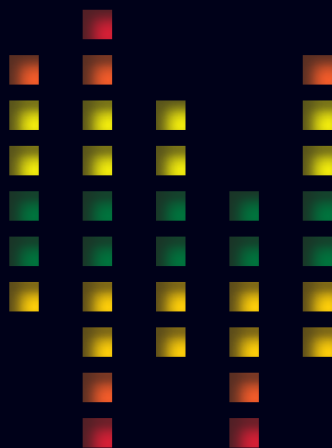


THE MEDIA FOR DEMOCRACY MONITOR 2021

*HOW LEADING NEWS MEDIA SURVIVE
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION*

2



NORDICOM EDITED BY **JOSEF TRAPPEL & TALES TOMAZ**



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ITALY

A highly regulated system in search of equality

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Introduction

Italy is a Southern European country, a peninsula extending into the central Mediterranean Sea, northeast of Tunisia, with a population of 60,359,546 (30,974,780 female and 29,384,766 male). The most inhabited municipalities are Rome (2,856,133), Milan (1,378,689), Naples (959,188), and Turin (875,698) (ISTAT, 2020). The Italian population includes small clusters of German-, French-, and Slovene-Italians in the north alongside Albanian- and Greek-Italians in the south. Besides the official language, Italy recognises twelve linguistic communities, protected by the Constitutional Charter of 1948 and fully recognised by the approval of the 1999 Norme per la Tutela delle Minoranze Linguistiche Storiche [Norms on the Protection of Historical Linguistic Minorities].

Italy borders Austria, France, Holy See (Vatican City), San Marino, Slovenia, and Switzerland. Its geographical position in the Mediterranean has been strategic for centuries in relation to trade, political developments, and intercultural exchanges. Today, its position places the country on two of the most important migratory routes, the Mediterranean and the Balkan ones; and raises major geopolitical challenges in the country's international relations, particularly with Libya, Turkey, Egypt, and Lebanon.

¹ MDM 2021 IT coordinators

The State is organised in a centralised manner, with significant regional decentralisation resulting from the 2001 modification of the Title V of the Constitution, according to which the existing 20 regions have gained more autonomy and powers of intervention in specific policy areas.

The (current) 18th Italian legislation was inaugurated following the 2018 general elections, in which a coalition government emerged composed initially by the Five Star Movement and the League (centre-right), which has been substituted by the Democratic Party and other centre-left parties in 2019. The transition from a government in which the two major Italian “populist” forces were represented to a new coalition that excluded the right-wing party was far from painless, but Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, an independent figure close to the Five Star Movement, guaranteed a certain degree of continuity until the political crisis of January 2021, following which a new cabinet was appointed. Led by former European Central Bank president Mario Draghi, the current government is composed of both politicians and technocrats and is supported by a large majority of the Italian parliament, including right, centre-right, and centre-left parties.

Politically, Italy is considered a representative democracy in the form of a parliamentary republic.

Freedom in the World 2021: status “free” (Score: 90/100). According to Freedom House’s annual study of political rights and civil liberties worldwide, the most critical indicator for Italy is the one related to the rule of law, due to concerns about judicial corruption, lengthy delays in judicial procedures, reports of excessive use of force by police, and discrimination and violence against LGBT people and migrants (Freedom House, 2021).

Liberal Democracy Index 2020: Italy is placed high in the Top 10–20% bracket – rank 21 of measured countries, fluctuating between 16 and 25 in the period 2016–2019 (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021).

Political Corruption Index 2019: ranks Italy amongst the bottom 20–30% of measured countries, notwithstanding the fact that corruption has decreased in the past ten years (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2019).

EIU Democracy Index 2020: Based on five categories (electoral process and pluralism; the functioning of government; political participation; political culture; and civil liberties) and four types of regimes (from full democracy to authoritarian) – classifies Italy as a “flawed democracy”. The country ranks 29, up from 35 in 2019, the lowest score since 2006. This is explained by a high degree of popular discontent with traditional mainstream parties, which led to a fragmentation of the political scene, difficulties in government formation, and struggles for cabinets to remain stable and effective (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019, 2020).

2020 World Press Freedom Index: Italy ranks 41 out of 180 countries (gaining two positions since 2019). The report underlines some obstacles to full freedom of the

press in Italy such as the mafia and its acts of intimidations against journalists, with 20 professionals under full protection by the police because of threats at the time of writing, and verbal and physical attacks on journalists by members of fascists and far-right extremist groups (Reporters Without Borders, 2020).

Article 19's Expression Agenda has evaluated Italy on five criteria: civic space, transparency, digital freedoms, media freedoms, and protection. The overall picture is positive, especially in civic space and transparency, with the more critical situation being the digital dimension (Article 19, 2020). As highlighted by Freedom House's comprehensive study of Internet freedom around the globe – *Freedom on the Net* (Freedom House, 2020) – Italy, with a score of 75 out of 100, lags behind other European countries in terms of overall connectivity, despite several attempts made to close the digital divide.

According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019*, Italian citizens get information mainly through traditional media. Newspaper readership continues to fall steadily, while television news viewership has been more stable than in other countries. Furthermore, trust in news is particularly low amongst the Italian public, at 40 per cent for news. This longstanding trend is mainly due to the partisan nature of Italian journalism and to the strong influence of political and business interests on news organisations.

The most recent Censis data (2020) confirm the crisis of the print media (read by 50.4% of the total population, mainly in the age group 65+) and substantial stability in television use (94.2% of the total population, with homogeneous distribution by age), and a significant increase in Internet use (79.3% of the population, mainly in age groups 14–29 and 30–44). According to the economic-statistical service of Agcom (2018c), the communications guarantee authority, 54.5 per cent of the population access information through algorithmic sources such as social network sites, search engines, news aggregators, and information portals, and 39.4 per cent through editorial sources such as websites and apps of newspapers, periodicals, national and local radio and television, and digital native newspapers.

As reported by the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019*, after the 2018 general election, minor changes in the Italian media environment took place to reflect the new balance of power within Italian politics, while the print sector continued to weaken.

As far as the press is concerned, the sector has always been linked to political and cultural elites, and its mass diffusion has been somehow anticipated by that of television, which has been the basis of media consumption of Italians for many years, becoming, for the weaker social groups, a real single-medium culture. The effects of the historical absence of “pure publishers” (entrepreneurs active only in the publishing industry) and traits of more recent editorial concentration can be observed in the current ownership structure of the major print publications and radio and television companies.

The most read newspapers are *Corriere della Sera* (whose publisher, RCS MediaGroup S.p.A., is a 60% subsidiary of entrepreneur Urbano Cairo), *la Repubblica*, and *La Stampa* (both owned by Gedi, who also owns three of the major national radio stations – Radio DeeJay, Radio Capital, and Radio m2o – and whose majority shareholder, CIR, is a holding company active in the automotive and health sectors).

In the television sector, the historic duopoly between the radio and television public service Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI)¹ and the main private group Fininvest² has been threatened over the past few years by the appearance of new players. These include a television channel owned by the Cairo Communication Group, La7, and a pay-TV platform published by the homonymous English company, Sky Italia. The ownership structure of the media system is at the basis of the “conflict of interests”, an issue which, with the political success of Silvio Berlusconi between 1994 and the first decade of the 2000s, constituted a worldwide-known legal and political case.

In 1997, an Autorità per le Garanzie nelle Comunicazioni (Agcom) [Communications Guarantee Authority] was established. Amongst its tasks are the monitoring of radio and television broadcasting, the protection of political and social pluralism, and the verification of compliance with the so-called *par condicio* [same opportunity] to all parties and movements in accessing media.

The *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* also provides a general overview of the current situation and recent developments. While broadcasters' revenues have been relatively stable from 2013 to 2017, newspapers and magazines experienced a 21 per cent reduction during the same period. In terms of overall revenue share within the Italian communication system, the main players are the international broadcaster Comcast Corporation/Sky (15%), Berlusconi's broadcasting group Fininvest/Mediaset (15%), and the public service broadcaster RAI (14%). Other relevant players are international platforms like Google (4%) and Facebook (3%), together with domestic players such as Cairo Communication, the publisher of the television channel La7, which also controls *Corriere della Sera* (4%), and Gedi, the publisher of *la Repubblica*, *La Stampa*, and several other local newspapers and radio stations (3%).

The online news market is dominated by legacy players. The websites with the widest online reach are those of established commercial television broadcasters (Mediaset's *TgCom24* and *SkyTg24*), the main newspapers (*la Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*, and *Il Fatto Quotidiano*), and the main Italian news agency (Ansa). However, 2018 showed impressive results for the digital-born outlet *Fanpage*, an online newspaper owned by the Ciaopeople group and known for its investigative journalism vocation, which is currently among the top five online news players. CityNews, a local information publishing group based on the logic of participatory journalism that operates at a regional level, is also worth mentioning. Finally, in December 2018, Enrico Mentana, the editor of La7 television newscast, launched *Open*, a digital-born news outlet.

Gender equality

Gender equality should be considered as a core element in a country's democratic development. It relates to women's enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms, including the freedom to voice their concerns, and the possibility to participate in public life and access managerial and decision-making positions, so as to contribute to the country's governance.

According to the Gender Equality Index³ of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), with 63 out of 100 points, Italy ranks 14th in the EU. Between 2005 and 2017, Italy's score increased by 13.8 points, showing meaningful progress at a faster pace with respect to other EU members. Its rank has improved by twelve places since 2005, but its score remains 4.4 points lower than the EU average (67.4).

Violence against women is both a consequence and cause of persisting gender inequalities in the areas of work, health, finance, power, knowledge, and time. Italy recorded 76 women victims of intentional homicide by an intimate partner in 2016. The country does not provide data on women victims of intentional homicide by a family member. There were 747 registered women victims of human trafficking in 2016. Italy signed and ratified the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) in September 2013.

Covid-19

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit outside Chinese territory in early 2020, Italy was the first country in Europe to impose several restrictions on the free circulation of people, schools, universities and economic and commercial activities.

During the so-called lockdown, which in some areas of the country started at the end of February and was partially lifted only at the beginning of June 2020,⁴ the total television audience increased considerably, both during the day (about +2 million users) and in prime time (about +4 million users). According to the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2020), in March and April, 53 per cent of people aged 18–34 and 50 per cent of people aged 35–54 watched television to a greater extent than in the previous period.

Newsstand sales decreased, although the Italian government let newsstands remain open even during the first phase of the pandemic. According to Comscore, Italian Internet users have considerably increased their visits to newspaper apps and websites, possibly more than other European users: during the first lockdown week, +140 per cent compared with a normal week before Covid-19, and during Easter week in April 2020, +90 per cent compared with a normal week before Covid-19.

Only radio listeners decreased during this period, given the considerable amount of Italians who have the habit of listening to the radio while driving their cars, during their daily commute to work, which was impossible during the lockdown period.

The average daily time spent online by every Internet user has increased remarkably, +3 per cent from February to March 2020, by tablet and smartphone, and +16 per cent by computer, due to the shift online of classrooms (schools and universities) and working activities (smart work and *lavoro agile*). Even then, according to the March 2020 Audiweb report, about 25 per cent of the Italian population (two years or older) was offline in the average month.

Following the law decree 18/2020, the Italian Communications Guarantee Authority (Agcom) established four permanent working groups involving the main stakeholders, aimed at sharing proposals for managing priorities arising from the emergency. These working groups are specifically dedicated to 1) Electronic Communication Services and Consumers; 2) Postal Services; 3) Media Services; and 4) Online Platforms and Big Data. At the same time, Agcom has approved the following:

- a package of measures addressed to electronic communications networks and services providers aimed at coping with increases in the consumption of electronic communications services and of the traffic on the network, as well as at meeting the needs of different sectors, in particular the health sector;
- and a resolution containing provisions regarding the correctness of information about Covid-19. Agcom invited all audiovisual and radio media services to ensure correct and adequate information on the medical emergency and to provide verified information from authoritative sources. Also, video sharing platforms were asked to adopt measures to counter the spread of incorrect or not fact-checked news about Covid-19.⁵

Meanwhile, the Online Platforms and Big Data working group is focusing on the implementation of initiatives aimed at combatting online disinformation on medical and health issues related to Covid-19, through collaboration with online platforms themselves. Facebook has launched a project aimed at tackling disinformation on WhatsApp, in partnership with Facta, the new branch of the Italian fact-checker Pagella Politica.

Furthermore, Agcom publishes monthly special issues of its Online Disinformation Observatory specifically dedicated to Covid-19 and has set up a Data Science Task Force on online disinformation, in partnership with research institutes and academic institutions.

The Under-Secretary of State for Press and Publishing has launched a special Covid-19 Fake News Task Force, involving journalists, fact-checkers, scholars, and scientists. Following journalists' and (online) publishers' requests, law decree

34/2020 has extended the chance to get a tax credit for advertisers spending in print, radio, and television advertising spaces. It also introduced a specific tax credit for online publishers' IT expenses, and other measures affecting press distribution and newsstands.

In order to verify the impact of the emergency on the role of journalism and editorial routines, we conducted some follow-up interviews with selected leading media representatives. Particularly significant was the testimony of the editor-in-chief of *Tg1* (RAI), who highlighted four dimensions of the impact of Covid-19 on Italian news.

The first is related to the agenda-setting capacity of institutional actors and the response in terms of adaptation to media logic:

In terms of awareness, the media moved in sync with the overall perception of the phenomenon, which in turn was determined by the way institutional communication was handled by the government. They [the government] dictated the timing and generated the perception of the risks associated with the pandemic. Two antithetical tendencies emerged: on the one hand, there was a very strong demand for the restoration of journalistic mediation, all the more so in the face of what has been defined as “infodemic” [...] on the other hand, however, especially with regard to the specific nature of the television medium, distortions emerged linked to trends already in place before the virus: the logic of infotainment, cannibalisation of programming [...] In the first phase of the emergency it was rather difficult to distinguish journalistic content from infotainment. Then the pandemic made its way into the “light entertainment” programs – as on 23rd February 2020, when the Prime Minister, from the Civil Protection press office, connected with all the television broadcasts on air [...] all of them, even those that were not necessarily information or infotainment.

Between the need to refer to expert knowledge in times of emergency and the pervasiveness of media logic, a second element of interest was reported, related to the role of experts:

Journalism, at least in the first phase, had to rely heavily on the mediation by experts – epidemiologists, virologists [...]. The dynamic that accompanied the narration of the pandemic in the first phase was to identify a sort of consultant: each media outlet, each transmission chose one or two experts, and trusted their approach [...]. This situation produced a sort of loyalty to specific experts, and ways of creating attention to the solution of the problem, but it has also created a very strong distortion [...]. The scientists who were found to be the most credible were those visible on television [...] but we know that there are other parameters through which to assess the credibility of scientific approaches [other than those] of the logic of dichotomous opposition, of the opposition of a hypothesis “b” to a hypothesis “a”, which meets the requirement of controversial journalistic narrative.

The third dimension highlighted by the editor-in-chief of *Tg1* concerns the strengthening of measures to combat disinformation, which unfortunately seem to confirm a tendency towards formalism rather than actual behavioural change and actual impact on journalistic narrative:

RAI has set up an Observatory on Fake News in conjunction with the management of the emergency phase, equipped with a task force that has been a useful opportunity to accelerate an obligation of the Service Contract, which provides not only for the monitoring of fake news but promotes campaigns to raise awareness of television and radio audience on the risks of fake news. Honestly, I do not know what the Observatory has produced so far because nothing has been communicated to us [...] on the other hand, coordination between networks and newspapers is difficult even under normal conditions.

A short experiment of the integration of news programmes with citizens' participation also signals an attempt to open spaces for innovation in newsmaking:

As *Tg1* we have strengthened the social media management area [...] this has allowed us to receive more feedback than normal. Then we also used a quite interesting solution, always in the first phase of the pandemic: we invited viewers to send videos that portrayed their domestic life [...] in this way contributing to make that little piece of mediated public sphere domestically an element of the overall narration of the pandemic.

The overall picture remains unclear as the country moves into the “second wave” of the pandemic in 2021. The analysis shows that Italian journalism has to come to terms with a situation that openly challenged the logic of infotainment and, at the same time, with a renewed centrality of institutional communication. News media have been forced to accelerate processes linked to the so-called platform society, such as those of contrasting fake news and involving citizens, but until the end of 2020, no organic or sustained consequences were seen. Nevertheless, strategies and tactics adopted in the emergency remain as important innovations and may contribute to an innovation of daily practices and routines.

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Leading news media sample

Table 1 outlines the intended news media sample for the 2021 Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM).

