

A penny for your words. Job insecurity as the chief problem affecting Spanish professional journalism: 2012 to 2018¹²

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Abstract. Given the challenging period professional journalism is going through and the challenges facing journalists in their day-to-day work, this paper seeks to identify the main problems affecting professional Spanish journalists from the perspective of journalists, citizens and experts. To this end, the research presents results obtained through surveys of Spanish journalists, citizen focus groups and in-depth interviews with experts. The findings from a survey of journalists in 2018 are compared with those from a survey of Spanish and European journalists in 2012. These two surveys were conducted using the same parameters. The inclusion of findings from an additional survey carried out in 2008 by the researchers of this paper allows us to plot the evolution of the problems faced by the profession in Spain, highlighting those that have remained unchanged and become more deeply entrenched over a decade marked by the global economic crisis. The results show that Spanish journalists identified job insecurity as the main problem of their profession, while economic and political pressures came in second and third place respectively.

Keywords. journalistic profession; precariousness; economic power; citizenry; Spain.

[es] *A penny for your words*: La precariedad como principal problema del periodismo en España. Evolución de la profesión de 2012 a 2018

Resumen. Teniendo en cuenta el difícil periodo que vive la profesión y los retos que afrontan los periodistas en su día a día, este artículo tiene como objetivo identificar cuáles son los principales problemas que afectan a la profesión periodística, en España vistos desde la perspectiva de los periodistas y la ciudadanía así como la visión de expertos. Para ello se muestran los resultados obtenidos a través de encuestas realizadas a periodistas españoles, *focus groups* con ciudadanos y entrevistas en profundidad con expertos. Los resultados derivados de esta encuesta a periodistas, realizada en 2018, es comparada con los resultados de una encuesta realizada previamente a periodistas españoles y europeos en 2012 en las que se utilizaron los mismos parámetros. También se tienen en cuenta resultados correspondientes a otra investigación, realizada en 2008 por investigadores de este mismo trabajo, lo que permite dibujar la tendencia de cuáles son los problemas de la profesión en España, observando aquellas que se han mantenido y consolidado a lo largo de esta década, marcada por la crisis económica. Todo ello permite identificar que en los momentos en los que se ha consultado la opinión de los periodistas españoles señalan la precariedad laboral como el principal problema de la profesión, las presiones económicas y políticas aparecen en segundo y tercer lugar.

Palabras clave: profesión periodística, precariedad, poder económico, ciudadanía, España.

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1. Introduction

The 2018 Annual Report on Professional Journalism, by the Madrid Press Association (APM), provides one of the most accurate snapshots of the current state of Spanish journalism. The report reveals an evident decline in journalists' professional conditions and salaries, a rise in the number of freelance journalists and growing confusion among communication professionals as to their true role (Berganza et al, 2017).

Studies on professional journalism in Spain over the last 20 years (Humanes, 1998; Rodríguez, 2003; Soriano et al, 2005; Nosty, 2011; Mauri-Ríos, 2020) highlight a decline in journalistic standards and call into question the professional values of journalism. These conclusions also emerge from survey-based research on communication professionals (Alsius, 2010; Soengas Pérez et al, 2014; Aceituno et al, 2014; Mauri Ríos et al, 2018), reporting on this state of the profession before the onset of the global economic downturn of 2008, when the press lost much of its advertising revenue, resulting in mass layoffs and, consequently, and lower standards in the quality of news products (Farias Batlle & Gómez Aguilar, 2011). The result of these ongoing economic adversities, layoffs and uncertainty about the future of professional journalism led 2009 to be considered the worst year ever for the press (Guallar, 2010).

The number of Spanish journalists' preoccupations continued to grow. Besides job insecurity and the overall precarious state of professional journalism (Figueras-Maz et al, 2012), there is a perception of a decline in the quality of the news media (Palau Sampio & Gomez Mompert, 2017) brought about by challenges arising from technological adaptation and more exacting demands for immediacy (Mauri Ríos & Ramon, 2015). Key shortcomings are also found in the relevance and diversity of topics reported, access to sources, or the processing and verification of data. All of this has been compounded by layoffs in the mainstream media, forcing thousands of skilled journalists into early retirement (Gomez Mompert et al, 2015).

1.1. Background

In order to understand the problems affecting professional journalism in Spain and their evolution over the last decade, it is essential to note some of the characteristics that have traditionally defined journalism in Spain. In a survey on the profession undertaken by Ortega and Humanes (2000: 168) in 1995, 69.3% of the consulted journalists acknowledged that political power influenced their work, while 76.6% recognized that the profession came under the influence of economic power. These aspects are borne out in the media model system proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004: 89), according to which Spanish journalism responds to the polarized pluralist model, characterized by a strong influence of political actors and a

weak professional culture among journalists in private and public news organizations. In their research project, 'Ethics and Reporting Excellence', in 2008 – at the start of a decade marked by the global economic crisis, which directly impacted on journalism in Spain – the authors of the present study cited job insecurity as one of the most pressing concerns and main threats to Spanish journalism since precarious employment conditions affect not only news quality and freedom of expression but also make journalists more compliant (Alsius, 2010; Figueras et al, 2012). Other aspects that raised most concern among the journalists consulted were the primacy of economic and political interests over journalistic interests. An analysis in 2012 by the research project MediaAcT, whose results were based on a survey of 1,762 journalists from the United Kingdom, Finland, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy, Spain, Poland, Estonia, Romania, Tunisia and Jordan, revealed that the chief problems affecting European journalism were economic pressures and the influence of sensationalism, while the main problems cited in Spain were remuneration, followed by economic pressures (Fengler et al, 2015). As mentioned in the APM's 2018 Annual Report on Professional Journalism, the first and second problems facing Spanish journalists were identified as unemployment and job insecurity respectively, since 30% of the journalists on a contract and 50% of the freelancers working in journalism and communication earned less than 1,500 euros a month. In third and fourth place respectively were problems regarding the media's lack of political and economic independence.

