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# The professional situation of Spanish journalists: the repercussions of the crisis on the media

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## Abstract

[EN] **Introduction.** This article analyses the professional, working and economic situation faced by journalists working in Spain during the past five years, a period in which the crisis and the media convergence coincided with the digitisation process. **Method.** The analysis of the characteristics of the current landscape is based on the qualitative and quantitative analysis of a survey applied to journalists from the main public and private media companies. These journalists were questioned about all the changes that occurred in their companies since 2008. In addition, comparative interviews were applied to media experts to perform a complementary and external assessment of the situation of the media. **Results.** The results show that the conditions of most Spanish journalists have worsened since the onset of the crisis and that the problems increased remarkably in 2012. The cutbacks made during this period are the most drastic of the past twenty years and affect all the elements involved in the information process. **Discussion and conclusions.** In the restructuring of

newsrooms the economic objectives have been prioritised over journalistic criteria and informative interests, as acknowledged by 54% of the journalists working in public media and 65% of the journalists working for private media. The study showed that 87% of the sample of the media companies have reduced their workforce or their material resources, that 62% of the journalists have lost purchasing power since 2008, and that 33% of the journalists with employment contracts of indeterminate duration feared for their job, and that this percentage increases to 54% among journalists over 50 years and to 68% among journalists with fixed-term employment contracts.

## Keywords

Media crisis; media convergence; journalism; media landscape.

## Contents

1. Introduction and theoretical framework. 2. Object of study and research objectives. 3. Hypothesis. 4. Method. 5. Results. 5.1. Professional experience and mobility. 5.2. The working conditions of journalists. 5.3. The economic objectives of media companies. 6. Comparative interviews. 6.1. The opinion of experts. 6.2. Proposed solutions. 7. Conclusions. 8. List of references.

Translation by **CA Martínez Arcos**, Ph.D. (Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas)

## 1. Introduction and theoretical framework

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century Spain was characterised by a proliferation of media companies that did not correspond with the demands of the market or the information needs of the Spanish society. The creation of many media companies was exclusively motivated by political or opportunistic interests at a time of economic boom and not by the desire to increase pluralism and diversity (Rojo Villada, 2006). Information and communication became profitable goods and were intensively exploited. Most of the media applied expansionary policies, especially newspapers, which projected their business towards the audiovisual and multimedia sector, as evidenced by the data included in the successive yearbooks published by the Press Association of Madrid (*APM*).

The media expansion coincided with a period of technological development that begun in the 1990s with the computerisation of the newsrooms (Saiz Olmo, 1995) and spread extensively during the media convergence process and the subsequent phase of digitisation. The infrastructure of the analogue media was obsolete and the profile of many journalists did not meet the new requirements (De Aguinaga, 2002). However, the modernisation of the media focused almost exclusively in the technological aspects and was too ambitious, instead of planning a sustainable transition process. Most media companies made unnecessary investments and aggravated their situation by borrowing beyond their means. In fact, some media companies never recovered because they did not recoup or made profitable the multimillion amounts of money invested.

The restructuring formulas implemented in companies with economic problems did not guaranteed the adequate adaptation of the media system to the new digital landscape, nor laid the groundwork for implementing an information strategy that was unrelated to economic and political conditions and was adequate to the needs of the audience (Campos Freire, 2010). At the same time, the content offer and the human resources policies were neglected (Cabarcos, 2012), especially the recycling of the journalists who were trained during the analogue stage and were struggling to use digital technologies (Torregosa Carmona, Pérez-Ugena, García Jiménez, 2009).

The design of the media development model implemented in Spain was not coherent from the business point of view or from the perspective of communication, especially of the information offer. Spain opted for an opportunistic formula and most of its companies have focused their businesses in fields unrelated to journalism, with incursion into unknown and risky areas, without having the adequate infrastructure and knowledge to carry out the new activities.

The expansion of the print press to the audiovisual sector and later to the multimedia platforms generated structures that were difficult to manage, little profitable, inadequate and unviable, which triggered the current situation. In some cases, the workforce of the new media companies was formed with the surplus of the parent company, ignoring the importance of the specialised workforce with specific experience (Mellado, Simon, Barría, Enríquez, 2007). Thus, radio and television companies were run with newspaper journalists who had no experience in the activities of their new job and did not take refresher courses.

These daring decisions contributed the most to the failure of many projects. That is why one of the causes of the current situation of journalists can be found in the media system's bad planning and wrong development.