Table 1 *Leading news media sample*

News outlet	Company	Owner / majority shareholder	Director
Tg1	RAI	Ministry of Economy and Finance	Giuseppe Carboni
Tg5	Mediaset	Fininvest S.p.A.	Clement Mimun
TgLa7	La7	RCS MediaGroup	Enrico Mentana
SkyTg24	Sky Italia		Giuseppe De Bellis
Corriere della Sera ^a	–	RCS MediaGroup	Luciano Fontana
la Repubblica	–	Gedi Gruppo Editoriale S.p.A.	Maurizio Molinari
Il Fatto Quotidiano	–	Società Editrice Editoriale Il Fatto S.p.A.	Peter Gomez

^aAt the time of writing (November 2020) the Italian team did not manage to carry out the planned interviews with one editor-in-chief and one journalist from the *Corriere della Sera* and *FanPage*. This was partly due to the Covid-19 crisis that emerged at the time when these interviews were planned.

Indicators

Dimension: Freedom / Information (F)

(F1) Geographic distribution of news media availability 2 POINTS

A wide and stable variety of news media is available to Italian citizens. Some parts of the country are not served by local or regional news media. The distribution of news media varies along different media and news outlet types.

The public service company RAI is considered the most important source of local news for the inhabitants of 14 regions out of 20, mainly thanks to the regional newscasts coordinated by the news organisation TgR. According to Agcom's elaboration on Auditel data, the average share of TgR's evening programme – on air from 19:30 to 20:00 on RAI3 – was 12.5 per cent in September 2019. In the other six regions, the most important sources of local news are the media companies Monrif, Gruppo editorial (Gedi), and Caltagirone, Tosinvest, who are also relevant at the national level.

Looking at specific regions, and considering the nationwide news outlets established in the different regions including digital news, Lombardia and Lazio stand out for the number of news media companies. If we focus instead on local news outlets, Sicily is the region where the largest quota of news media outlets is available, followed by Puglia and Lombardia.

In general, we can find local radio stations and online news outlets in every region, yet the same cannot be said for local newspapers. Furthermore, journalists working for local news outlets are more likely to be threatened, as their weaker economic conditions exacerbate their vulnerability (see Indicator F11 – Protection of journalists against (online) harassment). Likewise small local companies, already hit by the 2010 crisis, are more fragile when facing threats, and often unable to bear the costs of proceedings resulting from legal actions (Agcom, 2017).

Regarding print media, looking at the data provided by Accertamenti Diffusione Stampa – the company certifying and releasing the data concerning circulation and distribution of dailies and magazines in Italy – the availability of the most important national newspapers is different in each region. If we can count more than 50 national or multi-regional newspapers spread in Lazio and Lombardia, in Molise only 19 newspapers are circulated, and in none of the southern regions can we find more than 24 newspapers. Several of them have been closed or acquired by other publishers, effectively reducing the number of local news media outlets available in some regions, so that in Valle d’Aosta and Calabria, no local newspaper is available.⁶

When it comes to radio and television, according to article 15.3 of the Contratto di Servizio [Service Contract] 2018–2022 between the Italian Ministry of Economic Development and RAI (2018), the public service company is required to cover at least 95 per cent of the Italian population. According to RAI Way – the company that owns the RAI radio and television broadcasting network and is in charge of managing these broadcasting systems – 99 per cent of the Italian population is covered by the RAI digital terrestrial television signal. Furthermore, according to article 19.4 of the same contract, RAI should also guarantee free access to all the programmes in simulcast by satellite network. Thanks to Tivù, a consortium between RAI and private broadcasters, the areas not covered by digital terrestrial television signal are covered by the satellite network signal. The private broadcast Tivù guarantees adequate coverage by satellite as well.

The other network providers, EiTowers (linked to Mediaset) and Persidera (hosting Discovery and Gedi television channels), are not obliged to provide data on population coverage, but on their websites, every citizen can find information about the coverage of the area in which they live.

The main Italian broadcasters have developed multiplatform delivery systems, making their programmes also available on the web, through specific apps, for

instance RAIPlay (the app developed by the public service media company RAI). However, according to Internet audience measurement systems, these apps and web portals are not widely used for news consumption.

According to Agcom, there were 17.38 million broadband and ultra-broadband fixed lines in Italy in September 2019. 37.5 per cent of these lines were faster than or equal to 30 Mbps. Moreover, there were 54.6 million SIM cards, generating 3,023 petabytes of mobile data traffic at the same date. As reported by Audiweb, the Joint Industry Committee detecting and distributing Internet audience data in Italy, in November 2019, the total Italian monthly digital audience connected by personal computer, smartphone, or tablet was 41.6 million people. They spent an average of 118 hours and 20 minutes online per month. The total Italian daily digital audience was 34 million people. On an average day, 30.3 million Italians have used their smartphone to connect for over four hours per person.

Search engines, video platforms, and social networks reach 96.5 per cent of monthly users (40.1 million), while general interest portals are used by 37 million users (89.1% of monthly users). Current events and global news websites reach 36.1 million users (86.8% of monthly users), more than e-commerce websites (35.2 million, 84.7% of monthly users), instant messaging (35.1 million), and e-mail (33.9 million).

Francesco Marrazzo

(F2) Patterns of news media use (consumption of news) 2 POINTS

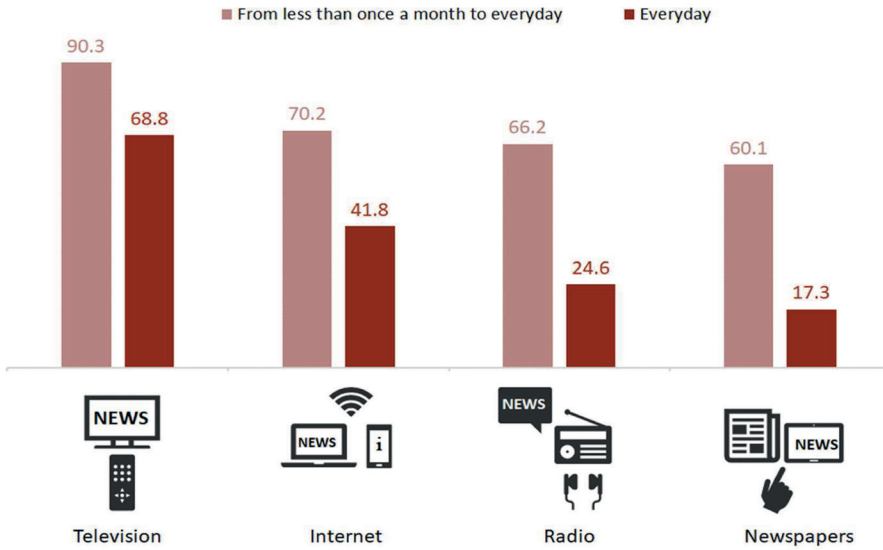
Almost the entire Italian population accesses the media for information, and over 80 per cent of Italian citizens access information regularly. Only 5 per cent of Italians are not informed at all. Older people tend to consume only one news-media type, while younger people are more prone to searching for information from different sources or media.

According to Agcom (2018d) (see Figure 1), almost the entire population accesses media to be informed, and over 80 per cent of citizens access information daily. Only 5 per cent of Italians are not informed at all, at least not through mass media.

Specific factors lead to the division of the population into groups with different kinds of information access, leading to the risk of media exclusion or marginalisation of certain segments of the population. In particular, low education and poor economic conditions appear to define the perimeter of social groups that risk marginalisation in the informational ecosystem.

The information diet of Italians is characterised by marked cross-media consumption, with more than three quarters of the Italian population consuming media this way.

Figure 1 Media usage to acquire information, 2017 (per cent population)



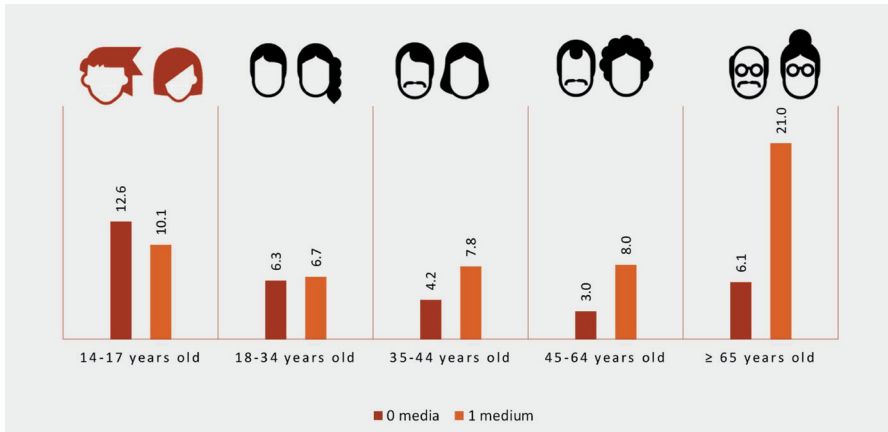
Source: Graph from Agcom, 2018c: 14

Television is confirmed as the medium with the greatest informative value, both in terms of frequency of access for information purposes and for perceived importance and reliability. At the same time, the Internet is considered an important source of news, yet the perceived reliability of online information sources remains, on average, lower than that of traditional sources.

The ranking and frequency of access to media used to obtain information do not change when it comes to political news, with television and the Internet remaining the privileged sources. However, with regard to political information, citizens have a narrower consumption habit, which is less cross-media and hybrid compared with general information consumption.

The age group of users has an impact on whether they have a single-medium informative diet. Compared to other age groups (see Figure 2), the class of individuals aged 14–17 registers the largest share of subjects who do not get informed, at 12.6 per cent, compared with 5 per cent for the total population. An additional share of minors, about 10 per cent, accesses only one medium to get informed. This value is higher than that of all the other age groups, with the exception of people over 65, most of which, according to Audiweb data do not access the Internet.

Figure 2 News consumption by age groups, 2017 (per cent)



Source: Graph from Agcom, 2018c: 34

Considering audience data and studies released during the Covid-19 pandemic, young people and especially minors accessed television and online newspapers more than ever during the total lockdown period (Gevers, 2020; ViacomCBS & MTV, 2020). Hence, we can probably say that older people are more likely to maintain a single-medium informative diet, compared with younger subjects.

When considering news outlets' audiences, according to Agcom's elaborations on Auditel data, the RAI first channel *Tg1* is still the most important evening newscast in Italy.⁷ According to Audipress (2020), there were 15.759 million newspaper readers on an average day in the last trimester of 2019, with sports newspapers representing one-fifth of total reads. The four most-important quality newspapers (*Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, *La Stampa*, and *QN-Il Resto del Carlino*) are read more than a million times on an average day (almost a third of the total quality newspapers reads). Looking at news websites, according to Comscore in November 2019, Citynews was the leading publisher (a syndication including digital native news outlets active in the most important Italian cities, e.g., *PalermoToday*, *QuiComo*, *PadovaOggi*, *IlPescara*, *CasertaNews*, etc.), thanks to an online monthly audience of 26 million, followed by *Fanpage* (about 20 million) and *TgCom24* (about 19 million). Looking at newspapers websites, *Quotidiano.net* (*Il Resto del Carlino*, *Il Giorno* e *La Nazione*), *FattoQuotidiano.it* (that is a news outlet different from the print newspaper *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, with a different managing director), and *Corriere della Sera* (which has recently introduced a metered paywall system on its website) are the best performers (each with more than 17 million monthly users).

Francesco Marrazzo

(F3) Diversity of news sources

1 POINT

Within the Italian news media system, approximately seven out of ten news stories are based on just one source. Government sources enjoy considerable importance, and personal contacts are one of the most-used sources. News agencies and press releases are also referred to. No systematic data is available concerning the use of press releases.

The data available for Italy offer some insights on the distinction between elite and institutional sources (e.g., politicians, officials, governments), civil society sources (labour unions, environmental groups), and non-elite sources, and prospective ones that do not possess the authority to attract media attention (Kleemans et al., 2017; Manning, 2001). A comparative content analysis involving eleven countries showed that in Italy, approximately seven of ten news stories made use of just one source. With regard to official sources in the news, “Italy has the single most dramatic result”, and government sources enjoy considerable attention and are regularly over-represented (Tiffen et al., 2014: 383).

Agcom periodically retrieves data from journalists, revealing that personal contacts are still the most common source of information. As Cornia (2014: 54) puts it, journalism in Italy is highly opinionated because it usually reports the opinions of political sources. The use of personal contacts as sources is the practice that most embeds political parallelism (Mancini, 1999). As Esser and Umbricht (2013) affirm, the importance of personal contacts in Italian journalism is also due to the polarised multi-party system that provides access to a broader range of voices in the political debate.

Additionally, Agcom shows that the use of news agencies is a prerogative of the richest newsrooms, generally digital media linked to traditional media outlets. Italy presents an important and well-rooted national news agency, Ansa, which is enlarging its audience in the digital environment.

Press releases are a different matter. There are just a few studies on Italian journalists’ uses of press releases, but according to Agcom’s data, nearly two-thirds of journalists use press releases as one of their main sources for producing news. This is the case for magazines in particular, whose news is more specialised (e.g., fashion, sports, electronics, software) and where there is a more direct link between journalists and public relations professionals.

However, recent studies of the local online journalism environment (see Splendore, 2017c) show that the chances of minor (in terms of power and influence), non-elite, and non-professionalised sources becoming accessible and reliable are greater in digital than in traditional media environments.

Interviews with newsroom members of leading media confirm the importance of news agencies. “For television news, agencies are crucial, we are around two-

thirds of all the material. In foreign news, not having correspondents, almost everything comes from the agencies”, explains newsroom member of *TgLa7*. “Agencies are fundamental, they represent a large part of the work we do”, confirms newsroom editor from *SkyT24*. With regard to the specific domain of politics, however, it is the personal contacts that are predominant, compared with the agencies or other types of sources. “Talking about politics [agencies] count a little less, that is mainly made up of personal sources”, the newsroom member of *TgLa7* explains again. This position is confirmed by his colleague at *Tg1*: “We produce the Italian parliamentary video material in autonomous way”. Another interesting hint on the diversity of sources that can be used comes from *Tg1*. Being a public service provider, it is a member of the European Network of Public Broadcasters (EBU), hence it can rely on “forms of partnership and collaboration between public services and TV that adhere to the network. The exchange of images and films is absolutely horizontal and symmetrical”.

Sergio Splendore & Mauro Bomba

(F4) Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy 2 POINTS

National and internal rules are in place to guarantee equality, impartiality, objectivity, and internal democratic practices in the newsroom. By law, all news media with at least ten journalists are expected to have a newsroom council (and a trustee for smaller companies). The publisher of a news organisation appoints editors-in-chief who then nominate managing editors.

When effective rules exist to guarantee internal democratic practices, democratic freedom is more likely to be safeguarded, and democracy promoted. In the Italian news media sector, the requirement of impartiality and objectivity is regulated by the *Testo Unico dei Doveri del Giornalista* [Consolidated Text of the Journalist’s Duties]. Approved in January 2016, it stems from the need to harmonise previous documents dealing with deontological issues. Several principles derive from previous laws. For example, the professional law 69/1963, which regulates journalistic practices in Italy, establishing the obligation for journalists to “respect the substantive truth of the facts observed” (Republic of Italy, 1963: art. 2). Inaccurate information must be corrected and violation of those rules entails disciplinary sanctions. This is the case, for example, when journalists are guilty of facts that do not conform to their professional dignity or facts that compromise the reputation of the *Ordine dei Giornalisti* [Order of Journalists] (Republic of Italy, 1963: art. 48).

For the public broadcasting service RAI, rules concerning pluralism, completeness, independence, and impartiality of information are prescribed by state laws and controlled by Agcom, and sanctions are prescribed.

A recent study involving Italian journalists from different news organisations⁸ has shown the value of several principles linked to impartiality. For example, concerning professional role orientations, the journalists interviewed found it most important to report “things as they are” and “to be a detached observer” (Splendore, 2016).

As far as newsroom councils are concerned, all news media outlets with at least ten journalists must have a council, even if their function is sometimes limited to formal consultations or providing preliminary opinions. If the number of professional journalists is under ten, a trustee is to be put in place to perform the same tasks.

According to the Contratto Nazionale di Lavoro Giornalistico [National Journalistic Employment Contract] (FIEG & FNSI, 2014: art. 6), the appointment of the editor-in-chief is the responsibility of the publisher, who communicates the decision to the newsroom council at least 24 hours before its establishment. Furthermore, the editor-in-chief appoints *caporedattori* [managing editors] as well as the *vicecaporedattore* [deputy managing editor]. Among the news media considered in the present study, an exception is represented by the designation of the editor-in-chief of the public newscast *Tg1*, who is appointed by the management board of the public service broadcaster RAI. The board is composed of seven members, four elected by the Parliament, two by the government, while the seventh one is chosen by RAI’s employees. It is important to note that the configuration of RAI’s management board is expected to:

[To] facilitate the presence of both sexes and an adequate balance between members, characterised by high professionalism and proven experience in the legal, financial, industrial and cultural fields, as well as taking into account the authoritativeness required by the appointment, and the absence of conflicts of interest or ownership of positions in competing companies. (RAI, 2016: art. 21)

Apart from this statement on the gender balance to be ensured in the composition of RAI’s management board, there are no specific rules to support the careers of female journalists and their access to managerial positions. Finally, there is no system to monitor the presence and participation of women in decision-making at all levels.

