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DOSSIER

VENEZUELA:

Journalists work in a fragile context

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ABSTRACT – This paper presents the results of a survey conducted by the civil association Medianálisis from 2015 to 2017. Printed newspapers, radio, television and Internet are part of the sample analysis. The field research had to overcome many difficulties, and the most critical one was the lack of reliable and consolidated information regarding the number of journalists professionally employed in media outlets in Venezuela. This study leads to an overview of the current scenario and the context concerning the professional practice of journalism in Venezuela.

Keywords: Journalism. Venezuela. Working conditions. Non-governmental organization.

O JORNALISMO NA VENEZUELA É EXERCIDO EM UM CONTEXTO PRECÁRIO

RESUMO – Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma pesquisa realizada pela associação civil Medianálisis entre 2015 e 2017. Jornais impressos, rádio, televisão e internet fazem parte da análise da amostra. A pesquisa de campo teve que superar muitas dificuldades, e a mais crítica foi a falta de informações confiáveis e consolidadas sobre o número de jornalistas profissionalmente empregados em meios de comunicação na Venezuela. Este estudo leva a uma visão geral do cenário atual e do contexto referente à prática profissional do jornalismo na Venezuela.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo. Venezuela. Condições de trabalho. Organizações não governamentais.

EL PERIODISMO EN VENEZUELA SE EJERCE EN UN CONTEXTO PRECARIO

RESUMEN – Para este artículo tomamos como referencia los resultados de la encuesta desarrollada por la asociación civil Medianálisis en los años 2015, 2016 y 2017 en Venezuela. Los medios de comunicación considerados para la constitución de esta muestra fueron de diarios impresos, radio, televisión y web. La investigación de campo durante estos años ha debido sortear diversas dificultades, pero hay una de fondo: la ausencia de información consolidada y confiable sobre el número de periodistas que laboran profesionalmente en los medios de comunicación. La intención última del estudio conduce a una visualización descriptiva de los escenarios y contexto vigentes en el ejercicio profesional del periodismo en Venezuela.

Palabras clave: Periodismo. Venezuela. Condiciones del periodista. Organizaciones no gubernamentales.

Introduction

Historically, in Venezuela Journalism have had an essayistic approach to explain, analyse and contextualize its professional practice. It has been an initiative of the Non-Governmental Organizations, and not in the academic university field neither from the guild, the work to elaborate explanatory maps about de Venezuelan journalistic employment with quantification tools.

Year 2002 that was a particularly intense period in Venezuelan public sphere, it was the started date of Situation of Freedom of Expression's reports that civil associations *Espacio Público* and Venezuelan chapter of Instituto *Prensa y Sociedad* (IPYS) jointly started to launch. This set of annual reports that started in 2002 aim to the general exercise of this right, they started to focus on issues that directly impact on the exercise of journalistic work such as at that moment (and they still continue impact them) quantify direct attacks against journalists, attacks against media's headquarters and actions of intimidation and disrepute against reporters and editors (Cañizález & Correa, 2003).

This first report was useful to document journalistic practice, with quantified indicators, in a context of that failed Coup d'Etat that was lived on April 2002 against Hugo Chavez president at that time, or what was the media role in the so-called "Paro Petrolero" (Oil general strike), at the end of that year, that also intended to ousted Chavez from power. It was a year of strong polarization and conflicts in Venezuela, and journalism seemed to be in the middle of firing line, if we are guided by figures of that report and in the following.

Collaboration between *Espacio Público* and IPYS last three report editions about situation, and since 2005 a report focused on Freedom of Expression by *Espacio Público* (Correa, 2006) and other focused on more specific restrictions to journalism by IPYS (Scharfenberg, 2007).

Some years later, since 2012 Civil Society Organizations started to conduct surveys to journalist in Venezuela. That year, Civil Association Medianálisis used the UNESCO's Media Development Indicators (MDIs), (UNESCO, 2010) and inspired by them designed the first national survey to journalists in Venezuela (Cañizález & Reyes, 2014). Then in 2015 an own methodology is developed with the aim to replicate it over the time and to generate contrasting annual information about journalism's situation in Venezuela

(Cañizález, 2015). This research instrument was applied again in 2016 and 2017 whose comparative results are justly the support to this paper. In some cases we will use only 2016 data (Medianálsis, 2016) as a middle point of this research process, promoted by a Non Governmental body.

In parallel to Medianálsis' initiative, that uses face to face interviews, visiting editing offices and media's headquarters in eight of the main cities in the country, the *Instituto Prensa y Sociedad* also made for the first time telephonic and online surveys since 2014. Then publishing its report entitled *La orden es el silencio* (Silence is the order) (IPYS, 2014) and the following year *Periodismo en arenas movedizas* (Journalism on the moving sands) (IPYS, 2015). Both studies emphasises aspects such as censorship and self-censorship.

As mentioned above, for this paper we use as input the survey's results conducted by Civil Association Medianálsis during years 2015, 2016 and 2017. In 2016 this study was made with a sample of 365 journalists divided in two groups. One of them were journalists that worked in Gran Caracas²; the other worked in states capital (provinces) of Anzoátegui, Aragua, Bolívar, Carabobo, Lara, Táchira and Zulia. Medias considered to this sample were printed newspapers, radio, television and web media. During years 2015 and 2017 a similar sample was used.