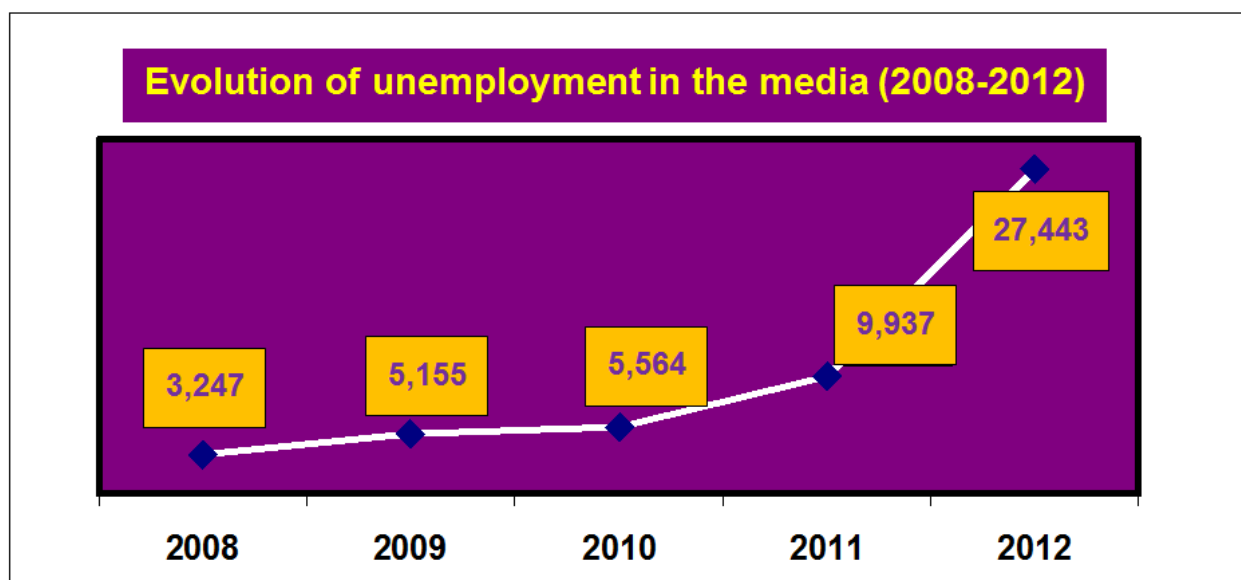
The media companies sought to ensure their business and expand their presence in all the ramifications of the new media landscape (Campos Freire, 2011), and did not consider the costs derived from the transformations needed to meet the demands of a different context that was conditioned by the digitisation of the media. However, in 2008 Spain went into crisis and from that moment on the press industry became one of the most affected media platforms because it suffered the consequences of the loss of advertising and an excessive and poorly planned offer that, in many cases, was also artificially sustained by strategic interests (Campos Freire, 2010).

With the new situation, the structural weaknesses of the media system surfaced and it became clear that there was a saturation of the market and an inadequate supply of information, which was initially designed based on political and economic criteria and ignoring the principles of the public service media.

The crisis coincided with a profound transformation in the communication sector, which was promoted and accelerated by globalisation (Weaver, 1999), and both circumstances substantially modified the landscape, forcing the media companies to face new challenges, which had repercussions on the professional, working and economic conditions of journalists (Túñez, Sixto, 2011).

The changes derived from the media convergence and the digitisation process forced many media companies to restructure their workforce to adapt themselves to the technological and professional requirements, the needs of the market and the economic situation (Scolari, Micó Sanz, Navarro Guere, Pardo Kuklinski, 2008), and this had immediate consequences such as the corruption scandal surrounding the Redundancy Dismissal Procedures (*EREs* as they are known locally), which are used to the employment authority to authorise mass layoffs, the actual mass layoffs and several closures, especially in the audiovisual sector, something unprecedented in the world of communications in Spain.

According to the 2012 Annual Report of the Journalistic Profession, published by the Association Press of Madrid, since 2008 197 media companies have disappeared in Spain and by late 2012 there were nearly 28,000 unemployed journalists, a figure that tripled in a year, as reflected in the following chart. Of the total of unemployed journalists, 64% are women and 36% men.



Source: authors' own creation

The media crisis is not caused by a single factor. There are several elements that intervene in the process and they must be explained from a structural point of view and also from a contextual perspective.

The dimensions of the Spanish media system do not correspond with the information needs of society and the expansionary policies implemented from the 1990s provoked the saturation in the media offer which was soon reflected in the audience data (Campos Freire, 2010).

Before the crisis of 2008, several media companies had already begun to suffer the consequences of the loss of advertising, and were left practically on the verge of bankruptcy, but even though they were not viable, the institutions kept them open with public aids and subsidies, for strategic reasons (Díaz Nosty, 2011). In addition, the computerisation and digitisation of the newsrooms eliminated or simplified several stages of the information process and allowed a significant reduction of the workforce (Scolari, Micó Sanz, Navarro Guere, Pardo Kuklinski, 2008). In fact, as a result of the technological renovation, the catalogue of jobs in the media has been modified and, in some cases, a redefinition of functions has been necessary to adapt the resources and professional profiles to the structural needs derived from the new situation (Túñez, 2012).

The media convergence and digitisation imposed a redesign of the structure of the newsrooms that laid the foundations of the current schemes. Moreover, the crisis has forced the media to rely on fast and cheap news acquisition mechanisms in order to remain competitive, sometimes sacrificing quality. All these factors have decisively increased the job insecurity of journalists (Ufarte Ruiz, 2012).

In 2008 Unesco offered media development indicators that allow us to analyse and evaluate the specific needs of the media and propose and carry out appropriate information policies, based on viable structures and solid editorial lines. These indicators, which are the result of a broad consensus, serve as a benchmark to determine the degree of compliance with the functions of media, to check the quality of the contents and to verify if there is a consistent relationship between the characteristics of media companies, the dimension and profile of the workforce, and the services offered.