Rossella Rega

(F5) Company rules against *internal* influence on newsroom/editorial staff

2 POINTS

Management units, sales departments, and newsrooms are formally separated, and the National Journalistic Employment Contract states that the powers of the editor-in-chief “are determined by agreements stipulated between the publisher and the editor-in-chief”, who is responsible for elaborating the editorial line with a degree of autonomy. There are nevertheless (rare) situations where pressure is exercised by owners or sponsors.

The analysis of the degree of independence of an editorial office from ownership, management, and advertising agencies should start from the Contratto Nazionale di Lavoro Giornalistico [National Journalistic Employment Contract] (published in 2009 and then updated in 2013 and 2016; see also the Collective Agreement for the Regulation of Employment Relationships of Journalistic Nature in the Periodicals of Information Distributed Locally, in National Non-Profit Newspapers, and in Mainly Local Online Newspapers, 2018–2020).

Regarding ownership, the National Contract states that the editor-in-chief’s powers “are determined by agreements to be stipulated between the publisher and the editor-in-chief” (FIEG & FNSI, 2014: art. 6). The publisher communicates these agreements “with particular reference to political guidance, organisation and development [of the publication]” to the editorial body, “together with the appointment of the editor-in-chief” (FIEG & FNSI, 2014: art. 6). Therefore, the role of the publisher formally ends with the nomination of the editor-in-chief and the approval of the editorial plan. As stated by the editor-in-chief of *SkyTg24*, “there is an editorial line that is mediated by the editor, which he/she interprets and translates for the editorial staff [...]. There is no direct contact with the publisher”. A position confirmed for the *RAI Tg1*: “There is no direct conditioning of the publisher in editorial choices”. However, the indication of an editorial plan is not always transparent, as is the case of *TgLa7*: “Publisher and director do not have this approach, they have never submitted an editorial plan even if the contract provides for it. No one has ever put him on notice because he does his work well”.

The National Contract does not contain explicit references to the management of an editorial company and its relations with the editorial staff, hence diverse situations emerge. The ownership structure of the leading media selected for the 2021 MDM study is the following:

- the public radio and television service (*Tg1*) have company management by political appointment (RAI management boards);
- the management of commercial television depends on the ownership (RTI S.p.A. for *Tg5*; Cairo Communications for *TgLa7*; Sky Italia S.r.l. for *SkyTg24*), creating a situation of coexistence. Other large publishing

groups like Cairo Communications for *Corriere della Sera* and Gedi for *la Repubblica* operate similarly;

- and the cases of *Fanpage* and of *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, published by Società Editoriale Il Fatto (SEIF, a joint-stock company without a controlling shareholder), are different.

Finally, the independence of a newspaper from the pressure of advertisers is formally guaranteed by the separation of functions between publishing companies and advertising agents. Respondents tend to exclude forms of conditioning “No interference, no boycott”, the journalist from *TgLa7* explains. “There have never been successful cases of boycott intervention”, says the editor-in-chief of *SkyTg24*, who however admits the possibility of pressure: “Some company or some political subject complained. The only thing we did was to see if what we said or did was true and if there was accuracy in the work”. Nevertheless, journalists are not always completely free from interference, even if it happens more often at the corporate level than within the editorial staff. Newsroom members of *Tg1* say: “Some time ago, I remember that a well-known pasta brand complained about one of our pieces. I do not remember if there were any repercussions. They complained to the company, not to journalists”. Prevention rather than cure is an approach that the editor-in-chief of *Tg1* says applies to the whole Italian information sector: “Can those that receive important advertising from companies afford the luxury of attacking these companies head-on? It doesn’t mean not to give the news, but to renounce forms of aggression or speculation in advance”.

This is, however, not an attitude which can be applicable to all. In the case of *Il Fatto Quotidiano* newspaper: “We don’t have a lot of advertisements precisely because we touch a series of realities that then react by not considering us for ads”. The editor-in-chief talks about some cases of cancelled advertisements:

There have been cases of boycotts. We did an investigation on hazelnuts, it means touching Ferrero [the company that produces Nutella]. Another case is the one concerning ENI [national company for energy production] and instances of corruption in Nigeria. They’ve taken away advertisement from us in some cases.

As for the representation of journalists, this is guaranteed by the establishment of the *comitato di redazione* [editorial board] (FIEG & FNSI, 2014: art. 34).

Recently, some important protests against the influence of management in editorial choices have emerged from editorial boards. An example is in the strike by the editorial staff of *la Repubblica* on 24 April 2020, who stopped the newspaper both at newsstands and on the web to protest the decision of the Gedi Group management board to replace the editor-in-chief Carlo Verdelli during the Covid-19 emergency, and on the very day that had been indicated

as “date of the death of the director Verdelli” by an anonymous person who had threatened him in previous months.

Christian Ruggiero & Mauro Bomba

(F6) Company rules against external influence on newsroom/editorial staff

1 POINT

The Department of Information and Publishing of the Presidency of the Italian Council supports, through direct contributions, the editorial activity of newspapers and periodicals. Politics remains the main “external” factor influencing the quality of the journalistic product. Moreover, Italian newsrooms depend on a few large advertisers or sponsors. In this respect, legal provisions are in place to guarantee editorial independence, but the boundaries between information and advertising often tend to blur.

The Department of Information and Publishing of the Presidency of the Council (Italian Prime Minister’s Office) supports, through direct contributions, the editorial activity of newspapers and periodicals in accordance with the principle of pluralism of information, with particular attention to local publishing and to the digitisation of the publishing market. Until 2017, the same department also gave direct contributions for publications by political parties, political movements, and trade unions. This possibility was lifted by the legislative decree 70/2017.

Politics remains the main external factor influencing the quality of the journalistic product: a widespread tendency at the European level, but a peculiar characteristic in the Italian case (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Mediaact, 2014). This factor is relevant especially for RAI and *Tg1* which, being public service providers, have a direct connection with politics:

This company since it was born has a peculiar characteristic: it responds to politics, there is a parliamentary commission that gives us an orientation that must be translated into an editorial plan. The director is chosen on the basis of his or her ability to interpret that editorial plan.

In some cases, the influence of politics also occurs more directly through pressure on in-house companies: “It happened that politics tried – the previous government did so explicitly – to tell the participants not to give advertisement to our newspapers”, the editor-in-chief of *la Repubblica* states.

The National Contract for Journalistic Work mentions the separation of functions between publishing companies and advertising agents, stating that “advertising messages must be clearly identifiable as such and therefore distinct, also through a specific indication, from journalistic texts” (FIEG & FNSI, 2014: art. 44). “The advertising agency is internal, but I don’t know what they look like”, explains a *TgLa7* newsroom member. No relationship with the adver-

tising dealership”, confirms *SkyTg24* editor-in-chief. There are also forms of branded content that link the work of the editorial staff and advertising agency. According to the editor-in-chief of *la Repubblica*:

In the digital world, branded content is becoming strata for which in a transparent way there are specials that are sponsored. That is, journalistic content that we produce in total independence, but the container is sponsored. We declare it to the reader.

Hence, special attention is given to reporting the presence of advertising content to readers, a principle also regulated by law (FIEG & FNSI, 2014: art. 44).

The jurisprudence on the mixing and merging of advertising and information goes back to 1986 and has evolved over the years in an attempt to regulate forms of “editorial advertising” (legislative decree 74; see Republic of Italy, 1992) and to contrast those of “hidden advertising” (law 223; see Republic of Italy, 1990). However, despite the obligation to properly report advertisements, the boundaries between information and advertising often tend to blur. This is evident in recent cases when complaints have been raised within the editorial offices themselves. For instance, on 5 November 2019, *Corriere della Sera* hosted a dedicated article on the new calendar realised by *For Men Magazine*. Since this magazine belongs to the Cairo group that also owns *Corriere della Sera*, it was a sign of proprietary interference in editorial work. The editorial board of the outlet sent an open letter to the editor Lucio Fontana:

This morning many colleagues have reported their discomfort in reading the sidebar article on page 23 on the calendar of *For Men*. We understand the need of our editor to publicise the initiative of one of his monthly magazines, but the choice to dedicate an article on the pages of the Italian chronicles with two photos, quotes, names, and details on the sponsors who have paid, seemed out of place to many, and unfortunately not only inside the newsroom.

The relationship between heavy advertising and media coverage emerged as particularly evident in the work of Gambaro and Puglisi (2010). The two researchers implemented a survey, carried out on six different Italian newspapers and thirteen Italian companies in the period from 2006 to 2007. The research showed that the number of articles dedicated to various companies was related to the number of ads purchased in a given newspaper by a given company. According to the authors, an increase in advertising investment of EUR 50,000 per month led to an increase of at least 13 articles dedicated to the investing company per month.

Christian Ruggiero & Mauro Bomba

(F7) Procedures on news selection and news processing 1 POINT

Italian journalism does not have procedures for news selection, nor media accountability measures. There is almost an overabundance of codes of ethics, but these codes are not compulsory, nor widely respected and, when norms are violated, there are no strict sanctions. The Worlds of Journalism Study shows that Italian journalists perceive having little autonomy in deciding which topics to work on and how to frame their news.

Italian journalism does not show a great deal of transparency (Mazzoleni & Splendore, 2011; Splendore, 2017b) and does not include specific procedures for news selection or accountability instruments. For instance, the introduction of press councils or newspapers' ombudspersons has hardly been on the agenda of domestic media players, and only two ombudsperson initiatives have been put in place. *Il Messaggero*, Rome's most important daily, initiated the first in 1986, and *la Repubblica* appointed a prominent journalist as ombudsman, Piero Ottone, former editor of *Corriere della Sera*. Both efforts, prompted by the wish to imitate foreign experiences, did not last long, because of a scarcity of contributions from the readers, but also because the ombudsperson was (and is) generally perceived as an odd institution in the Italian political and cultural context (Mazzoleni & Splendore, 2011: 91).

There is an overabundance of codes of ethics in Italy, concerning topics like minors and immigration. However, those codes are not compulsory or widely respected (Brinkmann et al., 2017) and, when violated, there are no strict sanctions on journalists. The opacity in the use of codes of ethics implies that it is very difficult to evaluate the scope of newsrooms' internal debates. Research based on legacy newsrooms (Splendore, 2013, 2017a; Splendore & Rega, 2017) and our interviews with journalists show that the most established newsrooms especially do not leave much space for debate. The Worlds of Journalism Study shows that Italian journalists perceive having little autonomy in deciding which topics to work on and which frames to use for their news.

This scenario seems to be largely confirmed by the interviews conducted with newsroom members. The clearest indications on the responsibility for the choice of the news come from *TgLa7*:

There are editorial meetings to set the schedule for the main editions, between the editor or a management delegate and the individual newsroom members. The editor in charge lists a number of priorities and opens a debate. There is an axiological evaluation and the schedule is built. We must always pay attention to the timing, according to the editions. The 20:00 edition is in the hands of the editor, he chooses the themes and times.

A more political reading comes from the *Tg1* newsroom member:

If the institutions speak, nine times out of ten this becomes a piece. If the oppositions speak there will be the piece on the opposition. If there is a theme

there will be a dedicated piece. Then institutional politics, the newscasts live on institutional politics.

Something that seems to be totally missing in the Italian landscape is a procedure concerning news originating in social media. The question is particularly important when statements are diffused by political leaders through social media. *Tg1* newsroom members declare:

We always try to pay attention to the type of social profile, whether it is official or not. Most of the time it is the party who reports the post or tweet or video of a politician. Sometimes, for example, when a leader of a right-wing party, in order not to get infected with Covid-19, invites us to do the “Roman greeting” [form of salutation with the right arm up, dating back to fascist period], you wonder if it’s true. In that case, you check with the person concerned, with the press office or by calling [them] directly.

TgLa7 newsroom member raises the issue in broader terms, calling into question the issue of disintermediation:

Politicians, company owners, stakeholders, anyone who has an interest in giving their own version of the facts that should be mediated, but this does not happen. The question is: how is a statement about Salvini’s social media exposure, or Renzi or anyone else, going to be in the news? Without having a chance to ask a question... in my opinion, yes, but only if that statement is relevant, if it’s the news. If it’s a normal controversy, we can do without... But it’s a bad habit.

Sergio Spendore & Mauro Bomba

(F8) Rules and practices on internal gender equality 1 POINT

Although the overall situation of gender equality in the country has improved over the past 15 years, the reality of journalism in Italy shows that gender inequalities are still widely present in the sector, and there is still a lack of awareness amongst professionals. Patterns of inequality persist in women’s participation in news reporting, job guarantees, pay gaps, and glass ceiling barriers to career advancement.

Indicators for the practice of gender equality in Italy have improved over the past 15 years, but inequalities are still widely present in the media sector, and this seems to be a non-issue in most newsrooms, as well as in media governance. According to Paola Dalle Molle (committee for Equal Opportunities of the Order of Journalists) and Fabiana Martini (council member of Assostampa), there have recently been slow but evident improvements in some areas. The first woman ever was elected vice-president of the Order of Journalists council in 2017, and an Equality Committee was appointed by the same Order in

November 2019, while Federazione Nazionale Stampa Italiana (FNSI) [National Federation of the Italian Press] has had a gender committee since the late 1990s. Notwithstanding, the overall situation in the profession still appears highly problematic at different levels.

The number of women working in the sector has grown over the years, as a result of the increasing number of women enrolled in communication and journalism courses, where they account for more than half of tertiary-level graduates for media-related careers (EIGE, 2013). But adequate attention is not given, in academic education as well as in vocational training, to aspects pertaining the specific conditions and needs of women and men as both subjects in the news and newsmakers or media managers (French et al., 2019).

The Agcom Journalism Observatory indicates that women represent 41.6 per cent of employed journalists (Agcom, 2017). According to the latest survey by the Order of Journalists, out of the 100,000 journalists in the country, women aged below 35 represent 46 per cent, aged 35–64 compose 43 per cent, and 64+ drops to 20.11 per cent. Meaningful changes have characterised the profession over three decades, yet different patterns of inequality persist in news topic addressed by women professionals (women still tend to report about society and culture, or health and legal issues, but not about the “hard news” such as politics and economy; a phenomenon referred to as “horizontal segregation”), as well as in job guarantees, pay gaps, and informal barriers to career advancement.

In a context where eight of ten journalists are freelance, with little protection and very low wages, women most easily fall into a specific category named *precarie* (precarious jobs, grammatically articulated in the feminine precisely because this emerges as a “gendered issue” – see also Indicator C5 – Journalists’ job security), with implications in terms of limited guarantees and available financial resources, limited turnover in the newsroom, but also fostering the emergence of self-sustained journalism models (Agcom, 2017). The average annual salary for women is EUR 52,081, versus EUR 66,611 for men. The average gap is above 19 per cent, but big differences are found in top and senior roles, where the average salary is around EUR 82,000 for men, but EUR 75,000 for women (INPGI, 2015).

Shortcomings are also evident in relation to the number of female journalists who make the news by signing articles, particularly those working in the print media, and in relation to the news topics addressed by women and men journalists, with political and economic news mostly reported by men (Azzalini & Padovani, 2016).

Unequal are also organisational cultures, accounting for the limited presence of women in decision-making positions in news companies as chief executive officers and members of the board, as well as at operational levels. According to the data collected for the EIGE (2013) report *Advancing gender equality*

in decision-making in media organisations, in a number of selected national media, across all management levels, women constituted around one-third of senior staff placed in decision-making positions. However, only 16 per cent of women were found in top-level positions (EIGE, 2013). None of the leading media outlets selected for the MDM 2021 study is led by a woman. Although public service companies, in general, comply more fully than private organisations with national provisions for gender equality, recent developments in the Italian public service RAI signal a persistent problematic unequal reality.

Furthermore, the EIGE (2013) study showed that no single woman was a member of the board of the Italian independent media regulator Agcom in 2012 (while the average female representation amongst the 213 board member positions across the EU was 31%). Today, the commissioners of Agcom are all men, except for Elisa Giomi, who was appointed in 2019 following public calls for gender inclusiveness in the management of public authorities.

Finally, looking at gender participation in leading positions in the various entities that represent the profession, only the Istituto Nazionale di Previdenza dei Giornalisti Italiani [National Welfare Institute of Italian Journalists] pension fund is currently governed by a woman. In 2017, the first woman ever was elected vice-director of the Order of Journalists (Elisabetta Cosci), two out of twenty Regional Order of Journalists are led by women, and there are three women out of eight members in the FNSI secretariat.

