



AUTORITÀ PER LE  
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SERVIZIO  
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# OBSERVATORY ON JOURNALISM

Journalism at the time of the Covid-19 emergency

NOVEMBER 2020

III EDITION





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**SES** SERVIZIO  
ECONOMICO  
STATISTICO

Economic and Statistic Department



Innovative Monitoring Systems and Prevention Policies of Online Hate Speech



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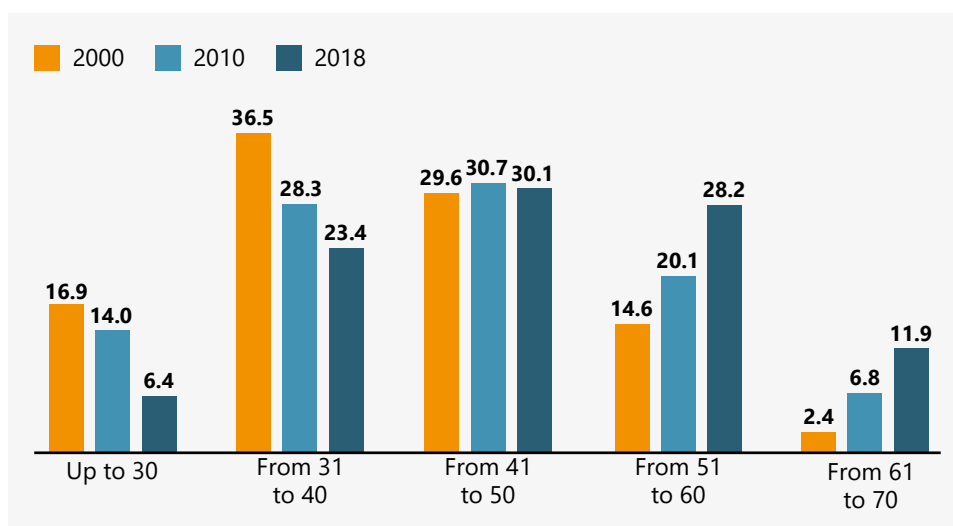
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 emergency has been an important test case for the news system, which is once again at the centre of public and political debate as a crucial gateway for the circulation of medical and healthcare-related information (and beyond). Local communities have gathered around the information system which has played the role of a fundamental component for maintaining, ultimately, the delicate balance on which our society and collective life are based. However, the provision of Covid-19 related information has also posed a significant challenge for the professional status of those involved in news production, i.e. journalists, who were already struggling with the rise of online platforms as information intermediaries and with the circulation of disinformation.

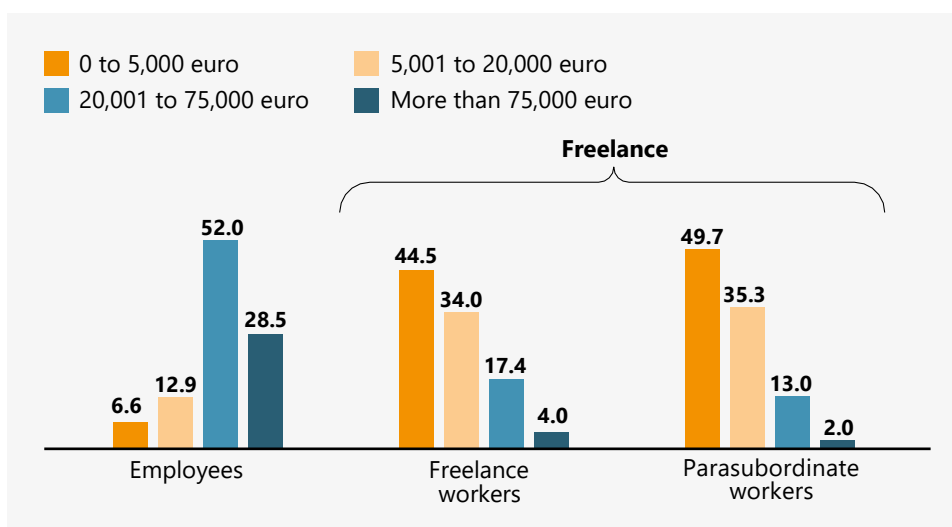
In Italy, the last twenty years have been marked by the ageing of the press population, with the gradual disappearance of journalists aged less than 30 and a sharp reduction in the number of journalists aged less than 40 years.

**Distribution  
of active  
journalists by  
age**

(data in %, 2000-2018)



Considering that more than four Italian journalists out of ten fall into the freelance category (made up of self-employed individuals and parasubordinate workers), the data of the third edition of the Observatory on Journalism also confirm the deep structural differences in terms of income between these latter and employees, and thus an insider-outsider labour market condition in which employees (insiders) enjoy greater protection, while the remaining categories of journalists (outsiders) are forced to work in precarious and low-income conditions.



### Contractual condition and income of Italian Journalists

(data in %)

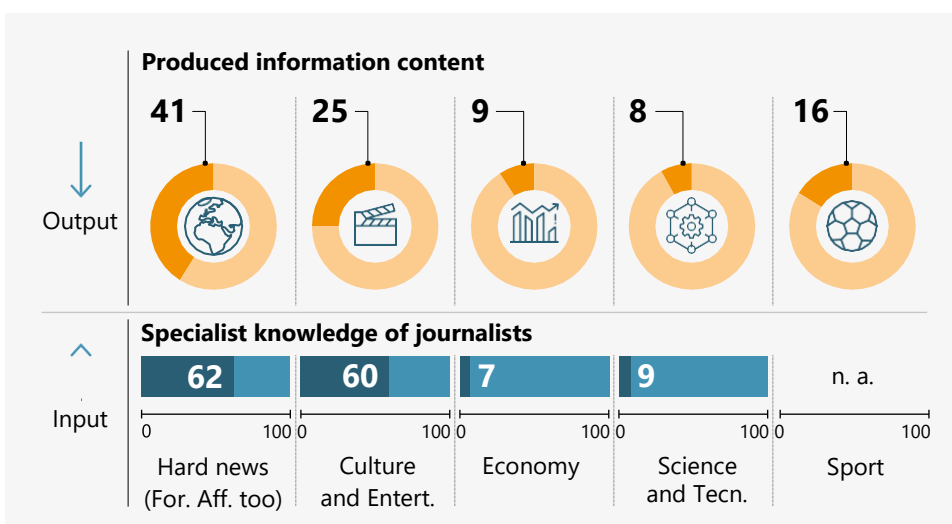
The precariousness of the working conditions is especially evident in new (online-only) news outlets, which make up for the majority of young professionals, characterised by an organisational model based on a streamlined editorial structure (so-called flexible editorial offices) and extensive recourse to occasional collaboration with freelancers.

In the light of these phenomena (i.e. ageing, precariousness and related insider-outsider structure), the profession of journalist tends to increasingly mingle with other professions, and many journalists are starting to work in press offices and public and private bodies, which are characterised by a greater possibility of reaching medium-high income brackets and achieving lower professional (and personal) precariousness. Moreover, this evolution is accompanied by, and is the responsible for, digital skills levels that are not yet fully developed. The propensity of journalists to carry out innovative web journalism activities that go beyond the usual production routines is low. In addition, professional journalists who already cover economic and scientific issues in a lesser way compared to political and cultural ones lack a level of specialist knowledge (particularly in terms of academic training) adequate to cover economic, financial, scientific and technological facts and events.



**4**  
journalists out of  
**10**

FALL INTO THE  
FREELANCE  
CATEGORY



### Variety and level of specialist knowledge of the topics covered

(data in %)

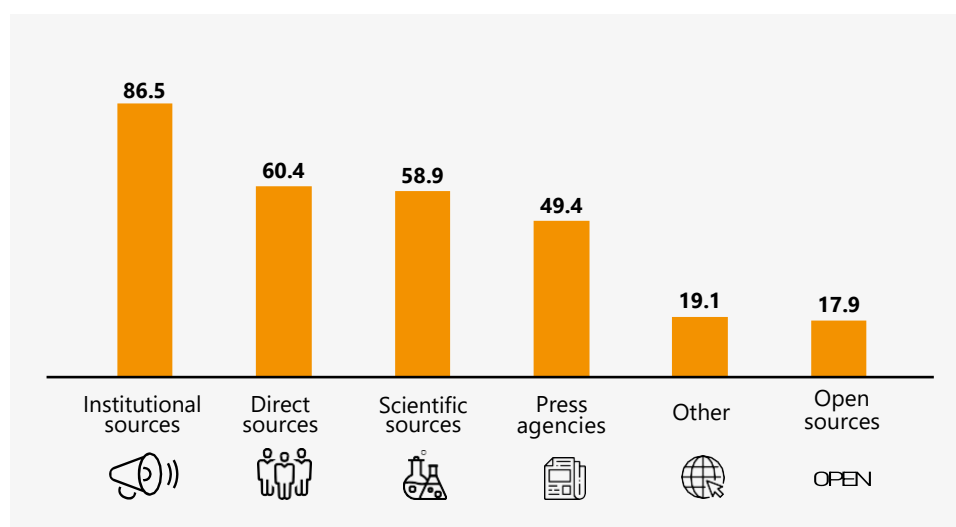
Source: Agcom elaborations on Volocom and company data  
Agcom Observatory on Journalism - 3<sup>rd</sup> edition

Precisely because of their low propensity for activities with a highly innovative content and the low level of specialist knowledge of scientific topics, the COVID-19 health emergency has seen journalists opt for mainly institutional sources and give room, without filters or mediation, to scientists and experts, whom even citizens themselves have been able to freely consult for information on the key aspects of the emergency.

This has been to the detriment of both direct sources and field work, which are usually essential when it comes to news, and digital and open data sources, which have sometimes been used even less by journalists than before the emergency.

**Sources used by  
journalists  
dealing with the  
COVID-19  
emergency**

(data in %)



**4**

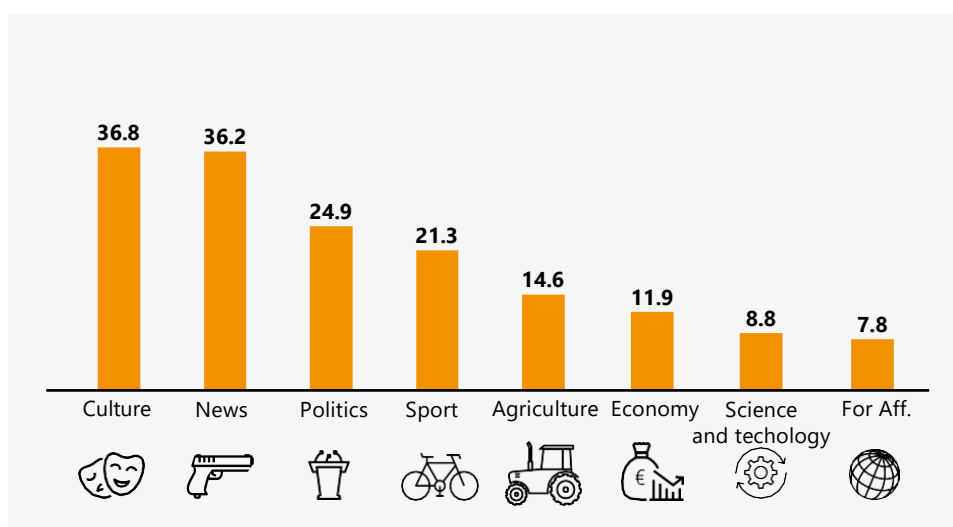
**journalists out of**

**10**

**HAVE NOT DEALT  
WITH THE TOPICS  
THEY NORMALLY  
DEAL WITH  
DURING THE  
CORONAVIRUS  
EMERGENCY**

Failure to use innovative sources has also led almost 4 journalists out of 10, even in fields not fully affected by the pandemic (such as culture and sport, for instance), not to deal with topics they usually deal with. While for culture and sport this choice is due to the drastic reduction in events and news, it should also be noted that about one third of journalists have given up dealing with news items, the lack of coverage of which has certainly not been due to a reduced number of events to be covered. In the long run, this could also lead to significant consequences, given the fundamental contribution of quality journalism in monitoring socially relevant phenomena (such as those related, for instance, to organised crime) and thus in ensuring the proper functioning of democratic life in the country.

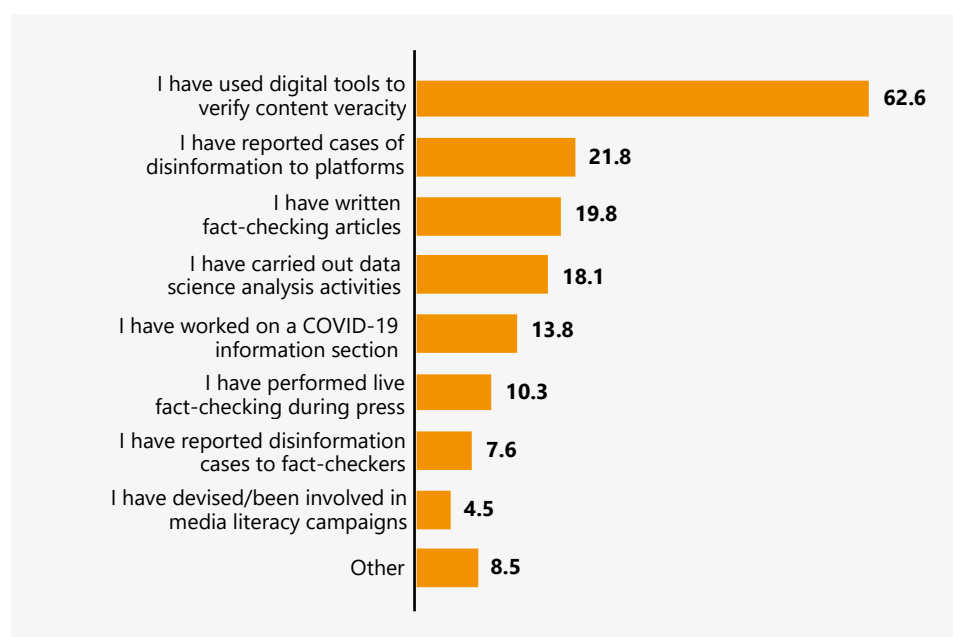




Topics not dealt with by journalists who have been unable to deal with the topics they usually deal with due to the COVID-19 emergency

(data in %)

Moreover, at a delicate time when citizens must be guided by experts, journalists have not been fully successful, except in few significant cases, in taking on the role of debunkers and certifiers of quality news, leaving the complex task of filtering, selecting and decoding correctly knowledge and news of collective interest to public institutions and experts.



Practices adopted by journalists who have spotted and analysed fake news during the COVID-19 emergency

(data in %)

If national and regional/local institutions and scientific personalities, which both journalists and citizens can access in the same way, remain the main source of information on a significant number of issues of collective interest even after the pandemic, and if journalists themselves do not manage to equip themselves with the digital and specialist skills needed to exercise greater control over the entire information (and disinformation) circuit, the mediation role historically played by journalists since the birth of the Western public sphere risks being called into question.



# INTRODUCTION



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Democratic societies require the participation of citizens in the debate on local, national, and supranational decisions and public policies. This entails that individuals have credible and relevant information from various sources at their disposal to learn and express their opinions, and therefore make informed choices about government and society<sup>1</sup>.

This is an increasingly relevant issue with the rising and lasting crisis of identity, role, economic sustainability, and public utility of traditional media, starting from newspapers. Such a phenomenon is plain to see and cannot be simply explained as part of the more general economic and role crisis that has periodically affected the capitalist Western world over the last decade. Indeed, that crisis has its own causes, strictly connected with the massive digitisation process underway and the irruption of the Internet in the lives of all citizens. This crisis, its causes, effects, and consequences define the stability of our democratic systems, as well as studies, research, and investigations carried out in recent years by the Italian Communications Authority (AGCOM), including this work.



Third

EDITION  
OF THE OBSERVATORY  
ON JOURNALISM

Freedom of expression, conceived as a citizen's right to receive information and ideas<sup>2</sup>, involves media freedom and plurality<sup>3</sup>, contributes to the quality of journalism<sup>4</sup> broadening the diversity and credibility of the available information, and opposes the propaganda and disinformation circulating in the digital ecosystem<sup>5</sup>.

Considering that the protection of the external, internal, and substantial information plurality is one of the founding objectives of AGCOM's regulatory mission in the field of media, AGCOM has been carrying out for years an intense supervisory and monitoring activity by constantly observing technological and market developments. Moreover, it has promoted studies and public initiatives such as conferences, seminars, and workshops,

1 Today, political communication occurs in a hybrid media environment in which politics, media, technology, and citizens are evolving. The transformations of the *political information environment* (demand and supply of political information and news) challenge democracy, since the quantity, quality, and structure of this information—available through old and new media—intersect with the quality and use of political information itself by the different segments of the population (see Van Aelst, P. *et al.* (2017). *Political Communication in a High-Choice Media Environment: A challenge for Democracy? Annals of the International Communication Association*, 41(1), 3–27); Mounk Y. (2018). *Popolo vs democrazia. Dalla cittadinanza alla dittatura elettorale*. Milano: Feltrinelli, in particular Chapter 4).

2 See European Convention on Human Rights, art. 10.

3 See Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, art. 11.

4 The connection between quality journalism, and media freedom and pluralism is well known in the field of social and economic sciences (see McQuail D., *Media Performance. Mass Communication and the Public Interest*, Sage, 1992; Prat A., Stromberg D. (2013), *The Political Economy of Mass Media*, in Acemoglu D., M. Arellano, E. Dekel (ed.), *Advances in Economics and Econometrics: Volume 2, Applied Economics*, Cambridge University Press), and is also mentioned by recent resolutions of international organizations (see Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, *Declaration by the Committee of Ministers on the financial sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age*, 13th February 2019).

5 As observed by the Council of Europe in its resolution dated 13th February 2019 and by various institutional documents of the main international organizations and research centres which have recently analysed the phenomenon of disinformation (see Wardle C., Derakhshan H. (2017). *Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*, Council of Europe).

technical committees<sup>6</sup> on multiple aspects of information, also by collaborating with the national and international research community and the academia. Furthermore, during the first phase of the COVID-19 emergency, AGCOM set up specific discussion groups with stakeholders from the media and online platforms aiming at promoting and implementing initiatives to oppose online disinformation on medical, health, and contagion-related issues<sup>7</sup>.



AGCOM's approach is based on the deep knowledge of phenomena in order to adequately face the challenges of the evolutionary dynamics of news media markets and the pathological spreading of disinformation. Therefore, AGCOM regularly conducts analyses<sup>8</sup>, reports, and sector inquiries<sup>9</sup> on the various components of the news media system: the users of information (all citizens)<sup>10</sup>, publishers (of all types of media)<sup>11</sup>, journalism professionals (of any category), content (with its quality- and offer type-related characteristics)<sup>12</sup>, the sources of financing and the related business models (both traditional and innovative)<sup>13</sup>, new platforms (social networks and search engines) and news creation and distribution mechanisms (including algorithms)<sup>14</sup>.

6 AGCOM also recently established [the technical roundtable for pluralism and the accuracy of information on digital platforms](#) (hereinafter also referred to as *Pluralism and Online Platforms Roundtable*), which promotes the self-regulation of platforms and the exchange of good practices for the detection and contrast of *online* disinformation. The aim of this one-of-its-kind Committee is to promote the sharing of information, the comparison and surfacing of adequate survey methodologies, and the identification of transparency tools, rules and appropriate forms of intervention. With regard to the fight against online disinformation during electoral campaigns, the Roundtable adopted the Guidelines for equal access to online platforms during the electoral campaign for the [2018 general elections](#). It also approved the commitments of online platforms for the [2019 European elections](#), also used for Italy's referendum and regional and administrative elections of September 2020.

7 During the meeting held on 18th March 2020, AGCOM's Council decided to undertake a series of initiatives to effectively implement the provisions of the "Cura Italia" law decree no. 18 dated 17th March 2020, by creating four *ad hoc* committees to find a stable connection for the management of emergencies in the current situation. Therefore, the following committees were created: Telco and consumers; Postal services; Media services; Digital platforms and big data (further information at: <https://www.agcom.it/emergenza-covid-19-tavoli-tecnici-con-gli-operatori>). In particular, the last committee focuses on the implementation of initiatives aimed at tackling online disinformation on medical, health, and contagion-related issues, also in collaboration with the technical committee referred to in resolution no. 423/17/CONS ("Roundtable for pluralism and the accuracy of information on digital platforms"). The roundtable also aims at connecting online platforms, stakeholders, and other Italian institutions on the use of big data for identifying measures against the contagion (for further information: <https://www.agcom.it/table-digital-platforms-and-big-data>).

8 For instance, [television and radio monitoring activities for political and social pluralism](#), the analysis of data on the [circulation of daily newspapers](#), the monitoring of media markets (within SIC, the Integrated System of Communication) through [IES \(the Economic Information System\)](#) and [ROC \(the Register of Communication Professionals\)](#), and continuous and periodic monitoring activities, such as [the Observatory on Communication](#).

9 See AGCOM's sector inquiry "[Settore dei servizi Internet e sulla pubblicità online](#)" (Internet services sector and online advertising), 2014, "[Informazione e Internet in Italia. Modelli di business, consumi, professioni](#)" (News and Internet in Italy. Business models, consumption and professions), 2015, "[Informazione Locale](#)" (Local Information), 2018, and "[Piattaforme digitali e sistema dell'informazione](#)" (Digital platforms and the news media system), 2020, with the related reports "[News vs. fake nel sistema dell'informazione](#)" (News vs. fake in the information system), 2019, and "[Percezioni e disinformazione. Molto "razionali" o troppo "pigri"?](#)" (Perception and disinformation. Too "rational" or too "lazy"?), 2020.

10 See, among others, the reports "[Il consumo di informazione e la comunicazione politica in campagna elettorale](#)" (The consumption of information and political communication in election campaigns), 2016, "[Rapporto sul consumo di informazione](#)" (Report on the consumption of information), 2018, and "[L'informazione alla prova dei giovani](#)" (News media challenged by younger minds), 2020.

11 See the first edition of the [Osservatorio sulle Testate Online](#) (Observatory on online publishing), 2018.

12 See the aforementioned report [News vs fake nel sistema dell'informazione](#) (News vs. fake in the information system), and the various editions of the [Osservatorio sulla disinformazione online](#) (Report on online disinformation).

13 See the first edition of the [Osservatorio sulle piattaforme online](#) (Report on online platforms), 2019.

14 See the aforementioned [closing document](#) of the sector inquiry [Piattaforme Digitali e Sistema dell'informazione](#) (Digital Platforms and the Information System).

In this context, the Observatory on Journalism was created in 2014 as a specific study on new media professionals. The results of the first edition of its work were disclosed in the [second chapter](#) of the [sectorial inquiry "Informazione e Internet in Italia. Modelli di business, consumi, professioni"](#) (News and Internet in Italy. Business models, consumption and professions), published [with resolution no. 146/15/CONS](#).

The second edition (2016) was the subject of a broader study, and the related [report](#) was presented at the Senate on [29th March 2017](#).

Two years later (2018), the Department of Economics and Statistics launched the Third Edition of the Observatory on Journalism. This report shares a large amount of general observations and data on the status and evolution of journalism.

The analysis was conducted through a survey. The survey, which is attached to this report<sup>15</sup>, contained questions enabling personalised paths according to the answers provided and was elaborated in collaboration and through specific pilot interviews with subjects selected among experts in the field<sup>16</sup> and representatives of some of the main stakeholders—the National Association of Journalists (OdG), the Italian National Press Federation (FNSI), Rai Journalists Trade Union (USIGRAI), the Union of Freelance Journalists (USGF), *Ossigeno per l'Informazione* (in particular for the section about threats), and the Italian Federation for Public Relations (FERPI) and *Assocomunicatori* for the section dedicated to communication professionals.

The questionnaire was delivered to active journalists in Italy in autumn 2018. AGCOM received 3,160 responses (with a 30% increase compared to the previous edition), of which 2,191 could be used for the analysis, a final sample that underwent a statistical process of ex post re-weighting to the target universe, made up of the active journalists registered by INPGI (the Italian National Social Security Institute of Journalists) as at 31st December 2018. For this process, AGCOM has collaborated with ISTAT, the Italian National Institute of Statistics<sup>17</sup>.

In summer 2020, AGCOM also launched an additional investigation for the third edition of the Observatory on Journalism, specifically focusing on journalism during the COVID-19 emergency.



**3,160**

responses  
received, of  
which:

**2,191**

could be used  
for the analysis

IN THE SURVEY OF  
THE THIRD EDITION  
OF THE OBSERVATORY  
ON JOURNALISM

<sup>15</sup> See Annex 1, Survey.

<sup>16</sup> In this regard, we thank Professor Sergio Splendore (from Milan's Università Statale) for his precious support to draft the survey and collect the related bibliography on journalism studies.

<sup>17</sup> For further information on the survey, see Methodological Appendix.

This analysis was conducted through a survey as well. The survey was delivered to active journalists in Italy in June and July 2020 and especially focused on the first months of the emergency. AGCOM received 1,869 responses, of which 1,423 could be used for the analysis, a final sample that underwent a statistical process of *ex post* re-weighting to the target universe, made up of active journalists registered by INPGI. For this process, too, AGCOM has collaborated with ISTAT<sup>18</sup>.

In addition to the information directly obtained from the survey addressed to active journalists in Italy, the methodology of the study also focused on the use and integration of other data sources on the information sector.

  
**2,000**  
SOURCES  
OF INFORMATION  
AND  
DISINFORMATION  
IN ITALY

In particular, the analysis refers to: a) journalists: data from INPGI<sup>19</sup> and the National Association of Journalists for the identification of active journalists (see Chapter 1) and the *World Journalism Study* research project for international comparisons (see Chapter 1); b) media: data on the content extracted through the platform used by AGCOM and developed by Volocom Technology, containing tens of millions of documents generated in Italy by 2,000 information sources (television and radio channels, newspapers, websites of traditional publishers, online-only news outlets, and related social network accounts) and disinformation sources, in particular for Chapter 4, i.e. data on the characteristics, financial statements, and structure of media companies, obtained by AGCOM through the Economic Information System (IES), and already used with local companies for the Regional Information System<sup>20</sup> (for Chapters 1 and 4); c) the Italian population: data on resident population, employment, education, and income (from official sources, such as ISTAT and the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance), digital and language skills (source: GFK-Sinottica) for Chapters 1, 2, and 3, methods and habits with the consumption of information (acquired through specific surveys on samples of citizens, conducted by the survey company on behalf of AGCOM, or from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism *Digital News Report*) for Chapter 4, and data on the behaviour of consumers of communication services, in particular during the COVID-19 emergency (acquired through a survey prepared by AGCOM and conducted in June 2020 by SWG on a representative sample of 7,015 individuals, aged 16 and over<sup>21</sup>) for Chapter 5.

<sup>18</sup> For further information, see the Methodological Appendix.

<sup>19</sup> AGCOM thanks INPGI's President Marina Macelloni, the General Manager Mimma Iorio and Mr. Marco Bocci for making the data available and for the precious collaboration in processing it.

<sup>20</sup> Annex A to resolution no. 570/18/CONS, *closing sector inquiry on "Local information" launched with resolution no. 310/16/CONS-Part II-Regional Information System*.

<sup>21</sup> The survey, partially administered via CATI and partially via CAWI, is divided into different sections: demographics and social information; availability of digital tools; general aspects concerning the behaviour and feelings of users during the lockdown; aspects concerning the consumption of information; consumption of fixed and mobile telecommunications services; consumption of video services; use of electronic commerce and postal services.

The report opens with a chapter on journalism professionals in Italy, highlighting the scope of the analysis (limited to so-called active journalists) and analysing the main social and demographic characteristics of Italian journalists. The second chapter analyses the main characteristics of journalists who work for the publishing, with reference to professional conditions and contracts, training and digital skills (e.g., methods and purposes of using social networks and other digital tools), sources, activities, topics of interest, and work organization. The third chapter is dedicated to journalists who work for public and private communication agencies and press/communication offices, the so-called "communicators", whose professional conditions and contracts, training and digital skills, main activities and relations with the publishing are analysed. The fourth chapter focuses on the role of journalism in the broader information ecosystem, and contains analyses on the production of information and the intensity of production of journalists employed by various media, i.e., topics information professionals deal with, in a scenario now characterised by the incidence of disinformation. Finally, in the fifth and last chapter, the main results of a specific survey on the impact of COVID-19 on journalism professionals are reported, with particular attention to both the modalities of the working activity and the news coverage of the emergency (aspects they dealt with and sources used) and the role of disinformation.



5

CHAPTERS THAT  
ANALYSE THE ROLE  
OF JOURNALISTS  
AND  
COMMUNICATORS



1

# Journalists in ITALY



AUTORITÀ PER LE  
GARANZIE NELLE  
COMUNICAZIONI



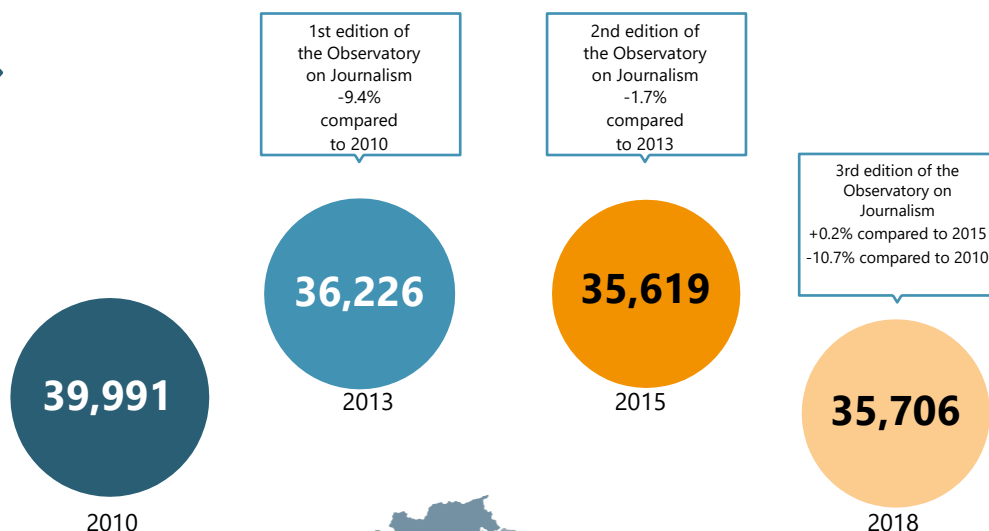


# Journalists in ITALY

## THE UNIVERSE OF JOURNALISTS

The trends of the Observatory on Journalism

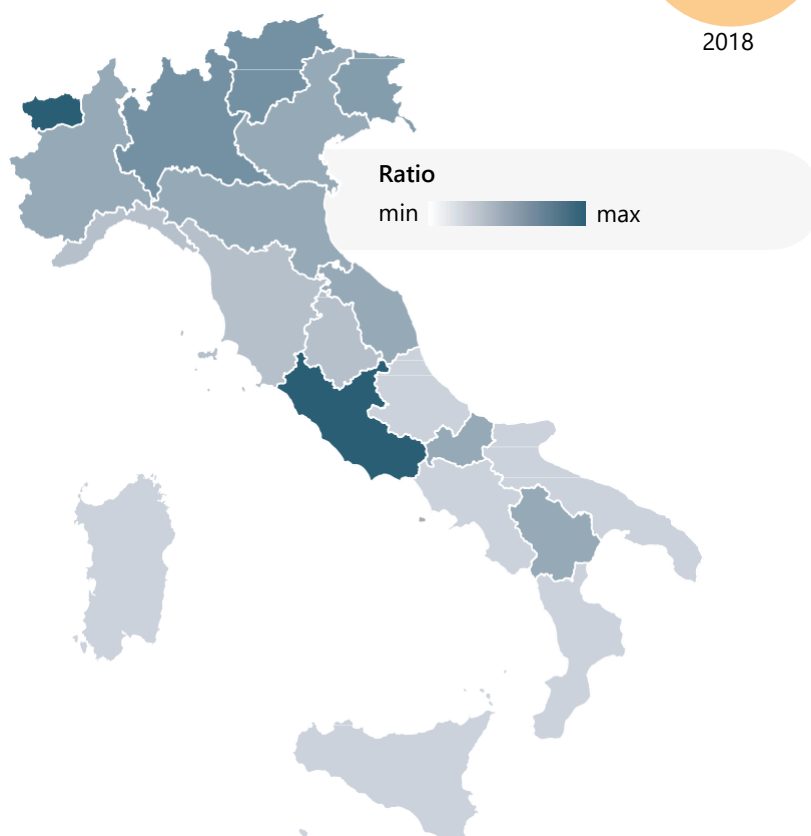
In Italy there are **35,706** active journalists, with a **10.7%** decrease compared to 2010



## NUMBER OF ACTIVE JOURNALISTS

per 10,000 inhabitants per region

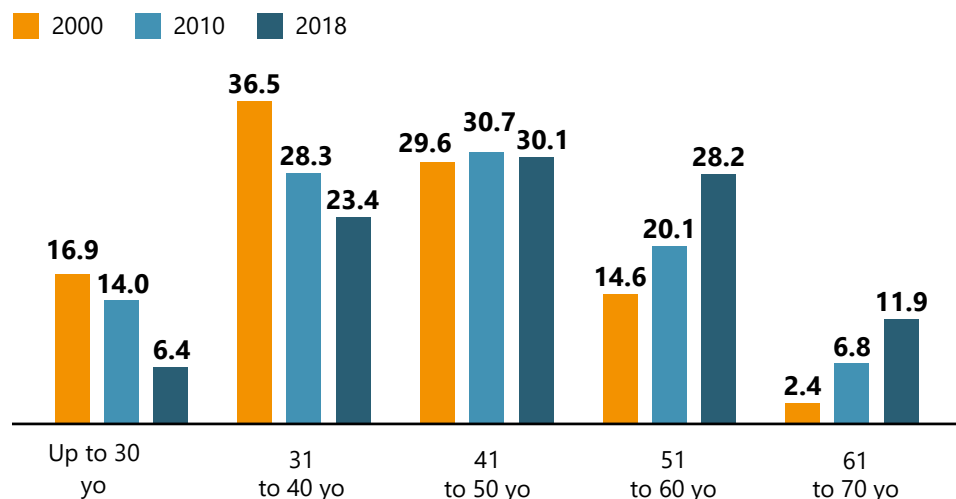
The regions with the highest relative rate of journalists are **Lazio**, **Aosta Valley**, and **Lombardy**



## DISTRIBUTION OF ACTIVE JOURNALISTS BY AGE

(data in %, 2000–2018)

Average age of journalists has increased since 2000, with a sharp decrease of people **under 40** and an increase of those **over 50**

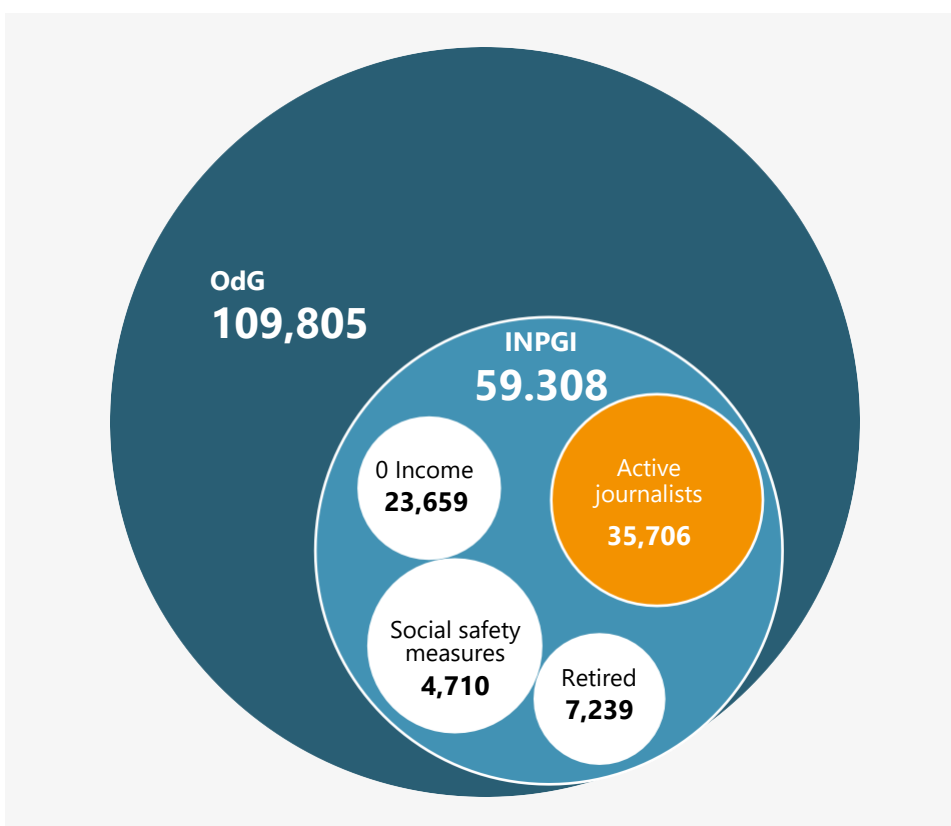


## 1.1 ACTIVE JOURNALISTS IN ITALY: FRAMEWORK AND MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

Active journalists considered in the survey were identified by consulting the register of members of the National Association of Journalists (OdG) and their Institute for Social Security (INPGI). The first major source (OdG, a legal non-economic public entity established by law no. 69<sup>22</sup> of 3rd February 1963) represents the association of people legally authorised to work as journalists in Italy: at the beginning of 2019, the association gathered 109,805 subjects. Around 54% of them (59,308 subjects, see Figure 1.1) are registered to INPGI, the body in charge of social security and assistance for journalists and entitled family members<sup>23</sup> in substitute tax regime and with autonomous regulation.

