

Chapter 15

The professionalisation of journalism

Global trends and the challenges of training and job insecurity

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Abstract

This chapter aims to answer the question of how the professionalisation of journalism is experienced in the 18 countries included in the 2021 Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) research sample. To this end, we focus on two dimensions of analysis, which concern, on the one hand, the importance of education and professional training – including the aspect of accountability processes along with the self-regulation culture – to the construction and development of journalistic professionalism, and on the other, the way in which the precariousness of journalistic work affects its perception and self-perception. Ideally, these two levels should correlate, but when being put to the test in the context of the actual working conditions of journalists, they have margins of deviation. The first dimension captures the ideals of journalists and the rootedness of the values that characterise the professional ethos of journalism. The second dimension captures some of the conditions that make journalists able to carry out their work in a way that responds to the ideals of society and the journalists themselves.

Keywords: professional ethos, professional training, job security, newsroom inequalities, ethics

Introduction to the professional ethos of journalism

Throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century, journalism has had a solid tradition of professional values, which have survived against a backdrop of transformations within the media field. These values compose an “enduring professional ethos”, incorporating the notion of a public service mission with notions of objectivity, accuracy, and fairness, reflecting core standards connected to journalists’ need to behave professionally (Mari, 2015). However, over the last two decades, professional values and working practices of journalists are facing a growing number of challenges (Deuze, 2007; Meier, 2007; Phillips, 2011), most notably technological advances, new patterns of media consump-

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tion, and an understanding of journalists as multiskilled news workers with a flexible working ethos, or using the words of Deuze (2007) and Kantola (2012), within a framework of liquid journalism.

A point of departure for this chapter is that journalism's practice and ethical journalistic behaviour, developed through training, can be regarded as a prerequisite for a professional ethos. That is why changes in journalism practice, for example, caused by shifts in working conditions, may affect the professional values considered important to the journalist profession: truthfulness, independence, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and public accountability, as recent comparative research shows (Örnebring, 2018). However, the dimension of the precariousness of one's job is now a "normal" fact for journalists; this dimension influences journalists' ways of thinking about their profession and their work – "ways of thinking" that are, together with the more traditional dimensions related to norms, identity, and mythology, constitutive of the very concept of professionalisation. In other words, the professionalism of journalists cannot be implemented in a context where these shared values are impossible to uphold, as the professional ethos is not only a matter of individual character but materialises in the collective journalistic practice. Additionally, the professionalism of journalists is also hindered in a context where the awareness of journalists concerning the norms of self-regulation is at a low level. Therefore, safeguarding principles of journalistic practice based on self-regulation or accountability mechanisms can ideally operate as an effective means of contributing to a high-quality professional ethos.

Journalistic professionalisation is one of the critical variables in every comparative analysis between media systems. Blumler and Gurevich's (1975) pioneering research deals with the nature of the legitimising creed of media institutions and, more specifically, the distance between the reporter and external interests. The latter is understood as a place of tension between an ideal concerning the journalist's professionalism and audience and the interrelated political and economic interests affecting the media system.

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), professionalisation is one of the dimensions used to clarify some problematic concepts. They illustrated some of the variations in professionalisation criteria among their four models of media and politics, dividing them into three dimensions: autonomy, distinct professional norms, and public service orientation. Hallin and Mancini paid more attention to the systematic body of knowledge or doctrine generally required to be recognised as a profession (compared with doctors and lawyers) and consequently on the fundamental variables regarding formal training and education.

Though a direct link between the education rate of those who work in journalism and their degree of professionalisation cannot be made, the 2021 Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) data provides an encouraging sign regarding the comprehensiveness of the training of contemporary journalists (Trappel &

Tomaz, 2021b, 2021c). Concurrently, another critical issue that respondents have raised in the 2021 MDM project is the need for further training. The importance of training concerns the ethical and deontological principles that should guide decisions on newsworthiness. At the same time, training also relates to the challenges that come from the so-called hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), in which journalistic companies compete with a direct flow of information at different levels, from the circumvention of the gatekeeping role to the proliferation of fake news.

The portrait of the profession that emerges from our data illustrates that journalists do not have the time for further training. The time constraints faced by journalists have already been recognised by Koljonen (2013), who places the relationship between time and journalism at the heart of the profession (along with dimensions related to knowledge, relationship with the audience, position towards power, and reflection on ethical dilemmas of one's work).

The integration of the temporal dimension in contemporary journalism becomes a challenge in terms of the ability, for example, to connect the present with the past and the future (developing through education and professional training the skills to do so), and thus the possibility of playing a more active role in setting the public agenda.

The value of immediacy has slowly been translated into the need to contribute significantly to the news flow. The problem arises when the definition of newsworthiness itself is linked to the search volume of different online queries over time, and the trends that sanction the popularity. Journalists are therefore increasingly dispossessed of their ability to set their own agenda and have professional and satisfying working time.

At the crossroads between the temporal dimension and that of the relationship with power – the former understood in terms of the effects of the acceleration of production routines on the professional ethos of journalism, and the latter concerning Hallin and Mancini's (2004) concept of autonomy and Blumler and Gurevich's (1975) concept of legitimation – there is an additional dimension of analysis that concerns the precariousness of journalistic work. The rise of the "network economy" (Castells, 1999) has represented a turning point for businesses and consumers, but also for workers, who have been asked to be creative, flexible, and autonomous in ways that do not necessarily correspond to their employment contracts. Based on socioeconomic differences in individual national contexts, and according to patterns that are difficult to trace back to traditional models of journalism, the mix between flexibility as a skill and flexibility as an occupational status has become a driving force for vitalising specific parts of the labour market while at the same time feeding traditional labour inequalities. In the field of journalism, this led to a provocative question: "Are Journalists Today's Coal Miners?" (Borchardt et al., 2019). Among the key findings of Borchardt and colleagues' research, one is the contradiction between a new generation of motivated, flexible, and technologically prepared journalists and their demand

for work–life balance and a career perspective only partially compatible with the rhythms and workloads required by newsrooms operating round-the-clock. The introduction of this last dimension, that of precariousness, allows us to think about the professional ethos of journalism in less abstract terms.