Unesco's report highlights the importance of the media as elements that contribute to the governance and democratic development, for which a series of conditions should be met: a regulatory system and institutions that support and ensure the freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity; equality in economic conditions and transparency in the ownership of the media companies; resources that allow the media to be platforms for the democratic discourse; and training of the media professionals and infrastructures that facilitate the development of independent media.

Based on these indicators, it is possible to analyse with greater rigour the media in Spain, to locate their strengths and weaknesses, and to know and assess the working conditions of journalists.

## **2. Object of study and research objectives**

Our study focuses on the year 2012 because this year coincides with the duration of the research project and because, in our view, it is the year that best reflects the current state of the press in Spain and the consequences of the decisions taken by media companies since the beginning of the crisis. During this period several media companies restructured their workforce while others redefined and updated their information offer; numerous Redundancy Dismissal Procedures were presented; mass layoffs were conducted; and many companies that failed to deal with the situation were closed. According to the latest report of the Press Association of Madrid, the year 2012 may be considered the most critical year for the communication sector (since it started to be evaluated) because in

twelve months 50 media companies ceased to operate. The object of study was limited by selecting the most representative companies in three media platforms (press, radio and television), whose relationship is discussed later.

The main objective is to know the current situation of the press in Spain and, in particular, to know how the press has changed in the past five years, a period in which the crisis and media convergence coincided with the digitisation process. This study aims to find out how this landscape has affected the professional, working, and economic conditions of journalists, and to establish how the workforce reduction and the restructuring of the newsrooms carried out by made several media companies has affected the quality of information.

### 3. Hypothesis

The study is based on the hypothesis that the restructuring implemented by the Spanish media over the last five years has excessively reduced the human and material resources of the newsrooms. These restrictive measures have decisively affected the professional, working and economic conditions of journalists and the quality of content, due to the cutbacks made to simplify and cheapen the information production process.

As a derived hypothesis we consider that in the structural and organisational changes carried out in media companies the economic objectives have been prioritised without taking into account the journalistic criteria and the social responsibility of the media to properly inform.

We argue that the implemented cost reduction policies do not always correspond with the delicate economic situation and that in some cases the crisis has been used as an excuse to reduce the workforce and increase corporate profits, which has in turn increased job insecurity and lowered the quality of information.

### 4. Method

To learn about the professional, working and economic conditions of the journalists working in Spain the study uses a mixed method that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques. The situation is examined in depth from various perspectives that addressing the aspects related to the changes made by the Spanish media companies since the beginning of the 2008 crisis, which we consider to be responsible for the state of the press in 2012, the year of reference for this study.

The selected method allows us to analyse with rigour the current situation of journalists and to evaluate the decisions that have been taken by media companies and that have affected the structure of the newsrooms, the size of the workforce, the availability of resources to provide informative coverage, and the professional skills, which in some cases have been redefined to reduce costs and also as a result of the computerisation and digitisation of the newsrooms (Scolari, Micó Sanz, Navarro Guere, Pardo Kuklinski, 2008).

The first part of the study involves a quantitative analysis, based on data from the Annual Report of the Journalistic Profession 2012 (*Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodística*), to establish the media companies that have been closed and the number of journalists who have been affected by the Redundancy Dismissal Procedures, lay-offs and changes to the working conditions. Although the object of study is limited to specific media companies, the Report's data are universal and offer a contextualising reference and serve to compare the survey results and determine whether the trends persist.

Second, the study offers a qualitatively and quantitatively assessment of how the current economic and employment situation, and the professional conditions, affect the independence and daily work of journalists and the quality of information (Ufarte Ruiz, 2012).

The study is particularly interested in establishing whether the changes have decreased the quality of information. To this end we surveyed journalists working for Spanish media companies that have different editorial lines and follow different business and information models: *TVE, Antena 3, Cuatro, Telecinco, La Sexta, Cadena COPE, Cadena SER, Onda Cero, RNE, ABC, El Mundo, El País, La Razón, and La Vanguardia*. This sample of companies represents the public and private media sectors, and the print press, radio and television platforms.

The survey was conducted in January and February, 2012, via e-mail, to four journalists from each of the aforementioned media companies. Of the four participants from each company, two were men, one with contract of indefinite duration and another with a temporary contract; and two were women, one with contract of indefinite duration and another with a temporary contract. In all cases, the selected participants had a minimum of five years seniority in the company in order to be able to assess the changes that have occurred after the 2008 crisis.

We believe that the journalists participating in the study are representative and thus that the results of this study can be extrapolated to the entire population of journalists, and allow us to get a real picture of the current situation of the press in Spain, and also reflect the way in which the professional, working and economic conditions of journalists affect the quality of information (Ufarte Ruiz, 2012).

Surveyed journalists were questioned about the following topics: their employment situation within the company (temporary or indefinite contract); the years working as a journalist; the media companies and platforms in which they have worked throughout their career; the number of years working in the current company; their appointed section or area; the structural changes or workforce reductions made, if any, by the current company; the new tasks assigned, if any, and their justification; the changes, if any, in their work schedules; the percentage of salary reduction or increase, if any; the loss of purchasing power, if any, due to other reasons; the availability of material resources and the time to develop quality information; the changes in the availability of any of these resources (degrees and reasons); the mandatory sharing, if any, with co-workers of resources that were individually used in the past; the increase, if any, in the use of news from agencies in their company.

