

## The relations of influences in the processes of newsmaking and its effects on journalistic quality. A vision from Latin America

### Las relaciones de las influencias en los procesos de producción informativa y sus efectos en la calidad periodística. Una visión desde Latinoamérica

As relações das influências nos processos de produção informativa e os seus efeitos na qualidade jornalística. Uma visão desde a América Latina

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explain how the determinants of newsmaking could influence the journalistic quality. To do this, the study is based on 120 semi-structured interviews with Chilean, Ecuadorian and Mexican journalists. The results show that routines are the determining factor for a quality journalism in our current media ecosystem. At the same time, we could verify the link between the different determinants of newsmaking and the professional praxis. All the above from a Latin American perspective, which is completed with the local point of view and contexts of the journalists interviewed.

**Keywords:** journalism; determinants; quality; influences; interviews; Chile; Ecuador; Mexico.

#### RESUMEN

*Este artículo busca determinar cómo los condicionantes de los procesos de producción informativa afectan a la calidad periodística. Para ello, la investigación parte de 120 entrevistas semiestructuradas a periodistas chilenos, ecuatorianos y mexicanos. Los resultados muestran que las rutinas son el elemento determinante en la creación de un periodismo de calidad en el actual ecosistema mediático. Asimismo, se observa el vínculo existente entre los diferentes condicionantes propios de la producción periodística y la praxis profesional. Todo lo anterior desde una perspectiva latinoamericana, a la que se suma la particular de los contextos de los países de procedencia de los periodistas entrevistados.*

**Palabras clave:** periodismo; condicionantes; calidad; influencias; entrevistas; Chile; Ecuador; México.

#### RESUMO

O presente artigo busca determinar de que maneira os fatores condicionantes dos processos de produção de informação afetam na qualidade jornalística. Para isso, a pesquisa parte de 120 entrevistas semiestructuradas com jornalistas chilenos, equatorianos e mexicanos. Os resultados mostram que as rotinas são o fator determinante na criação de jornalismo de qualidade no atual ecossistema midiático. Da mesma forma, observa-se a ligação entre os diferentes fatores condicionantes da produção jornalística e da práxis profissional. Tudo a partir de uma perspectiva da América Latina e nos contextos dos países de origem de dois jornalistas entrevistados.

**Palavras-chave:** jornalismo; condicionantes; qualidade; influências; entrevistas; Chile; Equador; México.

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## INTRODUCTION

From various perspectives (labor, professional, representative, among others), the journalistic profession has been experiencing a deep crisis for several years and is undergoing evident changes (Mogollón & Gutiérrez, 2006). In times of globalization, this critical moment could be understood as one of its consequences, which translates into a crisis of meaning in modern society (Bauman, 2000). The media, gradually, lose their informational weight when faced with social networks and the democratization of technology (Chadwick, 2013), and its informative function becomes blurred, since information and knowledge cannot be separated from power (Campás, 2011).

Journalistic activity is always sensitive to the social and technological changes with which it interacts, and the influence becomes reciprocal. Likely, today we are witnessing a paradoxical situation in the world, which endangers the essence of journalism. In addition to the loss of influence, the current deployment and technological advance mean a considerable modification in journalistic practices and routines (Almirón & Jarque, 2008). The information arrives in abundance and circulates in exorbitant amounts, which does not mean more quality. I.e., journalists fail to appropriate all the new spaces to generate added value and are giving up, perhaps without knowing it, their spaces to the audience. This can be attributed to the new conditions of management and dissemination of information that derive from the advancement of technologies and cultural changes, where entertainment plays a definite role (Pellegrini, Puente, Porath, Mujica, & Grassau, 2011).

On the other hand, the study of the Latin American media system involves the challenge of homogenizing culturally diverse groups. Thus, “to study journalism as part of the communicational processes of Latin America, we need to refer to traditional knowledge, memory, research, innovation, economic impositions, education, politics and the dialogue of knowledge” (Oller-Alonso, 2016, p. 226). This makes comparative research possible by defining “common elements that have defined journalism in this area” (Mellado, 2009, p. 194). Although each country has particularities in its media-society relationship, the media problem exists in all societies (McChesney, 2004, p. 16). Regardless of the time in which he/she lives, the Latin American journalist exerts his/her work according to his/her own reality.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### QUALITY IN THE JOURNALISTIC FIELD: A POLYSEMIC CONCEPT

News’ spectacularization, infotainment and the adaptation of the media to the various digital applications have placed journalistic quality as one of the key issues of the media debate in recent decades (Gómez-Mompart & Palau-Sampio, 2013). The media are losing credibility (García, Bezunartea, & Rodríguez, 2013) and journalism is devaluing (Picard, 2009).