A starting point for our analysis is the opinion that it is necessary to preserve an ideology of journalism as serving the public trust (another of the recurring elements in the definition of the professional ethos of journalism), and the aim of journalism to “expose hidden information, produce information independently, and interpret and even criticise the information offered to them [and in sum] to position themselves as a correction factor between power holders and citizens” (Koljonen, 2013: 147). But the autonomy needed to carry out the tasks described above is linked to the economic dimension – and the labour market in particular – as much as the political one. It is not just a question of the mere length of the employment contract: It has to do with the very nature of journalistic work and the perception of becoming part of a community that puts its members in a position to make a difference.

This chapter, based on data and interviews with journalists and editors-in-chief working in the leading news media of 18 countries, gathered for the 2021 MDM project, investigates the level and standards of journalism professionalism in different media environments to highlight positive and negative trends of contemporary journalism in defining and setting in place a common professional ethos. An equally important parameter in journalists’ relationship with the professional ethos is the role played by the self-regulation processes, since they considerably affect professional journalistic standards based on which journalistic quality is ensured or protected.

MDM Indicators and related research questions addressed in this chapter:

(C4) Journalism professionalism

How well developed is journalism professionalism? (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021a: 46)

(C5) Journalists’ job security

What provisions are in place to provide maximum job security for journalists? (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021a: 48)

(C8) Professional training

What importance do leading news media attribute to journalism training? (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021a: 51)

(E8) Level of self-regulation

Does a media self-regulation system exist at leading news media, requiring the provision of fair, balanced, and impartial reporting? Is it effective? (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021a: 38)

(F8) Rules and practices on internal gender equality

To what extent do media outlets acknowledge and address challenges to gender equality in their own operations and internal functioning? (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021a: 26)

Determining the dimensions of analysis

To answer the question of how the professionalisation of journalism is experienced in several media markets, the 2021 MDM research framework set several analytic criteria to be verified through desk research and interviews with information professionals and representatives of trade unions and associations. These criteria serve to test the ideal categories that make up the idea of journalists' professional ethos: investigative research as a priority, ethical tension towards what is being reported, and the ability to intervene constructively in public debate. What are the elements that limit the ability of journalists to reflect these values? What resources are available to assist them in living up to these expectations?

In this chapter, we intend to focus on two of these dimensions, which intercept the elements and suggestions in the scientific literature: the role of training and education in developing and upholding journalistic ideals – a small but essential part of which is related to journalists' awareness of self-regulation norms – and the conditions that contribute to the precarity of journalistic labour.

The first dimension has a direct relationship with the professional ethos. It has to do with the possibility for journalists to learn the fundamental values of the profession and develop critical tools to observe, understand, and report on its evolution. This possibility is enhanced when journalists are receptive to the idea that raising their awareness of self-regulation norms can affect journalism professionalisation. Overall, this is a somewhat problematic dimension, as it calls into question one of the reasons why it is difficult to define what exactly a professional journalist is: As there are many paths to becoming an information professional, non-professionals cannot be excluded from the field (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Additionally, not all professional journalism paths include training, although ongoing training is required in the profession. As Foote (2008: 133) points out, "mapping journalism programs worldwide is a challenging undertaking", even when the highest international institutions dealing with education and journalism take on this onerous task. This is because of the different nature of the institutions that provide training for those who wish to become journalists. Yet, it is a necessary exercise, because it is through these institutions that the orientation, content, and thrust of those learning the journalistic profession – and thus their attitudes toward the field and the profession itself – are formed. This is even more true in a context in which the relationship

between the institutions representing the journalistic profession and the institutions dedicated to the training of information professionals is less marked by a contract between education and apprenticeship and more oriented towards recognising entry qualifications.

The challenges in terms of training by no means stop at the moment of entry into journalism education. Murphy (2019) notes, concerning the United Kingdom, a context in which the crisis in journalism appears less severe overall, that developing more skills in ethics, law, curating, digital fact-checking, media analysis, and entrepreneurial journalism represent a commitment of immense proportions for journalists. Not only from a technical point of view, considering that video, audio, graphics, and other creative skills are now standard requirements for journalists, but above all, adapting to an interactive relationship with the public poses new challenges in terms of recognising the role of the reporter and building a trusting relationship with readers and viewers. In addition, it should be noted that the current multimedia requirements expected by journalists necessitate continuous professional development, not always guaranteed by national professional organisations and heavily influenced by a lack of time and financial resources. Moreover, the technological skills needed to meet the multimedia requirements of the journalism profession dramatically intercepts the forms of inequality linked to age insofar as younger journalists, more technologically skilled, are also the least paid and protected. Therefore, the least “equipped” to best exercise the journalistic role aligns with the outlined ethos.

The second dimension is more distant from the subject of this chapter but equally relates to the professional ethos of the journalistic profession. In a nutshell, it is a matter of pragmatically acknowledging that the values and functions of this profession cannot be implemented without reducing the inequalities (e.g., related to gender and age) that remain in the journalism sector and by demanding greater job security.

Considering staff turnover primarily in terms of savings for the media company, letting go of an experienced journalist to hire a younger and cheaper employee debases the very foundation of what it means to be a journalist. Such a lens does not account for the gains related to experience and the related maturation of a professional image characterised by the journalistic ethos. Research conducted by Nygren (2011) offers some interesting data in this regard. It shows how dissatisfaction with the conditions of one’s job is closely associated with the fixed-term contractual condition. The absence of a prospect of real integration in a newsroom generates the feeling of not improving and growing in one’s profession. This concerns, in particular, younger journalists (under 40) who have less experience in the field (paradoxically enough, often hired to renew the capacity of the editorial staff), employed in local newspapers and radio stations – sectors particularly affected by the economic crisis but crucial for the ability of journalism to fulfil its’ democratic function.