The survey questionnaire remarked that the study was only interested in the changes that occurred from 2008 to 2012, which is the reference period for the research.

A rigorous analysis of the current situation of journalists in Spain requires knowing the general guidelines of the media development policies that have been applied in recent years, because according to several experts, including Campos Freire (2010), they are the real cause of the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the current problem. The business decisions always have immediate repercussions on the functioning of newsrooms, on the guarantees that must exist at all stages of the information process and on the quality of contents.

The complexity of the media system, characterised by interrelations and the dependence of other sectors, especially the political and economic spheres, conditions the development and independence of the media (Reig, 2011). That is why it is necessary to perform a qualified and external analysis to verify whether the measures to restructure or reduce the newsrooms were necessary, as a result of the crisis, or whether, in some cases, they were opportunistic solutions that took advantage of the economic context and the new employment regulation approved by the Spanish government.

To address this aspect, and to compare the survey data, a series of interviews were conducted in March, 2012, with four professors of journalism: Francisco Campos, from the University of Santiago de Compostela; Rosario de Mateo, from the Autonomous University of Barcelona; Xosé López from the University of Santiago de Compostela; and Ramón Reig from the University of Seville. These professors are accredited experts who know well the functioning and structure of the media, their economic situation, and the possibilities of adapting to the current context, the characteristics of the newsrooms and the professional responsibilities.

We selected experts who had knowledge about journalism, media management and economy, and were able to provide opinions with academic and scientific value, and were not related to the companies and the decisions that have been taken to restructure the newsrooms, which are the object of study. Thus we have complementary data and plural and unbiased opinions that contribute to an analysis and an assessment of the current situation of the press based on an external and independent perspective.

The interviewed experts were questioned about the causes of the crisis faced by the media, and were asked to make a diagnosis to find out which are, according to them, the main problems currently faced by in the press in Spain.

The study aimed to know their opinion of experts about the dimensions of the media map and the news contents offered to citizens, and to know whether they considered the media development policies of the 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, particularly the expansion into the multimedia sector, were successful or not.

In addition, we asked the experts to examine the measures implemented by the sample of media companies to deal with the crisis and to explain which measures are successful or not in their point of view.

Finally, the experts were invited to propose alternatives to optimise resources and to avoid traumatic and drastic solutions for journalists, taking into account the characteristics of the analysed newsrooms, and in accordance with the theoretical objectives of the companies and the information needs of the Spanish society.



## 5. Results

### 5.1. Professional experience and mobility

Of the participating journalists who had an contract of indeterminate duration, 82% have more than 15 years of work experience, while 74% of those with a temporary contract had more than 10 years practicing the profession. These results confirm the professional competence of the surveyed journalists and this allows us to say this study shares the testimonials of qualified persons and provide solid comparative elements to rigorously assess the current situation.

The analysis of the responses shows that there is an important mobility. Of the respondents, 24% have always worked for the same media company, 41% have worked for two media companies, and 35% for three or more. With regards to the professional activity, 47% has developed it in the same platform, 30% in two platforms, and 23% have experience in press, radio and television (Caro González, Jiménez Marin, 2006).

The journalists that participated in this research have gone through very different professional situations because they were required to have a minimum seniority of five years. However, 78% of them say that of all the changes they have gone through in their journalistic career, those imposed by the media companies since 2008, and more specifically in 2012, are the most serious because they decisively affect the quality of information and labour welfare (Sandoval Martín, 2011). In addition, according to 72% of respondents their companies have made cuts in essential aspects that distort work schemes and reduce the controls that guarantee rigour in the news-making process.

The traditional division of newsrooms into areas of specialisation is one of the referents that regulate the operation of the media with professional criteria (Esteve Ramírez, Fernández del Moral, 1999). Thus, news stories are prepared by journalists that are experts in the field, with resources to access specialised and reliable sources and have specific knowledge to identify possible gaps in the story, especially in the news stories that come from agencies (Fernandez Obregón, 1998).

Of the respondents, 95% are assigned to an area and are usually only responsible for the coverage of events related to that area, but 11% acknowledged that since the cuts started as a result of the crisis they have covered subjects that do not fall within their scope of expertise and were traditionally covered by other colleagues. These journalists affirm that they have had to take responsibility for additional tasks that are unrelated to their career due to the restructuring of the newsroom, which according to them began as an occasional practice, but then its frequency increased in parallel with the restructuring until it became a usual and constant practice.

In addition, 30% of the respondents said that since the cost cutting-based information policies were implemented, the distribution of work is not related to the criteria of expertise and that errors in news stories have increased due to the lack of fact checking and documentation in the initial version.

## 5.2. The working conditions of journalists

The structural changes have jointly affected the operational capability of the media and the dynamics of the work of journalists (Ufarte Ruiz, 2012). When asked how their working conditions had changed since the start of the crisis, 46% of journalists stated that the conditions have been modified negatively, 28% stated that they have been modified very negatively, due to the business decisions that subordinate the information policies to the economic objectives, 17% stated that the conditions have been maintained, and 9% mentioned that their conditions have improved.