The first investigations on this concept were based on the theories about gatekeeping and newsmaking, which drew up the guidelines to establish the newsworthiness criteria that make a fact attractive to the media, and the way in which the process of construction of the news is made (Gutiérrez, 2006, p. 31). Although, in the opinion of Gómez-Mompart, Gutiérrez-Lozano and Palau-Sampio (2013), we should speak of “journalistic quality’ rather than ‘informative quality’, since the interest focuses not only on the product, but in the entire informative-communicative production process” (p. 11).

But what does journalistic quality means? When aiming to classify quality in the journalistic field, literature usually shows a diversification in the name and number of variables (Bogart, 1989; De Pablos-Coello & Mateos-Martín, 2004; Gómez-Mompart & Palau-Sampio, 2013; McNerney & Bird, 2005; Pellegrini et al. 2011; Quality Journalism Network, 2006; Shapiro, 2010; Teramo, 2006; Wimmer & Dominick, 1996). However, Ramírez de la Piscina, Gorrosarri, Aiestarán, Zabalondo and Agirre (2014) identify three meanings that encompass the features of quality journalism: a) journalistic quality, b) quality of the news and c) quality of the news’ contents.

Nowadays, journalism cannot ignore the interrelation of global factors at the local level, since quality journalism points to an exercise that goes beyond simple news. From a *glocal* information perspective, it implies an approach of complex news, with in-depth information, that results from a joint work between professionals and experts (Gómez-Mompart, Gutiérrez-Lozano, & Palau-Sampaio, 2013).

Other aspects that cause deterioration in journalistic information are social factors. Parreño (2015) considers two causal factors of the decline in journalistic quality: the economic crisis and the adaptation to information and communications technologies. In his opinion, this directly affects working conditions, by making the generation gap widen when the media hire new unskilled personnel, while at the same time impacting

on the modification of journalistic practice from the adequacy of processes and the sense of immediacy accelerated by technological evolution.

In this regard, it is complex to try to define or characterize journalistic quality, since its study implies a whole epistemological difficulty and, at the same time, it can represent the key to the survival of journalism as a service to the citizen and as a democratic space.

Even more complex is finding the mechanism to assess quality. Pellegrini and Mujica (2006) point out that it is difficult to evaluate the work of journalists and that, for this reason, many media and publishers measure the performance of professionals with tangible criteria such as, for example, the amount of news they publish per month or the space they occupy within the media. The same authors began, in 1990, a work to create an instrument called Journalistic Added Value (JAV), which analyzes the journalistic quality in the media through the quantitative measurement of the informational product; thus, professional and ethical standards can be established (Puente, Pellegrini, Alessandri, Porath, & Mujica, 2004). JAV “studies the work of the media exclusively from the product, without considering the performance of the determinants of the production process (inputs, infrastructure and personnel) or of distribution, advertising and circulation variables” (Pellegrini & Mujica, 2006, p. 15). Alessandri et al. (2001) add that this system aims to rate the quality of information based on the degree of compliance with a set of established parameters, based on the capabilities of a specific media. Thus, there is a need to emphasize the difficulties observed by journalists themselves regarding how to face the challenge of conducting an informative function.

#### JOURNALISTIC QUALITY FROM THE JOURNALISTIC PRODUCTION PROCESSES

In the bibliographic study it is possible to identify efforts to characterize quality from journalistic practices, as an exercise that uses primary sources and bets on investigative journalism; it is also committed to structuring information based on the facts and seeking equity among the news’ actors (Gómez-Mompart et al., 2013).

For Shapiro (2010), journalistic quality depends on five basic principles of the performance of journalistic routines: a) a discovery in the search for information; b) examination and scrutiny of the information; c) fact interpretation; d) a style to tell the story, and e) an attractive presentation of the story.