During the decade marked by the global economic downturn and the journalism crisis, the burden of commercial pressures was shouldered and normalized professional by Spanish journalists (Goyanes & Rodríguez-Castro, 2019), impacting on both the independence of the profession and the confidence of the audience (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012). Commercial pressures refer to the economic imperatives (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011) experienced by editors in the traditional media and the new online companies, and they have led to changes in and the restructuring of newsrooms, where economic objectives now supersede journalistic criteria and news interest (Campos-Freire, 2010).

In this context, the media needs increasingly fewer journalists and ever more digital-savvy profiles. This new demand has also had an impact on news output, which in turn has a real bearing on the quality of information, even in outlets considered as media' references' (Ramírez-de-la-Piscina et al, 2014). Moreover, ever more consumers are accessing news via their influencers' social media accounts, which they can also share with their inner circles as a social currency, thus completing the third step in the information process (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2015). Given that commercialization and the media's growing dependence on advertising revenues forgo

autonomy or divisions between news content and advertising (Howe & Teufel, 2014), it is pertinent to ask whether the plurality of information and journalistic independence is in peril (Carlson, 2015).

This situation has led to the emergence of Spanish media cooperatives, such as *La Directa*, *Crític* or *La Marea* (Barranquero Carretero & Sánchez Moncada, 2018), which have taken their cue from similar organizations in the United Kingdom (Boyle, 2012) and Greece (Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016). Entrepreneurial journalism of this type has revamped the old business and organizational models in order to guarantee sustainable quality journalism (Casero-Ripollés, 2016; Yuste & Cabrera, 2014). These cooperatives seek to revive narrative and investigative journalism (Requejo-Alemán & Lugo-Ocando, 2014) and to maintain an independent editorial line, since as the journalists own the medium and create the content. Rather than rely on income from advertising, they opt for ethical or alternative financing as well as promotions or merchandising, such as the “book clubs” of yesteryear (García-Santamaría et al, 2016). However, these media do not compete with mainstream news outlets, preferring instead to focus on news linked to values such as human rights, gender equality or environmental protection, and their sphere of influence reaches far beyond that of the mass media. One unique collaborative project is the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, in which journalists from various countries work together and overcome funding problems by circumventing the traditional business model of the news market (Valcárcel, 2017).

The media’s economic dependence becomes riskier in the case of pre-election coverage of political parties, with Spain included among the high-risk countries (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, 2017). Political pressure refers to coercion by the political system and public relations firms (Mellado & Humanes, 2012). It comes as no surprise to learn that political pressures have even reached the BBC, considered an independent media outlet. Journalist Nick Cohen, writing in *The New York Review of Books*, criticized the BBC for helping to favour the leave campaign during the Brexit referendum campaign thanks to the organization’s passivity and its complicity in failing to combat populist ideas and fake news, generating a context of maximum information toxicity (Cohen et al., 2019). If this is true, it is an example of how the media can favour information whose function is to support rather than scrutinize the powers that be rather (Roses Campos & Humanes, 2019). When the media allies itself with political power, commercial and political interests appear to force journalism to renounce its role as a watchdog (Masip, 2018). Journalists acknowledge that internal pressures exert a decisive influence on the topics journalists choose to report. This compels them to adapt their focus or content to the organization’s editorial line and constrains them from taking

the initiative, which underpins the idea that journalists are drifting towards corporate journalism rather than consolidating a professionally skills-based style as the driving force behind news production (Túñez Lopez & Martínez Solana, 2014). Press freedom, one of the ideals to which the journalism profession aspires, consists of the journalist’s power to make personal decisions unhindered by external or internal forces (Kunelius, 2007; Relly et al, 2015).

Citizens, on the other hand, oppose the internal pressures that news outlets are forced to submit to, and they punish the media for this. In this regard, the Spanish situation differs little from that in Europe or North America. Gómez-Diago (2018) reports that only 6% of Americans trust the media, while 44% of Europeans believe that the information provided by the media is unreliable. The information ecosystem has been transformed not only due to the financial crisis but also the emergence of a new generation of news consumers. This business model can no longer be sustained by advertising and increased external and internal pressures aimed at undermining the independence of professional journalism.

This study seeks to highlight the chief problems affecting professional journalism from the perspectives of journalists and citizens alike. Citizens were included to ascertain how the general public perceives the state of journalism and whether the problems detected within and outside the profession are related (Chaparro-Domínguez et al, 2019). Experts in journalism and media accountability were surveyed to give the research a third point of view, which would contextualize the responses of the journalists and the citizens.

2. Methodology

The methodology used in this research combined quantitative techniques (in-depth interviews and focus groups) and qualitative techniques (surveys). Thus journalists’ opinions regarding professional codes of conduct were ascertained through a questionnaire administered online, focusing on aspects of media accountability. The questionnaire, which was emailed to journalists across Spain, allowed us to determine and compare the opinions of communication professionals from different regions of the Spanish state. A focus-group technique was used to seek citizens’ opinions on the ethical aspects of professional journalism. A total of 6 focus groups were conducted in different parts of Spain to detect similarities and differences in the geographical regions analyzed. Lastly, in order to contextualize the results derived from the survey on the journalists and the focus groups with the citizens, 19 experts in media ethics and media accountability were interviewed in depth about the ethical considerations that were first discussed with the journalists and the citizens.

Based on the questions put to journalists, citizens and experts, this study established three research questions:

- RQ1: What are the main problems affecting the profession according to Spanish journalists?
- RQ2: What are the main problems affecting professional journalism according to Spanish citizens?
- RQ3: To what extent have journalists' perceptions of the problems in the profession changed over the last ten years?