The difficulty for female journalists to break through the glass ceiling automatically reduces the possibility of having multiple points of view and makes the profession less desirable for female workers (see Padovani et al., Chapter 4). North's (2009) analysis of women's perceived "foreignness" in newsrooms remains highly present due to journalistic practices deeply rooted in male professional culture. More recent research has shown the urgency of overcoming the "professional myopia" (Lobo et al., 2017) produced by these practices.

Adherence to the values of journalism in general, and of the newspaper for which one works in particular, is inevitably called into question by the use of employment contract standards that disable paths of "secondary socialisation", which have traditionally characterised belonging to the editorial staff, and that at worst result in a lack of professional solidarity in case of conflict. Moreover, the importance attached to journalists' workers' rights in a country reflects the social relevance of the journalistic profession.

How training and education shape journalism's professional ethos

Challenges for journalism education

The 2021 MDM data confirms that the number of working journalists with higher education, or a university degree, has increased since the 1990s. In some countries, this progression is outstanding. In Australia, 35 per cent of journalists went to university in 1992, and 80 per cent in 2010 (Dwyer et al., 2021), and in Chile, 50 per cent of working journalists had a degree in 1960, while in 2021, 92.5 per cent had one (Núñez-Mussa, 2021).

Although the trend is that journalists in most countries have some higher education experience, there is more variation regarding whether journalists have a degree in journalism or communication sciences. This depends on different professional and educational cultures and the particularities of educational journalism models in each country participating in the 2021 MDM project.

Deuze (2006) determined that countries usually have one dominating journalism education model, through which professional journalists acquire deontological knowledge and practical skills. This socialisation occurs within the higher education system in some countries, while in others, in standalone schools. There are also some hybrid systems, for example, where journalists' training takes place while being on the job, or other types of institutions offer training programmes.

In Germany, 75 per cent of journalists have a university degree (Hanitzsch et al., 2016), but 56 per cent are in subjects other than communication or journalism. Still, journalists usually undertake four weeks of journalism education at an independent institution, followed by a two-year internship (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021).

As diverse as the educational models are, journalism education is quite similar worldwide and faces the same challenges (e.g., Gaunt, 1992; Goodman, 2017; Deuze, 2006). This homogeneity is reflected in the answers from journalists interviewed for the MDM project, who stressed autonomy, independence, and impartiality as journalistic values that guide them in decision-making and in defining characteristics of their professional ethos. This is coherent with previous research showing how these values transcend specific political and cultural contexts (Deuze, 2005; Josephi, 2010).

There is a common concern among the interviewed journalists about acquiring professional training to adapt to convergent or multiplatform media organisations, pushing journalists to produce stories for more than one format (text, video, sound, and graphic). These changes concerning reporters, broadly discussed by scholars, have not yet been integrated into the curriculum of most educational organisations (e.g., Canavilhas, 2013; Casals Carro, 2006; Tejedor, 2008).

In addition, there is a broad debate on whether and to what extent journalism education should focus on skill development and production versus theory (Foote, 2017); integrate both aspects to educate journalists (Reese, 1999); and if journalism education should prioritise innovation or preparing competent reporters for the industry (Deuze, 2006). Educators determining course content must relate to a fast-moving industry in need of skills that risk becoming quickly irrelevant. In contrast, some skills that the new context demands will likely remain, and with time, transcend the structure and content of educational programmes if not considered. Journalism presents itself as a profession where skills must be continuously updated; for example, the interviewed journalists agree on the need for training in order to gain new digital skills, particularly for data journalism.

Exceptional cases, such as Australia (Dwyer et al., 2021), Germany (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021), Denmark (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2021), and Sweden (Nord & von Krogh, 2021), have institutionalised training programmes for working journalists. Still, although acknowledging the existence of training opportunities, journalists from most countries declared time and resource constraints to engage in further education. In some cases, like Switzerland (Bonfadelli et al., 2021), Greece (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021), or Portugal (Fidalgo, 2021), skill development is dependent on journalists' initiative, while journalists in Hong Kong must look for training opportunities abroad (Lo & Wong, 2021).

As there are increasing regional and international training opportunities for journalists, as can be seen on the website of the International Center for Journalists, it is relevant to emphasise that journalism education at the university level is yet emerging (Foote, 2017), with ongoing discussions on what the proper curriculum for the profession is.

The creation of the World Journalism Education Council in 2004 is an example of an emerging global academic journalism culture. There is still a significant challenge in integrating criteria and building dialogues between practising journalists, schools, and journalism scholars (Lewis, 2018). However, there is evolution on this matter since practitioners serve as instructors and, in some cases, become researchers that can close that gap.

The role of professional training

Here, we focus on the first dimension of the professionalisation of journalism: the role of training and education. We consider what is needed to become a journalist and live up to the ideal of journalism as expressed in democratic theory. One of the most ambitious readings in this field comes from the Italian sociologist Giovanni Bechelloni, who, taking up Edgar Morin's concept of a "well-made head", argues that the journalist must have the necessary competencies to read and understand the complex reality produced by the intersection of social, cultural, political, economic, and technological revolutions (Bechelloni, 1982). This perspective of journalism as culturally or socially oriented which Bechelloni introduces applies to the contemporary hybrid media system. In the context of information overload and its consequences, the role of information professionals is more than ever not only to tell the news, but to give a profound interpretation of society. It is also helpful to recall the theorisation of Carlo Sorrentino (1987), who, taking up an intuition of Max Weber, identified a similarity between the role of the journalist and that of the social scientist, as both study the evolution of society. Within this framework, Sorrentino proposes the definition of participant journalists – as opposed to neutral journalists – as professionals with a high level of education and solid journalistic training who are involved in social issues such as inequality, poverty, defence of social and civil rights, and who work in dominating media companies based in large urban centres. Education and training evolve gradually as the media sector develops, and the social issues to be described and explained multiply and become more complex.

