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Characterisation of Spanish online journalists: Consolidation of a profession in a context of economic crisis

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Abstract

Introduction. The crisis of the Spanish newspaper industry has transformed the media ecosystem in Spain and has led to the emergence of new independent online news media, which have been mostly launched by journalists themselves. **Methods.** A mixed methods approach has been used to analyse the professional profiles of journalists working in the new Spanish digital news media outlets. The research involved a survey questionnaire applied to a sample of journalists working in 301 different media outlets and six semi-structured interviews. **Results.** The digital journalist is versatile and multi-skilled and there are no significant differences between the activities carried out by journalists across age groups. However, male journalists give more importance to technological tasks than their female counterparts do. **Conclusions.** This study shows that the precariousness of the Spanish journalistic sector makes it difficult to exploit the potential that digital media afford, while job insecurity does not allow journalists to develop their online presence.

Keywords

Professional profiles; entrepreneurial journalism; social networks; digital media; professional skills; digital journalists.

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1. Introduction

Almost 25 years after the emergence of the first Spanish online newspaper and after several research works on the transformation of the media ecosystem prompted by the introduction of the Internet and digital technologies into news-making routines, this article aims to describe the new journalistic practices that have been adopted in the newsroom and labour organisation, the incorporation of new professional profiles and the consequences of the versatile character of online journalists in their daily work.

The business model of the press in Spain, based on advertising revenue and newspaper sales, did not resist the global economic crisis. In fact, between 2007 and 2008, the sector lost 95% of its income (AEDE, 2010) and more than 375 Spanish media outlets were shut down (APM, 2015). This context has been the breeding ground for the creation of new independent online media that are not endorsed by large media companies and in many cases have been founded by journalists themselves. This trend has been defined by some authors as entrepreneurial journalism (Manfredi-Sánchez; Rojas-Torrijos; Herranz, 2015).

According to the Madrid Press Association, between January 2008 and October 2015, 579 media outlets were launched (APM, 2015), with the largest boom experienced in 2012 and 2013. The low economic cost of creating online media, in comparison to analogue media, and the decreasing number of job offers in traditional media have been the main causes of the emergence and expansion of entrepreneurial journalism.

Currently, the Spanish media system is divided into two groups: a wealthy media oligopoly and a large number of independent small media companies. This research focuses on the latter group and aims to analyse the tasks that journalists perform in their daily routines and determine how the new journalistic profiles are organised.

1.1. Professional profiles in digital journalism

Professional journalistic profiles have undergone great transformations after the advent of the Internet and the possibilities that the Web 2.0 has afforded for the dissemination and sharing of information. This evolution has changed the ways of producing, understanding and accessing information (Sánchez-García; Campos-Domínguez; Berrocal, 2015; Soengas-Pérez; Rodríguez-Vázquez; Abuón-Vence, 2014) and, in turn, these developments affect the tasks and functions journalists perform on a daily basis.

After the convergence and implementation of new technologies, scholars have offered different terms to refer to journalism and the activities performed by journalists in the digital environment. Five years after the incorporation of some Spanish newspapers to the Internet, Gil (1999) pointed out that the terms “electronic journalism” and “digital journalism” were vague because television, for example, had offered this type of journalism for many years. Some authors agree that a more correct term is the one used in the English-speaking world: *online journalism* (Gil, 1999, Díaz-Noci, Meso, 2000). However, for Gil (1999), the goal should be network journalism, which “breaks with the linear and one-way communication between sender and receiver. The network journalist is immersed in a sea of

information and is interconnected with sources, journalists, receivers, interactors, etc” (Gil, 1999 no page).

While the digital ecosystem has reconfigured the traditional figure of the journalist, many authors claim that the basic functions of this profession, such as “verification of sources and facts, search for truth, objectivity, public service mission and journalistic ethics” (Rosique-Cedillo, 2013, p. 118), are still at the centre of the profession, with the only exception that today they are performed with other tools.

The new context has provoked the reformulation of the professional profiles as well as the emergence of new roles (Marques-Hayasaki; Roca-Cuberes; Singa-Casellas, 2016; Meso et al., 2010; Sánchez-García; Campos-Domínguez; Berrocal, 2015). These changes have been influenced by four factors. The first factor, as mentioned, is technological advance, which has not only expanded the supply of information, but also the platforms that enable the distribution of information products, which has given rise to journalistic profiles that are capable of writing the same content for different platforms (Jódar-Marin, 2010; Salaverría; García-Avilés, 2008).