A total of 228 journalists filled out the questionnaire, consisting of 29 questions on various ethical aspects of the profession, including the influence of external and internal regulatory bodies and political and economic power, which was rated on a ten-point Likert scale in order to guarantee operability, dichot-

omous, multiple-choice and rating scale questions were combined (Wimmer & Dominick 2011). The questionnaire was administered online from 17 October 2017 to 17 January 2018 on the SurveyMonkey platform. During this time, the entered responses were monitored weekly. The responses were treated with descriptive, monivariate and bivariate statistical analyses using the specialized software IBM StatisticalPackage for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The resulting data was then triangulated with the qualitative information gathered from the citizen focus groups.

The results presented in this paper reflect the responses to question number 10: "Which of the following items affect the general state of journalism? Journalists were asked to rate their opinion on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means "doesn't affect at all" and 10 means "affects completely". The journalists responded to the following terms:

Training in Journalism and Communication Degrees
Remuneration
Observance of professional ethics
Influence of sensationalism
Economic pressures
Government pressures
Political pressures

Table 1. Items included in the question "Which of the following items affect the general state of journalism?".

The focus groups took place on the following dates: Barcelona, 12 April; Castelló, 19 April; Madrid, 17 May; Seville, 21 May; Mondragón, 24 May; and Santiago de Compostela, 31 May. Before running the groups, the investigators planned the topics for exploration and defined the questions that would guide the discussion. The topics discussed in the focus groups were structured along three main themes: a general assessment of current ethics in journalism; the analysis of the instruments used to safeguard media ethics; and the journalists' opinions on the journalists' attitudes from an ethical standpoint. The moderator introduced these themes according to the script, probing those that sparked more intense debate and adapting the sequence and formulation of questions according to how each group progressed. Each focus group lasted 120 minutes and was recorded on audio, and later transcribed verbatim in the language used in the discussions. The final report was compiled by coding and analysing the data. The results included the participants' textual quotes from the focus groups. Each quote taken from the discussion group was identified (from GD01 to GD06) and the sex of the respondent specified.

Finally, 19 in-depth interviews were conducted with journalists and members of regulatory or self-regulatory bodies from across Spain. The in-depth interview based on a predefined questionnaire adapted to the profile of the interviewee allows the individual

to respond to the questions spontaneously (Alsius, 2010). The questionnaire used in these in-depth interviews were based on the script of the survey well as the questions posed in the focus groups; hence the inclusion of the question on the main problems affecting journalistic practice.

Sample Description. Survey of Journalists

In order to obtain a valid representation of journalists for the survey, the inclusion criteria were limited to journalists: (1) working for a news media outlet (thus excluding professionals engaged in public relations work); (2) engaging in journalistic practice, (thus excluding professionals employed in technical or organizational work in the media industry); and (3) employed full-time in journalism or earning 50 per cent or more of their income from this profession. In this case, freelancers earning 50% or more of their income from journalistic activities were also included. The same criteria were used by the European research project MediaAct (2012), in which some members of the MediaACES project participated, allowing for a comparison of the results obtained between the two studies.

Unlike countries such as France, Germany, Finland or Switzerland, Spain has no official data on the demographics of journalism professionals nor a directory or census of the group (Fengler et al, 2015;

Rodríguez-Martínez et al, 2017). Given this limitation, the MediaACT project used three criteria - the number of journalists who are members of professional associations, the different types of media and the approximate number of journalists per region - to estimate that the number of journalists in Spain stands at 25,000 professionals. A reliable and valid representation of Spanish journalists was obtained with a subsample of 123 journalists (Fengler et al, 2015; Eberwein et al, 2014). Taking at its reference the number of journalists consulted for the European project MediaACT, it was determined that 228 (N=228) would yield relevant data on the perception of accountability among Spanish journalists, thereby allowing us to update and expand the data collected in the MediaACT project. This number of responses to the survey were obtained thanks to collaboration from the following several professional institutions: Federation of Associations of Journalists of Spain (FAPE), Association of Journalists of Catalonia and Madrid Press Association (APM), which send the questionnaire to their members. A total of 228 validated responses corresponding to the three themes were used to cross-check the Spanish journalists' responses in 2018 with those of their European counterparts in 2012. The remaining answers that did not respond to the three criteria were omitted during the analysis of the results. In order to obtain representative data of the whole profession in Spain, the 228 journalists who responded to the survey worked in the 16 autonomous regions in Spain. Madrid and Catalonia that yielded the highest number of responses as these are the two autonomies with the largest number of media outlets. The informants comprised 52.2% (n=119) women and 47.8% (n=109 men). Most of them (71.1%) have a university qualification in journalism. In addition, 53.1% are members of a professional association or college of journalists.

Data were collected and analyzed using IBM SPSS software. To find statistically valid correlations, Kendall's Tau-B test was selected as it is more robust for the sample characteristics, is a nonparametric test and can deal with small samples. This correlation test, which uses Kendall's Tau coefficient, has a correlation range of -1 to 1, where 0 is absolute independence. Bivariate tests showed age, work experience, type of environment, position and education as having significant correlations at a 95 and/or 99 per cent confidence level (Kendall & Gibbons, 1990). In the case of the MediaACT project, the total number of responses obtained from the group of European journalists totalled 1762, of whom 123 were Spanish (40 per cent women, 60 per cent men).