In addition, a direct association must be established between the quality of the information and the time devoted to journalistic production, through certain routines: a) conducting interviews; b) telephone communication with sources; c) attention to events related to the story; d) the socialization of processes in editorial boards; e) documentation as a way of knowing the context; f) organization of the material, and g) face-to-face coverage of the events (Picard, 1998).

#### THE CONFIGURATION OF INFLUENCES IN JOURNALISTIC PRODUCTION PROCESSES

Journalistic work must ensure that the changes produced by information technologies in society do not alter the democratic right of citizens to receive information prepared based on excellent quality criteria (Parreño, 2015). Thus, we could ask ourselves, why sometimes these criteria are not met? Which elements affect journalists’ professional development?

For Shoemaker and Reese (2014) the determinants that affect the development of journalistic practice occur from five levels of influence: a) individual, in relation to the journalist himself/herself as the creator of journalistic stories; b) journalistic routines, established in the profession and, therefore, tacitly validated; c) organizational, related to decision-makers in the media; d) social institutions, which encompasses advertisers, audiences or interest groups, and e) the system, understood as the social system or the ideologies of societies (pp. 8-9).

On the other hand, Hanitzsch et al. (2010) classify these influences into six dimensions: a) policies, both of political representatives and of political lobbies; b) economic, related to the need for advertising as a way to finance journalistic companies; c) organizational, related to the decision-making processes in the media; d) of procedure, regarding the limitations of time and space with which journalists work; e) professionals, regarding work practices established according to cultural conventions of the profession, and f) reference groups, which determine the work of the journalist and that are composed of both the audience and other diverse actors as fellow colleagues, friends or family (pp. 11-12).

Finally, Oller-Alonso and Meier (2012) propose a categorization of the influences in the journalistic practice on three levels: a) a first level, of system, refers to the social framework for the development of the media; b) a second level, of influences of the media institution itself, in its regular structure and procedures, and c) a

third level, where the journalist is an actor who relates to the work routines he/she develops within the media.

Regardless of the categorization used when organizing these determinants, it is essential to consider that this hierarchy of influences “proposes important distinctions between levels of analysis and locates the individual journalist within a web of organizational and ideological constraints” (Reese, 1999, p. 48). Thus, the ideological factors of journalists are limited by institutional constraints, from hierarchical organization to journalistic routines, which also depend on the social context and media where the professionals work.

#### MAIN DETERMINANTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE JOURNALISTIC PROFESSION ACCORDING TO LATIN AMERICAN JOURNALISTS

The study of influences in journalistic practice has become a main axis of Latin American academics. From multiple perspectives and different methodological developments, journalists have become fundamental subjects of study when it comes to deepening into the processes of journalistic production.

Using the categorization proposed by Oller-Alonso and Meier (2012), there have been studies on the influences of the system, such as, for example, the risks in the journalistic exercise in Mexico from the increase in violence and its consequences in the practice of information (Hughes & Márquez, 2017). There are also investigations about pressures exerted on journalists by political and other social actors in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico (Gutiérrez-Atala, Odriozola-Chéné, Ferreira, Anaya-Ávila, & Pajoni, 2016) or on the conditioned autonomy of journalism in Colombia and Mexico derived from physical threats, overlapping forms of inequality and clientelism (Hughes, Garcés, Márquez, & Arroyave, 2016).

Regarding the determinants derived from the media institutions themselves, we find studies on the preponderance of media publishing interests over the working conditions of journalists, such as the operation of the Argentine information system based on property interests, government financing and regulation (Amado & Waisbord, 2018) or the low perception of hierarchical pressures among Ecuadorian journalists (Odriozola-Chéné, Aguirre-Mayorga, & Roa-Chejín, 2016).

Finally, when addressing those that come from the journalist’s ideology and his/her productive routines, we find research focused on the journalists’

role based on the use of digital information tools and their performance, particularly on Twitter (Tandoc, Cabañes, & Cayabyab, 2018); the role of women in journalistic culture and as a producer of informative content in Argentina (Amado, 2017), or the importance of university training for the professional practice of journalists from Ecuador, Chile and Mexico (Gutiérrez-Atala, Domínguez-Panamá, & Odriozola-Chéné, 2017).