The second factor is the high competition that exist in the news industry and the media’s need to be present in multiple platforms. Third, the 2008 global economic crisis and technological convergence have prompted the emergence of new business formulas, which have resulted in job cuts in traditional media, more precarious working conditions and the diversification of the tasks required from journalists. Finally, the journalistic profession has lost its exclusivity on the creation of news content and in reaching mass audiences given that a significant share of the current audience are now *prosumers*, i.e., have the capacity to produce and disseminate information (Berrocal; Campos-Domínguez; Redondo, 2014; García-Galera; Valdivia, 2014).

These four major changes are forcing online journalists to become versatile, multi-purpose and ever evolving (Cabrera, 2009; Salaverría; García-Avilés, 2008; Scolari et al., 2008). The versatility of journalists suggests, in principle, a positive evolution of the journalistic roles. However, for some authors this versatility prevents the thematic specialisation of journalists, who now have to perform activities that were previously carried out by other professionals (Esteban, 2012; Masip Micó, 2009).

The transversality of the tasks performed by journalists has led scholars to define these professionals as multimedia journalists (Túñez; Guevara, 2009; Túñez; Martínez-Solana; Drone-Mendoza, 2010), cyber-journalists (Arroyo-Cabello, 2011), multi-platform or multitasking journalists (Meso et al., 2010). In an attempt to classify the different tasks that journalists perform online, Bakker (2014) highlights the existence of three differentiated professional profiles, although he also remarks that, in most cases, journalists perform more than one professional profile.

– Technological profile: Technological competencies include the use and development of mechanical text publishing and editing tasks on various platforms and outlets. They also include more specialised skills such as data manipulation and infographics (Flores-Vivar; Méndez-Muros, 2014; Morato Sánchez-Cuadrado; Fernández-Bajón, 2016).

– Content management profile: it includes information and data filtering and ranking according professional criteria, and in relation to both offline and online sources (Sánchez-García; Campos-Domínguez; Berrocal, 2015).

– Community manager profile: in addition to managing the media's social networks, it includes encouraging and increasing the participation of the audience in the production of information, conducting surveys and moderating debates across different platforms (Bakker, 2014; Sánchez-Gonzalez; Méndez-Muros, 2014). The organic development of audience participation has required the creation of this professional profile to activate and manage user interventions (Harrison, 2010).

In addition to these profiles, Bakker (2014) points out the novelty of the entrepreneurial journalist, referring to professionals who, in the absence of job opportunities in traditional media, have created their own journalistic companies and/or work as freelancer for various media companies. As mentioned above, this type of journalism has proliferated in Spain, which is the focus of this research.

Bakker's typology (2014) of the tasks performed by online journalists coincides fully with the classification proposed in 1999 by Gil, who organises them according to sources, target audiences, the medium and the contents. The practice of each of the routines explained by Gil (1999) consolidate the profile of the network journalist.

Based on the analysis of the previous context, we have established the following research questions:

Q1. What tasks do online journalists perform in independent Spanish media?

Q2. Do online journalists from independent media have differentiated professional profiles or are versatile professionals?

Q3. Do online journalists perform tasks that are in principle attributed to the so-called new professional profiles in the journalistic field (for example, the community manager)?

Q4. Are profiles and tasks determined by socio-demographic variables such as sex, age, employment situation and professional role?

Q5. Can online journalists be considered network journalists (Gil, 1999)?

2. Methods

This study adopts a mixed methods approach. The survey was used to identify the routines and tasks performed by journalists working in Spanish independent online media and the semi-structured interview was chosen to collect the qualitative accounts of the group of journalism professionals.

2.1. Survey to digital journalists

The questionnaire designed for this research is divided in two thematic blocks. The first one investigates respondents' demographic data (sex, age) and employment situation in the medium or media in which they work (position of responsibility). The second block considers 19 different tasks developed by digital journalists, based on the review of the studies mentioned above (Gil, 1999;

Bakker, 2014; Flores-Vivar; Méndez-Muros, 2014; Morato; Sánchez-Cuadrado; Fernández-Bajón, 2016; Sánchez-García; Campos-Domínguez; Berrocal, 2015; Sánchez-Gonzales; Méndez-Muros, 2013). These activities have been classified into three categories that reflect the digital journalistic profiles analysed above: technological tasks (8), content management tasks (5) and community management tasks (6). All the activities have been evaluated by the respondents with 5-point Likert scales (where 1 is not important and 5 is very important within their working day). In addition, two control questions were asked to obtain more information about the professional use of social networks.