Considering the legal framework, codes of conduct, and good practices, no specific study has been conducted on the extent to which gender mainstreaming has been adopted in policies for the media sector, across levels, platforms, and companies, but little normative provisions have been put in place to address inequalities. The national legal framework for the media, law 112/2004, does not include any specific reference to gender equality or gender mainstreaming. Agcom has issued guidelines related to the respect of human dignity and non-discrimination (European Parliament and Council, 2016) and recent Agcom decisions deal with fair representation of the image of women in information and entertainment programmes, but do not include specific indicators (Agcom decisions 442/17/CONS & 157/19/CONS). Relevant but widely disregarded is the general Codice Nazionale per le Pari Opportunità [National Code for Equal Opportunities] (Republic of Italy, 2006) that specifically calls for “positive actions in the audiovisual sector”, stating that the public service licenced entity should promote actions to eliminate any condition of disparity (European Union, 2006: art. 49). Another development worth mentioning is the 2017 national Contratto di Servizio [Service Contract] that licences the RAI, which establishes the principle of equal opportunities in public media operations and prescribes regular monitoring activities. As of 2020, RAI seems to be the only media outlet that has adopted a specific gender equality policy alongside a policy to prevent and sanction gender-based harassment in the newsroom.

What emerged from the interviews conducted with editors-in-chief and journalists in the leading media is a prevailing gender-unaware attitude and often gender blindness (“Let me think... How many men and women do we have here in the newsroom? No, I don’t think we have problems in this respect...”). Interviews have also highlighted a diffused aggressive attitude within the newsrooms towards women professionals who are vocal and speak out on social media. The combination of a lack of awareness and unsupportive attitude within media outlets becomes particularly problematic (as discussed below and in other indicators) when there is a need to acknowledge and address instances of abuse and violence against women journalists, both offline and online.

Equal opportunities commissions are now a feature of media unions, while a number of civic networks are also active in conducting advocacy, such as *Pari o Dispare* [Even or Odd], the Observatory on Gender Discrimination, *Se Non Ora Quando* [If Not Now, When], a movement which attempts to improve the social position of women in Italy, and *Donne in Quota* [Women on High], a civic organisation that fosters women’s representation in society and politics. A relevant resource on these issues is a major EU-funded project, *Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries*, co-coordinated by the University of Padova between 2017 and 2019. *Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries* has created a set of unprecedented tools accessible online: a database of global good practices, a series of thematic learning units with video lectures and interviews with experts, and an app to carry out media monitoring activities translated in English, French, and Spanish.

Claudia Padovani

(F9) Gender equality in media content

2 POINTS

Italian news media are increasingly presented and produced by female journalists, yet it is still mostly men that make the news as subjects, while women continue to be marginalised in the news agenda. In comparative studies, Italy still scores below the European and global average, but some recent positive developments are worth mentioning.

In terms of media content, according to the Global Media Monitoring Project, over the past 20 years, the status of women in the Italian news media has hardly changed. Although the news is increasingly presented and produced by female journalists (36% in the Global Media Monitoring Project, 2015),⁹ it is mostly men that make the news as subjects (Azzalini & Padovani, 2015). In traditional media (radio, television, and newspapers), which have been monitored since 1995, the visibility of women as sources or subjects of Italian news has increased from 7 to 21 per cent (Azzalini & Padovani, 2016), below the European and

global average (25% and 24% of women subjects, respectively) (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2015).

Furthermore, women as sources of news are seldom included as authoritative expert voices (18.5%) or spokespersons (13.3%), while stereotyped representations are paralleled by the irrelevance of gender-related issues (4% of all news). This demonstrates a profound gap between the advancement of women in society and the image of women (and men) as reflected by news media (Azzalini & Padovani, 2015).

We can highlight that article 25 of the Service Contract that licences the RAI calls for the adoption of regular gender-monitoring of RAI content (besides what has been covered in Indicator F8 – Rules and practices on internal gender equality). A yearly report is produced by an independent company, and the latest report is available on the RAI website and results from a study conducted by the Osservatorio di Pavia. According to the Osservatorio (2018), gender inequality issues are being addressed in the planning of public service media RAI. One-fourth of the 263 analysed items refer to gender, with violence against women being the most-discussed item. Women and gender identities are represented respectfully (in 98.3% and 98.8%, respectively, of the analysed cases), and gender stereotypes appear to be challenged in 7.5 per cent of cases only. At the same time, the presence of women and men in television programmes is still unequal (37% versus 63%), while explicit or subtle stereotypes still persist (4.4% and 7.8%, respectively).

Despite progress made by the public service also with regard to the adoption of internal rules, recommendations, and guidelines regarding the promotion of gender equality in media content (i.e., Service Contract 2018–2022), no specific initiative can be reported from the other MDM leading media outlets.

Although a *Manifesto delle giornaliste e dei giornalisti per il rispetto e la parità di genere nell'informazione* [Manifesto of women and men journalists for the respect and gender parity in news and against all forms of violence and discrimination through words and image] was launched in 2017 by the Equality Commission of the FNSI, Unione Sindacale Giornalisti Rai (UsigRAI) and GiULiA Giornaliste (the *Manifesto di Venezia* [Venice Manifesto]), leading mainstream media lack recommendations and guidelines for gender-sensitive coverage of gender-based violence.

In fact, this is a specific and sensitive topic, particularly when cases of femicide are reported. From 2015 to 2017, a study by the University of Torino in partnership with the RAI Research Center investigated the ways in which femicide is normalised in the public and media discourses (press, local televisions, and some online environments, and social media). The coverage of femicide and gender violence still appears as highly stereotyped and not capable of, nor interested in, making public narratives more gender-sensitive.

Various civic and professional initiatives, as well as women's alternative media outlets, exist. Amongst Italian leading media specifically focused on media gender-transformative content, we report *Corriere della Sera's 27esima ora* and the web pages managed by *GIornaliste Unite Libere Autonome (GiULiA) Globalist*.

Gender and media monitoring activities are also carried out by observatories like *Gemma (Gender and Media Matter, University of Rome)*, *TV Fai-da-te (University of Bologna)*, and *Inchiaro (University of Milan Bicocca)*. A recently established good practice is *100 Donne Contro gli Stereotipi [100 Women Against Stereotypes]*, a growing dataset of women experts created in 2016 to which journalists can refer when looking for diverse sources, in order to promote a balanced representation of women and men's competences in the news.

Claudia Padovani & Marinella Belluati

(F10) Misinformation and digital platforms (alias social media)

2 POINTS

Italian leading news media have not developed particular expertise and practices to identify misinformation and avoid spreading fake news. Among the newsrooms examined, the most common habit is to address the problem at the individual level. Outside news media organisations several actors and agencies are involved in projects aimed at fighting misinformation.

Despite the fact that disinformation and fake news are becoming a huge concern for journalism, Italian news media are not developing processes to identify misinformation and avoid spreading fake news. Among the examined newsrooms, the most common habit is to address the problem at the level of individual journalists. Hence, non-systematic approaches are found among Italian journalists as a result of their practical experience:

Over the years we have gained so much experience that the alarm bell rings and then a more in-depth verification is carried out and this often allows us to eliminate the risk of publishing a false news story, without any particular support in terms of tools and expertise. (editor-in-chief, *la Repubblica*)

In Italy there is no access to specific tools. I think this could be done, but I think it costs a lot. I think it is an Italian gap: we still miss a combination of information experts and technicians able to support this type of analysis and the elaboration of journalistic content. (editor-in-chief, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*)

There are no standardised editorial guidelines on how to handle misinformation, and so journalists “rely on common sense” (journalist, *SkyTg24*). There are no specific training courses on the use of automated tools for the verifica-

tion of information. Practices related to the reliability of sources are left to the discretion of the individual: “We are there to give news, verify it with sources, more than one, cross-check two or three sources, verify the news and at that point the news is considered reliable and therefore publishable. The assessment is personal and discretionary” (journalist, *La Repubblica*). “Having anti-fake-news algorithms in real-time is very complicated, the work must be manual” (editor-in-chief, *La Repubblica*).

There are two main problems highlighted by journalists in relation to misinformation: the problem of skills and experience of individual journalists and the problem of timing, because often problems related to misinformation relate to the hurry to publish a piece in the news:

There are two issues on disinformation: one is to strengthen the skills of journalists, also through the algorithmic management of the phenomenon [...], but we have an enemy to fight against which is not only disinformation but also time, because the biggest mistakes, at least in the mainstream, are made on the assumption of the lack of time to do verifications and this is all the more true for all-news channels evidently. (editor-in-chief, *Tg1*)

Maybe we gave ourselves the rule that it is better to be second in giving the news, but to do so in an accurate and correct manner, than to be first, but presenting news that is unreliable. (editor-in-chief, *La Repubblica*)

Finally, there is also a problem linked to the professional culture, which functions as an element of resistance to change and which is more visible among senior journalists. “The practice of automated verification of sources through fact-checking tools or services, internal or external to the editorial staff is unusual in the Italian journalistic culture compared to foreign models. This happens mostly manually”, said an editor-in-chief of *SkyTg24*. A journalist from *TgLa7* explained:

The truth is that there are stratifications in the editorial offices [...]. There are generations formed on books, certainly, but very much on the road and very often without academic preparation [...]. Then, there is a younger generation, to which I belong, which is quite disenchanted, perhaps even too cynical and independent, which was formed in schools of journalism.

Fake news is approached slightly differently by *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. What is highlighted in this case is that distortion of the news often depends on the interpretative frame:

It is difficult, however, given the quality of Italian newspapers, that fake news ends up on paper unless you take it as it is from the Internet. [The biggest problem is] the interpretation that is given to news as fake. In this case, the

disinformation concerns the curvature you give to the news. (journalist, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*)

Again, it is pointed out that there is often also an emphasis on the problem, especially by political actors:

On fake news, we have dealt with the subject. If I have to tell you, there was, on our part, a characteristic of the newspaper, which was to criticise the excessive emphasis of the use of fake news as an instrument of political battle. (editor-in-chief, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*)

It is worth mentioning that there are several actors involved in projects aimed at fighting misinformation. They are developing tools and creating and dedicating specific sections of their websites to contrast problems connected with fake news:

- Institutional observers: Agcom; Osservatorio Permanente Giovani-Editori; Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis; Luiss Data Lab; Pagella Politica; T6 Ecosystems srl; Official fact-checkers, non-institutional actors, and debunking projects;
- Official fact-checkers – institutions and newsrooms: Agenzia Giornalistica Italia; Carta di Roma; Open.online; Lavoce.info;
- Non-institutional actors – blogs, television programmes, and debunking project: Bufale.net; Butac; #Fake: la fabbrica delle notizie;
- Fact-checking projects during electoral campaigns: Mapping Italian News; Fact-Check EU;
- Actors and websites fighting scientific and health-care disinformation: Medicalfacts; Dottoremaeveroche; Osservatorio Terapie Avanzate.

Marinella Belluati, Alice Fubini, & Rossella Rega

(F11) Protection of journalists against (online) harassment – 1 point

Italy features as the country in Europe where journalists' safety is most threatened by online harassment, personal assaults, and intimidation, often connected to reporting on organised crime and mafia issues. No specific protection mechanism has been adopted against online harassment or threats (apart from the legal guardianship in the exercise of the journalistic profession); no mechanisms exist to protect women professionals from on- and offline harassment.

The overall situation of journalists in the country is dangerous, and this represents a huge challenge to media professionals' freedom of expression. According to a special report from the Index on Censorship, the European

Center for Press and Media Freedom, and the European Commission (2018), Italy is the country in Europe where journalists' safety is most threatened, with 83 cases reported between 2014 and 2018, including online harassment, personal assaults, and most of all intimidation, often connected to reporting on mafia issues (see also Mapping Media Freedom, 2020). At present, about 20 journalists are living under round-the-clock police protection, as indicated by the 2020 *World Press Freedom Index* (Reporters Without Borders, 2020). Although Italy scored two points higher in comparison with the previous year (41st position), attacks against journalists are still on the rise, particularly in Lazio and other Southern regions.

Women's freedom of expression is also challenged by acts of violence against women and gender-based violence, particularly against women working in the media sector (see IFJ, 2017; and global surveys conducted by the IWMMF & Troll-Busters, 2014, 2018). In Italy, according to the association Ossigeno per l'Informazione [Oxygen for Information] (2019), 358 women journalists received threats, attacks, and suffered violence between 2014 and 2019. This figure represents 21 per cent of 1,706 professional journalists whose cases have been identified, which are nevertheless only a minor segment of a much larger phenomenon. However, a different study shows that in the first three months of 2019, the percentage of women journalists threatened had already escalated to 24 per cent, with 18 women threatened out of a total of 73 (Della Morte, 2019). The FNSI promoted the first quantitative study to assess the status of sexual violence and harassment of women journalists in the media sector (FNSI, 2019). The results indicate that 85 per cent of 1,132 female journalists surveyed experienced some form of sexual harassment or abuse during their professional careers, and 42.2 per cent experienced these abuses in 2019.

In terms of institutional responses and newsroom practices, according to the interviewed journalists, no specific protection mechanism has been adopted by newsrooms against online harassment or threats, apart from legal guardianship in the exercise of the journalistic profession. Also, there is widespread resistance in denouncing instances of harassment and abuse, including physical, psychological, and economic, particularly by individual women journalists. A journalist from *Sky Tg24* commented on social media attacks: "There is no support policy in this sense. [...]. If attacks happen, it is a matter that is independently managed by you with the platform". On the same point, a journalist from *la Repubblica* said: "We have full legal coverage with respect to menaces, for example, or libel lawsuits. It is normal. No other kinds of protection are provided". As far as *la Repubblica* and *L'Espresso* (Gedi Group) are concerned, many journalists, such as Federica Angeli, Salvo Palazzolo, Lirio Abate, Paolo Berizzi, and the most-known Roberto Saviano, received personal protection after being threatened by organised crime or extremist political movements. "Many police agents protect threatened colleagues", adds the journalist from

la Repubblica, “but we talk about threats other than stalking or the insult of keyboard lions”. In this regard, *la Repubblica*’s editor-in-chief speaks about the measures undertaken:

There is our solidarity with those who are victims of this type of action [...], but then there is the support of the institutions, the support of the police when it becomes necessary. The management is committed to ensuring that our most exposed journalists are always protected.

In general, informal support from colleagues as well as, in more critical cases, the stances of the editorial board and the unions, are common.

In recent years, some leading news media have adopted specific provisions to address cases of gender-based discrimination and harassment. In 2017, the public service broadcaster RAI renewed its norms against harassment in the workplace, banning any verbal or physical sexual molestation that has “the purpose or in any case the effect of violating the dignity and freedom of the person who undergoes it and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive atmosphere” (RAI, 2017: 1). Likewise, the code of ethics of Mediaset and Gedi Group (owner of *la Repubblica* and *L’Espresso*), as well as the code of conduct of Comcast (Sky Italia), prohibit any form of harassment and gender discrimination to the person. In particular, these forbid “violence or sexual harassment” and any kind of discrimination “refer[ing] to personal and cultural diversity” (Gruppo Mediaset, 2019: 12), and through “the promotion and the respect of human rights” (Gedi Group, 2020: 5), also encouraging employees to denounce “without fear of retaliation” (Comcast, 2020: 11).

Alice Baroni, Claudia Padovani, Marinella Belluati, & Michele Valente

Dimension: Equality / Interest mediation (E)

(E1) Media ownership concentration national level 2 POINTS

The Italian landscape shows moderate media ownership concentration, with some market-dominant positions by large companies.

In 2018, the overall print media market of national and regional newspapers was dominated by two large groups: Gedi (*la Repubblica*, *La Stampa*, and more than a dozen regional papers) and Cairo Communication/RCS (*Corriere della Sera*, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, and few regional papers) (Agcom, 2018e: 129). Gedi is the largest one, with a market share of 21.9 per cent on the basis of revenues (CR1), while Cairo Communication/RCS has a similar score of 19.1 per cent (CR2 40%). Although at a lower level, four other groups have some

relevance in the print media market. Monrif (*Il Resto del Carlino*, *La Nazione*, *Il Giornino*, *Il Telegrafo*) and Caltagirone (*Il Messaggero*, *Leggo*, *Il Gazzettino*, *Il Mattino*, *Corriere Adriatico*, *Quotidiano di Puglia*) score around 7 per cent, while *Il Sole 24 Ore* (*Il Sole 24 Ore*) and Gruppo Amodei (*Corriere dello Sport*, *Tuttosport*) are around 5 per cent. Overall, the concentration ratio is moderate (CR3 higher than 0.40).

In terms of radio and television, Italy has two broadcast television platforms – terrestrial and satellite – while cable television has had no success in Italy compared with other countries. The market is dominated by free channels, with pay channels steadily growing but marginal in terms of audience in the last two decades. Since 1984, the Italian television industry was marked by a duopoly, with more than 95 per cent of advertising revenues and more than 85 per cent of the national audience share held by the public broadcaster RAI and private Fininvest (later Mediaset) owned by Silvio Berlusconi (Padovani, 2004: 42). A major change occurred in 2004 with respect to media market concentration when the adoption of the so-called Gasparri law redefined the ownership restriction for the television sector. This law has been largely contested since it has strengthened the previous RAI-Mediaset duopoly. It abolished cross-ownership restrictions between television and press and also created a legal basis for future privatisation of RAI (Komorek, 2013).

