

The new professional profiles and multiskilling of journalists in Catalonia: a map of the situation

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- *This research, funded by the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia (CAC), presents a map of the new professional profiles on the present-day Catalan journalistic scene as a consequence of digitalisation of the media production process and tools. The article also analyses the disappearance and transformation of professionals in the broadcasting media and multimedia field. The research also presents a panorama of the professional skills required by journalists, particularly from the perspective of digitalisation processes in producing information.*

Keywords

New professional profiles, digitalisation, multiskilling, convergence, multimedia, digital journalism.

Introduction

This report, drawn up by the Digital Interaction Research Group (GRID), connected to the Digital Communication Department of the Faculty of Business and Communication at Vic University (UVic), is the result of an annual research project funded by the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia (CAC). The study, which started in July 2005, forms part of the GRID's line of research initiated in 2003 with the project "Digital Communicators", of the Iberian-American Digital Communication Network (ICOD Network). The "Digital Communicators" project, coordinated by the UVic Digital Communication Department and funded by the ALFA Programme of the European Union and the Department of Universities, Research and Information Society (DURSI) of the Generalitat de Catalunya, aimed to draw up specific proposals to accelerate the adaptation of university communication courses to the new digital situation. Some of the most important proposals were to define the professional skills of "digital communicators", to design training plans in the field of digital communication and to debate the ideal pedagogical methodology in order to optimise the teaching of digital skills in graduate and postgraduate communication courses. The objective of all these projects, beyond the specific goals of each one, was to analyse the consequences of digitalisation processes in the media.

When we talk about digitalisation, this is a process that is characterised by the appearance of the following:

- Textual supports based on binary code (which, unlike traditional supports, mean that the text can be manipulated infinitely without losing information).
- Information production and distribution devices based on binary code (computer assisted publishing, non-linear video editing, etc.).

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- Information exchange via networks based on transmitting data packages (conceptual and technological basis of the internet).
- New ways of organising production (company-network) and new logics for creating and transmitting information (point-to-point network, open source code, etc.).
- Convergence of languages, media and companies.

Digitalisation has also altered the profile and work of professionals involved in the culture industry. The impact has been particularly felt in large production units where an industrial and Taylorist division of labour reigned supreme. Among other things, digitalisation has transformed the job descriptions for different areas, workers' competences and the quality of working life (Rintala and Soulanen, 2005).

1. Objectives and methodology

The overall objectives of this research were as follows:

- 1) detect changes in the functions of journalists;
- 2) define the new professional profiles in the present-day Catalan audiovisual and multimedia setting with the introduction of digital technology.

The research included work by agencies, radio, television and the online versions of newspapers and media specifically created for the Internet.

The following were among the specific objectives for the research:

- Analyse the consequences of the digitalisation of journalism in the audiovisual and multimedia sectors in Catalonia.
- Describe the structural changes in Catalan firms in the sector: new media, new products and new journalistic genres.
- Examine the new profiles, the disappearance and transformation of professional figures in the present-day communication context.
- Review the competences of these professionals and changes in their work routines.

This research is in line with the researchers who, over the last few years, have investigated the relationship between

new digital technologies and the journalistic profession. Within this context, references to the leading work of Armañanzas, Díaz Noci and Meso (1996) and to the initial attempts at defining the profile of the "digital journalist" are a must. With regard to Catalan scientific work, the main lines of research explored have been as follows:

- New professional profiles in the world of information (Micó, 2003, 2005).
- New routines and functions of journalists (Masip, 2003, 2005; Micó, 2003, 2005; Soriano, 2004; Domingo, 2005; Franquet et al., 2006; Xarxa ICOD, 2006).
- Use of the Internet as a source of information or of email at work (Luzón, 2003; Masip, 2003, 2005).
- Relationship between journalists at conventional offices and professionals at digital editions in the same medium (Domingo, 2006).

The research is qualitative in nature, prioritising unstructured interviews and personal observation as the main techniques for gathering information (see table 1).

Unlike other studies focusing on few media in order to investigate their production dynamics more deeply, such as Masip (2005), where three firms are analysed (TV3, Catalunya Ràdio and *La Vanguardia*), and Domingo (2005, 2006), with four firms (*laMalla.net*, *El Periódico de Catalunya*, *Telenotícies.com*, CCRTV in his work from 2006, and the *Diari de Tarragona Digital*), in this research we have opted to construct a national map comprising of the different types of media based on a notably larger sample. The research therefore covers 25 media from the present-day Catalan context, with a total of 35 interviews carried out during the first six months of 2006. The number of people interviewed exceeds the number of media because, in large companies, two interviews were carried out: the first with a journalist and the second with a media manager. These figures make it re-semble the study recently carried out by the College of Journalists of Catalonia, where 30 journalists were interviewed in depth after carrying out a telephone survey with 420 people (Soriano, 2004; Soriano and Cantón, 2005). In this case, in order to achieve the objectives established, qualitative research has been used in which non-structured interviews predominated as the technique for gathering data.