Given these premises, it is interesting to analyse the specific issues related to training in the 18 countries participating in the 2021 MDM research project. If we read the analyses of the country reports in light of the models of media and politics developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004), we find some of the cleavages defined by the authors still practically untouched. As we already underlined, the level of education among journalists is emphasised in countries like Germany (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021). Also, in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, about 93 per cent of journalists have a degree, particularly younger professionals (Hendrickx et al., 2021). Switzerland also has highly educated journalists, although the profession is "open", because there are no formal requirements to work as a journalist (Bonfadelli et al., 2021). According to the results of a survey

conducted in 2015, about 70 per cent of Swiss journalists have an academic degree, nearly half in journalism, communications, or a similar field of study (Dingerkus et al., 2018). The situation does not seem significantly different in countries belonging to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) Mediterranean model. In Italy, 68 per cent of journalists have a university degree, thanks in part to the progressive recognition of their qualifications for entry into the professional register (Padovani et al., 2021). Something similar is happening in Chile, where a law on freedom of opinion and information and on the exercise of journalism requires journalists to have a university degree or to be legally recognised as a journalist (Núñez-Mussa, 2021).

Even with a strong investment in education and training, economic pressures hurt the professionalisation of journalism in the countries included in the Mediterranean model. Journalistic professionalism in Greece, for example, has been strongly challenged by the financial crisis, which harmed journalists' labour rights. The economic crisis of 2010–2018 and the recent Covid-19 crisis have led to the bankruptcy of several Greek media outlets (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021). As the representative of the Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers (JUADN) affirms:

The level of journalistic professionalism has always been very high in Greece [...]. Nonetheless, the financial crisis and the special crisis afflicting the media industry in recent years, and the various pathogens that characterise the way media owners grow and invest, have induced a significant blow to the industry, sometimes distorting the image of [high journalistic professionalism]. (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021: 217)

Likewise, the economic crisis in Portugal had a negative impact on the journalist population in terms of remuneration: A survey conducted in 2015 among 806 journalists confirmed that 55.4 per cent received less than EUR 1,000 net monthly (Miranda, 2019). In Italy, younger journalists must have many skills and competencies while in precarious job positions. A harsh testimony on the subject comes from the president of the National Union (Padovani et al., 2021: 369):

In recent years a series of labour policies have been adopted that have increased flexibility, that turned it into precariousness for life, that in some cases have created what I call the "information riders", that is, girls and boys who work in particular in the areas most at risk, in Campania, in Sicily, in Calabria; they work for unscrupulous publishers, paid one euro per piece.

Where the effects of the economic crisis and job insecurity are less severe, journalistic professionalism is challenged by harsh competition, substantiated in the pressure exerted by newsrooms on journalists. For instance, in the United Kingdom, quality journalism seems increasingly threatened by this demanding

context: In 2018, 77 per cent of newspaper journalists reported higher work intensity, 41 per cent said they produced a lower quality of journalistic work, and 42 per cent reported a lower job satisfaction (Spilsbury, 2018). In Austria, job satisfaction has decreased significantly over the last decade (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2020). The scarcity of financial and temporal resources significantly reduces job satisfaction in various national contexts, including Austria, Iceland, and Portugal. In the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, declining job satisfaction among journalists is attributed to the unfortunate combination of a heavy workload, on the one hand, and the demand for continuous skill improvement, on the other (Hendrickx, 2021).

Problems related to work–life balance, referring to working conditions and private life as well as training and education, seem to affect, among others, journalists in Finland (Ala-Fossi et al., 2021) and the Netherlands (Vandenbergh & d’Haenens, 2021). In several nations, the issue of professional training is regulated by formal organisations. In this regard, the Order of Journalists manages continuous training in Italy. It involves both professionals (journalists with permanent jobs and associated legal protection) and publicists (journalists with no legal protection and short-term contracts) (Padovani et al., 2021). Professional training is also organised by formal organisations in the Netherlands, Portugal, and South Korea. Specifically, in the Netherlands, training courses are offered by the NVJ (Dutch Association of Journalists) and VVOJ (Association of Investigative Journalists) (Vandenbergh & d’Haenens, 2021). In Portugal, where continuous training is not a top priority for leading news media, courses are sometimes organised by entities outside the media companies, such as the Centre for Training of Journalists (Cenjor) or the Journalists’ Union (Fidalgo, 2021). In South Korea, professional training is managed by the Korea Press Foundation (Kim & Lee, 2021).

Just as greater professionalisation does not automatically follow from journalists having attended higher education, the presence of a formal network of organisations that deal with the continuing education of journalists does not by itself contribute to professionalisation. However, in several of the countries where no such networks exist, journalists perceive the absence of a formalisation of further training as a missed opportunity for professionalisation: in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, the interviews show that professional training is of significant importance to journalists, but it is not required by law to participate in additional training (Hendrickx et al., 2021); in Greece, the need for continuous training is not embedded in national news media organisations’ culture (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021); in Switzerland, although there are many training opportunities through the courses organised by the Media Education Centre MAZ in Lucerne or the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) in Winterthur, participation is not stimulated by editorial offices and can be seen as an individual matter (Bonfadelli et al., 2021); and Hong Kong

does not provide educational training, but the journalists interviewed admitted the importance of professional courses in order to improve skills related to Big Data analysis and artificial intelligence (Lo & Wong, 2021).