**FIGURE 1.1**  
The universe  
of active  
journalists in  
Italy

The framework

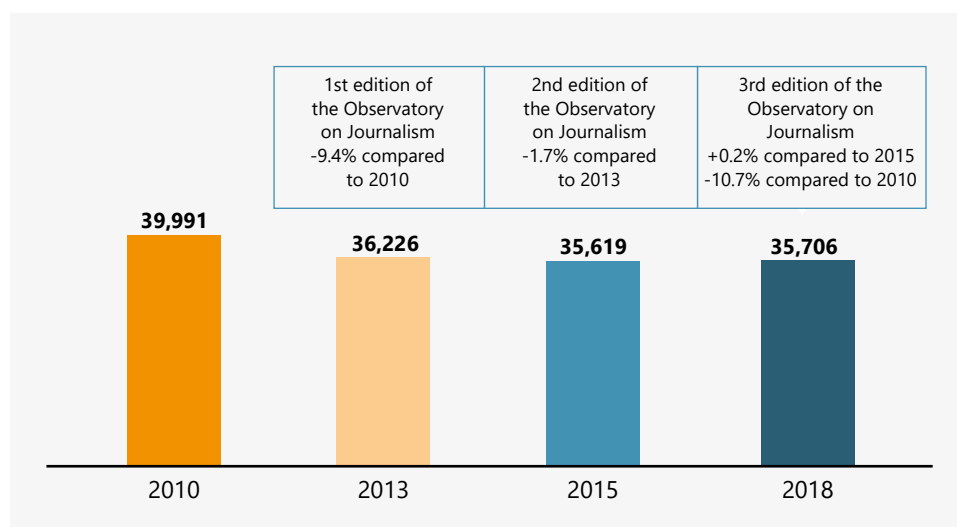


22 On the "Organization of the profession of journalist" (OJ no. 49 dated 20th February 1963), amended by law no. 198 dated 26th October 2016, on "Establishment of the Fund for pluralism and innovation of information and mandate to the Government for redefining the regulation of public assistance for the publishing and local radio and television sector, the regulation of retirement for journalists, and the structure and scope of the Council of the National Order of Journalists. Procedure for awarding the concession of the public radio, television, and multimedia service" (OJ no. 255 dated 31st October 2016) and by Legislative Decree no. 67 dated 15th May 2017 on "Review of the structure and scope of the Council of the National Order of Journalists, implementing article 2, paragraph 4, of Law no. 198 dated 26th October 2016" (OJ no. 115 dated 19th May 2017).

23 Today INPGI is the only body that administers a substitute form of the compulsory general insurance under private law, following the privatization of Legislative Decree no. 509/1994. Therefore, it offers the same protection measures envisaged by the corresponding compulsory forms provided to employed journalists by INPS's social security system. In particular, INPGI provides retirement, seniority, invalidity, and survivors' pensions, maternity benefits, and the severance indemnity fund, as well as social safety measures for income supplementation, which it directly manages as far as it concerns unemployment and lay-offs/solidarity funds (with the same general criteria of Legislative Decree no. 148/2015). For a more detailed analysis of the historical evolution and functions of the INPGI, consult [the Institute's website](#) and the [Note for the hearing in the Parliamentary Supervisory Commission on social security institutions and pension funds dated 18th June 2019](#).

The overall number of active journalists can therefore be determined starting from the last subgroup, further excluding: those who do not have an income as journalists (23,659 units)<sup>24</sup>; retired subjects, for various reasons (7,239 units), including 1,085 in early retirement; individuals who are no longer journalists and benefit from social safety measures (4,710 units), such as unemployment benefit (1,471 units) or lay-off fund (1,065 units).

On the basis of these parameters, the ultimate number of active journalists in Italy is equal to 35,706. This figure appears to be slightly higher than that reported in the second edition of the Observatory, but a remarkably lower than that of just eight years earlier (Figure 1.2).



**FIGURE 1.2**  
The universe  
of active  
journalists in  
Italy

The trends of the  
Observatory on  
Journalism

Source: AGCOM elaboration on INPGI data

Compared to the other main Western countries, despite the objective difficulties in comparing the various official and unofficial sources to define the universe of active journalists<sup>25</sup>, the number of professionals in the Italian journalism field (compared to the total population) is similar to France, higher than the United States, and lower only than Great Britain whose total number of active journalists appears to be overestimated (Figure 1.3).

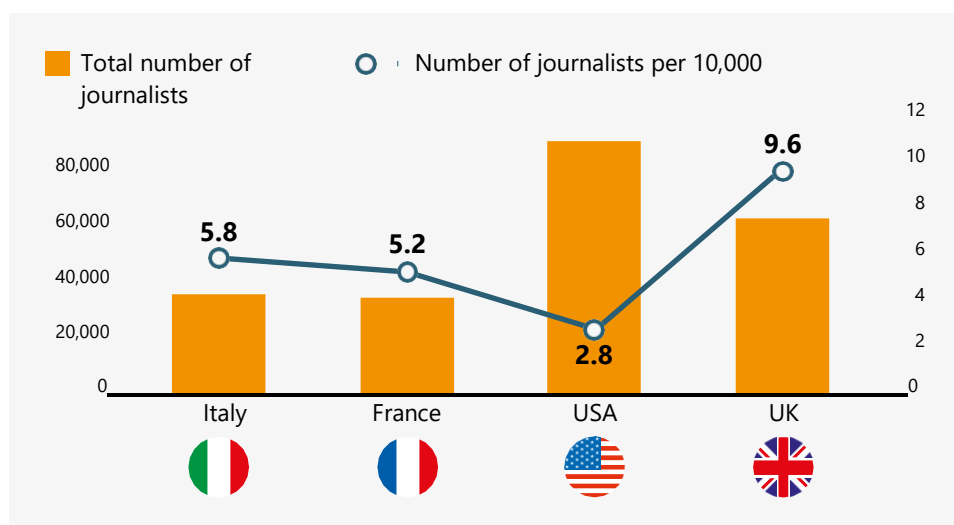
<sup>24</sup> Although the subjects registered to OdG and INPGI with a "0" income as journalists may have actually carried out a journalistic activity in the year preceding the survey without being paid, on a voluntary basis, pending payment, or paying their contributions to another social security fund, they were excluded from the considered "universe" of active journalists, also in line with the previous edition of the Observatory.

<sup>25</sup> See *Observatory on Journalism, 2nd edition*, paragraph 2.1, box 1.

FIGURE 1.3

### Active journalists

An international  
benchmark



Source: AGCOM elaboration on INPGI data (Italy) and Worlds of Journalism Study Country Reports (for France, USA, and UK)<sup>26</sup>

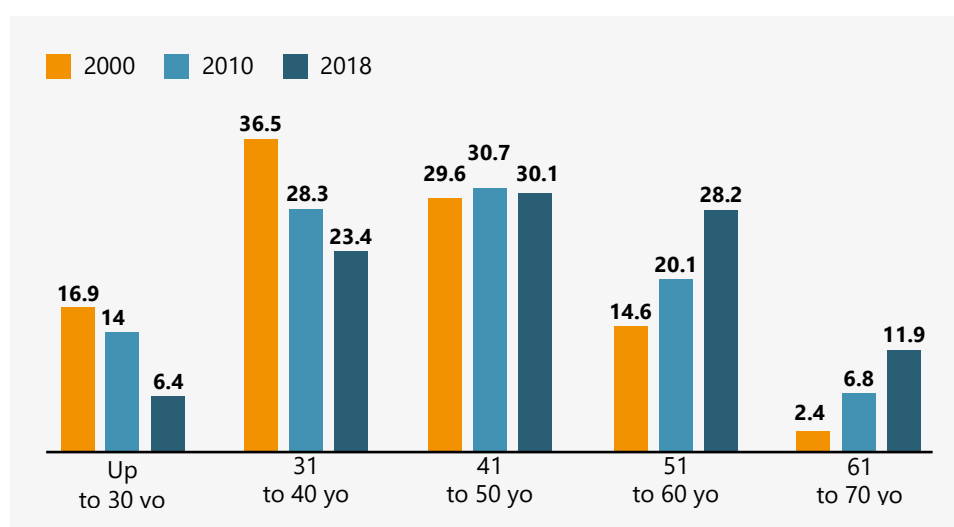
## 1.2 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ITALIAN JOURNALISTS

The distribution of active journalists in Italy by age group (Figure 1.4) shows a gradual and constant aging of the workforce: around 12% of the active population is over 60, while this share was only 2% in 2000, when more than half of journalists (53%) were under 40—a share that has now fallen to less than a third (30%). Basically, in only 15 years Italian journalism has gone from being a substantially young profession (more than half of the journalists being under 40 years old) to an activity carried out by more mature professionals, two fifths (40%) being over 50 years old and more than two thirds (70%) being over 40 years old.

FIGURE 1.4

### Distribution of active journalists by age

(data in %, 2000–2018)



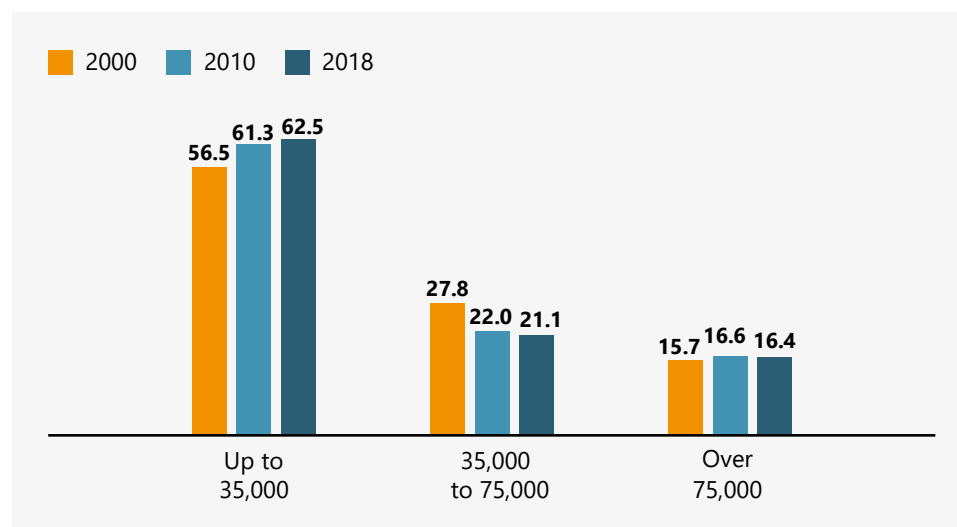
Source: AGCOM elaboration on INPGI data

<sup>26</sup> The data referring to the number of active journalists reported here are comparable, at least as France and the United Kingdom are concerned, with those published in the previous edition of the Observatory on Journalism, and taken, respectively, by the *Commission de la carte d'identité des journalistes professionnels* and the *Office for National Statistics*. However, for the United States, the WJS estimate is much broader than that of the *Bureau of Labor Statistics* used in the previous report.

The group of active journalists in Italy is made up of 15,053 women (42% of the total) and 20,653 men (58%), a constant distribution compared to previous surveys and in line with the percentages of the Italian employment by gender<sup>27</sup>.

With regard to the gender analysis, AGCOM is preparing a specific report as part of the "[National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights 2016–2021](#)", approved by the Interministerial Committee for Human Rights (CIDU), which explicitly includes among the measures dedicated to business and human rights "a monitoring activity, carried out by AGCOM, on gender issues in the information sector and in particular in journalism". For an in-depth analysis of gender inequalities in the journalistic profession in Italy you can see the aforementioned report.

The dynamics of the distribution of journalists by income (Figure 1.5) reveals how, following a significant increase in the lowest income bracket (below 35,000 euros), in the second decade of the 2000s the situation has substantially settled. However, that confirms the progressive loss of importance of the intermediate group of journalists (with gross annual income between 35,000 and 75,000 euros), made up of 28% of journalists in 2000, and 21% in 2019, and a consequent increasing polarization of low- and high-income positions, even more evident than in other professions (see Chapter 2).



Source: AGCOM elaboration on INPGI data



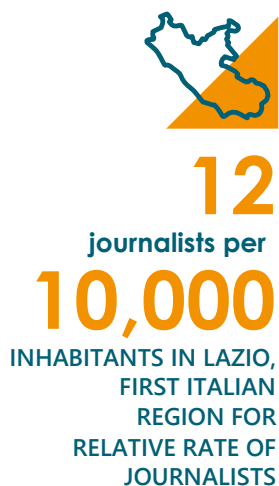
**15,053**  
women in journalism  
**42%**  
of the total

**FIGURE 1.5**  
Distribution of  
active journalists  
by income

(data in %, 2000–2018)

<sup>27</sup> ISTAT data in December 2018.

As always, in the geographical distribution of active journalists, Lombardy and Lazio are at the forefront, with respectively 25% and 19% of the total. Indeed, the two regions host three quarters of traditional media companies (newspapers, radio, TV). Significantly lower groups of journalists, but higher than 5% on a national scale, reside in Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont, Veneto, Tuscany, and Campania (the only Southern region), while the share of journalists residing in the other regions is residual.

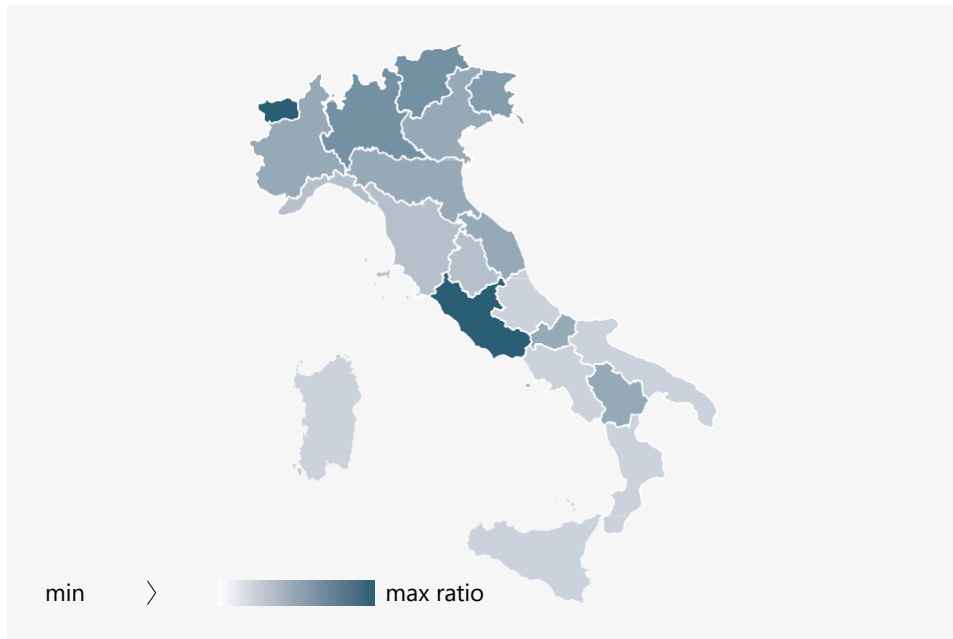


However, when we consider the number of journalists in relation to the resident population (number of inhabitants per region<sup>28</sup>), the scenario is different. In Lazio, 12 journalists per 10,000 inhabitants have their journalistic domicile, a figure also due to the number of publishing companies operating on the territory and the presence of correspondents who have their journalistic domicile in Rome; a similar figure emerges for the Aosta Valley, also due to the presence of numerous journalists employed by the concessionaire company of the radio, television, and multimedia public service<sup>29</sup>. Then Lombardy, with 9 journalists per 10,000 inhabitants (where numerous specialist publications and magazines, as well as agencies specialising in public relations and press offices, i.e. the departments of large national and multinational companies dedicated to communication), Trentino Alto-Adige with 8 journalists per 10,000 inhabitants, Friuli Venezia-Giulia with 7 journalists per 10,000 inhabitants (the two last cases, are also due to the presence of newspapers—and related journalists—representing linguistic minorities, protected by specific legislation<sup>30</sup>) as well as Umbria; in all island and Southern regions (except Molise), as well as in Veneto, there are 3 to 4 journalists per 10,000 inhabitants (see Figure 1.6).

28 Source: "Total resident population on 1st January 2019", ISTAT.

29 In the Aosta Valley Region, in particular, the number of journalists employed by RAI in relation to the resident population is similar to that of Lazio —the region where the employees of all the main national media of the public service concessionaire work (respectively 1.51 and 1.6 RAI journalists per 10,000 inhabitants)—and significantly higher than any other region (the national average is 0.3 RAI journalists per 10,000 inhabitants, 2017 data). For an analysis dedicated to the specific role of the public service in local information (particularly the organizational structure of the regional editorial offices of the regional TV news) see [Indagine Conoscitiva sull'Informazione Locale. Parte I – Una visione di insieme](#) (Sector Inquiry on Local Information).

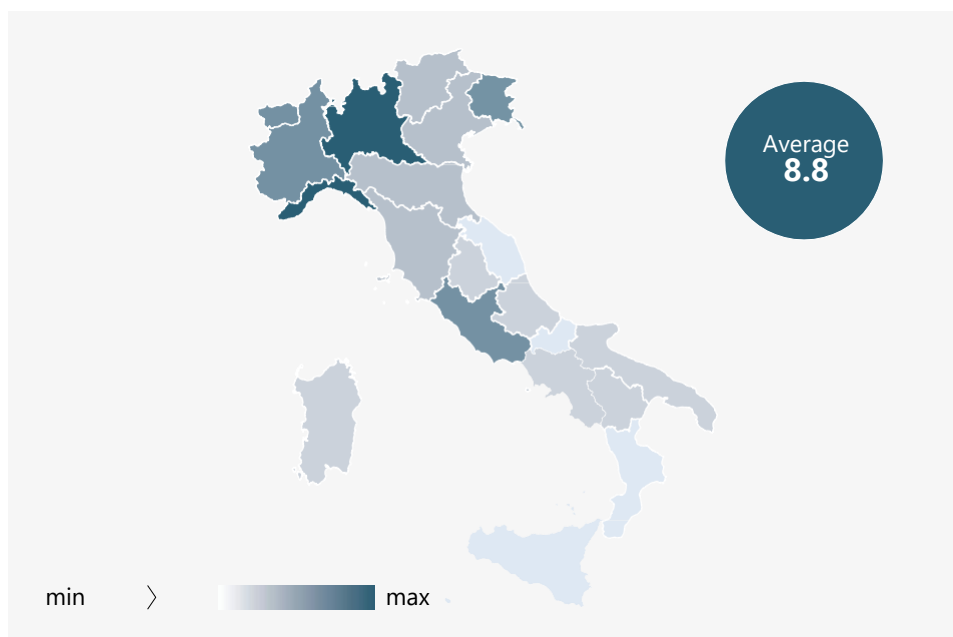
30 Recently, the Legislative Decree 70/2017, on the "Redefinition of the regulation of direct contributions to newspaper and magazine publishing companies, implementing article 2, paragraphs 1 and 2, of law no. 198 dated 26th October 2016" extended the possibility of benefitting from public contributions to publishing companies of newspapers and magazines that express all linguistic minorities recognised by Law 482/1999 (art. 2: Albanian, Catalan, Germanic, Greek, Slovenian, and Croatian populations speaking French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan, and Sardinian).



**FIGURE 1.6**  
Number  
of active  
journalists per  
10,000  
inhabitants  
per region

Source: AGCOM elaboration on INPGI data

The low presence of journalists in Southern area (Islands included) does not seem to be attributable to the scarcity of companies in the communication and media sector<sup>31</sup>. Figure 1.7 presents an analysis on the relationship between the number of active journalists and the number of publishing companies per region. The figure shows how this ratio is low in the South of Italy (in particular, Calabria has the minimum value, while the regions in the North-West and Lazio have the highest values).



**FIGURE 1.7**  
Number  
of active  
journalists per  
publishing  
company per  
region

Source: AGCOM elaboration on INPGI data

<sup>31</sup> The [Indagine Conoscitiva sull'Informazione Locale. Parte II – Sistema informativo regionale](#) (Sector inquiry on Local Information) shows in particular that Sicily, Campania, and Apulia are respectively the third, fourth, and sixth regions in terms of number of media companies (with respectively 315, 259, and 237 radio and television companies and publishers of newspapers—also online).



## In Southern Italy

THE PRESENCE OF  
NEWSPAPERS IS  
MINIMAL.  
IN CALABRIA THERE  
IS NO LOCAL  
NEWSPAPER

This marked a difference on the national scale can be explained by the presence of less solid publishing companies and less structured editorial offices in Southern Italy—in terms of workforce. In other terms, there is a large portion of professionals who do not exclusively work as journalists (and who therefore are not included in the group of active journalists). Moreover, in most of the Southern regions (Abruzzo, Molise, Basilicata, Sardinia), there is a minimal number of newspapers (which are the media with the greatest value in terms of information), considering that in Basilicata there is only one local newspaper, while in Calabria this is none<sup>32</sup>.

## To summarise:

A general overview of the status of the journalistic profession in Italy shows:

- The progressive and constant reduction in the number of active journalists.
- A significant aging trend among the journalistic population, demonstrating the existence of barriers at the beginning of a career for the youngest journalists, whose percentage has sharply dropped since 2000.
- A remarkable differentiation of active journalists between the Northern regions and the Southern ones, that, while facing the need for (even local) information, suffer because of less solid or sometimes non-existent publishing structures.

<sup>32</sup> See *Indagine Conoscitiva sull'Informazione Locale. Parte II, op. cit.* (Sector inquiry on Local Information) on the importance of local newspapers in a democratic system, see Darr, J.P., Hitt, M.P., & Dunaway, J.L. (2018). Newspaper Closures Polarize Voting Behavior. *Journal of Communication*, 68(6), 1007–1028, in which the authors highlight the connection between the end of the activities of some newspapers and the greater polarization of the vote in the presidential elections in the respective local communities.





2

# The Universe of **JOURNALISTS**



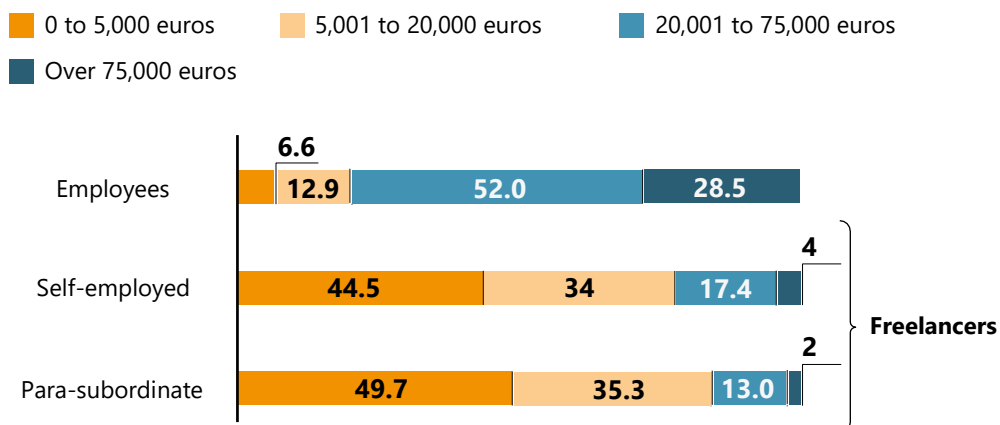
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# The Universe of JOURNALISTS

## CONTRACTUAL CONDITION AND INCOME

(data in %)

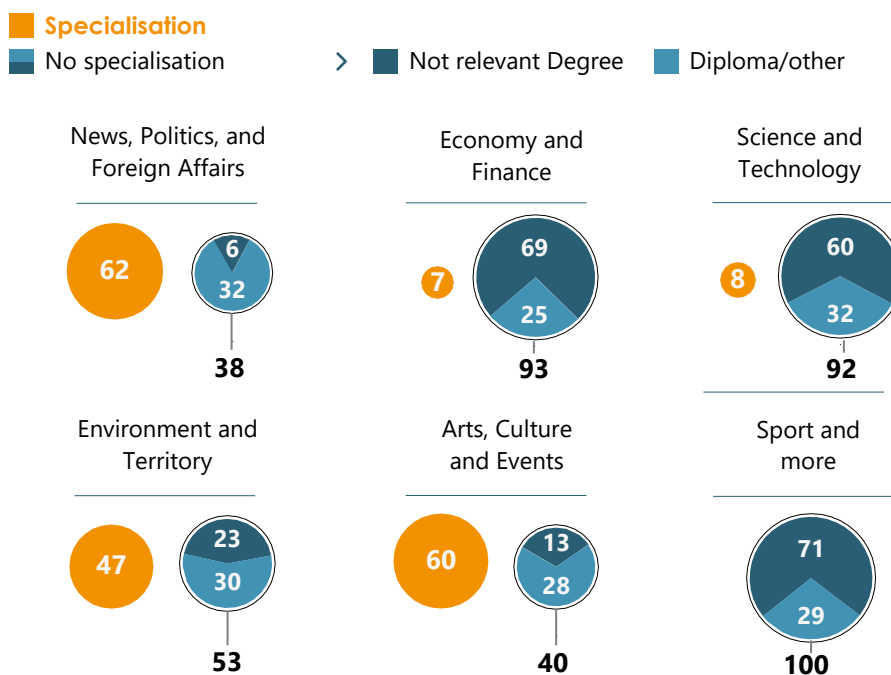
**39%** of active journalists are freelancers. The contractual condition strongly influences the distribution of journalists by income brackets



## RELATION BETWEEN THE STUDY CURRICULUM AND THE MAIN TOPIC COVERED BY THE JOURNALIST

(data in %)

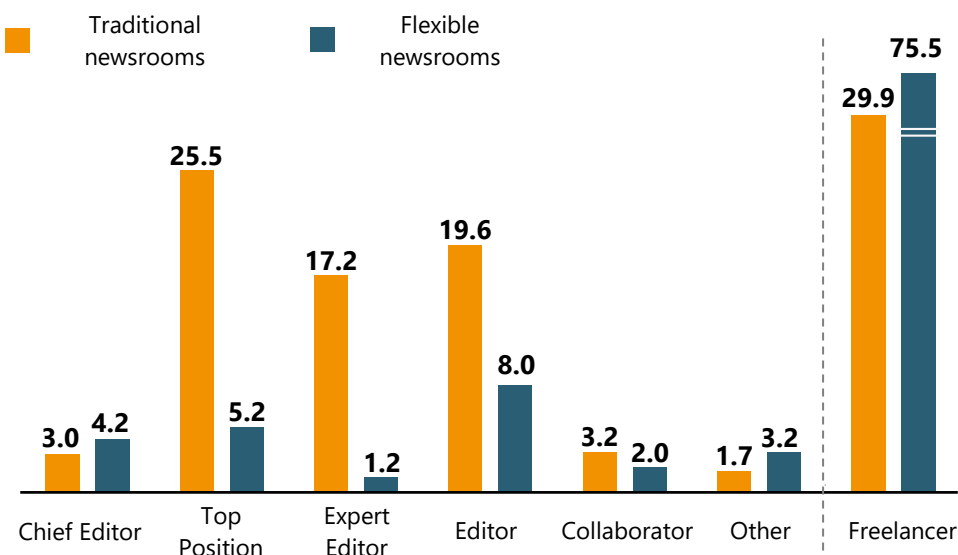
Very often, the journalists dealing with economy, science, and technology did not earn a **relevant degree** to these domains



## POSITION OF JOURNALISTS IN THE ORGANISATION BY TYPE OF NEWSROOM

(data in %)

New publishing companies, gathering young professionals, have simpler and flexible editorial offices, and extensively resort to **freelance professionals**



The online survey addressed to journalists enables AGCOM to collect a lot of information relating to the professional status and contract (Paragraph 2.1), training and digital skills (Paragraph 2.2), with particular reference to the use of social networks and other digital tools (Paragraph 2.3), the sources used, the activities performed, and the topics covered (Paragraph 2.4), as well as the organization of work (Paragraph 2.5).



In this chapter, all these aspects will be discussed, with special attention, on the one hand, to the differences between the various age groups, on the other, to the differences between employees and freelancers or, in some specific cases, between professionals employed with different types of media (see in particular Paragraph 2.5).

This overview of the different professional profiles will highlight some aspects (relating to the insecurity of an increasingly large part of information professionals, or to the existing gaps in terms of specific skills), which will be subsequently considered in the analysis of the role of journalists in the news media ecosystem (Chapter 4) and in the final chapter about the journalistic profession during the Coronavirus pandemic (Chapter 5).

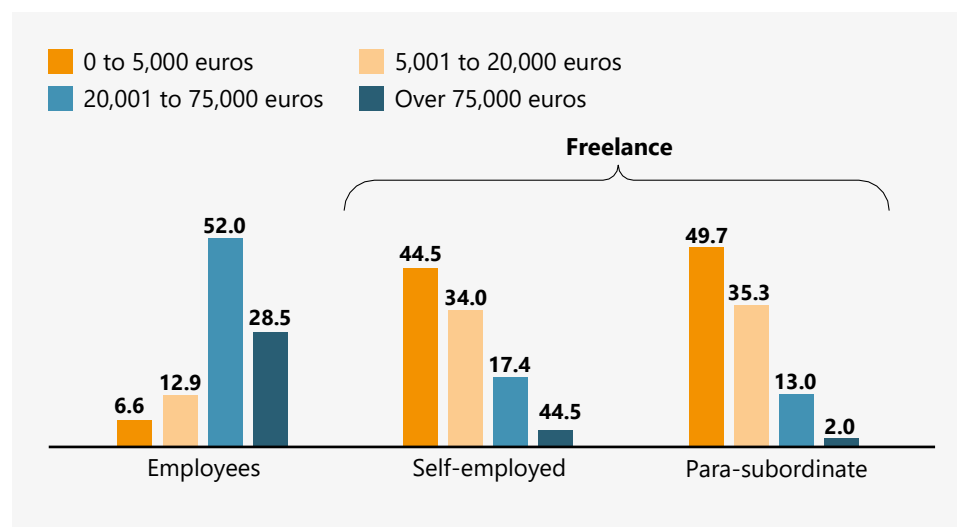
## 2.1 THE PROFESSIONAL STATUS

Journalists were employed (also through so-called fixed collaborations pursuant to art. 2<sup>33</sup>) in 55% of cases and self-employed in 28%. 11% of journalists are also represented by the so-called para-subordinate workers (*co.co.co.s*, general collaborators)<sup>34</sup>. The overall number of freelance journalists is therefore equal to 39% of the total.

<sup>33</sup> I.e., "the journalists employed by newspapers, daily news agencies for the press, magazines, private radio and television broadcasters, and press offices in any case connected to publishing companies, who do not perform daily journalistic work as long as there is continuity of performance, employment, and responsibility of a service". In this regard, see the [National journalism employment agreement FIEG-FNSI 2013/2016](#).

<sup>34</sup> In light of the choice to consider just the so-called active workers, only a small percentage of journalists were found to be unemployed/never previously employed (2.8%) or retired (2%).

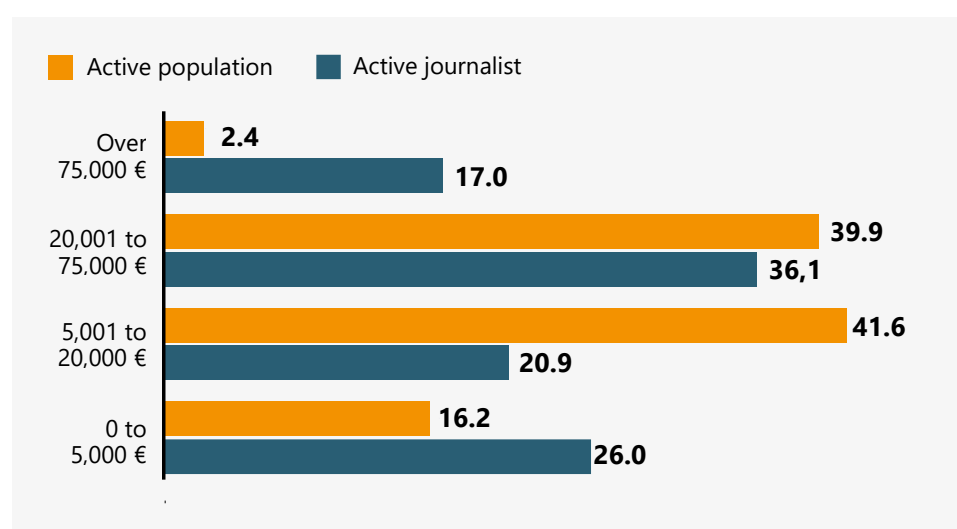
By comparing the data on the professional condition of journalists and their gross income (Figure 2.1), deep and structural differences are confirmed. Among the employees, 80% have an annual income exceeding 20 thousand euros. This percentage drops to 21% for the self-employed and 15% for the para-subordinate. As already highlighted in the previous edition, this can be seen as a consequence of an "insider-outsider" labour market, in which employees (insiders) enjoy greater protection, while the remaining categories of journalists (outsiders) are forced to work in precarious and low-income conditions.



**FIGURE 2.1**  
Contractual  
condition  
and income

(data in %)

Another peculiar income dynamic among journalists adds to the insider-outsider one. Indeed, it is interesting to note the considerable difference between the distribution of the overall Italian active population and journalists: the latter are in fact characterised by a more marked difference of the two extreme income categories (Figure 2.2).



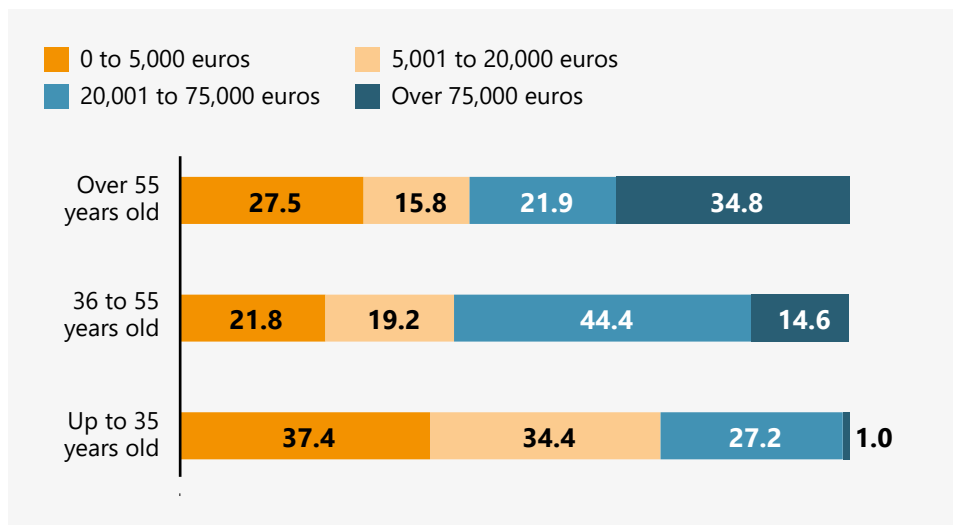
**FIGURE 2.2**  
Distribution of  
the active  
population  
and journalists  
in the income  
brackets

(data in %)

Source: AGCOM elaboration on data from the *Observatory on Journalism – 3rd edition* for active journalists, and on IRPEF Income Tax Returns 2019 – Financial Year 2018 (Italian Ministry for Economy and Finance – Finance Department) for the overall Italian active population

The differences in income are also combined with a different distribution of active journalists in income brackets by age. This is typical of a system rewarding career more than merit: more than half of journalists aged 36–55 and over-55 earn incomes above 20,000 euros per year with a clearly unbalanced distribution—the former are on the intermediate income bracket, whereas the latter on the highest bracket. At the same time, almost three quarters (around 72%) of journalists under 35 earn less than 20,000 euros, showing a "generation pyramid" which is common to many professions<sup>35</sup>, yet certainly evident in the case of journalists (Figure 2.3).

**FIGURE 2.3**  
Distribution  
of active  
journalists by  
income  
bracket and  
age group  
(data in %)



**74.6%**  
journalists providing  
occasional  
collaboration  
services that do  
not exceed  
**5,000**  
euro per year

As for freelancers (the fastest growing category among journalists), in 35.7% of cases they work with a registered VAT number, and in 23.4% of cases they work under coordinated and continuous collaboration contracts. Occasional collaboration services are provided by 31.7% of professionals (a strong increase compared to the 25.5% recorded in the last edition), whereas the transfer of copyright by 17.7% (Figure 2.4).

The comparison of the data on the types of collaboration with income brackets shows that occasional collaboration services are obviously associated with a lower income (in 74.6% of cases, journalists do not exceed the threshold of the 5,000 euros per year<sup>36</sup>), followed by the transfer of copyright (in 42% of cases those who use this type of collaboration are also placed in the lower income bracket).

<sup>35</sup> Even for lawyers, for instance, the average income of those under 40 is definitely less than 20,000 euros gross per year. See CENSIS (2018). *Percorsi e scenari dell'avvocatura italiana. Rapporto 2018*, available at <http://www.cassaforense.it/media/7191/censis-report-2018.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Occasional collaboration services provided by journalists registered to INPGI are not subject to the requirement of a total annual duration with the same client of less than 30 days and a fee (per year and client) not exceeding 5,000 euros.