Table 1. Research design

Phases	Activities / tasks / characteristics
Methodological preparation	Methodological background / Research methodology
	Sampling. Defining, characterising and finding participants
	Drawing up and designing the guide and questionnaire to be applied
Fieldwork	Contacting participants
	Carrying out interviews
Data analysis	Analytical procedure / Category design

Source: in-house.

2. Summary of the research findings

This section presents the main findings from the research.¹ In order to improve how the findings are presented, we have used four diagrams. Table 2 shows the main figures that have disappeared since the arrival of digital technologies, the professions that have survived in the new environment (although their routines have undergone some changes) and the new professional profiles. Table 3 shows the skills taken on by journalists in the new work environment.

This research presents a diagram of the situation showing a scenario in total transformation: the media ecosystem is currently going through a phase where new technologies are appearing every day, new professional profiles are being defined and new narrative forms and production models are being experienced. For this reason, the conclusions are presented as "trends", some already almost established and others just beginning (which does not necessarily mean they will become established in the future). Media digitalisation is a recent process that must continue to be studied as it adopts its definitive form and reaches a point of socio-technical balance. The main trends detected by the re-search are as follows:

2.1. Digitalisation

Digitalisation is a process that affects information production, editing and distribution processes. Its main characteristic, in addition to transforming the material nature of information (from paper or electromagnetic tapes to bits), comes from the integration of the Internet and all its applications and services into the work of journalists. In other words, the digital network changes how journalism works and how it is seen. The digitalisation of the production of information is an ongoing process. Its consequences have therefore just started to be verified. The scale of the process is global but it takes on specific characteristics in each situation. Digitalisation is therefore experienced in one way by large media and in another by smaller media; it varies depending on whether companies are public or private, etc. There are experiences of the complete introduction of technology in which there has been no transition from an analogue to a digital system but the decision has been taken to directly incorporate the second formula. In many Catalan media, the digitalisation process has been started at the head office and has afterwards spread to the branches. In other words, the trend has been as follows: the formula has been tested in Barcelona and has gone on afterwards to other counties.

¹ The complete report can be consulted on the website of the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia (http://www.cac.cat/pfw_files/cma/recerca/estudis_recerca/perfilsprofessionals.pdf) and of the Digital Interaction Research Group (<http://www.uvic.cat/fec/recerca/es/grid/presentacio.html>).

Table 2. Transformations of professional profiles

Professional profiles that have disappeared

Radio	TV	Agencies	Online media
Teletypist	Teletypist	Teletypist	-
Documentalist / Archivist	Documentalist / Archivist	Documentalist / Archivist	-
Music editor	Image operator / editor	Editorial assistant	-
Head of record / audio library			-
Music coordinator			-

Professional profiles that have remained and are changing

Radio	TV	Agencies	Online media
Writer / journalist	Writer / journalist	Writer / journalist	-
Broadcast technician	Presenter / Commentator		-
Content manager	Editor		-
Programme editor	Cameraman		-
Producer	Decorator		-
	Programmer		
	Computer graphics designer		

New professional profiles

Radio	TV	Agencies	Online media
Multiskilled journalist	Multiskilled journalist	Multiskilled journalist	Multiskilled journalist
Webmaster	Webmaster	Webmaster	Graphic designer
Head of new formats	Head of production		Graphic designer / Programmer
	Media browser		Programmer
	Super-user / Content manager / Media manager		Interactive designer
	Technical system manager / System manager		Information architect
	Head of news digitalisation		Content director
			Comment manager
			Manager of websites and pages
			Computer graphics designer

Source: in-house.

Table 3. Map of professional skills

	Agencies	Radio	TV	Online
AUDIO				
Scriptwriting		•		
Music editing		•	•	
Audio recording and editing	•	•		•
Voiceover		•		
GRAPHICS				
Creating graphic designs				•
Modifying graphic designs				•
PHOTOGRAPHY				
Taking photographs	•			•
Retouching photographs	•			•
VIDEO				
Scriptwriting			•	
Recording and editing video	•		•	•
Voiceover			•	
SOFTWARE AND PROGRAMMING				
Office computing	•	•	•	•
Photoshop	•			•
CoolEdit (or similar)		•		
FinalCut (or similar)			•	
Dreamweaver				•
Flash				•
HTML				•
OTHER SKILLS				
CMS management			•	•
Remote work	•		•	•
Information management	•	•	•	•

Source: in-house.