The survey questionnaire was applied in January 2018 through an online form. The sample of media were selected through the New Media Observatory, a web initiative that has an updated directory of Spanish-language media classified by theme and country. We considered all companies that are based in Spain and have an online presence, regardless of their theme and geographical scope. In addition, we made sure the selected media were not part of any major national or international media group. The form was sent to all the members of the selected media to obtain a random sample within our universe.

2.1.2. Survey participants

The survey questionnaire was answered by a total of 262 professionals, of whom 240 answered it in a valid way (91.6%). The margin of error is $\pm 6.33\%$ with a confidence level $2\sigma=95\%$. Participants belong to 301 different news media, given that some of them work in more than one medium, and are present in companies based on all the Spanish autonomous communities. In addition, it should be noted that 9.6% ($n=29$) of the selected media have no physical headquarters.

The distribution of the sample by gender is 67% ($n=162$) men and 33% ($n=78$) women. In terms of age, the mean is 39 (standard deviation=11). The most predominant age groups were 30 to 39 ($n=77$, 32%) and 40 to 49 ($n=70$, 29%). Participants under the age of 30 represent 21% ($n=50$) of the sample, those aged 50 to 59 represent 14% ($n=37$) and those older than 60 years represent only 5% ($n=12$).

Most respondents ($n=209$, 87%) are remunerated for the activities they perform and for 78.8% ($n=189$) of them, journalism is their main source of income. The most common employment category is freelance ($n=131$, 54.6%), followed by full-time or part-time contract ($n=78$, 32.5%), and collaborator ($n=31$, 12.9%). Regarding the professional role, the most common is director ($n=110$, 45.8%), editor ($n=29$, 12.1%) and writer ($n=76$, 31.7%).

The statistical tests have been carried out with the open source program *R*. To detect the presence or absence of professional profiles, we performed a confirmatory cluster analysis to statistically determine whether the tasks performed by each journalist belong to just one of the three profiles or to more than one of these profiles. For the verification of the significance of relationships between variables we used Student's T test, in the case of the independent sex variable (bivariate), and the Kruskal-Wallis test, for the rest of the socio-demographic variables. The significance level considered for this study is 0.05.

2.2. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 digital journalists from four different autonomous communities of Spain (Madrid, Galicia, Andalusia and Catalonia). They were previously invited to participate in the study via emails sent to different online media chosen according to the following

criteria: type of medium (general/specialised), coverage (national, local and hyperlocal) and origin. The objective was to collect testimonies from different types of media to detect differences in the production routines related to the aforementioned categories.

The interviews were conducted from 22 to 25 November 2018, via Skype or WhatsApp calls. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and were recorded audio. The testimonies were transcribed for their subsequent analysis.

The issues addressed in the interviews aimed to delve into the exercise of the journalistic work from a more philosophical aspect, and were divided into six areas:

1. Professional training
2. Description of professional development (previous job positions and contract types)
3. Current professional situation
4. Description of professional activities in the digital context
5. Characteristics of their journalistic exercise
6. Questions related to professional success, evaluation of the journalistic exercise, ethics, journalism and society/public service.

The call for participation was answered by 8 journalists, of whom 6 met the selection criteria. The following table presents the characteristics of the interviewed professionals.

Table1. List of interviewed journalists

Media	Type	Coverage	Origin	Name	Age	Position	Education	Interview date	Duration
Media-tics.com	Specialised	National	Madrid	Miguel Ormaetxea	72	Corrector	BA in journalism	22-10-2018	45:00
Periodistadigital.com	General	National	Madrid	Roberto Marban	35	Staff writer	BA in journalism	22-10-2018	31:28
Vallecasweb.com	General	Hyper local	Madrid	Antonio Luquero	65	Editor	BA in journalism	23-10-2018	1:30:00
iSabadell.com	General	Hyper local	Catalonia	Jordi de Arriba	35	Editor	BA in journalism	24-10-2018	1:14:25
Cordobadeporte.com	Specialised	Local	Andalusia	Rafael Francisco	40	Editor-in-chief	BA in journalism	24-10-2018	1:07:00
Tendencias.com	Specialised	National	Galicia	Abril Camino	37	Staff writer	English & Spanish Philology	25-10-2018	27:00

Source: Authors' own creation

3. Results

Based on descriptive statistical evidence, the group of professionals in the sample carry out more activities related to content management (Q1). As shown in Table 2, the most important tasks are gathering information to write news articles and verifying data quality and validity. The second most important group of tasks are technological. In this sub-group, professionals give more relevance to the updating of the web and the publication of contents on different platforms and, to a lesser extent, the design graphics or infographics.