Figure 1 – Location and distribution of the selected sample in 2016



Source: elaborated by the author.

Study overview

The study about the State of Journalism in Venezuela, developed by Medianálisis, in nature, the research had a quantitative approach in nature, field non-experimental, based on a “face to face” survey. The most populous urban places of the country were selected with and it was applied a survey instrument composed by 50 closed-ended questions items.

During these years, field research has overcome various difficulties, but there is a fundamental: the lack of reliable and consolidated information, in Venezuela, about the number of journalists employed professionally in the media. Despite the fact in Venezuela there is a Compulsory Membership in an Association Prescribed by Law for the Practice of Journalism, and it is mandatory a Bachelor degree in the required area, the reality is that the journalistic profession is diminished to the point that it does not have a national data on how many of its members are indeed working as a journalist.

Universities do not have figures either. Therefore research strategy has been to choose a purposive sample of media (press, radio, television and web), and go personally to the media, in different cities, to interview journalists in their own workplaces.

For Medianálisis, and for us as authors of this paper and executives of this civil association, the research carried out did not intend other than to reveal the reality of journalism as important sector for being observed, at a given time and in a specific national context, without meaning verification of any hypothesis. Basically, we used journalists’ opinion, which in these pages is accounted for, systematized and organized.

Results and their relationships

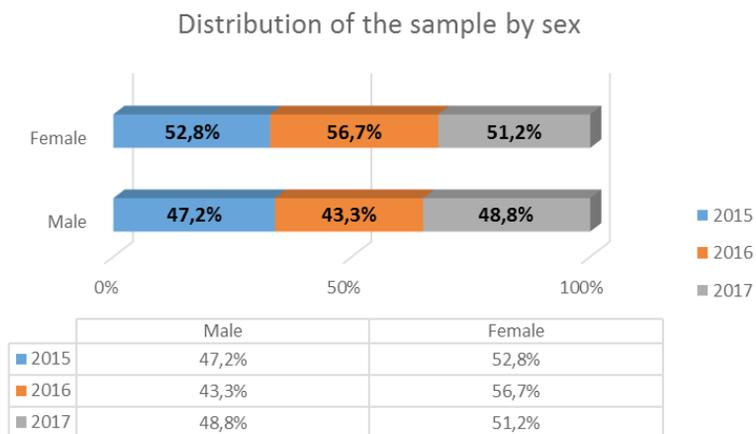
Since the main goal of the study leads to a descriptive visualization of the current scenarios and context in the professional practice of journalism, the review of the results is focused on the analytical organization of the data obtained and the links that some observed indicators could have to each other.

Attributes of the Sample

The description of Venezuelan scene in journalism was reflected, in some way, based on the consolidated attributes of the sample for the implementation of the nationwide survey applied to media's representatives and operators throughout the country.

It is the case that from 100 per cent of the journalists consulted in different cities, less than a half were men, the majority was women. Although during these three years there were variations because the sample is focused on visited media in their newsroom and it is during the visit that those journalists were selected to be asked.

Graph 1 – Distribution of the sample by sex

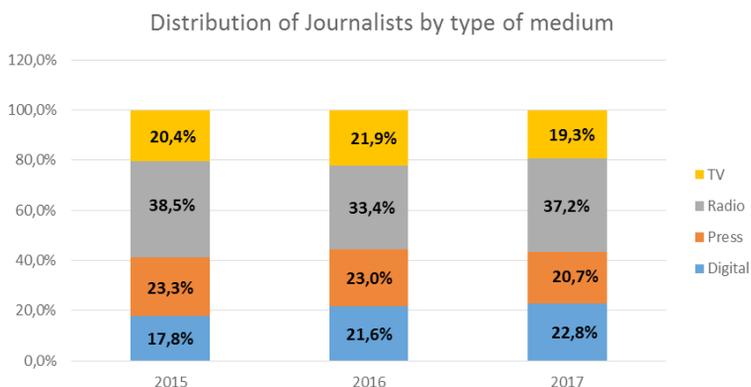


Source: elaborated by the author.

Although a particular interpretation of some elements and data obtained was not one of the purposes of this study, it is valuable to highlight a possible relation between the balance of asked journalists and the observed trend in the female predominance within Social Communication Schools in the country.

This trend was replicated in most of the media in which the male's rate is below 50 percent. In general, in digital media we recorded a greatest number of women among the working teams. Meanwhile, without us having an explanation of the phenomenon, on radio men are majority.

Nevertheless, this result was considered by a panel of experts and professionals at universities and researchers, for whom statistical results correspond fairly closely with the sector reality.

Graph 2 – Distribution of Journalists by type of medium

Source: elaborated by the author.

