

“I DON’T HAVE THE NECESSARY CONDITIONS”: HOW TELEVISION AND RADIO JOURNALISTS RATE THE QUALITY OF JOURNALISM IN PORTUGAL

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ABSTRACT

Studying the quality of journalism in Portugal is important, given the current financial crisis the business landscape is going through, where newsrooms are increasingly smaller and with precarious working conditions. In this context, how do Portuguese television and radio journalists assess the quality of journalism practised in Portugal and the conditions they have to produce news? This article seeks to answer two research questions, through the use of semi-structured interviews with 11 radio and television journalists in Portugal: (a) how do television and radio journalists define quality journalism; and (b) how do television and radio journalists assess the quality of journalism produced in Portugal?

The interviewees stressed the importance of following the profession’s ethical rules, maintaining accuracy and impartiality, as well as other more formal aspects, such as the quality of their writing or the ability to captivate their audience. As for the conditions needed to practise good journalism, the importance of time and job stability stood out, which the interviewees agreed are in short supply. Although the interviewees were not unanimous in their assessment of the quality of television and radio journalism in Portugal — even the most positive ones had criticisms to make — most of the journalists interviewed considered that their working conditions for producing good journalism fall short of what is desired.

KEYWORDS

quality of journalism, interviews, television, radio, precarity

“NÃO TENHO AS CONDIÇÕES”: COMO OS JORNALISTAS DE TELEVISÃO E RÁDIO AVALIAM A QUALIDADE DO JORNALISMO EM PORTUGAL

RESUMO

Estudar a qualidade do jornalismo em Portugal manifesta-se como relevante perante uma paisagem empresarial em crise financeira e redações cada vez mais pequenas com condições de trabalho precárias. Neste contexto, como é que os jornalistas portugueses de televisão e de rádio avaliam a qualidade do jornalismo praticado em Portugal e as condições que têm para o produzir? Através de entrevistas semiestruturadas a 11 jornalistas de rádio e de televisão em Portugal, procuramos responder a duas perguntas de investigação: (a) como é que os jornalistas de televisão e de rádio definem o jornalismo de qualidade?; e (b) como é que os jornalistas de televisão e de rádio avaliam a qualidade do jornalismo produzido em Portugal?

Os entrevistados destacam a importância de seguir as regras deontológicas da profissão, de manter o rigor e a isenção e também outros tipos de características mais formais como, por exemplo, a qualidade da escrita ou a capacidade de cativar a audiência. Quanto às condições necessárias para praticar bom jornalismo, sobressai a importância do tempo e da estabilidade laboral, sobre as quais os entrevistados concordam estarem em escassez. Embora não sejam unânimes na sua avaliação da qualidade do jornalismo televisivo e radiofónico em Portugal — mesmo os mais positivos têm críticas a fazer —, a maior parte dos jornalistas entrevistados considera que as suas condições de trabalho para produzir bom jornalismo ficam aquém do desejado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

qualidade do jornalismo, entrevistas, televisão, rádio, precariedade

1. INTRODUCTION

Portugal is one of the countries where people trust the news the most. The *Digital News Report Portugal 2022* (Cardoso et al., 2022) points out that 61% of the Portuguese say they trust the news, the highest figure in Southern Europe and the second highest in the whole of Europe, only behind Finland. The most trusted brand is public television, RTP. In addition, the Portuguese believe that the news in Portugal is not too polarised — in other words, that the media do not tend to exaggerate the differences between political parties and groups. Portugal has the lowest perceived polarisation score in the world, along with Singapore. These figures reveal a country where the relationship of trust between the media and their audiences has not yet eroded, contrary to the trend in other European countries and North America. It is also a country where the majority of people still consume information from television every week — 63% of people watch news on RTP, SIC or TVI at least once a week, according to the same report.

Given the considerable demand for television information and the still encouragingly high levels of public trust in the media, there is interest in studying the quality of journalism produced on Portuguese television, along with radio journalism, as a possible point of comparison to understand how widespread the perceptions in question are.

Over the last few decades, different techniques and approaches have been used to measure and assess the quality of journalism. Experts have proposed a variety of angles from which to study this subject, and these range from content analysis using different methods (Martins & Palacios, 2016; Palacios, 2011), to the study of the conditions that exist in media companies for the production of good journalism (Picard, 2000), as well as definitions and measures linked to the social and democratic role of journalism (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). Research into the quality of journalism in Portugal is still in its infancy, which indicates a need to understand better how Portuguese journalists and audiences define quality journalism and what assessments they make of it.

The issue of quality has also become particularly pressing at a time of financial crisis within journalism, which has led to a reduction in the number of newspapers and journalists in newsrooms. As journalists (Gómez Mompert et al., 2015) and institutions (Esteves, 2020) and academics (Meyer, 2009; Silva, 2020) point out, quality journalism

cannot be achieved without investment — whether in human resources or in technological and technical resources.

