



Research Article

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The Future of the Journalism Profession from the Perspective of Professionals Following the COVID-19 Pandemic

Mohamed Chettah¹

Faycal Farhi²

¹College of Communication and Media,
Al Ain University, P.O.
Box: 112612, Abu Dhabi,
United Arab Emirates

²College of Communication and Media,
Al Ain University, 64141, Al Ain,
United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic widely affected almost every field of life, and journalism is no exception. Following these major transformations, journalism is today going through different phases which further indicate the future of journalism worldwide. This study examined the future of the journalism profession in the post-pandemic era from the perspective of professionals in media organizations. The results revealed that most of these indicated that their organizations dealt with the coronavirus pandemic professionally by changing the work pattern in the institution. For example, changes in work location during the crisis were emphasized. Many journalists also had to adopt job turnover due to the increase of work-life challenges. In addition, recruitment patterns were altered and working patterns were transformed into digital approaches such as news gathering, publishing online and via social media. Additionally, the professional pressures on journalists were also emphasized in the responses. Regarding the future of journalism in the post-pandemic era, respondents revealed that journalism practices changed greatly after the pandemic. Specifically, changes in working hours, resources and approaches are now affecting the competencies of journalists in their organizations. Finally, the respondents indicated that the demand for "comprehensive journalism" is now in demand by media organizations. Consequently, there are increasing demands for individuals to have professional degrees in media and journalism.

Keywords: Journalism profession, Covid-19, Descriptive research, Journalism and media, Journalistic practices

1. Introduction

The development of media professions has been linked for nearly a century to developments in the media field. For a long time, the profession of journalist was associated with workers in newspapers and magazines, later including radio workers, editors and news anchors. The same was true with the discovery and spread of television, and thus the title was given to news gatherers and reporters in this

medium, and also to employees of television stations, including editors, technicians, and presenters. Technology remained the main factor in the emergence of new professions and the disappearance of others, with forward-looking studies being unable to predict the possibility of new factors emerging outside technology that would have a significant impact on the profession and its practice. The exceptions to this were those of war and conflict, which gave rise to the profession of war correspondent, and of covering up information related to crime and smuggling cases, which led to the emergence of the profession of "investigative journalist".

The outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the need for new professions in the media and for new forms of practicing the profession, and thus the places and methods of the profession have changed as well as the media messages and content.

The current study constitutes a scientific attempt to monitor the transformations that affected the media profession during the pandemic, through investigating the opinions of a sample of professionals working in the media in its various traditional and new forms regarding how their institutions dealt with the pandemic and the accompanying changes that affected the practice of the profession. In addition, the study surveyed their views concerning the future of the media profession following the end of the pandemic.

2. Study Concepts

2.1 The profession of Journalism

Various definitions have been given to the profession of journalism. The American Press Institute defines it as "the profession of collecting, evaluating and presenting news and information and production of media content". It also defines it as "the professional activity that aims to convey daily or periodic information to the public by conveying news and its comments in the written press or in the various other means of communication".

A person who works in this profession is called a journalist, "a person whose job is to collect and write news stories for newspapers, magazines, radio, television, or news sites on the Internet".

The names of practitioners have varied according to their communicative functions. One study listed these terms as: Web Communicator, Online Journalist, Integrated Reporter, Online Gatekeeper, Internet Journalist, Web Journalist, Online Editor, Online Journalist, or Producer (Al Leeban, 2014).

Today, the profession is also included in a broader field of communication professions, as many studies and references indicate the growing multiplicity and diversity of these professions, including that by Adaray, Celine & Helene (2018), who classified the profession into four groups, from which more than 30 professions branch out. These groups are as follows:

Business communication professions.

- Communication consulting professions.
- Professions creating communication contents.
- Professions in the communication materials industry and in production.

Finally, the profession of journalism can be approached from different perspectives and is a set of diverse practices which vary according to the diversity of technologies and the diversity of functions and needs (Zelizer, 2005).