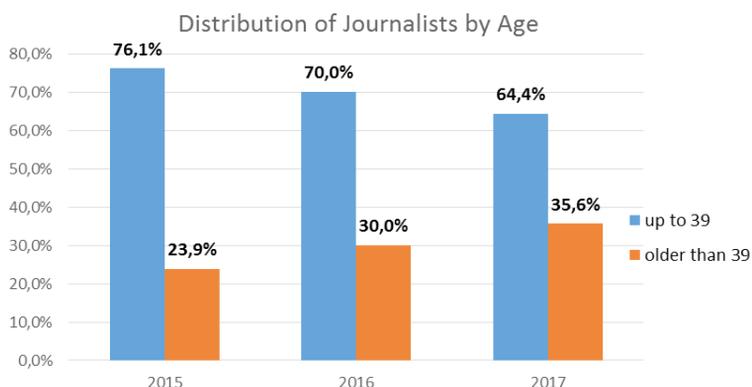
An additional issue that became relevant, in the characterization of the selected sample, was the age of men and women employed in journalism in different media visited to apply the survey about diverse aspects related with their professional practice.

In this sense the sample acquired particular attributes in each type of media analysed, although general data shows an expected predominance of young professionals practicing journalism in their different functions and roles, due to the large number of new social communicators that graduated every year in Venezuela.

As we can see in figure Distribution of Journalists by age, professionals aged fewer than 39 is larger, in general, than those aged over 40. However, for example, in media such as radio there is a balance between these two groups set in this section of the study.

Other numerical facts were observed in the press. The rate decreased as long the age increased, in which younger than 30 years are more. In television was relevant the group aged from 30 to 39 years, while digital media was significantly dominated by young people under 30. Maybe it was influenced by the digital native condition of this age group.

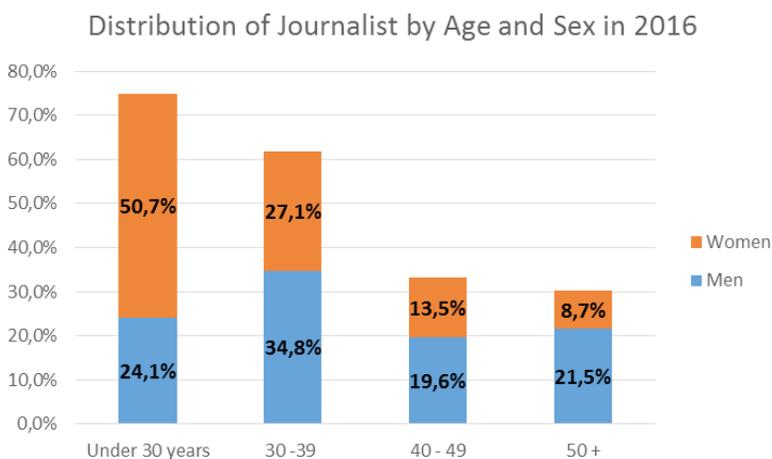
Graph 3 – Distribution of Journalists by age



Source: elaborated by the author.

We can see the relation between age and sex in the following graph of the year 2016. It shows a greater proportion of women under 30 years and men of 30 and more. This could explain salaries disadvantages for women in comparison with men, as we can see later.

Graph 4 – Distribution of Journalists by age and sex in 2016



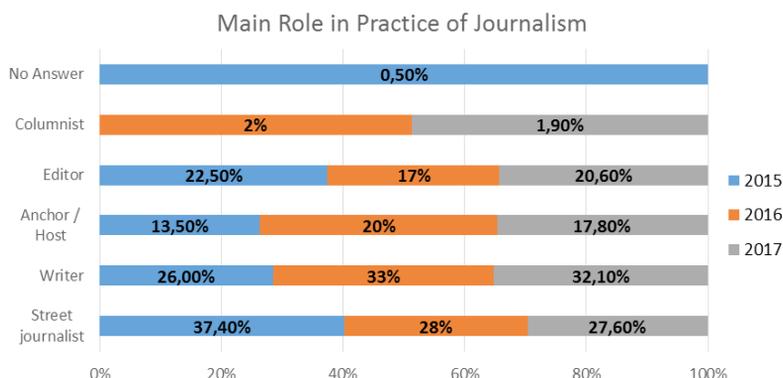
Source: elaborated by the author.

Regarding the journalists' roles³ that perform in the media for which they work, it is suitable to establish that some activities

and their names are specific to each media, and make comparisons among them could be inappropriate. In any case, the majority of the respondents have roles related with production of information.

Only in television is highlighted the number of people working in the street journalism compared with the others activities in this medium. In television this activity is mainly the most common, so in the search and collection of the information audio-visual input, journalist is directly involved.

Graph 5 – Main role in Practice of Journalism



Source: elaborated by the author.

Because the working characteristics in this medium, also is highlighted in the graph Main Role by Type of Medium, the number of people that works as radio anchor /host, it shows a big difference between this activity and news writing and street journalism. Maybe this trend is due to the predominant production style in this medium and the way this professional observes himself/herself. There is also the Independent National Producer (PNI) established in the Law on Social Responsibility in Radio and Television of 2004.