Based on these studies that reflect the journalists’ perspectives regarding their national realities, it is worth asking to what extent the determinants for the development of a quality journalism are due to situations that can be extrapolated to Latin American reality and which are enhanced by local realities themselves. In turn, it is necessary to know how the determinants relate when conducting an analysis of the journalistic production processes and their influence on the quality of the information.

#### METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to deepen into the determinants that affect the development of quality journalism from the perspective of the meanings and relationships of these influences.

Beyond quantifying the importance given to each of the determinants, we intend to deepen in how these determinants are constructed from different contexts through specific meanings and how the determinants are interrelated.

The research, from a qualitative approach, has an exploratory and descriptive character, to examine the influence of the determinants for the development of quality journalism in different contexts, locating patterns and particularities between them. To do so, the method used is that of the semi-structured qualitative interview, in which the interviewer has a script that gathers the topics that must be addressed, although both the order of the questions and the way of formulating them are left to their discretion (Martínez & Rodríguez, 2008).

#### METHODOLOGICAL TOOL

The semi-structured interviews were made in two parts. A first one of spontaneous answer to the question: “What are the determinants that affect the development of a better-quality journalism in your work routine?”. This allows locating the elements preset as fundamental by the interviewee. In a second part, this is deepened by a series of non-predetermined questions.

When determining them, in the development of quality journalism, we created a taxonomy consisting of eight determinants arising from the literature review:

- Ideological: situations in which the journalist's own ideology collides with that of the informational company.
- Political: pressures whose origin is related to the authority and its representatives.
- Economic: they derive from the financial situation in the national and regional context of the media.
- Labor: the labor immersion of the journalist, the maintenance and stability of the job, the salary situation, among others.
- Journalistic routines: actions and behaviors acquired and accepted by the journalist, because they are practices established, consolidated and validated through practice and professional performance.
- Training/vocational: effects that the professional's shortcomings and/or deficiencies have on both the basic skills of the journalistic function, those acquired in the university training process or those related to the permanent update required of any professional.
- Technological: the disposition and access that the journalist has to the necessary ICTs for the effective accomplishment of his/her professional work and to their condition, relevance and updating.
- Social pressure: the pressure that society (through its various groups) and the audience exert on the journalist and the media, to install their demands in the information scenario.

Following a first pretest to study the suitability of the tool, we detected responses that could not be clearly located in any of the categories, so we incorporated two new determinants:

- Working conditions: linked both to the provision of the necessary resources to effectively fulfill the informative work (physical space, transportation, etc.) and to the conditions of the work environment and interpersonal relationships.

- Hierarchical: related to the effects that the coercion from the organizational hierarchy in any of its manifestations has on the journalist and his/her work.

#### STUDY SAMPLE AND TYPE OF SAMPLING

The interviews were conducted with 120 Latin American journalists who work in the Biobío Region, Chile (subjects 1 to 40), the Metropolitan Area of Quito, Ecuador (subjects 41 to 80) and the State of Veracruz, Mexico (subjects 81 to 120). The subjects interviewed were guaranteed anonymity, assigning a number to each interviewee. The interviews took place between October 2014 and April 2015, face-to-face in all three countries<sup>1</sup>.

This is a non-probabilistic sample that does not seek to extract statistical generalizations to the whole population of journalists from the three countries, let alone to the group of Latin American journalists. The type of sampling is due to a criterion of convenience according to the resources of the participating researchers and, in turn, to a diverse or maximum variation criteria that allows "to show different perspectives and represent the complexity of the phenomenon studied, or to document diversity to locate differences and coincidences, patterns and particularities" (Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández-Collado, & Baptista-Lucio, 2010, p. 397). Therefore, the interviews bring together journalists from three different geographical areas of Latin America (southern cone, Andean zone and northern zone), with different socioeconomic weight within each of the countries and in the region as a whole.

It should not be forgotten that, as García-Canclini (2001) states, "Latin American countries are currently the result of sedimentation, juxtaposition and cross-linking of indigenous traditions (especially in the Mesoamerican and Andean areas), of Catholic colonial Hispanicism and of modern political, educational and communicational actions" (p. 86).

#### COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE MATERIAL

The transcription and data collection were done manually due to the diversity of meanings, episodes and relationships with which the 120 interviewed journalists can characterize the determinants for the development of quality journalism.