Sample Description. Focus groups with Citizens

The focus group technique used provides qualitative material through group interaction. The participants of the focus group were recruited from a suitable structural sample, which was representative of the diversity of the Spanish population. Thus, attention was given to different segmentation variables

including sex, age, socioeconomic status, education and media habits. Following the detailed instructions of the opinion research company that developed the focus groups, the researchers selected 38 people. The number of participants in each focus group was as follows: Barcelona, 8; Castelló, 8; Madrid, 5; Seville, 7; Mondragón, 6; and Santiago de Compostela, 6. The age of the participants was evenly balanced, with 42% of them being middle-aged and the rest distributed almost equally between those under 60 and those over 60. As regards education, the focus group members with the highest qualifications were PhDs or graduates, some of them in the field of audiovisual communication or journalism. The focus groups participants with medium or low qualifications mostly carried out administrative or commercial tasks.

Regarding media habits, the vast majority of the citizens consulted read the online press. Only rarely was the reading of print newspapers mentioned. Few of the participants read the international or specialized press; those who did mention this type of newspaper or magazine claimed they read it for professional reasons or because they were born abroad. The participants usually access news online via Twitter or, in second place, Facebook. In other words, they do not read the news until someone highlights or refers to a particular item. Typically when this happens, the informants go straight to the link in question. In any case, some also tend to access online news sites directly. To a lesser extent, some participants follow specific journalists on social media.

Sample Description. In-depth interviews

Various criteria were used to select expert interviewees, which would provide comparable data for the study. The experts consulted for this study were either academics or researchers in journalism or belonged to at least one of these five professional categories:

- Journalists' associations/professional bodies.
- Media boards.
- Self-regulatory bodies.
- Regulatory bodies
- Academics and researchers in the field of journalism.

The same performance criteria were ensured by conducting all the interviews in person (or exceptionally by telephone) by members of the research team. The interviews took place after the survey was designed and tested and the focus groups conducted, in order to establish a methodological coherence across the different analysis techniques within the same period, between April and June 2018. Having considered the relevance of the responses to the survey and the issues raised in the focus groups, the investigators included five of the 19 experts interviewed in the analysis. Furthermore, in order to reflect the diversity of Spanish journalism, the researchers ensured that

the five interviews selected represented Spain's different geographical areas. The 5 experts were: Nemésio Rodríguez, first vice-president for Professional Affairs of the Press Association of Madrid and president of the Federation of the Association of Journalists of Spain; Elsa González, former president of the Spanish Federation of Journalist Associations; María José Gómez-Biedma y Gutiérrez, journalist and audiovisual producer; Lorena Mejías, governing board member of the Professional Association of Journalists of Andalusia (CPPA), president of Territorial Demarcation of the CPPA in Cadiz and member of the board of directors of the Press Association of Cadiz; and Neus Bonet, former dean of the Catalan College of Journalists.

3. Presentation of results

The results were presented with a content analysis methodology combined with a lexicometric analysis via Iramuteq, a textual statistical tool that looks for consistencies and correlations of specific graphical representations of a corpus. This is an application of the exploratory multidimensional analysis methods of linguistic data. The textual analysis was performed using the applications developed by Benzécri (1973) and the Reinert program (1998). Thus, for example, textometry, also known as logometry or textual statistics, is the current form of lexicometry (Lebart et al, 2000). This methodology was used to present the results because it suggests procedures to organize and calculate statistics for the study of a corpus of digitized texts. This methodology enables the study of multi variables in the text.

Iramuteq generates:

- Word clouds, which display the size of the words according to their frequency of occurrence in the text against the hypothesis raised.
- The coloured graphics display the same results by the similarity of concept. This analysis is based on graph theory. Each graphic is a cluster of words related to their proximity to the object under study. The image is connected by a line, from which branches of coloured balloons emerge, each one based on relational data analysis. The keywords are in shown as nodes in the chart and represent

the co-occurrence between them. Co-occurrence is understood as the relationship of lexical units within a corpus, and complementary terms are needed as a semantic field. The bigger words are those repeated most frequently in the corpus. Hence, the greater the co-occurrence between words, the stronger the link between them.

This software performs a quantitative analysis on a qualitative data corpus, from which the results are interpreted qualitatively. In addition, new text corpora can be generated from the results, if any variable in the study identifies them. This is very practical for conducting comparative studies.

3.1. Findings

Journalists, experts and citizens share the same view, that job insecurity is one of the most acute problems affecting journalism in Spain. Although all these actors widely accept this opinion, the journalists (questioned through surveys) and experts (with in-depth interviews) expressed most concern, especially about the remuneration received and the current unemployment situation in journalism. The journalists and experts also mentioned economic pressures as one of the scourges of the profession. Despite sharing this concern, the citizens interviewed in the discussion groups believed the media's main problem is the lack of trust they generate due to the gradual development of entertainment journalism, as well as the influence of political power on journalists.

3.2. The journalist's opinion

To the question "Which of the following items affect the general state of journalism", the Spanish journalists rated remuneration with 8.11 out of 10 as the issue most affecting their profession. Economic pressure (7.91) and government pressure (7.62) were ranked in second and third place respectively as issues most affecting professional journalism in Spain. In fourth and fifth place, they ranked observance of professional ethics, such as the influence of sensationalism, with 7.25, and observance of professional ethics with 7.05. In last place, and far behind, was journalist training (5.94).

	Journalist training	Remuneration	Observance of professional ethics	The influence of sensationalism	Economic pressures	Government pressures
Mean	5.94	8,11	7.05	7.2	7.91	7.62

Table N. 2. Main concerns for Spanish Journalists in 2018

These same items were raised in a survey of 1,762 journalists from 12 European and 2 Arab countries who took part in the 2010 European MediaAct project. The responses of the 123 Spanish journalists

participating in that survey gave remarkably similar responses to those of the journalists in the 2018 survey. Hence, remuneration received, ranking 8.11, was also the issue that most affected the profession in

2012, followed by economic pressures, also in second place, with a score of 7.91, and in third position was government pressure, with 7.62. The influence of sensationalism was once again rated in fourth place among the issues most affecting journalism, with 7.14. The only issues to have changed position over the six years covered in the analysis relate to journalist training and observance of professional ethics. In the 2012 survey, journalist training was ranked fourth, with 3.16, while observance of ethical standards came in the last position, with 2.86 out of 5.