2.2 Coronavirus Pandemic

This virus is known as Covid19, we believe that the World Health Organization's definition is one of the best: "A disease caused by a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2". The who first learned of it on December 31st, 2019, after a report of a cluster of cases of "viral pneumonia" in Wuhan, in the People's Republic of China (<https://www.who.int/home>(2021).

3. Literature Review

The researcher reviewed previous studies in this field to identify the results and adopted them as a guide in the current study. Among the studies that have dealt with this topic, we cite the following. Marina Tuneva's study, the critical role of media and press councils during Covid-19. Tuneva, (2020), was published in the form of a report indicating that the coronavirus crisis has changed the way in which the media work since the beginning of 2020, including the journalists' role, working conditions, and safety and has left profound effects on the economic conditions of media institutions and professionals, negatively affecting the process of accessing information. The study adds that the spread of the epidemic was accompanied by new restrictions on the freedom of the press, as media professionals faced many difficulties, including threats, verbal and physical attacks, censorship, and difficulty in accessing websites and information.

The study aimed to compare several issues faced by the press councils that are part of The Alliance of *Independent Press Councils of Europe* (AIPCE). It also highlighted their crucial role in helping journalists to overcome the crisis, through reviewing the documents, guidelines, and recommendations of the relevant international associations. Interviews were conducted with representatives of 13 press councils in Europe and elsewhere.

The study reached several conclusions, including:

- Press councils have played a major role during the Covid-19 crisis by promoting ethical standards and helping to restore public confidence in the media.
- The lack of financial resources for the press councils to perform their tasks properly, mainly those in south-eastern Europe, led to reliance on donors, especially after financial support decreased during the pandemic due to the decline in advertising revenues.

The importance of this study lies in its analysis of the role of press councils in protecting media professions and in providing various forms of support and assistance through helping them to perform their media duties in an appropriate manner. This role increased during the crisis as the media professions suffer from limits their freedoms, in addition to the withholding of material and financial aid. Consequently, these bodies intervened and mobilized support for practitioners to help to preserve the profession.

The study by Florence Le Cam, Manon Libert & David Domingo, *Journalism in quarantine – a survey of employment and working conditions of French-speaking Belgian journalists* (Le Cam, Libert & Domingo, 2020).

The above study was based on a survey of 492 journalists, addressed working conditions before and after the quarantine, and reached important results, including:

- Covid-19 forced 8% of journalists to move to other professions.
- Covid-19 forced 11.7% of women to change their profession, compared with only 3.5% of men.
- The pandemic caused 15.8% of young people to change profession.

These changes were accompanied by a decrease in salaries and a lack of work equipment, in addition to the fear of losing one's job at any moment. The study identified the reasons as follows:

1. Failure to collaborate with freelance journalists.
2. Failure to cover a number of activities such as sports, museums, cinema, theatre, and arts in general.
3. The media institutions required their journalists to contribute financially to help them to survive the crisis, for example by donating part of their salary or by waiving some working days for the benefit of the institution that they worked for.

The study approached the effect of the quarantine on work volume and work positions. It also provided a description of the effects of the quarantine, including instability, loneliness, and working from home. It assessed the feelings of journalists as they performed their job during the quarantine and 304 respondents stated that their role was important, essential, and indispensable during the crisis.

The study reached three conclusions:

1. The quarantine had an impact on jobs, employment, and work contracts.
2. The quarantine also impacted working conditions, resulting in difficulties of movement and difficulties in obtaining tools that could help in such conditions, such as clothing and materials that would protect against the epidemic.
3. Despite the crisis, there was an increase in awareness among journalists of the importance of journalism in society, and a growing degree of pride in belonging to this profession.

These studies are among the closest to our own, focusing on working conditions before and after the quarantine, and presenting results and conclusions which support the interpretation and analysis of the current study's results.