The analysis of the material was done from two matrices. One focused on collecting, for further analysis, the meanings that professionals give to the

			Chile (n=40)		Ecuador (n=40)		Mexico (n=40)		Total (n=120)	
			Presence	Frequency (%)	Presence	Frequency (%)	Presence	Frequency (%)	Presence	Frequency (%)
Sociodemographical variable	Gender	Female	18	45	13	32.5	16	40	47	39.2
		Male	22	55	27	67.5	24	60	73	60.8
	Age	Average	39.6		37.5		37.5		38.2	
Labor variables	Type of media*	Cybermedia	10	25	12	30	17	42.5	39	32.5
		Press	10	25	12	30	12	30	34	28.3
		Radio	10	25	12	30	12	30	34	28.3
		Television	10	25	13	32.5	10	25	33	27.5
	Organizational role	Reporter/writer	31	77.5	18	45	27	67.5	76	63.3
		Editor/Section chief	9	22.5	10	25	8	20.0	27	22.5
		Directive/Owner	0	0	12	30	5	12.5	17	14.2

Table 1. Sociodemographic and labor characteristics of journalists interviewed

\* The sum of the total and country frequencies of the type of media variable can be greater than 100%, since journalists sometimes work in different types of media.

Source: Own elaboration.

determinants. The second matrix works exclusively on the relationships between them, so that, through a crosstab, the observed relationships can be located in the corresponding quadrants. The direction of these relationships is established by using the determinants' rows to mark the relationship direction.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### MEANINGS GIVEN BY JOURNALISTS TO THE DETERMINANTS TO DEVELOP QUALITY JOURNALISM

The analysis of the results obtained is based on the premise that we have worked with three samples that respond to three specific realities, so there are differences<sup>2</sup>. However, the answers given by the interviewed journalists allow us to advance certain similarities when defining the determinants for the development of quality journalism.

The responses of the 120 journalists are coincidental when placing certain aspects as fundamental for the development of quality journalism.

In the first place, all the journalists emphasize the need for a change in journalistic routines derived from the importance of immediacy in the dissemination of journalistic content. The need to display the contents as quickly as possible can sometimes cause the information to be constructed as it is told:

I edit all day and suddenly it is half past six, I am on the air, and I am still doing editing work while I am on the air. That is something that undermines the quality of the attention that I put in my work, both regarding what is being broadcasted and my work as newsperson (Chile, subject 27).

This has a consequence: aspects inherent to quality journalism, such as the need for deepening, contrasting and research the information, are limited in the daily work of professionals.

The adaptation of work rhythms to this new dynamic causes the need for greater technological awareness by journalists. This is a second determinant largely considered among the interviewees. However, there are differences between journalists: there are those who take

advantage of the opportunities derived from technology and those who have a greater problem in dealing with the digital divide derived from the technological revolution. “Those who do not adapt to the routines of digital media are lost in time and space, because that is where we are going towards” (Ecuador, subject 51). In this context, the fear of technological changes is seen as an impediment to better professional performance: “Having the latest technology for rapid information management would allow a journalist to have the tools to conduct his/her work” (Mexico, subject 114).

Other aspects usually mentioned by journalists as fundamental in their work are the precarious economic situation of the media, sometimes enhanced by the economic situation of the country (mainly Ecuador and Mexico), the low salaries that journalists usually earn, and the lack of human, material and economic resources (transportation) for the coverage of the daily agenda. In these cases, there is a relationship between labor, economic and working conditions that will be analyzed later.

This homogenous vision presented so far is broken when addressing certain determinants. From Chile<sup>3</sup>, there is a criticism of the university education received. While it is true that in the 120 interviews we can see a certain disconnection between training and journalistic practice, in the case of the Biobío journalists the criticisms are exacerbated: “The journalists who finish the university are not trained at all to be able to exercise their work in an acceptable manner” (Chile, subject 33).

From the Mexican state of Veracruz<sup>4</sup>, the importance of social pressure is so present that, sometimes, attacks on the lives of journalists reach the point of being “normalized” as aspects of professional performance: “The demands, kidnappings and even death are occupational hazards” (Mexico, subject 91). Finally, in Ecuador, the importance given to political conditions is crucial, both regarding the influence of the Organic Communication Law<sup>5</sup> and the control of informational rhythms by government sources:

To have access to specific issues you must, among other requirements, send a letter, you have to explain the research topic you are developing and that is like anticipating part of your research. Then, this letter must go through some filters, public relations, advisors of the person you want to interview, so usually a week goes by (Ecuador, subject 64).