As such, given the deteriorating financial conditions of media companies in Portugal, how do Portuguese journalists assess the quality of journalism practised in Portugal and the conditions in which they themselves have to carry out “good journalism”? This article aims to answer two research questions: (a) how do television and radio journalists define quality journalism; and (b) how do television and radio journalists assess the quality of journalism produced in Portugal?

To this end, this article begins by presenting some theoretical guidelines concerning the study of the quality of journalism and journalists’ perceptions of quality. It then offers a few points to contextualise the evolution of the professional profile of the Portuguese journalistic class, the financial situation of media companies and the present-day working situation of journalists in Portugal. It then presents the methodology utilised in this study, namely semi-structured interviews conducted with 11 radio and television journalists in Portugal. Finally, it provides a contextualised analysis of the results of the study.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. THE STUDY OF THE QUALITY OF JOURNALISM

It is often said that there is a “public interest” in a quality press, that is, that the press fulfils important roles in society and that the quality of its work is therefore in the common interest. These benefits of the press for society are manifold, including the systematic scrutiny of power, stimulating active democratic life, as well as creating opportunities to express ideas and perspectives about the world (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). There is a normative outlook from professionals who practise journalism about the quality they consider they have an obligation to achieve and there is an expectation, on the part of society, that the press should be held to a certain standard. This is partly due to the historical context of journalism, with its role having been defined as a link between political institutions and citizens. Research into the quality of the press often focuses on its ability to fulfil this normative role. McQuail and Deuze created the concept of *media performance* to talk about the quality of journalistic content, with a definition based on five values: freedom, equality, diversity, quality of information and truth, and social order and solidarity.

However, not all definitions of journalistic quality are associated with these concepts of public service. Picard (2000), for example, takes a more economic approach: “the concept of quality involves providing value for the money or time expended by consumers to obtain and use a product or service” (p. 97). In order to define the quality of journalism, the author proposes an approach based on the time spent by the journalist during the working process and points out seven categories of activity to be quantified mainly by the time spent on them. For example, this includes activities such as “interviews”, “being on the phone gathering information and arranging interviews”, “participating in editorial

meetings, discussions and training sessions” and even “thinking, organising material, and waiting for information and materials” (Picard, 2000, p. 101).

Where Picard (2000) focuses on time, Lacy (2000) suggests measuring the quality of journalism through financial investment. An idea that first appeared in 1986, proposed by Litman and Bridges, is that the measurement of the quality of journalism can be achieved by gauging the newspaper company’s financial investment in the product. “This concept of performance is not an evaluation per se of the product itself but rather of the resources put forth by a newspaper to produce and deliver such a quality product” (Litman & Bridges, 1986, p. 10). Lacy (2000) points out that, although more money is not a guarantee of quality content, nor is it the only factor at play, a news organisation needs financial support to produce it:

ask any newspaper editor if money guarantees quality journalism, and the editor will likely deny it. Yet, ask that same editor if money can help him or her improve the quality of news reporting, and the answer will be “of course”. (p. 25)

As such, financial investment has value as a tool for measuring the quality of journalism, argues Lacy (2000), because funding is crucial for producing quality content consistently over time.

Others have sought to define quality journalism based on the criteria of the professionals who develop it. Rosenstiel et al. (2007), as part of the *Project for Excellence in Journalism*, developed a list of criteria that define good quality local television news, based on surveys and interviews with journalists who produce this type of news. The journalists questioned as part of this research felt that a good newscast should meet seven criteria, namely, cover the whole community, cover substantive and significant issues, show courage, be fair, be accurate, show authority and not sensationalise.

These are criteria that appear in various research projects concerning what journalists value in quality news, such as Gladney’s (1996) work. The journalists in Gladney’s study prioritised certain criteria for the quality of journalism, including “integrity, impartiality and editorial independence” when it came to the criteria for news organisation, and “strong local coverage, accuracy and good writing” (p. 327) when it came to the criteria for the content itself. The author sought to understand whether journalists and audiences valued similar characteristics in quality journalism and concluded that, for the most part, professionals and readers indeed had similar standards for journalistic excellence. This study also showed that journalists seem to underestimate readers’ interest in serious topics and exaggerate their “appetite for superficial material”, while readers are “more discreet and restrained than editors in deciding what is fit to print” (Gladney, 1996, p. 328) — readers valued a less sensationalist approach from newspapers more than journalists themselves.

This proximity between the criteria for journalistic quality identified by the public and by professionals has been shown in several other studies, including the one by Odriozola-Chéné and Rodrigo-Mendizábal (2017) in Ecuador, where the authors surveyed

audiences and interviewed 40 journalists to find out which criteria were most valued and also which conditions were necessary for the development of quality journalism.