An interesting phenomenon concerns in-house training. This may be a response to the lack of a formalised structure for further education, but, significantly, it develops in countries that already invest heavily in the training of their journalists (Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the United Kingdom). In this regard, it is possible to argue that leading news media provide special forms of professional training dedicated to their journalists, which underlines 1) the attention to the improvement of professional skills of companies in a competitive news media market, and 2) the difference in terms of economic and human resources between leading news media and other competitors for the professional improvement of journalists, with an impact on the quality of journalism among news media companies. In contexts where professionalisation is high, national and company training projects struggle with those same limitations that we have identified as the most significant research challenges: issues related to digital journalism and gender inequality. The representative of the German journalists' union states: "Not all journalists are up to date in training on Big Data analysis. We have noticed that the willingness of companies to actively offer such a service is very weak", denouncing a sort of reluctance on the part of editors-in-chief to provide a member of their editorial staff the tools for career advancement (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021: 247). The same interviewee also states that diversity, gender, and inclusion training are rarely booked: "There is still room for improvement in gender-oriented continuing education. Here the German media landscape still has a considerable need for improvement" (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021: 247).

Finally, it should be noted that the drive for change is more about professional training aimed at implementing digital skills; Big Data analysis, artificial intelligence, visual skills (design, photo, and video editing) are of particular interest. We can argue that journalists are fully aware of the need for acquiring digital skills in a digital-driven market. Sometimes, the desire for professional training conflicts with the rhythms of newsrooms, fostering job dissatisfaction.

Professionalisation and self-censorship in journalism

Attempts of self-regulation in the media field date back to the late nineteenth century and extend to the twentieth century – in codes of ethics, press councils, and ombudspersons (Brown, 1974; Campbell, 1999; Dennis et al., 1989; Laitila, 1995). In the participatory media culture of the twenty-first century, a renovated set of self-regulation instruments have emerged, such as active newsroom blogs and criticism through social media, enriching the existing paradigm of media

accountability. Both traditional and new accountability mechanisms greatly influence professional journalistic standards, perceived as a means by which journalistic quality is protected (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004). Theoretically, these accountability mechanisms are based on ideal values and norms contributing to high-quality journalism and a high-level professional ethos.

The paradigm of media self-regulation refers to ethical norms set, implemented, and sanctioned internally by the professionals themselves rather than the government (Campbell, 1999), in order to safeguard the principles of journalistic practice. These ethical guidelines reflect the journalistic profession's virtuousness, offering protection from internal challenges (tabloid-journalism, unsubstantiated reporting) and external pressures (state, interest groups) as well as contributing to solidarity within the profession (Laitila, 1995).

The media accountability culture is not characterised by the same dynamics across various media systems. It has been argued that in Anglo-Saxon and Northern European states, there are well-developed mechanisms of media self-regulation, as opposed to some countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where accountability practices are considered inexistent (Fengler et al., 2015). The critical question being raised today is to what extent self-regulation instruments can respond to the conditions of the various media systems facing different financial constraints, levels of journalism precariousness, and levels of politicisation.

According to the 2021 MDM research findings, self-regulation in the 18 countries is practised in many ways. One of the most typical instruments is a code of ethics sanctioned by specialised organisations to promote journalistic ethos and quality. This is exemplified in several countries (Finland, the Netherlands, South Korea, Sweden, and Switzerland); however, this model of self-regulation reflects varying degrees of contribution to media accountability. For example, while it seems functional in Sweden – where journalists present themselves as fully aware of the national code of ethics' importance (Nord & von Krogh, 2021) – it seems ineffective in Switzerland, where the ethical code of media organisations has a limited impact on the level of professionalism in journalism (Bonfadelli et al., 2021). Ombudspersons do not constitute a widespread instrument within the media self-regulation mechanisms of the sample countries, and when applicable (e.g., South Korea), their effectiveness is not ensured.

Public service media adopt more inclusive accountability processes than private media. For instance, German public service media incorporate formal provisions for self-regulation based on a wide range of instruments (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021). Moreover, in Portugal, public service broadcaster RTP operates based on an editorial statute identifying the obligation of public service television to promote pluralism and diversity. Since 2006, it has been obliged by law to have at its disposal an active ombudsperson (a separate one for radio and television), applicable to both cases in the form of a broadcasting

time every week (Fidalgo, 2021). Last but not least, in the United Kingdom, the BBC's news output and the rest of its programming are regulated based on the broadcaster's editorial guidelines, which are set out in the Royal Charter and Agreement. The BBC should also publish complaint reports based on data derived from its complaint mechanisms (Moore & Ramsay, 2021).

The findings of the 2021 MDM research project also show that innovative self-regulation practices are rare, taking place only in limited media markets. Distinctive is the case of the Netherlands, where an open debate culture in newsrooms focuses on fairness, balance, and impartiality (Vandenberghe & d'Haenens, 2021). Additionally, in Finland, the public broadcaster's self-regulation is conducted using a special position called the "head of journalistic standards and ethics", in charge of supporting journalists and monitoring their compliance with the ethics standards (Ala-Fossi et al., 2021). A special programme called *Newswatch* is hosted by the public service broadcaster in the United Kingdom, offered to audiences every week for most of the year, in order to allow listeners' and viewers' complaints relating to news coverage to be heard. At the same time, the programme is based on a right of reply offered both to the audience members and the BBC's news personnel (Moore & Ramsay, 2021).

In order for self-regulation mechanisms, such as ethics codes, to be operational and strengthen the professionalisation of journalism, journalists must accept and be able to understand the codes. Internal training programmes oriented to that targeting would be useful in raising journalists' awareness of the importance of self-regulation. Particularly in today's media markets, where economic constraints risk affecting the quality of journalistic output, ethics training in journalism can counterbalance the challenges faced by journalists to maintain the desired quality of the news flow. According to the 2021 MDM research findings, an exemplary case of relatively widespread ethics training is the United Kingdom, supported by the National Union of Journalists and the National Council for the Training of Journalists (Moore & Ramsay, 2021).