Technological change has encouraged media networks to be managed in economic terms, something that favours a reduction in expenditure because the number of people required for work is lower. Moreover, management is simplified with this way of operating. Certain media outsource work as much as possible. If they can't meet their commitments within the firm, they hire external services without losing profitability. In this context, independent journalists, isolated, can write pieces both for the radio and television at the same time. These are more akin to individual experiences. The dynamic might even work in small agencies. However, it is much more complex to implement this way of working in large media, which contain all the production processes. Incorporating these new routines would entail a lot of effort.

The process of technological adaptation has sometimes been less traumatic than was supposed. The departments of new technologies and content management have tried to work with journalists as clients, to teach them how they must work in order to make the most of the technology in question. Digitalisation leads to a number of transformations in production routines and professional profiles. Professions change (for example, journalists, who become multiskilled) as well as relations between professions (for example, between journalists and computer programmers). Finally, according to the generalised view, the digitalisation of production processes leads to savings in time, but no-one has specified what is done with this "time gained".

2.2. Professional profiles

Throughout the whole process, figures that have existed in the media for a long time disappear, from the corrector to the music editor, including the image operator. If these disappearances are analysed from the point of view of the social history of technology, we might say that this is almost a natural step: each new technology reconfigures the media ecosystem and entails the disappearance of some of those involved. Moreover, digitalisation is also altering traditional professional profiles. For example, at some radio stations the person responsible for the record or audio library has become a content manager; the person in charge of sets on television now tends to create and develop virtual spaces, etc. Obviously the central figure in these transformations is the multiskilled journalist. As we can see, numerous pro-

fessional figures have undergone changes in those competences that, historically, had characterised them.

In general, these transformations can be reduced to two types:

- Technological, due to the incorporation of the necessary knowledge to work with digital tools.
- Functional, where the professional must take charge of new tasks or tasks that were previously carried out by other workers.

Whatever the case, both transformations are closely related. If the professional in television journalism is required to know how to edit video and the professional in radio journalism is asked to edit the programme, this is due to the fact that digital technologies have made handling content significantly easier thanks to the spread of user-friendly interfaces.

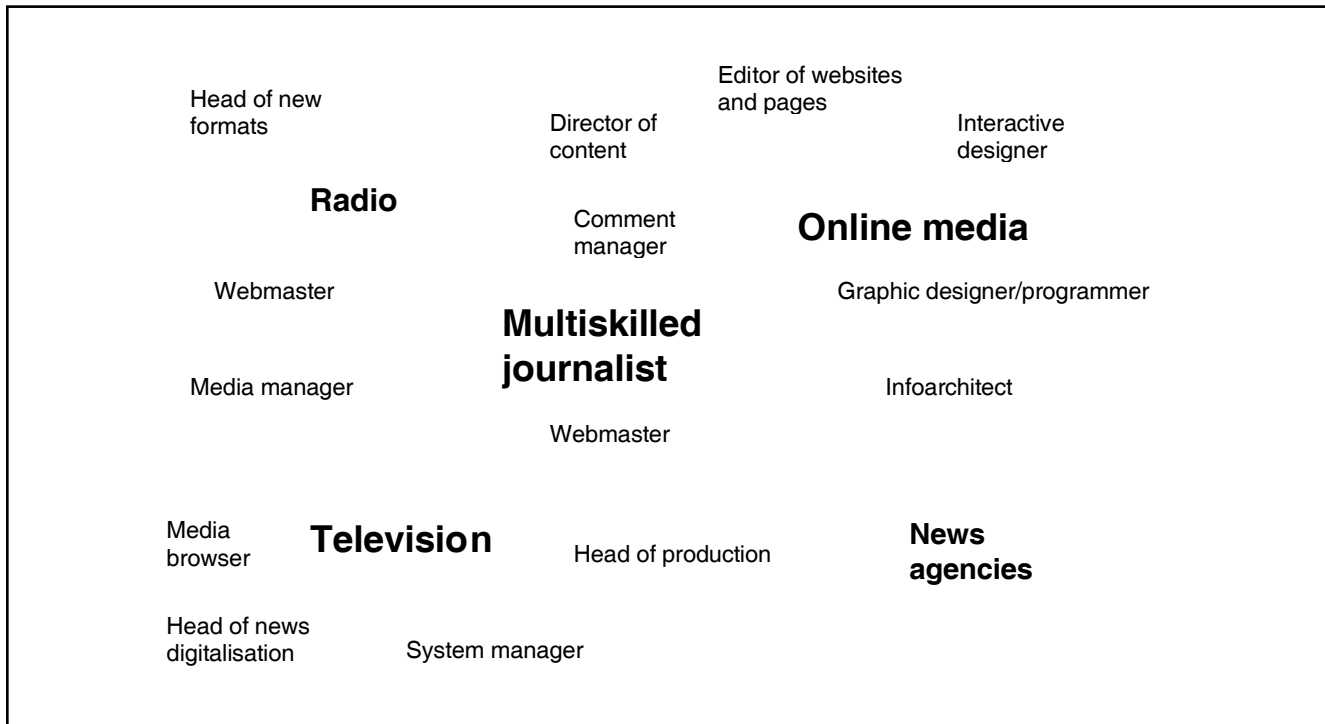
Digitalisation is also creating new professional profiles. However, the initial expectations of the research group in this area were not met one hundred percent, as not so many new figures as expected were detected. On radio and in agencies, the appearance of new profiles is minimal. The firms that have created most new figures based on digital technologies have been the large TV production structures. Given their youth, the new professional profiles have converged on online media (albeit with another dimension) (see table 4).