The study by Caroline Lacroix, *A crisis within a crisis: How do journalists see their roles and their future in times of the epidemic?* (Lacroix, 2020), exposed the perceptions of Quebec journalists in Canada on the role they played during the Covid-19 pandemic, during which newspapers witnessed a serious financial crisis due to the global economic downturn which led to the layoff of many journalists.

The study also monitored the passion of journalists, and their loyalty to their profession, and recorded a few impressions, including the statement of one journalist: "I do not want to be anything other than a journalist...This crisis makes me reconnect with part of my love for this profession." The study concluded that journalists feel they have played an essential role during the health crisis and that the press should have the means to allow it to continue as an essential service to society.

The study also conveyed UNESCO's fear that the economic impact of Covid-19 would pose a real threat to the existence of the press and noted that this moment of crisis provided an opportunity to recognize the press as an essential part of our lives and resources, and to enhance its role in society today and in the future.

As for the TV5 Monde study (2020) on *the News in the time of the Coronavirus*, this was conducted through interviews that included professionals in the field of television media at the French TV5 Monde group, represented by the following members of staff:

- Assistant Responsible for Social Media Accounts
- Chief Editor.
- graphic designer
- web journalist
- journalist and reporter
- collaborating journalist
- journalist and news presenter

The study attempted to answer two key questions: How did media professionals work during the crisis, and how did they continue to provide news and information during the quarantine? What interests us in the study is the possibility of using it to measure the way in which media professionals deal with crises, as with the Covid-19 crisis.

Among the studies that we have reviewed is that by Dariusz, (2020), which addressed the changes that occurred in the journalism profession during the Covid-19 pandemic through a quantitative study that included a sample of 316 media journalists in Poland. The research reached a set of results and conclusions, among which were:

- The pandemic caused major changes in the journalism industry, the most important of which was the relationship that journalists had built with their target audiences and how to maintain them.
- Recipients should be involved in the new press formats.
- Journalists are resorting to online tools more intensely than before in their quest for information.

The study included several conclusions and analyses, through quantitative research, which can be employed in assessing the situation related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Perreault & Perreault study proceeded from the idea that, during the pandemic, journalists

faced great difficulties in gathering and distributing accurate information. Journalists are part of an environment that can be affected by them, but which affects them at the same time. Using the framework of disaster communication ecology, the study explores the discursive construction of journalism during the Covid-19 crisis. To understand this process in the field of journalism, the researchers unpacked discourses relating to the coronavirus pandemic, collected from interviews with journalists during the pandemic and from the US journalism trade press through the Journalism Discourses Database. Through analysis discourse, the researchers discovered that, during Covid-19, journalists discursively placed themselves in a responsible but vulnerable position within the communications ecology, as a result not only of the pandemic but also of the environmental conditions that long preceded it. Journalists found it difficult to conduct their reports during the pandemic and have sought to limit the influence of forces that challenge their work, including the powerful flow of misinformation (Perreault & Perreault, 2021).

The study by Fandouchi (2021), showed that the spread of the coronavirus revealed the growing role of various media in covering and following up on news related to the pandemic's developments. The study focused on the Algerian case, where it was noticeable that the media treatment was characterized by chaos at times and by professionalism at other times, with media professionals finding themselves torn between two tasks, the first being to cover the events of the pandemic and to adhere to professional ethics, and the second being to achieve the journalistic scoop considering the fierce competition between various means. The study sought, through analysis, to divulge the rights of journalists to practise the profession under the laws and legislation that govern media. It reached several conclusions, the most important of which were:

- The Algerian media made a number of professional mistakes while covering the news of the pandemic due to a lack of experience in dealing with such crises.
- During the crisis, journalists waived some of their professional rights to gain access to information sources and serve the public interest.

Finally, the study by Geni, Briandana, & Umarella (2021), examined the strategy adopted by television channels in Indonesia for the management of Covid-19. The study was based on the fact that the outbreak of the pandemic, in March 2020, affected the operations of broadcasting offices, forcing workers to work from homes, and thus disturbing the television content industry. The study relied on a case study of Kompas TV in Indonesia. The results revealed that Kompas TV, thanks to its digital platform in the form of websites, YouTube channels, and communication sites, was able to raise its rate of viewers and users, and the study concluded that this was a model that could be imitated or applied by other television stations in Indonesia.