Finally, the activities of the Community manager profile, specifically amp up social networks, moderate comments on the web page and social networks and respond to private messages, are considered little relevant in journalists' work routines. On the other hand, the most recurrent task is posting on the social networks of the medium or media in which they work (P3).

In order to corroborate the level of relevance of social networks in the daily work of journalists, respondents were asked about the time they spend daily on these platforms. Of the 210 journalists (87.5%) who use a social network for professional purposes, 74 (35.2%) do it for more than 2 hours a day, 35 (16.8%) do it about two hours a day, and only 27 (12.8%) do it less than half an hour a day.

Table 2. Assessment of professional tasks by digital journalists

	Average (mean)	Standard deviation	High Ratings *
CONTENT MANAGEMENT	3.8	1.170	
Gather information to write news articles	4.5 (5)	0.948	87.9% (n=211)
Check quality and validity of data	4.4 (5)	0.933	85% (n=204)
Write opinion articles	3.1 (3)	1.346	35.4% (n=85)
Search for information and news on social networks	3.7 (4)	1.163	58.3% (n=140)
Conduct interviews	4 (4)	1.183	63.3% (n=152)
TECHNOLOGICAL TASKS	3.4	1.195	
Personally publish content on the medium's different platforms	4.3 (5)	1.078	73.7% (n=177)
Edit pictures, videos and audios	3.5 (4)	1.307	49.2% (n=118)
Measure online impact of the medium's news	3.4 (4)	1.325	45.4% (n=109)
Update the medium's website with original content	4.5 (5)	0.889	80% (n=192)
Create graphics or infographics	2.2 (2)	1.080	65.8% (n=159)

Improve or update technical aspects of the website	3 (3)	1.442	34.6% (n=83)
Use and analysis of databases	3.1 (3)	1.249	35.8% (n=86)
Take pictures	3.1 (3)	1.450	39.2% (n=94)
COMMUNITY MANAGER	3.2	1.415	
Reply to private messages on social networks	3.2 (3)	1.321	40% (n=96)
Follow the reactions generated by original content on social networks	3.4 (4)	1.865	44.6% (n=107)
Publish on the medium's social networks	4.2 (5)	1.204	72.5% (n=174)
Generate discussions on the medium's social networks	2.4 (2)	1.215	18.3% (n=44)
Moderate comments on the website or social networks	2.8 (3)	1.488	30.4% (n=73)
Share the medium's news on personal social networks	3.3 (4)	1.398	44.6% (n=107)

Source: Authors' own creation.

* Percentages of the values 4 (important) and 5 (very important) of the Likert scale