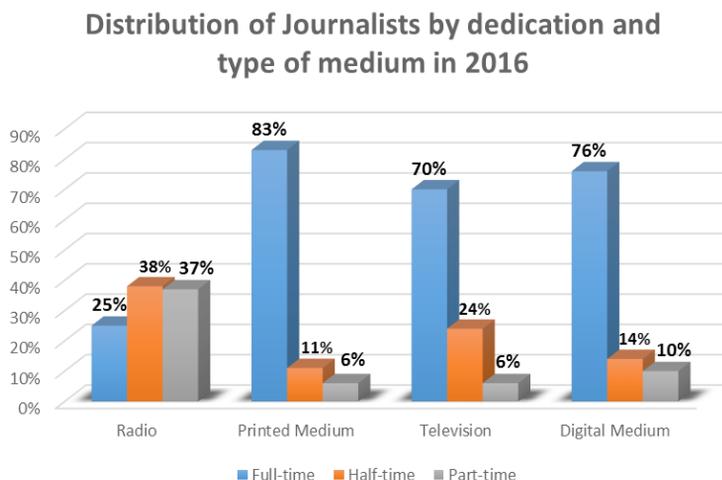
Employment situation

The matter of the employment state in the journalism practice could be a guide regarding real sceneries of this professional practice and about outstanding issues in this area.

For example, based on the 2016-survey, the matter of

journalists working-hours dedication in their main jobs, we can see a differentiated behaviour of those who works in radio, barely a 25 percent work full-time, in contrast with television, printed newspapers and digital media. Professionals that work in radio broadcasting, half-time and part-time, are slightly above them with 38% and 37% respectively. Broadly, we can observe the radio sector in no longer a main source of employment and now it is a supplementary job to information professionals in Venezuela.

Graph 6 – Distribution of Journalists by dedication and type of medium in 2016

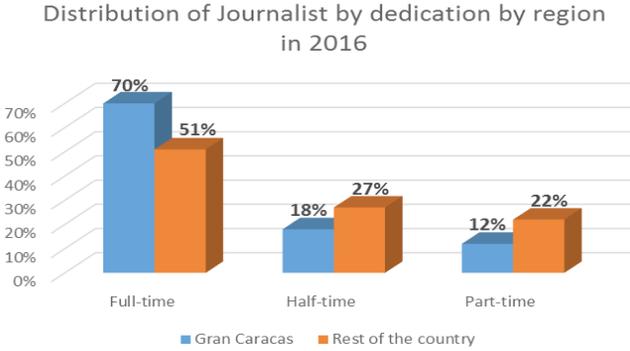


Source: elaborated by the author.

Maybe, this result has a direct relation with independent producers in radio, also valid in television, although it is not expressed in the same way because other organizational structures predominate on TV and PNI linked with journalism trend to be considerable lower.

In fact, in digital media, press and television, social communicators working in journalism are mainly at full-time, with figures that overcame 70 percent in the 2016 study. By analysing this issue in two big groups, in different geographic locations, the number of journalists working full-time in the Gran Caracas represents 70 per cent and in the rest of the country only 50 per cent.

Graph 7 – Distribution of Journalist by dedication by region in 2016

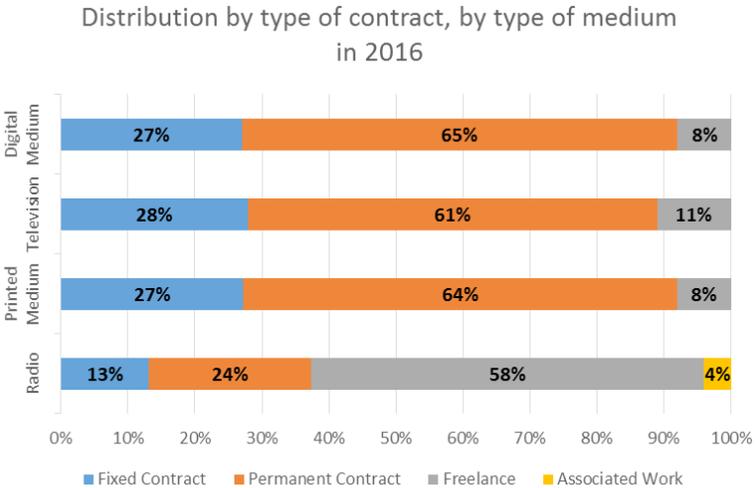


Source: elaborated by the author.

Other issue is the type of contract that the respondents have with media. In this sense, according to 2016 data, in press, television and digital media prevailed permanent contracts as a legal framework, overcoming 60% of the answers in the three above mentioned.

By contrary, in the radio almost 60 per cent of the respondents affirmed tending to self-employed, while fixed contracted and permanent contracted were lesser-used employment relationships.

Graph 8 – Distribution by type of contract, by type of medium in 2016



Source: elaborated by the author.

In this medium it has a big impact the current legal requirements that forces professionals to become and register themselves as Independent National Producer, PNI, this fact also influence in the characteristics of this group of professionals. For example in terms of the type of dedication-time and the role they perform in the media.