The authors found several points of convergence, for example, in the importance given to the significance, clarity and accuracy of the information. "citizens and journalists share a set of values when it comes to determining what is important", the authors wrote, and "the correct identification of sources contributes to citizens' perception that the news are representative of the events reported" (Odriozola-Chéné & Rodrigo-Mendizábal, 2017, p. 186). However, the public considers that impartiality and reliability are hardly present in Ecuadorian news and journalists justify this by saying that there are professional, hierarchical and external constraints that make it difficult to produce quality journalism. For journalists, political pressure appears to be the greatest constraint on the development of quality journalism, followed by other pressures, such as audience expectation.

2.2. JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY

It is not only important to understand what criteria journalists use to define quality journalism, but also how they assess the current state of journalism, including the work they themselves do. This article has chosen to highlight three studies (Gómez Mompert et al., 2015; Jenkins & Nielsen, 2020; Plasser, 2005) that assess journalists' perceptions of the quality of journalism and which seem to highlight some cross-cutting trends.

Plasser (2005) compared United States and Austrian political journalists' perceptions of news quality and found "striking" similarities (p. 64). On both sides of the Atlantic, journalists question the good quality of political news: in Austria, more than 50% of the journalists interviewed believed that the quality of political journalism had declined in previous years and only 19% thought it had improved. The causes of these quality-related problems were market pressures and the hypercommercialisation of the journalistic product, which also had consequences for interaction with sources. However, although political journalists in both countries were very critical of news quality, "there are no indicators that they are willing to reduce their professional standards of news gathering and reporting" (Plasser, 2005, p. 65).

Jenkins and Nielsen (2020) found similarities in the qualities that local newspaper journalists mentioned as essential in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Finland. The interviewees mainly emphasised the values of proximity, public service and popularity of content. They did, however, have criticisms to make, including the difficulty of producing more content with fewer journalists while trying to maintain high standards of editorial quality. The editors and journalists interviewed stated that it is increasingly difficult to cover communities in a way that provides the information necessary for readers to be active citizens, due to the time pressures of the digital environment and the reduction in profits, readers and journalists per newsroom. Certain elements of quality journalism and the resources to produce this have reached their limits. Jenkins and Nielsen (2020) thus found a "cross-national local news ecosystem" (p. 251) in which journalists generally

try not to lower their high standards for quality journalism while trying to maintain the sustainability of their under-resourced media outlet.

In Spain, Gómez Mompert et al. (2015) surveyed 363 journalists to find out how they assess quality in the media outlet where they work, using various criteria, and found general dissatisfaction. For example, only half of journalists considered that the percentage of significant information in their media outlet is sufficient, although significance is one of the criteria they consider to be essential. The same goes for a media outlet's ability to offer original content.

Good quality information requires a financial investment that "companies are not willing to make" (Gómez Mompert et al., 2015, p. 20), according to 34% of those questioned. Many journalists also pointed out the lack of job stability — 28% stated there is little job stability in the profession and 34% said that only half of the workers have such stability. The perception of precarity and salary levels varies according to age (those with fewer years of experience view these aspects more unfavourably) and also according to the type of media (in television, salary and stability levels are the highest).

Gómez Mompert et al. (2015) found a tendency among Spanish journalists to blame companies for most of the quality problems in journalism, "especially with regard to the lack of investment to improve production conditions" (p. 29). Another problem pointed out, as reported by journalists in Jenkins and Nielsen's study (2020), is the need for speed, which hinders the process of quality assurance and analysis of topics in depth.

2.3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE JOURNALIST'S PROFILE IN PORTUGAL

While it is true that there are many common traits within the profession of journalism at the international level, and that American and European currents differ, it is also indisputable that Portuguese journalists and journalism have developed in a particular society that has endowed them with their own distinctive traits. As Correia and Baptista (2007) wrote, the professionalisation of journalism in Portugal took place mainly under the dictatorship, in the face of political constraints which, however, did not prevent the creation of a specific *ethos* for the profession:

independence, accuracy, the denunciation of injustice and the pursuit of social justice have never left the profession's legitimising discourses, even if the reality imposed by the censorship clearly devalued these and, in many cases, prevented operations involving choice, selection and interpretation essential to making these a reality. (p. 32)

Between the 1950s and 25 April 1974, many changes were to take place inside and outside Portuguese newsrooms, with the aim of shaping the professional identity of the Portuguese journalist, a process that would continue beyond the revolution and up until the present day. While during the 1950s, journalists had no specific training in communication and much more value was placed on learning the "craft" in a newsroom and with colleagues, little by little a trend towards professionalisation began to emerge, requiring

specific educational training. Journalists had low social status and there was resistance within the profession to the creation of professional courses: at the time, many texts only acknowledged “the newsroom as the special and exclusive space for the learning required to perform the ‘craft’” (Correia & Baptista, 2007, p. 400). It was not until 1968 that the Journalists’ Union managed to create the first journalism training course, and there was still a long way to go for consensus being reached among professionals on the need for this institutionalisation.