When determining the aspects that undermine the development of quality journalism, the answers of the

interviewees are mainly based in these meanings given to the determinants.

In addition, throughout their responses we can see the common belief that the hierarchical, political, social pressure and ideological determinants condition the journalistic production process. However, although journalists state that the pressures of superiors, politicians or advertisers are a common factor in their daily practice and that there are processes of “censorship and self-censorship, which apply the commercial and political interests of the editorial company” (Mexico, subject 102), they do not highlight them as the main determinants in their responses. These statements – related to the influence of hierarchical superiors in the final construction of journalistic stories according to the ideological line of the media, to the weight of advertisers in the pressure of the journalistic treatment of issues that threaten their commercial interests or to political pressures when addressing or hiding certain issues of the media agenda– strikingly clash with the general conception of the interviewed journalists of their own influence in the construction of their texts: “Definitely, the opinion that I have regarding a subject influences all the work, its main line and even the sources consulted” (Ecuador, subject 42).

In short, we can observe that journalistic quality is linked to a series of determinants that affect journalists’ own routines; i.e., the journalistic production process is transformed and adapted to a series of conditions external to it.

#### THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DETERMINANTS: THE SUBMISSION OF JOURNALISTIC ROUTINES

The analysis of the meanings, granted by the 120 journalists interviewed to the aspects that condition the development of a quality journalism, has allowed us to discover a series of relationships that exist between these determinants in which it is necessary to deepen.

In general, the research has shown an adaptation of journalistic routines to the rest of the determinants. This means that journalists must modify, adapt or transform their production processes based on a series of external criteria to develop their journalistic work.

On the one hand, the national economic situation –mainly in the case of Mexico and Ecuador– is transferred to the media that have financing problems, thus making them more susceptible to pressure from public institutions and from the economic sectors due to the great dependence on institutional and commercial advertising:

Our profession is based on a business. You cannot go strong against someone because they might have some kind of commitment to the media, basically advertising commitments (Chile, subject 6).

Government decisions have had an impact on the level of income of the media, which has resulted in a reduction in personnel and thus some of us are doing twice the work. The fact that companies, for fear or for their direct relationship with the Government, advertise less, does influence how we work with information, sometimes it determines the number of pages or the weight we give to the issues due to lack of publicity (Ecuador, subject 49).

The medium in which I work has agreements with the government, this affects what is published (Mexico, subject 88).

Thus, the capacity of the political and economic sectors to influence the processes of journalistic production increases. Not only there is –sometimes– a confluence of the ideological or strategic interests of the media with those of other political and economic actors, but even when the interests of both actors respond to different realities, advertising dependence leads to the emergence of hierarchical pressures towards the journalist from within the media: “If there is a sensitive issue for the owners of the media, it might be subject to revision or simply not published. It is part of the business” (Chile, subject 2). “What we say it is news is what the editor says is news. Therefore, much of the treatment given to the information will depend on the people who make the final decisions” (Ecuador, subject 47). “There is a fear that comes from above, because of the censorship and self-censorship that the commercial interests of the publishing company apply” (Mexico, subject 102).

Therefore, the professional perception of the journalist when developing his/her work is neutralized, despite the fact that, throughout the interviews, journalists, mainly from Quito and Veracruz, determine the prevalence of their vision when building their journalistic stories: “There is total freedom to do the job” (Ecuador, subject 67); “Journalism is based on the opinion of the reporter, it is subjective information” (Mexico, subject 87).

In short, the selection of topics, their approach and the interpretative work associated with journalistic practice are limited by the pressures that underlie the relations between the media, institutions and other economic actors.

On the other hand, the scarcity of economic resources also implies a lack of human and material resources that

blur the coverage of journalistic events, in a scenario of job insecurity. Journalists do not have the time, the tools and, sometimes, the motivation, due to their low salary recognition, to face the journalistic practice with minimum quality standards:

You know at what time you begin, but you never know when you are going to leave. That is already a factor that makes you produce less, because you arrive exhausted at your place, without wanting to do anything else, something that affects you the next day, because you are low on spirit. You don't have time, you don't have a life, but you don't have money either (Chile, subject 1).