4. Methodological Framework of the Study

4.1 Objectives of the Study

The current study is based on a scientific attempt to investigate and highlight the transformations that affected the journalism and media profession during the coronavirus pandemic. The researchers analyzed the opinions of professionals working in the media in different organizations. The focus was on examining how media institutions dealt with the pandemic and how they resorted to the changes that have affected journalism. Furthermore, the effects of the pandemic on journalism and media practices in the current era was also investigated, indicating what is expected from the future as technology evolves and professional practices are drastically changed.

4.2 The Study's Questions

The study aimed to survey a sample of media professionals about practising journalism during and after the pandemic, through a form that included so many questions, distributed over three axes, as follows:

1. Personal details (socio-demographic).
2. The second axis (practising the profession during Covid-19).
3. The third axis (practising the profession after Covid-19).

4.3 Sample of the Study

The current study research population is represented in the total number of media workers of all kinds, in television, radio, newspapers, websites and the various professions included in the media field, including journalists, technicians, department heads, reporters and freelancers. The sample included workers in media institutions without being restricted to a specific geographical field. The study was conducted from 10th August to 10th November 2022. The sample of media professionals was chosen in an intentional way, and the questionnaire was sent to 80 professionals, with 53 items recovered. The survey form included socio-demographic data, including gender, age group, educational level, specialization, professional experience, position in the work institution, ownership of the institution and nature of the work contract.

4.4 Study Methodology

This study belongs to the field of descriptive and exploratory studies and seeks to identify the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the media profession over its three stages: describing the characteristics of a group of individuals with a view to obtaining sufficient and accurate information; interpreting this scientifically; and drawing the results in the form of indications that help to obtain generalizations on the issue being addressed. The study relied on the descriptive survey method, considered a standard model for data collection and analysis, and drew conclusions on the studied issue. It relied on the questionnaire tool for collecting information from the studied sample. The form was sent by Google Drive application via Messenger to the selected sample. The answers were collected followed by the analysis and interpretation.

5. Discussion of Results

In this part of the study, we will address the results reached through a survey of a sample of professionals of media, by means of interpretation, analysis, discussion, and conclusions.

5.1 Respondents' answers regarding the way in which their institution dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic

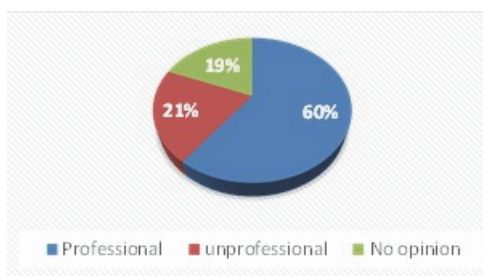


Figure 1: Sample answers about their organization's dealings with Covid19 pandemic

- Figure1 represents the answers of the sample under study concerning the way in which their institution dealt with the coronavirus pandemic, with 60.40% viewing their institutions'

treatment as professional, compared with 20.80% who took the opposite view. A total of 18.90% of respondents said that they had no opinion on the subject. These results contradict some studies that have confirmed the state of "confusion" that characterized the handling of the pandemic, especially when the World Health Organization announced the outbreak's transformation into a pandemic (Fandouchi, 2021 & Novelli, 2021).