Even during the dictatorship, journalists coordinated efforts to improve their working conditions in terms of their salaries and careers, and the growing dignity of the profession created space for them to define their own ethical and deontological principles as well as specific journalistic values, that is, the concepts of “impartiality” and “accuracy” and the idea of public interest gained ground, even under the yoke of censorship (Correia & Baptista, 2007).

Any characterisation of Portuguese journalists as a group, however, remained somewhat rudimentary until Paquete de Oliveira, who in 1987 carried out the first sociological analysis of this professional group and the following year published the article “Elementos Para uma Sociologia dos Jornalistas Portugueses” (Elements Towards a Sociology of Portuguese Journalists). The knowledge we have today about the evolution of the journalistic class is largely due to the surveys of Portuguese journalists he carried out with José Luís Garcia, seeking not only to discover the sociological characteristics of journalists, but also their concerns and objectives within the profession (Crespo, Azevedo, & Cardoso, 2017).

The composition of the journalistic profession in Portugal continued to evolve until the end of the 20th century: while in 1974 there were 700 registered journalists, in 1996 there were 4,300, according to Fernando Correia (1997), who clearly attributes this increase to “the diversification and growth of the media (specialised magazines, new radio and TV stations)” (p. 42). During the 1980s and 1990s, the profession was not only revitalised, but also feminised, and efforts to increase education also bore fruit — in 1992, 35% of journalists had studied social communication (Correia, 1997).

In little over two decades, at the time of the survey by the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology — University Institute of Lisbon: “Os Jornalistas Portugueses São Bem Pagos? Inquérito às Condições Laborais dos Jornalistas em Portugal” (Are Portuguese Journalists Well Paid? Survey on the Labour Conditions of Journalists in Portugal), carried out in 2016, there was a balance between genders, with men and women standing at 51.8% and 48.2% respectively. Regarding education, professionals with specific training more than doubled, with around two thirds of journalists possessing a higher educational degree in communication sciences, social communication or journalism (Crespo, Azevedo, Sousa, et al., 2017).

Inseparable from the evolution of journalists’ sociological profile was the progress in their labour situation — Paquete de Oliveira pointed out back in 1994 that the average journalist’s salary was “clearly lower than the average salaries earned by professionals in well-established professions such as doctors and lawyers” (Garcia & Oliveira, 1994,

p. 37). Correia (1997) even wrote that the fact that journalists were not self-employed, but employees, made them more vulnerable as professionals, for example, in the case of precarious or poorly paid labour contracts, which interfered in both their personal and professional lives, and also in their freedom to follow the deontology and principles of professional ethics that should govern them. Therefore, they had less power to resist corporate or managerial pressures.

Precarious labour situations and low salaries are still common among Portuguese journalists today. Miranda (2021) maps out how demands for better working conditions are a common theme in the conclusions reached at all four Portuguese Journalists' Congresses. The author also points out that through the different congresses there is the same concern with "demands (...) on the class itself", such as a lesser concern "with quantity and speed, and more with the quality and weight of the information" (Miranda, 2021, pp. 26–27). Miranda (2021) even mentions a framework of demands that includes, over the decades, "concerns about the quality of information and its regulation, or judgements about best practices and ways of carrying out their activity" (p. 29).

In her book, Felisbela Lopes (2015) interviewed a hundred Portuguese journalists about what they considered to be the greatest factor conditioning press freedom. The author found that one of the factors most mentioned had to do with economic and labour concerns, involving the same reasons that Correia had mentioned in 1997 — the impact that precariousness and low salaries have on journalistic production and practice:

one of the greatest constraints on press freedom in Portugal lies in the self-censorship that precarious, freelance or fearful journalists are forced to resort to (sometimes automatically or unconsciously) in order to stay in the labour market. - Andreia Azevedo Soares, *Público*. (Lopes, 2015, p. 9)

In 2017, two-thirds of Portuguese journalists stated they had already considered leaving journalism, with the most frequent reasons being low income (21%), deteriorating working conditions (20.4%) and precarious contracts (14.3%), which once again emphasises how worrying the labour situation of Portuguese journalists remains (Crespo, Azevedo, Sousa, et al., 2017).

2.4. THE BUSINESS VIEW OF THE JOURNALISM CRISIS IN PORTUGAL

For more than three decades, newspaper advertising revenues have been falling in most developed countries, if calculated according to the percentage of gross domestic product (Cagé, 2016). Partly due to a reduction in available funds, and also due to the media companies' goal of producing higher revenues in relation to costs (in the case of the press quoted on the stock exchange, for example, which is obliged to produce profits for its shareholders). Newspapers are shrinking in number and, in those that remain, the number of journalists is decreasing. Between 1997 and 2007, the number of people working in the press in the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development fell by between 10% and 30% (Peters, 2010).

In Portugal, in 2004, there were 2,089 periodicals, but by 2020 this figure had already reduced to 886 (Pordata, n.d.). There has also been a reduction in the number of professionals in recent years. Indeed, the country lost 1,218 journalists in seven years (between 2007 and 2014), according to the Professional Journalist License Commission (Morais, 2015).