3.1. The versatility of journalists

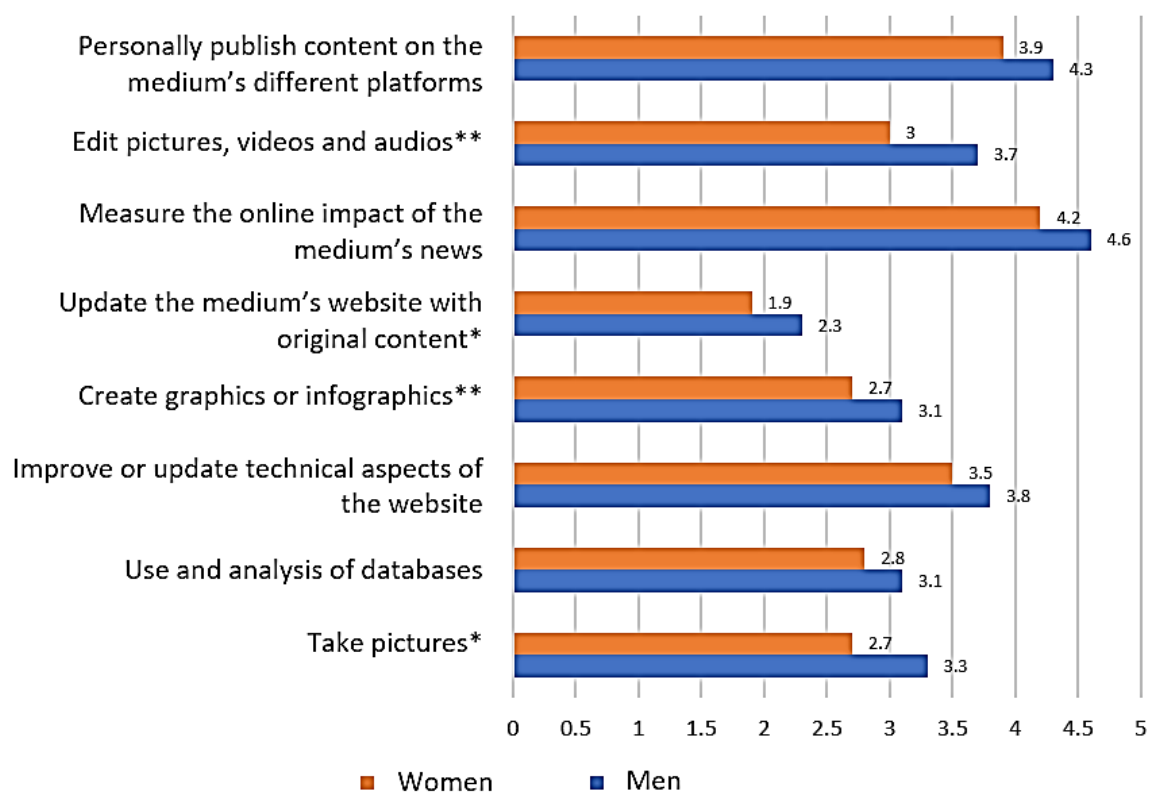
The results obtained from the confirmatory cluster analysis highlight that none of the respondents gave significantly greater importance to the tasks associated to a specific profile because they have obtained higher indexes than the significance level established ($p > 0.05$). These results indicate that although content management tasks are considered more relevant, journalists do not perform them exclusively, and that during their working day they perform activities associated to the three profiles (Q2).

Based on this, correlation analyses have determined that certain sociodemographic variables do affect the degree of relevance granted to daily tasks (Q5). In reference to gender, there were differences between men and women in technological tasks. As shown in Figure 1, men score higher the relevance of those tasks that require medium or high technical knowledge.

Regarding the differences in terms of tasks according to journalists' age, the first group coding (younger than 30, 30 to 39, 40 to 49, 50 to 59 and 60 and over) showed no correlation between the tasks of the three profiles and journalists' age. As a result, the age of respondents in the three large groups (younger than 35, 35 to 50 and older than 50) was recoded to identify differences across wider generational groups. Despite this change, the new test only found a statistically significant difference in the editing of images, videos and audios, where the younger the journalist the more relevance he or she gives to the task ($X^2 = 6.5398$, $df=2$, $p < 0.05$).

The categories used to check whether the type of contractual relationship determines the professional activities of journalists were freelance (n=131, 54.6%), part-time or full-time contract (n=78, 32.5%) and collaborator (n=31, 12.9%). The differences that were identified refer to the community manager tasks. Those who have a more direct relationship with the medium (full-time or part-time contracts) give more importance to the medium’s social networks and to interaction with the audience: respond to private messages in social networks ($\chi^2= 18.896$, $df=6$, $p < 0.001$), publish in the medium’s social networks ($\chi^2=14.973$, $df=6$, $p < 0.05$) and generate discussions in the medium’s social networks ($\chi^2= 16.95$, $df=6$, $p < 0.001$).