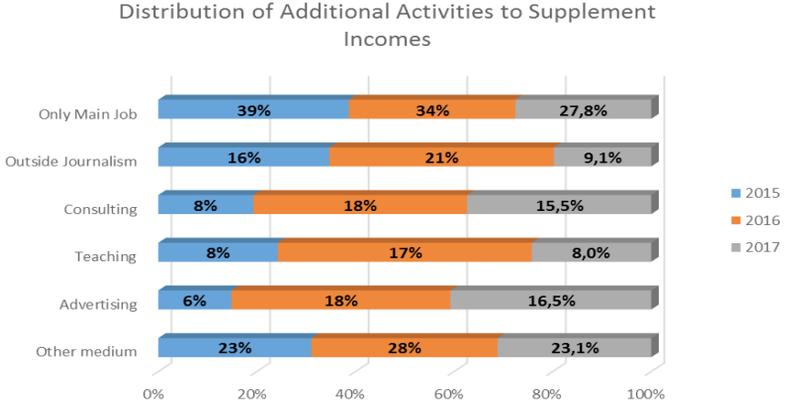
When we review deeply the issue of journalists' contractual benefits, we find that one out of three active professional in the Venezuelan media does not have any kind of additional or complementary compensation. The survey applied these years also revealed that about 2 out of 5 of these communicators have a working relationship by individual contract and barely 15 percent of the respondents are protected by a collective agreement.

Another interesting verified matter was the activities that journalists have been forced to perform during the Venezuela's economic crisis ⁴in order to supplementing their income and strengthen their personal finances. In this sense, by comparing the three years the study showed a decrease of the number of journalists that have only one job (in the journalism area) to generate their income. According to what the respondents said, in average, two out of three Venezuelan journalists are forced to do other activities to get a better income.

Among the keys founded about this issue, it is highlighted that journalists in functions in Venezuelan media perform an amount of activities that have nothing to do with journalism (specially, informal trade). As a way to gain income they work in other areas for which they studied at the university,

Some optional or additional activities inside Communications field in which they have had to resort are consulting, services linked with advertising, also teaching, without specific information about what level they are associated with.

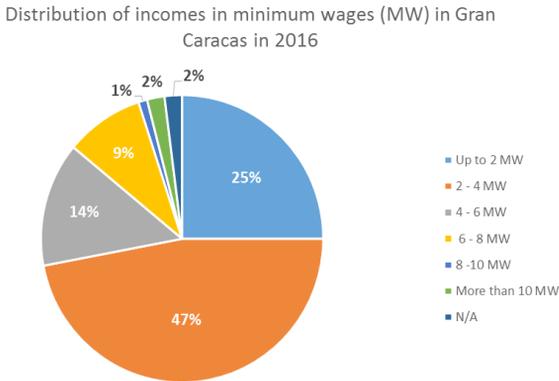
Graph 9 – Distribution of Additional Activities to Supplement Incomes [multiple answers]



Source: elaborated by the author.

When the issue about the earned money, answers show that one out of three professionals earn less than 2 minimum wages (During 2016 survey was conducted, the monthly minimum wage was estimated in US\$ 16 at the Simadi rate of exchange that is used as a reference); and barely 1 out of 4 exceeds 4 minimum wages, with small differences because of de media and region in which they work. In province or regions, income is lower in most of the respondents' cases than those journalists employed in the capital city. It is remarkable the impoverishment of Venezuelan journalists whose income became extremely low.

Graph 10 – Distribution of incomes in minimum wages in Gran Caracas in 2016

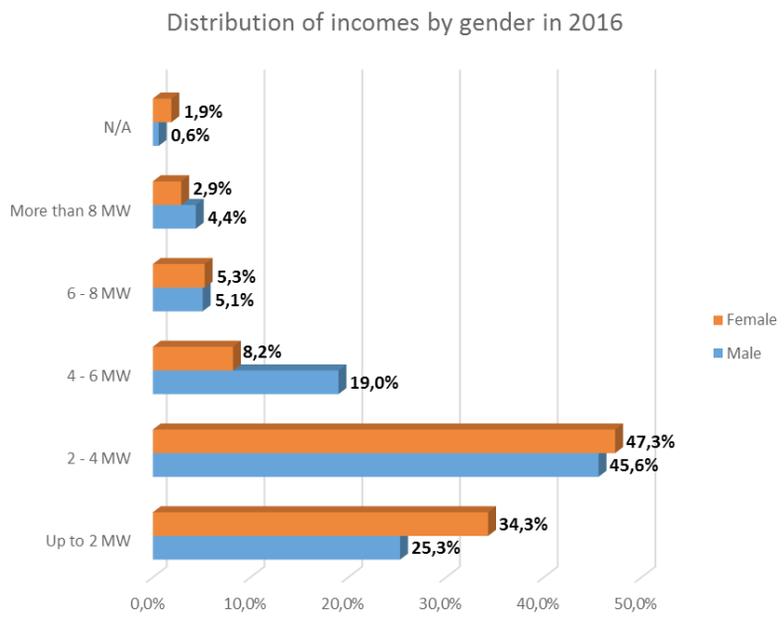


Source: elaborated by the author.

By relating this reality with the fact that two out of three journalists have to opt for multiples employments, it is evident that in the current Venezuelan socioeconomic context, generally journalists perform their profession in their post with deficient salaries.