In 2017, the Italian broadcast television market was worth EUR 9.354 million, basically in line with previous years (see Mediobanca Research Department, 2019). Considering the main sources of income (advertising, licence fees, subscriptions, etc.), a clear picture emerges: the public broadcaster, RAI, and the two private outlets, Mediaset and Sky Italy, earn a similar level of revenue, around EUR 2,500–2,800 million. Together, these operators control 95 per cent of the Italian television market, leaving only marginal shares of revenue for other broadcasters, such as Discovery Italy and La7. As noted by Mazzoleni and Splendore (2011: 8), the television market is still characterised by the traditional RAI–Mediaset duopoly, and “the entry of Sky Italia into the market via satellite broadcasting has arguably enlarged the duopoly to a ‘triopoly’”. However, while RAI, Mediaset, Discovery Italy, and La7 operate in the digital terrestrial television market, Sky Italy is mainly satellite pay-TV. This implies that these broadcasters have different audiences and consequently different relevance in the Italian public debate. In terms of audience market share, the traditional duopoly RAI–Mediaset persist, since these two broadcasters together account for more than 65 per cent, and no third competitor exists. In 2017, hence, the CR3 index was higher than 0.7, signalling weak competition and a concentrated industry (Agcom, 2018e: 118).

The radio market is less concentrated. The CR3 index was 0.59 in 2018, which means a moderate level of concentration (Agcom, 2019: 52). However, a handful of players control over 80 per cent of the radio market. In this case

too, RAI and Fininvest are the two biggest players, although with much lower shares than in the television market. Considering that other relevant broadcasters (such as Gedi, RDS, and Gruppo 24ore) are highly connected with print media publishers, regardless of the moderate CR3 index, the radio market appears colonised by players who have core interests in other media markets.

No clear figures about market shares are available for online platforms and news. In 2017, established media, especially print media (e.g., *la Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Messaggero*, etc.) but also television news (such as *TgCom24*) and news agencies (e.g., Ansa) were the most appreciated by Internet users, but in top positions we also find some news outlets operating exclusively on the web, such as Citynews, Nanopress, and Fanpage (Agcom, 2018b).

Giuliano Bobba

(E2) Media ownership concentration regional (local) level 2 POINTS

The Italian national and local news media landscape is not easy to analyse, as it is hard to disentangle the local from the national dimension. The overall level of concentration is moderate.

National and regional (local) media markets are strictly intertwined. In particular, with regards to news media, it is quite hard to disentangle local and national levels. Many papers, for example, have local readership, but they also cover national news.

Several national editorial groups (such as Monrif, Gedi, or Caltagirone) in print media also play an important role at the local level. These are mainly groups that publish national newspapers as well as regional newspapers. In three regions, Tuscany, Piedmont, and Emilia-Romagna, the main source of local information for citizens is the daily newspaper. However, in all these cases, the newspaper identified as the main source of local information belongs to a national publisher, and the newspaper contains both national and local news. These are Monrif in Emilia-Romagna (*Il Resto del Carlino*) and Toscana (*La Nazione*) and Gedi in Piedmont (*La Stampa*) (Agcom, 2018a: 30). Local and regional television consists of approximately 400 companies, which focus primarily on the wealthier metropolitan markets, such as Piemonte, Lombardia, and Lazio.

With regards to television news, however, the third channel of the public broadcaster RAI is virtually in a monopoly position. Notwithstanding some regional or local television outlets that broadcast news in each region, the regional RAI newscast is in an undisputed position of strength thanks to the availability of resources and in terms of audience. In recent research carried out by Agcom (2018a), RAI emerged as the leading media outlet for local informa-

tion in 14 of 21 regions. Although the public service company offers regional information content in specific and delimited time windows (after lunchtime and before prime time), the regional RAI newscast represents a primary reference point for most Italian citizens (Agcom, 2018a).

With regards to radio broadcasting, 2018 data show that at the local level, there are almost a thousand broadcasters (publishers) and almost 1,300 radio brands (radio). Unfortunately, figures about local news radio are not available, but we know the audience is highly fragmented, and therefore the weight of individual publishers is quite marginal.

Agcom (2018d) has evaluated the relevance of (national and local) media groups in each region, by estimating the Total News Audience Index, namely the percentage of the population reached for information purposes in a given region by any editorial title held by the companies in all information media (newspapers, television, and radio channels). Findings show that the regional market is composite, mainly driven by the regional RAI newscast that scores the higher level of audience (38%), even though national media groups (such as Gedi, 16%, and Monrif, 5%) play a relevant role at the regional level also.

Giuliano Bobba

(E3) Diversity of news formats

2 POINTS

The diversity of news formats in Italy is quite rich. A high degree of abundance characterises different media sectors, with positive results for democracy.

The information menu of Italians is quite rich and diverse. Accertamenti Diffusione Stampa, a company that certifies the circulation data of the print content published in Italy, provides data on 62 daily newspapers, 41 weeklies, 51 monthlies, and 2 free presses active throughout Italy. Among the top fifteen for print and digital circulation, six are national, five operate at a regional or local level, three are sports media, and one focused on economic content (PrimaOnline, 2020a).

RAI has three mainstream national television newscasts, one on a local level (with offices in each region), two all-news channels (one devoted to sports), and three mainstream national radio newscasts. Additionally, in the 2019–2020 season, a total of 28 in-depth information programmes and magazines and two journalistic inquiry programmes were broadcast on the three RAI channels.

The private sector has several programmes:

- Mediaset has three mainstream national television newscasts and one all-news channel, a total of four in-depth news programmes on its three networks in the 2019/2020 season;

- La7 has one mainstream national television newscast and nine in-depth news programmes in the 2019–2020 season;
- and Sky has two all-news national television newscasts, one devoted to sports and 20 private radio stations broadcast newscasts.

As far as consumption is concerned, Censis-Ucsi (2018) reports a gap between television and radio on the one side – which seems to compensate for the decline in traditional users with an increase in online and mobile users – and newspapers on the other. In the latter case, in the face of a constant decline in sales in the print sector, the online sector sees growth in general information portals. A very broad and rapidly evolving context marks online information. Among the first 15 online information brands indexed by Audiweb (PrimaOnline, 2020b), nine are online versions of traditional newspapers and magazines (including *la Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera*, but also *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, which features a radical division between offline and online newsroom), four are native online information sites and apps (including *Fanpage*), and two are online versions of all-news television channels (one by Mediaset, the other by Sky). Agcom (2018c) states:

Italians access online information mainly through so-called algorithmic sources (especially social networks and search engines), consulted by 54.5 percent of the population, while there is less use of editorial sources (websites and applications of traditional and native digital publishers). Moreover, 19.4 percent of the population indicates an algorithmic source as the most important within their information diet. The importance accorded to search engines and social networks stands out as the third and fourth most important source of information for information, considering all media (classic and online).

Christian Ruggiero

(E4) Minority/Alternative media 3 POINTS

Minority and alternative media play an important role in the Italian news media market, particularly for linguistic minority groups, to whom the Italian Constitution guarantees provision of relevant news access by both public and private initiatives. The plurality of non-commercial and civic information initiatives, often connected to the so-called third sector, is also meaningful.

The recognition of minority languages within the Italian territory is safeguarded by the 1948 Italian Constitution, provisions of the autonomous regions, as well as international commitments. As it is stated in article 6 of the Constitution:

“The Republic safeguards linguistic minorities by means of specific measures” (Piergigli, 2016). Thus, the public broadcaster RAI provides information in languages other than Italian in regions with special or ordinary status as the home of minority communities. Furthermore, there are initiatives such as *Daily Muslim*, an Italian online newspaper for Muslims in Italy; *Romit.tv*, an Italian television channel dedicated to the Romanian community; *Obiectiv*, an Italian-Roma bilingual newspaper printed fortnightly in Turin; *Agi.it*, a news agency dedicated to news articles and in-depth reports on contemporary China; *Cinitalia*, an Italian-Chinese magazine to promote both cultures; and *Albanianews.it*, an online newspaper in Italian language, reporting on Albanian issues, just to cite a few.

In the Valle d’Aosta/Vallée d’Aoste, RAI has been producing radio programmes such as *Voix de la Vallée* since 1968, and television news and local programmes in Italian and French, in addition to the transmission of French and Swiss channels, *France2* and *Suisse Romande* (RAI Aosta, 2020). Moreover, *Ràdio Valàde* offers radio transmission in Franco-Provençal to promote the language and culture of the Aosta, Savoy, and Swiss regions. The initiative is funded by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, according to law 482/99 (Norms for the Protection of Linguistics and Historical Minorities). In Trentino-Alto Adige, in the South-Tirol area, there are cultural, educational, entertainment, and news programmes in Italian, German, and Ladino. The radio news *Tagesschau*, founded in 1966, was broadcasted initially in German, but expanded its coverage to embrace radio and television programmes in German and Ladino. In 1998, the television news *TRAIL* started to broadcast its coverage in the three official languages of the region, Italian, German, and Ladino (RAI Alto Adige, 2020). In addition, *TV Ladina* on YouTube prides itself for being a digital platform of the people, produced with and for the people of the Fassa Valley (Comun General de Fascia). The print newspaper *Dolomiten*, founded in 1926, is the oldest daily in Trentino-Alto Adige, dedicated to the promotion of the cultural identities of the peoples of South-Tirol in German and Ladino languages. Another example is the *Neue Südtiroler Tageszeitung*, founded in 1996, with editions from Tuesday to Saturday. On Sundays, the newspaper circulates the Saturday edition with a special dossier.

In Friuli Venezia Giulia, the regional studio of RAI broadcasts radio and television programmes in Italian and Slovene to promote the coexistence of both languages and cultures (RAI Friuli, 2020). The *Primorski dnevnik*, founded in 1945, is the only newspaper dedicated to the Slovene minority in the region, with editions from Tuesday to Sunday. The three newspapers *Primorski dnevnik*, *Dolomiten*, and *Neue Südtiroler Tageszeitung* are the Italian representatives of the European Association of Daily Newspapers in Minority and Regional Languages, which includes 27 dailies from 13 different European countries.

Looking beyond minority languages, the Italian association Articolo 21 (Farina, 2016) mapped a wide range of civic initiatives, providing a long list of available websites and resources, categorised according to their main focus: general news, economy, and alternative consumption habits, environment, geopolitics, and Global South, social issues, counter-information, crime, and criminal organisations, participative journalism. In this context, some news sources can be categorised as alternative media.

Alice Baroni, Marinella Belluati, & Claudia Padovani

(E5) Affordable public and private news media 2 POINTS

In Italy, the price represents an entrance barrier for few households in terms of access to information. Although almost all of the Italian population accesses the media, and over 80 per cent of citizens access information every day, lower education and economic levels can lead to the exclusion or marginalisation of certain segments of the population from the news consumption.

In 2017, it was estimated that the average Italian household net income was EUR 31,393 a year, or EUR 2,616 per month. In 2018, according to the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), 20.3 per cent of people residing in Italy were at risk of poverty, that is to say, they had an equivalent net income in the year preceding the survey of less than EUR 10,106 (EUR 842 per month). When the price for the news media is financially affordable for all households, including the disadvantaged ones, then it is more likely that democracy will be promoted (for geographic accessibility, see Indicator F1 – Geographic distribution of news media availability). Table 2 compares the cost of access to the selected leading newspapers (price of the annual subscription and copy price for paper and online) to public and private television and selected online media.

Access to television news (*Tg1*, *Tg5*, *TgLa7*, and *Sky News*) is normally free of charge in Italy, though there is a cost related to accessing television news through the annual television licence fee [*canone*]. This is a tax on the possession of a device through which it is possible to watch television, even though its profits finance only public television. *Sky News* belongs to the private network Sky Italia, a satellite-television platform, and offers a wide range of paid services. While other channels offered by Sky are paid, the channel dedicated to the news is freely accessible to everyone.

To determine the accessibility of online news, we calculated the average cost of a broadband Internet connection for a year, in 2019. While, generally, newspapers' websites (*la Repubblica*, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*) and online magazines (such as *Fanpage*) are free, the website of one leading news media outlet (*Corriere della Sera*) offers ten free articles per month, and then it is necessary

to buy a subscription (for more information on Italy’s digital audience, see Indicator F1 – Geographic distribution of news media availability).

Table 2 Cost of access to leading media (EUR)

	Annual subscription	Copy price	Online (website)
Corriere della Sera	465 (full subscription, paper and online) 200 (digital edition only)	1.50	10 free articles per month, then EUR 10 a month for full access
la Repubblica	40 (full subscription, paper) 200 (digital edition only)	1.50	Free
Il Fatto Quotidiano	305 (full subscription, paper and online)	1.80	Free
Broadband Internet connection	400		
TV tax	90		

Overall, we argue that for a segment of the population (the lower-income household groups), these costs to access information can be high. According to Agcom (2018c), although almost all of the Italian population accesses the media, and over 80 per cent access information every day, lower education and economic levels can lead to the exclusion or marginalisation of certain segments of the population from the consumption of news (see also Indicator F2 – Patterns of news media use).

Cecilia Biancalana

(E6) Content monitoring instruments

3 POINTS

Monitoring instruments for media content in the Italian landscape are numerous and diversified. In this scenario, the presence of Agcom, which works to protect pluralism also through a series of monitoring activities, should be highlighted.

The media monitoring landscape in Italy is diverse, with many institutions, authorities, and research institutes involved. First of all, the work of the independent Agcom can be indicated as a best practice in the European landscape. The Authority has launched several monitoring activities for the protection of pluralism, often in partnership with universities (see Indicators E3 – Diversity of news formats & F3 – Diversity of news sources).

Another important body is the Osservatorio di Pavia, an independent research institute specialised in media analysis, which carries out monitoring projects on

media and democracy, media pluralism, freedom of expression, media governance, and human rights, with a particular focus on public service broadcasting. In the words of the editor-in-chief of *Tg1* (see Indicator C2 – Independence of the news media from powerholders), this constitutes a significant pressure point for the public news service. The Osservatorio di Pavia also monitors the degree of pluralism in local television broadcasting and collaborates with Associazione Carta di Roma [Charter of Rome Association] (an association for journalism deontology in migration, see Indicators E7 – Code of ethics at the national level & E8 – Level of self-regulation) to prepare an annual report on racism and migrant representation in the media.

To fight hate, intolerance, and violence on the web, the Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali [National Office against Racial Discrimination] operates especially with a focus on young people.

Oxygen for Information, a not-for-profit association with the support of FNSI, regularly publishes reports on cases of intimidation of journalists by authoritative powers as well as organised crime (see Indicator C9–Watchdog function and financial resources).

Finally, monitoring activities also concern the economic and professional dimension of journalism. Since 1990, the Federazione Italiana Editori Giornali [Italian Newspaper and Publishers' Association] has analysed the quality of employment and economic benefits. The Federazione also monitors the professional training of workers in the media sector. A more recent development is the establishment of PA Social, an Italian public communicators association that through the Osservatorio Nazionale sulla Comunicazione Digitale [National Observatory on Digital Communication] (web, social networks, chat, artificial intelligence) fosters innovation in the field of public authorities' communication.

Little has been done in response to the Beijing Platform for Action's calls for the adoption of adequate legal instruments, policy provisions, and self-regulatory mechanisms to support and protect women working in the media and to promote gender-responsive media content, but many observatories working on gendered representation operate within Italian universities (see Indicator F9 – Gender equality in media content).

Marinella Belluati

(E7) Code of ethics at the national level

2 POINTS

In Italy, the journalistic profession and deontology are characterised by a relevant number of codes pertaining to different aspects, and establishing principles and norms, but these are seldom known or explicitly considered guidelines in newsroom practice.

At the national level, journalistic deontology refers first to the constitutional provisions (art. 21 of the Italian Constitution) and to rights and duties codi-

fied in the professional law 69/1963. These sources of law have been enriched over the years with regard of specific areas through the adoption of charters and other tools, for instance the Carta di Treviso [Charter of Treviso] on the protection of minors (FNSI et al., 1990), the Carta di Roma [Charter of Rome] on the rights of migrants (ODG & FNSI, 2008), and the Manifesto di Venezia [Venice Manifesto] on respectful reporting about gender-based violence (FNSI et al., 2017) (see Table 3 for all the codes approved by the Order of Journalists).