Of the participants, 10% have been affected by the cuts implemented in other departments of the company and acknowledge that they are now, quite often, assigned tasks that were formerly managed by the production and administration staff and are not part of the news-making process, and that nevertheless they carry out these tasks because they are aware of the delicate situation they are facing (Ufarte Ruiz, 2011).

Of the journalists, 43% stated that in the last five years they have lost all or part of the rights they had won in the past decades, and 37% considered that this situation was provoked in a decisive way by the new labour legislation. In this sense, 33% of the journalists with contract of indeterminate duration feared for their job, and this percentage increases to 54% among journalists over 50 years of age and to 68% among journalists with temporary contract. Among the journalists with temporary contract, 25% feared to be replaced by interns who, according to them, already perform the same exact tasks staff workers perform: they cover sensitive information, are responsible for tasks that do not correspond to their status, and meet schedules that go beyond their obligations, while earning a quarter of the salary of a journalist. In addition, 31% of the respondents worried that the company may outsource more services or hire freelance reporters to reduce expenses and may let part of the staff go.

This solution increases job insecurity because it generates subcontractors in appalling conditions (Iglesias, 2012) and makes the media company to lose control over the news-making process, and also because the coherence of the information content with the editorial line of the company is not guaranteed since the approach of a news story developed by an external journalist does not always follow the criteria applied by the editorial board to other issues.

In addition, as mentioned, 11% of the respondents admitted that they have lost part of the professional responsibilities initially assigned to them within the company, in accordance with their speciality and the traditional structure of the media company, as a consequence of the new organisational models which substantially modify the distribution of the daily work of journalists and influences the levels of job satisfaction (Rodríguez Andrés, 2003).

The changes described by the affected respondents are diverse, but there are two aspects in which a significant number coincides: the responsibilities of 27% were reduced to justify a wage reduction, and the responsibilities of 32% were increased but this was not accompanied by an adequate economic compensation, i.e. they became responsible for tasks that hitherto had been performed by other colleagues who are no longer part of the company, have been moved to another schedule, or have been transferred to other positions or departments.

With regards to the economic situation, 62% recognised that their economic situation worsened since the start of the crisis, and particularly in 2012, due to the loss of purchasing power, or as a result of the cuts. In 44% of cases the adjustments have been decided together with workers in order to reduce costs and avoid layoffs, while in the rest of cases (56%) the adjustments have been imposed unilaterally by the company. Of the 62% of journalists who saw their economic situation worsened, 59% was directly affected by the cost reduction measures in the form of salary reduction or the elimination of bonuses or income supplements, and 41% was indirectly affected, mainly by the changes to the working schedule, which forces them to modify their daily routines and reorganise their personal life with the consequent costs.

For 93% of the journalists the three factors (the professional, working and economic conditions) are very interrelated and any alteration in any of them affects the others and the quality of the information.

### **5.3. The economic objectives of media companies**

All the companies under analysis have modified their organisation chart in the last five years to simplify the operation schemes and reduce costs, but they have not always optimised the existing resources and this has affected the autonomy of some areas.

Of the journalists working for public media companies, 54% state that the restructuring of the newsrooms, the adjustments and layoffs have not been made taking into account journalistic criteria, but instead have been guided by economic objectives to the detriment of the quality of information. This perception is shared by 65% of the journalists from private media companies. Both types of journalists recognise that when it comes to lay off personnel their companies focus on cutting costs and let go key elements. This is one of the reasons why some journalists have assumed new responsibilities and performed tasks that do not correspond to their specialty.

Since the beginning of the 2008 crisis, 87% of the media companies selected for this research study have reduced their workforce due to the Redundancy Dismissal Procedures, the termination of contracts and pension benefits. In some cases the number of journalists has been reduced by 15%. In addition, the companies have cut or limited the use of material resources that are needed guarantee the quality of information during the different phases of the news-making process. According to respondents, these shortcomings are especially noticeable in the coverage of extraordinary events, which require large deployments and complex provisions.

For 52% of the respondents the reduction of the workforce encourages the excessive use by their media companies of agency news and political and institutional news because they are affordable and the consultation of official sources, in most cases, can be done from the newsroom. According to 75% of respondents, the media company in which they work, in the past five years, has increased the volume of agency news, to the detriment of the news produced by their own journalists, and have reduced the production of investigative journalism because it requires a continuous and prolonged follow-up.

The professional efforts, regardless of the significance of an event, do not always translate into good audience results and the media seeks immediate profitability. In addition, the layoffs and schedule adjustments do not allow journalists to investigate issues that require exclusive dedication. According to the journalists consulted for the study, agency news used to be expanded and contrasted in the newsroom but now, due to lack of resources, are quite frequently published or broadcast without checking their veracity and are only adapted in their format according to the space available in the audiovisual or print media. In the newsrooms this solution is known as “cut and paste”.

The data indicate that the international news are the type of content affected the most by this practice, especially the events that occur in places where the company does not have correspondents. This reduces diversity and increases thematic homogenisation because it vanishes the offer of news stories that do not come from the regular circuits of information supply. As a consequence the newspapers do not publish events that are not covered by the news agencies, which are those that represent the minorities and allow us to know the reality that does not appear in the official discourses.