The level of journalists' awareness of self-regulation norms and the ways they are employed in practice is an important indicator of journalistic professionalisation. However, there seems to exist several challenges testing the professional ethos of news workers. One of the most common practices in newsrooms has turned out to be self-censorship, which poses a direct threat to media freedom, and in extension, democracy. Nevertheless, it is a common practice in today's news media to favour the interests of media organisations. In the increasingly competitive media environments, journalists acknowledge that the complexity or unattractiveness of news topics being in disharmony with the media company's interests are sufficient reasons to avoid getting involved in them or to mitigate their tone (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Self-censorship practices vary from country to country, with journalists being motivated by various factors, depending on the political context. The

most common sources of self-censorship are pressures from political, social, and economic factors (Hayes et al., 2006; Skjerdal, 2010). Self-censorship practices directly oppose the ideal mission of journalism and condemn media professionals to a denial of issues that are sensitive to powerful interests. There are cases where journalists are forced to self-censor their news topics for fear of losing their job or their life, and in doing so, the credibility of their profession and its future is also put at stake (Yesil, 2014). In other cases, the practice of self-censorship has been found to contribute to the balance of power relations (private and public interests) that influence the media, safeguarding political safety by minimising political risks and at the same time practising professional journalism to the benefit of the public (Tong, 2009).

Journalism as a precarious profession

Several inequalities affect the work of newsrooms in the countries participating in the 2021 MDM project. Two main trends are highlighted by the journalists interviewed: The first concerns the disparity between men and women, not only in terms of a pay gap but also in terms of access to decision-making positions and underrepresentation within editorial offices, an issue that has long-standing origins and cuts across different national and work contexts (see Padovani et al., Chapter 4). The second is a more recent challenge, raised by the constant state of economic stagnation affecting the news market in most MDM countries. This puts the younger generations of journalists – who are entering the profession with less protection and compensation than in the past – into conflict with long-time professionals, who often enjoy more solid contracts and higher salaries. The interviews and data derived from the 2021 MDM project suggest that this disparity is sometimes resolved in favour of older, more protected, and privileged journalists, and sometimes in favour of younger journalists with lower labour costs, greater flexibility, and digital skills.

Analysing the aspects of gender inequality and generational cleavages makes it possible to define the context and conditions under which journalists work and how these elements influence – positively or negatively – the professionalisation of journalism. Gender equality plays a crucial role in ensuring social justice and contributing to democratic governance and diversity in the newsroom. In turn, it helps the news industry achieve professionalism.

Gender inequality in newsrooms

Even though the presence of women in the editorial staff is generally considered to be increasing in most European countries, and averages around 40 per cent in the countries participating in the 2021 MDM project, only in Sweden do

women make up a considerable part of the management of media companies. The three public service media in Sweden are headed by women, and the same applies to two out of the four major daily newspapers (Nord & Van Krogh, 2021). The situation is similar in Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, where state laws and internal editorial regulations promote gender balance, equal pay, and support the careers of female journalists. Particularly virtuous is the case of Germany, which in 2016 introduced a law to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, also applied in editorial offices (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021). Even in these countries, however, gender inequality still exists; for example, German and Swiss journalists report a minority of women in management positions, and Swiss and Finnish respondents emphasise a tendency of stereotyping assignments, with female journalists assigned to “soft news” content (39% in Switzerland; Bonfadelli et al., 2021) and men to “hard news”. In the rest of Europe, the disparity is greater: In Austria, only 8 per cent of women hold managerial positions, compared with 14 per cent of men (Grünangerl et al., 2021); in Belgium, over 70 per cent of the management positions in news media in the whole country are filled by male journalists, and the salary gap is 12 per cent (Hendrickx et al., 2021); and in the United Kingdom, *The Telegraph*’s pay gap is over 22 per cent, and women are more likely to have precarious part-time or freelance roles than their male colleagues (Moore & Ramsay, 2021).

In the South European countries in the sample, the gender issue is more critical. The Greek and Portuguese interviewees revealed that gender equality is not perceived as a relevant issue within the editorial offices. There are few women at the top of media companies in Greece, Portugal, and Italy. In the Italian peninsula, women are more likely to have precarious contracts, and the pay gap reaches 19.57, and in Portugal, it is 18 per cent. Significantly, in all the 2021 MDM countries where there is a substantial disparity between men and women (except for Italy), the male professionals interviewed maintain, despite the data, that parity has been achieved (Fidalgo, 2021; Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021; Padovani et al., 2021).

Despite the remaining inequality, the situation in Europe seems to be improving: The Austrian, Belgian, Danish, Finnish, German, and Italian interviewees claim a significant increase in the number of women attending degree courses in journalism and those entering the profession (especially in digital media); and the issue of gender inequality seems to be particularly prioritised in editorial offices and public opinion (apart from Greece and Portugal, as mentioned above). Looking at the non-European context, gender equality in the newsroom remains to be achieved in Australia, Canada, and South Korea, although there have been recent improvements. Hong Kong is an exception, with equal employment conditions, including salaries, for male and female journalists (Lo & Wong, 2021).

In South Korea, the proportion of female journalists reached 31.5 per cent in 2018. The gender imbalance is even more evident in high-ranking positions, with 34.8 per cent of male respondents in the South Korean MDM sample holding positions above the director level, compared with only 7.5 per cent of female respondents. In 2018, virtually no women were in top-level management positions at South Korean news media firms, suggesting that women have little say in what is reported or how reporting is conducted (Kim & Lee, 2021).

Looking over the Australian mediascape reveals more female representation, but concerns remain regarding inequalities in pay and promotion, as well as with respect to issues of discrimination and harassment. Furthermore, nearly half of female respondents had experienced harassment or bullying in the office (48%) or online (41%). Although there are government initiatives to address some of these concerns (Women NSW, 2018), significant work is needed to improve the position of women in the Australian news media (Dwyer et al., 2021).