Emuneration was also the chief issue affecting the profession in 2012, with an 8.26, suggesting that the situation has remained almost unchanged over 6 years. At a very short distance, economic pressures were also in second place, with 8.18, a very simi-

lar score to that in 2018 (only dropping almost 0.3 points). In third place were also governmental pressures, which at 7.38 was also very similar. The influence of sensationalism was again in fourth place among the items most affecting journalism. With a score of 7.14, this item showed no significant changes. The only items that did change position over the six years covered in this study were the training of journalists and adherence to ethical principles. Hence, in the survey conducted in 2012, the training of journalists ranked sixth at 6.32, compared to 5.94 in 2018, while adherence to ethical principles ranked last at 5.72. The 1.5 difference between the two highlights more concern over the lack of proper monitoring over the year.

	Position	1.Remuneration	2. Economic pressures	3. Government pressures	4.The influence of sensationalism	5/6. Observance of professional ethics	6/5. Journalist training
Year	2012	8.26	8.18	7.38	7.14	5.72	6.32
	2018	8.11	7.91	7.62	7.2	7.05	5.94

Table N. 3. Main concerns for Spanish Journalists in 2012 and 2018

As this was a survey of several European and Mediterranean countries, it was also relevant to compare the Spanish journalists' responses with those of their European colleagues. Whereas low salaries appeared as the main issues affecting Spanish journalism in 2012, the European journalists ranked eco-

nomical pressures as their main issue, followed by the influence of sensationalism. Remuneration, the chief concern for Spanish journalism, was ranked third among the European journalists, with the observance of ethical standards coming last.

	Undertrained journalists	underpaid journalists	Journalists who do not observe professional ethics	Journalists who follow the masses and produce media hype	Economic pressures harm journalistic quality	Government pressures harm journalistic quality
All countries	6.02	7.18	5.92	7.36	7.90	6.00
Spain	6.32	8.26	5.72	7.15	8.18	7.38

A survey undertaken in 2008 by the same group of researchers on a sample of 2,012 journalists from across Spain highlights job insecurity as the main problem of professional journalism (Alsius, 2010: 282).

Journalist age

The test using Kendall's Tau coefficient shows a correlation (with a 95% confidence level) between the age of the informants and some of the issues af-

fecting the general state of journalism. The youngest respondents (aged 19-24) are most affected by economic pressures, followed by sensationalism and government pressures. The 25-34 and 35-44-year-old respondents expressed the most concern about remuneration. According to the age variable, older journalists consider themselves less affected by the situations referred to, which suggests that journalists with more experience enjoy greater more autonomy from these issues, except in the case of economic pressure, which maintains a high percentage.

In your opinion, which of the following items affects the general state of journalism in your autonomous community? Please rate them on a scale from 0 (not affected at all) to 10 (totally affected)	Age (by groups)				
	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-65
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Bachelor's Degree in Journalism and Communication	6.33	5.78	5.86	6.38	5.50
Remuneration received	7.89	8.43	8.13	8.32	7.32
Observance of professional ethics	7.67	7.16	6.90	7.79	5.88
Influence of sensationalism	8.22	7.47	7.33	7.06	6.82
Economic pressures	9.22	8.24	7.86	7.45	7.79
Government pressures	8.00	7.90	7.78	7.19	7.38

Table N.5. Main concerns for Spanish Journalists according to age

Years of professional experience

Years of professional experience in journalism also correlates (with a 95-99% level of confidence, according to the applied correlation test) with some of the issues affecting the general state of journalism. The results show that the more limited the journalists'

work experience, the greater their concern for remuneration. This issue affects almost all the age groups, except those with less than 1 year's experience and those with 11 to 15 years' experience. Economic pressures are the main issue affecting journalism for these respondents. Once again, more professional experience reveals a lower prevalence of these issues.

In your opinion, which of the following issues affects the general state of journalism in your autonomous community? Please rate them on a scale from 0 (not affected at all) to 10 (totally affected)	How many years of professional experience as a journalist do you have?					
	Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	More than 20 years
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Bachelor's Degree in Journalism and Communication	6.50	6.67	5.73	5.22	6.35	5.91
Remuneration received	7.00	8.67	8.53	8.17	8.05	7.88
Observance of professional ethics	8.00	7.46	7.03	7.28	7.00	6.85
Influence of sensationalism	7.50	8.04	7.67	7.22	7.57	6.79
Economic pressures	9.00	8.50	8.30	8.25	7.78	7.52
Government pressures	8.50	7.79	7.97	8.08	7.70	7.24

Differences between types of organizations

The study shows a correlation (with a 95% confidence level) between the type of news organization in which the informants work and their appraisal of the items affecting the general state of journalism. The type of media in which the surveyed journalists work clearly influences their perception of the chief problems of their profession. Job insecurity, for example, mainly affects journalists in private media: remuneration was ranked 9 among private television professionals,

making it the most relevant issue, while observance of professional ethical standards and training obtains a score no higher than 5 on a scale of 0 to 10. However, government pressures, the influence of sensationalism and observance of professional ethical standards have a greater impact on the public media than in private newspapers or television stations. It should be noted that for freelancers and journalists working in traditional and online newspapers, news agencies, magazines, economic pressures are also viewed as one of the main problems affecting journalism.