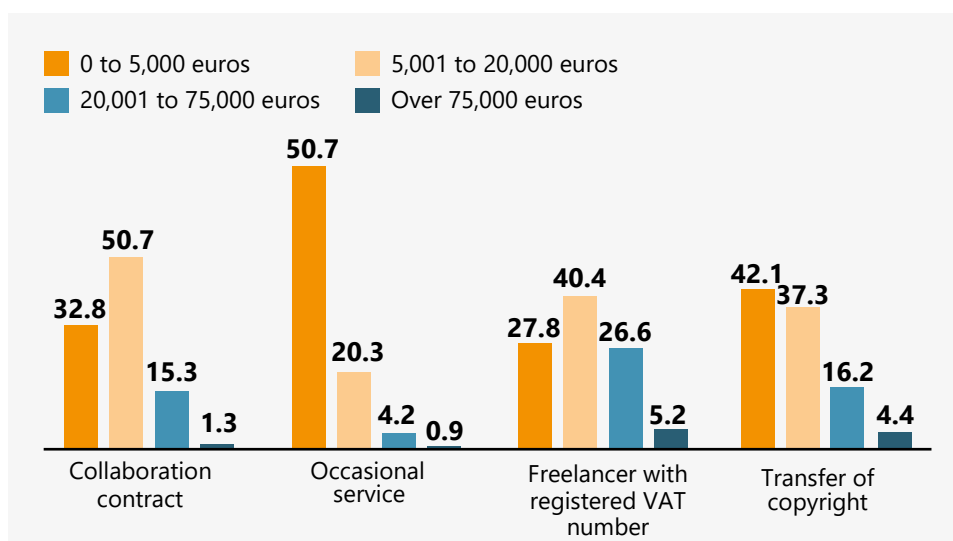


FIGURE 2.4

Type of  
collaboration  
and income  
from  
freelance work

(data in %)

As already highlighted in the previous edition, almost 80% of journalists not actually employed have an annual gross income lower than 20,000 euros (an increase compared to two years ago).

This significant pay gap between employed and freelance journalists (together with the well-known problems that characterise the Italian publishing sector<sup>37</sup>, especially at the local level<sup>38</sup>) negatively affects the overall quality of information<sup>39</sup>, and also becomes a strong negative discriminant towards freelancers who—as shown below (see Paragraph 2.5)—really bring innovation to the profession in terms of skills and activities.

37 [Focus bilanci – Principali evidenze aggregate dei settori di interesse dell'Autorità per gli esercizi 2013 - 2017](#), Updated 21st December 2018.

38 See AGCOM Sector inquiry on Local Information, cit.

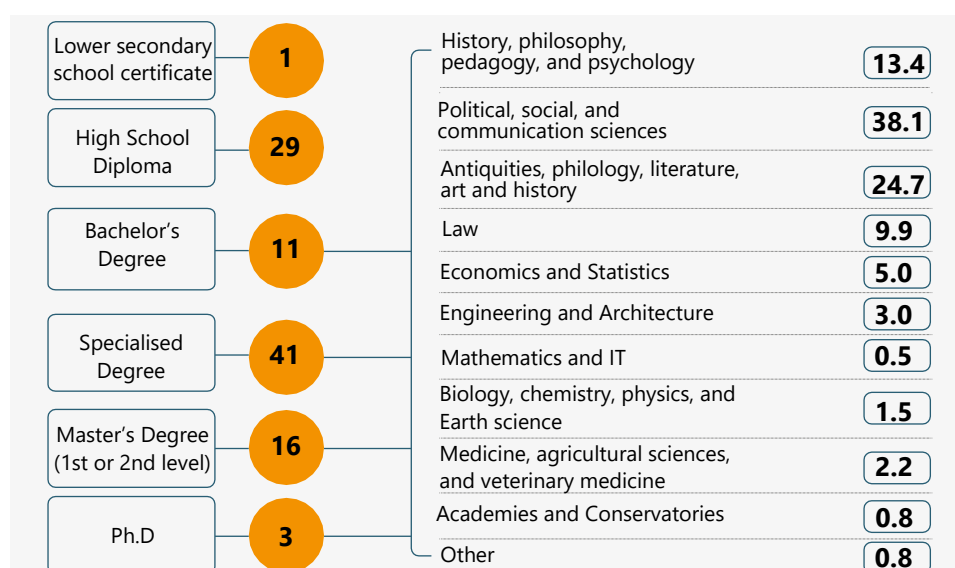
39 As noted by some scholars, the limited presence of the commercial press, the strong presence of a party press, and, more in general, a remarkable parallelism between the mass media and the political system, have historically forced Italian journalists to live in the condition of financial uncertainty and lack of autonomy (see Bechelloni, G. (1995). *Giornalismo o post-giornalismo? Studi per pensare il modello italiano*. Naples: Liguori.; Hallin, D.C., Mancini, P. (2004). *Modelli di giornalismo. Mass media e politica nelle democrazie occidentali*. Rome-Bari: Laterza).

## 2.2 EDUCATION AND SKILLS

As for training, 70% of journalists have a higher education degree than the upper secondary school diploma (university degree, bachelor's degree, specialised degree, 1st or 2nd level master's degree, doctorate or Ph.D.), earned in Italy or abroad (Figure 2.5).

Among graduates, humanistic and social degrees clearly prevail (76.3%), followed by legal sciences (around 10%), technical degrees (engineering and architecture, mathematical and computer sciences, biology, chemistry, physics, earth science, medicine, agricultural sciences, and veterinary medicine), globally earned by 7% of graduate journalists, and economic and statistical sciences (5%).

**FIGURE 2.5**  
**Degree earned**  
**by journalists**  
(data in %)



The high level of education of journalists, already highlighted in the previous editions of the Observatory on Journalism, and also well known in the literature<sup>40</sup>, is even more evident when compared with the general level of education of the Italian working population. Indeed, around 20% of Italian workers have a degree, while more than one third did not even obtain a secondary school diploma<sup>41</sup>.

As for specific post-graduate training in journalism, 23% of journalists with a degree attended a journalism school. In particular, 16% of graduate journalists attended a journalism school in Italy recognised by OdG for a journalism traineeship valid for accessing the profession.

<sup>40</sup> Deuze, M. (2006). Global journalism education: A conceptual approach. *Journalism studies*, 7(1), 19–34. In Italy and in all Southern European countries with a polarised and pluralist model of journalism, the high level of education of journalists is also due to the historically elitist idea of the journalistic profession, as well as to its close connection with the literary and political world (Hallin, D.C., Mancini, P., *Modelli di giornalismo*, op. cit.), as also show by majority of degrees held by Italian journalists.

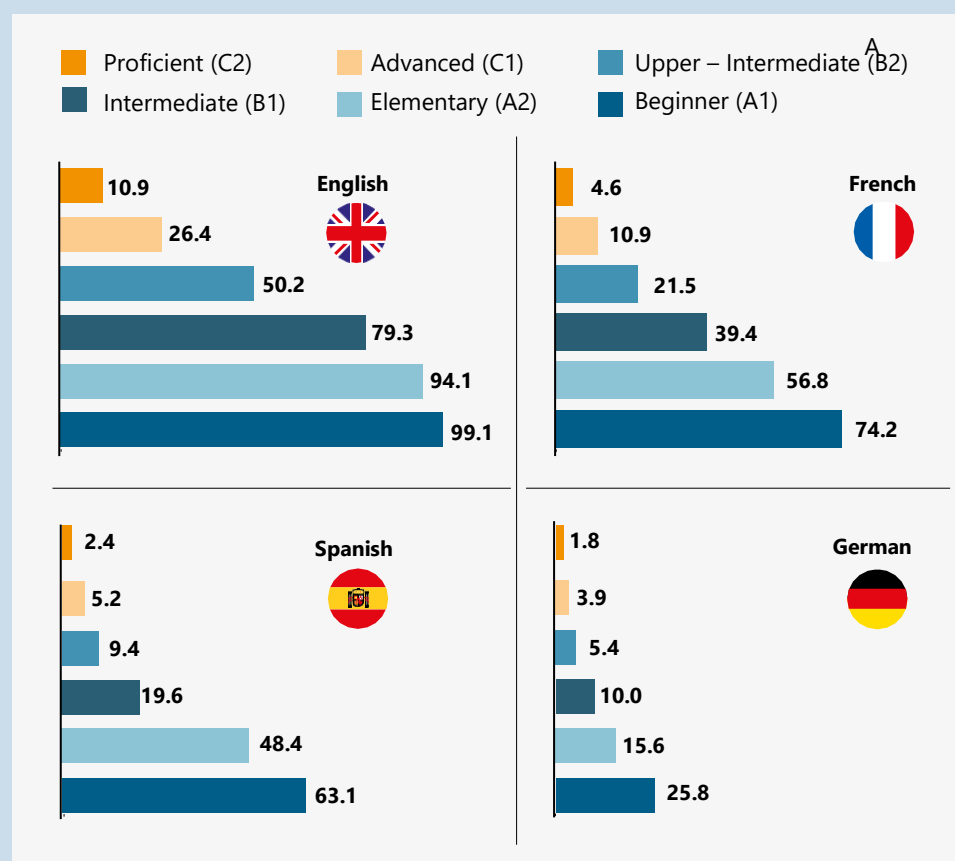
<sup>41</sup> Data by GfK-Sinottica. The Italian working population considered from now on in this report includes the following professional categories: executives, managers or officers, employees (or soldiers), teachers, business owners, freelancers, retailers, farmers, artisans.



## The language skills of Italian journalists

A specific study on the mastery of the main foreign languages was designed for the third edition of the Observatory on Journalism as well. These skills are necessary for understanding foreign sources on national and international events (production routine), or for crafting of articles, investigations, reports (including audiovisual ones) suitable for international distribution. In this regard, Figure 2.6 shows that the foreign language best known by Italian journalists is obviously English (99% can speak English at different levels), followed by French (74%), Spanish (63%), and German (26%). Proficiency in other languages is residual: 4% of journalists state they can speak Arabic, 2% Russian, 1.5% Chinese, 1% Portuguese.

The data also show that more than half of Italian journalists have at least an advanced-intermediate level (B2) in English, and are therefore able to understand even complex texts, have a basic interaction with native speakers, and write clear and detailed texts on a wide range of topics. More than one fifth of journalists (21.5%) have the same level of proficiency in French, while the percentage of journalists with intermediate-advanced language proficiency in Spanish and German is less than 10%. As for professionals with the most advanced linguistic level (C2)—necessary to produce news content that can be distributed and compete on foreign markets—they represent just over 10% of Italian journalists (data in line with the previous edition) for English and less than 5% for other languages.



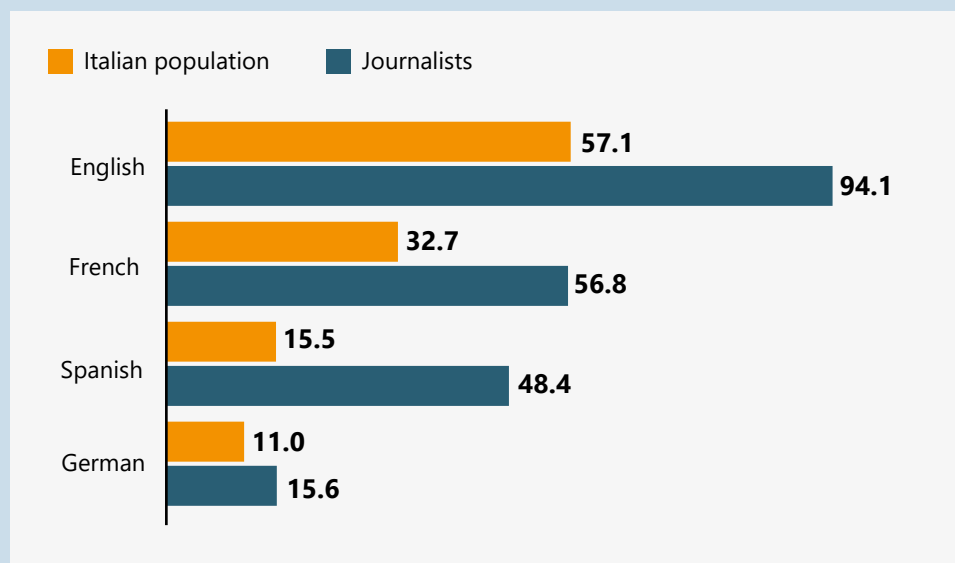
**FIGURE 2.6**  
Level of  
language  
proficiency  
of Italian  
journalists

(data in %)

Finally, by comparing language skills of journalists and those of the general working population (Figure 2.7), journalists show a much higher level of (even elementary) proficiency in the main foreign languages than other professionals, with more significant differences in English—a language commonly used by journalists—as well as in Spanish and French, rarely used by other professionals.

**FIGURE 2.7**  
Language  
proficiency level  
of journalists and  
the population

(data in %)



Note: for the working population, the percentage of those who claim that they can speak English, French, Spanish, and German "well" or "so-so" was taken into consideration; on the other hand, for journalists, the percentage of those who claim that they have at least an elementary level (A2) for all the considered foreign languages was reported.

Source: AGCOM elaboration on data from AGCOM's *Observatory on Journalism - 3rd edition* (journalists) and *GfK-Sinottica* (general working population)

As for digital skills, a topic of great interest in a context in which the production of information is increasingly moving online<sup>42</sup>, in light of the various information available through the survey, and on the basis of the literature on digital inequality<sup>43</sup> and digital divide<sup>44</sup>, a specific index has been designed, including indicators referring to the technological equipment available to journalists, their commitment to multiple activities, i.e. the extent of activities carried out online (extent of use) and the quality of use of digital tools (quality of use), i.e. their use for capital enhancing<sup>45</sup> activities.

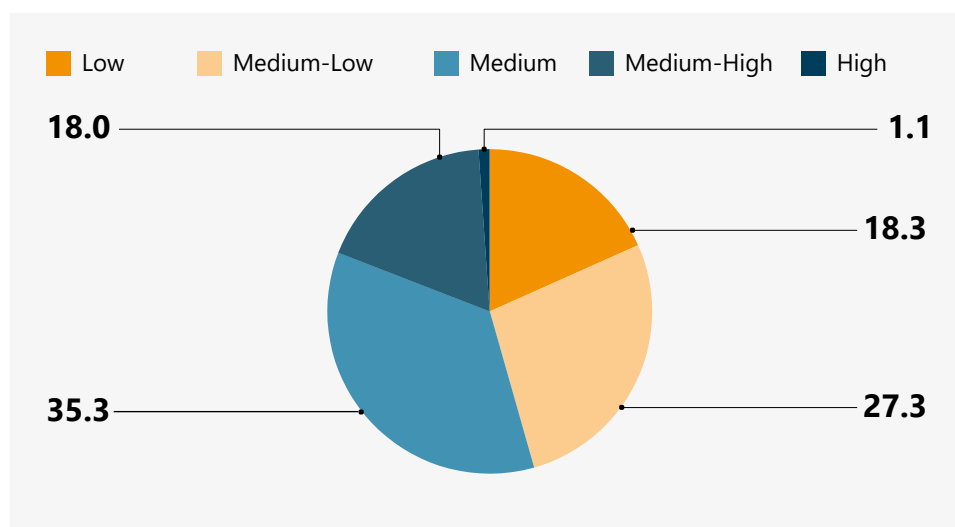
<sup>42</sup> Over the last year (October 2019–September 2020), around 70% of the information content was published online (AGCOM elaboration on Volocom data).

<sup>43</sup> See Di Maggio, P., Hargittai, E., Celeste, C., & Shafer, S. (2004). From unequal access to differentiated use: A literature review and agenda for research on digital inequality. *Social inequality*, 1, 355–400.

<sup>44</sup> Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. (2007). Gradations in digital inclusion: Children, young people and the digital divide. *New Media & Society*, 9(4), 671–696; Gui, M. (2015). Le trasformazioni della disuguaglianza digitale tra gli adolescenti: evidenze da tre indagini nel Nord Italia. *Quaderni di Sociologia* (69), 33–55. Although most literature on digital inequality and the digital divide focuses on adolescents and young adults, some indicators used in related field research can be easily adapted to the journalism professionals.

<sup>45</sup> As defined by Hargittai, E., & Hinnant, A. (2008). Digital inequality: Differences in young adults' use of the Internet. *Communication Research*, 35(5), 602–621

For each of the three dimensions, at least four indicators were considered referring to the journalistic activity<sup>46</sup>.



**FIGURE 2.8**  
The level of  
digital skills  
among Italian  
journalists

(data in %)

As shown by Figure 2.8, 18% of Italian journalists have a low level of digital skills, while only 19% have a medium-high or high level (achieved by only 1% of information professionals). In any case, more than one third of journalists (35%) have a medium level of digital skills. However, almost half of the journalistic population (46%) is below that level.

From an analysis of the correlation of digital skills with variables such as age, education, and work domain (Figure 2.9), it is evident that professionals over 55 particularly have a level of digital skills that is significantly lower than the average of journalists, whereas journalists who work for newspapers (as well as for native online news outlets) have a higher degree of digital skills on average. Finally, the average level of digital skills of journalists tends to increase only slightly, although being directly proportional to their level of education.



**18%**

Italian journalists  
with a

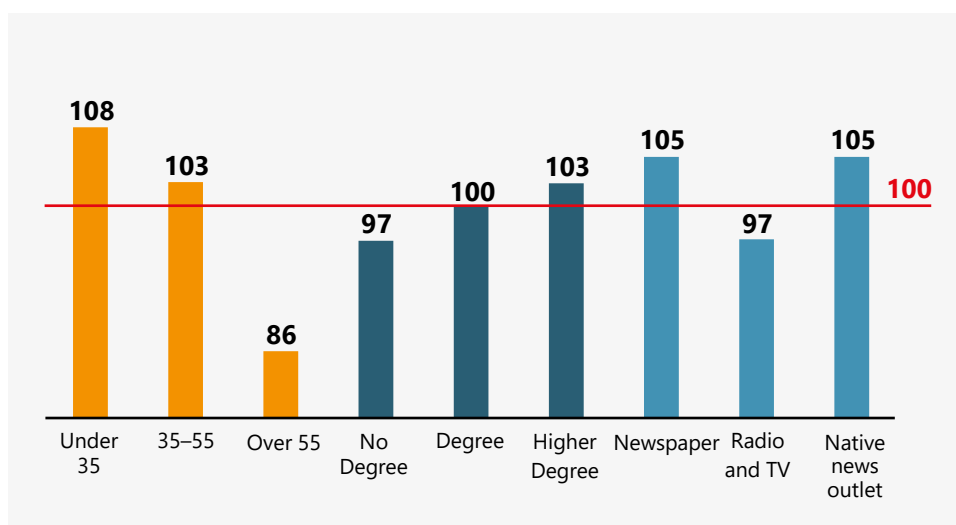
**low level**

of DIGITAL  
SKILLS

<sup>46</sup> This digital skills index in particular is an additive index, with twelve characteristics/indicators for which as many dichotomous/dummy variables were calculated (where not present), relating to the use for journalistic work purposes of (i) desktop computer, (ii) laptop, (iii) smartphone, (iv) tablet (size of equipment), (v) use of online sources, (vi) daily use of search engines and (vii) at least one social network (or blog) for journalistic purposes, (viii) having an account on at least two social networks (extent of use), the use of (ix) open data and (x) fact-checking sites as journalistic sources, and the use of social media to (xi) retrieve information and (xii) stay in contact with their audience (quality of use). Journalists who achieved a score from 0 to 4 were classified in the low level of digital skills, from 5 to 6 in the medium-low level, from 7 to 8 in the medium level, from 9 to 10 in the medium-high level, from 11 to 12 in the high level.

**FIGURE 2.9**  
Digital skills by  
age, education,  
and work domain

(data in %)

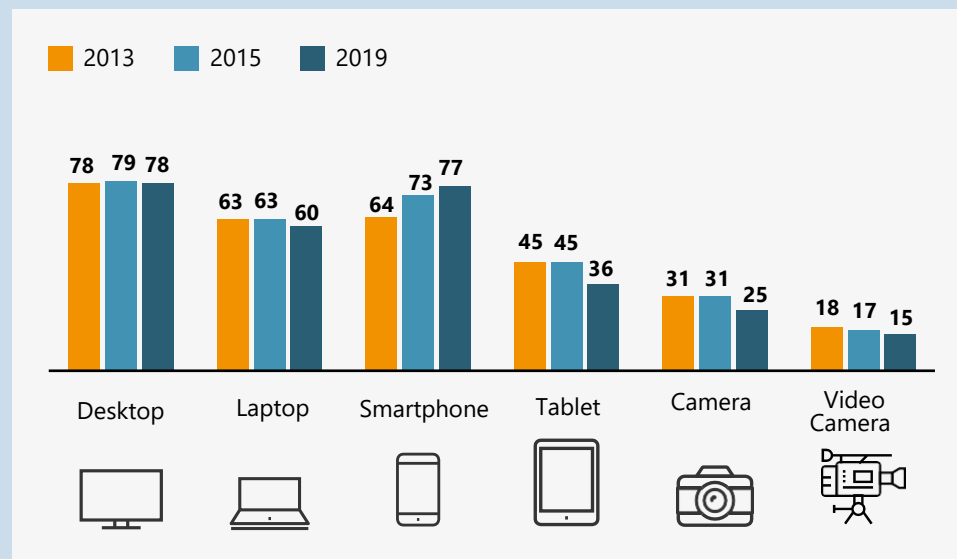


Note: the index has values over 100 if the average level of digital skills is higher than the average level of all journalists (equal to 6.59); below 100 if the average level of digital skills is lower than the above-mentioned average level.

In summary, the overview of Italian journalism shows that, despite being in possession of technological devices (since almost all journalists use laptops or desktop computers and more than three-quarters use their smartphones, see next Figure), journalists cannot always use these tools in a broad and appropriate manner to seize the opportunities that the digital environment offers to information professionals.

### Mobile journalism: the rise of smartphones among journalists

By analysing the possession of technological devices used for journalistic activities (Figure 2.10)—an aspect on which AGCOM can easily retrace a historical series by comparing the data of previous editions—the latest edition proves to the strong rise of smartphones, a tool that is now essential for journalistic activities and used by 77% of journalists (a percentage similar to that of the desktop computers). Smartphones are the symbol of merging productivity thanks to their ability to integrate text editing, images (photos and videos), Internet connection (and therefore to online platforms such as social networks, search engines), and instant messaging systems (WhatsApp, Telegram, etc.). The increase in the use of smartphones among journalists obviously occurs at the expense of cameras and video cameras, and above all tablets, whose advantages in terms of handling and portability are disappearing since smaller smartphones enable journalists to carry out all their professional activities<sup>47</sup>.



**FIGURE 2.10**

Tools used for  
journalistic  
activities

(data in %)

<sup>47</sup> See Westlund, O., & Quinn, S. (2018). Mobile journalism and MoJos. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*.

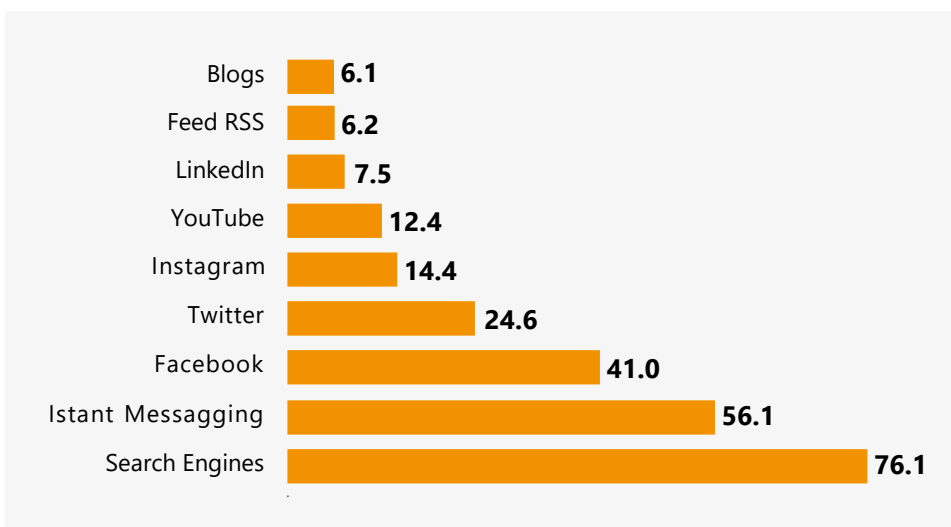
## 2.3 DIGITAL TOOLS

When investigating the relationship between journalists and new tools and online services in a broader way, we can retrace through specific questions in the survey not only their use, but also their related purposes. With this information, AGCOM could elaborate some considerations about the impact of these tools on professional practices and values, thus deepening the main aspects connected to the digital skills of journalists.

First of all, in line with what had already been noted in the previous edition, among all the online tools, Italian journalists mainly use on a daily basis (Figure 2.11) search engines (76%), instant messaging systems and services (56%, only item with a sustained increase compared to the previous edition), and Facebook (41%). Twitter is decreasing compared to the previous survey (25 vs 30%), whereas the use of other social networks for journalistic purposes is not clear yet (for instance, only 14% stated that they use Instagram daily for reasons related to their work activity). At the bottom of the ranking of the online tools most used by journalists are RSS feeds and blogs, used only by 6% of journalists<sup>48</sup>.

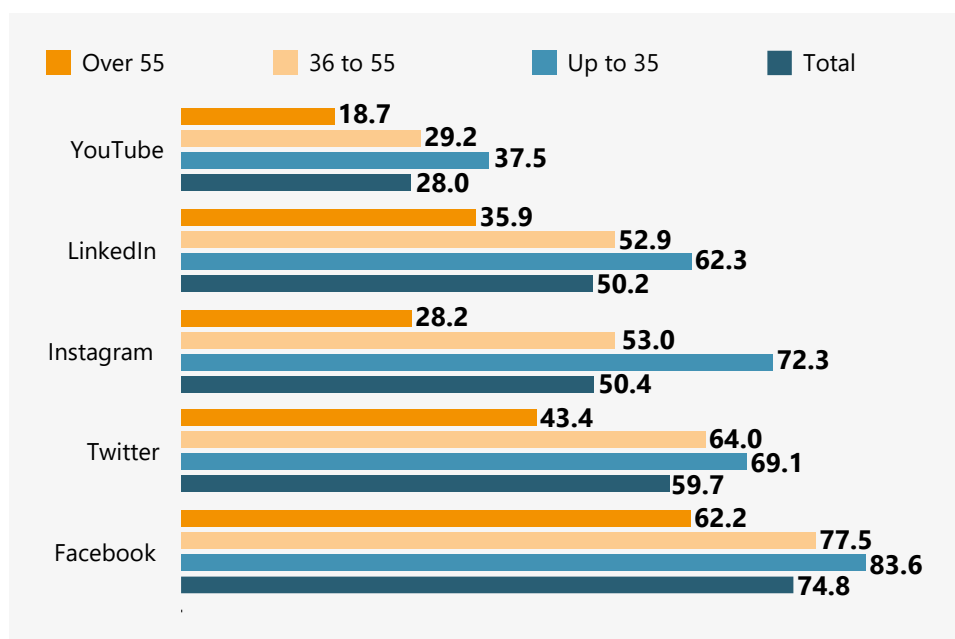
**FIGURE 2.11**  
Daily use of  
online  
tools

(data in %)



As for social media, strong differences emerge both in the creation of accounts (Figure 2.12) and in their use for work purposes (Figure 2.13) between the three main age groups, thus reflecting an important generation gap use of these tools.

<sup>48</sup> According to the previous survey, 14% of Italian journalists used blogs daily for work purposes. However, by looking at the use of online tools at least once a week, 28% of journalists declare that they use blogs for work purposes, a higher percentage than those who use LinkedIn, the most "niche" social network (24.7%), and RSS feeds (17.3%).

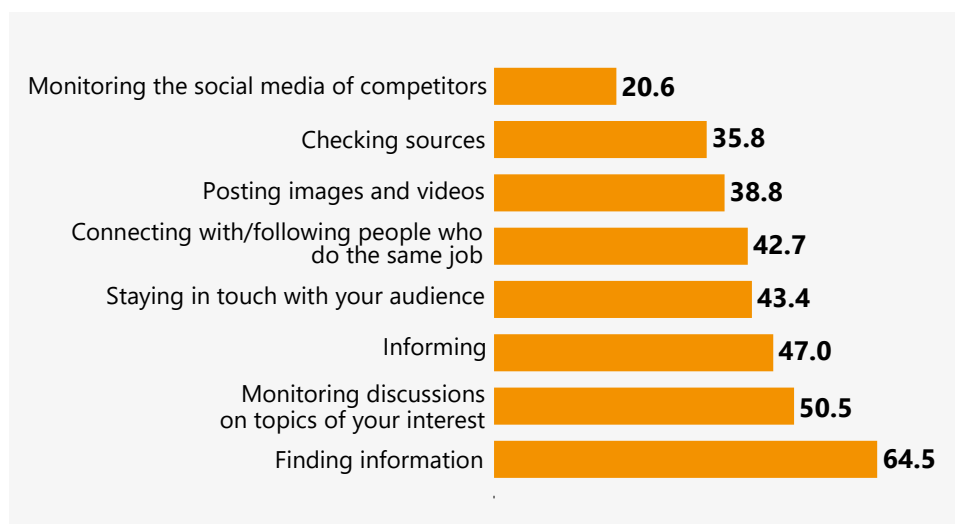


**FIGURE 2.12**  
Holding an account on the main social networks

(data in %)

On a general level, while Facebook clearly appears as the social network where most journalists have a personal profile (or page) (75%), more than half of journalists also activated an account on Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. The differences between the age groups are more evident for Instagram, less so for Facebook and Twitter, which, however, is used by less than half of journalists over 55. In that group, characterised by a lower level of digital skills (see Paragraph 3.2), almost a third of journalists have a Facebook account, but just over a quarter have their own Instagram profile.

On the other hand, the most common declared use in Italy continues to be that of obtaining information (64.5%), followed by monitoring online discussions (50.5%). However, in the ranking of the purposes of use, activities that most take advantage of social sharing tools are increasing, including "Staying in touch with your audience" (43.4%) and "Connecting with/following people who do the same job and/or deal with your own topics" (42.7%).

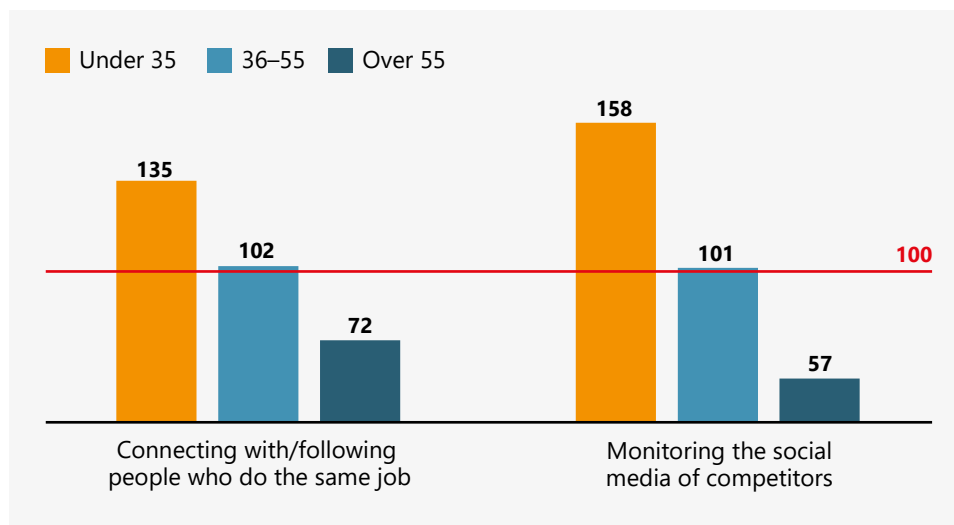


**FIGURE 2.13**  
Main purposes of use of social media in journalism

(data in %)

In particular, the differences between the two groups and the totality of the population are more evident for Instagram and YouTube, both characterised by audiovisual communication, and not by written words. This also happens for the purposes of use linked to activities with a high degree of interaction, such as "Monitoring the social media of competitors", which also requires some web analytics skills<sup>49</sup>, and "Connecting with/following people who do the same job". It is therefore legitimate to say that, among younger journalists, participatory practices centred on greater contact with the audience are strongly emerging (Figure 2.14).

**FIGURE 2.14**  
Use of social  
media in  
journalism by  
age group  
(data in %)



Note: the index has a value over 100 if the percentage of journalists who use social media for each of the above considered purposes is higher than the average percentage of all journalists; below 100 if the percentage of journalists who use social media for each of the considered purposes is lower than the average percentage of all journalists

The first analyses on the use of Twitter by Italian journalists showed a greater interest in the development of meta-journalistic narratives<sup>50</sup> and in their own visibility and reputation. The most recent research in the field shows how journalists are increasingly committed to dealing with the specific characteristics (affordances<sup>51</sup>) of social media, in particular by seeking new ways to reach the audience<sup>52</sup>.

49 Some studies showed that, although the information obtained from web analytics systems is perceived as conflicting with professional standards relating to news selection criteria, journalists tend to use them to decide whether to continue to cover topics covered by articles previously published online (see Welbers, K., Van Atteveldt, W., Kleinnijenhuis, J., Ruigrok, N., & Schaper, J. (2016). News selection criteria in the digital age: Professional norms versus online audience metrics. *Journalism*, 17(8), 1037–1053).

50 Splendore, S., Caliendo, A., & Airoidi, M. (2016). Twittare le news: giornalisti hard e testate soft. Uno studio di caso di tre redazioni. *Comunicazione politica*, 1, 87–106.

51 Boyd, D. (2011). *Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications*. In Papachrissi Z. (ed.), *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*. New York: Routledge, 47–66.

52 See Broersma, M., Eldridge, I. I., & Scott, A. (2019). Journalism and Social Media: Redistribution of Power? *Media and Communication*, 7(1), 193–197.



As journalists come across social media logic<sup>53</sup>, despite a persistent discomfort with online platforms<sup>54</sup>, a hybrid normalisation is actually being configured between the needs of the participatory culture typical of social networks (and therefore audience engagement) and traditional norms and practices of the journalistic profession<sup>55</sup>.

AGCOM's survey shows a significant differentiation in the purposes of using social media not only among journalists of different age groups, but also among journalists who work for different news outlets (Figure 2.15). Taking into consideration the diffusion of typical audience engagement practices among professionals who work for newspapers, TV, and native online news outlets, it is evident that the last ones are much more likely to find opportunities for dialogue with the audience or for proactive use of social media for their work, therefore reflecting the redefinition of professional practices and norms carried out by journalists working for this new type of publishing<sup>56</sup>.

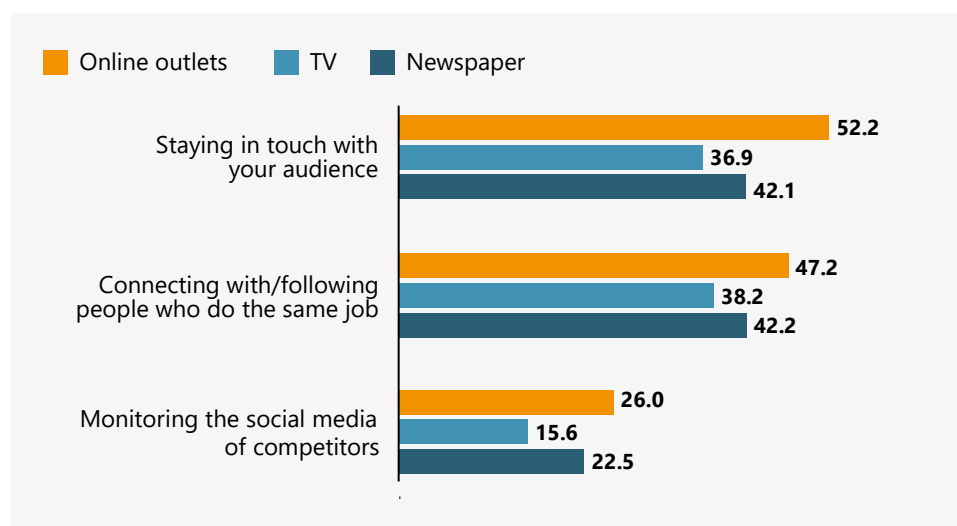


FIGURE 2.15

Purpose of use of social media by type of publishing

(data in %)

53 On the differences between social networks and *media logic* see Klinger, U., & Svensson, J. (2015). The emergence of network media logic in political communication: a theoretical approach. *New media & society*, 17(8), 1241–1257.

54 See Bruns, A., & Nuernbergk, C. (2019). Political journalists and their social media audiences: New power relations. *Media and Communication*, 7(1), 198–212.