What is more, the employment status of those who remain in the profession is not a favourable one. According to the report *Jornalistas e Condições Laborais: Retrato de uma Profissão em Transformação* (Journalists and Labour Conditions: Portrait of a Profession in Transformation; Crespo, Azevedo, Sousa, et al., 2017), more than half of the journalists surveyed had not progressed in their careers for more than seven years. Almost 70% of journalists were dissatisfied with “developments in working conditions in the sector in recent years” (Crespo, Azevedo, Sousa, et al., 2017, p. 21). Of the 60% of journalists who said they worked more than 40 hours a week, 13% indicated a working week of 51 to 60 hours and 9% worked more than 60 hours a week. Moreover, although in most cases contracts provide for between 35 and 40 hours of work per week, 63% of journalists said that overtime was not compensated, either in money or in time off.

The situation has only worsened since 2020, due to the pandemic situation the world was plunged into. In Portugal, during the first 14 months of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than a hundred journalists were fired, according to data from the Portuguese Journalists' Union (Lusa, 2021).

In its 2020 report, *Relatório de Regulação 2020: Análise Económico-Financeira do Setor de Media em Portugal* (Regulatory Report 2020: Economic and Financial Analysis of the Media Sector in Portugal; Esteves, 2020), the Portuguese Regulatory Authority for the Media analysed the contraction of the advertising market caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. “The advertising market contracted by 4.2% overall” (Esteves, 2020, p. 8), stated the report, which pointed out, however, that in Portugal television news continued to be the main source of revenue for media companies. For example, in the cases of Impresa and Media Capital, advertising accounted for around 65% of revenues (in contrast, for example, to RTP, with a percentage closer to 10%). The public sector ended up being better protected from the drop in advertising revenue, as was the case with Agência Lusa and RTP. In April 2020, the government chose to support the press by purchasing € 15,000,000 of institutional advertising in advance.

A study by the Professional Journalist License Commission and the Journalists' Union in partnership with academic institutions, titled *Estudo Sobre os Efeitos do Estado de Emergência no Jornalismo no Contexto da Pandemia COVID-19* (Study on the Effects of the State of Emergency on Journalism in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic; Camponez et al., 2020), concluded that the pandemic had increased trends related to the precarity of journalists' work. Almost half of the 799 respondents who worked in journalism had a monthly income of less than € 900, and “only around half had permanent employment contracts” (Camponez et al., 2020, p. 15). For example, looking at freelance journalists, many of those surveyed were either in this situation because of difficulties in

obtaining a work contract (35%) or were only formally self-employed (20%), as they had “conditions characteristic of a dependent worker” (p. 16).

In Portugal, the future financial scenarios for the media were summarised into four hypotheses by Cardoso et al. (2015). The first would be the development of journalism in reconvertng to the digital medium, which would generate new value propositions capable of sustaining it. The second would be “short-term management”, the “usual” solution of restructuring companies and their human resources with redundancies and changes to the cost structure. The third would be where part of the value of journalism would be paid for by paywalls and by costs sustained by content aggregators such as Google. Finally, there would be a solution that separated journalism “as an economic reality” from journalism “as a social function”, so that journalism no longer depended on its economic viability and profit, but would rather be maintained by “non-economic forms of financing” such as donations, crowdfunding, sponsorships and state subsidies.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research proposes to explore the issues of journalism quality from the perspective of those who produce it, thus seeking to answer the two research questions mentioned above: (a) how do television and radio journalists define quality journalism; and (b) how do television and radio journalists assess the quality of journalism produced in Portugal? On the one hand, this research seeks to discover what criteria journalists use to define “a good piece” for television or radio, including the particular characteristics that these media require, and to know what conditions are necessary to produce such a “good piece”. Furthermore, it seeks to learn how these journalists see journalistic production in Portugal in relation to the criteria they themselves establish, including their own work and the conditions under which they actually practise their profession. A path is thus traced between the normative perspectives of what journalism should be and the descriptive perspectives of what journalism actually is.

As a first approach to the issues of journalism quality among information producers in Portugal, it was opted to carry out semi-structured interviews, a qualitative methodology, despite the fact that international articles on this subject often use surveys as their main method, such as Gladney (1996) or Gómez Mompert et al. (2015). Instead, like Jenkins and Nielsen (2020), the semi-structured interview was chosen. This does not rule out the possibility of later on using the knowledge gathered in this process to carry out a broader survey.

The interview script used, with slight variations, as is natural in the case of semi-structured interviews, consisted of six questions, divided into two blocks. The first explored the characteristics that the journalist attributes to quality journalism, their definition of “good journalism” and the ideal conditions needed to produce this. The second was focused on assessing the quality of television or radio journalism in Portugal, depending on the interviewee’s area of work, and assessing their own working conditions in relation to the ideals they described.