Sometimes, you no longer know what to say or what to write and we become information robots. All media have the same and, moreover, they even share the videos (Ecuador, subject 51).

The lack of depth in the news is determined by the workload, delivery time and competition in the news published (Mexico, subject 85).

To all this we must add that the economic situation of the media has caused them to have a lack of technological development. There is a series of deficiencies in material resources, increased by the need to undertake changes according to the technological revolution in which today's society is immersed. This material scarcity also moves to other areas of professional practice such as non-renewed equipment or transportation to cover events, among others:

There are technical aspects that are sometimes limiting, for example, the number of vehicles, of mobile phones that a certain media has. That is a very important limitation because suddenly you want to be in many places and you must discard some event (Chile, subject 4).

My medium does not have a large infrastructure. We do not stop the coverage due to lack of infrastructure. We have little infrastructure and people, but we cover anyway (Ecuador, subject 46).

There are aspects such as transportation that influence the development of my work (Mexico, subject 93).

The difficult economic situation of the media translates, above all, into a shortage of human resources that leads to a great workload when covering the news:

In television, in particular, there is the issue regarding resources, especially at the human level. When you want to have a newscast, you need a certain number of journalists to be able to ensure that the news delivered are of acceptable quality (Chile, subject 33).

The main resource that is missing is the human [...] because of the austerity policy that derived from the media crisis with the digital era (Ecuador, subject 47).

It is impossible to expect that a report does a great job if he/she must work non-stop, as an “assembly plant” and cover enormous amounts of bland news (Mexico, subject 81).

Therefore, journalists find it hard to develop their work outside the newsrooms, although aspects such as immediacy lead them to accelerate their production processes by developing an important part of their work outside the newsroom. This expands their borders, beyond the traditional physical space: “My work routines can be done from home, on the street, from a cybercafé or in the media headquarters” (Mexico, subject 108).

Thus, the journalist must face this scenario from a perspective in which the update and adaptation to new technologies becomes crucial and he/she must resort to continuous learning, since, sometimes, higher education does not grant the necessary abilities. This is another common aspect, regardless of the country of origin of the interviewees: the need to work during university in the most practical aspects of the profession, as stated by the subjects interviewed: “The university prepares you theoretically and many practical things are missing. Soft skills are missing, things as simple as speaking in public” (Chile, subject 7); “You need more experience than theory, but I wouldn’t describe the theory received at the university as useless” (Ecuador, subject 56); “In school, they prepare you for journalism, but not for what you encounter when you graduate, they ‘bother’ you every so often until you ‘get along’, they adapt” (Mexico, subject 99).

In short, the changes in the media ecosystem—where the consolidation of the Internet as a new informative support converts the news value referred to current issues into immediacy—entails a shortening in the times of journalistic production. This change occurs in an economic situation in which the media have a lack of economic capacity to invest in the material and human resources necessary for the coverage of social reality, which leads to an inability to deepen into it.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research is based on three very different scenarios, since the journalists interviewed are located on three very different geographical and socioeconomic realities. A capital of an Andean country like Ecuador:

Quito; a peripheral region of a Southern Cone country, such as Chile: the Biobío, and a state of one of the most populous Latin American nations, Mexico, which holds the record number of journalists killed between 2010 and 2016: Veracruz (Ureste, 2017).

Despite the sample’s heterogeneity, the results show a series of similarities when it comes to knowing journalists’ perspectives on the aspects that influence the development of quality journalism. While it is true that their different realities determine the development of the determinants, it is also worth noting how the analysis of the journalists’ responses identifies a common and basic aspect: journalistic routines are the fundamental element in the development of quality journalism. However, the performance of these routines throughout the journalistic production process is modified by aspects that dilute the principles associated with quality journalism: autonomy (Bourdieu, 1997) and deepening (Gómez-Mompart, Gutiérrez-Lozano, & Palau-Sampaio, 2013; Shapiro, 2010) as axes of journalistic interpretation.