Figure 1. Assessment of technological tasks by journalists’ gender



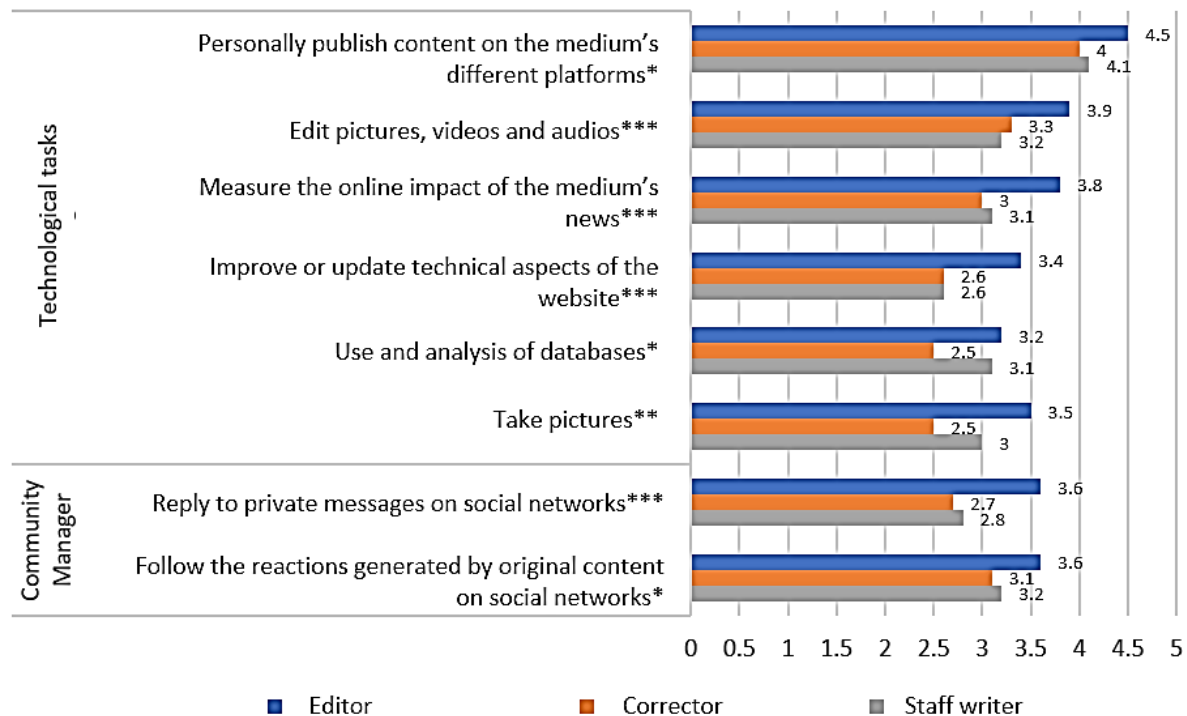
Source: Authors’ own creation

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

Finally, we checked whether the tasks performed by journalists are influenced by their position of responsibility, bearing in mind that the workforce of the analysed media is, in most cases, reduced. This analysis took into account the 3 most common job positions among respondents: editor (n=110, 45.8%), corrector (n=29, 12.1%) and staff writer (n=76, 31.7%). In this regard, we found that the editor gives more relevance to technological tasks than the other roles (see Figure 2). In the community management tasks, the editor also gives more importance to responding messages/comments on social networks and following the reactions generated by their original content. On the other hand, correctors

and staff writers consider that content management tasks (gathering information to make opinion articles and conduct interviews as a source of information) are more relevant in their daily work.

Figure 2. Assessment of task importance by journalists from independent digital media



Source: Authors' own creation
 * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

3.2 The daily work of digital journalists

Interviewed journalists indicate that much of their journalistic work is related to tasks that are characteristic of their professional profile, such as writing news, fact-checking, reviewing social network profiles of figures from the spheres of politics, sports and business, and reading other national and foreign media.

The workforce of the media companies in which they work is reduced, but there are at least 5 journalists per medium. Most of them are self-employed and write an average of 6 news stories a day. However, two of the six interviewees perform management tasks too, so they only write one or two news pieces a day. "Apart from me there are about four or five people. There is a writing team, there an editor in chief and there are collaborators. We worked hard. I have very few people on the payroll because I work mostly with freelancers. The newsrooms I knew... had 70 or 80 journalists and that no longer makes sense" (Mediatics.com). Some of the interviewees explain that in order to keep the medium in economic terms, they tend to outsource some services such as magazine editing and/or news transfer.

The management of the medium's social networks is the second most important task for these journalists. None of the media has a community manager. Only one of the interviewees has been trained professionally to carry out the maintenance and monitoring of social networks. Most of them have learned "on the go" with the help of co-workers and a couple of them comment that their company has offered them training courses but not on a continuous basis.

Twitter and Facebook are the networks where the media where the interviewees work have the most presence. Facebook is the network that generates more traffic to their contents on the web. "Facebook began to work as the great distribution channel for news media and, although we try to do our best job and fact-check the news, this has an impact on the speed with which we post news about some events. If a story can circulate a lot on social networks, the sooner you post it, the best reception that it gets" (iSabadell.com). Everybody has been affected by Facebook's algorithm change in 2018, which affects the scope of the publications of fan pages.

Time and speed are categories that journalists identify as key elements to understand production routines in an online context. They both condition to some extent the quality of the information. "The issue of the rapid posting of content... the desire to be the first one because otherwise people do not seem to read the news, that goes a little against my way of understanding journalism, which is to make things more slowly to be careful with the style. I love the Spanish language and I try to be as careful as possible and all this seems to go against everything that has become journalism" (Córdobadeporte.com)

Everyone believes following the mass use of social networks, they have to verify the information that comes from them and especially from Facebook. "Social networks have, in my view, an excessive weight in the media and right now any person with an account can publish information... so you have to try to fact-check it just in case. We do not ignore any source, so we really try to verify the information" (Córdobadeporte.com).