In your opinion, which of the following items affects the general state of journalism in your autonomous community? Please rate them on a scale from 0 (not affected at all) to 10 (totally affected)	In which kind of media do you mainly work?									
	Daily	Weekly	Magazine	Public radio	Private radio	Public television	Private television	Online daily	News agency	Freelance
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Bachelor's Degree in Journalism and Communication	5.38	6.60	6.25	6.02	6.28	5.79	5.89	5.81	6.57	6.00
Remuneration received	7.98	9.00	8.25	7.78	7.80	7.74	9.00	8.57	8.43	8.67
Observance of professional ethics	7.07	7.20	7.00	7.27	7.00	7.18	5.44	7.24	7.43	6.39
Influence of sensationalism	7.10	4.00	7.13	6.73	6.88	8.13	6.89	8.29	7.48	7.06
Economic pressures	8.14	7.60	8.63	7.76	7.92	7.47	7.00	8.38	8.19	7.94
Government pressures	7.33	6.20	7.38	7.90	7.36	7.87	6.00	8.24	8.29	7.33

Table N. 7 Main concerns for Spanish Journalists according to the type of news organization

Position

The correlation test again indicates (with a 95% confidence level) that the current position held by the informant correlates with how they perceive the issues affecting journalism. In all the professional categories, remuneration received is the highest ranked item, apart from the copywriters (7.99), who, a priori, would most experience this issue. However, they are the ones most affected by government pressures (8.15), which is also a concern among the

other professional categories. Government pressures are the second most relevant item among the directors (6.64), section heads (7.42) and editors-in-chief (6.70). These results could be explained by the fact that, as positions of responsibility in the media, they have regular contact with political sources. It is also noteworthy that ethical issues and sensationalism are of most concern among the section heads and copywriters, who are the lowest echelons in the newsroom.

	What is your position at present?					
	Other (specify)	Editor-in-chief / News Director / News Editor	Section Head	Director / Media Representative in his community	Copywriter	Freelancer
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	
Bachelor's Degree in Journalism and Communication	5.69	6.06	6.58	6.21	5.83	6.07
Remuneration received	8.77	7.94	8.11	7.86	7.99	8.40
Observance of professional ethics	7.46	7.00	6.32	6.07	7.33	5.93
Influence of sensationalism	7.96	6.64	7.53	6.71	7.32	6.87
Economic pressures	8.08	7.88	7.95	7.43	7.96	7.73
Government pressures	7.46	6.70	7.42	6.64	8.15	6.93

Table N. 8 Main concerns for Spanish Journalists according to professional category

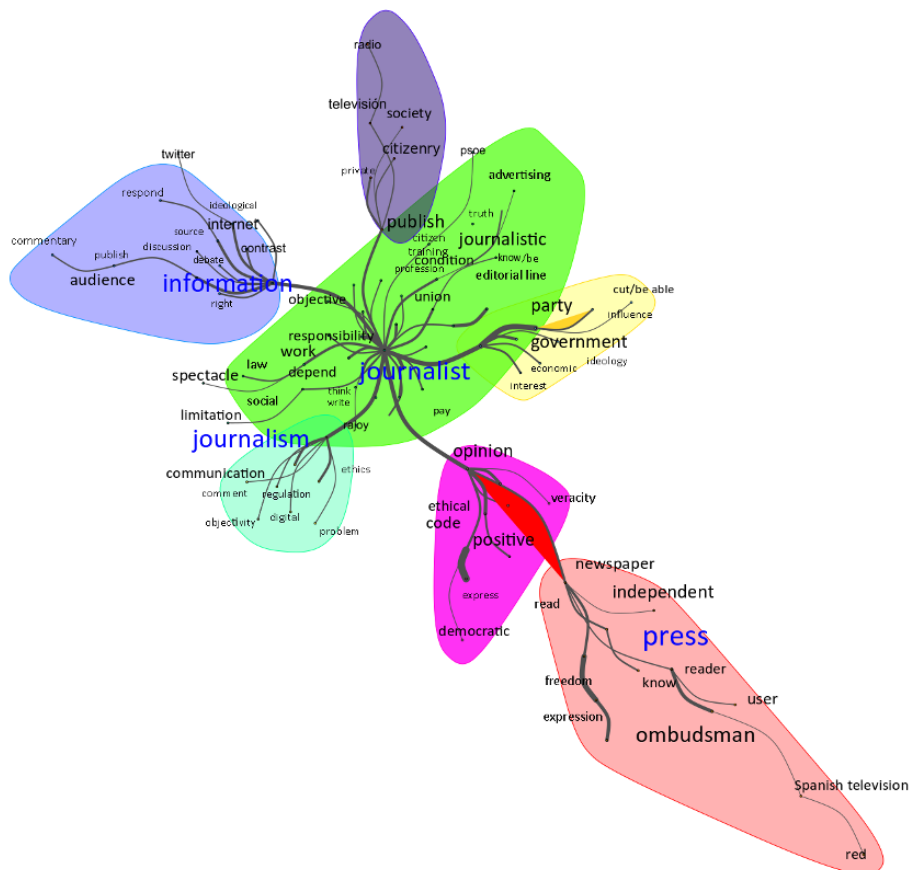
Differences according to training and qualification

The 95% confidence level also shows a correlation between training and the journalists’ ranking of the items affecting journalism. It is relevant that remuneration and economic pressures are considered to influence the entire profession. It is also observed

that journalists with the most training express more concern over the influence of sensationalism. Furthermore, among the practising journalists with no formal education, the item about studying for a degree in journalism is clearly the least relevant. Finally, government pressures are perceived to affect all the journalists in equal measure regardless of the qualification they may hold.