A first attempt to harmonise the various deontological documents was made in 1993, with the Carta dei Doveri del Giornalista [Charter of the Journalist's Duties] (ODG & FNSI, 1993). The Charter has since been absorbed in the Testo Unico dei Doveri del Giornalista [Consolidated Text of the Journalist's Duties], approved in 2016. Both the charters dedicated to journalistic coverage of sensitive issues and the periodical production of consolidated texts on the journalist's duties represent updates of the national code of ethics. In some cases, the promoters of a specific document are associations which are also active in monitoring their application. This is the case with the Associazione Carta di Roma which brings together different subjects, from media companies, civil society, and academia in collaboration with the Osservatorio di Pavia, to monitor migration issues in television news. Furthermore, the promoters periodically produce guidelines to improve the Charter's application (Meli, 2012; Meli & Chichi, 2015; Barretta et al., 2018)

The Order of Journalists performs, the functions related to the discipline of its members on a regional basis, providing different types of disciplinary sanctions (warning, censorship, suspension from the practice of the profession, removal from the Register of Journalists; see ODG, n.d.-b, for the ethical precepts of the Order).

Table 3 Codes of ethics and deontological charters approved by the order of journalists

Charters and Codes	Notes
Carta Informazione e Pubblicità (1988) Charter on Information and Advertising	Establishes that advertising messages must always be distinguishable from journalistic texts. The journalist is prohibited from advertising unless it is free of charge and as part of initiatives that are not speculative in nature.
Carta di Treviso (1991) Charter of Treviso	Compels journalists to engage in ethically correct rules and behaviour towards minors.
Carta dei Doveri del Giornalista (1993) Charter of Journalist's Duties	A complete statute of professional ethics recalls respect for the person, non-discrimination, correction of errors and rectification, and presumption of innocence. The Charter also defines the concept of incompatibility between journalistic work and interests or assignments that conflict with the rigorous and exclusive search for the truth.

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Carta di Perugia (1995) Charter of Perugia	Charter prescribing how to deal with health and disease communication topics.
Carta Informazione e Sondaggi (1995) Charter on Information and Polls	Rule of conduct for the correctness of the information on the surveys both for those who carry them out (demographic institutes) and for those who disclose or disseminate them in any form (journalists or clients).
Testo Unico sulla Privacy e Codice Deontologico Relativo al Trattamento dei Dati Personali nell'Esercizio dell'Attività Giornalistica (2003) Single Text on Privacy and Code on Personal Data Treatment	Provides that the processing of personal data for journalistic purposes "is carried out with respect for fundamental rights and freedoms and dignity of the person concerned, with particular reference to confidentiality, personal identity, and the right to protection of personal data".
Carta dei Doveri dei Giornalisti degli Uffici Stampa Pubblici (2002) Charter of Journalists' Duties in Public Press Offices	Helps the journalist who works in public press offices in the delicate task of fostering dialogue between body and user by observing the deontological rules established by the law establishing the Order.
Codice di Autoregolamentazione TV e Minori (2002) Code of Self-Regulation TV and Minors	The Code takes into consideration the minor in his or her capacity as a user of the television message and addresses the need to protect minors.
Carta dei Doveri dell'Informazione Economica (2007) Charter of Duties on Economic News	Sets out the criteria that must govern information on the economic sector to which journalists must adhere.
Codice di Autoregolamentazione delle Trasmissioni di Commento degli Avvenimenti Sportivi (2008) Code of Self-Regulation for Sports Media Reporting	With this Code, all the protagonists of sports information say "no" to violence in stadiums, aware of the contribution that mass media, from traditional to new media, can make in condemning violence related to sports events, especially football events.
Carta di Roma (2008) Charter of Rome	Invites journalists to adopt legally appropriate terms avoiding the use of improper terms when dealing with stories about migration and migrants. It also invites reporters to avoid the dissemination of inaccurate, sketchy, or distorted information and to maintain a homogeneous and consistent yardstick to avoid feeding any racist attitudes.
Decalogo del Giornalismo Sportivo (2009) Decalogue of Sport Journalism	Helps to certify the rights and duties of the category in the confrontation that journalists have daily with sports clubs and organisations and with the authorities.

Christian Ruggiero

(E8) Level of self-regulation

2 POINTS

Though the Italian legislation does not explicitly require the adoption of self-regulatory mechanisms, several leading media newsrooms adopt internal codes of ethics.

The Italian legislation does not explicitly require self-regulatory measures, but many newsrooms have adopted an internal code of ethics. For example, the daily newspaper *la Repubblica* has adopted a code of ethics that journalists are expected to respect in order to “carry out their profession correctly and in full transparency”. In this document, the values of accuracy, completeness, honesty, independence, impartiality, transparency, ethical use of social media, responsibility, respect, quality, and verification are mentioned as the foundations of the readers’ pact. In line with the backwardness on the issues of respect for gender equality (cited in Indicator E7), the code used by *la Repubblica* is comprehensive and well structured, but no single mention is made to gender (in)equality issues on fair representation, voice and plurality of sources, or the use of gender inclusive language.

In the case of media companies not exclusively dedicated to news, such as RAI, Mediaset, and La7, reference is made to the company’s codes of ethics, which normally refers to the obligation to guarantee the rigorous respect of professional ethics by journalists. The production of a code of ethics by media companies is regulated by legislative decree 231/2001, which regulates the administrative liability of legal persons, companies, and associations (Republic of Italy, 2001).

The importance of a company’s code of ethics emerges clearly in the interviews with the editors-in-chief. A *Tg1* interviewee stated that, on the one hand, national codes of ethics “are relevant because they are very useful, and should be an incessant guide in professional activity, but honestly they are little known. I don’t even know how many of my colleagues have ever read the codes of ethics”. On the other hand:

There is a corporate code of ethics that is very important, a charter of rights and duties written very well [...] It is delivered to the employee, and is the subject of courses that we do in e-learning. However, there are two approaches. The first one reads: the law says you have to know these things, and I put you in a position to know them. The second one makes these elements professionally grounded. We are still behind on this, but it is not the responsibility of the company as much as it is the responsibility of the category.

So, the possibility of concretely applying the rules to one’s professional life, not by chance, is called into question with reference to the company’s code of ethics, which is closer to journalists and therefore more pressing than the national one.

System-wide proposals have been made, in particular by trade unions. For example, the introduction of a charter of values was discussed in the 2019 Stati

Generali dell'Editoria [General States of Publishing]. This charter aims to protect the autonomy of the editorial staff and the transparency of the relationship with readers. In order to do this, it commits the editor, each individual journalist, and the owners to strict compliance with the codes of ethics for the protection of the reader established by the Order of Journalists, such as the Charter of the Journalist's Duties (1993) and the Charter of Treviso for the protection of minors (1990).

However, doubts remain about the knowledge of Codes and Charters of Ethics at a more than general level. In the words of the editor-in-chief of the *Tg5*:

We have an obligation of professional updating, and part of that are credits of a deontological nature. [On the knowledge of codes of ethics and charters] I would have doubts: in short, their contents are known, but if you go and ask if in the Treviso Charter as far as minors are concerned, the prohibition only concerns interviews or images, a newsroom member probably would not know how to answer.

Christian Ruggiero

(E9) Participation

2 POINTS

Italian leading news media do not seem to be truly open and accessible to the public, since readers and audiences are rarely involved in the information production process. An increased awareness of the importance of using social media among information professionals goes together with limited management of the relational elements of digital platforms.

Collaboration between professionals and the public could ensure more transparent journalism and social media, in particular, are becoming an optimal tool to include readers in editorial processes (Sorrentino, 2016).

Starting from traditional forms of participation, print newspapers guarantee small visibility to readers' requests. This is in the form of readers' letters to the editor-in-chief or the newsroom (selected and published in the comments section of the newspapers), receiving daily answers from journalists (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*), or a prominent figure (*la Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*). In addition, this form of interaction between readers and editorial staff of print newspapers is sometimes further strengthened through the organisation of live events during the year, such as the "Repubblica delle idee" or the "Festa de *Il Fatto Quotidiano* alla Versiliana". As the *la Repubblica's* managing editor states:

We have had for years live events such as the "Repubblica delle idee", moments in which we physically meet the community of our readers; therefore this is very important because it gives us the opportunity to understand the reader's "pulse" and enthusiasm and the extent to which *la Repubblica* is considered

a cultural reference point [...]. During the festival, the website's editorial staff works in real-time and people can see how it works while visiting the festival.

The co-editor in chief of *Il Fatto Quotidiano* emphasised the importance of these gathering moments:

There is an association composed of the members of *Il Fatto*, who are subscribers and *Il Fatto* followers, [...] we can use this expression: loyal supporters, readers, fans of *Il Fatto*. This association meets every year at the "Festa della Versiliana". They have the right to participate and, whenever they want, they can come to the newspaper headquarters and take part in the editorial meetings, even with family members.

Regarding the online news outlets, only a few channels allow readership to get in touch with the editorial offices, to request information or report a source or news item. For instance, online news forums are not provided, and the possibility to comment on articles published on the websites of the news organisations is provided only by three of the selected media after logging-in, thus implying the use of an ad hoc account (*Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*), and in two cases via Facebook login (*Fanpage* and *Tg3*). The other news organisations (*Tg1*, *TgLa7*, and *SkyTg24*) do not provide any space for comments under articles or videos that appear on their websites.

Other tools to interact with the editorial staff are in place. *Corriere della Sera* and *Fanpage* offer a detailed contact page that includes a form to be filled; while *la Repubblica* and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* provide the editorial staff's e-mail address (although not clearly visible on their homepage).

Television news media (*Tg1*, *Tg5*, *TgLa7*, *SkyTg24*) provide an e-mail address for the newsroom, but this is very hard to find on the web page. A test on the public's interaction with the editorial staff was carried out in the context of the MDM project in order to verify their reactivity. An email was sent to each of the selected news media, explaining the objective of the cross-national study. No response was received within four months. Overall, it appears that the leading news media are de facto limiting the possibility for the audience to reply or give feedback.

Concerning the use of social media, the largest community of users on Facebook is that of *Fanpage* (8.2 million users), followed by *la Repubblica* (3.5), *Corriere della Sera* (2.6), and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (2.3). The daily degree of participation of community readers is high, both in terms of comments and reactions. However, the performance of television channels is quite different. *Tg5* is not active on Facebook or Twitter, while the use of Twitter and Facebook by the others channels (*Tg1*, *Tg3*, and *TgLa7*) is limited to publishing the content created for and broadcasted in their news editions. Only *SkyTg24* regularly updates its social media channels, integrating Facebook Messenger to broadcast breaking news.

In other words, Italian leading news media rarely use social media as a tool to strengthen audience participation and, in fact, the interviewed journalists talk about a “broadcast mentality” in this regard. The managing editor of *la Repubblica* says:

We control reactions and feedback, but we do not engage in interaction and dialogue because this would require enormous resources that we do not have [...]. We have a moderation team that works 24 hours a day, which however is an external service to the editorial staff. When in doubt, they contact the editorial staff to approve content.

The latter point is restated by the co-editor in chief of *Il Fatto Quotidiano*: “There are moderators who do this. There was a time when commenting was very free. Actually, even somewhat questionable things came out. It is now more selective”. According to the *Tg1* managing editor, the professionals themselves should play an authoritative role in moderating the online debate: “My idea is that we as journalists should be officially present on social networks like influencers, with a function that cannot be improvised, but it has to be recognised”. Overall, it seems that journalists are conscious about the importance of dialogue with citizens but, at the same time, they are aware that this possibility is curbed due to limited available resources. Moreover, they also seem to be aware of the risks of uncontrolled proliferation of hate speech, misinformation, and harassment.

SkyTg24 constitutes a positive exception in disseminating user-generated content, and its managing editor claims:

There are specific rules. When there are news events or events that are in any case relevant, we make a so-called “call to action”. There isn’t immediately the opportunity to go to the place where there was a flood or an earthquake [...], in those cases, we call on our audience to participate and to send us contributions.

In any case, this experience remains an exception, as there is no evidence of publication of user-generated content in print newspapers or their websites.

Rossella Rega & Michele Valente

(E10) Rules and practices on internal pluralism

2 POINTS

Pluralism of viewpoints is regularly controlled by the Communications Guarantee Authority (Agcom). Private television broadcasters respect the *par condicio* during election periods, while the public service is obliged to allocate air time proportionally to all the political forces in Parliament.

Concerning the space given to political forces, meaningful differences emerge between the public service news (RAI) and private television news. Newsroom

member of *TgLa7* explains: “We do not have the problem that RAI has: that of balance; we are not subject to the constant control of the supervisory commission, we do not have problems to weigh the space given to political sources on a daily basis”. The only formal rules followed by private television stations are those established during the election campaign period. “There are no routines, nor internal rules. The only rules are those of Agcom in times of *par condicio*”, declares the newsroom member of *SkyTg24*. The situation is different for public television. *Tg1*, for instance, is obliged by contract of service to allocate air-time proportionally to all the forces in Parliament. “Let’s pay attention to the right proportion that reflects the composition of the parliamentary groups. We also pay attention to the smaller parties, giving them the so-called right to stand. There is no routine, there is attention”, said the newsroom member. The editor-in-chief underlines that we are talking of a system that is also controlled through external bodies: “If you derail from the straight line you try to rebalance; we have a system of important pressure with the Osservatorio di Pavia that provides us with the parameters to evaluate the coverage of politics by the public service”.

As far as the selection of external guests is concerned, according to a *SkyTg24* newsroom member, these are “selected on the basis of their newsworthiness and how influential they are”. This practice is confirmed by a *TgLa7* editor: “They are selected on the basis of their competence and relevance to the theme”. Often, however, the experts involved are journalists, in which case it becomes important to which political area they belong. As stated by newsroom member of *TgLa7*:

There is a somewhat pathological aspect that does not concern us so much, but what happens in the world of information: the journalists *pro quota*. Maybe the politician does not send them, who in some cases, however, prefers some or recommends some journalists as interviewers, but they are selected because they are right or left. It is the television logic that also produces ratings.

A similar position to the editor of *Tg1*:

In the particular case of politics, in choosing newspaper editors or columnists, sometimes we are guided by their belonging to a certain political area, so as to include all perspectives. There are no written routines, but there is commitment to plurality of voices. External opinions mostly arise from the direction, it is the direction that gives input to listen to external opinions.

Mauro Bomba

Dimension: Control / Watchdog (C)

(C1) Supervising the watchdog “control of the controllers”

2 POINTS

Professional as well as scientific debates on watchdog journalism and its practices are quite rare in the Italian media landscape, yet some meaningful initiatives fuel discussions and expose problematic situations.

There is no tradition of controlling the (media) controllers in Italy. This is due to a self-referential model of journalism, or “polarised pluralist” model of the relationship between media and politics, typical of the Mediterranean region (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

The main association fostering debate on watchdog journalism in Italy is Articolo 21 [Article 21] (the name refers to the Constitutional article dedicated to freedom of expression), whose president Paolo Borrrometi is a young Italian journalist threatened by the organised crime association also known as mafia. Another relevant entity is the journalistic association Oxygen for Information, which launched an Observatory on intimidations, threats, abuses, undue pressures on journalists, or violations of the right of information.

Columns in important daily newspapers, such as Giovanni Valentini’s in *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and Vincenzo Vita’s in *il manifesto*, foster media debate on journalism. Only one Italian journal is specifically dedicated to journalism studies: *Problemi dell’informazione* [Information Problems], edited by Il Mulino. Recently, Newsguard, an American company focusing on trust in news, has started activity in Italy, evaluating the most important online news outlets according to international criteria, and releasing some special issues on disinformation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 4 *Debate on journalism in Italy: Main initiatives*

Initiatives	Notes
Articolo 21 [Article 21]	<p>“Articolo 21, liberi di ...” is an association founded on 27 February 2002 that brings together exponents from the world of communication, culture, and entertainment. Several journalists, jurists, and economists who aim to promote the freedom of expression principle (object of Article 21 of the Italian Constitution, hence the name) are active members of the association. Hundreds of campaigns have been promoted by the association since 2002 through its website www.articolo21.org. Over the years, there were many episodes of censorship, intimidation, mobbing, denial of the rights to freedom of expression suffered by journalists, directors, authors, writers, denounced by Article 21 in Italy and abroad. The association promotes the Paolo Giuntella Journalism Prize, too.</p>
Ossigeno per l’Informazione [Oxygen – Observatory on Journalistic Information and Obscured News]	<p>Established in 2008 under the patronage of the FNSI and the Order of Journalists to document, analyse, and make public the growing intimidation and threats against Italian journalists investigating sensitive areas such as organised crime. It regularly publishes reports and news data to increase public awareness of the serious phenomenon of the restriction of freedom of information and circulation of news. It is a consultant to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the parliamentary anti-mafia commission.</p>
Problemi dell’informazione [Information Problems]	<p>Problemi dell’informazione was the first Italian magazine dealing with journalism and communication, offering itself as a place for processing and stimulating an interdisciplinary debate. It was founded in 1976 by Paolo Murialdi and directed by Angelo Agostini until 2013. The actual director is Professor Carlo Sorrentino (University of Florence). Since 2014, it has introduced a peer-review process for the essays hosted, which range from theoretical reflection and rereading of classical authors and texts to empirical research studies of particular interest and originality. In the other sections, interventions with a more popular focus are organised, such as reviews and critical notes, interviews, and debates with scholars and journalism and communication practitioners.</p>

Francesco Marrazzo

(C2) Independence of the news media from powerholders 1 POINT

Independence of news media is a critical aspect in the Italian context, where journalism evolves from longstanding relations with political and economic powers.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) consider Italy as an example of a “polarised pluralist” model. This is characterised by a high level of politicisation or “political parallelism”, a strong influence of the state on the media, and a low level of professional autonomy. In particular, in Italy, the ties between politics (and powerful social and interest groups) and journalism have always been tight.