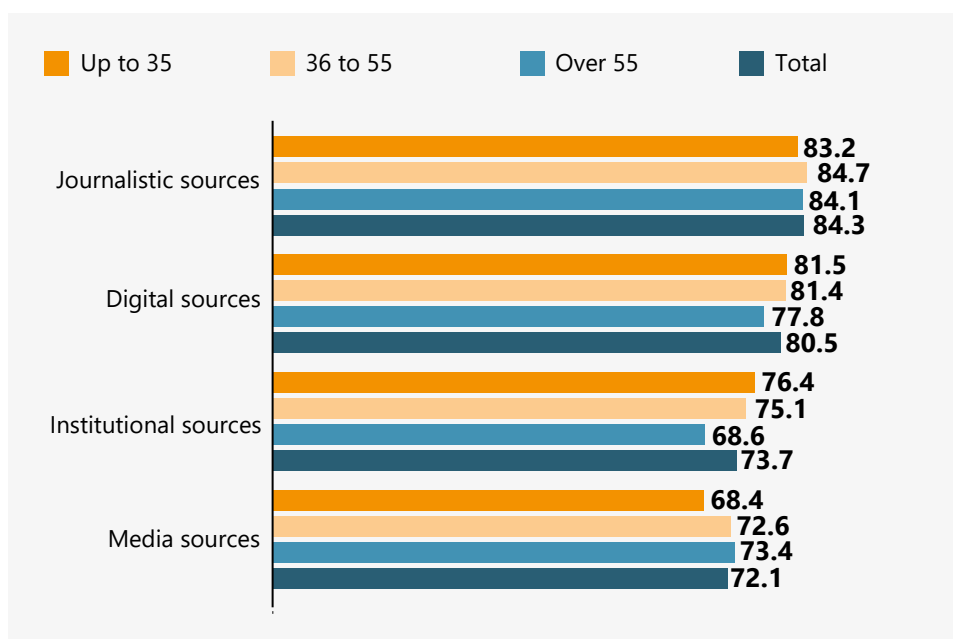
55 Bentivegna and Marchetti highlight a simultaneous adhesion of Italian journalists who are on Twitter to the typical rules of the participatory web (for instance, in terms of dialogue with citizens) and to the traditional journalistic practices taken into consideration in their empirical research (transparency of sources and gatekeeping function), in a context characterised by a high degree of self-referentiality and professional parallelism (Bentivegna, S., & Marchetti, R., 2018). Journalists at a crossroads: Are traditional norms and practices challenged by Twitter? *Journalism*, 19(2), 270–290). At an international level see, among others, Bruns, A. (2018). *Gatewatching and news curation: Journalism, social media, and the public sphere*. New York: Peter Lang.

56 The low reputation among the public of Italian native online news outlets (see AGCOM Report on the consumption of information, *op. cit.*) in any case shows a poor connection between audience engagement practices carried out by journalists through social media and a positive perception of their professional dimension among citizens, also highlighted by some experimental studies conducted in the United States on young adults (Lee, J., 2015). The double-edged sword: The effects of journalists' social media activities on audience perceptions of journalists and their news products. *Journal of Computing-Mediated Communication*, 20(3), 312–329).

## 2.4 SOURCES, ACTIVITIES, AND TOPICS

In journalism, the use of sources has always been one of the most sensitive and studied areas<sup>57</sup>, in which the impact of online or user-generated content, tools, and resources has been increasingly investigated<sup>58</sup>. A first overview on the universe of Italian journalists (Figure 2.16) shows that, across all age groups and in line with what was found in the previous edition of the Observatory on Journalism, traditional journalistic sources (direct and internal sources) come first, followed by a wide range of digital sources (including social networks, blogs, online encyclopaedias, native online news outlets, and innovative tools such as open data and fact-checking sites<sup>59</sup>).

**FIGURE 2.16**  
Main  
categories of  
sources used  
for journalistic  
activities by  
age group  
(data in %)



57 See Carlson, M. (2009). Dueling, dancing, or dominating? Journalists and their sources. *Sociology Compass*, 3(4), 526–542. Among the classics of *journalism studies* that deal with the topic of sources, see: Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making news: A study in the construction of reality*. New York: Free Press; Gans, H. J. (1979). *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBS Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. Pantheon Books.

58 See Kleemans, M., Schaap, G., & Hermans, L. (2017). Citizen sources in the news: Above and beyond the vox pop? *Journalism*, 18(4), 464–481.


59 With regards to fact-checking, AGCOM adopted, within the specific working group of the [Technical Committee on Pluralism and Online Platforms](#), the definition formulated by the [International Fact-Checking Network](#): "non-partisan reports on the accuracy of statements by public figures, major institutions, and other widely circulated claims of interest to society". The reference to fact-checking among the tools to tackle online disinformation is particularly present in the [Report on Online disinformation strategies and the fake content supply chain](#), in the [Guidelines for equal access to online platforms during the electoral campaign for political elections in 2018](#), and in the [Commitments undertaken by the companies operating on online platforms to ensure equal access of political subjects to digital platforms during the electoral campaign for the elections of the members of the European Parliament in Italy in 2019](#).

Although the literature on journalistic sources shows that Italian journalists usually limit themselves to a single source for each of their articles or reports, and that this source is often political-institutional<sup>60</sup>, AGCOM's survey shows a more complex scenario, in which journalists resort to various types of sources, and in which institutional press releases are only part of a larger patchwork of sources (see Chapter 3).

Indeed, going into the details of the individual sources, 76% of journalists use direct personal sources, compared to 68% who use institutional/corporate press releases, and 57% who resort to press agencies. Overall, social networks are used by 48% of Italian journalists (Facebook in particular by 26% of them), while search engines serve as sources for 40% of information professionals, testifying the use of different digital sources by individual professionals (given that an overall 79% of journalists use at least one source of this type). However, in this context, the use of the most innovative sources (such as open data and fact-checking sites/articles) is very limited. Through them journalists could exploit the full potential of the digital ecosystem, but they are taken into consideration by less than one tenth of Italian journalists (8.2% open data and 7.8% fact-checking). The scarce use of innovative digital sources clearly finds an evident counterpart in the low preference of Italian journalists for typical and specific digital activities.

Beyond the digital sphere, only two out of ten professionals use sources from non-governmental organizations and associations, known in the literature as non-elite sources as opposed to classic institutional sources<sup>61</sup>. The use of scientific sources (scientific databases, specialist publications, etc.) is almost non-existent instead, used by only 0.5% of Italian journalist — a sign of low interest and lack of specific competence on the subject (see Paragraph 4.2).


Furthermore, as Chapter 5 will highlight, the current health emergency has considerably changed the use of sources by journalists (and citizens), for instance by relaunching access to scientific and institutional sources.



**76%**  
journalists  
using  
**sources**  
that are **DIRECT**  
and **PERSONAL**

<sup>60</sup> A comparative study showed that most of the Italian news articles/reports, in particular the ones for television, do not present a comparison between points of view from multiple sources, in a way that is clearly broader than other Western nations being studied (see Tiffen, R., Jones, P. K., Rowe, D., Aalberg, T., Coen, S., Curran, J., Hayashi K., Iyengar, S., Mazzoleni G., Papathanassopoulos S., Rojas, H. & Soroka, S. (2014). Sources in the news: A comparative study. *Journalism Studies*, 15(4), 374–391). On the other hand, a high use of political-institutional sources (Cornia, A., 2014). *Will Italian political journalism ever change?* In Kuhn, R. and Nielsen, R.K. (eds). *Political Journalism in Transition: Western Europe in a Comparative Perspective*. London, Tauris, 47–73) is an expression of a political “background” journalism typical of the Euro-Mediterranean or pluralist-polarised model (Hallin, D.C. and Mancini, P., *Modelli di giornalismo*, op. cit.).

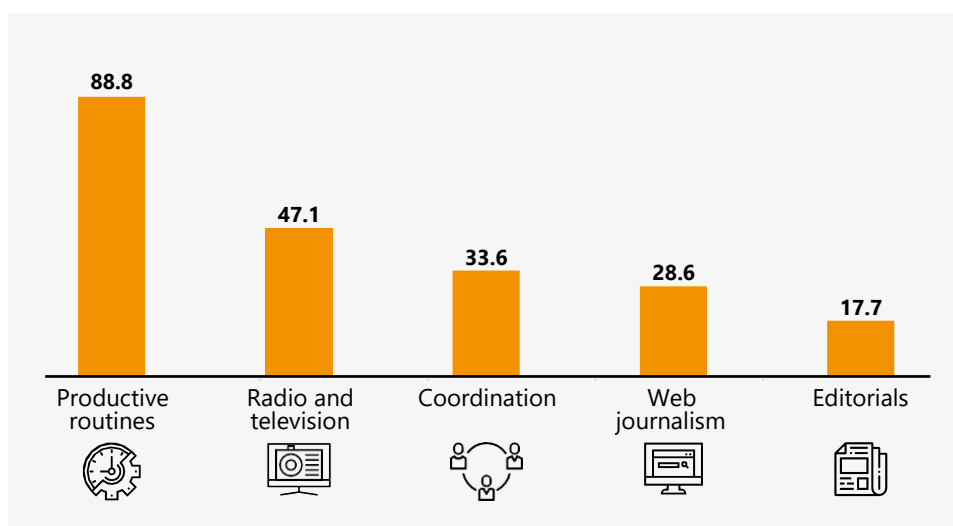
<sup>61</sup> The growing importance of these sources in Italian local journalism has been investigated by Splendore, S. (2017). The dominance of institutional sources and the establishment of non-elite ones: the case of Italian online local journalism. *Journalism*. See also Delmastro M., Splendore S., (2020), Google, Facebook and what else? Measuring the hybridity of Italian journalists by their use of sources. *European Journal of Communication*.

  
**28.6%**  
journalists  
carrying out  
activities related to  
**web**  
JOURNALISM

Looking at the analysis of the broad perimeter of the activities carried out by journalists within their profession, AGCOM referred (as for the previous editions of the Observatory on Journalism) to the activities mentioned by the international classification of professions (ISCO-08) concerning journalists<sup>62</sup>, in addition to some activities specifically connected to radio and television media or the most innovative profiles identified with the support of the most representative associations of the profession (see Introduction).

From the analysis of the answers provided (Figure 2.17), the activities regularly carried out by journalists are in most cases referable to the production routines identified by the international classification of professions: 88.8% of Italian journalists carries out at least one of these activities<sup>63</sup>. Other more specific activities, such as those related to the radio and television sector (television and radio commentary, radio and television broadcasting, photos and videos, production of audiovisual services, authoring) are carried out by 47.1% of journalists. The share of journalists who declared that they carry out activities typically connected to web journalism or the use of the internet and digital tools in general, such as infographics and data journalism, web analytics activities, the aggregation of news and the creation of snippets, social media management and writing for the web (generic web content and blogging activities) is more limited: only 28% of journalists actually carry out at least one regularly. Finally, 33.6% of journalists carry out coordination activities involving several people, and 17.7% deal with the drafting of editorials.

**FIGURE 2.17**  
The main  
activities carried  
out by Italian  
journalists  
(data in %)



<sup>62</sup> See ISCO – International Standard Classification of Occupations, <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco08/index.htm>

<sup>63</sup> These include activities such as collecting news on-site; creating news from traditional news agencies, radio and television news agencies, or web agencies; writing articles; editing/titles/layout; interviews; investigations/insights/reports.

Finally, with specific regard to the issues addressed by journalists (Figure 2.18), local and national news; local, national, and foreign politics; art and culture; and social issues (including education and health) are the four main macro-categories, dealt with by at least one third of professionals. Less covered are specialised topics such as economy and finance (less than one quarter of journalists) and science and technology (less than one fifth), which are dealt with by more or less the same amount of journalists working on *soft* issues such as entertainment and gossip or cooking, home, fashion, and travel.

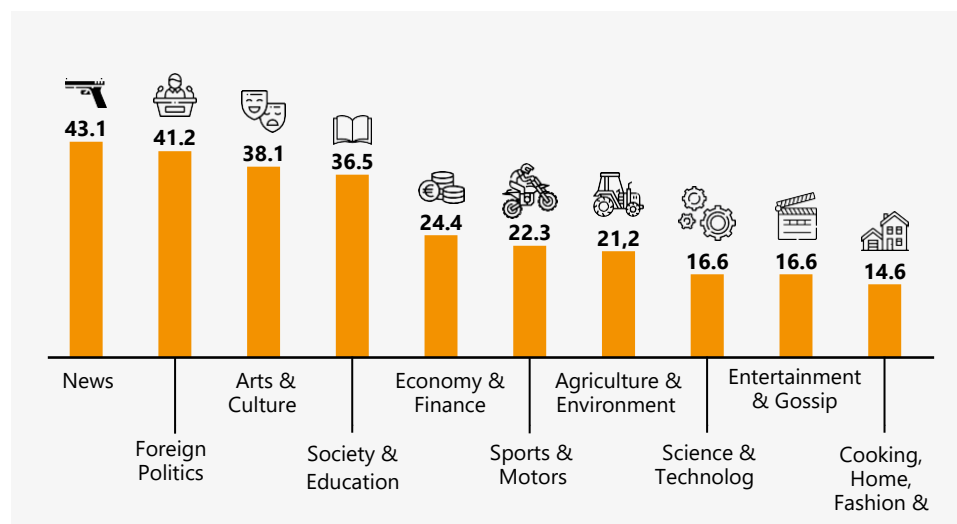


FIGURE 2.18

Issues  
covered  
by journalists

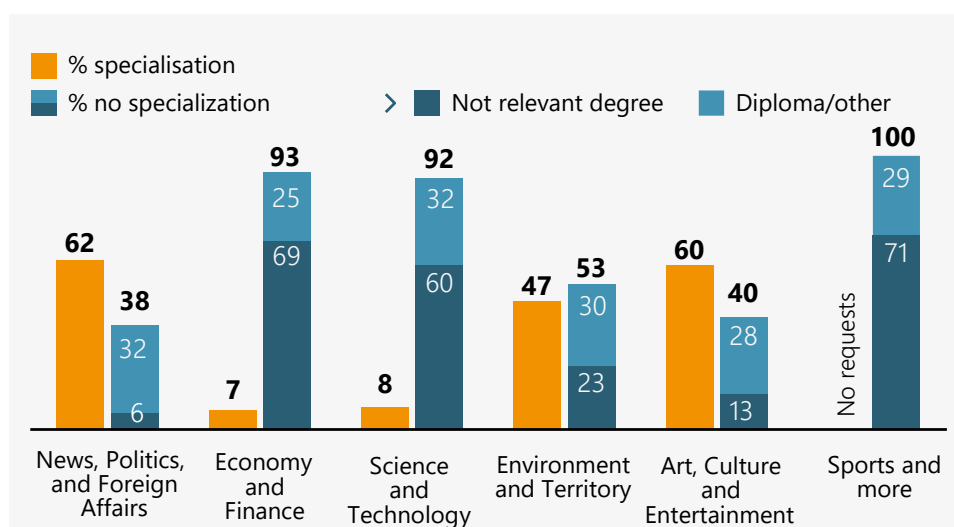
(data in %)

By analysing as in the previous editions, the specialist skills of journalists dealing with the various topics<sup>64</sup>, first of all the share of journalists with lower credentials (the diploma in blue in Figure 2.19) is rather homogeneous among the main categories identified above (around 30%), including sports.

<sup>64</sup> The attribution of the titles to the topics was the following: News, National Politics, and Foreign Affairs require a specialization with degrees in the areas of history, philosophy, pedagogy, and psychology, political, social, and communication sciences, antiquities, philology and literature, history and art, and law. The topics of Economy and Finance require a specialization with degrees in the area of economics and statistics. For the topics of Science and Technology, the areas of engineering-architecture, natural sciences, and mathematical and computer sciences are referred to. For Environment and Territory, degrees in engineering and architecture, or in the areas of medicine, agriculture, veterinary medicine, history, philosophy, pedagogy and psychology, political, social and communication sciences, antiquities, philology and literature, history and art are all relevant. For Art, Culture, and Entertainment, the link is with degrees in academies and conservatories, in the areas of history, philosophy, pedagogy and psychology, political, social and communication sciences, antiquities, philology and literature, and history and art. Finally, for Sports and Other, given the wide range of topics, there is no particular connection with any specific educational background.

**FIGURE 2.19**  
**Connection**  
**between the**  
**educational**  
**background**  
**and the main**  
**topic covered**  
**by the journalist**

(data in %)



At the same time, journalists who deal with specialised topics, such as science and technology, and economy and finance, are those who obtained a degree not relevant to the topics they cover (respectively 92% and 93%). On the contrary, news, politics, and foreign affairs (the so-called hard news) and art, culture, and entertainment are the two macro-categories in which there is greater relevance to the degree obtained (respectively 62% and 60%)<sup>65</sup>. The macro-category Environment and Territory is in an intermediate position (which requires cross-sectoral skills between humanistic, social, technical, and scientific degrees), for which just under half of the journalists dealing with them (47%) hold adequate educational credentials.



**25.3%**

**JOURNALISTS**  
**WORKING FOR**  
**ONLINE-ONLY**  
**NEWS OUTLETS**

## 2.5 WORK ORGANISATION

Working for a magazine or newspaper (in the printed and/or online version) remains the most frequent activity for Italian journalists (respectively, for 31.1% and 27.7% of journalists<sup>66</sup>), even if journalists who work for online-only news outlets are always closer (25.3%), as they are increasingly widespread in the publishing industry, and those who work for television (24.8%), an additional sign of greater stability of the TV in the information landscape of recent years<sup>67</sup>. Other less-specialised media follow at a great distance (for instance, radio channels, where 12.9% of journalists work), as well as services/suppliers of journalistic products and news agencies, where approximately 8 and 5% of journalists respectively work<sup>68</sup>.

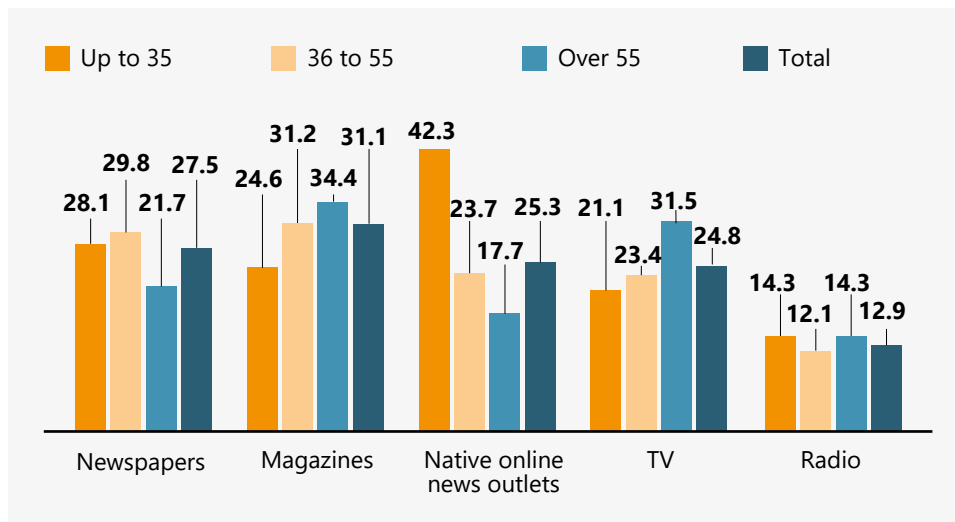
<sup>65</sup> As already highlighted in the previous edition, the higher percentage of journalists with a degree belonging to humanistic (philosophy, history, literature, languages) and social (political sciences, sociology, communication sciences) areas, compared to technical and statistical-economic degrees (see Figure 2.5) affects this evidence.

<sup>66</sup> As already mentioned in the Introduction, this chapter only refers to journalists who declared that they work for newspapers, and not to the so-called "communicators" (see Chapter 4).

<sup>67</sup> See *Focus Bilanci*, *op. cit.*, on the main economic indicators, as well as the *Report on the consumption of information* and the *Sector inquiry on local information* with regards to the primacy of television for the consumption of information, including local and political-electoral information.

<sup>68</sup> For the sake of completeness, out of the total number of active journalists taken into consideration, including the so-called communicators, the percentage of journalists who work for magazines is 26.8%, 23.7% for newspapers, 21.8% for native online news outlets, 21.4% for television channels, 11.1% for radio channels, 6.7% for publishing services, 4.5% for news agencies.

As shown in Figure 2.20, significant generational differences emerge especially for online news outlets, where over 40% of the under 35 journalists work, and, to a lesser extent, but in the opposite sense, for magazines and above all television channels, where 30% of journalists over 55 work.



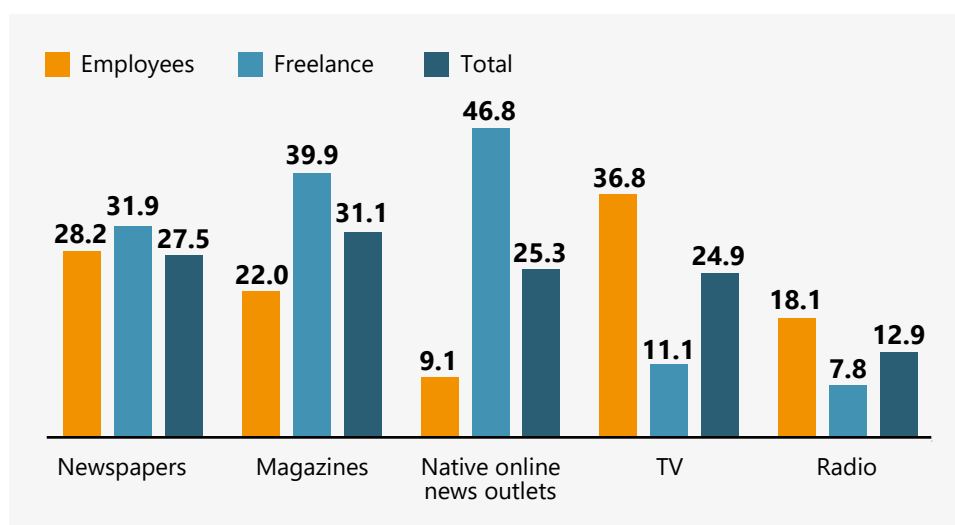
**FIGURE 2.20**

**Distribution of journalists by media by age group**

(data in %)

Moving the analysis to the type of collaboration by media, it is evident that many employed journalists work in television and radio channels, but also for newspapers. Conversely, freelance journalists mainly carry out their profession in magazines, online news outlets, and in services/suppliers of journalistic products (Figure 2.21).

In particular, almost half of freelance journalists work for new news outlets, such as online-only ones, where there are mostly younger professionals. In light of the strong link between forms of collaboration of self-employed workers and low income in the journalistic category (see Paragraph 3.1), the important presence of temporary workers in online news outlets is likely to adversely affect the quality of the news content and reputation of the new outlets among citizens (see Chapter 4).



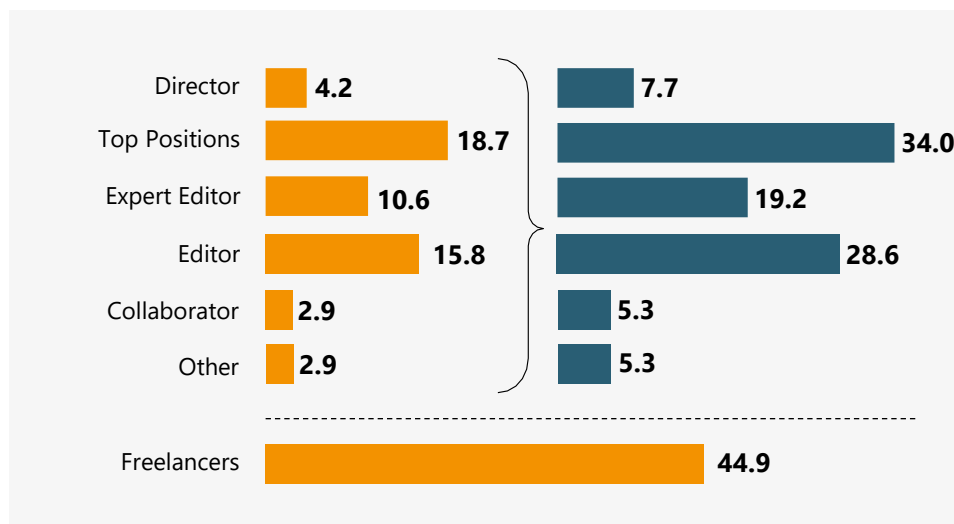
**FIGURE 2.21**

**Distribution of journalists by media and working condition**

(data in %)

An analysis of the organization of work shows that the majority of professionals are in a medium-high position in the pyramid of the organizational framework (half of the employed journalists are employed as chief editors, correspondents or expert editors), compared to a rather low percentage of collaborators, correspondents and interns, evidently replaced by professionals who collaborate with the publishing with independent or para-subordinate (freelance) work relationships, representing about 45% of journalists (Figure 2.22).

**FIGURE 2.22**  
**Pyramid**  
**of the**  
**organizational**  
**framework of**  
**journalists**  
  
(data in %)

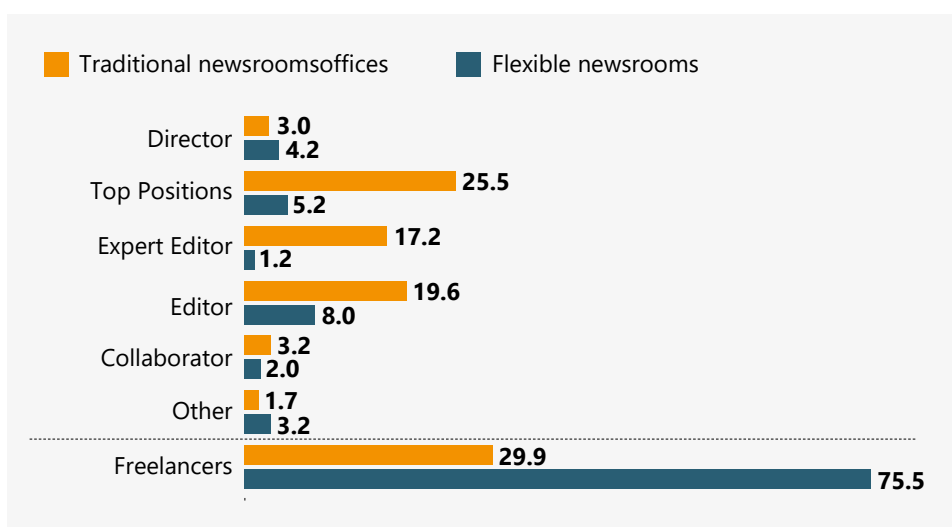


Note: the "top positions" category includes employed journalists hired as deputy director, chief editor/coordinator, deputy chief editor, head of services/senior editor. The "expert editor" category includes correspondents, deputy chiefs of services, expert editors, radio/TV journalists with over 24 months of experience, editorial coordinators, editorial deputy coordinators. In the "editor" category, there are radio/TV journalists with less than 24 months of experience and editors (FIEG-FNSI; former USPI contributors). Editorial collaborators, permanent collaborators, and correspondents are included into the "collaborator" category; finally, under "other" there are interns and journalists employed with other types of contracts.

Clearly, this distribution of journalists in the pyramid of the organizational framework is extremely different according to the type of news outlet taken into consideration. Previous studies carried out by AGCOM<sup>69</sup> distinguish traditional (radio, TV, newspapers) and flexible (online news outlets, news agencies, services/suppliers of journalistic products) publishing. In the first case, considering a share of freelancers lower than one third (30%), about 45% of journalists are employed in medium-high positions, according to a precise hierarchy with few leading journalists and many professionals in an intermediate position. In the second case, due to more streamlined editorial structures, freelancers (75%) and, among employees, simple editors are the majority (Figure 2.23).

<sup>69</sup> See in particular the *"Informazione e Internet in Italia" sector inquiry*, which analysed the composition and evolution of professional figures in the editorial offices of newspapers, TV and radio broadcasters (Paragraphs 3.4, 3.5, 3.6), therefore showing their greater degree of organizational structuring. On the contrary, the *Observatory on Online Publishing* highlighted a lean and limited organizational structure for this type of publishing, which, although with various sizes and natures of the companies (in particular with amateur and commercial editors), are commonly centred on the figure of the founder-journalist and on a small number of journalists—not always employees.





**FIGURE 2.23**

**Pyramid of the  
organizational  
framework of  
journalists  
by type of  
publishing**

(data in %)

Note: the "traditional editorial offices" category includes radio, TV, and newspapers, while the "flexible editorial offices" category includes native online news outlets, news/information agencies, services/suppliers of journalistic products

It is therefore evident that freelancers, working mainly for less structured newsrooms and smaller publishing realities, do not have the means and tools to be able to carry out their professional activity in a complete manner, with evident repercussions on their output: short and less in-depth articles, fewer inquiries, reports, and analyses expensive in time and resources.

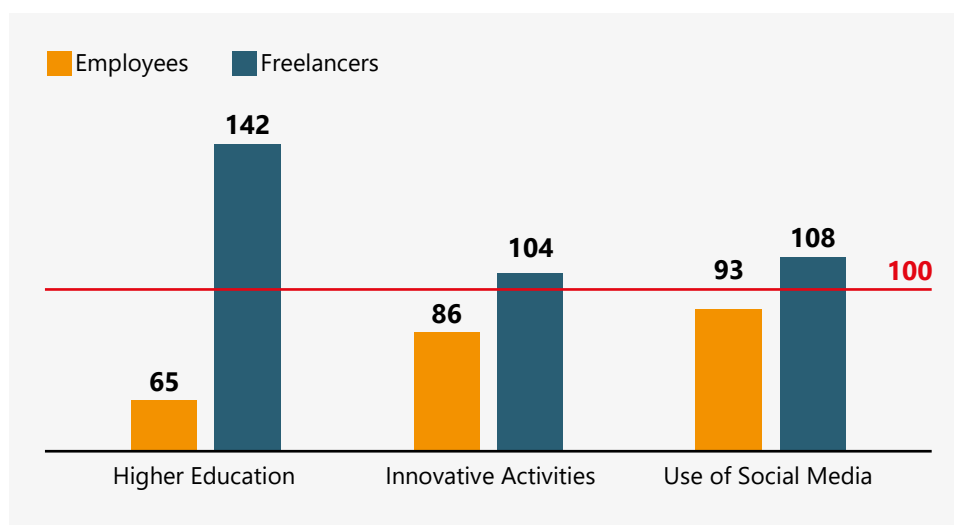
In this specific case, this is a lost opportunity for the evolution of the Italian journalistic profession, given that, thanks to the information in AGCOM's possession, it was possible to highlight how, compared to employees, freelance journalists on average not only have higher education, but are also more active, from a professional point of view, on social networks and carry out more innovative activities (see Figure 2.24).



**75%**

**FREELANCE  
JOURNALISTS  
WORKING IN  
FLEXIBLE  
NEWSROOMS**

**FIGURE 2.24**  
**Employed**  
**journalists**  
**vs freelancers:**  
**a comparison**  
**on three**  
**indicators**  
(data in %)



Note: reference is made to the possession of the PhD title, the highest in the Italian university system, for the "Higher Education" indicator; to activities such as infographics and *data visualization*, *data journalism*, and *web analytics* as far as it concerns the "Innovative Activities" indicator; to the use of social media in journalistic activity to inform and post comments regarding the "Use of Social Media" indicator. Each indicator has a value over 100 if the percentage of employed or freelance journalists who present the characteristics found in the single indicator is higher than the average value of all journalists; below 100 if the percentage of employed or freelance journalists who present the characteristics detected in the single indicator is lower than the average value of all journalists.

In the absence of interventions and corrective measures to protect their incomes, the innovative dynamics that freelance journalists can bring to the journalistic profession risk of being channelled into personal and working careers distant from traditional journalism (see next chapter).

## To summarise:

The overall analysis of the professional condition of Italian journalists shows that:

- Employed journalists (who still represent more than half of the total) have on average a gross annual income considerably higher than freelancers (whose percentage share of the total number of journalists is increasing). However, freelancers show greater innovation in their activities and professional attitudes.
- The journalistic profession is characterised by an anomalous income distribution compared to the rest of the Italian population (and more polarised among the higher and lower income brackets), especially to the detriment of younger workers.
- Journalists are on average more educated and more competent in foreign languages than the total of Italian workers.
- Digital skills are not developed enough among a large portion of Italian journalists, especially in the over 65 age group, with an important share of the journalistic population at a medium-low level.
- Journalists who are younger and employed in online news outlets tend to use more social media for activities related to audience engagement.
- Italian journalists (regardless of their age) tend to use more sources, but are less interested in innovative sources (e.g., open data and fact-checking).
- News, politics and foreign affairs are the most dealt with topic categories, for which the level of specialist knowledge of journalists is higher. Vice versa, specialist topics (science and technology, economy and finance) are on average covered by journalists with a lower level of technical expertise.
- Younger and freelance journalists are the most employed professionals by online-only news outlets and other less structured realities (press/information agencies and services/suppliers of journalistic products). By contrast, most employed and older journalists work in traditional news outlets such as radio, TV, and newspapers. The two types of newsrooms also differ in terms of work organization dynamics and contractual classification of journalists.

3

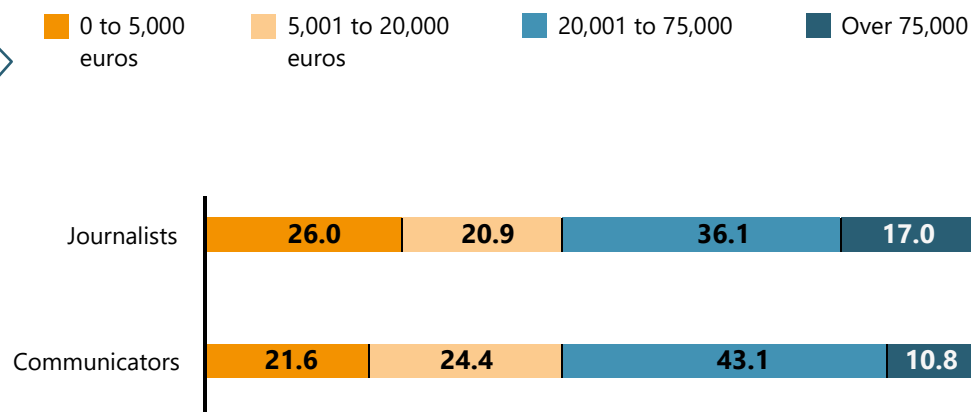
# The Universe of **COMMUNICATORS**

# The Universe of COMMUNICATORS

## DISTRIBUTION OF JOURNALISTS AND COMMUNICATORS BY INCOME BRACKETS

(data in %)

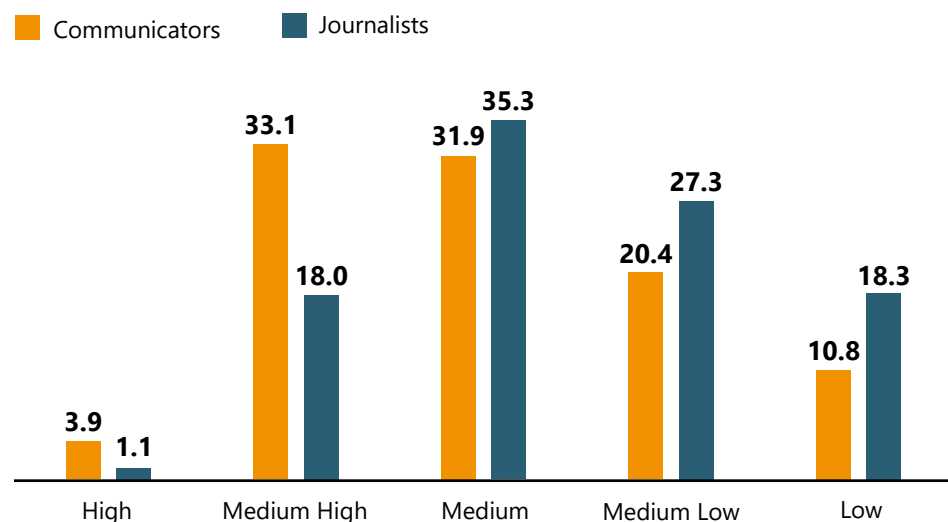
Communicators present a distribution by income brackets less unbalanced than journalists



## LEVEL OF DIGITAL SKILLS AMONG JOURNALISTS AND COMMUNICATORS

(data in %)

Communicators generally have a higher level of digital skills than journalists



## MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS FOR THE SUCCESS OF COMMUNICATION/PRESS OFFICE ACTIVITIES ACCORDING TO COMMUNICATORS

(data in %)

**Direct contacts in newsrooms** are the most important factor for success of communication/press office activities



As mentioned in the Introduction, the survey of the Observatory on Journalism was conceived with two distinct paths for journalists who work for the publishing (hereinafter: journalists), the subject of the analysis of the previous chapter, and journalists who work as communicators. This was necessary in the light of the deep mutation of the journalistic profession, i.e., the emergence of new areas that require the exercise of journalistic activities and new professional sectors that increasingly hybridise with journalism, in a process that leads inexorably scholars and professionals in the sector to openly speak about "journalisms" which overlap and intertwine with the classic job of journalists. In particular, those who work for communication agencies/web agencies and press/communication offices of public entities, associations, and companies were included in the broad category of "communicators".

In particular, the conditions and contractual forms under which communicators operate (Paragraph 3.1), training and related digital skills (Paragraph 3.2) and the main activities carried out, in particular in relations with news outlets (Paragraph 3.3) will be analysed in this chapter, in parallel with what was represented in the previous chapter for journalists.

Along the lines of the previous chapter, all these aspects will be covered with particular attention, on the one hand, to the differences between the various age groups, on the other hand, to the differences between employees and freelancers or, in some specific cases, among professionals employed in the various analysed areas (agencies, public entities, companies/associations). In some cases, where possible, the characteristics of journalists and communicators will also be compared.