Due to the reduction of the workforce and the maintenance of the same work level in the newsroom, journalists have to carry out more work, which is something that has been confirmed by 73% of the respondents when asked to compare the current situation with the situation before the crisis (Cantalapiedra, Coca, Bezunarte, 2000). This new distribution of tasks, based on cost cutting criteria, decisively influences availability. This is precisely one of the observations made by 64% of respondents, of which 41% consider that the margin they have to do their job properly is very small.

Journalists highlight that increasingly less time is dedicated to contrast the sources and that they are pressured to produce a lot of information quickly and with the least possible cost (Ufarte Ruiz, 2011). This factor, according to 47% of the journalists, is one of the most influential in the deterioration of the quality of information.

The crisis of the media affects the entire information process (Ufarte Ruiz, 2012). The economic situation of many companies has led them to opt for cheap and quick solutions to obtain the maximum possible profitability.

Of the participating journalists, 72% point out that since the cuts began the informational rigour has been relaxed and that now the journalistic criteria and the informative interest are no longer the only factors that determine the selection of news. They say that the cost of production is a very influential criterion and that some subjects which would had been discarded before are now automatically included. In fact, these journalists recognise that sometimes news are published not because they are relevant but just to make the most out of the material purchased from the agencies, which tend to be informational packages that include several events which, in most cases, do not respond to a logical criterion or do not fit the editorial line of the company. This practice increases homogenisation because agencies sell the same material to several media companies which simultaneously reproduce these identical contents in a systematic way, which generates a considerable decrease of customised news.

Proximity news are also affected by these changes. The survey suggests that many media companies have reduced the supply of local information that they included in the flux of general news

(Cantalapiedra, 1997). The greatest cuts in this type of news have occurred in the audiovisual media, which have eliminated many of their local news sections during the restructuring of the newsroom. In addition, 53% of the journalists mentioned that there is a tendency to the spectacularisation of contents in order to increase the audience during the current advertising crisis in which the media fight for leadership, which is difficult to maintain in such a saturated market.

The information policy of most media companies, which is conditioned by the economic adjustments, promotes instability and prevents the journalists from developing and maintaining a work schedule with reliable contacts to be able to obtain and contrast data and carry out a strict monitoring of any subject related to their specialty (Gómez Mompart, Gutiérrez Lozano, Palau Sampio, 2013). For 70% of the journalists the new cost reduction policies seriously jeopardise the classical structure of the newsrooms, especially the responsibilities of the areas of specialisation (Esteve Ramírez and Fernández del Moral, 1999). These respondents argue that media companies prefer multipurpose and versatile professionals because they are more profitable (Masip and Micó, 2009), although they do not have the knowledge necessary to ensure the proper coverage of some issues.

Job insecurity affects professional performance of journalists and the quality of information (López Hidalgo, 2005). For 60% of the respondents, many of the measures adopted by the media companies affect elements that are essential to practice the journalistic profession freely and in optimal conditions. For these journalists, the restrictions imposed to cut costs substantially condition the way of working. Sometimes, they do not have all that is needed to provide an adequate coverage according to the characteristics of the news, and thus cannot research, contact and contrast sources that ensure the production of rigorous, accurate and quality information, especially about those issues that require an important coverage (Gómez Mompart, Gutiérrez Lozano, Palau Sampio, 2013).

As mentioned, 30% of the respondents acknowledged that errors in news and the subsequent corrections have increased considerably, as a result of the cost cutting policies that eliminate the people responsible for guaranteeing the quality of the information.

For 26% of the journalists, the restrictions on the use of phones and the sharing of computers with colleagues are a major problem. These measures delay the completion of tasks in the newsroom affect the daily timetable of journalist. In addition, 40% of the respondents state that travelling with company vehicles has been reduced to scene of the news events and that there has been an increase in distance coverage, which consists in making a phone call from the newsroom and then, in the case of television, completing the story with agency or archive images or simply developing a story without images.

The main consequences of such practices are an increase in the homogenisation of information, due to the decrease in customised news stories.

When asked about the immediate positive factors derived from the restructuring of the newsroom, 73% of the respondents did not mention a single factor. On the other hand, 12% said that the staff members that did not meet the current needs or had become obsolete after the digitisation of the media were let go by their companies. For 9% of the journalists, the new landscape accelerated the modernisation of the information process, but with traumatic costs to workers. Meanwhile, 6%

considered that the media company for which they worked was poorly managed and that this situation will lead to the hiring of staff based on the real needs of the company and not based on other reasons.

Finally, 54% of the respondents believed that the situation in Spain has changed a lot in recent years and that the current model is obsolete because it is not able to optimise the available resources, or to guarantee an offer appropriate to the needs of society. However, these journalists that recognised the urgency of an integral redesign of the media system also warn that this will not work if it is guided by commercial interests or political objectives instead of professional criteria.