The roots of the politicisation of the Italian press can be traced back to the pre-fascist period, even though it was during Mussolini’s dictatorship that the political and consensus-oriented role of journalism was reinforced. After World War II, the first newspaper licences went to anti-fascist political forces, thus enhancing a politically oriented form of journalism, which wasn’t abandoned with the rise of market-oriented media in the 1970s. Partisanship and polarisation rose again with the entrance of Silvio Berlusconi, a media entrepreneur, in politics in the early 1990s.

This is true also with respect to broadcasters. The public broadcaster RAI has always reflected the political orientation of the country, for instance that of the Christian Democrats in the 1950s and 1960s. With the erosion of the dominance of the Christian Democrats in the 1970s, parties started to divide channels, personnel, and more generally power and resources according to their weight in Parliament, a phenomenon known as *lottizzazione* [allotment]. The collapse of the Italian party system in the early 1990s did not change these foundational features of the system, in which political affiliations continue to play a role.

The importance of political affiliation in contemporary public radio and television service is reflected in statements from the interviews. According to the editor-in-chief of *Tg1*, “This company was born with a peculiar characterisation, which is to respond in some way to politics”. It is not just the board of directors’ influence on the company’s choices, but rather a composite picture of weights and counterweights.

We have a system of pressure that is also quite significant, through the monitoring by the Osservatorio di Pavia, as well as Agcom, particularly during the election period. And when there are data that don’t work, the company tells you, you must correct it.

Although the independence of the editorial office with respect to the owner is formally guaranteed (see Indicator F5 – Company rules against *internal* influence on newsroom/editorial staff), ties between journalism and political parties, as well as big businesses, have always been strong (see Indicator F6 – Company rules against *external* influence on newsroom/editorial staff). Media have been

used by commercial owners – sometimes private, and sometimes linked to the state – to wield influence in the political world. In this respect, the case of Berlusconi’s Mediaset is a landmark.

The Italian State has also played an important role as the owner of media enterprises, not only broadcasters but also commercial media and print press. The country is indeed characterised by a low number of “pure publishers”, that is, entrepreneurs present only in the publishing industry. The figure of Urbano Cairo is an exception in this respect (see Table 5).

Table 5 *Leading media identified and their owners*

Leading media	Owner
Tg1	RAI (public television)
Tg5	Tg5 is the newscast hosted on the Italian television channel Canale 5, part of the Mediaset network. Mediaset is a mass media company founded by Silvio Berlusconi and still controlled by his family’s holding company Fininvest.
TgLa7	TgLa7 is the newscast of the channel La7, owned by Cairo Communication. Cairo Communication S.p.A. is a media and publishing company. Urbano Cairo owns the majority of the stakes of the company. In turn, Cairo Communication owns the majority of the stakes of the media company RCS MediaGroup.
SkyNews	SkyNews is the newscast of Sky Italia. Sky Italia is an Italian satellite television platform operated by Sky, itself owned by Comcast, an American telecommunications conglomerate.
la Repubblica	Gedi Gruppo Editoriale S.p.A is an Italian media conglomerate, in turn, part of the Exor group. It is the publisher of the newspapers la Repubblica, La Stampa, Il Secolo XIX and several local newspapers, as well as three national radio stations. It also publishes some magazines, including the weekly L’Espresso. The majority of the shares are held by the Agnelli family (FIAT).
Corriere della Sera	RCS MediaGroup, see TgLa7
Il Fatto Quotidiano	Società Editrice Editoriale Il Fatto S.p.A. It is a corporation without a majority shareholder. Among the shareholders, there are some journalists from the newspaper.
Fanpage	Ciaopeople Media Group

The launch of *Il Fatto Quotidiano* in 2009 constituted an attempt to counter the parallelism between the media and power. It is owned by a corporation without a majority shareholder and, among the shareholders, there are also journalists from the newspaper. This choice was made, in the words of the founder, Antonio Padellaro, in order to create a newspaper “with a property,

not a master”. As underlined by the editor-in-chief we interviewed, “We have an anomalous corporate form. We have a female CEO who is a stockholder. We have journalists as shareholders. The shares in the hands of journalists are able to guarantee independence”. Also, thanks to this corporate and editorial strategy, over time, the newspaper focused on investigative reporting, especially in the field of politics.

Nevertheless, in most cases, powerful organisations or individuals own or control important shares of leading news media in Italy. It remains to be seen if the rise of electronic media will transform the situation in the country.

Cecilia Biancalana & Christian Ruggiero

(C3) Transparency of data on leading news media 2 POINTS

Data on leading news media are generally available but, in some cases, these are incomplete and not easily accessible to citizens.

As stated above, the ties between journalism, political parties, big corporations, and the state have always been strong in the country (see Indicator C2 – Independence of the news media from powerholders), and media have often been used by private or state-linked owners to wield influence in the political world. Information on the leading news media’s ownership and of the key business figures are available, but not easily provided by the media themselves. While informed citizens can access this information through Internet research, leading news media are not keen to publish information on their ownership and key business figures.

The Communications Guarantee Authority (Agcom) collects (through the survey *Informativa Economica di Sistema* [Economic System Information]) and publishes all this information every year; however, this data is not easily accessible for ordinary citizens.

All news media’s websites contain some link to or information about the publisher, the owner, and the newsroom. However, this type of information is not immediately visible on the media webpage. An exception in this respect is RAI, which is required to provide all this relevant information by law.

Table 6 *Leading media and transparency of data*

Leading media	Transparency of data
Tg1	As RAI is public television broadcaster, it provides all the relevant information, by law (law 220/2015).
Tg5	Tg5 is the newscast hosted on the Italian television channel Canale 5, part of the Mediaset network. Mediaset is a mass media company founded by Silvio Berlusconi and still controlled by his family's holding company Fininvest. On Mediaset's website, information is given on the structure of the company, but there is no direct link between the website of the newscast and the company's website.
TgLa7	TgLa7 is the newscast of the channel La7, owned by Cairo Communication. Cairo Communication S.p.A. is a media and publishing company. Urbano Cairo owns the majority of the stakes of the company. In turn, Cairo Communication owns the majority of the stakes of the media company RCS MediaGroup. On the website is present information on La7's board of directors, but not on the newsroom.
SkyNews	SkyNews is the newscast of Sky Italia. Sky Italia is an Italian satellite television platform operated by Sky, itself owned by Comcast, an American telecommunications conglomerate. This information is not present on the website of the newscast, but there is information on the newsroom.
la Repubblica	Gedi Gruppo Editoriale S.p.A is an Italian media conglomerate, in turn, part of the Exor group. It is the publisher of the newspapers la Repubblica, La Stampa, Il Secolo XIX, and several local newspapers, as well as three national radio stations. It also publishes some magazines, including the weekly L'Espresso. The majority of the shares are held by the Agnelli family (FIAT). A small link to the Gedi website appears on the website of the newspaper, together with information on Gedi's board of directors and on the newsroom.
Corriere della Sera	RCS MediaGroup, see TgLa7. A small link to the RCS MediaGroup's website appears on the website of the newspaper. No information is given on the newsroom.
Il Fatto Quotidiano	Società Editrice Editoriale Il Fatto S.p.A. It is a corporation without a majority shareholder. Among the shareholders, there are some journalists from the newspaper. On the website of the newspaper information is given on the newsroom, but not on the corporation.
Fanpage	Ciaopeople Media Group. On the website of the newspaper, information is given on the newsroom and there is a link to the company's website.

Cecilia Biancalana & Giuliano Bobba

(C4) Journalism professionalism

2 POINT

The requirements to access the newsrooms are selective, although the professionalisation of Italian journalists is generally not high and mostly not related to their educational background. Younger professionals are expected to have many skills and competences – editing, writing, screen, and radio – and are requested to perform many tasks, though mostly occupying precarious positions.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) highlighted how a low level of professionalism characterises the Mediterranean model. The co-existence of such a low level of professionalism with a highly selective organisational form (regarded as a “guild”) constitutes an Italian anomaly. The Order of Journalists regulates access to the profession, defining who can (and cannot) become a journalist through a highly selective process based on years of paid work into newsrooms and a final examination. This means that Italian journalists approach the professional path inside newsrooms, rather than through education.

Nevertheless, in recent years, university education has become more common and relevant for new professionals. 68 per cent of journalists have a higher education degree. This could be university degree, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree (first or second level), or PhD, mainly in the field of Political, Social, and Communication Sciences.

Today’s diversity of journalistic styles and models (long-form journalism, data journalism, journalism based on native advertising, and so forth) is fostering a more fragmented Italian journalistic culture, whereby traditional values live side by side with newer ones. This situation produces mixed results, where paths of professionalisation may be very different. For example, on one side, forms of data journalism or crowdfunding experiments are multiplying and related information made available (see Porlezza & Splendore, 2016, 2019), but on the other side, transparency does not seem to be the core issue for many journalists and newsrooms (Bentivegna & Marchetti, 2018).

According to the president of FNSI, one aspect that is evolving positively is the journalist’s capacity of self-organising and creating forms of solidarity in cases of conflict. In November 2017, a journalist was attacked with a headshot by a member of an extreme right-wing political force and a well-known family of the Ostia underworld. In January 2020, the attacker was convicted. The president of FNSI said:

The Higher Court, with an unprecedented sentence, recognised that that headshot did not only affect the individual journalist but also the right to report [...]. This will allow us, in the future, to claim in a trial “harassment to the right to report” as an aggravating circumstance.

Finally, representatives of FNSI and the Order of Journalists (Equality Committee) have highlighted how younger professionals are expected to have many

skills and competences – editing, writing, screen, and radio – and are requested to perform many tasks, though occupying precarious positions.

Christian Ruggiero & Sergio Splendore

(C5) Journalists' job security

1 POINT

Job security varies a lot between the different categories of journalists, as well as in relation to where in the country the profession is exercised. Many gaps are found in terms of payments and protection schemes.

One way to interpret the level of job security in Italy is to look at the data that the Order of Journalists provides about its members, the most important categories being *professionisti*, *praticanti*, and *pubblicisti* [professionals, practitioners, and publicists]. The first category is usually composed of journalists with permanent jobs within their newsrooms. They have legal protection, a good level of job security, and may maintain secrecy about what they do in terms of investigation. The latest data list about 28,000 professionals. *Praticanti* are journalists who are working within newsrooms to become professionals with the expectation of acquiring the same privileges enjoyed by the former. The third group is characterised by the absence of legal provision as well as short term labour contracts and inadequate payment. There are about 75,000 *pubblicisti* today compared with around 47,749 in 2000 and 1,373 in 1975. This is a clear sign of the increasing precarisation of the profession. Moreover, another divide can be found between journalists who work in the northern part of Italy and those who work in the south, as they face more uncertainty and work in a more insecure environment.

A survey conducted by the Agcom Observatory on Journalism (Agcom, 2017) revealed that journalists were found to be employed (including permanent positions and fixed terms collaborations) in 49.5 per cent of cases. There were 24.2 per cent self-employed (freelance), 11.6 per cent para-subordinate workers (so-called co.co.co.), and 5.7 per cent unemployed or unemployed and job seekers.

From the point of view of contractual forms and their actual use by information companies, the president of FNSI paints a picture of grey areas. There are no guarantees for a contract that will last for a professional's entire career. Entry into the professional world often leads to a widespread and dangerous sense of frustration.

Many of the boys and girls I see don't even know when they're coming in, and that puts them in a situation of exasperation [...]. You have to keep in mind that there is what used to be called a "reserve army" made up of people that suffer and may even be available for any adventure if you're able to talk to them.

In this dramatic situation, the above-mentioned divide between north and south persists, so that,

in recent years a series of labour policies have been adopted that have increased flexibility, [...] that in some cases have created what I call the “information riders”, that is, girls and boys who work in particular in the areas most at risk, in Campania, in Sicily, in Calabria; they work for unscrupulous publishers, paid one euro per piece.

Representatives of the Equality Committees of FNSI and the Order of Journalists highlight the fact that a gender divide is also to be considered in relation to professional job security, as a high proportion of the precarious conditions involve women professionals. This has implications and serious consequences not only for women professionals’ job insecurity, but also on their possibility to act to obtain more equal conditions in terms of salary, or to receive support when they are exposed to situations of harassment and abuse. No efforts by media outlets are reported as addressing these intersecting dynamics.

Sergio Splendore & Christian Ruggiero

(C6) Practice of access to information

2 POINTS

Recent meaningful developments have recognised the principle of freedom to access public information (law decree 97/2016) and therefore strengthened the possibility for citizens and journalists to access public information. Despite the promises of open government, access to information presents numerous shortcomings. During the Covid-19 pandemic, even the possibility to monitor public administration’s acts was reduced.

As Porlezza (2016) pointed out, the digitalisation of public information allows, on the one hand, making public information available for the citizens and, on the other, monitoring the activities of public administrations, thus giving rise to models of open government. As Meijer and colleagues (2012) argue, the phenomenon of open government goes beyond the opportunity of data availability and involves dialogue and interaction between citizens and public administrations.

With the development of open government, journalists have the opportunity to deal with new issues and problems in a deeper manner, in line with the data journalism model (Antenore & Splendore, 2017; Giorgino, 2017; Porlezza & Splendore, 2019). In this context, journalists play the essential role of monitors of public administration activities, making use of data reporting and data analysis techniques (Felle, 2015).

In Italy, the legislative decree 97/2016 has introduced the right to generalised civic access to information for any citizen in front of any public administra-

tion, and the Autorità Nazionale Anticorruzione [Anti-Corruption National Authority], in collaboration with the Garante per la Protezione dei Dati Personali [National Data Protection Authority], has released some guidelines on this issue in 2016.

Recently, a number of civic associations have complained about the complexities of the procedures that grant citizens the right to generalised civic access to information. In particular, some journalistic associations, such as Oxygen for Information, have complained that the rules on transparency of the public administration say nothing explicitly about the request for access that may come from a journalist. Given that journalists have certain prerogatives in the processing of personal data for reporting purposes enshrined in the data protection legislation, some indications on the effective exercise of the right to generalised civic access laid down by the Anti-Corruption National Authority and Italian Data Protection Authority guidelines – applicable to all activities and therefore also to journalistic ones – seem to be more stringent than those usually valid for journalists. This is the case of the prerogatives of preventing the disclosure of relevant information by other parties, regulated by these guidelines, but usually not applicable to the personal data processing in journalistic activities in the way it is regulated by the data protection law.

Furthermore, during the Covid-19 pandemic, law decree 18/2020 suspended any proceeding with Italian public administrations, including generalised civic access. According to Transparency Italy representative Laura Carrer (2020),

the citizens and journalists who inform us every day must be able to access these information, a fundamental right especially in situations such as the one we are going through – in which it is difficult to exclude a high risk hidden under the emergency. The right of access is an essential tool for monitoring the transparency and accountability of even the smallest government, regional, and local authorities in the management of events such as this one. The choices and actions of today's government are in fact fundamental for our future, and we cannot afford to let them take place without the possibility of knowing the content and responsibilities.

Francesco Marrazzo & Simone Sallusti

(C7) The watchdog and the news media's mission statement

2 POINT

Investigative journalism is one of the missions of the news media. In spite of formal recognition and specific efforts in practice, media formats and daily news agenda often put constraints on this core news media function.

There are no explicit guidelines regarding the watchdog role of journalism, neither on the level of national standards and codes, nor in the mission statements of the leading news media outlets considered. Nevertheless, some general principles can be mentioned.

The first article of the Consolidated Text of the Journalists Duties (ODG, 2021: art. 1) states:

It is an irrepressible right of journalists to freedom of information and criticism, limited by the observance of the rules of law dictated to protect the personality of others and it is their mandatory obligation to respect the substantive truth of the facts.