“Interviews are essential when you need/want to map the practices, beliefs, values and classification systems of specific, rather well-defined social universes, where conflicts and contradictions are not clearly explained”, explains Duarte (2004, p. 215). The semi-structured interview allows the interviewee to articulate specific concerns and needs and the interviewer to better explore topics about which they may still have insufficient knowledge (Williamson, 2018).

A total of 11 interviews were carried out between 21 March and 6 April 2023. Five of the journalists interviewed worked for television channels: SIC (1), RTP (2) and CNN Portugal (2); and six worked for radio news programmes: Antena 1 (3), TSF (2) and Renascença (1). The journalists interviewed had been working for between three and 22 years. Most of the interviews were conducted via Zoom, three of them by telephone and one in person. The interviews lasted between 12 and 53 minutes, with the total number of interviews recorded totalling 3 hours and 48 minutes. One of the interviews was not recorded due to a technical error, and its analysis relies on the notes taken during the conversation, so there will be no direct quotes from it.

The journalists' answers were anonymised so as not to identify the name of the interviewee nor the media outlet where they work. The interviewees were informed of this anonymisation at the beginning of the interview process. This decision was made especially because of the questions in the second block of the interview, one of which is: “do you think you have the conditions to practise journalism with the quality you would like to achieve?”. Due to the limited size of newsrooms in Portugal, it is felt that the identity of the journalists interviewed would be decipherable if their means of communication were associated with their years of career or their answers, and therefore, in order not to restrict the criticisms they might wish to make, this information will not be associated with each other.

The interviewees were initially chosen for convenience — four of the journalists were personal contacts — and, later, through snowballing or chain referencing, in which the initial interviewees referred to colleagues in the same and other media organisations. In an attempt to include journalists from all the national news media in the fields of television and radio, an attempt was made to contact journalists from CMTV and Rádio Observador. However, within the timeframe set for this article, no response was received from these journalists such that interviews could be carried out, better to complement this work.

By the ninth, 10th and 11th interviews, the answers began to provide no new information in relation to those previously recorded, thereby reaching a point of theoretical saturation (Thiry-Cherques, 2009), so it was decided to cease data collection and start analysing it.

The interview responses were organised in a table for qualitative analysis, considering individual perspectives, in the words of each interviewee, and collective views. This approach revealed convergences, divergences, and patterns in various viewpoints.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The 11 journalists interviewed for this research work showed varying assessments of the quality of journalism practised in Portugal, but common opinions on what a “quality”

piece of journalism is. Asked about “the essential characteristics of quality journalism”, the interviewees were divided between deontological or public service aspects and formal characteristics. Six of the journalists mentioned accuracy and impartiality, and two of those specifically mentioned respect for the profession’s deontological rules, showing a connection to the journalistic *ethos* that goes back to the times when their colleagues worked under the dictatorship (Correia & Baptista, 2007). Four journalists spoke of the importance of diversifying sources. In contrast, five of the interviewees spoke of more formal characteristics of journalistic work, such as the “quality of the writing”, with the ability to “grab” the listener or viewer, clear and explanatory language and an original and interesting approach. These formal characteristics also appear in the literature as priorities for journalists, as was the case in Gladney’s (1996) work.

As regards the specific characteristics of quality television and radio journalism, almost all interviewees mentioned the quality of the image and sound, as would be expected, but other points were also raised. One of the radio journalists who was interviewed mentioned how, due to the limited length of news programmes, radio has to be able to “go to the heart of the matter” more than television, making it more difficult for this medium to fall into the dynamics of *infotainment* (Journalist 2). One of the radio journalists (Journalist 6) refers to the importance of using sound to verify the facts that are presented, including testimonies and other sounds in addition to the journalist’s narration. A television journalist (Journalist 11) pointed out that it is essential to “scrutinise videos and other amateur content” shown on television, and gave the example of the earthquake in Turkey in February 2023, following which images were broadcast on television that were circulating on social media, some of them not associated with the event in question and with wrong dates or locations (Almeida, 2023).

With regard to the conditions necessary for a journalist to be able to practise good journalism, two themes were generally mentioned, namely time to work and good working conditions, especially remuneration. Seven out of 11 interviewees spoke about the importance of time: “time is the first condition” (Journalist 1); “first and foremost, time, the scarcest resource in journalism” (Journalist 8); “the team should be large enough so that there are no time pressures” (Journalist 4); “above all, time: we have to do everything for yesterday and deadlines make it difficult to get to know all sides of the news” (Journalist 11). As Picard (2000) points out, when wishing to use the time spent on tasks to measure the quality of journalism, journalists justify the need for time for various reasons: listening to different sources, undertaking investigations and reports, and reviewing and verifying facts. Two cases (Journalist 4 and Journalist 8) identified the reason for the lack of time, which was the scarcity of human resources, which makes it difficult to free up a journalist to work on a story instead of contributing to current affairs on a daily basis. In another case, the pressure from the competition and the need not to fall behind other channels or radio stations were emphasised. The pressures of time and competition (which are, after all, interlinked in the need to be there first and get “the scoop”) may have already been present in the 1990s, as Correia (1997) wrote, but they have worsened with digitalisation and are highlighted in more contemporary literature on the quality