5.2 Respondents' answers regarding their institution's work pattern during the Covid-19 period.

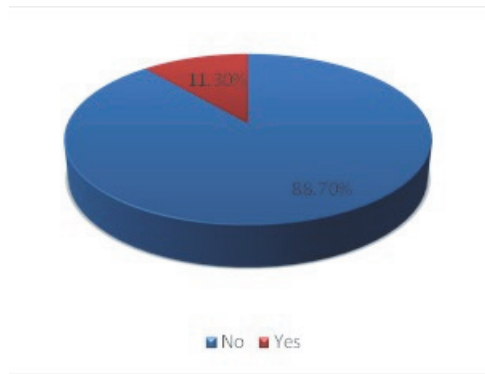


Figure 2: Sample answers about the institution's work pattern during Covid 19 pandemic

- Figure 2 represents the answers of the respondents to the question: Has the pattern of work in your institution changed during the coronavirus pandemic? A total of 88.70 % said that the work pattern had changed, compared with 11.30% who did not confirm this. Research, scientific reports, and media institutions' websites have confirmed all these changes (Le Cam et al, 2020).

5.3 Sample answers on whether the workplace in the institution changed during the Covid-19 period.

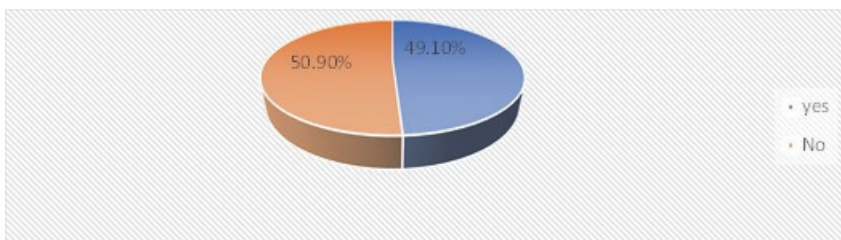


Figure 3: Sample answers about changing the workplace during the Covid 19 pandemic

- The results included in Figure 3 indicate a great convergence in the answers about the changes in the workplace, with the percentage of "yes" answers reaching 50.90%, compared with 49.10% who said that no changes had occurred. The answers reveal the state of hesitation that characterized media institutions and show that changing the workplace is also linked to the type of media institution, the number of its employees, the available spaces, and its capabilities in terms of health facilities designated for such crises. Also, we must not forget that some media institutions, including websites, do not require offices or daily attendance, which is the case with freelancers and reporters. Accordingly, many

channels, radio stations, and newspapers transferred journalistic work from newsrooms to homes and private offices. This has been confirmed by several studies, including that by Lenggo et al (2021).

5.4 Respondents' answers regarding the reduction in the number of journalists working in their institution.

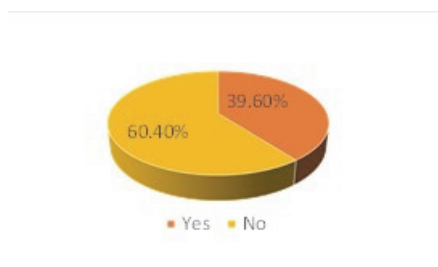


Figure 4: Sample answers about the institution's reduction for working journalists during the Covid-19 pandemic

Figure 4 represents the sample answers regarding the reduction in the number of journalists working in media institutions. The answers are, to some extent, linked to those in the previous Figure 3. So many of institutions have resorted to reducing the number of workers by referring them to temporary vacations or by terminating their contracts due to the health crisis and financial constraints. A total of 60.40% answered "yes", i.e., they said that the institution did resort to reducing the number of workers. On the other hand, 39.60% said that their institution did not resort to this procedure. Some studies have referred to suspension and lay-off procedures (Le cam, 2020, Caroline & Carignan, 2020). The study reported that, in the United States of America, about 21 local newspapers were merged, 1400 newsroom employees were permanently laid off, 56 sales points were closed, and about 60 newsrooms for local newspapers were closed (Schiffrin et al, 2021).