The verification of the sources when they come from social networks and the Internet is an obligatory task in their work because there are unreliable profiles and photographs can be manipulated. "I do not trust Facebook, well more or less, but over time you learn which pages are more or less reliable or what pages are fake news, so what we did was to go to the native content, that is, the original source. We never published anything that the Facebook page of a blogger said, for example" (Tendencias.com).

Everyone says that the information published on social networks should always be verified and that this can only be the beginning of a news story but not the news story by itself. However, some interviewees indicate that this verification work also depends on the topic: "to make the typical story that we all make viral... you know so-and-so replies to Twitter user... you already have the message, which can be embedded and also serves as the source, so it is not complicated because you can do it fast" (periodistadigital.com).

Instagram is the network that generates less interest among interviewees. In most cases they recognise that they have created an Instagram profile because "it is the place to be", "because it is fashionable", with the exception of Tendencias.com, since 80% of its content involves this social network.

The interviewed journalists use social networks to disseminate the news published in their websites to attract more traffic to it. They mention that they publish content on social networks almost every hour and that initially they shared all the contents of the website on these platforms, but over time, based on digital audience data, they started to organise their publications to perform better. In some cases, they have also identified the stories that generate more and less traffic. “Without having studied it too much, we have gradually modulated the amount of news we post, to achieve good traffic to our website, without forgetting their influence. At first, for example, we made very few events and now we do more events because it works at a quantitative level. We need to have many visitors and events brings them to you. What we try is not to go the pot and only end up making events, which is what some media do” (iSabadell.com).

Journalists reply to their readers’ messages to rectify information and when they ask direct questions. In general, they do not usually engage in discussions between readers unless they are alluded to.

In relation to multimedia contents, journalists explain that they have no professional skills to create them. In fact, video and infographics have little or no presence in their news media.

The reflection on the individual professional work was the last thematic block to be discussed in the interviews. First, interviewees were asked about professional growth and whether they felt they had achieved what they expected to achieve when they finished their degree. Most of them responded affirmatively and explained that their development has not been easy but that they are currently satisfied with their professional growth. “I do feel fulfilled. It is also true that in local journalism you must love the place where you work. If I worked elsewhere, I would not have that bond...” (iSabadell.com). Only one of the interviewees did not feel professionally satisfied: “I want to learn to make multimedia content, I want to learn more, so I do not feel fulfilled. I will consider myself fulfilled when I get to do post-industrial journalism, advanced digital journalism that helps, as much as possible, companies to make transitions, but I am still far from achieving that” (Mediatics.com).

Most of the interviewees have a consolidated career in different media of at least 10 years, so we consider it appropriate to ask them about the characteristics they consider a good journalist should have. All of them pointed out aspects related to the most traditional journalist, like being curious and honest. “First of all, great curiosity. The basis of this profession is curiosity. The profession is already changing but it will change a lot more and you have to be willing to learn for the rest of your life, systematically, and also change, change and change” (Mediatics.com).

“I think it would have to be an honest professional with himself and with the medium and with the other sources. I think that is very important and many are not honest enough. He must have values and his own point of view and I think that from there you can do things” (iSabadell.com). “We need much of that instinct to see what the news is, to care about it. Sacrifice must accompany a good journalist. Not caring about the working hours” (Cordobadeporte.com).

Finally, they believe that journalism should be considered a public service in a context in which there is a lot of information and people no longer know what is true. “Citizens need credible pages of reference to differentiate what is true from what is not. Because you find atrocities circulating on WhatsApp. The value that citizens give to the press will grow” (iSabadell.com). “In almost any

important issue, there a journalist giving out the information. A healthy society cannot exist without free journalism, at least as free as they let you be, because there are always conditions” (Cordobadeporte.com).

4. Conclusions

After almost 25 years of the emergence of the first Spanish newspaper on the Internet (Díaz-Noci; Meso, 2000) some online journalism practices have been consolidated and it is increasingly closer to the network journalism explained by Gil (1999).