The autonomy of journalists when focusing on the issues on which they base their journalistic stories is affected by the pressures exerted from the main political and economic actors, sometimes directly, and sometimes, mediated by the ideological and economic interests of the media where they work. This is not a new situation since, historically, several interests converge in the media: a) those of the rulers in ensuring social control and the prevalence of their hegemonic discourse; b) those of the economic agents looking to defend their commercial interests in consonance or struggle with the political power; c) those of other political and ideological actors that seek to break the prevalence of hegemonic discourse, and d) those of the audience, that uses the media as a source of information and education, but also entertainment (Álvarez, 2004, p. 27).

On the other hand, the deepening of issues, inherent in the development of journalistic quality, is limited from two fronts. In the first place, the lack of human and material resources that allow to enhance journalistic practices according to the necessary levels of deepening. To this is added the mutation of the noteworthy value of the news in immediacy, linked to the development of Internet journalism (Revers, 2014), which is promoted from the media due to the possibilities offered by the digital environment for journalistic deepening (Rosique- Cedillo & Barranquero-Carretero, 2015). This primacy of immediacy occurs at a juncture of economic deficiencies in the media, where journalists

face long working hours with low salaries, sometimes affecting the quality of journalistic products due to professionals' demotivation and fatigue.

This vision from Latin America leads us to raise the need to continue the never-ending research on journalistic quality. Taking up the statement of Shoemaker and Reese (2014), according to which the journalistic routines between different media are similar, but, in turn, substantially different (p. 168), we must be aware that the determinants for the development of quality journalism are due, on the one hand, to a series of common logics but, on the other, they develop according to the local realities in which journalists exert their profession.

The results of this research allow us to advance in the meanings and relationships that characterize the determinants for the development of quality journalism, some of a global nature and others of

marked local character. However, its qualitative nature prevents generalizing the results to a population as wide and diverse as that of Latin American journalists. Therefore, it is the starting point for future research that will seek to deepen this issue, and stresses the need to understand the Latin American context as a set of generalities but, above all, of particularities, which reflect the constitution of its reality from the roots of each culture and from those moving roots, the result of migrations and mobilizations (García-Canclini, 2003, p. 21).

In the framework of journalistic quality, in a historical moment in which the exercise of the profession is more questioned than ever, journalists must consider that they face old problems in a new context. To do so, they have new tools that, when used correctly, can help strengthen the quality of their journalistic products. And that is the real challenge.

## NOTES

1. Even if four years have passed since the end of the interviews, we believe that this research is still valid. Although the interviews are due to a specific historical moment, located in that period, there have been no major changes in the journalistic world in these years. Journalistic practice in the contexts studied continues at a time of recovery of the economic crisis of the beginning of the decade, and of transformation of journalistic production processes due to the rise of Internet journalism. Regarding the social context, the situation of the journalists of the Metropolitan Area of Quito is the one that could have evolved the most due to the changes in the Organic Law of Communication that have been studied throughout 2018, without yet an effective change of the law.

2. Throughout the analysis we made a numerical identification of the interviewees. This is due to the commitment of anonymity, to guarantee the sincerity in the responses of the interviewed journalists. It should be considered that the purpose of the interview fragments used throughout the analysis is to exemplify the general results obtained in terms of similarities and differences, once the information saturation point has been reached, and not to reflect the individual position of the different journalists.

3. We must keep in mind that, during the time in which the interviews took place, Chile was immersed in a process of student mobilization: there was a series of demonstrations (EFE, 2014; Montes, 2015) in response to the measures proposed in the reform Education promoted by the second government of Michelle Bachelet, presented as of May 2014 (Montes, 2014).

4. Veracruz has an historical weight that places it as a crucial state for the country's politics and, therefore, for the development of the journalistic practice, so much so that, in this city, is located the country's oldest newspaper, *El Dictamen*, with 120 years of existence. It is the city where the first journalism school outside Mexico City was established in 1954, and for 65 years has trained journalists from many states of the country (Universidad Veracruzana, n.d.). The recent acts of violence and murders of journalists that have been perpetrated in this city during the last 10 years place it in the epicenter of social pressure (Gómez, 2018).

5. In 2013, Ecuador enacted the Organic Communication Law that, among other provisions, allows the Government to establish the information that appears in the media and how they publish it. This law has sown notorious controversy, especially for the large number of sanctions imposed on private media (Magdaleno, 2015). The complete regulation is available at [http://www.cordicom.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2017/07/REGLAMENTO\\_LOC.pdf](http://www.cordicom.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2017/07/REGLAMENTO_LOC.pdf).

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