5.5 Respondents' answers regarding their institution's recruitment of new journalists during the Covid-19 crisis

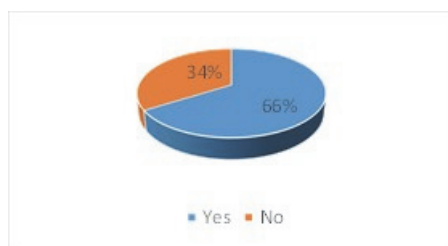


Figure 5: Sample answers about the institution's employment of new journalists during the Covid-19 pandemic

- Figure 5 represents respondents' answers regarding their institution's efforts to hire new journalists. The results revealed that 66% of respondents said their institutions did not hire new journalists, compared with 34% who said that they did. The employment rate seems acceptable compared with the conditions of the coronavirus crisis and its effects on jobs in

various media (Schiffrin et al, 2021, & Le Cam et al, 2020).

5.6 Respondents answering “yes” concerning the specializations of new journalists during the Covid-19 crisis

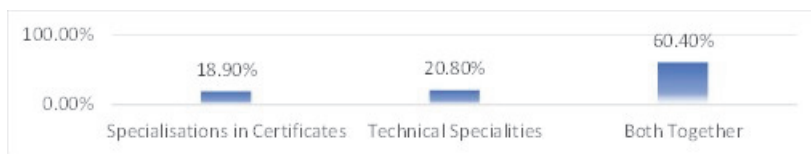


Figure6: Sample answers about the specializations of new journalists during the Covid-19 pandemic

- Figure 6 refers to the specializations of new journalists, with 60.40% of the sample saying that employment during the crisis was a mixture of media specializations (journalistic), followed by technical specializations (20.80%), then joint specialties (journalistic and technical) (18.90%). These answers confirm the future orientation of media institutions toward employing media professionals who possess technical skills in areas such as graphics, Photoshop, and design, as well as abilities related to editing and writing. This type of professional has come to be known as the “comprehensive journalist” (Powers, 2018).

5.7 Sample responses regarding the changes made to working means and tools by the media institution

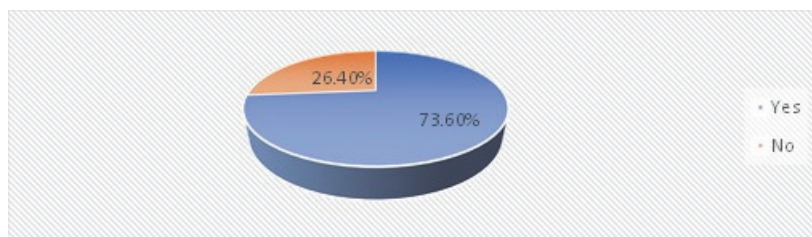


Figure 7: Sample answers about changes in work methods and tools during the Covid-19 pandemic

- The results of the questionnaire, Figure 7 indicate the answers to the question of whether or not the institutions made changes to the tools and means of work. A total of 73.60% of respondents believe that the employing institution made changes to working methods and tools, compared with 26.40% who took the opposite view. These results are considered logical in view of the measures that media institutions have taken in terms of health protocol and to deal with available equipment and means. This has been confirmed by several studies. One study Miguel, Martín, & César, (2020), refers to the European experience and analyzes the response of the European public service media to the crisis caused by Covid-19, particularly the impact of the epidemic on major public broadcasters in Europe, focusing mainly on technical and professional broadcasters and emphasizing their role in terms of basic services and their defence of the values that distinguish them. The study, conducted with 19 European public broadcasters through structured interviews with a sample of directors of innovation and strategy, indicates that the pandemic has forced content creators to adapt program production, shift from technical to emotional (human) standards, and accelerate integration with new online media. News-making processes were

changed to "remote journalism". The study indicated that some of these changes may be retained in the future. This is confirmed in the Polish study by Gawronski, Tworzydło, and Tomczak (2022), which highlighted that the situation relating to the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a significant change in the work of journalists who post their content on social media.