In Canada, none of the journalists or newsroom leaders interviewed for the MDM project had significant concerns about inequalities in working conditions. Indeed, most of the interviewees discussed their organisations' sensitivity to eliminate inequality and promote the advancement of women. Some of the journalists interviewed raised concerns about men being more assertive in negotiating higher salaries than their female counterparts. According to a reporter working at a major Canadian media organisation, more work is needed to improve gender equity: "There should be rules", the reporter told us, adding, "I think all these organisations could do a better job of promoting women" (Taylor & DeCillia, 2021: 61). Canadian Broadcasting Corporation data (unearthed in 2018 using Canada's Access to Information Act in the wake of the gender pay gap scandal at the British Broadcasting Corporation) support this position, revealing that male hosts in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation were paid almost 9.5 per cent more than their female counterparts (Houpt, 2018). Media unions in Canada also remain concerned about gender inequality and continue to push news organisations through collective bargaining and other forms of advocacy, in order to further reduce inequality and make newsrooms more sensitive to the needs of female journalists. Despite some progress, there is still room for improvement (Taylor & DeCillia, 2021).

In contrast to Australia, Canada, and South Korea, it is argued that there is no difference between male and female journalists in terms of promotion opportunities and salaries in Hong Kong, despite the lack of formal rules or regulations enforcing equal standards. Female journalists have an equal opportunity to take leading positions in newsrooms. Many female journalists have held leading roles – such as editor-in-chief or managing editor – with the leading news companies. The pay equality might be due to the generally low salaries paid to journalists in Hong Kong (Lo & Wong, 2021).

Generational inequality in newsrooms

The second trend of apparent inequality within newsrooms is linked to age and contractual conditions. Many interviewees maintain that, in the context of decreasing job security, there are two primary risk trends: the “generational conflict” between young and old journalists and the inclination of new hires towards contracts with less protection than in the past. Regarding the first issue, the age disparity sometimes translates – as in the case of Austria, Belgium, Greece, Iceland, and the Netherlands – into replacing older journalists with younger, less experienced, and less expensive journalists (Grünangerl et al., 2021). Sometimes, however, young journalists are hired with contracts providing less protection, less compensation, and fewer guarantees, as in Denmark, Germany, and Italy. In general, there is a contraction of permanent contracts and greater recourse for flexibility. Freelancing is increasing in Germany, Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands, and job security for local and regional journalists is decreasing in Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. German and British journalists note that these disparities have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis, which has worsened the job insecurity of these workers (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021; Moore & Ramsay, 2021). Among non-European countries, Hong Kong also faces the challenge of age inequality. When experienced reporters leave the newsroom, their places are usually taken by junior staff members (Lo & Wong, 2021). The apparent reason for this preference for junior replacements is the considerably higher salary costs for experienced reporters than those at the beginning of their careers.

Job insecurity – a cross-cutting issue

We have already mentioned that the dimension of job insecurity influences journalists’ ways of thinking about their profession and work. This is a particularly interesting dimension among those constitutive of the concept of professionalisation of journalism because, unlike the consolidated set of norms, identity, and mythology – and similarly to the dimensions linked to gender and age mentioned above – it configures a critical redefinition of professionalisation itself. It is true that even the elements most traditionally identified as characterising the professional ethos of journalists need to be updated in light of a social reality that is infinitely more complex and interconnected than the one within which they were formulated. But they express basic principles that the profession can and must continue to take into consideration, with the necessary updating: Think, for example, of the value of objectivity. And in this process of updating – which concerns, for example, the role of digital media – a central role is played by continuous education and training processes. As we have noted (Ruggiero & Karadimitriou, 2020b), the trends in the 2021 MDM

sample countries regarding continuing education and training are practically opposite to those regarding job security. This creates a short-circuit: Professionals who are increasingly well prepared – which reinforces the “founding” dimension of the professional ethos – at the same time are less and less able to exercise their profession with the guarantees that would allow them to put into practice those “fundamental” precepts they have assimilated and learned to put into practice in a complex communicative context.

The 2021 MDM data show that the media sector suffers from low job security. Only in one case, Chile (Núñez-Mussa, 2021), did the author decide to give this indicator the minimum score (no/low job security, precarious journalistic jobs are the rule). The countries in the sample are divided almost equally into two categories, which we can call “medium-high job security” (once employed, journalists usually remain employed for a long time, but such jobs are thinning out) and “medium-low job security” (news media change their journalistic staff frequently, and employment for a more extended period is not the rule). Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, South Korea, Sweden, and the United Kingdom scored 2 points (in a 0–3 scale), positioning them in the “medium-high” cluster; Australia, Canada, Greece, Hong Kong, Iceland, Italy, Portugal, and Switzerland scored 1 point, positioning them in the “medium-low” cluster (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021b, 2021c).

Interestingly, these two clusters do not overlap perfectly with the more traditional geographical distributions of journalistic traditions. For example, according to Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) model, all the countries in the MDM corpus belonging to the Mediterranean, or polarised pluralist, model (Greece, Italy, and Portugal) score the same, placing them in the “medium-low” cluster, but that cluster also contains Canada and Switzerland, classified as democratic corporatist and liberal models. This indicates that economic changes are likely to erode the boundaries of models constructed according to the logic of historical reconstruction. In other words, the positions of privilege from which some countries start can no longer be taken for granted, and at the same time, there is a movement towards levelling out privileges in some countries.

A more decisive factor than the specificity of the two clusters just defined (with effects across the dimensions of gender and age inequality discussed above) is the tendency towards precariousness of journalistic work. The difference between countries in the medium-high and medium-low clusters is indeed defined, if comparing the type of contracts commonly in place in newsrooms. The increase of freelancers is a global phenomenon, and this category of journalists does not benefit from the same forms of protection as permanently employed journalists. This explicitly translates into a low level of job security only in the medium-low-grade countries, with the country reports of Iceland (Jóhannsdóttir et al., 2021) and Italy (Padovani et al., 2021) showing a very critical situation. In contrast, in medium-high-grade countries, it is still possible to record fierce

struggles for equal pay for freelancers and permanent employees, as in the Netherlands (Vandenberghe & d'Haenens, 2021).