This research used quantitative and qualitative data to analyse the tasks performed by Spanish journalists in the new independent online media. Most studies on journalists’ job profiles are based on data provided by consolidated online and offline news outlets owned by large media corporations. However, as a result of the deep crisis in the newspaper industry, the analysis of what is called entrepreneurial journalism is fundamental to measure the development of medium and small businesses and the role of young journalists as drivers of a large part of these news media projects (Manfredi-Sánchez; Rojas-Torrijos; Herranz, 2015) and to identify the professional profiles and production routines of exclusively-online news media.

The tasks analysed in the quantitative part of the study are extracted from the profiles resulting from the digitalisation of the media and information, which are divided into technological activities, content management and community management. Activities related to content management are considered to be the most relevant in journalists’ field of work. With these results we can conclude that, despite the great impact of technology in the profession, the main activities remain focused on the selection and organisation of information (Rosique-Cedillo, 2013), although the ways of doing them have changed due to the chaos of data on the Internet and the difficulty to verify sources. Interviewed online journalists explain that they have incorporated into their routines the constant verification of sources, especially of those that are native to the Internet. The raw material of these journalists is both online and offline and, as part of their routines, they consult other local, national and international media to identify what are the news they should follow up to generate more traffic to their websites. In this way, online journalists have learnt to capitalise on news updating, either formally or informally, from the knowledge acquired from the technological convergence.

Technological and community management activities are also present in the daily work of surveyed and interviewed journalists. The positive evolution that we have identified in the qualitative study is that online journalists are, to varying degrees, skilled in social networks management, particularly as dissemination platforms and sources of information. This symbolic capital is used to carry out one of the fundamental tasks in journalism which is the verification and corroboration of information.

Regarding social network management tasks, a large majority of surveyed journalists use social networks professionally, for more than two hours a day during their workday. This use is not related to the creation of interaction with the audience through the generation or moderation of debates on their website or social networks, despite it is one of the possibilities afforded by these platforms. Interviewed journalists give less importance to the generation of dialogue with their audience, which constitute horizontal relations with their readers, which is maybe the legacy of the traditional press (Martínez-García, 2016). However, the interviewees do consider the dialogue with their audience to

be important and so they respond to their questions and comments. In this sense, online journalists become senders and receivers of information (Sandoval, 2001).

Based on these results and having studied a large number of journalistic tasks, it cannot be said that Spanish independent news media manages differentiated professional profiles. On the contrary, the journalists working in these news media are versatile (Cabrera, 2009; Salaverría; García-Avilés, 2008; Scolari et al., 2008) because the nature of the media in which they work requires so. They carry out activities that are transversal to all the specialties and this is perhaps one of the differences with respect to large news media companies that have an online and offline presence.

One of the relevant and innovative aspects of this analysis is the breakdown of the results by such categories as sex, age, employment situation and job position. These specificities give us a fuller view of the professional profiles. In terms of gender, men give greater importance to the technological tasks within their working hours. Previous studies on gender and the press found out that this is a predominantly male area (Martínez-García, 2016; Van-Zoonen, 1994) and the new Spanish online media are no exception. This is another legacy of the traditional press. Surveyed female journalists give priority to the activities related to the content management profile, over technical/digital competencies. This situation is also a reflection of the secondary position of women in jobs in the technological sector.

Another important finding is that a journalist's age does not influence the tasks he or she performs. This result can be explained by the high level of competitiveness in the information sector (Bakker, 2014), which requires that all workers have to be constantly updated and formed in order to expand their impact on the market and explore new ways of reporting and relating to the audience. Based on the interviews, it seems that while younger journalists are digital natives, older journalists do not update their knowledge and skills in a formal way, i.e. by undertaking postgraduate studies, but acquire experience through the trial-error method and through knowledge exchange with their co-workers. In very few cases the news media is responsible for the continuing education of their professional staff.

Another conclusion is that greater job security (hired personnel) equals greater involvement of professionals in the management of the media's social networks. In the same way, most professionals who work in the new digital media are self-employed or freelance, which perpetuates job insecurity in the journalistic sector (APM, 2015). This difference in the employment relation with the news medium is also reflected in the tasks that journalists carry out according to their position within the company. While executives of new media give priority to technological and community management activities, style correctors and writers give more importance to content management tasks.

This article shows that Spanish online journalists are one step away from doing “network Journalism” (Gil, 1999) as they are yet to explore a new information language that integrates the multimedia possibilities afforded by the Internet. The digital economy, which involves a reduced workforce, is a double-edged weapon for entrepreneurial journalists: on the one hand, it has afforded them job continuity -at a high cost- and, on the other hand, it does not favour the specialisation of journalists or contents, which are so necessary in a context where algorithms set the agenda.

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