Of the important new profiles are media and system managers, in the area of television, and infoarchitects in online media. While a certain confusion has been observed among profiles and functions in companies with a long history, especially in larger firms, in small-scale internet media the basic profiles are perfectly defined: multimedia journalist, graphic designer (with basic programming skills) and programmer.

2.3. Multiskilling

There are different ways of seeing the multiskilled nature of journalists. In small media, this professional has always been multiskilled. Journalists working for the new online media have also taken on multiskilling naturally. But in large-scale traditional media this process (journalists accumulating an increasing number of functions) is still open and often conflictive. In others it is currently

Table 4. Appearance of new professional profiles by medium



Source: in-house.

characterised by its unstable nature. Some of the professionals interviewed in this research have expressed their concern because they are becoming increasingly more distant from the news event per se. Journalists increasingly tend to get their information without leaving the office. Very often, the work to verify data and compare sources is done online. *Native digital journalists* dominate the technology, adapt easily to the work environment and have the capacity to work for different media and in a variety of languages. *Migrant digital journalists* are professionals forced to retrain themselves, to learn how the new tools work and assimilate the production systems.

2.4. Convergence

The boundaries between media become blurred with digitalisation. Rather than competing, different platforms tend to complement each other. That's why traditional companies are encouraged to open various channels (any medium must now have news presence on the *World Wide Web*) and to create divisions that produce content in different lan-

guages and formats, including the new genres (such as Interactive CCRTV and the Catalan News Agency). With regard to content, except for the appearance of interactive graphic designers in digital media, the content via mobile channels (such as SMS) and some limited experiences (the Digital Agenda of the EFE Agency), digitalisation has still not generated all the new products or formats expected. Technology makes work easier and faster, it's true. It also means that communities of consumers can be created and consolidated. But, essentially, interactive content still need developing. In other words, digital is employed, above all, to produce the same as always.

3. Towards a conceptualisation of multiskilling

According to this research, the concept of the *multiskilled journalist* is the one that best adapts to the present-day professional situation providing the meaning and scope of the term 'multiskilled' is clarified. The concept of a multime-

dia journalist is not wrong. However, it only refers to those professionals who produce content for different media. In this study we have seen that, in some media, in addition to having to prepare information for their company's radio and television stations and website, journalists are also responsible for diverse events (sports, cultural, political, etc.) or have to develop diverse functions (writing, photography, editing, etc.). For this simple reason, the concept of *multimedia* does not cover all the new tasks of journalists in digitalised environments. With regard to *digital journalist*, its meaning loses specificity in the day to day work: all journalists are now digital, from professionals working on a newspaper to those working for a radio or television station. They all work on digital material, model it and adapt it to each medium. We must therefore return to the concept of 'multiskilling'. Just as different kinds of convergence have been detected (Salaverría, 2003), we can also accept the existence of various kinds of multiskilling.