While not making explicit reference to the role of investigative journalism, this principle aims at protecting the journalist in carrying out investigative activities. In the leading news media outlets analysed for the MDM project, the RAI service contract makes explicit reference to the realisation of “programmes or columns of in-depth analysis, investigative reporting” (Ministry of Economic Development & RAI, 2018: art. 4) and is committed to “enhancing and promoting its tradition of investigative journalism” (Ministry of Economic Development & RAI, 2018: art. 25). However,

investigative journalism is one of the missions of the public service, the problem is that it is not always possible to guarantee this. There are programmes that revolve around investigative journalism – one example is *Report* – but it is always hard to push for more in-depth coverage. (*Tg1* editor-in-chief)

In Italian newsmaking, major space is devoted to political news, often narrated through the statements of politicians (Legnante, 2009), a condition grounded in the close relationship between media and politics, which are configured as complementary institutions (Gurevitch et al., 2009), leaving little time for investigation and watchdog functions. So, this remains confined to specific containers, such as the aforementioned *Report*.

Our newscast is very much focused on news, and less on in-depth analysis. It is also a question of resources, meaning time and finances. Newspapers have more space for in-depth analysis, and television newscasts have less... On television, other types of investigative programmes work better than the news. (*TgLa7* newsroom member)

In fact, although investigative journalism is not explicitly expressed in their mission statements, the selected online and print press media give relevance to investigative journalism and their watchdog function. “The nature of our newspaper is based on the watchdog function [...]. We come from investigative journalism and apply the same rules to political journalism”, explains the editor-in-chief of *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. However, even in the case of the print press, politics continues to occupy the centre of the agenda. “We have a pool of journalists who deal with investigations. Even if politics absorbs us daily. American-style investigative journalism is difficult and rare because of a lack of resources”, explains the newsroom member of *la Repubblica*. Worth mentioning is the magazine *L'Espresso* (same editorial group as *la Repubblica*), which focuses on investigations and in-depth analysis and is a member of the European Investigative Collaboration.

In general, investigative journalism has never had much space and market in Italy. This is also due to the high level of political parallelism, the low level of professionalisation of journalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), and the difficulties of importing this model of journalism from the liberal Anglo-American context (Gerli et al., 2018). The marginality of investigative journalism within the Italian information landscape is probably the reason why it is not considered a primary objective in the mission of the media outlets in our sample.

Mauro Bomba

(C8) Professional training

3 POINTS

Professional training is mostly provided by the twelve schools across the country that are recognised by the Order of Journalists, and by sustained activities of the Order itself. Media companies differ widely in terms of their investment in courses and training.

The Order of Journalists enjoys specific powers in the field of training, as defined by law 69/1963. It is possible to distinguish between training aimed at accessing the profession on one side, through journalism schools, and the provision of on-going on-the-job training on the other. There are currently twelve schools of journalism recognised by the Order (see Table 7).

The continuing professional training of journalists is an obligation provided for by law 148/2011, for all those enrolled in the register as *professionisti* and *pubblicisti* [professionals and publicists].

Few of the leading media outlets provide internal training opportunities, separate from those of the Order of Journalists. As the editor-in-chief of *Tg1* states, public radio and television seem to be the most sensitive to the question of training, both in terms of the existence of a dedicated structure and of its perceived importance:

There is a structure, RAI Academy, and then there is the Study Centre [...] but it is still too little: we could do a lot, also in collaboration with universities, to be able to strengthen a model that is unfortunately still very focused on know-how rather than on knowledge [...] There is still not enough investment in professional training. Continuous seminar cycles would be necessary.

The private news sector, instead, tends to conceive training as a form of professional updating on more technical issues. In this regard, the editor-in-chief of *SkyTg24* declares:

[Training] takes place not on a journalistic level but on a company level [...] certainly on privacy, on data management, on forms of hacking or computer piracy there are courses [...] which in my opinion should be more frequent and better organised. I understand that in a medium-large company it is complex, but there is a need for it.

Few degrees in communication and journalism across the country include courses focused on gender, diversity, and inequality issues, or adopt a gender and intersectional lens in the training of communication professionals (see Indicator F8 – Rules and practices on internal gender equality). The same goes for schools that are recognised by the Order. Where such courses exist, they are not integral part of the curriculum, they are mostly optional, and sustainability of the teaching offer depends on teachers' and trainers' personal interest. Interesting developments have characterised the trainings offered by the Order in response to law 148/2011. Courses on diversity and gender inequality issues have multiplied, as reported by members of the Equality Committee of FNSI and Order of Journalists; and the FNSI Equality Commission is debating how to propose the *Manifesto di Venezia* [Venice Manifesto] in the recognised schools. At the same time, no specific training, aimed, for instance, at supporting women's access to managerial and leadership positions, seems to be organised by media outlets.

Table 7 Journalism schools

School	City
Two-year master's degree in Journalism of the University of Bari	Bari
Two-year first level master in Journalism of the Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bononia	Bononia
Two-year master's degree in Press, Radio and Multimedia Journalism of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart	Milan
Two-year master's degree in Journalism of the Free University of Languages and Communication IULM	Milan
Two-year master's degree in Journalism of the University of Milan/IFG (School of Journalism "Walter Tobagi")	Milan
Two-year master's degree in Journalism from the "Suor Orsola Benincasa" University	Naples
Italian Centre for Advanced Studies for Training and Upgrading in Radio and Television Journalism	Perugia
Two-year master's degree in Journalism of the Free University SS. Assunta (LUMSA)	Rome
Higher School of Journalism "Massimo Baldini" of LUISS Guido Carli University	Rome
First-level master's degree "School of Journalism Post Graduate" of the University of Salerno	Fisciano
Master in Journalism "Giorgio Bocca" of the University of Turin	Turin
Institute for Training in Journalism	Urbino

Comments: List of schools authorised by the National Council of the Order of Journalists and currently in agreement on the basis of the Framework of guidelines for the authorisation, regulation, and control of schools for training in journalism approved by the National Council on 27 September 2018.

Source: ODG, n.d.-a

Christian Ruggiero

(C9) Watchdog function and financial resources 2 POINTS

Investigative journalism is acknowledged and valued, also by professionals. However, the limited availability of financial and organisational resources constrains this function to being a niche component of editorial routines. Transnational partnerships (like Lena and European Investigative Collaboration) and civic initiatives partly compensate for the limited support by media companies for investigative practices.

Despite the critical situation of the Italian news media in terms of newsrooms' resource availability and the lack of a professional tradition (Gerli et al., 2018; Štětka & Örnebring, 2013), the journalists interviewed recognise the importance of investigative journalism. As the managing editor of *la Repubblica* states:

Investigative journalism is the so-called non-fungible journalism, which allows us to make a difference towards the most demanding readers who come to look for something they may not find elsewhere. This is important to safeguard the role of information and the media in keeping attention on certain issues high, but it also becomes a strategic asset when the business model changes.

In this regard, a journalist of the *Il Fatto Quotidiano* underlines that investigative journalism is the core of the news organisation's mission itself:

For each event, we never just address the problem of reporting what is happening. We also try to dig into the nature of the facts, doing things that, in general, other newspapers do not dare out of “complacency” towards power [...]. Our goal is to combine the history of the facts with meticulous search and to discover what is behind facts, also from the economic point of view.

Nevertheless, the financial resources and dedicated professional teams within the editorial offices are very limited among the selected leading media outlets (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *la Repubblica*, *Sky Tg24*). According to the managing editor of *la Repubblica*,

We try to create a structure within the editorial staff that is dedicated to this type of journalism, with colleagues who are outside of the daily production and dedicate themselves to this activity. I would not say “Spotlight team like”, however, the idea is to have some colleagues who can work outside the everyday rhythms in order to do more in-depth work, with adequate time available.

Hence, investigative journalism imposes changes in the newsrooms' organisation and professionals' routines, impacting both the budget resources and time management. As the managing editor of *Sky Tg24* explains,

On some stories, there is an investment of time and money, which is generally established in advance. Therefore, we try to think of this also as an investment in terms of intellectual and monetary assets. Obviously, it's not an unlimited budget, but there is enough to decide what to do [...]. First of all, there is work on the dossiers. Once the attention is focused on that fact, one or several colleagues are commissioned to start working on it, putting together documents and data. This does not necessarily mean that we will then come to an investigation, but it is the beginning of something. This may take some weeks or sometimes even months. In that sense we have annual deadlines, three or four, in which we have spaces for in-depth inquiry, plus those that are potentially added on the wave of topical issues.

In general, according to the professionals interviewed, investigations remain only a privileged and expensive niche within the newsrooms' daily work, and no specific rules have been codified to conduct them.

The public service broadcaster encourages investigative journalism in its mission, but the editorial format and the hierarchical organisation of the newsrooms restrict this (*Tg1*). As *Tg1* managing editor claims,

Investigative journalism is not sufficiently represented in the offer of news programmes. This is for a number of reasons, because the bureaucratic-productive routines have been strongly focused on the logic of the news bulletin rather than on the news as a “television newspaper”. This is a big limitation because it is still too difficult to push in depth analysis even within the daily dimension of the TV news.

Transnational partnerships for investigative journalism should be mentioned here. *Il Fatto Quotidiano* has established a collaboration with the French investigative journal *Mediapart*, publishing their content weekly, and *la Repubblica* is one of the eight media partners of the Leading European Newspaper Alliance organisation (Lena), established to improve journalism in Europe by sharing common investigations. Another positive example of international partnership is the European Investigative Collaboration established in 2016 to jointly promote investigative journalism with a focus on European topics to understand how power structures affect European communities. *L'Espresso* participates for Italy, alongside prestigious news media such as *Der Spiegel* (Germany), *Le Soir* (Belgium), *Mediapart* (France), *El Mundo* (Spain), *Falter* (Austria), *Politiken* (Denmark), and *Newsweek Serbia* (Serbia).

Rossella Rega

Conclusions

The analysis and interviews conducted in the context of the MDM 2021 project provide a picture of the situation of Italian journalism with a focus on some of its leading news media. The analyses partly confirm findings from previous studies, but they also point to some recent developments, while providing insights into less investigated areas. The MDM framework has proven to be a productive tool to develop new knowledge and better the understanding of the Italian news media environment, thanks to the adoption of a holistic perspective.

Few indicators from the MDM framework have received a fully positive grade (Indicators E4 – Minority/Alternative media, E6 – Content monitoring instruments, & C8 – Professional training), and no indicator has received zero points. Most of the investigated aspects signal medium-positive trends in the profession and the sector, but there are also a number of problematic areas across the three core dimensions of freedom, equality, and control.

Freedom / Information appears as the most critical dimension. The majority of low grades are found in this set of indicators, where most indicators score 1, apart from structural aspects like geographic distribution (Indicator F1),

patterns of media use (Indicator F2), and formal normative elements, such as internal rules (Indicators F4 & F5), and gender equality in media content (Indicator F9), all of which score 2. Problems related to the limited diversity of news sources (Indicator F3) and persisting external influence on news-making (Indicator F6) seem to be related to the historical legacy and nature of a media system that, as indicated by Hallin and Mancini (2004), can be described as a typical pluralist polarised model, whereby the relation between politics, parties, vested interests, and the media still characterise news-making operations. On the other side, newer issues such as misinformation (Indicator F10) and journalists' protection against harassment, particularly online (Indicator F11) seem not to have produced adequate and systematic responses either at the national level or at the level of individual media outlets. It must be said, however, that one element allowing us to imagine positive developments in this regard is the presence of fact-checking initiatives solidly integrated within European networks operating in this field. Gender inequalities emerge as a persistent issue, more in relation to media structure (Indicator F8) than in media content (Indicator F9), but also transversely across other indicators, where a focus on the gendered implication of issues has been highlighted (for instance, in relation to Indicators F11 – Protection of journalists against (online) harassment, C5 – Journalists' job security, & C8 – Professional training).

On the contrary, the *Equality / Interest Mediation* dimension emerges as the one in which Italy gains its higher scores. In some cases, this is through good practices, as in the case the number and quality of monitoring agencies; but we also recognise that issues of (audiovisual) concentration that strongly characterised the country in the past decades have been at least partly addressed (Indicators E1 & E2); whereas the diversity of news formats (Indicator E3) and affordable news (Indicator E5) appear as consolidated features of the system (all graded 2). As anticipated, minority and alternative media (Indicator E4) and content monitoring instruments (Indicator E6) are the indicators where the most positive developments can be found. Besides acknowledging the role of a public broadcaster RAI – which, according to law, is expected to ground its operations in principles of inclusion, diversity, and pluralism – this finding should be explained by the role of both institutional and civic, or third sector, initiatives. The independent authority Agcom plays a crucial role in supporting the democratic function of media and journalism, while a number of observatories exist and monitoring activities are conducted by a plurality of actors, including civic organisations and academia. One aspect worth mentioning is the tension between, on the one side, a widely formalised set of principles, norms, and rules through the adoption of ethical codes that cover a variety of issue areas (from reporting about migrants, to respect for children, to the use of correct language when making news about gender-based violence) and, on the other, limited awareness, reference, and use of those very instruments,

alongside the absence of actual and effective sanctions in cases of violation of the codes' provisions. Finally, practices of public engagement and participation (Indicator E9) and internal pluralism (Indicator E10) seem to be evolving, but no clear model is emerging, nor innovative frameworks.

Finally, the *Control / Watchdog* dimension shows a mixed picture. Though professional training (Indicator C8) has been formalised and is well structured, mostly thanks to the role played by the Order of Journalists, other aspects appear to be more problematic. This is particularly the case for the indicator regarding the independence from the powerholders (Indicator C2), and journalists' job security (Indicator C5) in a context of widespread precarious working conditions, late entry, if at all, into the formalised profession, and the disproportional impact of precarity on women professionals. Nevertheless, the strategic relevance of the media's watchdog function and the importance of investigative journalism (as articulated through Indicators C3 – Transparency of data on leading news media, C4 – Journalism professionalism, C6 – Practice of access to information, C7 – The watchdog and the news media's mission statement, & C9 – Watchdog function and financial resources) emerge from the interviews as highly valued by editors and journalists, though seldom supported by formal mission statements or by adequate resources by media organisations.

There is a mixed picture overall, indicating elements of “path dependency” in the news media system, which parallel global trends such as financial difficulties, crisis in public trust, profound transformation of business, and practice models due to digitalisation and platformisation of news-making. At the same time, it is to be highlighted that where the most pressing problematic situations emerge – for instance in the case of threatened journalists, where Italy features the worst case in Europe – the responses by institutional actors (Agcom) and professional unions (FNSI), but also by civil society organisations (Ossigeno, Articolo 21, and others), are strong, indicating a mature professional ethos as well as societal understanding of the centrality of freedom of expression and the press.

The resulting picture is a reflection of the contemporary reality of journalism in the country, with its contrasting features and trends. It is also the result of the coming together of expert knowledge through which a team of 14 researchers, each with specific expertise, has managed to critically explore all the dimensions of the MDM framework. The team enjoyed taking part in the MDM project and appreciates its follow-ups as an opportunity to master our understanding of specific areas and contemporary challenges to the media and journalistic profession, thanks to a comparative approach across the world's regions.

Claudia Padovani

Notes

1. RAI [Italian radio and television] is a licenced agency whose board of directors consists of seven members, four of whom are appointed by the Chamber and Senate of the Italian Parliament, two by the government, and one by the employees' assembly.
2. Founded by tycoon Silvio Berlusconi and still 44 per cent controlled by the holding company of the Berlusconi family.
3. The Gender Equality Index is a tool to measure the progress of gender equality in the EU, developed by Eige. It gives more visibility to areas that need improvement and ultimately supports policy makers in designing more effective gender equality measures. It reveals both progress and setbacks by focusing on six core areas or "domains" (work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health) and two additional domains (violence against women, intersecting inequalities); and includes 31 indicators from 28 European countries) (See <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019/IT>).
4. All data and analysis concerning the pandemic was carried out in 2020.
5. Following this resolution, within the Media Services WP, Agcom is periodically sharing on its website data about the time dedicated by radio and television to the topic of Covid-19 in the news and current affairs programs and specific television audience data.
6. According to several scholars, in particular economists, local newspapers are very important for the public opinion in the election periods (Drago et al., 2014), because they can prevent the polarisation of the voting behavior (Darr et al., 2018). According to some political scientists, declining local political news coverage is reducing citizen engagement (Hayes & Lawless, 2018).
7. Even if, from September 2015 to September 2019, the audience of the evening news programme *Tg1* (on air from 20:00 to 20:30 on RAI1) has decreased from 25.1 to 22 per cent of share, while the audience of evening news programme *Tg5* (on air from 20:00 to 20:30 on Canale5) has increased from 17.4 to 18.2 per cent of share.
8. In particular, 36.6 per cent worked for daily print media, 5.6 per cent for weekly newspapers, 7.3 per cent for magazines, 17.7 per cent for private or public television, 14.9 per cent for private or public radio, 6.1 per cent for news agencies, 6.6 per cent for online newsrooms of traditional media, and 5.3 per cent for stand-alone online news sites.
9. At the time of writing, the latest data available from the GMMP are from the 2015 edition. The 2020–2021 national, regional, and global reports will be launched in June 2021 (available at www.whomakesthenews.org).

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