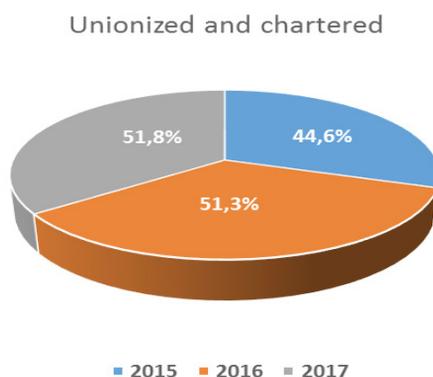
In 2016 it was observed incomes based on sex and it shows women disadvantage in comparison with men incomes working as journalists.

Graph 11 – Distribution of incomes by gender in 2016



Source: elaborated by the author.

Additional to Venezuelan journalists’ impoverishment, measured by their incomes, the survey shed light on the weakened Venezuelan union trade, in spite of a compulsory membership in an association prescribed by Law for the practice of journalism. In 2016 and 2017 in comparison with 2015 there is an increase of the number of journalists in any professional association or union trade [National Association of Journalists (CNP) or National Union of Press Workers (SNTP)]. This rate is much lower in digital media and television. In province the rate of people associated is a little higher than in Caracas.

Graph 12 – Distribution of associated journalists

Source: elaborated by the author.

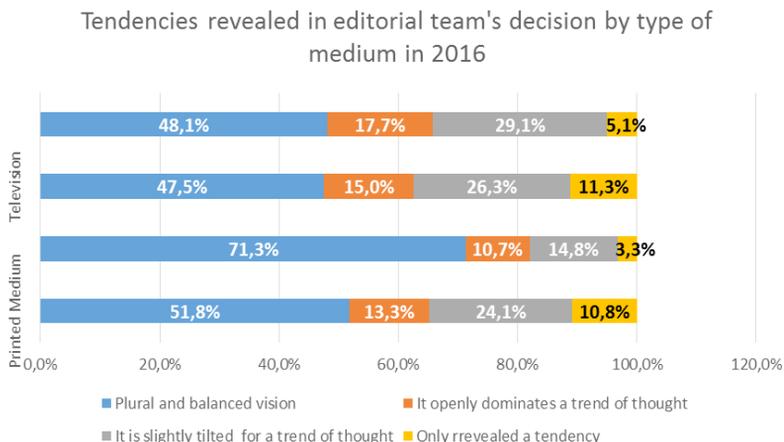
Editorial Context and Internal Conditions

In this dimension the study reveals the state in mass media in Venezuela from their own players' point of view. Subjects such as participation, inclusion, diversity, professional upgrading and continuing training promoted to facing journalism's challenges.

For example, in the subject about the gender of the respondents' direct boss, it is founded that they are predominantly male, while most of the newsgathering activities are made by young women. By comparing different mass media, there is more gender parity in digital media in managerial levels; in radio there is more inequality with male dominance.

In the area of editorial decision making in the medium, respondents said they trend to be characterized by plural and balanced vision, especially in radio and press. However, around 44% of the respondents in the national territory insist those decisions are influenced by a trend of thought in any way. According to the results, they show major plurality in the rest of the country than in Caracas, apparently with strong editorial line.

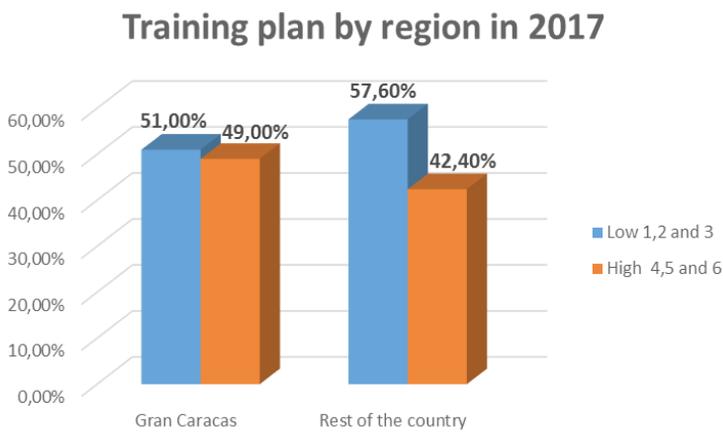
Graph 13 – Tendencies revealed in editorial team’s decision by type of medium in 2016



Source: elaborated by the author.

According to respondents, the matter of journalists’ professional upgrading seems to be a pending issue. Most of the journalists say they do not have a continuing training plan in media considered by them as their main employers.

Graph 14 – Training plan by region in 2016 and 2017



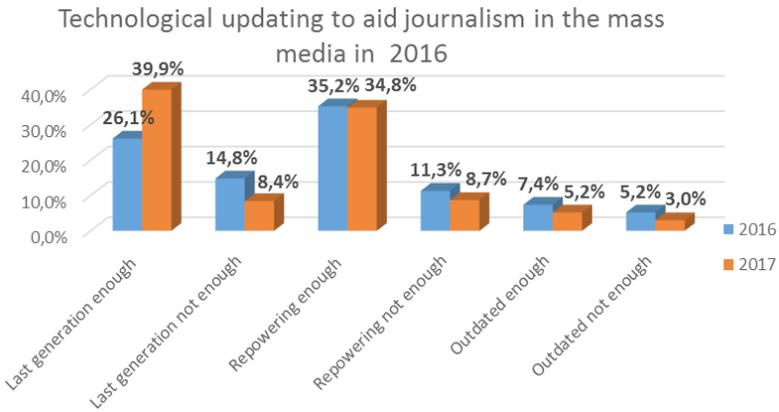
Source: elaborated by the author.