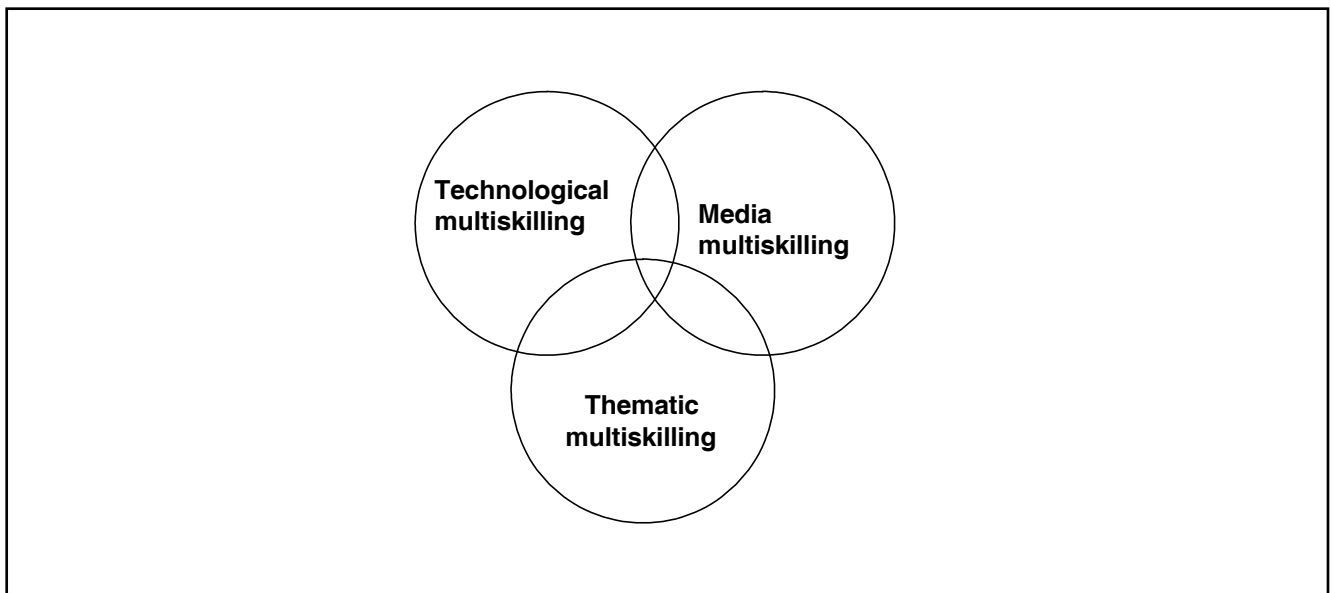
Based on the material gathered in this study, the *multi-skilled journalist* is understood as an information professional capable of carrying out different tasks with technological resources that, in many cases, were carried out previously

by other figures to produce content for different media.

The following classification of multiskilling is proposed (see table 5):

- **Technological:** information professionals use tools (programs and machines) to help them produce and manage content in different media. For example, journalists can now handle programs for writing, to retouch photographs, non-linear video editing systems, programs for network management, databases, etc.
- **Media:** information professionals design and produce content in some (or all) of the following formats: written, audio, graphic, video and interactive. For example, journalists, after covering an event, prepare a written text (for printed and/or online newspapers), a radio piece and edit the video for it to be broadcast on television. This range of skills requires technological competences (knowledge of technical tools) and semiotic competences (knowledge of the languages of the different media).
- **Thematic:** information professionals are responsible for drawing up information for different sections (sport, politics, cultures, etc.). For example, the same journalist covers highly diverse events, from a football match to a political event.

Table 5. The different types of multiskilling for information professionals



Source: in-house.

These forms of multiskilling are not mutually exclusive. Quite the opposite, as they go to make up different degrees of analysis. The same journalist may be capable of drawing up information for different media and, at the same time, of generating content on politics, culture and society (as happens in the Catalan News Agency and Diari de Barcelona). In other areas, journalists master the different media and languages but specialise in one theme (e.g. sport). This is the current situation of journalists working for the Catalan company CCRTV Interactiva.

This initial taxonomy of multiskilling should be tested in further research and should possibly be compared with the situation of other areas of production that have undergone digitalisation processes.

With these considerations of the concept of *multiskilling*, located at the heart of the present-day transformations suffered by the role of journalists in the media, this report concludes. New research is required, integrating other methodologies and focuses, to discover the transformations generated by digital technologies in the news media of Catalonia. On the other hand, these studies of the production process should be complemented with an analysis of the product (doubts as to information quality have appeared throughout the interviews) and the study of news consumption.

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