5.8 Respondents' answers regarding the pressures faced during the Covid-19 pandemic



Figure 8: Sample answers about types of work stress during the Covid 19 pandemic

- Figure 8 refers to the various work pressures that respondents faced during the coronavirus crisis. The workload pressures came first, with a rate of 49.10%, followed by the pressure of reviewing wages which garnered 20.80% of the total answers. Then came the pressure of reviewing contracts (5.80%), while other pressures recorded 32.30%, including timing pressure, lockdown pressure, quarantine pressure, the pressure of increasing the number of instructions, and several other pressures, totalling 17 cases. These results are confirmed in a number of research items, surveys, and reports, including the study by Perreault and Perreault (2021) and those by (Le Cam, Libert, & Domingo (2020) and Tuneva (2020). One of the most important studies in this field is the global study by the British Public Relations Agency, which serves technology companies, on journalists and the impact of the lockdown, revealing that 24% of journalists lost part of their activity, 65% admitted that they worked longer at home, and 32% confirmed the negative impact of quarantine on their mental health. <https://www.cbnews.fr/etudes/image>

5.9 Respondents' answers on the possibility of changing their profession of journalism after the Covid-19 pandemic

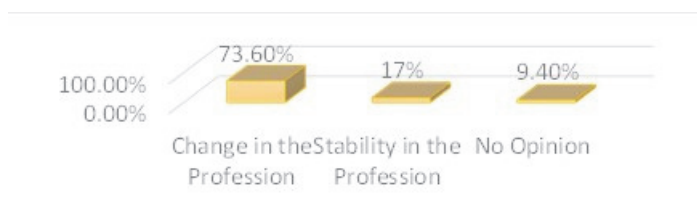


Figure 9: Sample answers about the possibility of changing the profession after the Covid 19 pandemic

- The results of the answers (Figure 9) to this question revealed that 73.60% of respondents answered "yes", compared with 17% who believe that the profession will remain the same, while 9.40% preferred not to give their opinion. The recorded result confirms the prevailing belief among those interested in the employment field that radical changes will affect several aspects of the profession of journalism, including its methods of work, and the

nature of the relationship between media owners and workers. Many believe that these transformations are the result not only of the coronavirus crisis, but also of the path being drawn and defined by the revolution in information technologies and the revolution in digitization and artificial intelligence in relation to journalistic and media professions (Desbordes 2018).

5.10 Respondents' answers regarding the aspects of the profession that will be affected by change following the Covid-19 pandemic

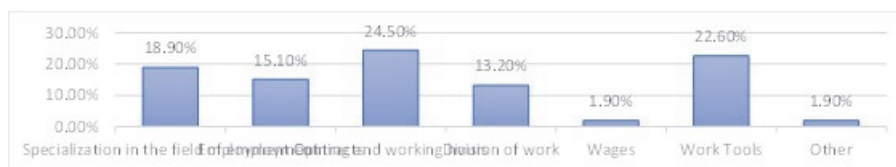


Figure 10: Sample answers about aspects of the profession affected by change after the Covid 19 pandemic

- Figure 10 shows respondents' answers about those aspects of the profession that will be affected by change following the coronavirus pandemic. A total of 24.50% said that the change would include working hours, while 22.60% of respondents believed that it would affect the working means. The data obtained revealed that 18.90% believed that the change would include specializations in the recruitment process, while 15.10% thought that employment contracts would change.

In general, it was thought that the changes would be significant and would include human, material, and financial resources. This view is supported by many studies and debates which agree unanimously that the post-Covid-19 media world, like the rest of society, would be more dependent on data and algorithms. It is therefore essential that journalists move beyond these trends. But they cannot do it alone; they need certain support to protect the values of journalism and creativity.

5.11 Respondents' answers regarding the journalistic professions that will have more opportunities for recruitment after the Covid-19 pandemic

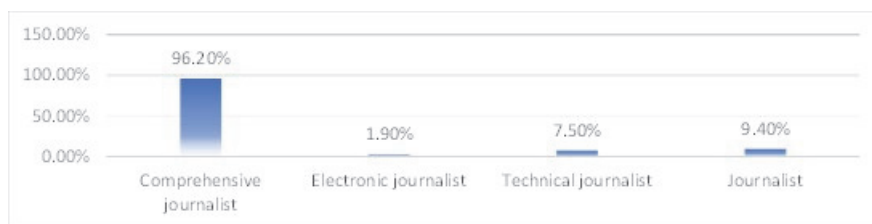


Figure 11: Sample answers about journalism professions with the most employment opportunities after the Covid-19 pandemic