	No formal education	Placements in a media outlet	Non-validated education	School of Journalism	University Qualification in Journalism	Master’s degree Postgraduate qualification in journalism / communication	PhD in journalism / communication
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Bachelor’s Degree in Journalism and Communication	3.20	6.00	7.00	6.29	5.83	6.31	7.38
Remuneration received	8.60	6.67	9.25	8.57	7.96	8.50	9.00
Observance of professional ethical standards	8.40	7.17	8.50	7.57	6.91	6.92	8.25
Influence of sensationalism	6.20	6.33	7.00	7.29	7.28	7.33	7.50
Economic pressure	7.60	8.83	8.50	7.00	7.85	8.19	7.75
Government pressure	8.00	8.00	9.00	6.71	7.62	7.31	8.75

Table N.9 Main concerns for Spanish Journalists according to training and qualification



3.3. The citizens' opinion

The citizens in the six discussion groups conducted discussed the issues that they believed most affect professional journalism. When asked for their general opinion of journalism in Spain, the participants were critical of and concerned over the state of the profession, particularly over how the media uses information as entertainment, the influence of governments and corporations, and, as a consequence, the lack of trust the audience has in the media. This was highlighted by one of the participants:

Journalists aren't free at all, and they aren't free because they're constrained by the company they work for, they aren't free because of ideology, they aren't free because of the economic pressure to sell new (GD01-M).

The citizens feel that job insecurity is also one of the issues most affecting journalism. Thus, among the limitations of journalists in their profession, the first issue that arises is the need to make a living in a precarious world controlled by large media corporations. This has repercussions on the journalist's freedom to express their opinion, to report news, to be self-critical of their work. One of the participants in the focus group expressed this as follows:

You depend on this work to make a living, to pay the bills, and you automatically censor yourself to avoid becoming embroiled in specific problems... (GD02-H)(GD02-H).

Besides inadequate remuneration, the citizens also believe that staffing cuts in newsrooms make professional journalism even more precarious, as one of the participating citizens points out:

The main problem affecting journalism in Spain is the precariousness of the profession, which has repercussions on the quality of journalism. (...) Because the newsrooms are getting smaller and smaller, and they hire people on lower salaries and then (...). As a journalist you can't produce twenty news items a day, copy-pasting from news agencies, and those agencies uploading them are supplied by communication departments and the information is not cross-checked, so the quality is abysmal, the quality is extremely low (GD03-M).

Another aspect related to precariousness is the influence of economic power. According to the informants, the leading cause of the influence of economic power over the media responds to the media's need to generate revenues from advertising. This phenomenon has become more acute today when newspaper subscriptions or other forms of financing (such as the purchase of print newspapers) have become rare.

I've been to newspapers and seen that these media depend a lot on advertising; therefore, they never stick their necks out because their very survival depends on it (GD06-M).

When the citizens are asked about possible solutions to the situation affecting journalism, one participant notes the following options:

One way could be through a subscription. [...] (this way) it would no longer be 100% dependent (on companies), you can say NO at a given time. If a bank says "hey, you have to sell me youth entrepreneurship, and you pump me for entrepreneurial news every 10 minutes", then if people pay, maybe they can say "I'm not going to do this to you, this yes, but not that". Because that's precisely what they're doing, obviously. We all indoctrinate (GD04-H).

However, for the citizens, as reported by the surveyed journalists, government pressures are influencing the profession. The focus groups clearly felt that governments and politics are influencing the media, and they gave some examples. The most significant of these are governments assigning managers to positions in the public media. Government control of information in the public media is viewed as particularly reprehensible and its media as particularly vulnerable. The power to influence is also shown in politicians' interest in controlling the media. The overall perception is that some political parties in power exercise ideological control over certain media and keep tight control over the news before it is released. This perception, widely shared among the participating citizens, is expressed in conclusions such as this one:

They're not going to pass on information the state doesn't want (them to do), are they? If you're being funded by the state... as they say, the dog doesn't bite the hand that feeds it... (GD05-H).

Some of the informants believe that the influence extends to the direct control of information:

But more than influencing, I think they are issue guidelines on what they must say, i.e. either you say this, or else you won't work anymore, i.e. you'll see. And I have friends in Madrid who are in journalism, and that's how it is, their hands are tied, the politicians control the news before it's released, they read it, they request it, and if they see it toes the line, it is approved, but if not, it isn't (GD05-M).

Often the government itself decides whether you are the director-general of TVE and that you will do what I tell you to do, and so it goes. So, I often feel we're not being told the truth and that we're being manipulated for that, to deceive us with what they want, which is a bit difficult in that respect (GD05-H).

The citizens in the focus groups express unanimous concern over the influence of economic, political and governmental power. Some speak of the absence of a fourth estate, in the sense of a media powerful enough to challenge the establishment's other estates. One of the citizens expressed this thus:

Right now, journalism is a convenience, the media are all convenience, economic or political, and it is difficult to change some of them, but well... (GD05-H).

The citizens also believe that sensationalism swaying journalism. According to them, journalism has become a spectacle that increases audience ratings at any cost, especially in the case of television. They regret that programmes on politics revel in morbid content or sensationalize sensitive issues:

Some television channels need to put on a show, this they do in all their programmes, the news included... (GD01-M).

And so this aspect of seeking spectacle instead of seeking the truth, and seeking the truth demands poise and dedication... (GD01-M).

Finally, the participants agree that journalist training is adequate and that the lack of quality in the news is not due to inadequate training in journalism schools. Nevertheless, during the focus group discussions, some specific criticism was directed at journalism, such as training in gender inequality issues or the need to instil a sense of accountability when reporting on topics of cultural and ethnic diversity, among others, which they attribute, among other factors, to fewer years of training. The informants believe these issues could be solved in university education:

Reducing journalist's training from 5 years to 4 years doesn't help a Communicator (GD02-M).

3.4 The experts' view

When asked about this particular issue, the experts all agreed that remuneration and professional precariousness are the main problems of the profession. In this study, we selected the opinion of five of the experts. According to Nemesio Rodríguez, vice-president of the Madrid Press Association, and the studies and annual reports this association publishes, employment precariousness is the primary concern of journalists. Rodríguez explained that by precariousness, he speaks of "both salary and job insecurity. These are two factors that influence your work because they weaken you when you're under pressure, which is another huge problem. Such pressure comes from all three areas: political, economic and from those in charge of the media".