**48%**

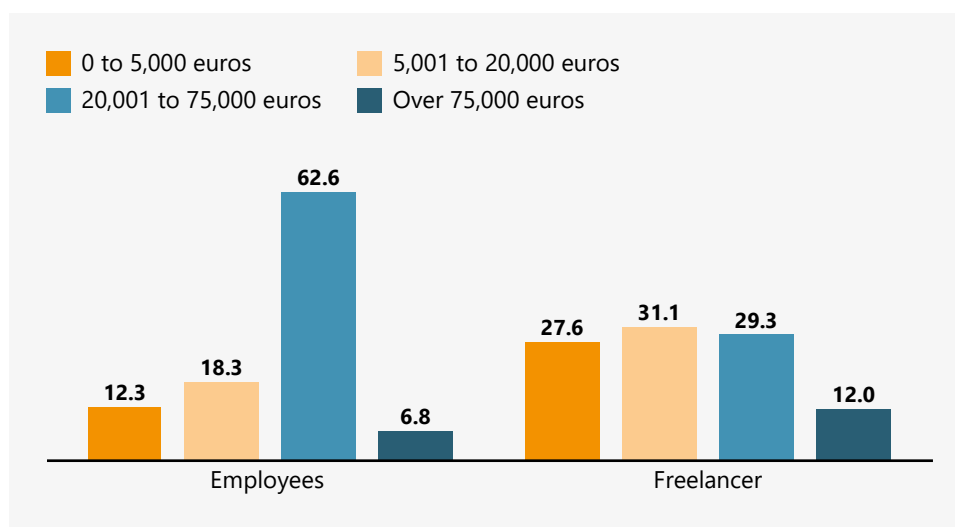
COMMUNICATORS  
WHO WORK AS  
FREELANCERS

### 3.1 NEW PROFESSIONAL CONDITIONS

Communicators are employed in 40% of cases and freelancers in 48%<sup>70</sup>, therefore in opposite proportions compared to journalists, who in 55% of cases were employees, and in 39% freelancers.

By comparing the data on the contractual condition of communicators with the gross income from journalistic activities (Figure 3.1), employees are concentrated (63% of cases) in the medium-high income bracket (from 20,000 to 75,000 euros), while freelancers show a balanced distribution between the different income brackets.

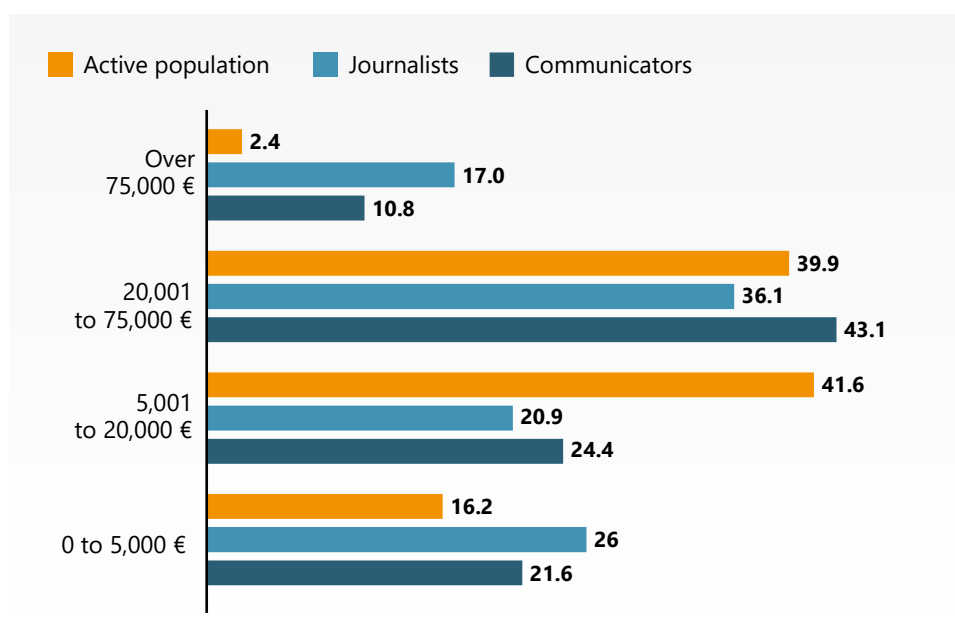
<sup>70</sup> 10% of communicators classified themselves in the "Other" category (specifying in particular that they are bloggers or subjects who carry out activities not properly considered as journalistic), while the retired and the unemployed are residual, also in light of AGCOM's methodological choices in the analysis of data (see Introduction).



**FIGURE 3.1**  
Contractual  
condition  
and income

(data in %)

Instead, by making a comparison with journalists and with the total Italian active population (Figure 3.2), it is evident that the distribution of communicators in the different income brackets, although more polarised than the average of the Italian active population, is in any case more balanced compared to that of journalists, in particular thanks to the presence of a greater number of professionals (43% of communicators) in the medium-high income bracket, to the detriment of the more extreme brackets.



**FIGURE 3.2**  
Distribution of the  
active  
population,  
journalists and  
communicators  
in income  
brackets

(data in %)

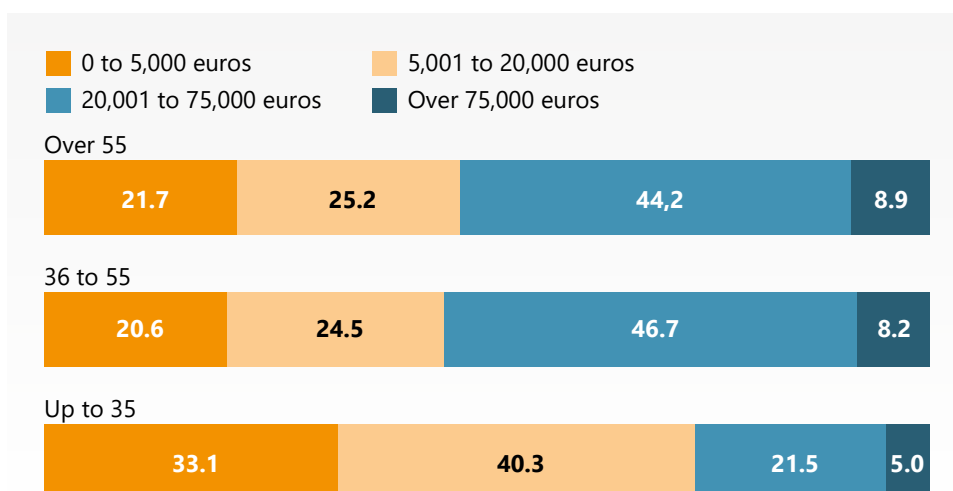
Source: AGCOM elaboration on data from the *Observatory on Journalism – 3rd edition* for journalists and communicators, and on IRPEF Income Tax Returns 2019 – Financial Year 2018 (Italian Ministry for Economy and Finance – Finance Department) for the overall Italian active population

If the less asymmetrical distribution remains constant both in the intermediate age and in the over 55 groups, a more shifted distribution towards the medium-low-income brackets is reported among professionals under 35 (similarly to journalists). Among communicators, too, almost three quarters (about 73%) of the under 35 earn less than 20,000 euros, in line with what was found for the other professions (see Paragraph 2.1).

**FIGURE 3.3**

**Distribution of  
communicators  
by income  
bracket and age  
group**

(data in %)



**80%**

**COMMUNICATORS  
WHO HOLD A  
DEGREE HIGHER  
THAN THE HIGHER  
SECONDARY SCHOOL  
DEGREE**

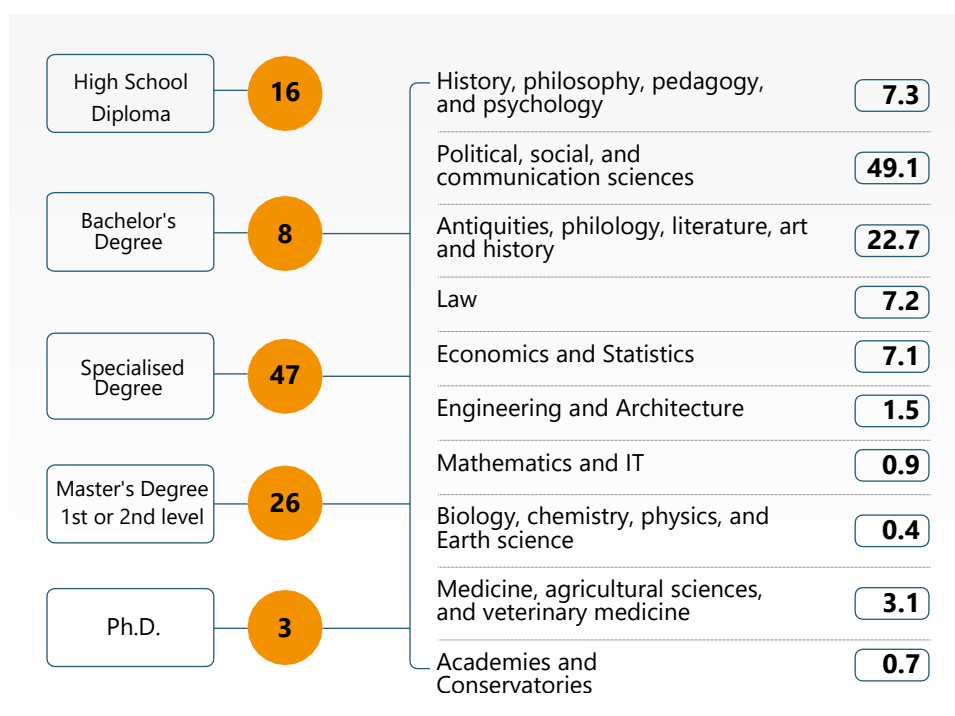
## 3.2 EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Turning to the training, 84% of communicators have higher educational credentials than the higher secondary education degrees, earned in Italy or abroad (Figure 3.4). The higher education of communicators is more evident than that of journalists and even more distant from that of the Italian working population, in which the percentage of graduates is equal to one quarter, as previously mentioned (see Paragraph 2.2).

Among graduated communicators, as well as journalists, humanistic and social degrees clearly prevail (about 80% of the total of degrees), with a prevalence of social, political, and communication sciences (49% of communicators, higher than 38% of journalists). They are followed by graduates in law and in economic-statistical sciences (in both cases, about 7% of communicators). Only the remaining 6% of graduated communicators obtained one of the so-called technical degrees (engineering and architecture, mathematical and computer sciences, biology, chemistry, physics, Earth science, medicine, agricultural sciences, and veterinary medicine)<sup>71</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> With regards to specific post-graduate training in journalism, only 15% of graduated communicators (compared to 23% of journalists) attended some type of post-graduate journalism school. In particular, only 7% of graduated communicators attended a journalism school in Italy recognised by OdG for a journalism traineeship valid for accessing the profession (among graduated journalists this percentage is 16%).



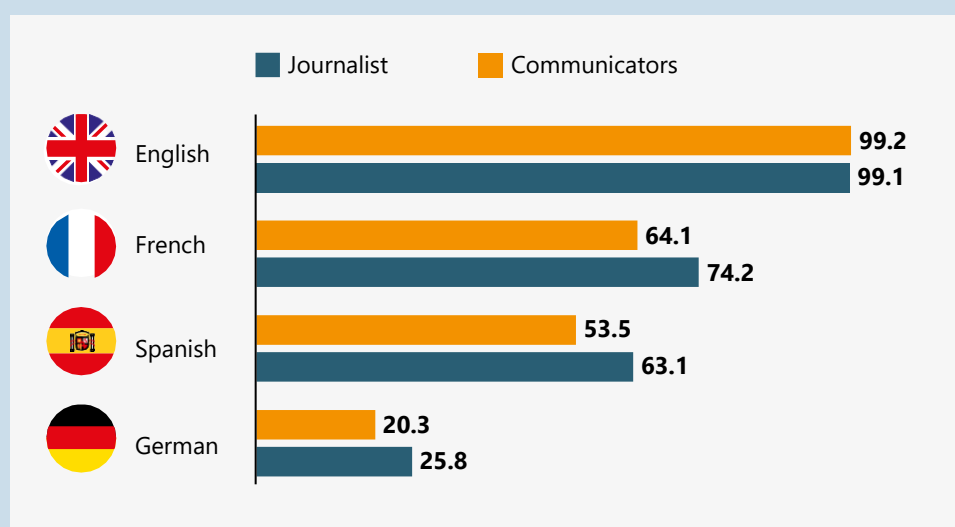


**FIGURE 3.4**  
Communicators' credentials

(data in %)

### Communicators and language skills

The percentage of communicators with at least a minimum level of proficiency in the main foreign languages (English, French, Spanish, German), although significantly higher than that of the Italian working population (see Paragraph 2.2), is slightly lower than that of journalists, except for English (Figure 3.5). Moreover, 60% of communicators have at least an advanced intermediate level (B2) level of English—more than 50% of journalists with the same level of knowledge. As for communicators with the most advanced linguistic level (C2), they are just over 13% of Italian communicators (slightly higher than journalists) for English and less than 5% for other foreign languages.



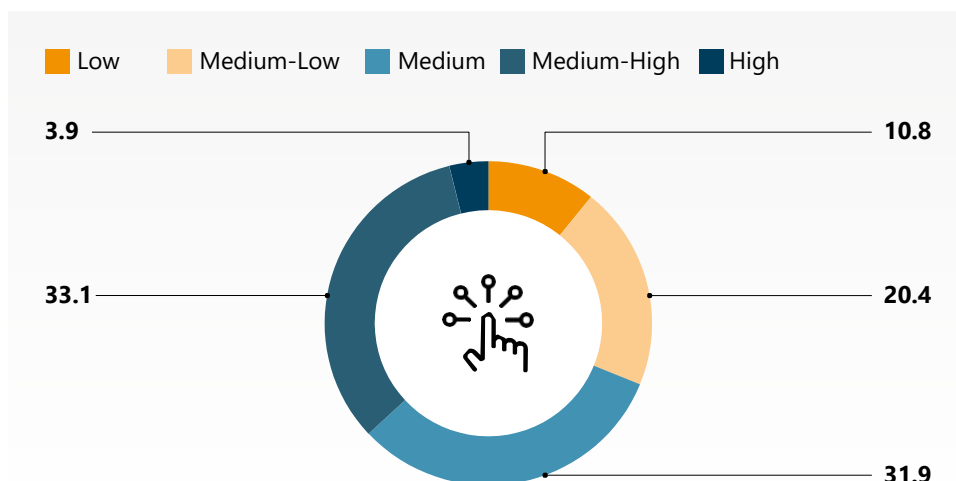
**FIGURE 3.5**  
Language skills of journalists and communicators

(data in %)

Note: for both categories, the percentage of those who claim that they have a language proficiency at least A1 level (beginner) was reported.

With specific regard to the digital skills of communicators, in this case also a specific index was developed, including indicators referring to the technological equipment available to communicators, their commitment to multiple activities, i.e., the extent of the activities carried out online (extent of use) and the quality of use of digital tools (quality of use), i.e., their use for capital enhancing activities (see Paragraph 2.2). For each of the three dimensions, some specific indicators referring to the professional activity of communicators were considered<sup>72</sup>.

**FIGURE 3.6**  
The level of digital  
skills of Italian  
communicators  
(data in %)

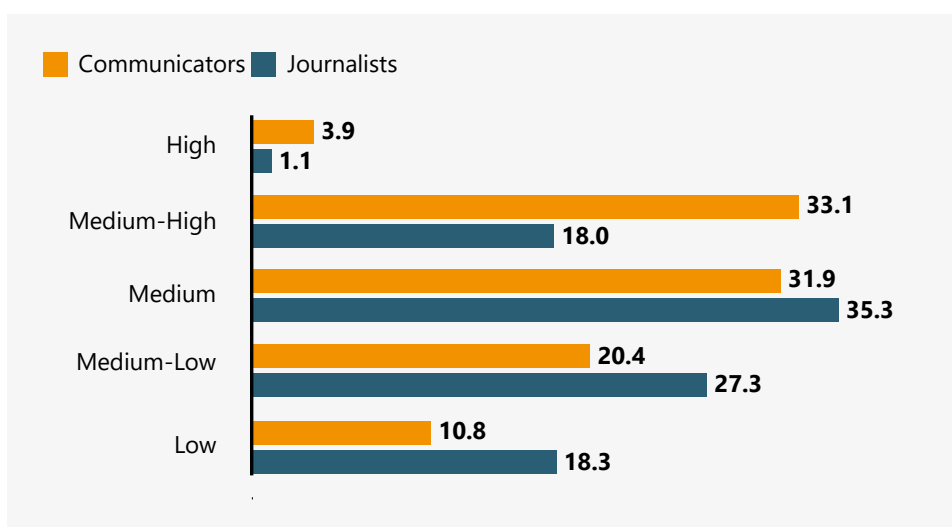


**11%**  
Communicators  
with a  
**low**  
LEVEL  
OF DIGITAL  
SKILLS

As shown by Figure 3.6, 11% of Italian communicators have a low level of digital skills, while 37% have a medium-high or high level. Almost half of communicators have a level of digital skills that can be classified as at least medium, less than a third of communicators are below that level.

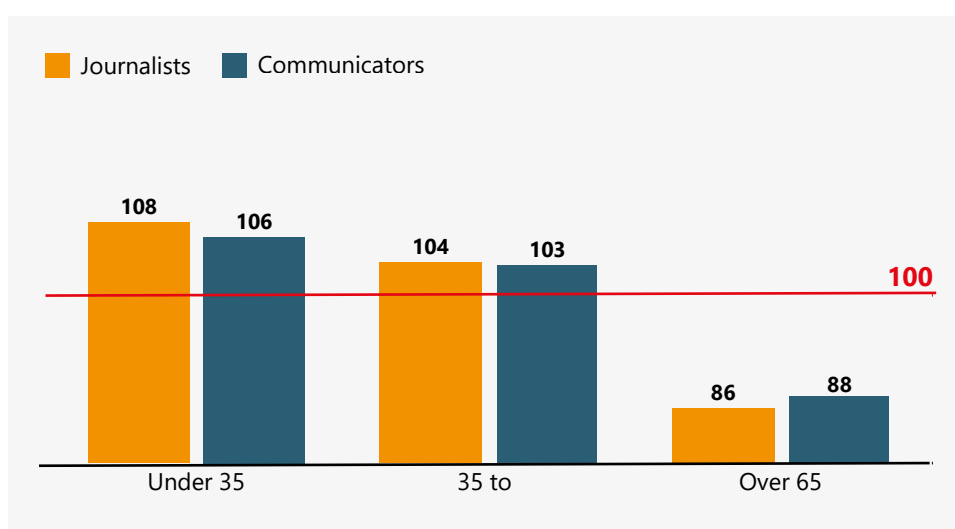
In this sense, by comparing that to journalists (see Figure 3.7), communicators are evidently more open to specific activities for the web and social networks, showing in particular a wide range of use of devices and digital tools for their professional activity, which is certainly enriched by hybridisation with the digital environment.

<sup>72</sup> This digital skills index is an additive index, too, with some characteristics/indicators for which as many dichotomous/dummy variables were calculated (where not present), relating to the use for communication work purposes of (i) desktop computer, (ii) laptop, (iii) smartphone, (iv) tablet (size of equipment), (v) daily use of search engines and (vi) at least one social network (or blog) for communication purposes (extent of use), for carrying out activities such as (vii) production of text and multimedia content for the web/social media, (viii) production of text and multimedia content for the publishing, (ix) *social media strategy*, (x) design and management of newsletters or blogs or websites (quality of use). Therefore, in this case as well, the value of the index can go from 0 to 12 for each individual. Communicators who achieved a score from 0 to 4 were classified in the low level of digital skills, from 5 to 6 in the medium-low level, from 7 to 8 in the medium level, from 9 to 10 in the medium-high level, from 11 to 12 in the high level.



**FIGURE 3.7**  
Level of digital  
skills among  
journalists and  
communicators  
(data in %)

Similarly to journalists, among communicators as well there is a strong difference in the average level of digital skills based on age, with differentiation indices that have almost identical values (see Figure 3.8). In any case, the average level of digital skills of communicators is higher than that of journalists for all age groups.



**FIGURE 3.8**  
Digital skills by  
age of journalists  
and communicators  
(data in %)

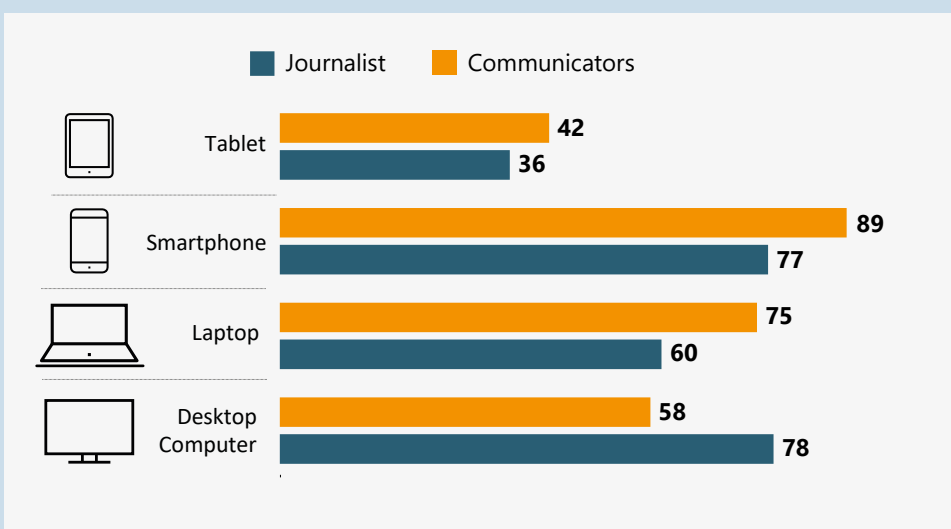
Note: the index has values over 100 if the average level of digital skills is higher than the average level of all journalists (equal to 6.59) or communicators (equal to 7.37); below 100 if the average level of digital skills is lower than the aforementioned average levels.

Therefore, unlike journalists, communicators—in addition to using the main technological devices (see box below)—are also able to exploit them in a wide and adequate manner with respect to the opportunities enabled by digital tools.

### Communicators and technological devices

By specifically analysing (among the indicators taken into consideration to elaborate the digital skills index) the use of technological devices for professional activities, communicators are more confident with mobile and portable devices compared to journalists (Figure 3.9). In particular, while the use of desktop computers is limited, the adoption of smartphones, increasingly essential for their ability to integrate text editing, photos, videos, and Internet connection is almost universal (89%). The primacy of smartphones does not affect the use of laptops and tablets, which are used more by communicators than journalists.

**FIGURE 3.9**  
Tools used  
by journalists  
and  
communicators  
for their  
professional  
activity  
(data in %)



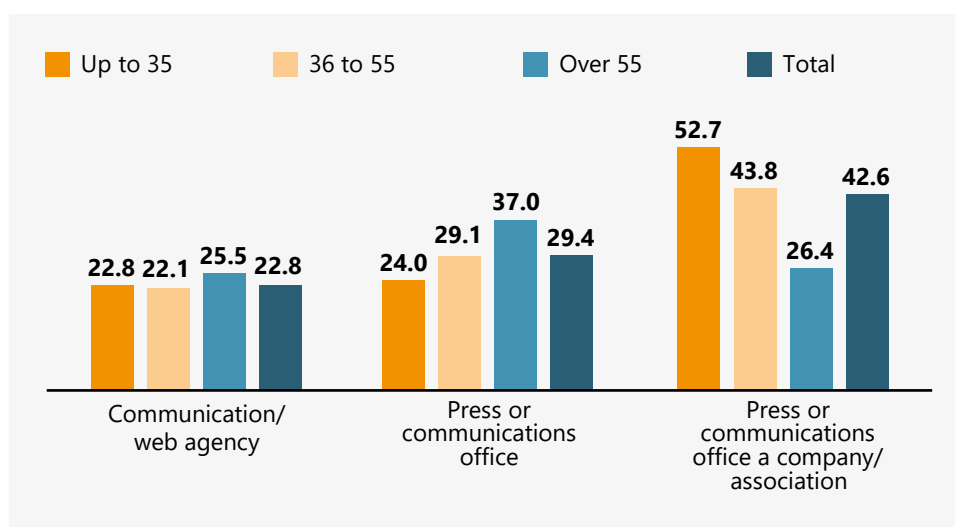
## 3.3 MAIN ACTIVITIES AND RELATIONS WITH THE NEWS MEDIA SYSTEM

**43%**

COMMUNICATORS  
WORKING FOR  
A COMPANY'S OR  
ASSOCIATION'S  
PRESS/COMMUNICATION  
OFFICE

Working for the press or communication office of a company/association is the most frequent activity for Italian communicators (43%). Fewer communicators work for press or communication offices of public entities (29%) and for web or consultancy agencies in the various fields of communication (23%).

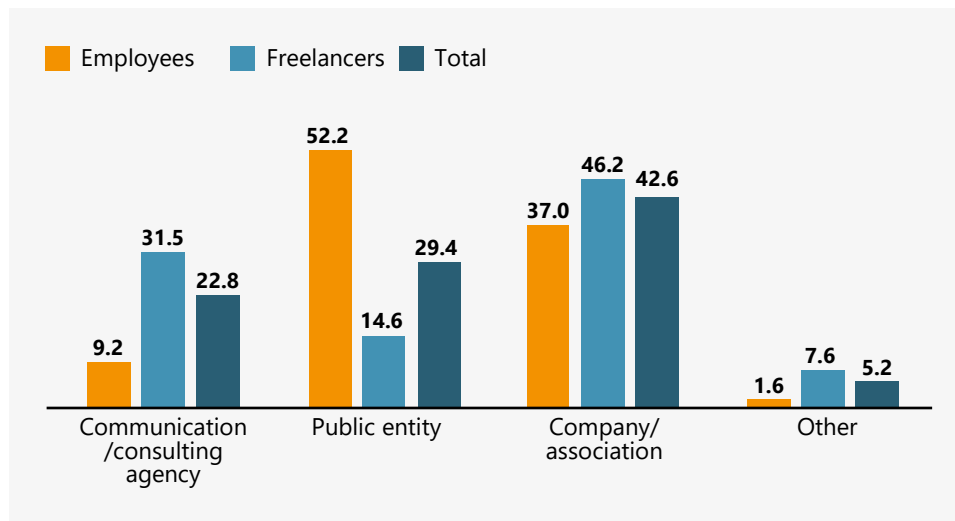
As shown by Figure 3.10, strong generational differences emerge especially for press or communication office of public entities, where more than one third (37%) of communicators over 55 work, and for press or communications office of companies/associations, where more than half (about 53%) of communicators under 35 work.



**FIGURE 3.10**  
Distribution of  
communicators  
by work  
environment and  
age group

(data in %)

The analysis of the correlation between work environment and contractual condition (Figure 3.11) highlights in particular that employees are mostly employed in press or communication offices of public entities, while forms of collaboration with companies or associations or activities related to collaborating with or owning a communication agency or a specialised consultancy company prevail among freelancers (therefore, in many cases, these subjects are real entrepreneurs).



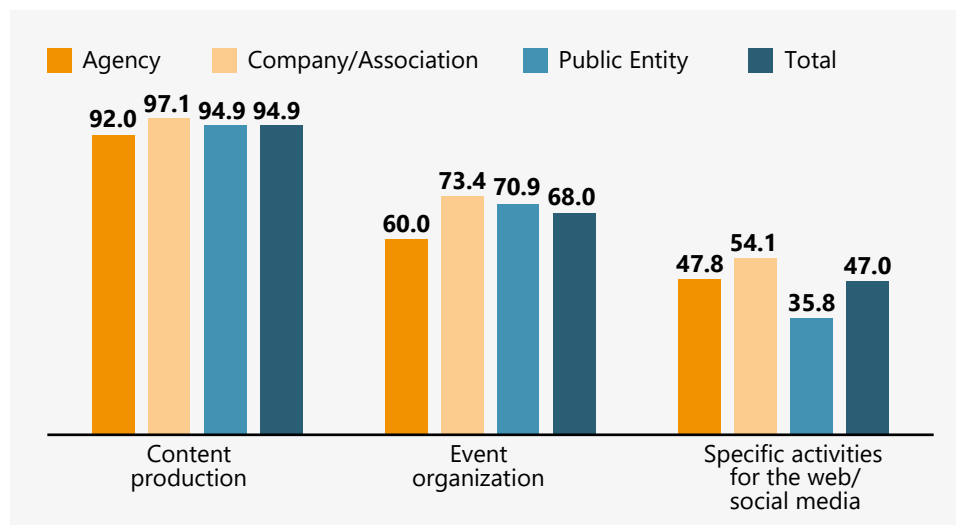
**FIGURE 3.11**  
Distribution of  
communicators  
by work  
environment and  
contractual  
condition

(data in %)

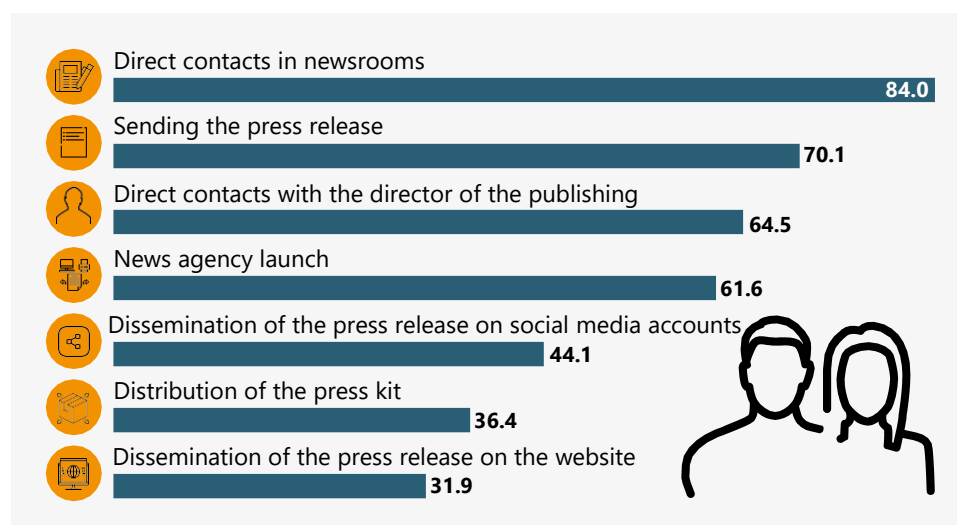
With regard to the activities, the drafting of press releases is handled by 72% of communicators, followed by the production of text and multimedia content for the web (59%), showing to a strong relationship of communication professionals with the production of news content in both the traditional and the digital environment (content production). Almost half of the communicators also deal with the organization of institutional/corporate events or press conferences (49% in both cases) (event organization) and press reviews, an activity carried out by 46% of communicators. On the other hand, one third of communicators deal with the production of text and multimedia contents for the publishing (advertorials, brand journalism, etc.), that are part of the content production. Less than one third of communicators are involved

in social media strategy, or other specific activities relating to the design or management of newsletters, blogs, or websites (specific activities for web/social networks). A comparison of the three types of activities with the working environments of communicators shows that, on the one hand, almost all communication professionals carry out activities in some way related to the content production, and on the other hand, when performing specific activities for the web and social networks greater differences are highlighted, since professionals employed in the press and communication offices of public entities deal with activities in this area to a limited extent (Figure 3.12).

**FIGURE 3.12**  
**Main types**  
**of**  
**communicators**  
**by work**  
**domain**  
(data in %)



A final analysis was dedicated to the factors that have the greatest impact on the relation between the news media system and the activity of communicators. The data presented above shows that, despite journalists declare that they use a wide range of sources for their activity, some empirical evidence from the content of the Italian publishing proves that few sources (especially political-institutional ones) are used (see Paragraph 2.4). According to the communicators who have a direct relation with the publishing (in particular those who deal with the preparation of press releases and the organization of press conferences), the contacts in newsrooms and the sending of press releases to individual journalists are the factors that will most likely affect the success of their communication/press office activities. The official methods of disseminating press releases during the press conference or on the company's/institution's proprietary channels are less relevant (Figure 3.13).



**FIGURE 3.13**  
Most important factors for the success of communication / press office activities according to communicators

(data in %)

Note: for each factor, the percentages of communicators who carry out press office activities (such as "drafting press releases" and "organization of press conferences") and declared that they have a significant impact on the success of their activities have been reported<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, personal relationships seem to affect more than other factors the connection between businesses/institutions and news media system.

On the one hand, this emphasis on personal relationships highlights how, in line with the findings of numerous professionals in the sector, also in Italy<sup>74</sup>, the "classic" press office activity is increasingly hybridising with public relations and reputation/crisis management activities. This does not appear to be in line with the findings of this survey, in particular where a considerable commitment by communicators in content production activities has been highlighted. This activity proceeds alongside the management of the reputation of the public entity/association/company or client (in the case of communicators working for agencies)<sup>75</sup>.



**84%**  
COMMUNICATORS STATING THAT THE DIRECT CONTACT IN THE NEWSROOM IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR FOR THE SUCCESS OF THEIR ACTIVITIES

<sup>73</sup> See Question no. 45 of the Survey (Annex 1).

<sup>74</sup> See, among others, Chieffi D. (2013). *Online Crisis Management*, Apogeo/Feltrinelli, Milano; Venturini R. (2015). *Digital public relations*, Egea, Milan.

<sup>75</sup> The importance of content production was also highlighted by industry professionals in recent essays: for instance, see Alfieri M., Bardazzi M., & Paolucci C. (2018), *Content strategy*, Egea, Milan.

In any case, in a context marked by temporary forms of journalistic work and the consequent potential renunciation to wider information research activities, the selection of news is increasingly left to the choices of agencies and press offices and their privileged relationships with news professionals<sup>76</sup>. Journalists are increasingly identified as intermediaries, who produce news content on the basis of a rewriting process of press releases coming from public relations agencies and press offices of government institutions and private entities<sup>77</sup>. Without forgetting that, especially in the era of COVID-19, characterised by a profound crisis in media advertising revenues<sup>78</sup>, and in particular those for information purposes (newspapers, online news outlets, etc.), the same private entities for which communication professionals work can influence (as advertisers) the methods of creating the journalistic product, which already tends to reduce the distinction between editorial content and advertising content.

## To summarise:

The overall analysis of the professional condition of Italian communicators shows that:

- This professional category, which includes different profiles (public employees, owners of communication agencies, etc.), is less precarious than journalists.
- The option for a professional career as a communicator is becoming increasingly profitable for many journalists, who can achieve a better average pay as public employees (especially older journalists), or as employees of companies and associations (preferred by the youngest, who remain the segment of the population that most feels precariousness and lack of economic certainty and professional autonomy).
- The activity of communicators is increasingly presented as a mix between the production of content and the ability to cultivate personal relationships with journalists. In a context of insecurity for professional journalism and the economic crisis of news media, this enables them to have an important impact on the work cycle and on the creation of news.

<sup>76</sup> Other qualitative research shows that, among sources, Italian journalists pay much attention to public relations activities carried out by public and private press offices, in particular press releases, considered "indirect sources that already provide interpretations to events" (see Splendore S., *Giornalismo ibrido*, op. cit.).

<sup>77</sup> As reported by Vos, T.P. (2019). Journalists' endangered professional status. *Journalism*, Vol. 20(1), 122–125.