of journalism, such as among those interviewed by Jenkins and Nielsen (2020). In six cases, journalists spoke of the obstacle to journalistic quality, that is, the precariousness of the profession. Professional stability, as two of the interviewees said, is important not only because of the good working conditions it provides for journalists, but also because it is reflected in the work they do. On the one hand, a journalist with a precarious labour situation is “less free”, that is, more susceptible to pressure on their work and may fear “reprisals”. Furthermore, only in good conditions can journalists “have other experiences and interact with the world” outside the newsroom (Journalist 4), where they will find stories and topics that they would not otherwise come into contact with. One of the journalists spoke about the importance of good pay “in order to be motivated and attract good professionals” (Journalist 9). “Journalism is increasingly a precarious profession and this affects the quality of the journalism that a person does” (Journalist 7). These testimonies are not surprising, partly because they are represented, albeit through the prism of press freedom rather than quality, in Lopes (2015), and partly because they are, in fact, concerns that run through the history of journalism in Portugal, as was seen above in Correia (1997). In this case, however, the association between the quality of journalistic work and job insecurity is directly made by the interviewees.

Six of the interviewees also mentioned the help of editors and managers, who support the journalist’s independent work and help develop ideas and stories, as being an essential condition. The ideal managers are described by journalists as those who give journalists the freedom (and also the oft-mentioned time) to work and who have “the vision to coordinate” (Journalist 1).

Other conditions mentioned by journalists include the journalist’s own preparation for the work they are going to do, their ability and opportunity to specialise in certain topics, good teamwork with technicians and editors, technological resources such as quality recorders and cameras and financial resources for travel, and freedom and security in regards to the political pressures and interests or from other sources.

When asked about the quality of television journalism in Portugal, the five television journalists interviewed had very different views. One journalist stated that, compared to “other countries” such as Spain and Italy, Portugal has good quality television journalism because in Portugal news programmes are the most watched television products, which “forces us to be more careful because there are a lot of people following them” (Journalist 10). This journalist spoke of a generalised concern to show well-filmed images and to have recorded testimonies in the pieces, something he does not see in the foreign news programmes he knows.

The rest of the television journalists, to varying degrees, are dissatisfied with the quality of television journalism. One of them rates it “6.5 out of 10”, noting only that “sometimes innovation is lacking a bit” (Journalist 9), regarding news programmes, with channels repeating the same topics. He was not the only one: another interviewee also said that “there are some very good products, but there is room to innovate more” (Journalist 11), given that work is done on the basis of audiences, especially private channels. Another journalist made a stronger criticism: “we have a lot of bad television journalism” (Journalist

7), pointing to CMTV as the main culprit, including for the spread of bad journalism to other channels, stating: "CMTV has lowered the standards". CMTV is, after all, the ratings leader in Portugal ("CMTV Líder na Informação com Melhor Resultado de Sempre em 2022", 2023). "There is journalism that is very well done, but there are also poor approaches which shame journalism", Journalist 7 added. Another journalist (Journalist 4), from another channel, made the same criticism: "people strive very much for quality and do the best they can", she began, before criticising sensationalism: "everyone tries to see what CMTV is doing and then chases after that".

What about radio? Here too, the criticisms on the lack of innovation persist: "we lack diversity, we all do the same thing" (Journalist 5), identifying the same problem as two of the television journalists. Another journalist mentioned the lack of innovation in the field of storytelling, for example in audio reporting (Journalist 6). Two of the interviewees, however, stated that the quality is "except on rare occasions, very poor" (Journalist 1), partly due to the time constraints on the journalist's work. "There isn't as much time and resources available to do what could be really good", affirmed Journalist 8, although going on to say that in the newsroom where she works "accuracy isn't lacking". Even the journalist (Journalist 3) who stated that "yes, without a doubt", radio journalism in Portugal is of good quality, then added the reservation that newsrooms that have been depleted by redundancies and have fewer journalists than before have had the quality of their journalism affected. They mention that, nonetheless, people are hard-working and want to maintain quality despite the lack of staff.

The findings, aligning with a prior survey by Gómez Mompert et al. (2015), displayed a more positive outlook. For instance, only half of Gómez Mompert et al.'s surveyed journalists believed their media outlets provided sufficient relevant information. This variance might be attributed to the nuanced expression of opinions enabled by interviews, potentially leading to less critical perspectives than the survey results. Television journalists were also asked which television channel was their favourite. Three mentioned SIC, although only one interviewee belonged to SIC, one mentioned RTP and another said "none". The radio journalists were evenly split between their favourite radio station being Antena 1 or TSF.

