Number and percentage of print journalists by age & employment, 2006

Age (years)	Employed	%	Self-employed	%
15-24	177	11	6	2
25-34	447	27	27	8
35-44	417	25	105	29
45-54	357	22	87	24
55-64	216	13	78	22
65+	45	3	54	15
Total all ages	1659	100	357	100

Source: Census, 2006

Table 6: Number and percentage of print journalists by ethnicity & employment, 2006 (Note: respondents may nominate more than one ethnicity, so the sums of the figures may not match the totals)

Ethnicity	Employed	%	Self-employed	%
European	1365	83	297	83
Māori	87	5	6	2
Asian	57	3	6	2
Pacific	33	2	3	1
Other	207	13	54	15
Total	1650	100	357	100

Source: Census, 2006

Table 7: Number and percentage of print journalists by region & employment, 2006

Region	Employed	%	Self-employed	%
Northland	33	2	9	3
Auckland	555	33	126	35
Waikato	99	6	24	7
East Coast	132	8	30	8
Taranaki	27	2	6	2
Wanganui/Manawatu	66	4	12	3
Wellington	321	19	69	19
Marlborough/Nelson/West Coast	72	4	15	4
Christchurch	204	12	42	12
Otago/Southland	141	8	27	8
Other	9	1	0	0
Total	1659	100	360	100

Source: Census, 2006

Table 8: Number and percentage of print journalists by hours worked per week & employment, 2006

Hours worked	Employed	%	Self-employed	%
1-19	84	5	90	25
20-29	75	5	75	21
30-39	111	7	48	14
40	672	41	39	11
41-44	78	5	6	2
45+	588	36	84	24
Not stated	45	3	12	3
Total	1653	100	354	100

Source: Census, 2006

Table 9: Number and percentage of print journalists by annual income & employment, 2006

Income	Employed	%	Self-employed	%
\$10,000 or less	54	3	42	12
\$10,001 - \$20,000	93	6	54	15
\$20,001 - \$30,000	168	10	45	13
\$30,001 - \$50,000	552	33	93	26
\$50,001+	780	47	117	33
Not stated	12	1	6	2
Total	1659	100	357	100

Source: Census, 2006

Table 10: Number of print journalists by hours worked per week, gender, employment & average annual income, percentage of totals, 2006

(Note: numbers in *italics* have been estimated, as the census data was confidential due to the small number of respondents for those categories)

Hours worked	Gender	Employment	Average income	No.	% of total employed/self-employed
1-19	M	Employed	\$25,700	36	2
1-19	M	Self-employed	\$27,700	21	6
1-19	F	Employed	\$24,100	45	3
1-19	F	Self-employed	\$22,000	66	18
20-29	M	Employed	\$29,900	21	1
20-29	M	Self-employed	\$37,900	24	7
20-29	F	Employed	\$28,500	57	3
20-29	F	Self-employed	\$34,000	54	15
30-39	M	Employed	\$48,300	42	3
30-39	M	Self-employed	\$58,000	24	7
30-39	F	Employed	\$37,700	69	4
30-39	F	Self-employed	\$40,500	27	7
40	M	Employed	\$54,900	330	20
40	M	Self-employed	\$57,600	21	6
40	F	Employed	\$43,300	339	21
40	F	Self-employed	\$49,500	15	4
41-44	M	Employed	\$66,900	36	2
41-44	M	Self-employed	\$45,400	9	2
41-44	F	Employed	\$47,200	45	3
41-44	F	Self-employed	\$52,000	3	1
45+	M	Employed	\$67,300	351	21
45+	M	Self-employed	\$64,600	60	17
45+	F	Employed	\$53,500	237	14
45+	F	Self-employed	\$64,700	27	7
Not stated	M	Employed	\$42,700	21	1
Not stated	M	Self-employed	\$38,300	3	1
Not stated	F	Employed	\$35,500	24	1
Not stated	F	Self-employed	\$14,300	9	2
Total	M	Employed	\$58,000	840	na
Total	M	Self-employed	\$52,100	162	na
Total	F	Employed	\$43,700	816	na
Total	F	Self-employed	\$35,400	200	na
Total	M & F	Employed	\$50,900	1659	100
Total	M & F	Self-employed	\$42,900	363	100

Source: Census, 2006

Table 11: Word count and percentage of print journalists' work by employment and publication type, 2007						
No. of articles (N)	2629		429		200	
Employment	Dailies	%	Weeklies	%	Magazines	%
Self-employed	170,980	19	59,716	36	69,725	59
Employed	549,248	62	100,020	60	48,645	41
News agency	55,434	6	0	0	0	0
Other	107,617	12	6362	4	644	1
Total	883,278	100	166,097	100	119,014	100

Source: Content analysis

Table 12: Word count and percentage of print journalists' work by publication type, newspaper section and employment, 2007

	Dailies			Weeklies			
No. of articles (N)	2629			429			
Newspaper section & employment	Word count	% of total self-employed & remainder word count	% of total self-employed word count			% of total self-employed & remainder word count	% of total self-employed word count
<i>General news</i>							
Self-employed	18,983	2	11		4379	3	7
Remainder	338,102	38	na		22,811	14	na
<i>Business</i>							
Self-employed	38,310	4	22	- Sunday papers			
Remainder	139,477	16	na	Self-employed	6233	4	10
				Remainder	13,268	8	na
				- Business papers			
				Self-employed	18,470	11	31
				Remainder	24,780	15	na
<i>Lifestyle</i>							
Self-employed	49,715	6	29		12,747	8	21
Remainder	76,046	9	na		6072	4	na
<i>Opinion</i>							
Self-employed	31,043	4	18		6273	4	11
Remainder	18,008	2	na		4743	3	na
<i>Sport</i>							
Self-employed	13,190	1	8		5543	3	9
Remainder	110,770	13	na		28,955	17	na
<i>Other</i>							
Self-employed	19,739	2	12		6071	4	10
Remainder	29,896	3	na		5753	3	na
Total self-employed word count	170,980				59,716		
Total self-employed & remainder word count	883,278				166,097		
Total percentages		100	100			100	100

Source: Content analysis

Table 13: Print freelance word count, number of print freelancers and percentages of totals, 2007

Freelance word count	% of total freelance word count	No. of freelancers	% of total no. of freelancers
74,886	25	24	5
97,892	33	37	8
149,623	50	77	17
197,432	66	133	30
223,935	75	176	39
300,420	100	447	100

Source: Content analysis