<sup>78</sup> In this regard, see AGCOM's report, "[Le comunicazioni nel 2020: l'impatto del coronavirus nei settori regolati](#)"





# 4

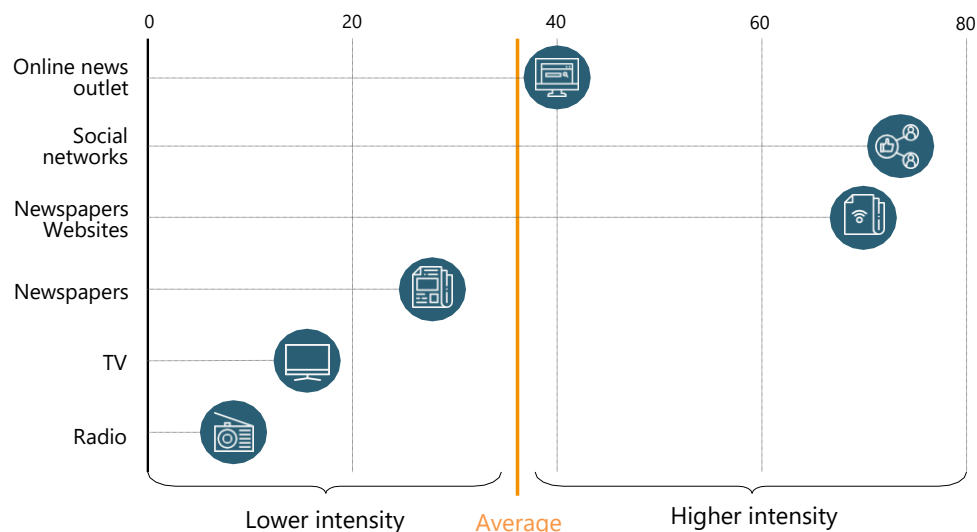
## Journalism in the **NEWS MEDIA ECOSYSTEM**

# Journalism in the NEWS MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

## JOURNALISTS' PRODUCTION INTENSITY IN AN AVERAGE MONTH

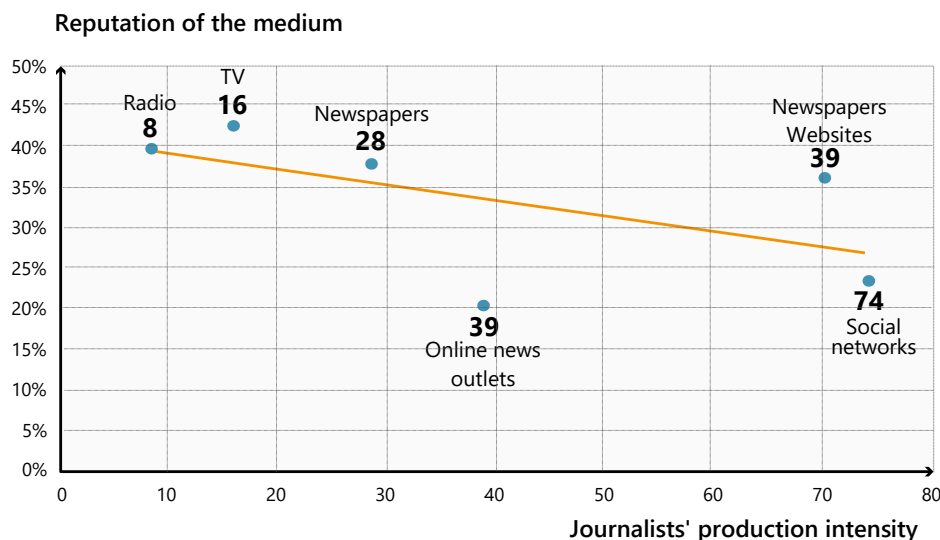
(news content per journalist)

Journalists engaging on **social networks** show a higher production intensity compared to those engaging on other news outlets



## CONNECTION BETWEEN JOURNALISTS' PRODUCTION INTENSITY AND REPUTATION OF THE MEDIUM

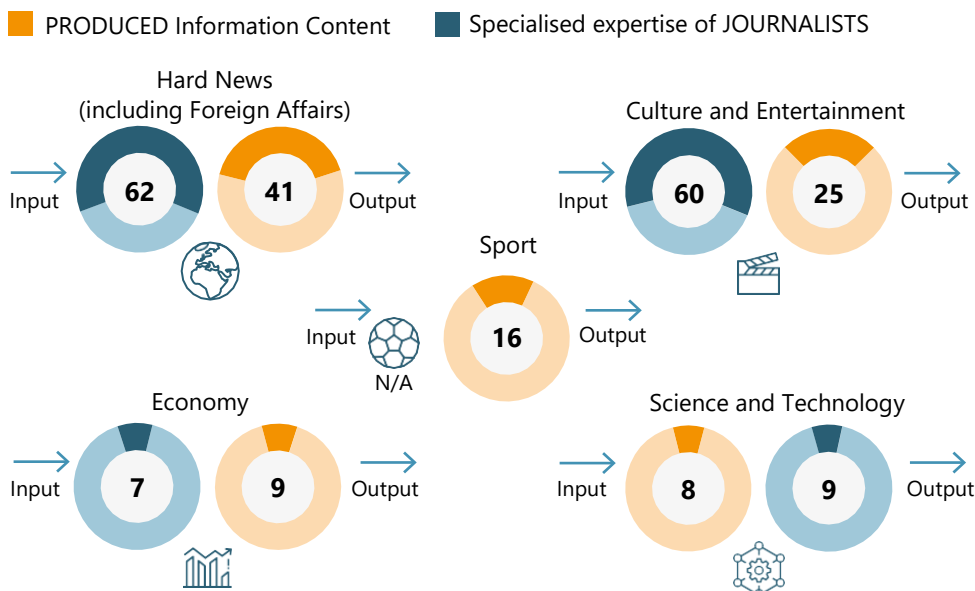
As the journalist's production intensity decreases, the **perceived quality** of the information conveyed and consequently the **reputation of the medium** increase



## VARIETY AND LEVEL OF SPECIALISED EXPERTISE ON THE COVERED TOPICS

(data in %)

Specialised topics (economy, science and technology) are covered by less specialised journalists with relevant consequences on **quantity** and **quality** of scientific and economic news



As already highlighted in previous reports<sup>79</sup>, the production of news identifies the process of creating and offering to the public information content concerning facts, events, phenomena, news of any kind. Therefore, it is the process on which the quantity, variety, and quality of news that reaches citizens depend, on the basis of which their own opinions and points of view are formed.

The production of news from each medium (TV, radio, newspapers, internet) is carried out by professionals (first of all journalists) employed in the newsrooms.

Journalists are therefore the main production factor ("input") in the news production process. A journalist's activity consists in collecting and analysing news, followed by the concrete creation of news content (articles, television and radio reports, but also posts/tweets on online platforms). Furthermore, the work of a journalist has its own specific features according to the medium, which go hand in hand with the peculiarities of the news content offered on that medium.



CONNECTION  
 BETWEEN EFFICIENCY  
 AND PRODUCTIVITY  
 IN THE WORK OF  
 JOURNALISTS AND  
 OTHER CRUCIAL  
 ASPECTS OF THE  
 INFORMATION  
 ECOSYSTEM

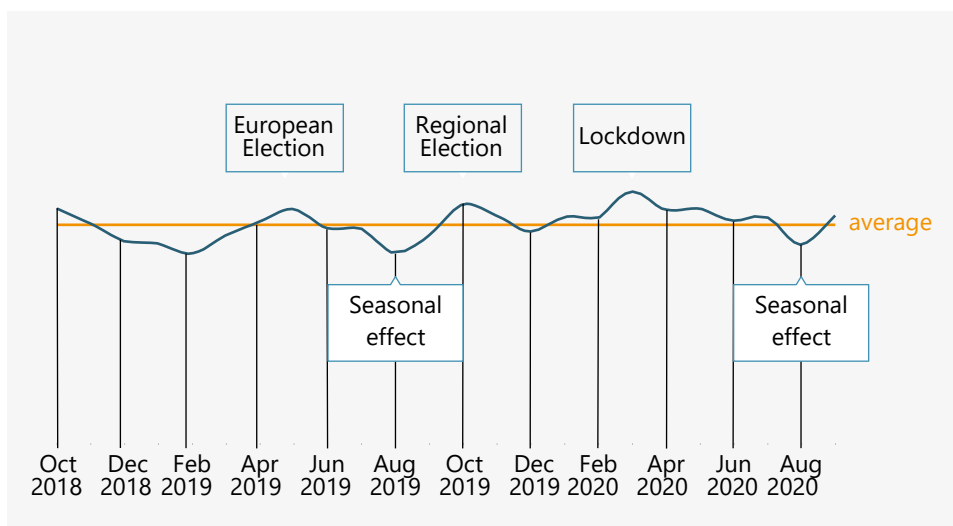
Taking into account the characteristics of the news production process and the technical and economic nature of the news product, in this chapter the results of the analyses conducted on the quantity, quality, and variety of news produced in Italy by all mass media will be presented and discussed, in particular with regard to the productive factor represented by the number of journalists working on the various media, as well as their level of specialisation and the topics they cover. AGCOM aims at highlighting the connection between efficiency and productivity of the work of journalists and other crucial aspects of the news ecosystem, as well as investigating the relation with the reputation of the different news outlets, and finally analysing the demand/supply of news content on specific categories of topics.

Therefore, in this chapter, aspects related to the production of information content in Italy, the production efficiency of editorial offices and the journalists' production intensity will be examined in detail (Paragraph 4.1), as well as the relation between the issues they deal with, i.e., the variety of news content and specialised expertise level of news media professionals (Paragraph 4.2).

<sup>79</sup> In particular, see [News vs fake in the information system. Interim report of the "Digital Platforms and Information System" Knowledge Survey launched with resolution no. 309/16/ CONS.](#)

## 4.1 THE PRODUCTION OF INFORMATION IN ITALY

The monthly dynamic analysis of the produced information suggests how to trace the effects determined by at least two factors on the quantity of news produced by the media: the first has a recurring nature (seasonality), the second a contingent nature (political cycle or information shock, such as lockdown). In particular, as shown by Figure 4.1, the dynamic evolution of the volume of news produced in Italy in the last year<sup>80</sup> highlights a reduction in the volume of news in the summer period (seasonality) and an increase in news produced in conjunction with political elections and the COVID-19 emergency period, and particularly during the beginning of the national lockdown in March 2020.



**FIGURE 4.1**  
Monthly trend of  
the news  
produced in Italy  
(2018–2020)

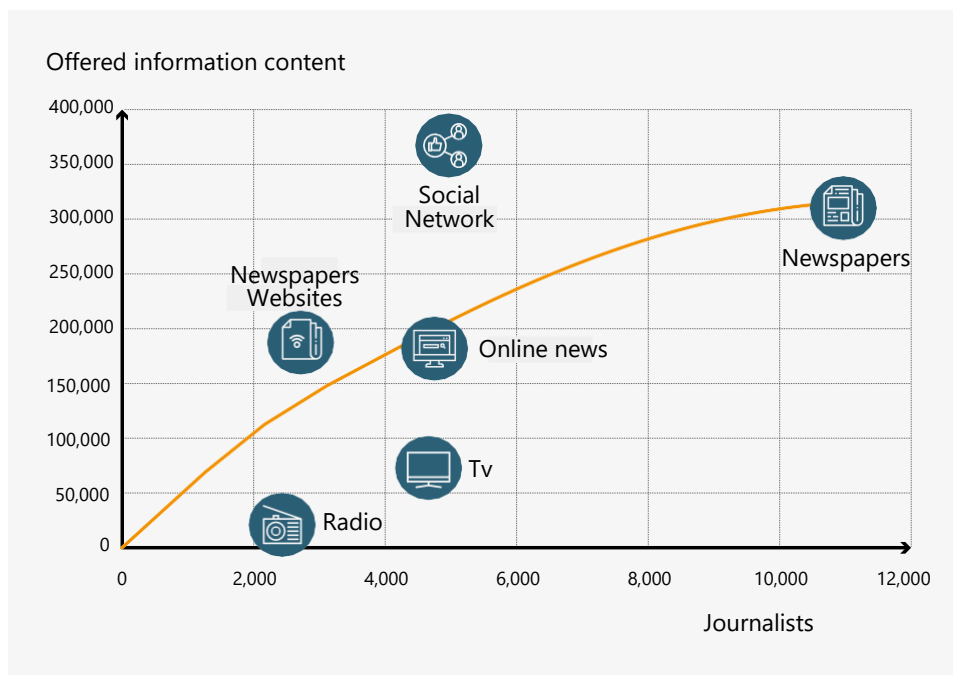
Source: AGCOM elaboration on Volocom data

By making a distinction by medium, remaining on a quantitative level, Figure 4.2 reveals the different contribution of the media to the national news media system. More specifically, the greatest contribution in terms of output produced comes from social networks—which are clearly characterised by news content that respect the typical format and style of the medium (shortness and immediacy). Therefore, they cannot be compared to newspapers articles or reports on radio and television news. Social networks are followed by (national and local) newspapers, the only medium which, net of advertising, offers content entirely dedicated to general or specialised news. Then online news outlets, both referring to traditional newspapers (newspapers websites) and online-only news outlets. A smaller quantitative contribution come from television and (to a much lesser extent) radio broadcasters, since news content represents only a part of their offer compared to entertainment shows.

<sup>80</sup> The analysis took into account the total number of news documents produced monthly by all media: from newspapers to television, from radio to information websites (both from online-only news outlets and others also operating on different channels), including online platforms (pages and accounts of publishing companies and influencers). In detail, the news documents refer to each article (for newspapers and information websites), television and radio story, or post/tweet (for online platforms) issued by approximately 1,800 news sources. For more information, please consult the Report "News vs fake", the [Observatory on Disinformation](#), and the related methodological appendices.

However, if these quantitative values are to be read in a broader perspective, which also involves other aspects of the production process (such as editorial efficiency and the quality of the content), it is necessary to obtain an estimate of the news production function as the curve which, under the same conditions, expresses at each point the relationship between the units of production factor used (the input, on the horizontal axis—that is, employed journalists) and the amount of news content offered (the output produced, shown on the vertical axis)<sup>81</sup>.

**FIGURE 4.2**  
**Information**  
**production**  
**function**  
  
(estimate,  
monthly average  
values)



Notes: national broadcasters were considered for TV and radio. For these media, the amount of information content (taking into account the programming hours dedicated to national and regional TV news and other information shows) is calculated on the basis of the average duration of a story. For newspapers and news websites, the information content is identified with the articles published, whereas for social networks, posts and tweets are considered.

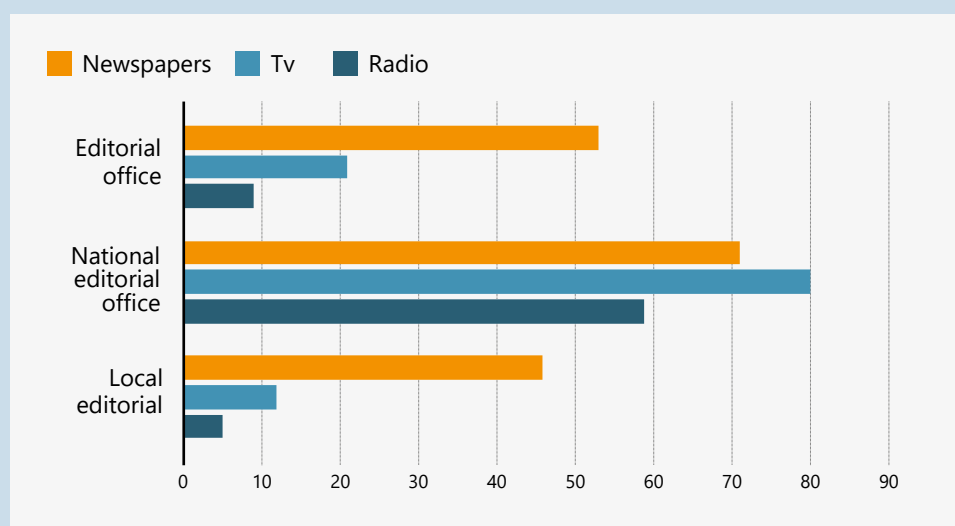
Source: AGCOM elaboration on Volocom and business data (for the information content), and the Observatory on Journalism - 3rd edition (for journalists)

As noted in the Interim Report "[News vs fake in the information system](#)", the news production function is increasing and shows decreasing returns to scale, so that an increase in the number of journalists determines an increase less than proportional in the quantity of produced news content, that is in line with what AGCOM had already found during the sector inquiry "[News and Internet in Italy. Business models, consumption and professions](#)". The optimal minimum size of a newsroom —where the average unit cost of the input is minimal with full production capacity (that no longer decreases as the size increases)—has a limited value, providing for the use of a reduced number of journalists, the positioning of the points that detect the input/output combinations of the individual medium with regard to the curve of the production function, providing information on the intensity of use of the journalists for the production of news (see also Figure 4.3) and, therefore, indirectly also on the quality of the generated news content.

<sup>81</sup> See Interim Report [News vs fake in the information system](#), op. cit.

### The optimal minimum size of a newsroom

The in-depth analysis carried out by AGCOM during the “*News and Internet in Italy*” sector inquiry made it possible to calculate the average size of newsrooms for the various media: from 53 newspaper employees (including 16 journalists, 35 external collaborators, and 2 other professional figures), to 21 on TV staff, and 9 on radio staff. However, within the single type of publishing, there is a marked difference between the publishers of national and local newspapers. The national publishing obviously has an optimal minimum size that is better than that of the local level, but the order of the media is also reversed and television (with about 80 employees) surpasses newspapers and radio. The local dimension is increasingly characterised by the presence of few employees (even 5 on average in a local radio), the dependence on external professionals and, in many cases, the purchase of pre-packaged information formats.



Source: AGCOM elaboration on business data

**FIGURE 4.3**  
The average  
size of a  
newsroom by  
medium  
(national vs.  
local)

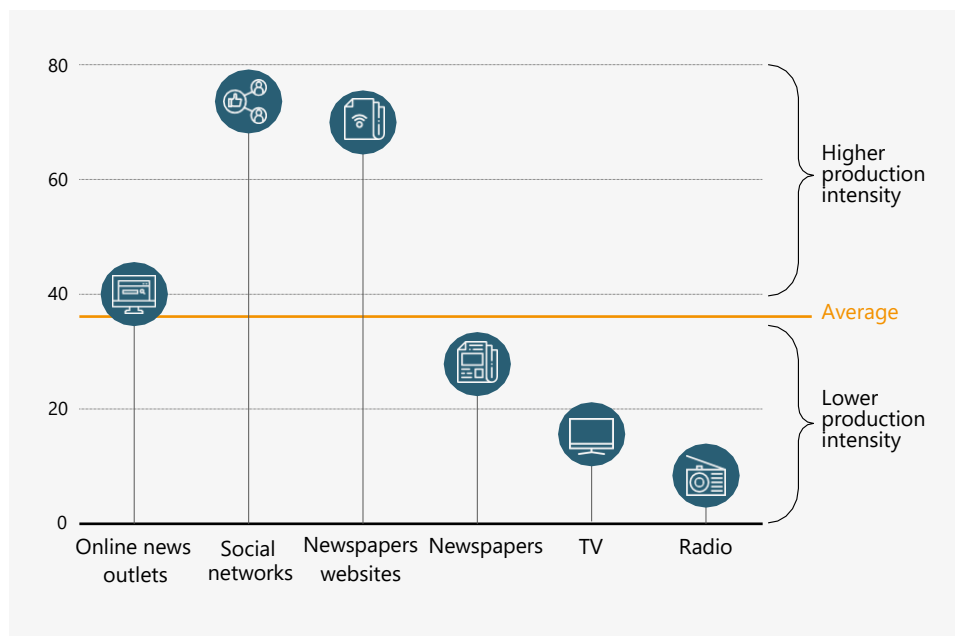
(number  
of people)

In this regard, compared to previous reports, it is clear that newspapers and social network websites are above the production curve, so that, with the same number of journalists and under the same conditions, they produce a greater supply of information, with a quantity of the production factor (journalists) that is potentially able to positively affect the (static) company efficiency and negatively impact on the quality of the final product.

Television and radio broadcasters are in the opposite situation, since they are below the production function. Journalists have a lower production intensity which, on the one hand (given the not only informative nature of the media), can be attributed to their assignment also to tasks other than journalistic routine, on the other hand, it can be an indication of a greater amount of time dedicated to the news, and therefore greater accuracy and depth of the disseminated news.

Unlike previous media, newspapers and online news outlets are almost in line with (slightly below) the production function. Therefore, newspapers prove to be the medium with a journalists' production intensity closest to the value of the production function, as can also be seen from Figure 4.4. Within this medium, journalists essentially devote themselves to the most typical tasks of their profession (since newspapers are entirely dedicated to news) and do not suffer from tight deadlines dictated by the need for constant publication throughout the day, thus being able to devote greater care and attention to quality. Even online-only news outlets, whose journalists are almost exactly on the average value of production intensity, are beginning to take on working routines more similar to those of the more consolidated publishing realities, reflecting an important qualitative growth in the sector<sup>82</sup>, certainly driven by some excellence, which are now already competing (also in terms of online audience) with the major national publishing groups.

**FIGURE 4.4**  
**Journalists'**  
**production**  
**intensity in an**  
**average**  
**month**  
(Average value  
equal to 40)



Notes: the journalists' production intensity is calculated, for each medium, as the ratio between offered news content and journalists, in an average month.  
Source: AGCOM elaboration on Volocom and business data (for the news content), and the Observatory on Journalism - 3rd edition (for journalists)

82 See AGCOM, [Observatory on Online Publishing – 2018 Report](#).



### The journalists' production intensity of the public service concessionaire

In the television sector, the journalists' lower production intensity compared to the average of all news outlets is mainly due to the value achieved by the outlets belonging to the RAI group<sup>83</sup>, where the production routines of journalistic work must adapt to the characteristics of information quality and variety (heterogeneity of the supply) typical of the public service mission, which must ensure, even in the current information ecosystem<sup>84</sup>, the access of all citizens to a variety of content able to respond to information, cultural, and social needs, without any discrimination and limitations, and consistently with an idea of news as a public and worthy good. Obviously, the lower production intensity of the public service could conversely also show a lower tendency of the company towards the principles of corporate efficiency.

Other national television broadcasters are characterised by a journalists' higher production intensity than the average value of all news media (Figure 4.5), reflecting their adherence to a commercial television model<sup>85</sup>, in a competitive context of multiplication of news sources<sup>86</sup> in which incentives to invest in quality content (including news) tend to weaken<sup>87</sup>.

<sup>83</sup> In particular, the production intensity of the journalists employed by TG1, TG2, TG3, and RaiNews has been analysed.

<sup>84</sup> Picard, R., Siciliani, P. (eds.) (2013). *Is there Still a Place for Public Service Television? Effects of the Changing Economics of Broadcasting*.

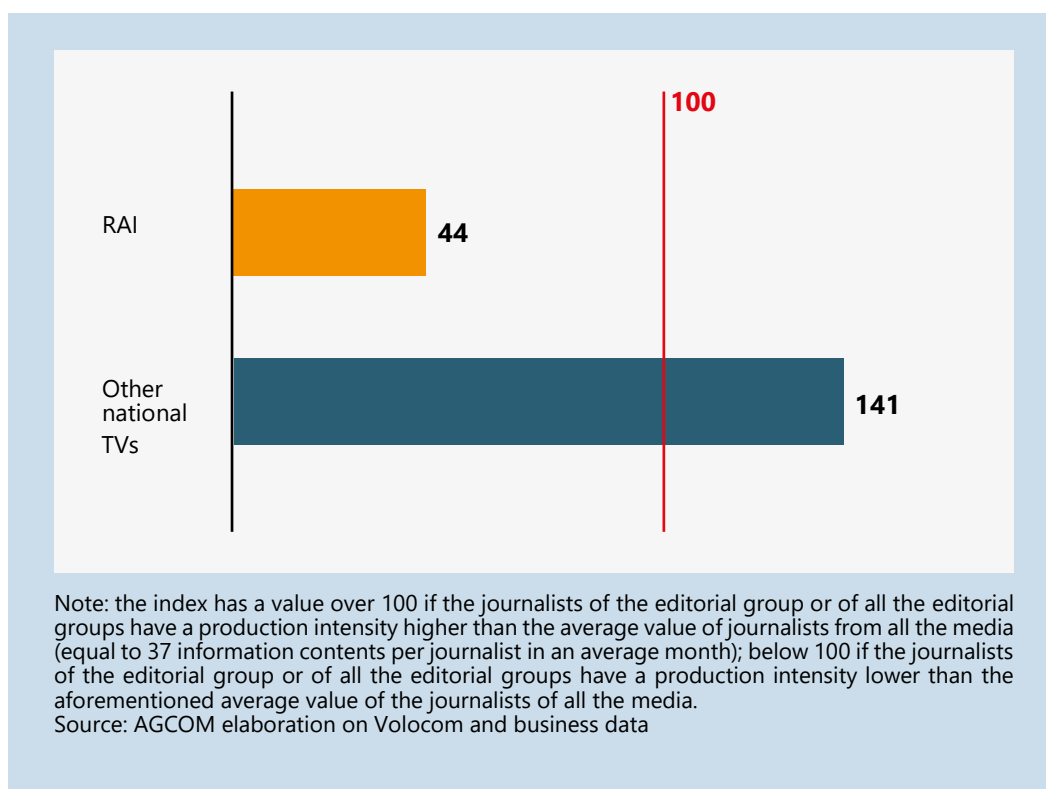
<sup>85</sup> McQuail D., *Media Performance*, op. cit.

<sup>86</sup> Barwise, P., Picard, R.G. (2012). *The Economics of Television in a Digital World: What Economics Tell Us for Future Policy Debates*.

<sup>87</sup> According to some economic literature (see in particular Armstrong, M. (2005). Public Service Broadcasting. *Fiscal Studies*, 26(3), 281–299; Armstrong, M., Weeds, H. (2005). Public Service Broadcasting in the Digital World. *Industrial Organization, EconWPA*), in the free TV business model, companies would have a lower incentive to provide a wide variety of shows, with the aim of acquiring large segments of audience to ensure adequate revenues from advertising. At the same time, they would have weaker incentives to invest in quality, since it is necessary to pay high costs—many of which cannot be recovered—in activities they deem risky, given the nature of an experience asset that characterizes radio and television content and the impossibility of taking advantage of the consumers' willingness to pay. According to the same literature, in pay TV, companies are encouraged to invest in quality, since they can take advantage of the consumers' willingness to pay, thanks to the direct payment of content. Furthermore, they tend to offer a variety of genres, since they are able to take into account the intensity of the audiences's preferences through subscription fees. However, even in pay TV, genres that meet the tastes of minorities and that generate low audiences are generally supplied in lower quantities than what is considered to be socially efficient (see Anderson, S.P., Coate, S. (2000). *Market Provision of Public Goods: The Case of Broadcasting*, NBER Working Papers 7513; Beebe J.H. (1977). Institutional Structure and Program Choice in Television Markets. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 91, 15–37; Spence, M.A., Owen, B.M. (1977). Television Programming: Monopolistic Competition and Welfare. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 91, 103–126; Steiner, P.O. (1952). Program Patterns and Preferences, and the Workability of Competition in Radio Broadcasting. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 66, 194–223).

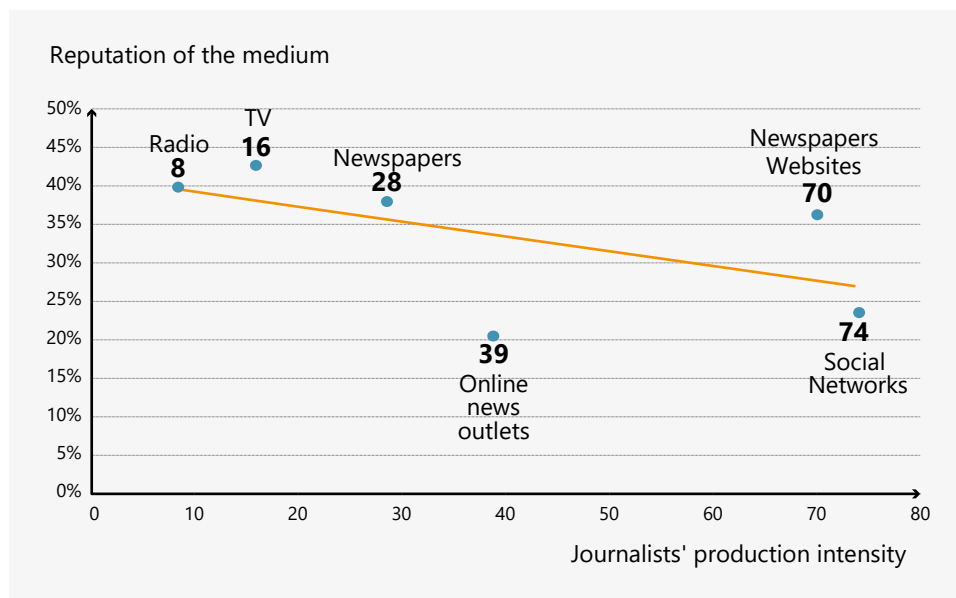
**FIGURE 4.5**  
Production  
intensity index  
of television  
journalists

(Average  
value equal  
to 100)



The above considerations take an additional relevance when considering the relations between the production intensity (i.e., the number of information contents produced on average in a month) of the journalists for a medium and the reputation of the medium itself among its audience, that is the perceived reliability by those who use it to find news.

**FIGURE 4.6**  
Connection  
between  
journalists' production  
intensity and  
reputation of  
the medium

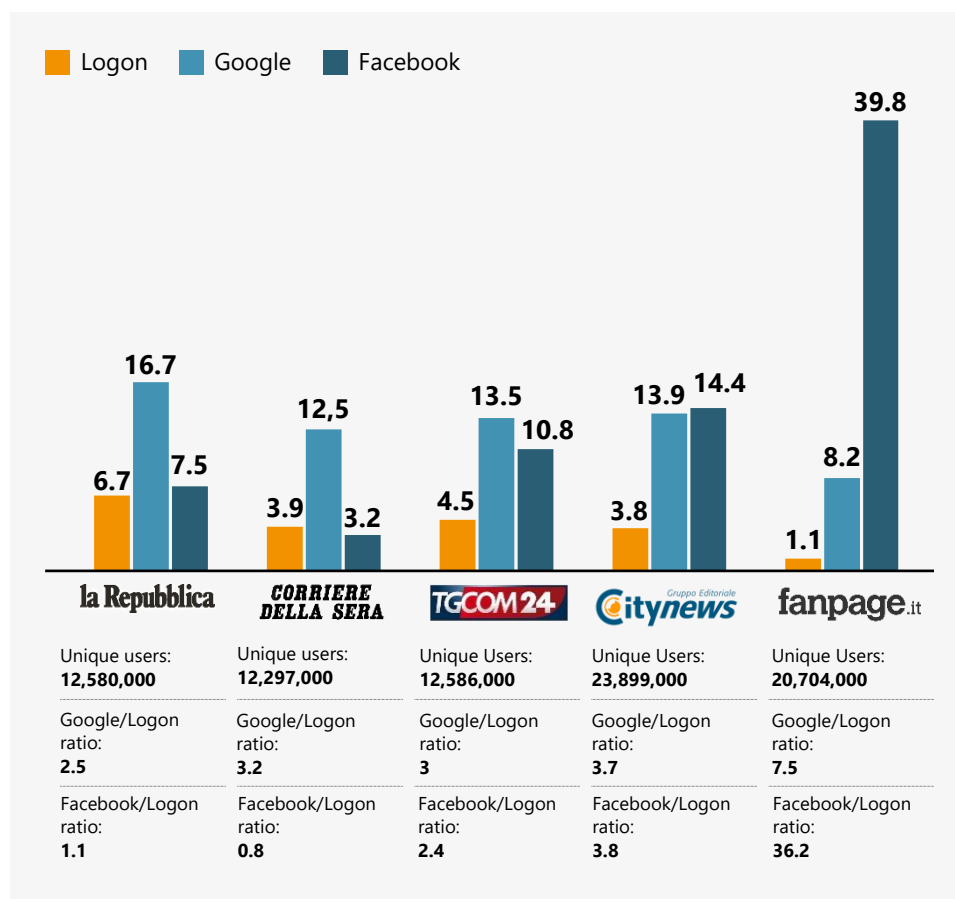


Notes: the journalists' production intensity is calculated, for each medium, as the ratio between offered news content and journalists, in an average month.

The reputation of the medium is calculated as a percentage of the users of the medium for information purposes that deem it "reliable" or "very reliable".

Source: AGCOM elaboration on Volocom and business data, *Observatory on Journalism - 3rd edition*, and AGCOM (2018), *Report on the consumption of information*.

Figure 4.6 clearly shows how as the journalist's production intensity decreases, the perceived quality of the news conveyed and consequently the reputation of the medium increase. Therefore, traditional media offering fewer news are considered more reliable by Italian citizens, whereas social networks, with a greater contribution in terms of production intensity of journalists who work on these channels, suffer from a lower reputation among citizens. At the same time, the Figure highlights how other media (namely newspapers websites and online-only news outlets) are respectively above and below the trend line. The former because—despite a higher production intensity of the journalists—are strongly connected to the daily newspapers or radio and television news, the latter because—despite the relative production intensity of the journalists is exactly equal to the average among all the media—are still associated by users with social networks, which remain a privileged gateway to these new sources of online news.



**FIGURE 4.7**  
Inbound traffic flows for the main sites of outlets

(data in % of desktop users, April 2019)<sup>83</sup>

Source: AGCOM elaboration on ComScore data

88 The data presented refer to ComScore's *Source/Loss* function, which enables the analysis of the steps to enter and leave the selected site with reference to desktop users. When access is not direct as the first step of online surfing (Logon), but occurs after visiting a specific site/platform (e.g. Google or Facebook), this does not necessarily mean that the user has followed a link from that site/platform, but only that before reaching the outlet they visited that sit/platform. The data considered refer to the entire web domain of the publishing and not just the homepage. For Citynews, in particular, the data referring to all the *properties* of the group were taken into consideration. The group publishes several native online news outlets, linked to different territorial realities, the so-called "metropolitan information" (e.g., PalermoToday, QuiComo, PadovaOggi, IPescara, CasertaNews, etc.).

As shown by Figure 4.7, taking into account the major newspapers websites, access to news varies significantly depending on the type of outlet. In particular, the main native online news outlets appear to depend more on the gatekeeping role of the two main online platforms (28% for CityNews and 48% for Fanpage), and, in the second case, mainly from Facebook, from which about the 40% of desktop accesses to the Ciaopeople group outlet<sup>89</sup> derives.



ACCESS TO  
ONLINE NEWS  
OUTLETS VIA  
DIGITAL PLATFORMS  
IS CONNECTED  
TO THE POOR  
REPUTATION OF  
THE MEDIUM

Moreover, the detailed analysis of the different access methods reveals how the importance of access through Google, in relation to direct access, unites all the publishing (online versions of newspapers and TVs, as well as native online news outlets), whereas the relevance of access via Facebook, in relation to direct access, varies between traditional and online news outlets, as well as within the same macro-category (as is evident by analysing the difference between TGCOM24 and newspapers sites, and between Fanpage and Citynews).

Access by users to news content (including editorial brands) via digital platforms involves a series of significant problems, relating to the incidental use of the news<sup>90</sup> or to the incorrect attribution of the sources from which the news derives in the event of access to sites via digital platforms<sup>91</sup>, with clear consequences on the reputation of the outlet.

89 In any case, for both traditional or native online outlets, access to their services and information content mainly derives from the platforms, which always have greater incoming traffic data than the direct ones (the so-called Logon, see Figure 4.7).

90 See Mitchell, A., Gottfried, J., Shearer, E., et al. (2017). *How Americans encounter, recall and act upon digital news*. Pew Research Center; Fletcher, R., Nielsen, R.K. (2018). Are people incidentally exposed to news on social media? A comparative analysis. *New Media & Society*, 20(7): 2450–2468. As noted by some qualitative analyses on the incidental consumption of news on social media among the younger audience (see Boczkowski, P.J., Mitchelstein, E., & Matassi, M. (2018). "News comes across when I'm in a moment of leisure": Understanding the practices of incidental news consumption on social media. *New Media & Society*, 20(10), 3523–3539), this way of consumption is often accompanied by an incomplete reading of the news (young users mainly focus on the headlines), the loss of hierarchy among the news, and the difficulty to distinguish the type of filter (editorial, algorithmic, social) through which the single news can reach the user.

91 See Kalogeropoulos, A., Newman, N. (2017), "I saw the news on Facebook". *Brand Attribution when Accessing News from Distributed Environments*, [www.digitalnewsreport.org](http://www.digitalnewsreport.org).

## 4.2 THE TOPICS OF NEWS

To delineate in a more exhaustive way the overview of the characteristics that distinguish the production of news in the Italian system, a further aspect to be investigated concerns the variety of genres and topic covered by the media and offered to the public.

In this regard, similarly to what had been previously done<sup>92</sup>, the distribution of the news supply was traced on the basis of five topic categories, i.e., "hard news", "culture and entertainment", "economy", "science and technology", and "sports".

In particular (see Figure 4.8), in an average month of the pre-COVID-19 period (for the analysis of the pandemic emergency phase, see Chapter 5), over 40% of the news produced in Italy concerns hard news, i.e. current affairs (including crime and judicial news), politics (including news related to elections, referendums, institutional or party issues) and facts with international relevance<sup>93</sup>.

On the other hand, the lower quantitative contribution to the overall supply of content derives from the topic categories typically associated with a more specialised information system, "economy" and "science and technology", which however include topics and events increasingly at the centre of the public debate, as they are also connected to important issues raising great interest in the electoral period<sup>94</sup>, an increasingly sensitive targets of disinformation campaigns<sup>95</sup>. The situation considerably changed after the current health emergency (starting from the beginning of 2020), increasing the weight of the information supply on scientific issues, but also highlighting the structural criticalities of the Italian news production (see Chapter 5).



40%

THE PERCENTAGE  
OF HARD NEWS IN  
AN AVERAGE  
MONTH OF THE  
PRE-COVID-19  
PERIOD

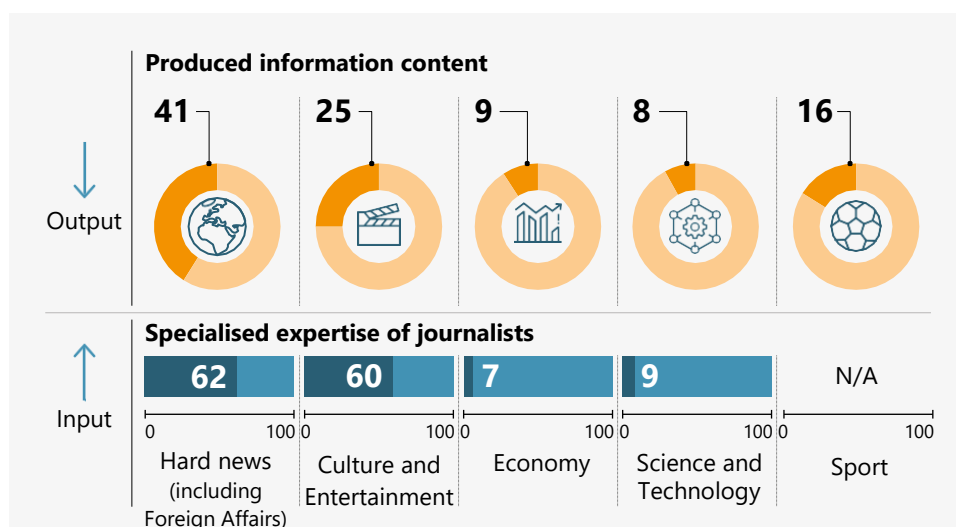
<sup>92</sup> See Interim Report *News vs fake in the information system*, op. cit.