## **6. Comparative interviews**

### **6.1. The opinion of the experts**

As mentioned in the method section, in order to learn more about the origin and extent of the problems the Spanish press is facing at the moment we investigated the opinion of experts on the structure, characteristics and operation of the Spanish media system. The comparative interviews with experts Francisco Campos, Rosario de Mateo, Xosé López and Ramón Reig confirmed most of the information provided by the surveyed journalists from the sample of media companies and complement their opinions and offer an external, independent and plural analysis that helps us to better understand the present situation of the press in Spain and the causes of the media crisis.

Firstly, we will discuss the general considerations in which there is unanimity and, finally, the individual clarifications. For practical reasons we only include extracts of the most illustrative interviews.

The four experts recognised that the media is facing a critical time, due to several factors, and that the 2008 crisis gradually uncovered the weaknesses of the Spanish media system and revealed that it was excessively large, that it had an obsolete structure, that it did not have solid ground, and that many companies were artificially sustained thanks to specific patches. They claim that some problems have emerged now, or have grown more acute, but that most of them were already latent and several media companies kept their real situation concealed, even at a loss, for strategic or political reasons, thanks to the public subsidies, aids or loans that were easily obtained during the economic boom.

For these professors of journalism the roots of the problem must be sought in a wrong and opportunistic media policy, based on unsustainable criteria applied in an arbitrary manner.

Dr. Francisco Campos, expert in media management, offers a resounding diagnosis and exposes the errors that, according to him, “were committed in the development of the media system and which are responsible for most of the problems that currently exist in the press industry”.

Dr. Campos argues that the “communication policies implemented by the governments of the past 25 years (laws, concessions for radio and television frequencies, tax rates, concentration processes, financing systems, etc.) have been erroneous and partisan because they were planned and managed

by the government in chair based on the interests of the hegemonic political parties and media groups of that time. In addition, they were combined with the industrial strategies of the business groups, with a lack of coherent editorial lines, with few standards of quality, creativity, innovation, social responsibility, reputation, credibility and differential added value, and paid no attention to the new business models demanded by the society of information and knowledge”. And the “political and media systems fed off each other and did not see the external changes that would occur structurally and according to the demands of the moment after the burst of the financial bubble that unleashed the crisis of 2008”.

For Dr. Campos, the current problems of the press (the Redundancy Dismissal Procedures, the layoffs and closures of media companies) are not exclusively caused by the crisis. According to him, “the economic situation has exposed the weaknesses of an extremely large media system and the explanation should be based on structural and contextual causes, both of which are determining factors, because the crisis is also systemic. The media system had become excessively large, boosted by artificial growth, fuelled by a financial and economic bubble, and was not supported by a strong and sustainable business model. Suddenly, the crisis burst the bubble, blocks the financial system and imposes recession over the traditional business models and content and advertising sales. At the same time, new and innovative internet-based information and communication management models emerge and changed the rules of the competition and highlight the weaknesses of the traditional media business models”.

Dr. Mateo Rosario, expert in the economy of communication, agrees with many of the observations made by Professor Campos. For her, “the deficiencies of the media system, as well as the Redundancy Dismissal Procedures, the layoffs and the closure of media companies have been caused by the economic crisis, the decrease in advertising investment, the fall in the consumption of some media (mainly print media), the collapse in the stock exchange of some communication groups, and the rise in unemployment. However, the crisis of the media cannot only be blamed on the economic crisis, as it is also a crisis of overproduction, redistribution of advertising investment, redistribution of audiences, and the inactivity of many companies. Faced with this situation, before the economic crisis, the media did nothing to modernise its structure and its business model even though its profits and remuneration was high, especially for some media groups”.

Dr. Xosé López, expert in digital media, argues that the Spanish media system “has been configured in a landscape of liberalisation and deregulation, and exhibits many deficiencies, both in terms of coverage and offer. The economic crisis has exposed the weaknesses of an excessively large and unsustainable system that managed to survive thanks to atypical income, especially agreements with the government and big economic groups or lobbyists”.

Dr. Ramón Reig, expert in information structure, argues that “the current situation of the press derives from the lack of pluralism and the lack of effective and concrete legislation that prevents excessive concentration. The media system in Spain is governed by a bipolar disorder derived from the political bipartisanship, something that has become evident even in the DTT. Most of the new DTT channels have gone to the same hands that owned the analogue channels. And the major mass media system revolves around the duopoly formed by Atresmedia and Mediaset Spain. The DTT

legislation aimed to increase real pluralism and this has not happened. Citizens must find that real pluralism on the Internet”.

Dr. Reig also believes that “the Redundancy Dismissal Procedures are a consequence of a market system in crisis, which has caused a drop of approximately 45% in the advertising revenue of the Spanish media system in the past five years. This has revealed a media system that is not only excessively large, but also faces a credibility crisis since long before the 2008 crisis broke out. The market crisis has joined a highly politicised media system, in which the advertising revenue of some newspapers depends on 30% of the public institutions. The media has moved away from citizens due to the diversification of capital and all of this is what has led to the current situation”.

## 6.2. Proposed solutions

When asked to proposed solutions, the interviewed experts agree on the need to renew the structure, operation and objectives of the media.