Although answers have the same tendency in Caracas and Province, a ratio of 64% of journalists considers occasional or nonexistent an effort of the media business sector to promote more and better professional training, while in the rest of the county's opinion reach 83%.

Indeed, during last year 46% of active journalists did not take any additional or upgrading study by initiative of the enterprise they work neither by their own initiative; between 13% and 18% among them said they have the opportunity of taking a course between 24 and 40 academic hours. Barely 7% expressed is in some postgraduate course.

The last interesting issue in this dimension is related to technological upgrading that have reach different mass media in Venezuela in order to ease journalism practice and other processes. Only 26.1% of the respondents asserted being working with last generation technology and being satisfied with it. Generally in Venezuelan media seem to prevail the so-called equipment "repowering".

Graph 15 – Technological updating to ease journalism practice in the mass media in 2016



Source: elaborated by the author.

Censorship and Self-Regulation

In this section some issues were reviewed in a direct way, but others were analysed tangentially, in order to finding more accurate approaches of the indicators of interest.

In journalistic media the instructions for writers is a tendency. It is about making subtle or remarkable adjustments in their notes to avoid uncomfortable contents. This is a way to implement censorship actions.

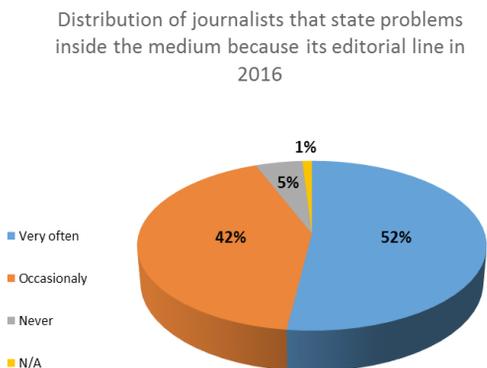
About this issue, general opinion was that respondents would like notes' production without instructions that constraint their autonomy. In fact, 71.5% of journalists is in this way, in contrast with 28.5% that expressed they have been led in any way to create a desirable text.

Another way to impact in this issue is the omission of some text already written and verified note by the media. In this sense, 21.6% of journalists expressed having experienced it during the last year. Barely 1.1% of the respondents did not answer this question.

Journalists observe from a different point of view when you ask about the management of the editorial line and its effects on the media in which they work. A little bit more than a half of them consider that the impact is real; and the other 42% think this phenomenon occurs occasionally.

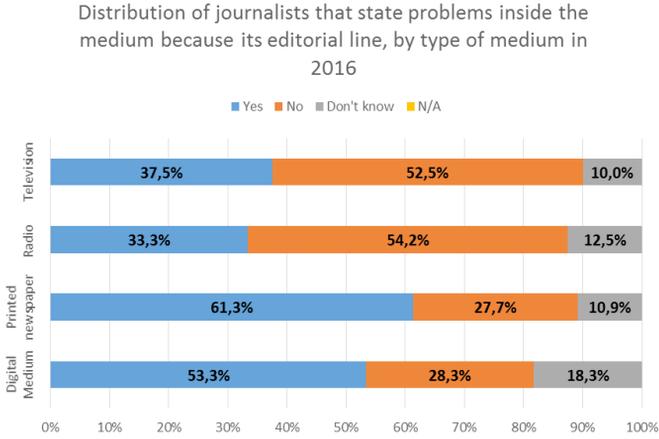
It means, more than 90% of the journalists think the editorial line causes occasional or frequent problems to the media. Meanwhile, at least 36% consider this phenomenon impact largely or totally in the journalistic performance.

Graph 16 – Distribution of journalists that state problems inside the medium because its editorial line in 2016



Source: elaborated by the author.

Graph 17 – Distribution of journalists that state problems inside the medium because its editorial line, by type of medium in 2016

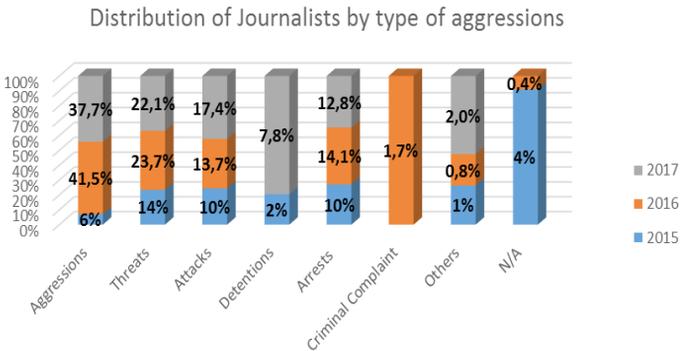


Source: elaborated by the author.