<sup>93</sup> With regard to the report, among the many definitions adopted in the literature (for a complete review on the concepts of *hard* and *soft news*, see Reinemann, C., Stanyer, J., Scherr, S., & Legnante, G. (2012). Hard and soft news: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, 13(2), 221–239), one that most insists on the content of the covered topics (*topicality*) is referred to: "*hard news refers to coverage of breaking events involving top leaders, major issues, or significant disruptions in the routine of daily life*" (Patterson, T.E. (2000). *Doing Well and Doing Good: How Soft News Are Shrinking the News Audience and Weakening Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 3–4).

<sup>94</sup> Consider, for instance, false news on issues related to health, medicine, and science that have been repeatedly circulating during the most recent electoral campaigns, or targeted disinformation campaigns on the issue of immigration (always among the first three issues with european relevance in the supply of disinformation in the first two quarters of 2019, see *Observatory on Disinformation*, 2, 3, and 4, 2019).

<sup>95</sup> Often, scientific issues are at the centre of commercial disinformation strategies, also aimed at discrediting specific food brands (see AGCOM, *Le strategie di disinformazione online e la filiera dei contenuti fake*, in particular Paragraph 5.3).

**FIGURE 4.8**  
Variety and level  
of specialised  
expertise on the  
covered topics  
(data in %)



Notes: the "hard news" category includes current affairs, politics, and international news. The level of specialised expertise of journalists is given by the percentage of those who have specialised training (university) relevant to a specific topic out of the total number of journalists who produce content on the same topic<sup>96</sup>.

Source: AGCOM elaboration of Volocom and business data, AGCOM's *Observatory on Journalism* - 3rd edition

**7%**  
of journalists  
has specific  
expertise  
in the  
economic  
field

**9%**  
economic  
information  
content

In this sense, the distribution of the information supply by category can be read jointly with the level of specialised expertise (based on the university career) of the journalists who deal with the related content. The level of specialised expertise, which concerns the productive input (journalists), takes additional importance in terms of the expected quality of the produced output (information), assuming that greater preparation and education in a field translate into a higher quality of articles or reports carried out in that field.

Figure 4.8 shows how the categories in which there is a greater relevance (close to 60%) between the held degree and the covered topics by journalists in their daily profession are those relating to "hard news" and "culture and entertainment", the two categories with the highest volume of supplied content.

<sup>96</sup> With regards to *hard news*, the study considered the percentage of journalists who declared that they deal with national or local news, national or local and foreign politics, and who graduated in history, philosophy, pedagogy and psychology, political, social, and communication sciences, antiquities, philology and literature, history and art, and law (out of the total number of journalists dealing with those topics). As far as culture and entertainment are concerned, the study considered the percentage of journalists who declared that they deal with art, culture, or entertainment, and who graduated in history, philosophy, pedagogy and psychology, political, social and communication sciences, antiquities, philology and literature, history and art, and academies or conservatories (out of the total number of journalists dealing with those topics). With regards to economy, the study considered the percentage of journalists who declared that they deal with economy, and who graduated in economics and statistics (out of the total number of journalists dealing with those topics). For science and technology, the study considered the percentage of journalists who declared that they deal with science and technology, and who graduated in engineering and architecture, mathematical and computer sciences; biology, chemistry, physics and Earth science (out of the total number of journalists dealing with those topics).

At the same time, dealing with specialised topics such as "economy" and "science and technology" requires a greater set of specific skills, but there is also where the presence of specialised journalists is lower instead (always less than 10%), with important consequences not only on the volume of scientific and economic news, but also on the quality of correct information on these topics, the first "antidote" against the propagation of false news and disinformation and their technical and detailed aspects, little known by most citizens<sup>97</sup>. This circumstance has taken considerable importance in the current health emergency, with consequences that will be illustrated in Chapter 5.

From the first analyses carried out by AGCOM on misperceptions in the Italian public opinion<sup>98</sup>, i.e. on the ability of individuals to be able to distinguish real news from false ones and correctly contextualise wide-ranging issues, it is clear that citizens tend to make systematic errors in assessing the extent of phenomena and problems on specialised and technical subjects, such as public debt or economic growth, showing a lack of knowledge also linked to the lack of an adequate specialist news supply.

With regard to science and technology, in the analysis of the connection between science, politics, media, and society, turning technical and scientific conflicts into a show (protest networks and Nimby syndrome) and the politicisation of important scientific issues (i.e., the waste issue) have led to a progressive dissolution of expertise in pseudo-science<sup>99</sup>. In particular, the progressive negligence of sensitive technical and scientific topics in TV journalism, also testified by the data collected through the survey<sup>100</sup> (TV is abdicating its dissemination role by resorting to pseudo-experts or giving way to professionals of the infotainment not always able to investigate issues with a strong impact on public opinion<sup>101</sup>) and the simultaneous transfer of competence of political decision-makers on technical and scientific issues to experts (the so-called "scientification" of policies<sup>102</sup>) act at the same time as a cause and a consequence of the invasion of pseudo-science, increasingly

97 According to a European survey, Italy is one of the Member States with the lowest percentage of citizens with a university degree in technical and scientific fields (9% against the 16% average in the EU). See EU Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 419. Public Perceptions Of Science, Research And Innovation*, 2014.

98 See the forthcoming *Disperceptions and Disinformation* report.

99 See Tiplado, G. (2019). *La società della pseudoscienza. Orientarsi tra buone e cattive spiegazioni*, Bologna, Il Mulino. In general, on the crisis of expertise, see Nichols, T. (2017). *The death of expertise: The campaign against established knowledge and why it matters*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

100 Science and technology are covered by 11% of TV journalists, a percentage lower than 18% of the entire journalistic population (for further details, see Chapter 2 of this report). Moreover, only 3.8% of TV journalists dealing with scientific topics have specialist expertise of these issues, compared to 9% of the entire journalistic population.

101 With the paradox that the most viewed television shows on science and technology are not journalistic programs, but often educational ones, and that journalists are even considered the first source of *fake news* in the scientific field (see Bucchi, M., Saracino, B. (2018). *Scienza, tecnologia e opinione pubblica in Italia nel 2017*, in Pellegrini G. (ed.), *Annuario Scienza, Tecnologia e Società 2018*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 11–39).

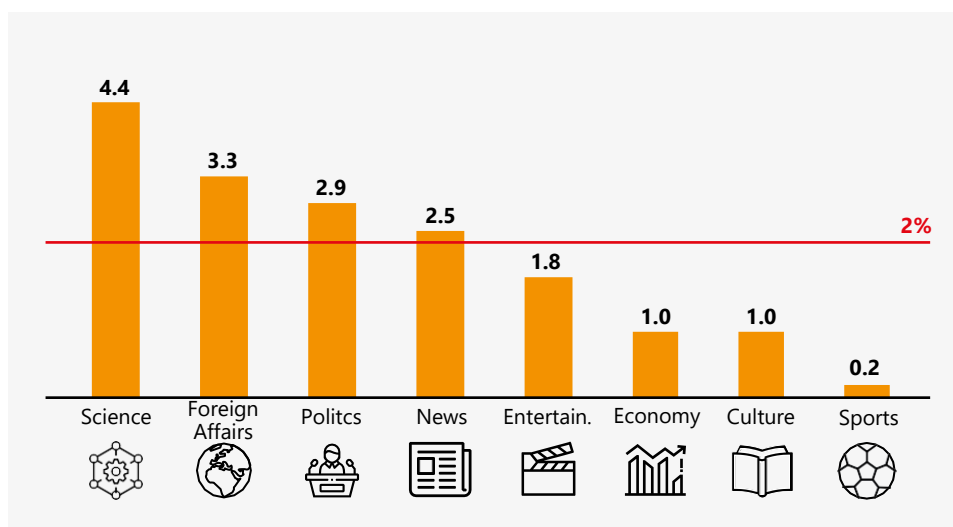
102 This refers to the attempt by politicians to cancel the debate and democratic confrontation on issues of public relevance, using science and expertise as "prophets of Truth" (see Pielke, R.A. Jr. (2005). *Scienza e politica. La lotta per il consenso*, Laterza, Roma-Bari; Tiplado, G. (2019). *La società della pseudoscienza*, op. cit.).



accompanied by the spread of targeted online disinformation campaigns (both in the short term, to monetise thanks to easy advertising earnings, and in the long term, such as targeted commercial strategies<sup>103</sup>) on scientific and technological issues<sup>104</sup>.

As shown by Figure 4.9, "science and technology" is the topic category with the highest percentage of disinformation content within the news media ecosystem, with a higher value (4.4%) than the categories of the so-called hard news (foreign affairs, politics, news) and the media relating to the entire news supply (in which disinformation content account for 2%).

**FIGURE 4.9**  
Incidence of  
disinformation  
content on the  
information  
supply, by  
category  
(data in %)



Source: AGCOM elaboration on Volocom and business data

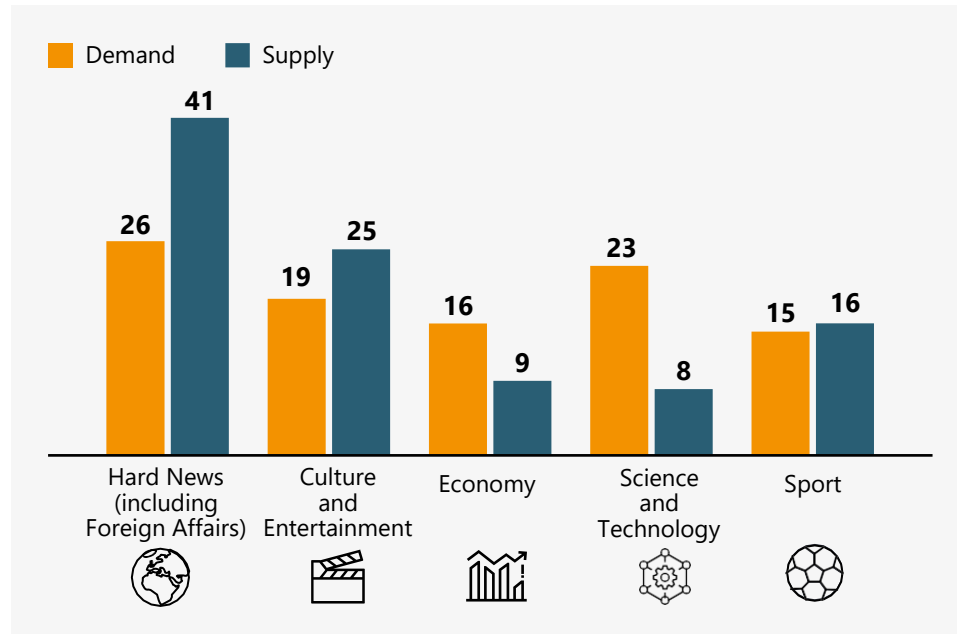
As also highlighted by the Observatory on Disinformation, news about scientific and technological topics is equal to only 8% of the total news content, while among the sources of disinformation, 18% of the content concerns these issues. These issues have been amplified by the ongoing COVID-19 emergency and will be further addressed in Chapter 5.

<sup>103</sup> For a typology of online disinformation strategies, see AGCOM (2018). *Le strategie di disinformazione online* (Online disinformation strategies), *op. cit.*, Chapter 5.

<sup>104</sup> Among other things, the *Observe – Science in Society* Observatory on Science, Technology, and Society, which has been monitoring the relationship between citizens and science and the coverage of scientific and technological topics in the Italian media for about ten years, has found that from 2010 to 2018 the percentage of citizens who consult online sources (websites and blogs in particular) on science and technology has increased from around 49 to 68% (see Bucchi, M., Saracino, B. (2019). *Scienza, tecnologia e opinione pubblica in Italia nel 2018*, in Pellegrini, G., Saracino, B. (eds.), *Annuario Scienza, Tecnologia e Società 2019*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 13–44). This obviously implies a greater likelihood that citizens will come across scientific and technological content that is not adequately treated from a journalistic point of view, if not in real online disinformation content, which is often related to scientific and technological issues (see Observatory on disinformation).



By comparing the distribution of news supply to the estimate of demand, significant imbalances are evident (see Figure 4.10). If for "hard news" and "culture and entertainment" content there is actually an excess of supply, the categories of specialised information, i.e., "science and technology" and, to a lesser extent, "economic", show an excess of demand, proving an ever greater interest in specialised issues<sup>105</sup> and therefore require interpretation by citizens.



**FIGURE 4.10**  
Distribution of  
news supply  
and demand,  
by category

(data in %)

Notes: the "hard news" category includes current affairs, politics, and international news. Source: AGCOM elaboration on Volocom and company data (for the supply), and Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, *Digital News Report 2017* (for the demand)

The current information proposal is therefore lacking above all in the supply of more specialised content or new interest, whereas the strong demand from citizens does not appear to be efficiently satisfied in terms of content quantity and quality.

<sup>105</sup> On the media and public agenda, see Marini, R. (2015). *Mass media e discussione pubblica: le teorie dell'agenda setting*. Roma-Bari: Laterza. A classic analysis of public and institutional agenda setting is provided by Cobb, R., Ross, J.K., & Ross, M.H. (1976). Agenda building as a comparative political process. *American Political Science Review*, 70(1), 126-138.

On scientific issues, the lack of the news proposal is particularly evident, since the specific tension between the request to participate in the technical and scientific debate and the natural constraints of scientific issues would require a news-making effort by the news media system and the acquisition of skills by news media professionals, even more necessary to avoid do-it-yourself information solutions by citizens<sup>106</sup>. Before new topics and areas of scientific and technological research and development in the public discussion, citizens are increasingly moving towards the search for news on the web or other news media<sup>107</sup>, where, as previously seen, disinformation on these issues is widespread.



Absence of  
adequate  
scientific news

VS.

Presence of  
sources of  
disinformation  
specialised in  
pseudo-science

The simultaneous absence of adequate scientific information to meet the needs of citizens and the dissemination pseudo-scientific theories by specialised sources of disinformation are factors with a remarkable impact on the low confidence of the Italian population towards technical and scientific innovation, especially in the food and medical fields<sup>108</sup>.

Chapter 5 will highlight that some of the pre-existing problems related to the journalistic coverage of specialised (and in particular scientific) topics resulted in a process of increasing delegation of information supply to new communication figures (scientists, experts, etc.).

<sup>106</sup> In particular, scientific journalism, like medical and health journalism, plays a fundamental role both for the correct information of citizens on health issues and the most recent scientific discoveries, and for the effects this can have on the public discussion on scientific issues (see Larsson, A., Oxman, A.D., & Herrin, J. (2003). Medical Messages in the Media. Barriers and Solutions to Improving Medical Journalism. *Health Expect*, 6(4): 323–331; Hinnant, A. (2009). *Health and Medicine Journalism*. In C.H. Sterling (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Journalism* (691–695). Thousands Oaks (CA), Sage).

<sup>107</sup> *Observe*'s data show slight but steady growth in the percentage of citizens who try to search for news on the web or in the media when they hear about a new technical or scientific sector (see Bucchi, M., Saracino B. (2019), *Scienza, tecnologia e opinione pubblica*, op. cit.).

<sup>108</sup> According to a Eurobarometer survey, only 43.6% of Italian citizens believe that technical and scientific innovation will have a positive impact on the quality and availability of food over the next years (throughout Europe the percentage is 60.2%), while only 51% believe that technical and scientific innovation will have a positive impact on health and medical care in the coming years (across Europe the percentage is 76.5%). In both cases, Italy ranks last among European countries in these specific rankings of trust in science. See EU Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 419*, op. cit.

## To summarise:

The analysis of journalistic production in the news media ecosystem shows that:

- The websites of newspapers and social networks are above the production curve, a sign of a quantitative use of the journalistic workforce, that can affect the quality of the final product.
- Conversely, television (mainly thanks to the contribution of public service outlets) and radio broadcasters rank below the production function, while newspapers and digital outlets are almost in line with the production function, a sign of an increase in the quality of news of the latter, which are however still associated, in terms of access and low reputation, to social networks.
- Among the categories of topics dealt with by the information system, “economy” and “science and technology”, i.e., the more specialised domains (which however include topics and facts increasingly at the centre of the public debate) are the least covered.
- For the same topics, which require a greater set of specific skills, the level of journalistic specialisation is very low, with important consequences, in the case of economy, on the awareness of specialised issues by citizens, and, in the case of science, also on the extent of the supply of disinformation on the subject.
- Such an evidence is central in the analysis of the evolution of the journalistic profession during the COVID-19 emergency that will be dealt with in the next Chapter.

5

# Journalism during the **COVID-19** emergency



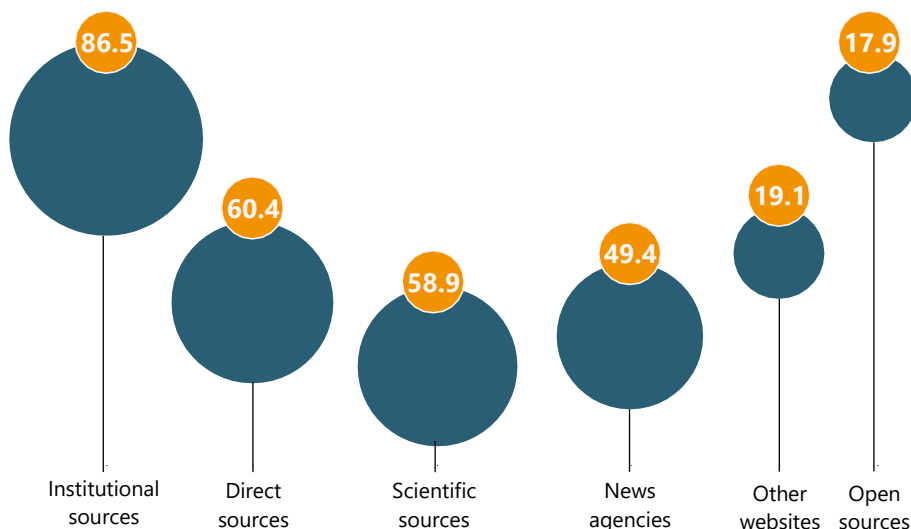
AUTORITÀ PER LE  
GARANZIE NELLE  
AGCOM COMUNICAZIONI

# Journalism during the COVID-19 emergency

## SOURCES USED BY JOURNALISTS WHO DEALT WITH THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

(data in %)

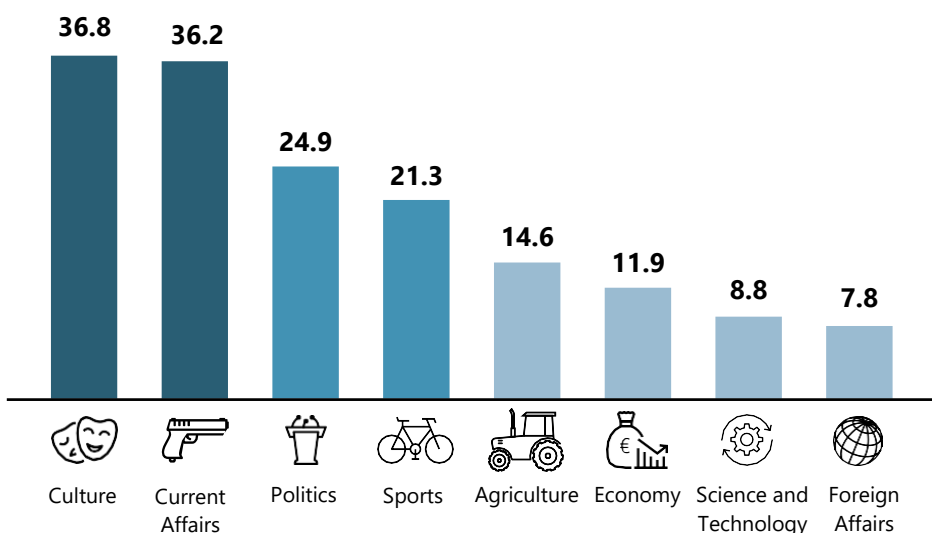
**Institutional sources** were mostly used during the COVID-19 emergency. Scientific sources also played a very important role



## TOPICS NOT COVERED BY JOURNALISTS WHO COULD NOT DEAL WITH THE ISSUES THEY USUALLY ADDRESS

(data in %)

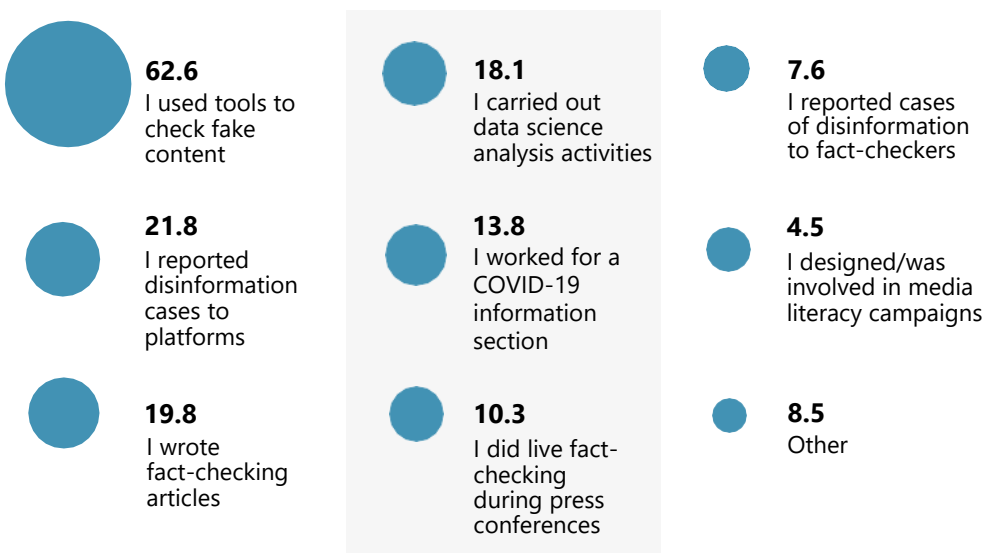
**Culture** (due to the reduction of events) and **Current Affairs** (due to a failure to adjust to routines) were the issues that journalists covered less



## PRACTICES ADOPTED BY JOURNALISTS WHO DETECTED AND ANALYSED FAKE NEWS DURING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

(data in %)

**Debunking and scientific analysis of fake news** were carried out less than just checking fake content





SPECIFIC  
 INQUIRY ON  
 JOURNALISM  
 DURING THE  
 COVID-19 EMERGENCY

In light of the COVID-19 emergency and the significant impact on the media and news sector<sup>109</sup>, AGCOM (considering its institutional commitment in the regulated sectors) deemed it appropriate to launch a supplementary investigation for the 3rd edition of the Observatory on Journalism, specifically dedicated to the consequences of the health emergency on various aspects of journalism. As mentioned in the Introduction, also in this case AGCOM opted for a survey inquiry. The survey was developed based on the activities that AGCOM carried out during the health emergency (in particular through the survey on the behaviour of consumers of communication services during the COVID-19 emergency)<sup>110</sup>, and on some international inquiries.

In this Chapter, the working conditions of journalists during the COVID-19 emergency will be analysed, with particular reference to the methods of performing their activities and the spread of remote working (Paragraph 1); the journalistic coverage of the emergency, in particular in terms of the aspects connected to the health crisis that they addressed and the issues they did not deal with in that period (Paragraph 2); the sources used for covering the emergency (Paragraph 3); their approach against the dissemination of disinformation content on COVID-19 (Paragraph 4).

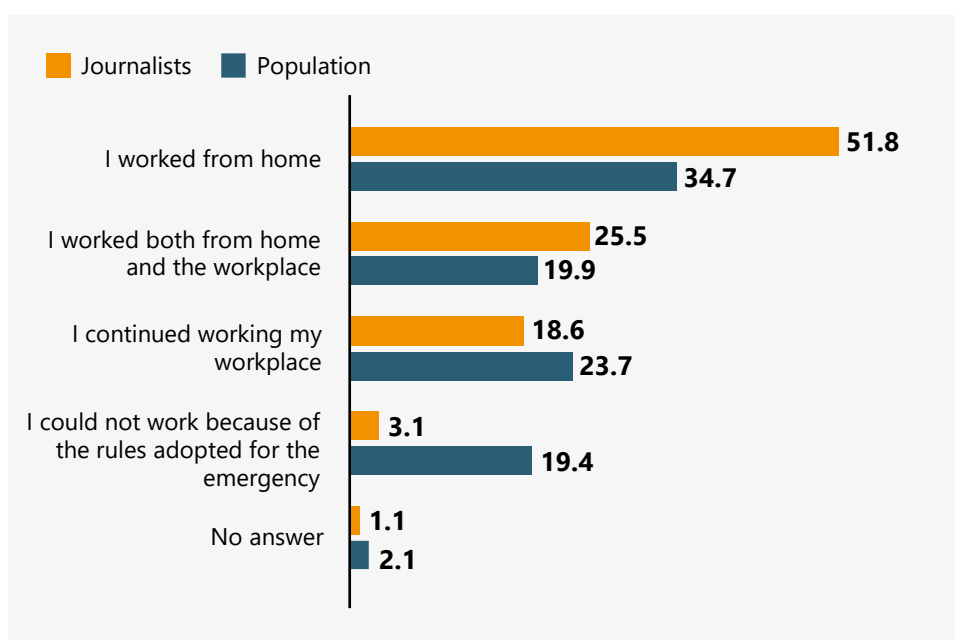
109 At an international level, there are many comparative inquiries on the impact of the health emergency on the world of media and journalism (see, among others, Media for Democracy Monitor, *Policy Brief COVID-19 and The Media*, available at: <https://kutt.it/mdm2020-covid>).

110 A first part of the analysis and study activities conducted by AGCOM's Department of Economics and Statistics merged into [Le comunicazioni nel 2020. L'impatto del coronavirus nei settori regolati](#) (Communications in 2020. The impact of Covid-19 in regulated sectors), attached to the 2020 Annual Report.

## 5.1 THE WORKING CONDITION OF JOURNALISTS DURING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

Although journalists were not amongst the most affected categories of workers in terms of job losses (at least in this phase), the health emergency had a considerable impact on the way their working activities are performed <sup>111</sup>.

By making a comparison with all employees and self-employed workers, journalists have clearly been able to work remotely, or choose to work both from home and the workplace, in a much more consistent way than all other workers.



**FIGURE 5.1**  
Active journalists  
vs employees  
and freelancers  
by way of  
working during  
the COVID-19  
emergency

(data in %)

The comparison between the important share (almost one fifth) of workers who could not work due to the restrictions adopted for the emergency (a percentage that increases with decreasing income and age and in case of self-employment) and the residual percentage (3%) of journalists who had the same difficulties is particularly remarkable.

<sup>111</sup> Literature is already flourishing on work at the time of COVID-19 (see, among others, Béland, L.P., Brodeur, A., Wright, T. (2020), *The ShortTerm Economic Consequences of COVID-19: Exposure to Disease, Remote Work and Government Response*, GLO Discussion Paper no. 524, Essen, Global Labor Organization; Barbieri, T., Basso, G., Scicchitano, S. (2020), *Italian Workers at Risk during the COVID-19 Epidemic*, GLO Discussion Paper no. 513, Essen, Global Labor Organization).

The possibility of working from home, on the one hand, in line with what is being supported by some literature and publications, represents a privileged condition of certainty typical of employees and high income brackets<sup>112</sup>, but on the other hand this can represent a significant negative element for temporary workers and freelancers, or for the professional growth of younger journalists.



71.8%

Journalists  
under 35 who  
only worked  
from home  
during the  
COVID-19  
emergency

As shown by a comparison between all workers and journalists, if for the former ones the possibility of working from home grows with increasing income and age, for the latter ones there is a greater aptitude for working from home among freelancers, younger and low-income professionals, proving a way of working in smart or remote modalities<sup>113</sup> which already belong to journalists working in unstable conditions.

Although it is clear that journalism, at least in Italy, is a job characterised by a high tendency to remote working<sup>114</sup>, working remotely risks to negatively widen the range between freelancers/temporary professionals who work remotely and employees/collaborators who can choose to work in the newsroom.

70.1%

Freelance journalists  
who only worked  
from home  
during the  
COVID-19  
emergency

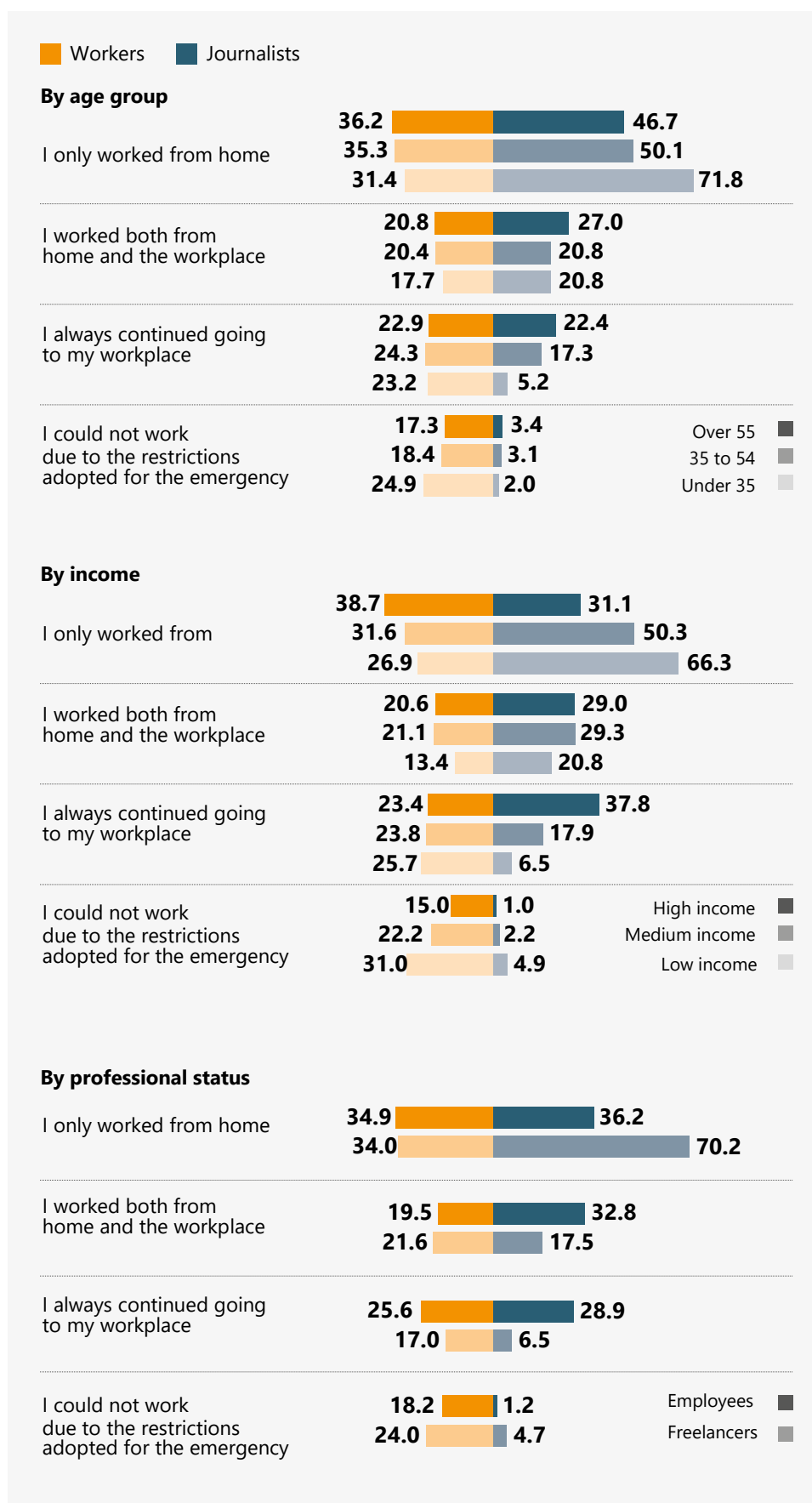
In the case of the journalism—rather than policies to reduce the inequalities due to remote working (which are almost non-existent in the journalistic field)—there is still the need to invest in restructuring publishing companies, to employ journalists on a stable basis and reduce the movement of many professionals toward freelancing and the "escape" of others to the safer sector of communication and public relations (see Chapter 3), two phenomena that end up decreasing the contribution of quality journalism to the proper functioning of democratic society. In its profound modification of work routines, remote working risks indeed cracking the attitude towards those activities in the field which have always been the backbone of journalism (and which are increasingly important in investigative journalism or in covering news), witnessed by the overtaking of institutional sources over direct ones during the COVID-19 emergency (see Paragraph 5.3).

112 According to INAPP (Italy's National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies), workers with a high aptitude for remote working have an average income advantage of 10% compared to workers with a low aptitude for remote working, which achieves 17% among workers with the highest incomes. In particular, the analysis carried out by INAPP researchers shows that the aptitude for remote working favours the highest income brackets, as well as male employees, adults and those who live in the provinces most affected by the COVID-19 (see INAPP, *Gli effetti indesiderabili dello smart working sulla disuguaglianza dei redditi in Italia*, Policy Brief no. 20 - July 2020, available at: [https://oa.inapp.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/714/INAPP\\_Effetti\\_Indesiderabili\\_Smart\\_Working\\_Disuguaglianza\\_Reddito\\_Italia\\_2020.pdf?sequence=1](https://oa.inapp.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/714/INAPP_Effetti_Indesiderabili_Smart_Working_Disuguaglianza_Reddito_Italia_2020.pdf?sequence=1); Bonacini, L., Gallo, G., Scicchitano, S. (2020), *All that glitters is not gold. Effects of working from home on income inequality at the time of COVID-19*, INAPP Working paper no. 50).

113 *Smart working* entails the definition of precisely identified objectives and timelines for achieving them by the company/institution and by workers, who can therefore work without time and location constraints. *Remote working*, on the other hand, simply configures a new way of performing work remotely/from home following the same typical model of office work. In teleworking, time and sometimes logistical constraints are also introduced (e.g., only the employee's home). During the COVID-19 emergency, agile working spread in Italy as a hybrid working modality, halfway between *remote working* (remote working without prior definition of objectives and results) and *smart working* (absence of time and logistic constraints). From now on, to ease the discussion, despite the awareness of the potential confusion generated by a distorted use of these expressions, *remote working* will only be used to indicate all these different ways of performing remote working activities during the COVID-19 emergency.

114 According to INAPP, the Information and Communication sector (together with Finance and Insurance, and Public Administration and Professional Services) is among those fields in which remote working is more frequent.





**FIGURE 5.2**

**Active journalists vs employees and freelancers: working modalities during the COVID-19 emergency by age group, income bracket, and professional status**

(data in %)

Source: AGCOM elaboration on data from the *Observatory on Journalism - 3rd edition (COVID-19 emergency special)* for active journalists and on SWG data for AGCOM for employees and freelancers



**84%**

JOURNALISTS WHO  
COVERED THE  
COVID-19  
EMERGENCY

## 5.2 THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY FROM A JOURNALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

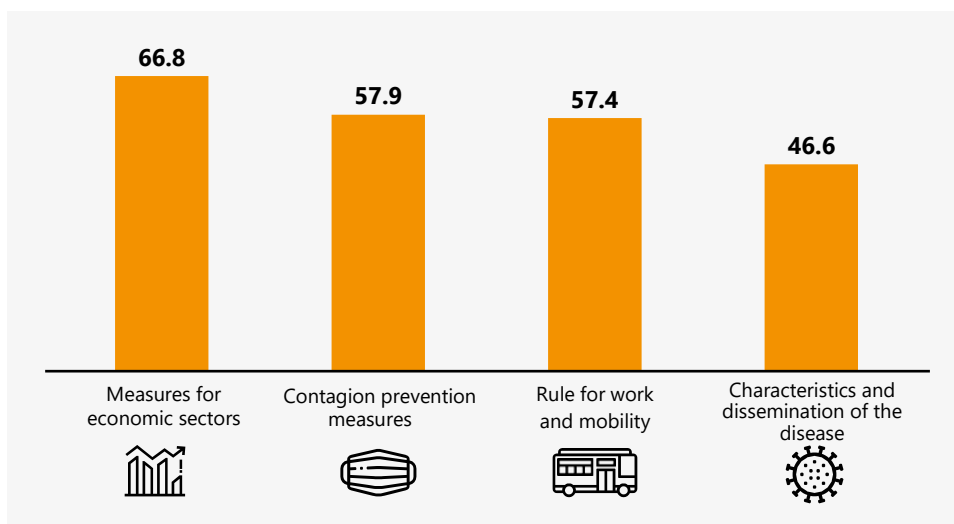
From a journalistic perspective, the COVID-19 emergency (as a communication outbreak which has led commentators and experts to speak openly about the infodemic<sup>115</sup> and its disruptive impact on social and economic relations<sup>116</sup>), has clearly attracted the attention of the majority of journalists, beyond the issues they usually deal with. Only 16% of the journalists did not cover issues related to the COVID-19 health emergency at all.

Among the journalists who dealt with the emergency, attention was mainly focused on aspects relating to economic measures and the consequences on working activity and mobility, as well as on aspects related to preventive measures. Conversely, less attention was paid to the characteristics and spread of the disease, probably due to the greater technicality of the issues, and to the less specialised preparation of journalists (see Chapters 2 and 4).