Finally, the last question in the script asked the interviewees: "do you think you have the conditions necessary to practise journalism with the quality you would like to achieve?". The answers can be divided into those who said "yes" and those who said "no".

Faced with this question, six of the interviewees initially stated they had the necessary conditions to practise good journalism. When highlighting the positive points, two journalists (Journalist 7 and Journalist 2) mentioned that there is "no pressure or constraint" on their work. Only one emphasised his personal characteristics, such as good academic training (Journalist 3), training which, as was noted above, has become much more specialised for most members of the profession in this century. "I think I have the conditions needed, the freedom to do the pieces the way I want" (Journalist 11), stated one of the television journalists.

However, even among those who initially asserted that they had the essential conditions for their work, all but one had some reservations after the initial affirmation.

“Frustrating” wage stagnation (Journalist 2), limited budgets for reporting and small teams were highlighted. Therefore, although six of the interviewees initially stated they had the conditions necessary to practise the “good journalism” they would like, five of them pointed out that these conditions could be better — mainly due to the economic constraints within media companies, which limit the size of teams and investment in work, or due to their own working situation.

Five journalists answered “no” to the last question in this script, stating that they did not feel they have the necessary conditions to practise good quality journalism. Three of the interviewees once again mentioned unfavourable pay and working conditions. “There is a general limitation that affects your way of being, which is the salary situation,” said one of the interviewees (Journalist 10). Another journalist (Journalist 4) stated that pay conditions in her newsroom had not been updated for four years. One journalist (Journalist 3) even spoke of an “incentive to leave” in his media outlet, leading many journalists to leave in the last eight years, which has discouraged and hindered the development of work.

Three journalists also spoke about the lack of human resources. One of the interviewees, a radio journalist (Journalist 6), mentioned the lack of journalists with whom to discuss ideas and brainstorm stories, as well as producers and technicians. Another interviewee (Journalist 8) stated that because there is “a lack of people in the newsroom to free up journalists for reporting”, she did not have as much time to work on topics as she would like. A third went as far to say: “I wish my media outlet had more resources so I didn't have to do 17 different jobs” (Journalist 4).

As a result, of the 11 journalists interviewed, only one (Journalist 7) unreservedly claimed to have the conditions she would like in order to carry out quality journalism.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of these interviews provide a contribution to the study of the quality of journalism in Portugal, by focusing on journalists' perspectives concerning the essential characteristics of quality journalism, their assessment of the state of journalism in Portugal and the existing conditions for its practice. The perspectives represented are in line with the international studies presented in the literature review, from the Spanish journalists who responded to the survey by Gómez Mompert et al. (2015), who blame the lack of quality in journalism mostly on the lack of investment by news companies, which creates poor conditions for production, to what is generally reported from that survey to the interviews by Jenkins and Nielsen (2020) on the difficulty of producing quality content with the speed that is required and in the time that is provided to do so.

This indicates that there are cross-cutting international challenges regarding the quality of journalism, including the lack of investment or funding for newsrooms, the resulting reduction in human resources, and the lack of time to devote to journalistic work, which is partly the result of this loss of labour, and partly driven by competitive dynamics and the speed of the digital medium.

However, it is also important to emphasise that these problems are not just present-day ones. Let us consider the following reflection by Crespo, Azevedo, and Cardoso (2017) as an example:

while in 2017 the conditions under which the profession is exercised are much questioned, it is important to realise how similar the issues raised by Paquete de Oliveira in 1994 are to this: "The conditions under which the profession is exercised are interdependent with those that mark the economic, political and social situation of press companies in particular and the press in general within the context of the country" (Oliveira, 1994, p. 82). (p. 51)

Although the interviewees are not unanimous in their assessment of the quality of television and radio journalism in Portugal (even the most positive ones had criticisms to make), most of the journalists interviewed considered that their working conditions for producing good journalism fall short of what is desired. The results suggest that journalists are able and willing to make negative assessments of their own work and to justify these assessments by stating the factors that cause the results to fall short of what is desired, which is promising for future research into the quality of journalism that seeks to focus on the perceptions of those who produce it. In this sense, this is a promising indication and one that does not follow the same line, for example, as that recorded in disinformation studies, where journalists state that the media in general are responsible for spreading disinformation (more than 60% consider that they have at least a moderate role in this process), but reject that the media outlet where they work has to be held accountable for this (Miranda et al., 2023).

A drawback of this study is that it was not possible to interview journalists from CMTV or Rádio Observador, media outlets that were mentioned several times by the interviewees as references (a negative reference in the case of CMTV), something that should be remedied in a future study.

The results of this study could inform future work on the subject of journalists' perceptions of the quality of journalism, for example through the survey method, in order to establish links between the concerns expressed and journalists' profiles, the media outlet they work for and their years of experience. It is also considered that it would be important to study the categorisations and classifications of journalism quality from the perspective of the audience in Portugal.

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