The former president of the Federation of Spanish Press Associations, Elsa González, also cites the

main problems as precariousness and unemployment: "Journalists don't generally earn a fair wage. Journalist independence is also affected, and prestige is undermined", she claims. María José Gómez Biedma, a journalist who has worked in different media and currently teaches journalism at the University of Seville, says that the profession is "in a deplorable state due to high unemployment and job insecurity". She adds, "although the manifestos and demands have got through to society, they haven't been reflected in the policies of companies, which, having sustained massive staffing cuts during the worst years of the crisis, now encourage 'false' self-employed workers, forcing them to work long days in exchange for paltry salaries".

Lorena Mejías, a member of the governing board of the Andalusian Professional Association of Journalists, also points to unemployment and precariousness as the main problem: "It's unemployment caused by layoffs in the media workforce due to the economic crisis and the closure of media outlets (due to the crisis, going digital). These are jobs that haven't been regenerated, making it very difficult for preferential sectors to enter the job market. Those who have kept their jobs, now find themselves in an increasingly precarious situation, having to take on ever more tasks and responsibilities and receive nothing in return". This view is shared by Neus Bonet, former dean of the College of Journalists of Catalonia: "As far as precariousness is concerned, the prevailing notion is that 'it's free, I don't pay for this information'".

Although retribution, unemployment and job security are critical factors in the current state of Spanish journalism, according to the interviewed experts, other issues have also come to the fore. Nemesio Rodríguez believes that economic pressures also have a significant impact "as many media outlets depend on the economic powers that be, from the point of view of ownership". Another concern, he adds, is that of government and political pressures: "This is more evident in the state-owned media than in the private media. Although the private media are also always looking to governments, I mean governments in general, central and regional, for financing, institutional advertising, which, though important factors are not decisive, since they contribute to financing the media. Therefore, they look a lot to governments and, above all, to those in charge of authorizing these subsidies."

Other experts also highlight government pressures. Journalist María José Gómez-Biedma points out that besides economic pressure, there is "considerable and continuous political and government pressure on the profession, which has led to an excessive politicization of the media and a strong dependence on institutional sources". For Gómez-Biedma, all of this has led to "a professional practice based fundamentally on opinion and press releases, as well as appearances, many of which are canned and don't take questions and are of little or negligible newsworthy

quality, which are drafted and sent to the newsrooms by powerful communications offices of public and private administrations and institutions”.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

One of the main objectives of this study was to understand the chief problems facing journalism professionals from their own perspective. The information gathered was then compared with the views of citizens and experts in journalism to confirm whether the three perceptions tally. This research also sought to observe whether the main problems of professional journalism in Spain have changed in recent years and how much the problems of Spanish professional journalists mirror those of their European counterparts.

The results of this research provide an unprecedented perspective as they not only allow an analysis of the evolution of the perception of the problems of the journalistic profession in Spain, but this analysis is based on the triple combination of perspectives of journalists, experts and citizens. The journalists and experts view precariousness and economic pressures as the leading problems in the profession; a situation that also worries the citizens, who, in contrast, rank sensationalism of information and political pressures as the principal evils of journalism. Even though job insecurity, unemployment or low pay directly affects journalists, which the experts also acknowledged, the citizens do not perceive these as so severe. This explains the loss of confidence the media has experienced in recent years among the audience.

The findings of the survey, conducted with Spanish journalists in 2018, clearly shows that the main problem facing the profession was remuneration received (an essential ingredient for discussing job insecurity), followed by economic pressure and government pressure. The similarity between the responses of the Spanish journalists in 2018 and 2012 regarding the issue of job insecurity is in contrast to those of their European colleagues, for whom the main concern was not remuneration, but economic pressure and sensationalism. While the Spanish journalists at that time viewed economic pressures as the second most concerning problem of their profession, job insecurity emerged as the third problem of the

profession in the European context. Six years later, the same problems are still affecting Spanish journalists and, in some cases, such as the lack of ethical principles, they are worsening.

All the actors consulted perceived weak professionalization, precarious employment and economic and governmental pressures, inherent to the Mediterranean or polarized pluralistic journalistic culture according to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) classification, as detrimental to the development of quality journalism. Journalists, experts and citizens alike agree in identifying them as obstacles to the development of a media system in a democratic country.

These findings, therefore, help to identify employment precariousness as one of the most deeply rooted problems in the Spanish professional journalism, which is borne out by the experts and the citizens alike. The precariousness in journalism is far from improving; indeed, the comparative surveys show it has worsened. In fact, in the survey “Ethics and Information Excellence. Journalistic code of conduct concerning citizens' expectations” (Alsius, 2010), carried out in 2007 as part of a competitive research project by the same authors of this paper, reveals that job insecurity was then already the main concern among professionals.

Almost a decade after these studies, our research shows that job insecurity has become a problem in the profession. The late arrival of Spanish journalism to the commercial press model, along with Spanish journalists' lack of independence from economic and political pressures, as already pointed out, have served to “normalize” a practice in which journalists are neither independent from a material nor an ideological standpoint.

All of this strips Spanish journalism of its power to offer citizens a public service guaranteeing plural, independent and quality information, a notion also perceived by the citizens in the focus groups. This is also indicated by both the journalists and the experts. Detecting and raising awareness of this situation is key to ensuring that professional journalism takes the appropriate measures to reverse a trend that, should it be consolidated further, could put the journalistic model itself in peril.

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- Lorena Mejías Castaño, interview, 18 March 2018
- Neus Bonet, interview, 15 May 2018.

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