Overall, there are few media markets (e.g., in Austria and Denmark) where the journalism profession is characterised by conditions of security and duration of stay. However, even where this sense of security exists, at least in Denmark, it is less pronounced for the younger generation of journalists, whose incomes are lower compared with those of the older journalists (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2021). Even in the Netherlands, where newsrooms can be considered highly professionalised, permanent contracts in the media industry constitute a rare working condition. In some other cases where there are no legal provisions for journalists' job security (e.g., Canada), the uncertainty of the profession is reflected in phenomena such as the decrease of newsroom staff as well as the movement of journalists to digital news media or to non-journalistic positions in social media management. In Switzerland, the uncertainty of journalism posts is considered to be more intense within commercial media organisations compared with their public service counterparts (Bonfadelli et al., 2021); in Italy, the precariousness of the journalism profession differs between north and south and between different categories of journalists (Padovani et al., 2021); and in the United Kingdom, instability and precarity in employment is worse for female media professionals (Moore & Ramsay, 2021). In the context of this predominant unfavourable working environment, an exceptional case seems to be the Finnish media market, where journalists are protected by law against dismissal (Ala-Fossi et al., 2021). Moreover, the unemployment rate is low and the media industry is characterised by a decrease in freelance journalists.

Conclusions

The 2021 MDM research data reveal two dimensions of particular importance that help determine the degree and nature of journalistic professionalisation: the processes of education and professional training of information professionals and the growing issues related to their job insecurity. Both refer to the concept of journalistic autonomy: One can be defined as internal to journalistic work and the other as external. In the first case, we identify a positive trend, as there are multiple efforts to improve the training and skills of journalists. In the second case, the external dimension, there is cause for concern.

The first dimension concerns the increasingly widespread role of self-organisation, which is related to the two closely linked fields of the application of ethical criteria to information and continuing education, with particular regard to new communication technologies.

The essence of self-regulation, in theory, lies in shielding the media from government intervention and safeguarding their independent operation (Puddephatt,

2011). However, the existence of professional ethics in itself does not equate to high-quality journalism, since adopting these ethical guidelines can be regarded as a considerable matter of journalists' conscience. The 2021 MDM research findings reveal that journalists' attitudes towards self-regulation differ among the participating countries, depending on the overall journalistic culture and their perception of the level of professionalism. Northern European countries, for example, place more emphasis on professional codes to ensure a professional ethos.

A professional ethos of journalists is not necessarily ensured in a working context inundated with complex regulations, but mainly in a free and safe working environment where journalists feel protected to perform their role (Clark & Grech, 2017). A qualitative professional ethos on the part of journalists cannot be achieved unless an overarching and stable normative philosophy is being cultivated. Overcoming or at least mitigating pressures leading to self-censorship, and providing reliable information, presupposes a constructive commitment to ethics and self-regulation mechanisms whose practical application is affected by the political structures of the country, the occupational culture within newsrooms, as well as the individual values of journalists.

Given that worldwide, a great number of national journalistic codes of ethics lack references to online journalism or to digital activity (Díaz-Campo & Segado-Boj, 2015), it seems reasonable that the professional ethos of journalists runs the risk of being regarded as inflexible or non-adaptable to the requirements of the new media era. Therefore, a considerable question being raised is whether self-regulation can adapt quickly to the evolving participatory environment of journalism so as to enhance professional standards by urging media organisations to develop their professional standards according to the era of digital disruptions.

The second dimension discussed in this chapter relates to the structure of the labour market in which the journalistic profession is embedded. It is a dimension that has to do directly with issues concerning job security, and indirectly with the perpetuation of inequalities linked to gender and especially age. The trend towards flexibility in the profession has introduced new types of fixed-term contracts and a much faster turnover rate than in the past, in a context that does not always provide adequate guarantees for journalists. This applies as much to the protections provided by the state as to the profession's ability to trigger processes of self-protection for its members (Ruggiero & Karadimitriou, 2020a). It is important to underline this last point, because it would be too easy to attribute this critical dimension only to the external context – to the ability of national economic systems to interpret the flexibilisation of the profession as an engine for change – rather than as a way of coping with a productive rhythm that is in fact unsustainable through recourse to “unrecognised professionals”.

Overall, the 2021 MDM research findings reveal a state of flux with regard to journalism professionalism and journalistic job security of the leading news

media, a challenging setting dictated by a climate of uncertainty dominating the news media field. The increasingly common use of fixed-term contracts and the generational change in newsrooms – aimed primarily at saving resources in times of crisis – are two factors that, to varying degrees, contribute to enhancing the already worrying decline in journalistic professional security in several countries.

These trends are in contrast to the great percentage of highly educated journalists. The economic pressures, shortages in staff, increasing workload, as well as adverse working conditions (including very low salaries and difficulties in implementing original journalism) are adversely affecting both quality and job satisfaction within newsrooms. In this unstable context, journalism seems a precarious routinised profession far from the goal of quality reporting or news narrative. Of course, exceptional cases exist (such as journalism in the Netherlands); however, in several countries, vulnerabilities persist, preventing the safeguarding of professional ethos in newsrooms. The rise of temporarily employed journalists, the apparent inclination of the media system towards freelancers, as well as the replacement of experienced journalists by younger ones, are trends that may not change; however, what can change is the mentality of media professionals, with the aim of eliminating the questioning of journalism's core values. Ethics training in journalism can be regarded as a prerequisite for professional ethos. Particularly in today's media markets, where economic constraints risk affecting the quality of journalistic output, ethics training can operate as a counterbalance to the challenges faced by journalists in their reduced capacity to maintain the desired quality of the news flow and the (high) standards of their professional ethos.

Only a reflection involving both the world of journalism and its stakeholders at all levels can change this trend. And from that shared reflection, combined with the practices of self-organisation that have already demonstrated journalism's ability to adapt to a changing context, a real re-thinking of the very category of journalism professional ethos can come.

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