Dr. Campos considers that “the solution is a change in the business model. Restructuring is inevitable. But it must be done keeping in mind the current challenges that the information and knowledge society is facing. The European Union approved in 2010 the strategy of the Digital Agenda 2020. As a statement of intentions this agenda is valid as a guide for the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the era of the transition from analogue to the digital system and to the knowledge society, but the experience of the governance policies of the European Union makes us fear that this strategy will be as futile as the Lisbon Strategy. This is the weakness and the challenge that the construction of Europe in relation to its citizens. The solutions for the sustainability of the media system need to include the adaptation to the new challenges and business models of the digital society, without completely abandoning the old models. This is a decade of transition in which companies must make an effort to gradually adopt a model that includes 30% of the strategies of the new models and 70% of the strategies of traditional models. Sustainable models will necessarily have to recover the mixed payment system for content, advertising and the protection of intellectual property rights. Copyright and intellectual property must be incorporated into the digital DNA of the media. And the unquestionable values that also have to be present in the media’s strategy of change are creativity, innovation, quality, social responsibility, reputation, credibility and social trust”.

Dr. Xosé López stresses that “a media system is sustainable if its design and structure fit the major measurement parameters of a country’s economic indicators. Our model should rest on an efficient system of public audiovisual media, with a little structure and a clear public service orientation, and private media that are governed by the market laws and are regulated by an independent body”.

For Dr. Reig, the solution is “to promote the public media, to avoid heavy dependence on private capital and political parties, to make the media fulfil the role of vigilant of power, which is the role they have to play in society, to establish adequate management controls, and to make the public and private media companies to focus in fewer but more powerful brands”.



## 7. Conclusions

The results of surveys applied to journalists from selected media companies and the comparative interviews with experts confirmed our hypotheses.

The professional, working and economic conditions of most Spanish journalists have worsened substantially since the beginning of the crisis in 2008 and the problems have increased in 2012. Changes and cuts imposed by media companies during this period are the most drastic of the past twenty years and affect all the elements involved in the news-making process, as recognised by 78% of the respondents.

All the analysed media companies have modified the structure of their newsrooms over the past five years and 87% have reduced the workforce and have cut down or limited the use of material resources that were traditionally used for information coverage. The new schemes and models implemented by the media, which are designed to enforce policies based on cost cutting, substantially modify the distribution of daily work and responsibilities of journalists. Now companies prefer versatile journalists, which is a decision that endangers the traditional competence and autonomy of the thematic areas, the professional competence and the quality of information.

The structural and organisational changes that have occurred in the media in the past five years have increased job insecurity and have affected the independence, freedom of information, labour rights and the diversity and quality of content. This is acknowledged by 43% of the respondents, who state that these setbacks favour censorship, manipulation and control of the news by people and sectors that are not related to the newsroom. In addition, with the increase of temporary contracts, the possibility of Redundancy Dismissal Procedures, and the outsourcing of many services, journalists are more vulnerable because there is a relation of dependence and permanent instability that conditions their work. For this reason journalists have lost power and autonomy against companies and authority against the sources of information, especially those who have political or economic relations with the media.

In the restructuring of the newsrooms economic objectives have been prioritised over journalistic criteria and informative interests, which are no longer the only factors that determine the selection of news. The cost of production is now very influential, as confirmed by 72% of respondents. The media's information policy is conditioned by cost cutting measures and profitability. Investigative journalism is the biggest loser as a result of the commitment to institutional and agencies news, sensationalist and ephemeral news that guarantee audience and save costs.

In very few cases alternative solutions have been sought to minimise the impact of the cuts on the quality of content, to avoid layoffs and Redundancy Dismissal Procedures, and to reduce job insecurity. In addition, the public media work with strategic and organisational models that are similar to those of the private companies, which are based on competition and ratings. In both cases information becomes a commodity, something incompatible with objectivity and professional independence.

The media that have managed to survive the crisis have lost much of their operational capacity and are now in a situation of economic and political dependence that reduces their autonomy and even

hinders the continuity of many newspapers without modifying their structure. For companies in need of public funding, subsidies become a tool used by institutions to control the information because these subsidies almost always include conditions that affect the work of journalists.

The interviews with experts allowed us to identify the basic elements responsible for the current situation of the press: a media development model based on expansionary policies; a modernisation model focused on technological investments and the consequent economic dependence derived from the requested loans; and a commitment to solutions formulated from an economic perspective, without considering less dramatic alternatives.

Part of the problems currently faced by the Spanish media are related to the evolution of the forms of production and consumption of information, specifically the migration of a large part of the audience to the Internet, which has exacerbated the crisis of media companies that are only present in the traditional platforms. This situation also creates a gap between the media groups that have resources and those that do not have them, and results in the control and monopoly of information that affects the pluralism and diversity of the information offer.

The current situation is not caused by a single factor and originated long before the 2008 crisis. The expansionary policies of the 1990s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century led the development of an excessively large media system based on economic criteria, strategic approaches and political objectives, which did not correspond to the information needs of society. Most of the media companies never became profitable, but during the economic boom they were artificially maintained thanks to public subsidies and the ease to get credit. Then the arrival of the crisis and the consequent fall in advertising revenue revealed the structural weaknesses of the system. Finally, in this restructuring process journalists and the quality of information have turned out to be the most affected.

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