- In response to this question (Figure 11), 96.20% said that the profession of "comprehensive journalist" was the frontrunner, contrasting with the decline of traditional professions such as "journalist" (9.40%), technical journalist (7.50%), and electronic journalist (1.90%). These results are logical considering that the "comprehensive journalist" performs all these jobs. So the results confirm that the prevailing trend in future recruitment will favor those

journalists who have multiple skills, including editing, designing, producing, and presenting.

5.12 *Sample answers regarding those university majors that will be prioritized for employment in media institutions after Covid-19*

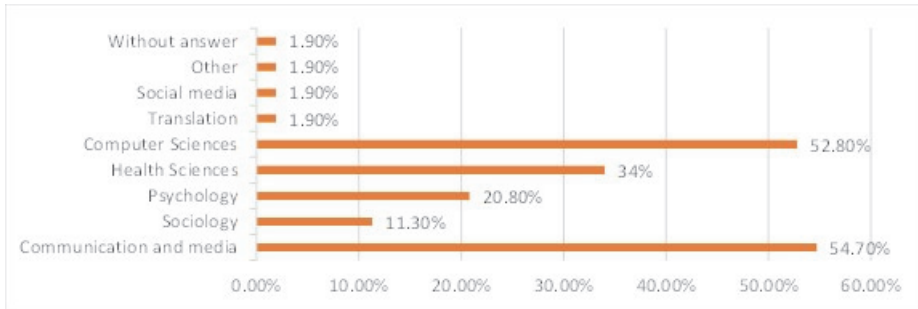


Figure 12: Sample answers about university majors that will have priority in employment after Covid-19

- Respondents' answers regarding university majors needed by media institutions (Figure 12) put communication and media sciences at the top of the list of degrees required with a response rate of 54.70%, followed by 52.80% for computer science, 34% for health sciences and 20.80% for psychology, and sociology.

Looking at the results recorded in this graph, it can be said that the discipline of media and communication sciences will remain a major tributary to employment in the field of journalism as this is the discipline that teaches the basics of journalistic work, in addition to computer science. These are the most important disciplines required by the daily work of a journalist in editing and preparing media material, while other specializations remain an added value and provide support for the professional when he/she exercises his/her journalistic job.

6. Conclusion

The current study sought to investigate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the journalism profession during and after the pandemic. The research was done through a survey that included a number of questions for a sample of professionals working in a number of media institutions. The study reviewed a number of previous studies, and dealt with their approaches to the subject, and the results it reached with the aim of employing them in interpreting and discussing the results that were realized in the current study.

The study intended to address the issue of the future of the journalism profession after the Covid 19 pandemic through three axes: the personal data axis, the journalism profession axis during the Covid 19 pandemic, and the journalism profession axis after the pandemic, through questions that focused on the transformations that the profession underwent, and what it will undergo in the future.

The study revealed a number of results, including:

- 60.40% of the respondents confirmed that their institution dealt professionally with the pandemic.
- 88.70% of the respondents confirmed that there has been a significant change in the work pattern in the institution during the pandemic.
- The results revealed, at a rate of 60.40%, that a number of institutions fired a number of journalists.

- The results indicated that the media organizations changed the *means and tools* of work, with a response rate of 73.60%.
- The answers of the sample of respondents, at a rate of 73.60%, revealed a change in the profession of journalism in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic
- 96.20% of the results revealed that the profession of "comprehensive journalist" will be one of the most demanded jobs in media institutions after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, the results revealed that the university domains of research that will be most in demand in employment in media institutions after the Covid 19 pandemic are media and communication sciences, then computer sciences, then health sciences, and with lesser percentages psychology and sociology, then other majors with very weak percentages.

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