If you relate these answers with communicators' widespread feeling that consider open and participatory the editorial management in the enterprise they work, you can infer that those journalists consider the censorship phenomenon as external of the medium.

In fact, by reviewing matters such as attacks, threats and other forms of intimidation, 48.20 % of journalists notice of having been victim of some of these actions from institutions or people external to the media.

Graph 18 – Distribution of Journalists by type of aggressions



Source: elaborated by the author.

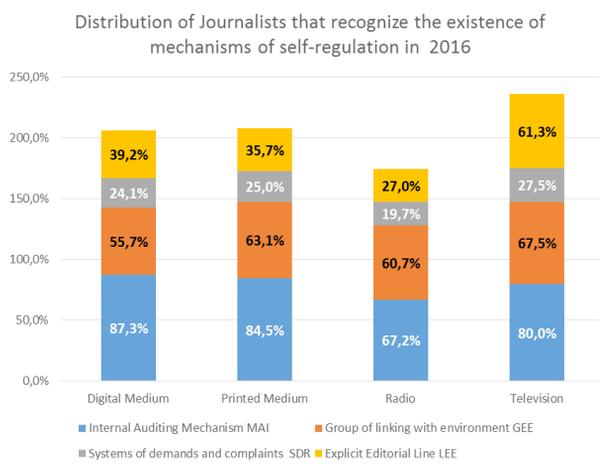
On the other hand, 40.8% of the journalists point out that there is some internal auditing mechanism in the information management

in the media they work. It is highlighted the television as medium with more respondents that affirmed the existence of these mechanisms.

However, it is highlighted that 59.2% of the sample said there is no internal auditing in their media or they do not know about their existence.

Regarding the subject of self-regulation, generally there is an adequate knowledge about principles of this mechanism. In that sense, journalists in digital media gave the most adequate responses to key questions about this issue. In any case, in summary 45.7% of the respondents did not know self-regulation principles neither their mechanisms.

Graph 19 – Distribution of Journalists that recognize the existence of mechanisms of self-regulation in 2016 [multiple answers]



Source: elaborated by the author.

Conclusions

It is still a tendency in the country a huge amount of women with a degree in Social Communication; a smaller number of men in different job post in the field of communication media. The tendency is opposite only in the radio.

It is prevailing full-time and permanent contract of journalists in Venezuelan communication media, especially in the press media, by the nature of the business, mostly in the Capital Region.

Population under 40 is still prevailing in the group of journalists employed in Venezuelan mass media, with a remarkable tendency of young people in digital media; while in radio communicators are mostly older.

Regarding sources of income, two thirds of the journalists is forced to have several jobs. It highlights the tendency of job posts with inadequate wages. There are pending matters that need paying attention in the area of compensatory mechanisms to journalism practice, such as socio-economic and salaries benefits. It is an issue of justice and also a way of autonomy in the professional practice.

One out of three professional earns less than two minimum wages; while one out of four is over four minimum wages; with small variations based on type of media and region. The relationship between incomes based on sex represents a salary disadvantage to women journalists. About this matter, even if in digital media we can see more parity, in radio is evident a greater inequality. In managerial level prevails male.

The matter of professional upgrading is another worrying issue to journalistic enterprises, professional associations or union trades, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and especially to social communicators in the journalism because this guarantee information quality.

For most of the journalists interviewed, editorial decision making in the media tend to be plural. This is a widespread opinion in radio and printed media. According to respondents media are more plural in the rest of the country than the Capital region.

It is relevant continuing protecting balance and plurality in the editorial decision making in the mass media for ensuring better information diversity for interest of media's users.

In addition, even if 7 out of 10 respondents pointed out they are not experiencing censorship neither self-censorship, 3 of them admit the phenomenon is in some of their forms. It means, there is something to do in order to reduce it to its minimum expression.

One out of four interviewed journalists does not identify experience of censorship as a phenomenon inside the media, but as a result of situations that impact the media and are originated by external environment, although it affects editorial freedom at the end.

In general social communicators, especially in digital media and women, have an appropriate knowledge about self-regulation principles in the journalism practice. However, an important number among them ignore the existence of those principles.

Maybe unconsciously, Venezuelan journalists identify self-regulation precepts. In general they are unaware of specific mechanism in this way inside mass media.

NOTES

- 1 This paper, now revised, was originally published as the report *Situación del Periodismo en Venezuela 2016* made available by Medianalis civil association
- 2 “Gran Caracas” is understood as the urban agglomeration that comprises Metropolitan District of Caracas and their satellite cities such as Los Teques, San Antonio de Los Altos, Maiquetía, La Guaira, Guarenas, Guatire, Valles del Tuy and other towns of Miranda and Vargas states.
- 3 It means the main role of their working time. When it was not possible to establish it, the respondents selected the most important dedication considered by him/her. In general, journalists perform more than one role.
- 4 According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Venezuela has had the highest inflation rate in the world during two consecutive years (2016 and 2017). 700 % in 2016 and 2,200% in 2017. In addition to a fall of the Gross Domestic Product in 10% in 2016, according to the World Bank and 7% in 2017 according to ECLAC.

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