**FIGURE 5.3**

Categories of  
topics  
concerning  
COVID-19  
addressed by  
journalists who  
covered the  
emergency  
COVID-19

(data in %)



<sup>115</sup> On infodemic and fake news during the COVID-19 emergency, see Baines, D., Elliott, R.J.R. (2020). *Defining misinformation, disinformation and malinformation: An urgent need for clarity during the COVID-19 infodemic*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham; Nielsen, R.K., Fletcher, R., Newman, N., Brennen, S., & Howard, P.N. (2020). *Navigating the 'infodemic': how people in six countries access and rate news and information about Coronavirus*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. However, the term 'infodemic' appears to be often misused, as a mere suggestion of the occurrence of an epidemic, both in health and news media system.

<sup>116</sup> See Lupton, D. (ed.) (2020). Special section on 'Sociology and the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic'. *Health Sociology Review*, 29

In particular, by analysing in detail the aspects related to the COVID-19 emergency dealt with by journalists, more than half of the professionals who addressed the emergency (51.5%) covered economic support measures to workers and businesses, which certainly represented an important test for national and regional institutions and attracted the interest of the population, not always accustomed to bureaucratic procedures for obtaining bonuses and aids. On the contrary, the spread of the contagion and the characteristics of the disease were among the topics less addressed by journalists, who, according to a mechanism already known in the sector literature regarding policy makers<sup>117</sup>, often abdicated their information task on issues related to health and science to experts and scientists, who have never been as present as in this period in news spaces (and not only) of traditional media<sup>118</sup>, often encountering conflicting opinions and judgments from the public<sup>119</sup>.



51.5%

CITIZENS SATISFIED  
BY THE  
INFORMATION  
COVERAGE OF  
ECONOMIC AND  
SOCIAL SUPPORT  
MEASURES

A comparison with the degree of satisfaction expressed by citizens with regard to the information received on the various issues related to the current emergency, it should be noted that, even with an average level of citizens satisfaction (with values between a minimum of 6.2 to a maximum of 7.5), some of the topics addressed by information professionals received a lower average rating.

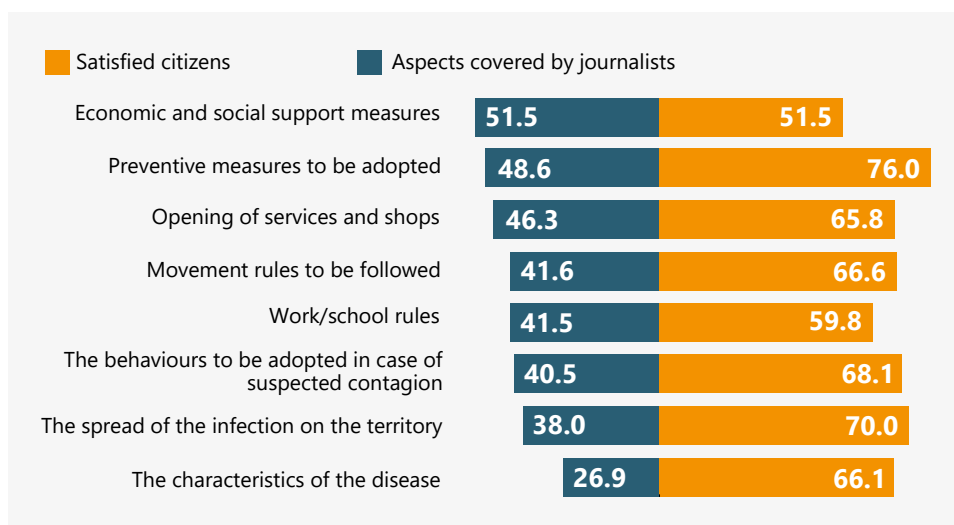
In particular, the news coverage of economic support measures (covered by more than half of the journalists) and the rules on work and school activities (probably also due to the continuous variations and modifications that occurred over the weeks) are the only issues on which less than 6 out of 10 citizens expressed a satisfactory opinion (equal to or greater than 7, on a scale of 1 to 10). More than two thirds of citizens are satisfied with the news related to health aspects, such as prevention measures to be adopted, the spread of the contagion in the territory, the characteristics of the disease—this is potential consequence of the growing presence of doctors and scientists in the media.

<sup>117</sup> See Pielke, R.A. Jr. (2005). *Scienza e politica*, op. cit.

<sup>118</sup> According to the findings of GECA Italia for AGCOM, among the top ten subjects for speaking time in the extra-news TV shows of the seven general television broadcasters, five are scientists (virologists and infectious diseases specialists) or representatives of scientific institutions (e.g., ISS, the Italian National Institute of Health). See AGCOM, *L'informazione nei programmi televisivi. Tempi di parola dei soggetti politici, istituzionali e sociali* (Information in television programs. Speaking times of political, institutional and social subjects). Period: March-April 2020.

<sup>119</sup> According to the Observa's April 2020 COVID-19 Observatory, almost one in two Italians (48%) believe that the diversity of opinions given by experts in their interventions created confusion. According to the same survey, even if the work of national scientific experts is judged positively by almost 3 out of 4 Italians (72%), national (such as Protezione Civile), regional, and local institutions obtain a positive judgment from a higher percentage of the Italian population (see Observa, *Gli italiani e il Coronavirus: i nuovi dati dell'Osservatorio*, <https://www.observa.it/gli-italiani-e-il-coronavirus-i-nuovi-dati-dellosservatorio/>). For an analysis of the role of scientists on TV during the health emergency, see also Sfondini, A. (2020), *Come comunicare la pandemia? Credibilità e fiducia delle fonti istituzionali nell'informazione italiana sul COVID-19*, in Sala, M., Scaglioni, M. (eds.), *L'altro virus. Comunicazione e disinformazione al tempo del COVID-19*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 63–73.

**FIGURE 5.4**  
**COVID-19**  
**issued addressed**  
**by journalists who**  
**covered the**  
**emergency**  
**COVID-19**  
**(data in %)**



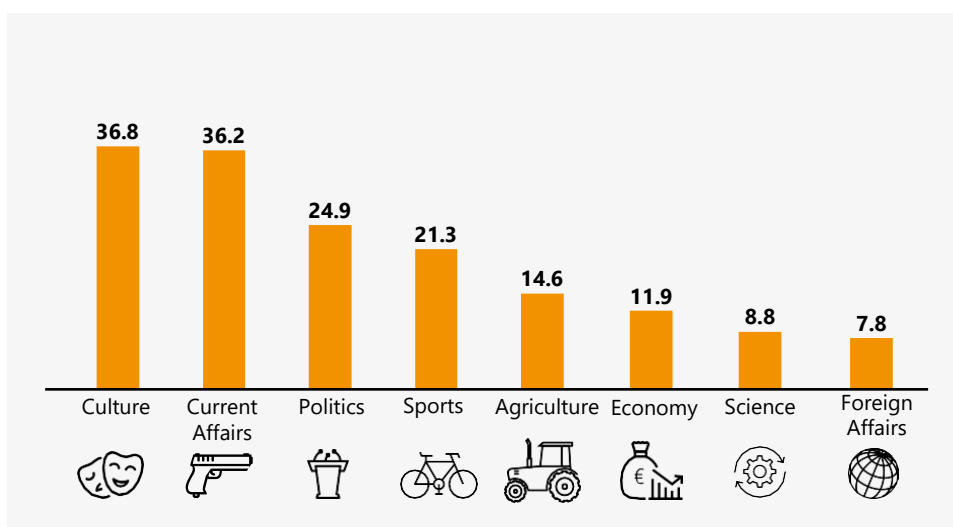
Source: AGCOM elaboration on data from the *Observatory on Journalism - 3rd edition (COVID-19 emergency special)* for active journalists and on SWG data for AGCOM for citizens

**36.8%**  
**JOURNALISTS**  
**WHO USUALLY**  
**DEAL WITH**  
**CULTURE AND**  
**NEGLECTED**  
**THE TOPIC DURING**  
**THE COVID-19**  
**EMERGENCY**

Finally, to close this analysis on the journalistic coverage of the COVID-19 emergency, it is certainly interesting (also to understand the future trends of post-emergency journalism) to highlight the issues that journalists had to leave without news coverage, a phenomenon that affected more than one third (38%) of journalists who dealt with the pandemic.

The primacy of culture (neglected by 36.8% of journalists who usually dealt with the topic), and the prominent position of sports (which 21.3% of journalists could not address) are undoubtedly linked the drastic reduction of events in these areas.

On the contrary, the lack of coverage of news (a category in which crime facts are also included), neglected by 36.2% of information professionals, certainly did not depend on fewer events, but rather highlighted a profound change in journalistic production routines, as shown by the analyses on the most used sources during the COVID-19 period.



**FIGURE 5.5**

Topics not covered by journalists who could not deal with the issues they usually address due to the COVID-19 emergency

(data in %)

### 5.3 NEWS SOURCES DURING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

During the period of the health emergency, due to both the lockdown imposed by the acts of the Prime Minister<sup>120</sup> and the methods of working remotely, institutional sources exceeded direct sources among those used by journalists who dealt with the COVID-19 emergency.

If in the past (see Chapter 2), institutional sources were used by less than 3 out of 4 journalists, in the most intense emergency period almost 9 out of 10 journalists used this type of sources (86.5%). Direct journalistic sources, which were the most used sources instead (84.3% of active journalists in Italy referred to this type of sources), in the emergency period were used only by 6 journalists out of 10. An unprecedented role compared to the previous period is obviously reserved for scientific sources in the coverage of the health emergency (58.9% of journalists who dealt with all aspects relating to COVID-19 used them), while about half of the news professionals referred to news agencies (49.4%). Finally, other online and open sources were still little used, despite the wealth of data and information freely accessible online thanks to non-governmental institutions, research institutes, and information outlets during the emergency period, both categories met the interest of less than 2 out of 10 journalists (respectively 19.1% and 17.9% of journalists).



9

JOURNALISTS OUT OF

10

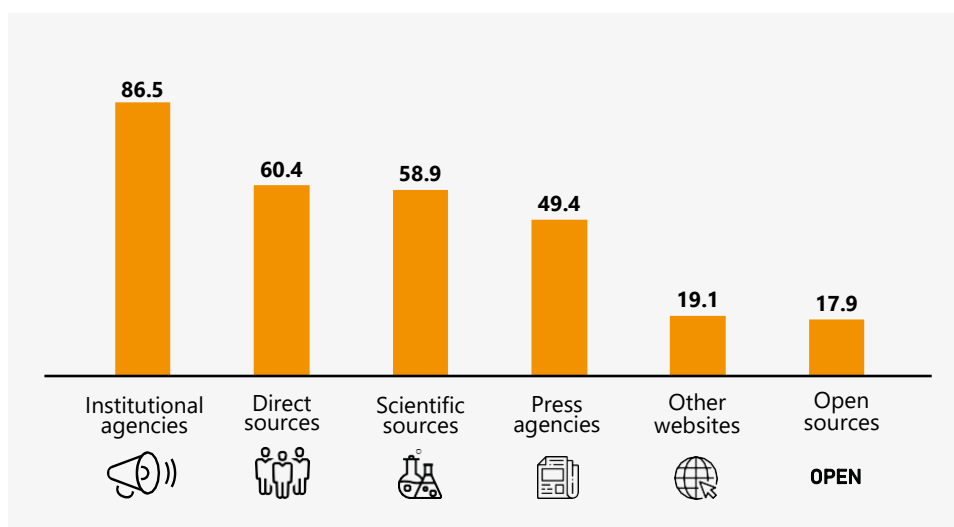
USED INSTITUTIONAL SOURCES DURING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

<sup>120</sup> In any case, travel bans did not affect journalistic activities, given that work-related traveling was allowed during the lockdown period as well. In some territories, local institutions also favoured the mobility of journalists (including private mobility), for instance by granting free parking spaces in the usually paid stations, in order to ease their activity.

FIGURE 5.6

Sources used by  
journalists who  
dealt with the  
emergency  
COVID-19

(data in %)



7.2%

JOURNALISTS  
WHO USED OPEN  
DATA DURING  
THE COVID-19  
EMERGENCY

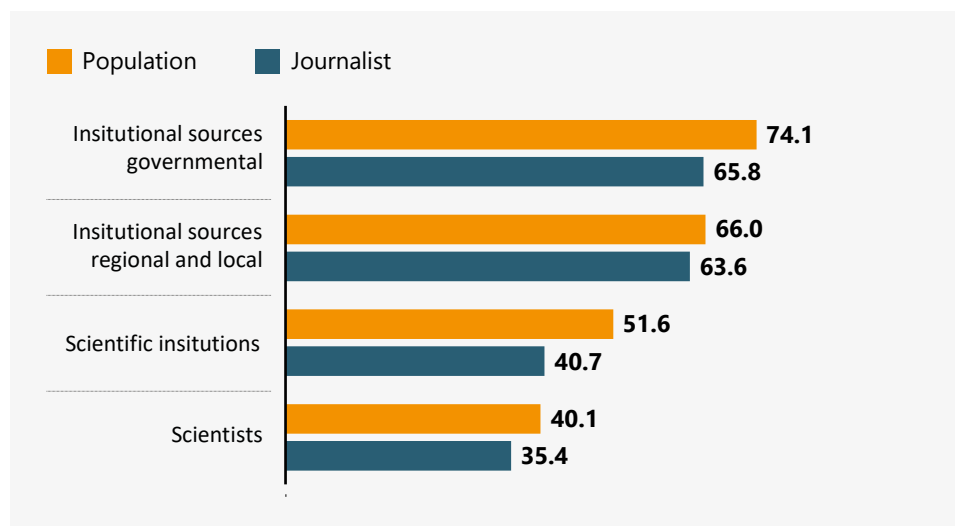
In more details, on the one hand, almost two thirds of journalists used the institutional, government, and regional/local sources in the coverage of issues related to COVID-19 (respectively 65.8 and 63.6%). On the other hand, there is very little use of documents and information held by public administrations already available or available upon request<sup>121</sup> (11.2%), open data (7.2%), and fact-checking sites<sup>122</sup> (5.8%).

From these data, it is evident that, with the impossibility of resorting to routinely used sources, such as direct sources, journalists have opted, probably also due to the unprecedented climate of uncertainty, to press releases and statements from national or regional/local institutions, since they were not used (even before the emergency) to innovative sources. However, information search method caused an indirect effect of overlapping between sources used by information professionals for their professional activity and sources used by the population to obtain information

<sup>121</sup> In this regard, during the health emergency, Decree Law 18/2020 suspended all administrative proceedings in Italian public administrations, including those relating to requests for generalised civic access (FOIA), provided for by Legislative Decree 97/2016.

<sup>122</sup> Moreover, during the COVID-19 emergency, the International Fact-Checking Network promoted the creation of a #CoronaVirusFactCheckAlliance (with the participation of, among others, the Italian Pagella Politica and Open) and made available to the public an international database of fact-checking resources carried out by its members.

By analysing the use of specific sources by journalists (who covered the COVID-19 emergency) and citizens (who were informed about the health emergency), latter have resorted to information both to institutional and scientific sources in a way that was sometimes even higher than what journalists did for their activities.



Source: AGCOM elaboration on data from the *Observatory on Journalism - 3rd edition (COVID-19 emergency special)* for active journalists and on SWG data for AGCOM for citizens

FIGURE 5.7

**Journalists vs population: a comparison on the use of some sources to be up to date about the COVID-19 emergency**

(data in %)

The direct use of institutional sources by citizens proves a process of disintermediation and hybridisation of the news consumption diet, which is a consequence of the new technological possibilities and the presence of new information intermediaries such as social networks and search engines. Journalists (almost all with limited specific skills, see Chapters 2 and 4) were not able to adequately respond to this phenomenon with a change in their production routines, delegating much of the production of scientific information to professionals (virologists, epidemiologists, doctors, but also other scientists), to whom citizens also directly addressed in a moment of great uncertainty. Journalists thus risk seeing their possibilities of providing information at the service of citizens compressed by the increasing incidence of advertisers' strategies aimed at maximising their visibility at the expense of journalistic products (see Chapter 3), and undermined by the continuous unmediated resorting to expert and institutional sources.

In this way, there is an actual risk of watering down the filtering and mediation functions of the Italian journalists and of limiting their presence in the public debate, moreover at a time when citizens are increasingly concerned about the proliferation of disinformation in medical-health issues<sup>123</sup>, and are therefore more likely to show confidence in professional and quality information conveyed by traditional media<sup>124</sup>.



**74.1%**

**CITIZENS WHO USED INSTITUTIONAL SOURCES TO GET INFORMED DURING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY**

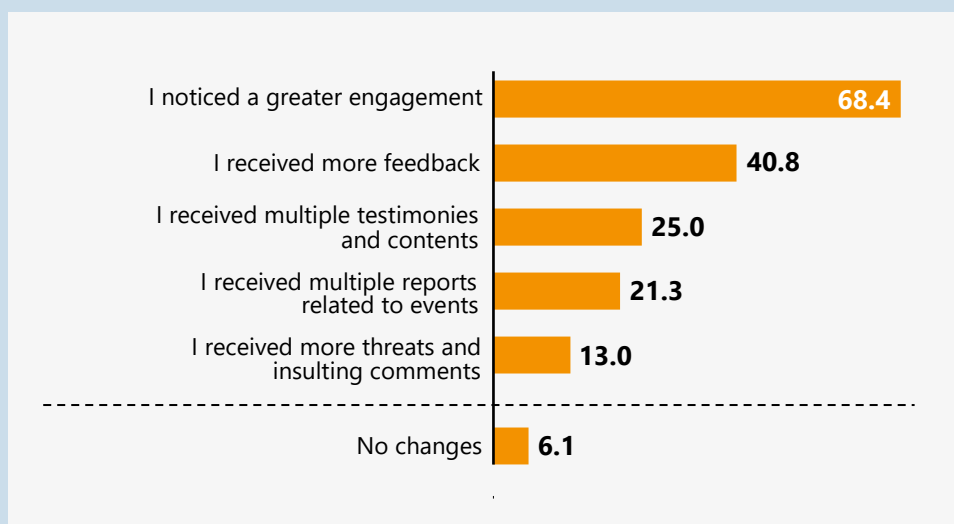
<sup>123</sup> According to the recent Edelman Trust Barometer dedicated to the COVID-19 emergency, 67% of citizens are afraid of fake news and false information about the virus (see Edelman, *Edelman Trust Barometer. Spring Update: Trust and the COVID-19 Pandemic*, <https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2020-05/2020%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20Spring%20Update.pdf>)

<sup>124</sup> According to the same survey, 69% of citizens trust in traditional media, a percentage that has never been higher over the last 9 years (see Edelman, *op. cit.*).

### Social networks, journalists, and citizens: new ways of participating in the public debate

More than two thirds of journalists on social media for work purposes (68.4%) highlighted greater engagement of the public on their own page or on that of the publishing, reflecting greater participation of citizens in the continuous and constant flow of news about the pandemic. Furthermore, 40% of journalists active on social networks received more feedback (comments on articles, requests for corrections, etc.). About one quarter received more testimonies and contents (videos, photos, etc.) and reports related to events worthy of news coverage, proving a direct participation of citizens in the news production cycle in the emergency period (a phenomenon which is already typical of information coverage of environmental crisis situations<sup>125</sup>). On the other hand, a not large but significant number of journalists on social networks for work reasons (13%) found an increase in threats and offensive comments by citizens compared to the period before the pandemic<sup>126</sup>.

**FIGURE 5.8**  
Change in  
relationships  
with the social  
network  
audience  
according to  
journalists  
(data in %)



<sup>125</sup> On the role of content disseminated by citizens through social networks in information coverage and in the management of environmental and natural disasters, see Mehta, A.M., Bruns, A., and Newton, J. (2017). Trust, but verify: social media models for disaster management. *Disasters*, 41(3), 549–565; Valenzuela, S., Puente, S., & Flores, P.M. (2017). Comparing disaster news on Twitter and television: An intermedia agenda setting perspective. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 61(4), 615–637.

<sup>126</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of online threats to journalists and a more complete classification, please refer to the forthcoming AGCOM'S report on threats to journalists.



## 5.4 JOURNALISTS AND DISINFORMATION DURING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

About three quarters (73%) of journalists encountered cases of disinformation during the COVID-19 emergency. 78% of them found cases of disinformation more than once a week and 23% of them even once a day. The main source of disinformation is certainly Facebook, mentioned by almost all those who encountered such incidents (88%), while more than half of the journalists identified it in WhatsApp chats and groups (55%).

In general, almost all (94.9%) journalists who dealt with disinformation cases on the COVID-19 emergency did it on non-traditional online sources (social networks, search engines, messaging systems, and other online sources). More than half (53.8%) did it on editorial sources (online outlets and media). In this regard, very often (due to the speed and uncertainty of the information on the virus and its consequences) some traditional and online news outlets may have encountered unwanted errors or episodes of disinformation, which are often confused with voluntary disinformation<sup>127</sup>. Finally, as an evidence of the credibility and pervasiveness of these sources, only a marginal share (less than 0.5%) of journalists stated that they had encountered inaccurate pieces of content from institutional sites.



73%

JOURNALISTS WHO  
ENCOUNTERED  
CASES OF  
DISINFORMATION  
DURING THE  
PERIOD OF THE  
COVID-19  
EMERGENCY

Almost two thirds (63.5%) of journalists say they adopted practices to identify and analyse false news regarding the COVID-19 emergency. 62% of them used digital tools to verify fake videos/images/audios/memes, but only 1 out of 5 produced fact-checking articles, only 1 out of 10 did live fact-checking during press conferences or public debates, and only 1 out of 20 was involved in media literacy campaigns aimed at helping citizens identify cases of disinformation.

In a delicate moment in which citizens must be accompanied by expert voices, journalists did not fully succeed (except in some but significant cases) in assuming a role of debunkers and certifiers of quality news, leaving to public institutions and experts<sup>128</sup> the complex task of correctly filtering, selecting, and decoding knowledge and news.

<sup>127</sup> In this regard, as part of the work of the [Technical Roundtable on Pluralism and Online Platforms](#), AGCOM primarily defined (also for the benefit of the stakeholders participating in the activities of the Roundtable, such as publishers, journalists, online platforms, associations of advertisers, or media practitioners) the correct terminology to be used and the different types of information disorders. In detail, when reference is made to a type of untrue or inaccurate information content not created with a malicious intent but still capable of being received by users as news on real facts, the term to be used is 'misinformation'. When the information content is based on real facts (many times with a private character) but contextualised in such a way that they can also be viral and disclosed with the specific intent of damaging a person, organization or country, or affirm/discredit a thesis, the term 'malinformation' is used. Finally, in the event that the manipulation of information content is characterised by both falsity and malicious intent, the notion of 'disinformation' is referred to. The classification attempt by AGCOM has been, subsequently merged into the technical report [Le strategie di disinformazione online e la filiera dei contenuti fake](#) (Online disinformation strategies and the supply chain of fake contents).

<sup>128</sup> In this sense, the [operational program](#) proposed by the *Monitoring Unit to combat the spread of fake news relating to COVID-19 on the web and social networks*, activated by the Department for Information and Publishing of the Italy Presidency of the Council of Ministers during the emergency period, identified a key role for public communicators in the harmonisation of institutional content and in raising awareness among citizens.

**FIGURE 5.9**

**Practices  
adopted by  
journalists who  
detected and  
analysed fake  
news during the  
COVID-19  
emergency**

(data in %)



If national and regional/local institutions and the institutions and personalities of the scientific world (which both journalists and citizens can access in the same way) will remain, even after the pandemic, the main information hub on a significant number of issues, and if journalists fail to equip themselves with digital and specialised skills to be able to have greater control over the entire information (and disinformation) circuit, their historical mediation role risks being called into question.



# METHODOLOGICAL Appendix

The survey for the 3rd edition of the Observatory on Journalism, drafted after delivered period for the activities of the Observatory and the dialogue phase with stakeholders, was disseminated to active journalists in Italy between October and December 2018<sup>129</sup>. AGCOM received 3,160 responses (with a 30% increase compared to the previous edition), of which 2,191 could be used for the analysis<sup>130</sup>.

The first part of the survey addresses the broad field of professional activity, with specific reference to the working condition. Following a filter question on the work setting, respondents were divided into two different *routes*, the first (and broader) for journalists who work, as employees or freelancers, for the publishing companies (including newspapers, magazines, television or radio channels, online-only news outlets, news agencies, services/suppliers of journalistic products), the second for communication professionals, or journalists who work for communication agencies or press/communications offices of public entities, associations, and companies<sup>131</sup>.

With regards to news media professionals, the survey continues with questions relating to their professional activity (type of medium they usually work for, activities and topics, use of sources and main factors affecting their work) and threats (with particular reference to threats on the web, legal actions, and the effects on their activity), which will be the subject of a specific and separate study<sup>132</sup>, and finally, questions on sources, working tools, and the evolution of the profession (in particular the most important influences)<sup>133</sup>.



30%

increase in the  
number of  
answers to the  
survey received  
compared to the  
previous edition

2,191

COULD BE USED  
FOR THE ANALYSIS

129 The link to the survey was sent by e-mail on 18th October 2018, with a recall on 20th November 2018. The survey, which could be filled out from desktop computers and was also optimised for mobile devices, was hosted on AGCOM's institutional website (<http://www.agcom.it/Osservatorio-giornalismo>) throughout the entire duration of the inquiry (from 15th October to 13th December 2018). The information and data collected were acquired anonymously and analysed in aggregate form, with the utmost respect for the principles established by Article 5 of EU Regulation no. 2016/679, the so-called General Data Protection Regulation.

130 In selecting the questionnaires to be used for the analysis, the incomplete ones (with the exception of those that presented information related to the weighting variables taken into consideration: gender, age, income, region) or those that did not present information in any of the weighting variables were eliminated. The questionnaires filled out by retired subjects who do not work as journalists were eliminated, too, as well as those filled out by people with no income, the unemployed (for a longer period than one year), and those who do not mainly work as journalists. This further selection phase was necessary in light of the definition of the scope of analysis, limited to the universe of active journalists. In any case, even the surveys which were not used for the quantitative analysis provided useful insights for the general framework of this study.

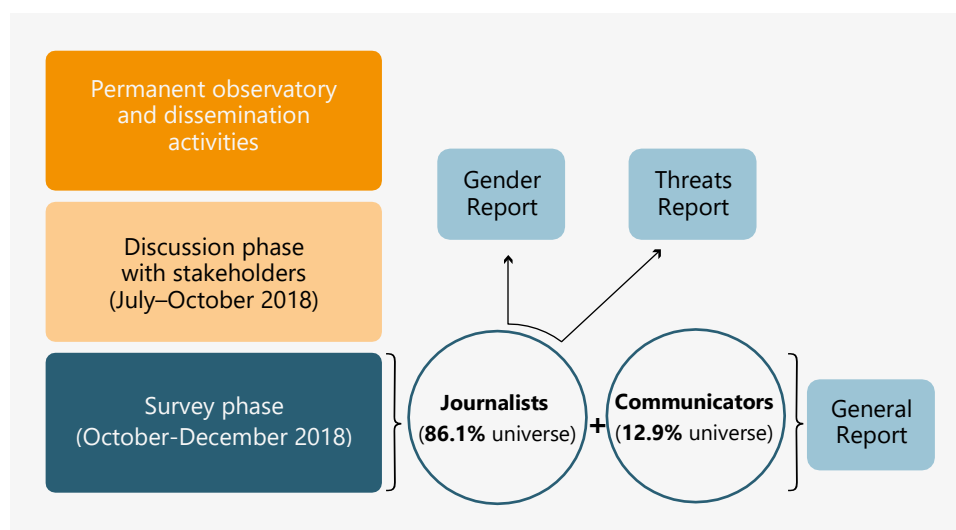
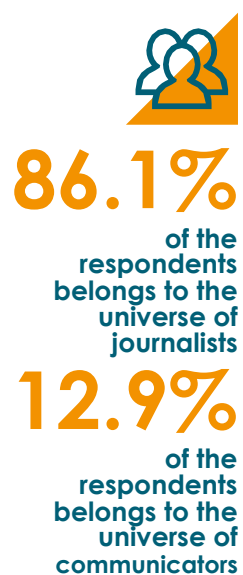
131 Considering that AGCOM's Department of Economics and Statistic launched the Observatory with the specific aim of analysing the world of the journalistic profession as a news producer, those who declared that they work for both the publishing companies and communication agencies/press offices were re-directed to the route for journalists who work for the publishing companies.

132 As part of the 3rd edition of the Observatory on Journalism, in addition to this general report on news media and communication professionals (see infographic on the next page), AGCOM developed specific analyses both on threats to journalists and on the possible appearance of gender differences within the profession.

133 The questions on factors and influences on journalism were elaborated starting from the survey of the international research project *The Worlds of Journalism Study: 2012–2016* on the transformations of the journalistic profession. *Worlds of Journalism Study* (WJS) is an international academic project that was created to regularly assess the state of journalism. In particular, within the WJS, two surveys on the journalistic profession were conducted between 2007–2011 and 2012–2016. In light of the similarity between the WJS and the Observatory on Journalism, AGCOM established a collaboration with the Italian research unit operating at the Department of Social and Political Sciences of the "Statale" University of Milan, coordinated by Prof. Sergio Spoladore.

With regard to communication professionals, specific questions were asked to investigate in greater detail their work environment, the activities they carry out and (only for those who specifically carry out press office activities) relations with the publishing, and some questions already posed to other journalists on working and online tools.

Finally, all respondents were asked to provide some basic socio-demographic information (gender, gross income, professional domicile, level of education, and language skills).



AGCOM confirmed the trend of the previous editions, recognising the opportunity to foresee once again the spontaneous and open participation in the Observatory by all subjects belonging to the national journalistic universe.

In particular, with the third edition of the Observatory, AGCOM further reaffirmed its “participatory” data-gathering approach. This choice is also attributable to the purpose of drafting operational policy proposals inherent in AGCOM's activity, in constant dialogue with economic operators, professionals, and other market players and protagonists<sup>134</sup>. In other words, the aim was also to stimulate the participation of all active professionals in the information system not only, as in traditional approaches, in the subsequent phases of sharing, presenting, and discussing the research results, but already from the moment of construction of the analysis and acquisition of related information.

<sup>134</sup> In this regard, see the heterogeneous composition of *the Roundtable on Pluralism and Online Platforms*, where representatives of online platforms (Google, Facebook, Wikipedia), all major national publishers (of newspapers, radio, and TV), journalism professionals, advertising representatives, trade associations (including those representing consumers), as well as of academic institutions and research centres participate since its establishment in November 2017.

This was eased, in the specific case of the Observatory on Journalism, by the small number of active journalists in Italy (35,706 as of December 2018), and the consequent possibility of reaching, through this approach, many of them. Furthermore, the *ex-ante* knowledge of socio-demographic variables (in particular: gender, age, income, region of residence) made it possible to carry out a statistical process of *ex-post* re-weighting of the final sample. The critical aspects that can be found in this methodology, especially in relation to self-selection phenomena, were therefore addressed, during the processing of the data collected, thanks to the control of the results obtained for known variables, through a re-weighting of the sample of respondents with regards to the socio-demographic characteristics attributable to the target universe. In particular, also in this edition of the Observatory, AGCOM collaborated with ISTAT (the Italian National Institute of Statistics), with an active protocol [of understanding for collaboration in the statistical field](#), for re-weighting the sample to the target universe.

The answers obtained brought the survey to the first place for the number of respondents compared to the international panorama of the sector, with a representativeness rate of 6.1% of the entire universe of Italian active journalists.

The methodological choice of the Department of Economics and Statistics also enabled AGCOM to significantly engage the journalistic world and its main representatives.

AGCOM contacted active journalists in Italy in various ways indeed. On the one hand, the survey was sent via e-mail to thousands of people who carry out journalistic activities as freelancers or in newsrooms<sup>135</sup>; on the other hand, AGCOM (willing to establishing a fruitful collaboration with all the stakeholders interested in the state of Italian journalism) raised awareness among all the associations contacted for the testing phase of the survey, as well as the regional associations of journalists, regional press associations, industry groups and associations, schools of journalism recognised by OdG<sup>136</sup>.



6.1%

REPRESENTATIVENESS  
RATE OF THE WHOLE  
UNIVERSE OF ITALIAN  
ACTIVE JOURNALISTS

<sup>135</sup> The database of employed and freelance journalists was provided by the company Mediaddress, which manages a database containing references and contacts of 32,182 Italian journalists and 5,736 publishers (data updated as of October 2018).

<sup>136</sup> The two-year School Journalism of the University of Bari, the two-year School of Journalism of the University of Bologna, the two-year School of Journalism for Press, Radio, and Television and Multimedia of the "Cattolica" University of Milan, the two-year School of Journalism of the LUMSA University, the two-year Walter Tobagi School of Journalism at the University of Milan, the two-year School Journalism of the IULM University of Milan, the two-year School of Journalism of the "Suor Orsola Benincasa" University of Naples, the "Centro Italiano di Studi Superiori per la Formazione e l'Aggiornamento in Giornalismo Radiotelevisivo" in Perugia, the "Massimo Baldini" School of Journalism at the LUISS University, the Post-Graduate School of Journalism at the University of Salerno, the two-year School of Journalism of the University of Turin, the Urbino Institute for Journalism Training.



**1,869**  
responses received,  
of which:

**1,423**  
could be used for  
the analysis

IN THE COVID-19  
INQUIRY OF THE THIRD  
EDITION  
OF THE OBSERVATORY  
ON JOURNALISM

## Inquiry on the journalistic profession during the COVID-19 emergency

The survey on the journalistic profession during the COVID-19 emergency, drafted after the discussion phase with some stakeholders<sup>137</sup>, was delivered to active journalists in Italy during the summer of 2020<sup>138</sup>. AGCOM received 1,869 responses, of which 1,423 could be used for the analysis<sup>139</sup>.

The first part of the survey, similar to that of the previous one but simpler, addresses the broad issue of professional activity, with specific reference to the potential impact of the COVID-19 emergency on working conditions. In this case, too, following a filter question on the work setting, respondents were divided into two different *routes*, the first (and broader) for journalists who work, as employees or freelancers, for the publishing (including newspapers, magazines, television or radio channels, online-only news outlets, press/information agencies, services/suppliers of journalistic products), the second for communication professionals, or journalists who work for communications agencies or press/communications offices of public entities, associations and companies<sup>140</sup>.

With regards to information professionals, the survey continues with questions relating to their professional activity (type of medium they usually work for, activities and reference topics, use of sources and main factors affecting their work) and the impact of the health emergency on the ways they work, the coverage of issues related to the emergency and the sources used, the impact of the emergency coverage on the issues they usually address, disinformation on the emergency, and any practices used to tackle it and the relationship with the public through social networks during the emergency.

With regard to communication professionals, specific questions were asked to investigate in greater detail their work environment, the impact of the health emergency on the ways they work, the coverage of issues related to the emergency.

<sup>137</sup> In particular, among the historical partners of the Journalism Observatory, the National Association of Journalists (OdG), the Italian National Press Federation (FNSI), Rai Journalists Trade Union (USIGRAI), the Union of Freelance Journalists (USGF).

<sup>138</sup> The link to the survey was sent by e-mail on 12th June 2020, with a recall on 8th July 2020. The survey, which could be filled out from desktop computers and was also optimised for mobile devices, was hosted on AGCOM's institutional website (<http://www.agcom.it/osservatorio-giornalismo>) throughout the entire duration of the inquiry (from 12th June to 28th July 2020). The information and data collected were acquired anonymously and analysed in aggregate form, with the utmost respect for the principles established by Article 5 of EU Regulation no. 2016/679, the so-called General Data Protection Regulation.

<sup>139</sup> In selecting the questionnaires to be used for the analysis, the incomplete ones (with the exception of those that presented information related to the weighting variables taken into consideration: gender, age, income, region) or those that did not present information in any of the weighting variables were eliminated. The questionnaires filled out by retired subjects who do not work as journalists were eliminated, too, as well as those filled out by people with no income, the unemployed (for a longer period than one year), and those who do not mainly work as journalists. This further selection phase was necessary in light of the definition of the scope of analysis, limited to the universe of active journalists.

<sup>140</sup> In this case as well, those who declared that they work for both the publishing companies and communication agencies/press offices were re-directed to the route for journalists who work for the publishing companies.



Finally, all respondents were asked to provide some basic socio-demographic information (gender, gross income, professional domicile, level of education).



#### PARTICIPATORY DATA-GATHERING

AGCOM confirmed the trend of the previous editions, recognising the opportunity to foresee once again the spontaneous and open participation in the Observatory by all subjects belonging to the national journalistic universe, following a “participatory” data-gathering approach, in line with the purpose of drafting operational policy proposals inherent in AGCOM's activity.

Furthermore, the *ex-ante* knowledge of socio-demographic variables (in particular: gender, age, income, region of residence) made it possible to carry out a statistical process of *ex-post* re-weighting of the final sample in collaboration with ISTAT (the Italian National Institute of Statistics)<sup>141</sup>.

With regard to the methods of participation of the subjects, AGCOM contacted active journalists in Italy by sending the link to the online survey via e-mail to thousands of subjects who carry out journalistic activities as freelancers or in editorial offices<sup>142</sup>, as well as raising awareness among all the partners of the Observatory, including the regional associations of journalists, regional press associations, industry groups and associations.

<sup>141</sup> The group of active journalists registered to INPGI was used as the target universe.

<sup>142</sup> The database of employed and freelance journalists was provided again by the company Mediaddress, which manages a database containing references and contacts of 5,541 Italian journalists and 4,462 publishers (as of June 2020).